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Dissertation

THE IMPULSE TO ORTHODOXY: WHY ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACIES TREAT RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AS A THREAT

by

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THE IMPULSE TO ORTHODOXY: WHY ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACIES TREAT RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AS A THREAT

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ABSTRACT

Since the late 1990s, governments across the post-Soviet space have redefined freedom of conscience as freedom from "non-traditional" religious groups — part of a broader effort to recast pluralism as a threat to national sovereignty. This dissertation focuses on the Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, which have restricted such groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Ahmadi Muslim community, and the Chinese spiritual movement Falun Gong. It analyzes why illiberal regimes restrict marginal and apolitical religious groups, which are often more docile than the population at large. Furthermore, it addresses why policies that infringe on civil liberties nevertheless enjoy popular

support.

These questions take on greater significance in the midst of the current global retreat from democratic values. Yet they cannot be answered by the prevailing instrumentalist perspective in political theory, which assumes that rational citizens should seek to maximize individual liberties. Popular support for authoritarian figures has prompted scholars to propose non-instrumental motivations, such as national and religious identity. Rather than treat "identity" as non-instrumental, I propose a relational model of identity politics, wherein pluralism and *essentialism* represent opposing strategies in a competitive political field. Drawing from Bourdieu's work on public politics, I argue that essentialist claims to authority (e.g. ethnic nationalism, religious populism) appeal to strata with relatively low capacity for autonomous political mobilization. Illiberal regimes propagate essentialist claims on behalf of such strata, and repress even benign forms of pluralism as part of this *essentialist social contract*.

I investigate these hypotheses by examining recent discourses on religious tradition in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. I employ a dataset of 5,000 public documents (legislation, court rulings, etc.), which I analyze using qualitative coding. In addition, I draw on interviews with government officials and religious leaders collected during fieldwork between 2012 and 2014, and on data from the

World Values Survey. I find that the political and religious establishments of both states are erecting new orthodoxies that *consecrate* the will of their political bases as essential to national self-determination. Thus, illiberal democracies maintain popular support by redistributing authority (symbolic capital, per Bourdieu) to core constituencies at the expense of peripheral constituencies.

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List of Abbreviations

CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States; a multinational organization created in teh wake of the dissolution of the USSR to retain economic integration between post-Soviet states.

CSTO: Collective Security Treaty Organizatoin; a multinational organization created in teh wake of the dissolution of the USSR to coordinate military and security partnership between post-Soviet States

KG: Kyrgyzstan

KNB: The Committee for National Security [*Komitet National'noi Bezopasnosti*], successor institution in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to the KGB.

KZ: Kazakhstan

SAMK [DUMK]: The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan/ Kazakhstan [*Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'manov Kyrgyzstana/Kazakhstana*], commonly refered to as the Muftiate

ROC: The Russian Orthodox Church, which in practice often refers to the patriarchate or leadership structure of the Church

SARA: The State Agency for Religious Affairs; the government entity in Kazakhstan tasked with regulating the activities of religious groups, especially heterodox religious groups that do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Muftiate.

SCO: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization; a multinationl organization incorporating China, India, and most member states of the CIS; the SCO represents a relatively new block of Eurasian states who are committed to military and economic cooperation.

SCRA: The State Commission for Religious Affairs; the government entity in Kyrgyzstan tasked with regulating the activities of religious groups, especially heterodox religious groups that do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Muftiate.

INTRODUCTION

The "Mysterious" Popularity of Illiberal Regimes

In the summer of 2010 a group of local men approached a house in Toktogul, Kyrgyzstan that served a small congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. Toktogul resembles many small towns in Central Asia — a community of 16,000 people in tin-roofed houses, sitting along an alpine reservoir that powers a Soviet-built hydroelectric dam. In such small Kyrgyz towns, everyone is connected within a few degrees of separation, and the Jehovah's Witnesses that lived and gathered at the house were undoubtedly family and neighbors to a significant proportion of the community. Despite these connections, however, the men looted and set fire to the house, burning most of it to the ground. They also assaulted several members of the congregation in the process.[1]

When the Jehovah's Witnesses turned to the local court for justice, they were led down a lengthy legal process that eventually led to the revocation of the group's license to meet. The State Commission of Religious Affairs, responsible for licensing religious organizations and monitoring interfaith relations, attributed the incident to tensions caused by the Jehovah's Witness' presence,

[1] Mushfig Bayram. 2012. "We need to protect the rights of the majority." Retrieved Feb 2, 2014 (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1712).

and laid the blame on them for stirring up interfaith strife. The Jehovah's Witnesses have fought for the right to reopen this congregation and establish more elsewhere in the country, but they, along with many other religious groups, face increasingly stringent restrictions that hamper the ability of so-called "non-traditional" religions to establish and expand their activities in Kyrgyzstan.

The fate of the Toktogul Jehovah's Witness community mirrors a tendency across much of the post-Soviet space to redefined freedom of conscience as freedom from "non-traditional" and "destructive" religious groups. Restrictive religious policies represent part of a broader effort to recast pluralism, an integral part of democratic rule, as a threat to national security, sovereignty, and self-determination. The administrations of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, on which this dissertation focuses, have drawn increasingly rigid distinctions between "traditional" and "non-traditional" religious groups, and dramatically curtailed the freedom of the latter to practice and proselytize their faith. The groups affected primarily include marginal and apolitical groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Ahmadi Muslim community, and the Chinese spiritual movement Falun Gong. Traditional status is primarily received for Sunni Islam of the Hanafi school, to which the titular Kyrgyz and Kazakh community of each state nominally subscribes, as well as for the Russian Orthodox Church that claims

“spiritual jurisdiction” over the sizable Russian communities residing in each country.

Though this shift toward authoritarianism has surprised few observers of the region, scholars and advocates for the freedom of conscience have expressed concern over the erosion of religious rights in the region. Local observers have expressed particular dismay that more democratic Kyrgyzstan has reproduced the policies of its more autocratic neighbors, signaling that it will remain in the orbit of other post-Soviet “illiberal democracies” (Zakaria 1997). But scholars have also puzzled at certain contradictions between the rhetoric of the regimes, which claim that such policies defend the cultural and “spiritual” sovereignty of the nation, and the outcomes of these policies in practice. Despite the regimes’ statements that heterodox groups present a threat to public order and security, none of the groups labelled “destructive” represent an demonstrable threat to the state or citizenry. Marginal and apolitical religious groups would seem to present no challenge to the power of authoritarian regimes, and are often more docile than the population at large. And while it might be tempting to attribute these policies to banal identity politics, in practice they often do more to undermine local traditions than they do to enforce them.

Rather than defend local religious groups against foreign incursions, the

religious policy of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan often do the opposite. In addition to targeting global religious groups such as Baptists and Ahmadi Muslims (who themselves have a decades-long history of peaceful coexistence in the region), the regimes have harassed local imams and proponents of genuinely local faith traditions such as Tengrianism — the animistic beliefs native to the Kyrgyz and Kazakh peoples before Islam penetrated the region in the 7th century. At the same time, the 'traditional' practices of Islam and Russian Orthodoxy bear the influence of foreign governments, Islamic foundations from the Middle East, and the Moscow Patriarchate. Russia, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia all finance mosques, churches, and religious centers in the region as a form of soft power. These religious organizations represent a far greater foreign intervention into public life than the grassroots missionary activity of groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses or Tablighi Jamaat — an Islamic missionary movement originating in India.

Given these puzzling aspects of religious policy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, this dissertation will examine two interrelated questions: First, why do illiberal democracies restrict seemingly benign religious groups? Second, why do such policies often enjoy broad popular support, despite the fact that they infringe on the civil liberties of average citizens? In addressing these two research questions, I will also engage a number of related questions: Why in

particular has Kyrgyzstan enacted such similar policies to its more authoritarian neighbors such as Kazakhstan, given the disparities in regime consolidation and the country's reputation as an "island of democracy?" Finally, given the discrepancies between the official discourse on tradition and the historical record in the region, what rationale governs the distinction between "traditional" and "non-traditional" religious groups?

I. Research Puzzles and Existing Explanations

The answer to these questions initially seems inherent to the concept of authoritarianism itself — a form of governance that suppresses the freedoms and will of its citizens. In a recent publication on Central Asian "dictators without borders," Cooley and Heathershaw define authoritarianism as a system of rule "in which political authority is concentrated in the hands of the few." Working with this definition, authoritarian regimes can be understood to oppress religious minorities and any other social dissidence simply as part of their efforts to reproduce their power, which inherently comes at the expense of civil liberties and public input into governance. Such definitions assume a misalignment between regime and popular interests — that the regime concentrates power at

the uniform expense of its citizenry. In reality, authoritarian regimes engage the social competition among diverse social factions. The alignment between regime and population not a constant — a uniform misalignment — but complex and variable.[2]

In relation to pluralism, autocratic and absolutist regimes have frequently used minorities as a means to perpetuate their rule, defending ethnic and religious minorities as bulwarks against populist challenges to their authority (Gellner 1983). Contemporary authoritarian regimes are not built simply on coercive suppression of the public, but on the capacity to monopolize the voice of the public. As Chatterjee points out of "popular politics in most of the world," even the most autocratic contemporary regimes must claim their mandate to govern from the people they govern:

> There is no question that the legitimacy of the modern state is now clearly and firmly grounded in a concept of popular sovereignty. This is, of course, the basis of modern democratic politics, but the idea of popular sovereignty has an influence that is more universal than that of democracy. Even the most undemocratic of modern regimes must claim its legitimacy not from divine right or dynastic succession or the right of conquest but from the will of the people, however expressed. Autocrats, military dictatorships, one-party regimes — all rule, or so they must say, on behalf of the people (Chatterjee 2006:27).

[2] Scholars such as Cooley and Heathershaw realize this fact, of course, and introduce greater nuance when examining particular cases, but in so doing they disconnect their empirical discussions from their own strong definition of authoritarianism.

Working with Chatterjee's conception of authoritarianism, we can assume, *a priori*, that actions taken by illiberal regimes generally serve the goal of reproducing this monopolistic claim to represent the popular will. Such claims at times serve to silence the legitimate interests of the citizenry, undoubtedly, but authoritarian rulers and their policies can also enjoy genuine support among broad segments of the population. What's more, policies that target the rights of minorities would seem to be intended to appeal precisely to the political base of such regimes. Thus, when investigating restrictive religious policies in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, we must consider how such policies appeal to average members of the titular, majority community of each country.

Here we encounter the second puzzle, however: Common citizens would seem to have an inherent interest in opposing policies that infringe on their civil liberties. The prevailing institutionalist perspective in contemporary political theory assumes that rational actors desire the freedom and autonomy to pursue their interests (Pepinsky 2014). Reasonable citizens should thus support democratic governance that maximizes their civil liberties, and thereby guarantees them the freedom to pursue their interests in both the public and private spheres. Within this instrumentalist perspective, only actors who directly participate in an authoritarian regime, or otherwise gain from complicity with

the regime, would have a rational incentive to support authoritarian accumulation of power. Common citizens with no direct connection to the regime would seem to have an inherent interest to oppose such accumulations of power, and should therefore recognize that self-determination hinges on maximizing civil liberties.

This is not what we observe, however. Instead, authoritarian regimes — the present cases included — frequently deploy illiberal policies in order to mobilize popular support. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, large proportions of the titular national communities have aligned themselves with the regimes' efforts to circumscribe pluralism, religious and otherwise. Rather than unify as multiethnic coalitions to hold power in check, as the instrumentalist perspective expects, many common citizens support authoritarian regimes and illiberal policies seemingly at the expense of their own liberties. These common citizens would seem to be betraying their manifest interest in liberal democracy for the sake of purely symbolic victories offered by banal nationalism (Billig 1995).

This puzzle takes on greater significance in the midst of the current global retreat from democratic values. Entire scholarly literatures have proliferated to explain why common citizens support illiberal regimes seemingly against their interests. Scholarship on identity politics (Smith 1991; Castells 2010), religious

fundamentalism (Huntington 1997), and other non-instrumental political factors arose precisely to explain citizens' seemingly irrational behavior. These theories implicitly or explicitly attribute causality to a putative lack of civil, democratic values, especially across the Global South. Other theories focus on the charismatic qualities of individual leaders, and their capacity to manipulate the masses through media and cultural hegemony (Feldman 1997). In all cases, however, these literatures explain popular support for illiberal regimes either by treating the population as irrational, or by removing popular agency entirely and treating the public as weak and malleable.

The analysis I pursue in this dissertation thus offers a critique of the instrumentalist assumption that reasonable citizens seek maximum individual liberties, as well as of the theories on "identity politics" and other non-instrumental factors that have arisen as a result of this assumption. This focus may seem narrow, but the emphasis on individual liberty and self-determination runs through Western political thought back to Plato, and is central to much of contemporary political theory. Though many scholarly treatments of authoritarianism avoid reifying strong forms of this instrumentalist assumption, including sensitive case studies of Central Asia and the broader post-Soviet space, there remains a significant divide between these nuanced cases studies

and the prevailing instrumentalist perspective in political theory. This dissertation aims to bridge that divide with a relational model of populist, identity, and authoritarian politics.

II. Argument and Theory

To answer these questions, I propose to turn to the concept of authoritarianism itself. Rather than treat authoritarian rule primarily as a concentration of power or a form of *unfreedom* (Sen 2001), I treat authoritarianism as a distinct *claim* to authority — a claim to represent an *essential* popular will that must be "defended" from pluralism. This definition requires that we model representation not as a function of institutions, but rather as a struggle to propagate such claims in public life, in which both public figures and their constituents play roles. This model I draw from Bourdieu, who described representation as a *mystery of ministry*, wherein public figures articulate a unified will in place of the many particular wills for which they speak: "When the spokesperson speaks, it is a group that speaks through him, but one that exists as a group through that speech and its speaker" (Bourdieu 2004:41).

From populist upstarts to entrenched dictators, authoritarian figures claim to

speak for a sacrosanct will that transcends social differences and stands above mundane politics. Such leaders claim privileged authority to enact the "true" will of the people (or, perhaps, the will of the "true" people) *upon* the population, whether they ground that sacrosanct will in ethnic identity, national tradition, religious belief, or even "class consciousness." Furthermore, illiberal regimes circumvent democratic constraints by denigrating politics as something frivolous and petty in comparison to this sacrosanct will. They condemn opposition and dissent as forms of *false consciousness* that lead constituents astray from their essential values and interests as part of a sacred group.

I argue, therefore, that illiberal democracies restrict marginal and apolitical religious groups because even seemingly benign forms of heterodoxy challenge their claims to represent an essential and sacrosanct popular will. The distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy derives its logic not from the doctrines or vintage of religious groups, but rather from a regime's efforts to reproduce its authority to speak for the people. To the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, it matters not whether a religious group or organization is local or foreign, but simply whether that entity works in symbiosis with the establishment to reproduce the regime's claims to public authority.

I further argue that illiberal regimes seek to control public life by establishing

a system of quasi-ordination that reserves positions of authority for individuals who demonstrate their loyalty to established elites. Bourdieu called such control the power of *nomination*, i.e. the power to name people to positions of power. To the degree that a regime succeeds in consolidating power, therefore, established elites restrict all forms of public authority to their own agents, who have demonstrated their loyalty to and utility for the establishment. They then use this monopoly of authority to confer legitimacy (symbolic capital, per Bourdieu) on those strata who also have a vested interest to reproduce the ruling order, and to deny legitimacy to those strata who do not. Thus, authoritarian *claims* and authoritarian *regimes* are analytically distinct, and relate according to how much authority a regime has consolidated around a set of claims by monopolizing the power of nomination.

Finally, I argue that these new discourses on national tradition and religious orthodoxy enjoy support among wide segments of the citizenry because they enhance populist claims to ownership over public life and public institutions. Though authoritarian regimes do impinge on the liberty of citizens to associate and mobilize according to common interests, autonomous from the state, we must acknowledge that the means to mobilize autonomously are unevenly distributed. Liberal democracy disproportionately empowers those strata with

greater means of autonomous mobilization — greater volumes economic, cultural, and social capital, in Bourdieu's theories. The *impulse to orthodoxy* that we observe in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan represents a rational field strategy for those strata who are relatively poorly equipped to participate in public life without the kind of collective voice that religious and political identity confer. I argue, therefore, that illiberal democracies propagate essentialist claims on behalf of such strata, and repress even benign forms of pluralism as part of this *essentialist social contract*.

III. Cases, Methods, and Findings

I investigate these hypotheses by examining recent discourses on religious tradition in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which present a series of key similarities and contrasts that make them ideal cases for the relational analysis I suggest above. The titular nations of both states share a common linguistic and cultural history as semi-nomadic, Turkic peoples of the Central Asian steppe. The region's nomadic peoples held animistic and zoroastrian traditions before the penetration of Islam, but embraced Islam (at least nominally) starting from the 7th century. Thereafter, the steppes of Central Asia saw the rise of a number of

great powers, such as Timur's Islamic dynasty.

Eventually, the Russian Empire expanded into Central Asia and the October Revolution brought the Soviet state-building project to the region. Only within this project were the nomadic peoples forcefully settled and divided into the mutually-exclusive nations. Today, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are the two most liberal countries in post-Soviet Central Asia, although Kazakhstan's regime has consolidated far more power than Kyrgyzstan's, allowing for important comparative analysis. Though both states have increasingly targeted religious minorities, neither features the pervasive authoritarianism of more oppressive neighbors such as Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan.

Those familiar with Central Asia may object to my usage of the term "authoritarian" in reference to to Kyrgyzstan, whose government is generally regarded as more "liberal" than its neighbors. Some may even object to my calling Kazakhstan authoritarian, given the popularity that President Nazarbayev enjoys. But by treating authoritarianism as a distinct claim to authority, rather than as a series of institutions and practices of rule, we can navigate the distinction between illiberal democracy and authoritarian regime more easily. All illiberal regimes seek to control who has authority to speak for the people — both within the state and beyond — but different regimes succeed

in monopolize this authority to varying degrees.

To examine the evolving discourses on national and religious tradition, I draw from a dataset of 5,000 public documents (legislation, court rulings, policy papers, etc.), evenly divided between my two national cases. When coded in MAXQDA using keywords, this dataset yielded over 100,000 coded segments, which I navigated using refined coding queries and browsing code matrices. I also draw on fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2014 in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, including interviews with government officials and religious leaders, and attendance in court cases, local conferences and workshops for government officials, and the Kurultai summit through which the Muftiate in Kyrgyzstan elects its Head Mufti. I also analyze data from waves four and six of the World Values Survey to make comparative and longitudinal observations of public attitudes on religion, democracy, and authoritarianism.

I find that the political and religious establishments of both states use discourses on tradition to *consecrate* the will of their bases as essential to national self-determination. The religious policies of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are couched in such claims. Both regimes link 'traditional' religions to a sacrosanct will that must be preserved through proper state regulation. The director of Kyrgyzstan's State Commission for Religious Affairs, for example, stated in one

editorial that:

> Islam and Orthodox Christianity from time immemorial are considered traditional religions [in the region], and the sound of azan [the call to prayer] is as familiar to the population as the bells [of the church] ringing. Both religions train their flock with such qualities as: honesty, diligence, charity, striving for peace, serving the common good, which are also a civic duty.[3]

Top state officials in the Kazakhstan similarly assert that national character is "inseparably linked with the Sunni Islam of the Hanafi madkhab [school], which determined the originality of the Kazakh people and its value orientations."[4] Kazakhstani officials have directly invoked this melding of religious belief and local custom as "a kind of 'social contract' among the members of the Muslim Ummah of Kazakhstan,"[5] But officials are careful to include the Russian Orthodox Church in such discourses on tradition, noting that "our two traditional confessions — Islam and Orthodoxy — despite their dogmatic differences, are united through their socio-political similarities, particularly in

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[3] Gennadiy Kholkin, 'The State Concept in the Religious Sphere,' *Moya Stolitsa,* September 6 2005 (https://ca-news.info/2005/09/06/31).

[4] Magzum Sultangaliev, 'Islam is the religion of unity, peace and kindness,' *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, August 2011. Source: http://www.nomad.su/?a=10-201108110025.

[5] Yuldasheva, Nargiza. 2009. "In Kyrgyzstan in 2008 the Court Declared Religious Organizations "People's Congress of Kurdistan" and "Jihad Group" Terrorist and Their Activities." *24.kg,* February 3. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (https://24.kg/archive/ru/parlament/45766-2009/02/03/105193.html/).

their relation to the institution of the state."[6]

Similarly, officials have spoken out forcefully against the expansion of "non-traditional" religious groups in the region. President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, for example, stated that "We must not allow our true religion, to which our ancestors held, be divided by divergent tendencies that would knock us off our path."[7] This rhetoric applies to heterodox religious groups from various religious traditions. Protestant denominations and groups like Scientology, subsumed under the label of "destructive sects," have been referred to as "poisonous mushrooms that appear at the roots of true religions."[8] Many non-traditional groups have been accused in engaging in "destructive" activities, that "subvert the natural, harmonious state of the personality — spiritual, psychological, and physical — as well as the creative traditions prevailing in the social structures, culture, belief system and society as a whole" (Galkina 2013:498). These accusations even include purported practices of "mass hypnosis." One court case

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[6] Shlymova G. 'After the adoption of the new law on religion, the country managed to form a new legal framework governing the confessional relations,' Director of the Research and Analytical Center on Religion of the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Religious Affairs.

[7] Meyrambek Baigarin, "President Nazarbayev: The only recognized structure of traditional Islam in our country - the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan."

[8] Nam, "New Religious Movements and their Influence on the National and State Identity of Modern Kazakhstan, as a means of manipulating public consciousness in the guise of social groups," published online by the Eurasian National University of L.N. Gumilev. Retrieved Nov 11, 2017 (http://repository.enu.kz/handle/data/12652).

in Kazakhstan against an evangelical church alleged that "during a so-called religious ritual 'healing' many religious churches fell into a psychic trance and there was a mass psychosis."[9]

Similar concerns have arisen around various forms of Islamic heterodox groups, which either deviate from the doctrines of the Muftiate, or simply carry out their activities autonomous from the Muftiate structure. The director of Kazakshtan's State Agency for Religious Affairs has warned against "a wave of 'new Islamization,' in which part of the Muslim community actively absorbs radical religious ideas brought in from outside."[10] In the rhetoric of the regime, Islamic currents that operate beyond the Muftiate's purview threaten to subvert the solidarity or even the security of the Kazakh nation:

> All of the foregoing allows us to assert that takfirism [a form of fundamentalist rhetoric] can deal a serious blow to the psychology and mentality of young Kazakhs as representatives of the state-forming ethnos [i.e. the titular ethnicity], awakening among current generations of Kazakhs a sense of "shame" for their history and for the path of their ancestors… This guilt provides at least an ideological basis for the possibility of conducting armed jihad against their fellow citizens.[11]

Government and religious authorities in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have

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[9] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2011. The Verdict of the Court No. 2 of the City of Taraz from September 5, No. 1\812-11. The hearing was declared closed. Presiding Officer Dauylbaev N.A., Secretary of the Court Session Uderbayeva N.B.

[10] Kairat Lama Sharif, *Takfirism is a betrayal of one's religion and one's own people,* accessed from the site "Islam in the CIS. Retrieved February 10, 2018 (http://www.islamsng.com/kaz/opinion/6954).

[11] Ibid.

thus enacted a number of measures to counteract groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat, which, in the words of Kyrgyzstan's Attorney General in 2009, "promote radical Islam and the establishment of an Islamic state - the Caliphate."[12]

With such statements, state officials, religious leaders, and state-aligned experts seek to link national sovereignty and self-determination to an essential will rooted in national and religious tradition — a discourse on tradition which they have the authority to curate. Thus, the political and religious establishments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan maintain popular support by redistributing authority (symbolic capital, per Bourdieu) to core constituencies at the expense of peripheral constituencies. Illiberal policies are popular among the titular majority in each nation (and among the sizable Russian communities) precisely because they consecrate their will as essential to sovereignty and self-determination of the nation as a whole. In so doing, these policies not only redistribute symbolic capital away from religious and other minorities, but generally away from cosmopolitan, dissident, and opposition groups who seek greater political input through civic and deliberative modes of democracy.

Authoritarian regimes do not dispossess their own supporters of their voices,

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[12] Yuldasheva, Nargiza. 2009. "In Kyrgyzstan in 2008 the Court Declared Religious Organizations "People's Congress of Kurdistan" and "Jihad Group" Terrorist and Their Activities." 24.kg, February 3. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (https://24.kg/archive/ru/parlament/45766-2009/02/03/105193.html/).

therefore, but rather facilitate their supporters' efforts to dispossess the broader population of their plural voices. As my empirical chapters will demonstrate, the image or "effigy" of the popular will that the authorities of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan promote speaks directly to the interests and values of their bases, thought they presume to speak for the nation as a whole. The very efforts of heterodox religious groups to exercise basic rights and liberties is thus seen as a pluralist (and globalist) threat to the sovereignty of the regime's political base. The populist base of such regimes thus support the concentration of authority in autocratic figures, because strong autocrats more effectively execute this redistribution of symbolic capital from peripheral to core constituencies.

IV. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation explores these issues through a series of theoretical and empirical chapters. The first chapter introduces the two national cases in greater detail, and further establishes the theoretical puzzles that I address. I explore the historical origins of the contemporary nations of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, touching on influential periods such as the introduction of Islam in the 7th century, cultural transformation under Timur's (Tamerlane) Islamic empire, and

the coalescence of the modern nations under Soviet rule. I also discuss factors that contribute to the significant differences between the political systems of contemporary Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and examine the impact that these differences have had on the religious policy of the two countries.

Chapter two examines existing theories of authoritarianism and religious politics, and propose a relational model of populist and identity politics. I show that the conventional approach to authoritarianism in the political sociology and political science literature betrays a strong instrumentalist bias that focuses on rational actors who seek to maximize their power (in the case of regimes) or liberties (in the case of common citizens) through struggles over institutions. While I do not discredit the validity of this approach, I do argue that it prevents scholars from explaining satisfactorily the motivations of regimes for targeting docile minorities, as well as the motivations of common citizens for supporting regimes and policies that infringe on their civil liberties. I address a number of scholars from the region to show that general theory has lagged behind the important revelations about authoritarianism that have been made by careful case studies. I then introduce Bourdieu's later work on public politics as a *mystery of ministry*, and propose modifications to his theory that make it more applicable to a broader range of political systems. I conclude by showing that a

relational theory of identity synthesizes the instrumental and identity literatures, and compliments existing scholarship that this focused on analyzing authoritarian institutions.

Chapter three provides an overview of my methodology, focusing primarily on my primary dataset of public documents from Kyrgystan and Kazakhstan. I explain the methods I used in retrieving these document from public databases, my coding strategy, and the analytical tools I used to extract coded segments that form my empirical chapters. I also provide information on my fieldwork conducted in the region between 2012 and 2014, especially my strategies for accessing and interviewing respondents. The remaining chapters present my empirical discussion of the cases. Each consecutive pair of chapters draw their data from a common trawl of coded segments. With over 100,000 coded segments in the overall dataset, I relied on narrow coding queries to extract a manageable number of segments per chapter. Even with very focus queries, however, each trawl extracted between 800 and 1,500 segments, which yielded sufficient material for two related chapters. Thus, each consecutive pairs of chapters — four and five, six and seven, and eight and nine — draw their data from a common coding query.

Chapter four examines the core policies that structure state regulation of

religion in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. It explores both key legislation and policy documents, as well as public statements in support of these policies on the part of ranking government officials. The chapter introduces official narratives on "spiritual sovereignty," "destructive sects," and the "threat" that pluralism presents to national sovereignty. The chapter thus explores the motivations for regulating religion, including relatively benign religious groups, in the words of the regimes themselves. Chapter five continues this discussion by examining the combined efforts of the political and religious establishment to *consecrate* particular narratives of national and religious tradition. It investigates the origins of the official status as traditional religions enjoyed by the Muftiates and the Russian Orthodox Church in contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as the cooperation of these leadership structures with each other and with the state to monopolize authority. Thus, the chapter explores the how the political and religious establishments consecrate a particular *effigy* of the popular will through public discourses on national and religious tradition — how they claim a mandate to speak for a *sacrosanct popular will* that transcends politics and supersedes voices of dissent coming from the actual public.

Chapter six turns the discussion from consecrating orthodoxy to regulating heterodoxy. The chapter examines the main techniques used by the governments

of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to regulate the activities of heterodox religious groups. The chapter first explores the different discourses on *threat* that the states use to distinguish Islamic heterodox groups, which fall under the authority of the Muftiate of each country, from all other heterodox groups, which fall under the purview of the SCRA and SARA. The chapter then outlines various techniques for regulating and restricting the activities of heterodox groups, including registration requirements, forms of surveillance, and bureaucratic obstruction. Chapter seven focuses more closely on state responses to "destructive sects" and other heterodox groups that have no links to Islam or the authority of the Muftiate. The chapter examines in detail how the regimes work to demonstrate the "destructive" character of these heterodox groups, especially through discourses on psychological and moral harm. I examine the circumstances of three groups in particular — the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon (commonly known as the *Moonies*), and the Church of Scientology — comparing the different fates of these groups in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The chapter shows that the overall goal of discourses on "destructive sects" is to assert that national community asserts a quasi-legal form of ownership over the individuals whom they claim as constituents.

Chapters eight and nine, finally, address state discourses on Islamic

heterodoxy, which themselves fall into two overlapping categories — discourses on radicalism and security threats, and discourses on Islamic dissidence as a threat to the authority of national traditions. Chapter eight examines the relationship between these two sets of discourses, and focuses in particular on discourses on extremism, terrorism, and security. The chapter shows that discourses on security and authority are not clearly delineated, one from the other, but nevertheless speak to different state strategies in relation to Islamic heterodoxy. Discourses on security convey a vague sense of threat that justifies state power, and are thus used more extensively by Kazakhstan in relation to the regime's greater capacity. The chapter examines in particular the cases of the movement Hizb ut-Tahrir, which has been labelled an extremist and even terrorist organization for its calls to create a single Muslim state or Caliphate. Chapter nine demonstrates how the political and religious establishments deploy discourses on radicalism to delegitimate dissent and bolster the authority of the Muftiate. It examines in particular discourses that depict radical Islam as a foreign attack on local traditions. The chapter examines state rhetoric on Wahhabism and Salafism, two fundamentalist movements that the regimes depict as a form of conservative Arab nationalism that is radicalizing local Muslims. The chapter also examines the Islamic missionary movement Tablighi

Jamaat from India, which has been labelled a "hidden threat" despite its moderate values. The chapter explores the strikingly different careers of Tablighi Jamaat in Kazakhstan, where th group is banned outright, vs. In Kyrgyzstan, where the movement has gained increasingly mainstream recognition and even penetrated the leadership structure of the Muftiate.

The conclusion revisits the central puzzle of the study, and reviews the answers offered in the dissertation. I discuss and synthesize the major themes and arguments of the empirical discussion, and reflect on some of the broader sociological implications of the analysis presented herein.

CHAPTER 1

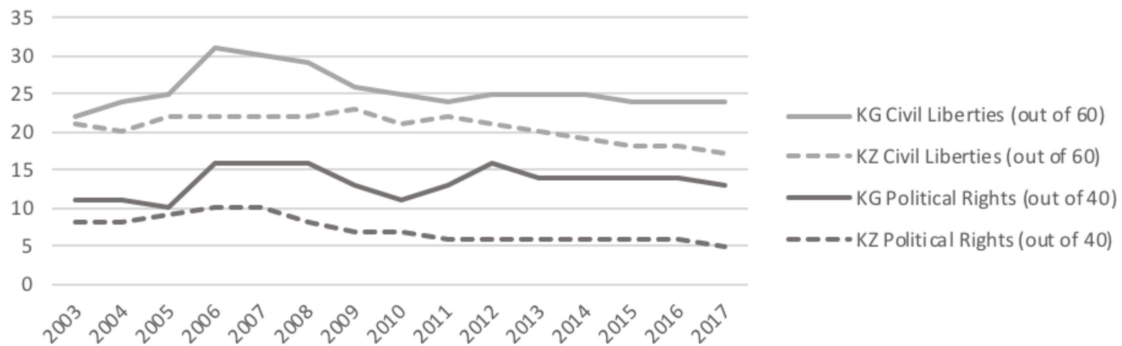
Cases and Puzzle: Illiberal Democracy in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

Few observers puzzle that religious minorities are embattled in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Neither country has a strong tradition of pluralist and democratic governance, though neither features the pervasive suppression of basic freedoms that neighboring states such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan present. Kyrgyzstan in particularly has enjoyed a reputation as an 'island of democracy' in Central Asia, although this status is less a function of liberal democratic values than of a fragmented elite and devolution of power to local government (Siegel 2016). Nevertheless, as figure one below demonstrates, both countries face significant challenges in providing political rights and civil liberties.[1]

[1] All scores drawn from the Freedom House annual *Freedom in the World* report, accessible at freedomhouse.org.

Figure 1: Freedom House scores by year for political rights & civil liberties in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

Source: Freedom House, Freedom in the World annual reports



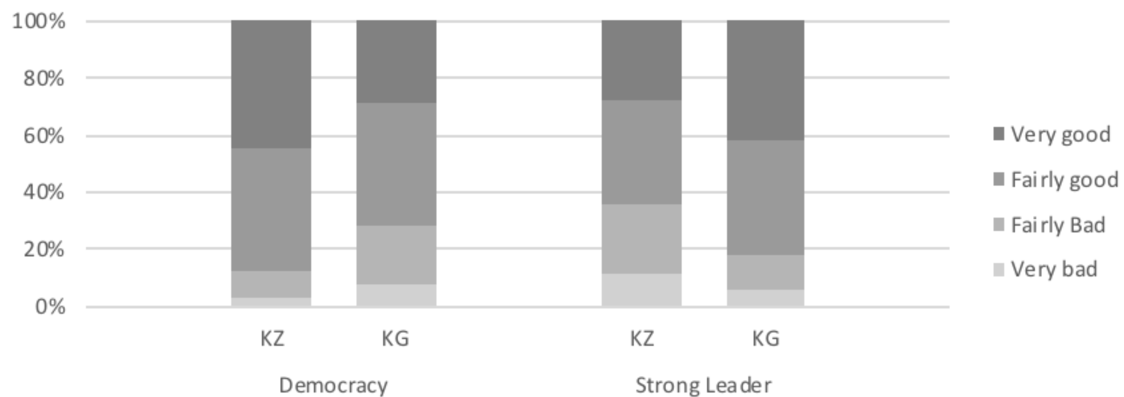
Given this legacy, few observers have puzzled over source of the restrictive policies that have been passed in relation to religious pluralism in recent years in both countries. While there has been extensive scholarship over the state and religion in the region (Epkinhans 2009; Low 2007, 2013; McBrien 2009; Montgomery 2007; Rasanayagam 2006), the motivation for such policies seems inherent to the nature of these post-Soviet regimes. Upon further inspection, however, this crackdown on religious pluralism raises several questions, both in terms of the regimes' motivations, and in relation to the popular support for authoritarianism that such policies belie.

While it might be easy to attribute these policies to regimes that want to force an authoritarian agenda on the public, data from the most recent wave of the World Values Survey shows significant support for authoritarian leaders. What's

more the data show greater support for authoritarianism in relatively more democratic Kyrgyzstan than in more authoritarian Kazakhstan.[2]

Figure 2: Support in Kazakhstan vs. Kyrgyzstan for "having a democratic system" vs. for "having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections"

Source: The World Values Survey, wave 6



This data contradicts theories that attribute the popularity of authoritarian leaders to elite manipulation or the charismatic persona of the leader. Even after deposing the widely disliked strongman Bakiev in 2010, respondents to the World Values Survey in Kyrgyzstan expressed a stronger preference for authoritarianism over democracy than respondents who have experienced

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[2] The relationships demonstrated in this chart between country and support are significant at the .001 level; country and support for a strong leader: X^2 (3, 3000) = 137.2, $p < .001$; country and support for democracy: X^2 (3, 2997) = 140.9, $p < .001$; data from wave 6 of the World Values Survey, conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in 2011, available at www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

twenty years of stable rule under Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan.

Part of the problem lies in our definition of authoritarianism itself. Scholars tend to treat authoritarianism as a series of institutions that consolidate the power of an autocrat at the expense of the citizenry. When examining Central Asia's "dictators without borders," Cooley and Heathershaw (2016:xi) define authoritarianism as 'systems in which political authority is concentrated in the hands of the few and exercised without effective accountability to parliament, the judiciary, civil society or a free press.' This conception undoubtedly captures a core feature of essentialism, but it also draws scholars to an erroneous conclusion — that common citizens have no reasonable motivation for supporting authoritarian regimes, and that supporters of such leaders are acting against their own interests.

This assumption does not define all scholarship on authoritarianism, but implicitly runs through the very core of western political philosophy, with its emphasis on individual liberties. If we view self-determination and popular rule only though an institutional framework, then authoritarian regimes would be seen to consolidate their power at the expense of their own constituents. Common citizens would seem to have a manifest interest in opposing these infringements on their rights, and promoting politics that maximize civil

liberties. And yet common citizens often join authoritarian leaders in assailing pluralism and liberal democracy as an assault on national self-determination. I argue that the literatures on identity politics and fundamentalism that have proliferated in recent years have largely emerged to address this inconsistency by proposing irrational and primordial identities as an explanation for why common citizens side with authoritarian leaders, seemingly against their own interests.

This dissertation aims to address precisely this assumption — that common citizens have a manifest interest in liberal democracy, and that citizens who support authoritarianism do so against their instrumental interests. So long as we treat authoritarianism merely as a concentration of institutional power, we cannot explain why authoritarian regimes repress religious groups and other forms of social dissidence that represent no threat to that power. Similarly, if the only goal of authoritarian regimes is to consolidate power at the expense of the public, then we cannot explain the popularity of authoritarian leaders and policies among large segments of the public. Instead, we find that authoritarian regimes as a rule show great concern with maintaining a spectacle of public legitimacy and popularity (Adams 2009; 2010).

We must therefore treat authoritarian regimes as political enterprises

concerned not only with concentrating power in the hands of a few, but also with maintaining legitimate authority. Similarly, we must develop a model that recognizes how such regimes maintain popularity among a political base by distributing social power and authority to their constituents in the name of the nation, religion, or whatever collective cult the regime invokes. I pursue such a model through an analysis of religious policy in order to show how seemingly benign and apolitical dissident groups challenge the sense of sovereignty that regime and supporters alike are pursuing through identity politics, but without ever challenging the institutions of rule.

I. The Historical Origins of Contemporary Nationalities

Central Asian history and ethnicity has for centuries been shaped by both symbiosis and antagonism between settled and nomadic peoples, the legacy of which can still be felt in the diverse cultures of the contemporary nations. Although the region has a continuous history of settlement stretching back to antiquity, the modern profile of nationalities and national boundaries was shaped largely by two great imperial forces — the conquests of Timur (Tamerlane), which reconstituted the Mongol Empire under an Islamic banner,

and Russian expansion to the south and east, which eventually brought Soviet culture, politics and nationalities policy to the region. Timur's conquests are credited with reshaping the ethnic map and, exterminating great deal of religious diversity among the populations (especially Buddhism and local animistic traditions), and developing, expanding and implanting Islamic civilization in Central Asia. Soviet governance, in contrast, brought to the region an unparalleled zeal for social engineering along "scientific" socialist models, including the categorization of the population into mutually-exclusive nationalities with varying degrees of national autonomy under Stalin's "national in form, socialist in content."

Steppe Power and Russian Expansion

The contemporary delimitation of the region into distinct nations represents a dramatic simplification of the pre-modern ethnic map, accomplished primarily under Russian and Soviet rule. The political-economy of Central Asia was shaped over the centuries by overland trade between China and the Mediterranean. The global significance of this trade reached its peak in the eight century at the height of the Silk Road, but its significance for shaping the ethnic map of the region goes back to the very beginnings of the historical record.

Numerous peoples who came to populate Central Asia first entered the region through imperial expansion to protect and coordinate long-distance trade.

Timur's conquests in the fourteenth century had a definitive impact on Central Asian cultures. Islamic civilization flourished in the region during his rule, and he secured the place of Islam in among the population of the region for centuries to come. Timur constructed some of the most renowned Islamic architecture in his capital Samarkand, even as older Islamic cultural centers in the Middle East suffered significant declines during his rule. Timur's diplomatic skills in organizing loosely confederated nomadic armies represented the hight of steppe power, with historic implications both for the political map of Eurasia and for the ethnic composition and arrangement of Central Asia. However, ethnic identity remained fluid within Timur's empire. The link between ethnicity and nationality would only begin to become clarified in Central Asia much later under Russian rule.

The first efforts to classify ethnic categories and territories began after the Russian Empire expanded into Central Asia in the nineteenth century through the military campaigns of Konstantin von Kaufman, the first Governor-General of then-called *Turkestan*. From the late 1860s to the early 1870s, von Kaufman subjugated the major khanates and emirates of the region as vassals of Russia. In

the spirit of the times, however, von Kaufman also exhibited a zeal for studying his territories and subjects in the hopes of modernizing the region. He invited teams of scientists from various academies to study the physical and cultural diversity of Central Asia in the hopes of clarifying the ethnic map (Brower 1997).

These scientists had difficulty making sense of the diversity of the region. Contemporary ethnonyms such as Uzbek and Kyrgyz were used simultaneously to denote ancestry and way of life (e.g. a Kyrgyz Uzbek would be a nomadic Uzbek). Divisions between settled and nomadic peoples, and between Turkic and Persian ethnicities had to be amplified or invented. When the ethnographic map proved too complex to yield clear-cut divisions, ethnocultural variation was re-conceptualized as a function of religion. Kaufman distinguished the nomadic peoples, whom he considered to be only nominally Muslim and largely indifferent in their faith, from the town dwellers, whom he considered to have internalized the teachings and identity of Islam (Brower 1997).

As the autocracy of the Tsarist regime was increasingly challenged in the late nineteenth century by calls for reform and liberalization, many national groups seized the opportunity to fight for greater national self-determination. In 1905, Tsar Nicholas II signed the October Manifesto, establishing a legislative body, the Duma, and a council of ministers as his advisors (Seton-Watson 1962). The First

and Second Dumas each contained thirty deputies representing various Muslim peoples in the empire. Leaders from Turkestan also promoted their national aspirations through the formation of an All-Russian Muslim League, which was dominated by Volga Tatars but also gained supporters from “the Crimean and Azerbaijan Tatars, Bashkirs, Turkmen, Kazakh, Uzbeks, and Kirghiz” (Von Hagen 1997:240). Under the new, more liberal regime, these groups made significant advances, including the establishment of native language education. Converts to Orthodoxy also gained the right to convert back to Islam without any consequences, and practiced this right en masse (Von Hagen 1997).

The Soviet Period: Religious, Economic, and Nationalities Policy

It was not until the Soviet era that the ethnic categorization initiated under the Tsarist regime became a permanent, legal feature of public life, and the contemporary boundaries of the Central Asian states were delimited. As with other areas of economic, political, and social reform within the Soviet Union, nationalities policy represented an enthusiastic attempt by the Communist Party leadership and intellectual vanguard to engineer away archaic folkways and social forms, and introduce modern, progressive institutions. Nationalities policy was unique, however, in that it specifically addressed the question of how to

bring Soviet civilization to peoples who resisted Russian rule and (in the Bolsheviks' eyes) lacked sufficient class consciousness to assimilate the new, revolutionary culture.

Soviet nationalities policy must therefore be understood as a combination of Marxist-Leninist conjecture over how to elevate the consciousness of Central Asia's peoples to the level of international communism, and pragmatic policies aimed at a divide and rule strategy (Brubaker 1994). Both of these elements clearly express themselves in the two pillars of Soviet nation-building: (1) the formation of a four tiered hierarchy of national territories with varying degrees of autonomy, from all-union republics to local soviets, and (2) the institution of individual passport nationality, by which all citizens were assigned an official national label that was transmitted across generations based on the officially recognized nationality of their parents (Brubaker 1996). The level of autonomy accorded to each national homeland was ostensibly based on the perceived level of consolidated national and class consciousness among its titular nation, but in reality the delimitation of Central Asia (and its segregation from the southern Urals) was intended to prevent the unification of a single Turkestan that might resist Soviet rule from Moscow.

Five Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR), the highest level of political autonomy

accorded within the Soviet Union, were created in Central Asia for titular nations that by many measures lacked the national consciousness and solidarity of the Tatars, for example, who were incorporated into the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic as a semi-autonomous republic. This is especially true of the semi-nomadic peoples of the steppe, who had a long history of tribal resistance to Russian rule, but produced no initiatives for national unification. These peoples, who frequently identified with individual clans and patriarchal figures more than any super-tribal ethnonym, were divided into the Kazakh and Kyrgyz nations, and given homelands that roughly divided the steppe ranges from the mountain ranges that nomads had long occupied.

With national homelands came native-language education, state patronage for folk arts, and general legitimacy of titular culture in public life. All of this patronage operated through the curious form of Soviet mimicry of imperial high culture, e.g. training a generation of Kyrgyz elites to both produce and demand Kyrgyz-language opera. Such efforts may seem curious, as promoting national consciousness, especially in the form of bourgeois high culture, directly clashed with orthodox communist ideals of progress as originally formulated by Marx and Engels. The reason for such a radical change in ideology within the USSR was twofold. First, nationalism was viewed by Lenin and Stalin as an inevitable

stage of social evolution through which all peoples must pass on their way to proletarian awakening. Second, minority nationalism was viewed as a justifiable reaction to Great Russian imperialism and Tsarist oppression, and, so the logic went, could be quelled through the granting of national forms and the promotion of national cultures. From these principles, the Soviet leadership formulated the policy of "national in form, socialist in content (Martin 2001).

A complex pyramid of diminishing national-territorial units within units was constructed with the goal of eliminating national tensions and sentiments by seamlessly blending the state structure with the ethnonational identity of every soviet citizen. However, nationalist tensions between center and periphery plagued Soviet governance and society throughout the state's seventy years. For many individuals, the national labels assigned by the Soviet State had very limited personal weight, as with the significant population of Tajik-speaking Uzbeks in Samarkand (Gorenburg 1999). Furthermore, assigning a single titular nation to each multiethnic territory was ultimately prompted members of that titular nation to view the territories as theirs alone, and pressure minority communities to assimilate or evacuate.

This tension between nationalities did not engender popular calls for independence, however. When Gorbachev held a referendum for dissolving the

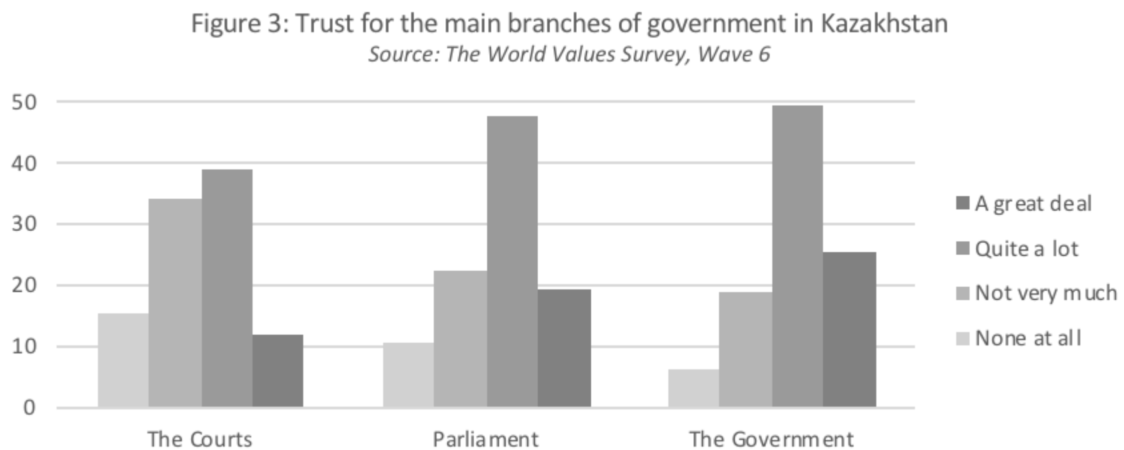
Soviet Union in 1991, the population of Central Asia voted overwhelmingly to retain the union (Snyder 1997). The leaderships of the respective Central Asian SSRs stood to gain tremendously from national independence, however, and followed Boris Yeltsin's advice to draw as much power as possible for the SSR level and cripple the central government. When independence came not long after the referendum decisively spoke against it, most citizens greeted it with trepidation, aware of the economic and political turmoil that lay ahead.

II. The Contemporary Period

Much of the political differences between contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan extends from Soviet industrial and nationalities policy that were intended to prevent the rise of unified, regional opposition to centralized rule from Moscow. Today, Kazakhstan's larger industrial base and resource wealth has engendered more consolidated rentier politics under President Nazarbayev. Resource poor and less industrialized Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, features fragmented cadre politics that have resulted in two coup d'etats and endemic power struggles among regional elites.

Kazakhstan features a far more robust spectacle of national unity and popular

support (Adams 2010). Kazakhstan's public politics therefore corresponds more closely to conventional depictions of authoritarianism, featuring strongman leadership and manipulation of the masses through manufactured patriotism. Though it may be hard to gauge genuine popular support in a country where elections, media coverage, and other potential indicators are compromised, there is ample evidence that Nazarbayev's administration and policies enjoys genuine, even fervent support among wide bands of his constituents. Figure 3 below, for example, compares the amount of trust expressed for Nazarbayev's administration in relation to trust expressed for the other branches of government.



Like Putin, Nazarbayev is revered by many as a strong leader and patron for the

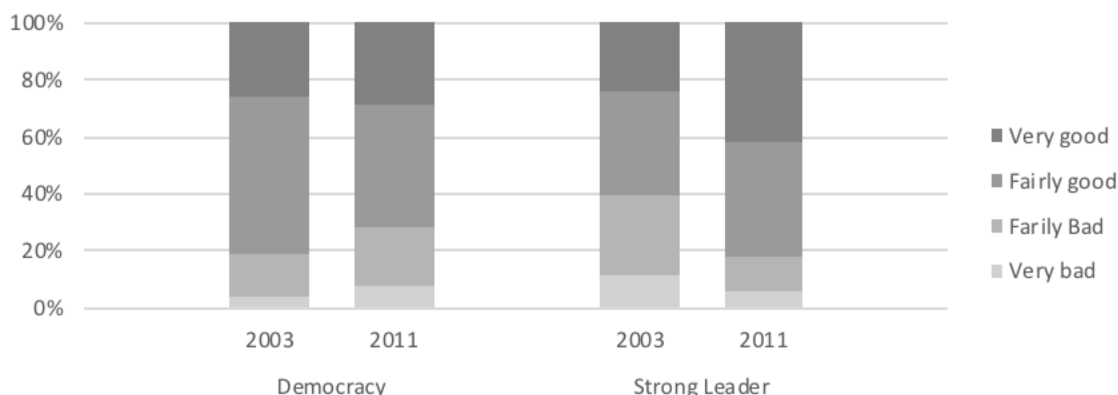
nation. In Kazakhstan, as elsewhere, certain strata of the citizenry genuinely embrace authoritarian leaders as champions of the popular will, who stand against enemies of the people — both external and internal. Furthermore, as Seigel (2016) has shown, citizens of Kazakhstan express far greater confidence in their central government in comparison to local government, despite the fact that local government officials are in fact appointed by the central government. In contrast. Local officials in Kyrgyzstan won battles early on after independence to retain autonomy and devolve significant powers from the central government. As a result, citizens in Kyrgyzstan express significantly greater confidence in local government officials than they to in the central government.

For these and other reasons, Kyrgyzstan has no single figure that monopolizes public authority as Nazarbayev does in Kazakhstan. There is no autocratic or charismatic leader who would benefit from manipulation of the masses, and past presidents have faced increasing public resistance as they sought to accumulate such power. And yet, as the figure two above indicates, popular support for authoritarianism is significantly stronger in more democratic Kyrgyzstan than in more authoritarian Kazakhstan. What's more, this preference for authoritarianism has grown over time. The chart below compares the support in Kyrgyzstan in 2003 and 2011 for "a democratic political system" vs. "having a

strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections."[3] In the same period of time that Freedom House gauged a general decline in political rights and civil freedoms, this chart shows a significant decline in support for democracy and a significant increase in support for a strong leader.

Figure 4: Support in Kyrgyzstan by year for "having a democratic system" vs. for "having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections"

Source: The World Values Survey, waves 4 & 6



Just the two points mentioned here speak strongly against one prevailing conception of authoritarianism — that authoritarian leaders rise to power because of their individual charisma, and maintain popularity by using their consolidated power to manipulate the public. Respondents to the World Values

[3] Year and support for a strong leader: X^2 (3, 2497) = 24.5, $p < .001$; year and support for democracy: X^2 (3, 2517) = 164.5, $p < .001$; data from waves 4 and 6 of the World Values Survey, conducted in Kyrgyzstan in 2003 and 2011, respectively.

Survey expressed relatively greater support for authoritarianism in Kyrgyzstan compared to in Kazakhstan, despite there being no charismatic figure to rally such support. Respondents from Kyrgyzstan further expressed increasingly strong preference for a strong leader and distaste for democracy as their political rights and civil liberties generally expanded in the wake fo two successful coups. Before turning to religious policy, I will discuss this period of Kyrgyzstan's independent history to give more context to this decline in democratic values.

A Receding Island of Democracy

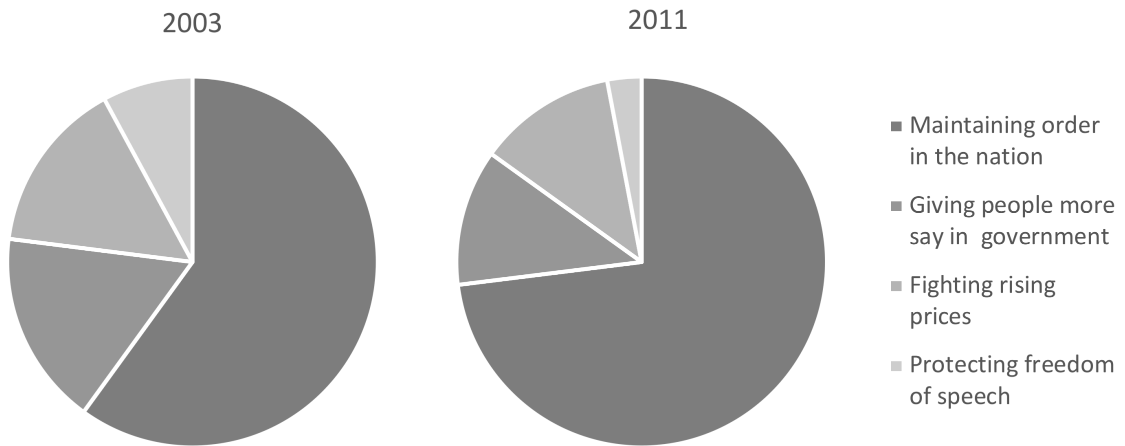
Kyrgyzstan's history as an independent nation can be traced symbolically according to the three successive monuments that occupied the central square of its capital, Bishkek. The people greeted independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 with a combination of elation and uncertainty. Many were glad to be free of the increasingly worn down economic and ideological apparatus of Moscow and the Communist Party, but felt uncertain of what national self-determination would mean without familiar guiding principles. For more than a decade after independence, the monument of Lenin thus stood on the central square, undisturbed. There seemed to be no urgency to replace him, nor any self-evident replacement to symbolize an independent Kyrgyzstan.

Legend has it that Lenin's eventual removal (to a neighboring square between the Parliament and the national history museum) was sparked by the first state visit from a newly inaugurated Vladimir Putin. The Russian head of state allegedly expressed his surprise to then-President Askar Akaev that Lenin still stood on the central square. Regardless of the veracity of this account, Lenin was replaced in 2003 by a winged woman that symbolized freedom, holding in her outstretched arm a tunduk — the centerpiece of a traditional Kyrgyz yurt ceiling. Akaev had cleverly used the tunduk as an inclusive, albeit specifically Kyrgyz symbol of civic nationalism. Kyrgyzstan was a "common home" for the roughly sixty ethnicities living in the country, but the titular nation held a privileged position. In particular, this symbol of the Kyrgyz people's nomadic history subtly accorded secondary status the large Uzbek minority in the south of the country, who were historically settled and agrarian.

Image 1: From left to right, the statue of Lenin, Erkindik (Freedom), and Manas (the mythical patron of the Kyrgyz), which successively occupied the main square of Bishkek.

Akaev remains the only inaugural president of the five former Soviet republics of Central Asia to have been removed from power in his natural lifetime. In 2005, he was deposed by an opposition coalition after amending the constitution to grant himself more terms. His replacement, Kurmanbek Bakiev, quickly set about dismantling the laissez-faire institutions and power-sharing arrangements among elites that had earned Kyrgyzstan a reputation as an "island of democracy" and "the Switzerland of Central Asia." Bakiev's clan was ousted in 2010 in a far more bloody coup, which involved clashes between security forces and armed protesters in the capital, and precipitated ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the South. As figure five below demonstrates, the nation registered a notable exhaustion with the promises of

liberal democracy in 2011, and a palpable hunger for social order.[4] In August of 2011, a monument of Manas, the mythical warrior-patron of the Kyrgyz nation, was unveiled on the central square of Bishkek to mark the 20th anniversary of Kyrgyzstan's independence from the Soviet Union.



The Freedom monument did not receive the same reverential treatment as Lenin. While the Soviet period is remembered by many as a time of national pride and heroic transformation, democracy appeared to have failed in engendering the social and economic gains promised by an open society. Rather, democracy had

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[4] Year and support for a strong leader: X^2 (3, 2538) = 60.6, $p < .001$; data from waves 4 and 6 of the World Values Survey.

produced quibbling and stalemates among cadres of elites, and had contributed to a national indecisiveness that seemed to make Kyrgyzstan weaker than its more authoritarian neighbors. The "empty throne" of sovereign Kyrgyzstan was easy for regional powers like Russia and China to manipulate, and for neighboring Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to outmaneuver in regional disputes. In contrast to the "afterlife" that Lenin was granted on a lesser square, Erkindik was condemned to a kind of monumental purgatory. She lies face-down on a stack of pallets near a workshop on the outskirts of Bishkek, in a state of perpetual limbo.

The symbolism of this succession in monuments was lost on no one. Local and international proponents of civil society voiced alarm at the replacement of a monument dedicated to freedom with a symbol of national potency, implying that Kyrgyzstan had abandoned efforts to build a democratic society. Monuments symbolize more than the qualities of the regime or the national mood, however. They symbolize something sacred and immutable, something transcendent that stands above mundane politics. They demarcate sacrosanct ideals and values that are not subject to the profane realm of popular debate, negotiation, and compromise. In this regard, the monument that stands on the main square signals to the people what issues constitute suitable subjects of public deliberation, and what ideals stand beyond the quibbles of mundane

politics.

The monument to Manas asserts that national character and values have been elevated to this sacrosanct status, and by extension so have the public figures and institutions that claim the authority (often intrinsic) to speak for these reified values. Indeed, one outcome of rising nationalism has been a crackdown on the capacity of civil society to challenge this authority. Foreign organizations and local groups alike, most of them politically benign, have come under attack simply because they do not take their cues directly from the political or religious leadership of the country — the two pillars of a growing consensus on what constitutes "traditional" Kyrgyz values. In effect, the monument to Manas consecrates national values as a sacred fetish that stands above the commonplace concerns of citizens — a sacrosanct essence that at once defines the will of every Kyrgyz, and yet can only be divined and executed by the ruling elite.

The motivations of the regime itself are clear: to bolster their hold on power by depicting pluralism as a challenge to national self-determination rather than a constituent part of the popular will. The monument's popularity among the titular Kyrgyz majority begs the question of why common citizens would embrace a symbol that seemingly excludes popular input — that elevates national values above the arena of public deliberation in which they can

participate. Why would common citizens endorse their leaders' claims to "defend" popular sovereignty by constricting it — by circumscribing an expanding repertoire of culture, values, and interests from the realm of public politics?

The most apparent answer to this question is that the public readily accepts any loose symbolism of the nation, even if they are ambivalent about the regimes that erects such monuments. However, if people are so amenable to generic, nationalist imagery, why did it take twenty years and two regime changes for Kyrgyzstan's ruling elite to arrive at such an obvious symbol of national strength and order? Why did President Akaev not erect Manas or a comparable symbol of national strength upon Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991? Why did he calculate in 2003, when he replaced Lenin, that a monument to freedom would endear his administration to the public more than a simple, potent symbol of national strength? These questions cannot be answered by theories of political identity that assume that the masses are always eager to embrace essentialist symbolism and rhetoric. Strong theories of identity similarly fail to explain the popularity of illiberal policies with an ethno-national animus.

Theories of identity must be able to account for how symbols that stand for popular inclusion in one period come to represent an establishment that excludes

the people in another. As the Soviet economy stagnated, as communism's revolutionary vanguard gave way to the conservative stewardship of the Soviet nomenklatura, Soviet citizens felt increasingly disenchanted with the symbols of Communist Party rule. Lenin no longer seemed to elevate the people, but rather excused the regime and its policies from public input or scrutiny. In an instant, national independence wiped away this entire apparatus of exclusion, and democracy instituted new forms of popular participation and inclusion. A monument to the Manas in the context of recent independence would mostly have reproduced stale Soviet nationalities policy, which smothered claims to popular input beneath hollow invocations of national consciousness, and ubiquitous ovations to the "friendship of peoples" (Martin 2001).

President Akaev thus calculated greater political utility from a symbol of freedom than from a symbol of national potency. His administration erected a monument that expressed an abstract and inclusive concept of liberty, signifying both national independence and inalienable rights. Nevertheless, freedom alone failed to provide the citizens of Kyrgyzstan with a sense of self-determination. Civil and pluralist politics became themselves a source of exclusion for many citizens — a politics championed by western experts that seemed to have greater influence over the government than did its own citizens. A mere decade later,

therefore, replacing the Erkindik monument with a statue of Manas seemed somehow necessary and urgent. In the same vein, restrictions on pluralism, particularly religious pluralism, also come to seem increasingly urgent to many citizens.

Religious Policy

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have become host to a diverse set of religious organizations, sects, and movements with an international reach, resulting in increasingly strict laws. As table 1 and figure six below show, a greater proportion of the population of Kyrgyzstan identifies as belonging to a religious group than in Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan's population similarly accords relatively greater significance to religion than that of Kazakhstan.[5]

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[5] Kazakhstan was only surveyed in wave 6 of the WVS, and this it is not possible to draw similar longitudinal comparisons. Relationship between country and importance of religion significant at the .001 level; : X^2 (3, 3000) = 326.2, $p < .001$.

Table 1: Religious Demographics in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

	KG	KZ
Muslim	89.4%	51.1%
Orthodox Christian	6.2%	26.6%
Christian Other	0.5%	1.7%
Jewish	1.5%	0.1%
Other	0.2%	0.2%
None	2.3%	20.3%

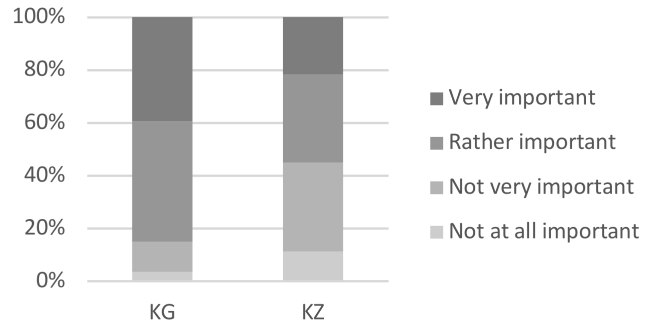

Figure 6: Importance of religion in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan
Source: World Values Survey, 2011

Though Kazakhstan was not included in earlier waves of the World Values Survey, data from Kyrgyzstan shows significant increases in religiosity between 2003 and 2011 (presumably continuing a trend since the end of the Soviet period). Figure seven further demonstrates that this increase in reported religiosity transcends the different denominations that are active in the country.[6]

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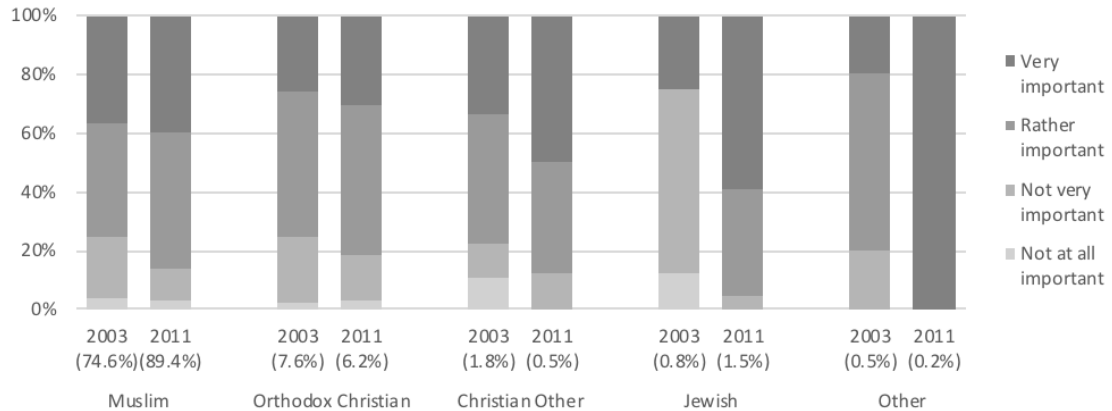
[6] Relationship between year and importance of religion across denominations in Kyrgyzstan significant at the .001 level: X^2 (24, 2527) = 245.3, $p < .001$.



Both states maintain an agency dedicated to regulating religious affairs, as well as a Muslim board or Muftiate that specifically regulates Islamic teachings and activities (with varying degrees of autonomy from the state). Furthermore, the security services of each state view religious activity as one of their primary concerns, and various state-controlled foundations and research organizations contribute expert analysis that supports each state's policies toward religious regulation. The countries differ, however, in the timeline with which they adopted such restrictions, and the degree of control that the central government exerts over their execution.

Kyrgyzstan has maintained a State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA hereafter) since 2001. The organization has worked to create a consistent policy

and legal framework for regulating religious organizations and practices, but its criteria for registration have become increasingly strict in recent years. Religious pluralism long flew under the radar of the Nazarbayev administration, but Kazakhstan has recently moved more aggressively to curtail pluralism. Nevertheless, the country has pursued a concerted, albeit more piecemeal, effort to regulate religion. Kazakhstan passed legislation strengthening the State Agency for Religious Affairs (SARA hereafter) in October of 2011, and has quickly moved to restrict hundreds of congregations and religious organizations within its territory.

These restrictive policies enjoy popular backing among the titular populations of both nations, although the restriction of religion in Kyrgyzstan is more "hampered" by political contestation and due process of law. What can explain this popularity among common citizens, who would seem to have a manifest interest in supporting liberal institutions that expand individual freedoms? Before addressing the answers offered by the literature, I will briefly address a number of explanations offered by people engaged in these politics locally as to why the state expends such effort to restrict marginal and apolitical religious groups.

I already noted that normative applications of "tradition" differs significantly

from the historical record, but the people engaged in these politics offer various explanations for the underlying meaning of "tradition," i.e. of what the state is defending. First, "traditional" and "non-traditional" might be euphemisms for local vs. foreign groups. Tradition might connote the local and current sensibilities, which extends no deeper than recent memory, but nevertheless carries the authority of the status quo. While many respondents have explained restrictive policies as efforts to protect local religious groups from recent foreign incursions, the policies hardly work to enforce religious autocthony.

The state and Muftiate have conferred the mantle of tradition on brands of Islam that are often recently imported and sponsored by foreign powers, especially Turkey and Saudia Arabia.[7] This intervention represents a far greater role for foreign powers in the country than does the activities of marginal groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, and yet this imported Islam is popularly viewed as contributing to, rather than detracting from, the spiritual self-determination of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh nations. Similarly, the direct links between the local Orthodox patriarchate and the central patriarchate in Russia should be seen as a serious intrusion of foreign power. The Russian Orthodox Church represents a

[7] Interview with professor of anthropology specializing in local religious activities, Bishkek, KG, June 2014.

form of soft power from Russia, from an institution with increasingly strong ties to the Kremlin. And yet the ROC has never been deemed an agent of foreign subversion, and certainly never been in danger of losing its traditional status..

Second, therefore, we might see this "impulse to orthodoxy" stemming from anxiety over national self-preservation. A Kyrgyz or Kazakh convert to Christianity has betrayed the nation because he or she is undermining the nation's cultural distinctiveness. "Traditional" Islamic practices may be imported or innovated, but they still preserve the living legacy of national tradition. Again, this explanation undoubtedly finds support in the rhetoric of local people themselves involved in this debate, but it cannot explain why these people see the conversion of a relative handful of citizens as a such a threat to the nation's "cultural sovereignty." How can national self-determination be threatened by the private decision of a small proportion of the population to abandon the tidy linkages between religious and national identity? More generally, what does it mean when Russified government officials speak of spiritual and cultural sovereignty, given their love of Italian suits, German automobiles, and the music of Boney M? The current generation of elites came of age in the Soviet era and often display little regard for their history and culture. Yet they worry about the "destructive" influence of non-traditional groups on the nation.

Finally, we might consider tradition in the Durkheimian sense, as a source of solidarity, social cohesion, and collective conscience. Orthodox religion may feature imported and even "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm 1983), but it sows social accord irrespective of its vintage. In contrast heterodoxy sows discord and anomie. Again, this line of reasoning is indeed popular among local observers, but most religious discord emanates from the regime or from the burgeoning religious orthodoxy interfering with docile "non-traditional" groups. Almost without exception, members of heterodox groups go to great lengths to avoid religious animosity, and converts often find themselves at pains to demonstrate that they still "belong" to their titular nation.

Thus, although these explanations perform important political work in context, they only deepen the puzzle once we interrogate them. In the next chapter, I turn to the explanations offered by scholarly literature from the region and more broadly, before proposing my own model of religious orthodoxy.

CHAPTER 2

Theory and Literature

Conventional approaches to political behavior assume a misalignment between the interests of authoritarian regimes and that of their subjects. Instrumental approaches to political behavior work from the assumption that people desire the freedom to pursue common interests and articulate autonomous political programs. Authoritarian regimes constrict the latitude for such grassroots association and mobilization, and should thus draw opposition from across the public. In this perspective, only those who stand to gain instrumentally from the concentration of power - primarily the agents of the regime itself and those in collusion with them - have a clear rationale for supporting authoritarian politics.

Conventional accounts of authoritarianism thus frequently depict supporters of autocrats as either complicit with the regime, or blinded to their manifest interest in liberal democracy by some primal force. Many scholars seek to explain popular support for autocrats through reference to non-instrumental factors such as elite manipulation or primordial and reactionary identities, which ostensibly

cause people to act against their best instrumental advantage. I will go through a number of these perspectives briefly before developing a Bourdieusian framework for authoritarian and "identity" politics.

I. The Instrumentalist Perspective

The literature on authoritarianism tends to promote a number of key assertions that make it difficult to explain the popularity of authoritarian figures. First many scholars treat authoritarianism primarily as a concentration of regime power at the expense of the people, and as a series of strategies to prevent democratization (Dresden and Howard 2015; Schedler and Hoffman 2015; von Soest 2015). Key among these strategies are efforts to suppress the population's right to political input through free elections and free association according to shared interests in civil society. Thus, many scholars focus specifically an authoritarian regime's efforts to suppress political rights and civil liberties (Borzel 2015; Moller and Skaapning 2013; Whiting 2017).

Though these approaches are entirely valid and have produced detailed accounts of the workings of autocratic power, this scholarship promotes an perspective in which the interests of authoritarian regimes are uniformly aligned

against the interests of the citizenry. It therefore becomes difficult to account for the popularity of authoritarian regimes. Some scholars of authoritarianism thus account for popularity by focusing on elite manipulation of the population. Such scholars may devote particular attention to the utility of external threats to the goals authoritarian leaders, and catalogue autocratic efforts to play up such threats (Feldman 1997; Gerschewsk 2013). However, this literature often analyzes cases retrospectively. Scholars point to cases in which authoritarian leaders were able to exploit their constituents' sense of insecurity, treating discourses of threat and stability as causal factors, without accounting for cases when discourses on threat failed to be politically salient.

Scholars who have offered comparative analyses of authoritarianism frequently focus on the institutions of rule. Numerous studies have examined the institutional foundation for variation between democratic and authoritarian rule (Brancati 2014; Koolner and Kailitz 2013; Levitsky 2014; Simpser 2013). However, this emphasis on institutions only reproduces the dominant instrumentalist perspective within political thought, which assumes that rational actors seek to maximize their utility in relation to formal institutions. This emphasis on institutions forces us to assume that authoritarian institutions benefit those who directly participate in, or otherwise collude with the regime, at the expense of the

broader population. The instrumentalist perspective thus promotes a general assumption that common citizens would have no interest in supporting regimes that undermine their civil liberties. Many scholars who try to offer formal, institutional models of authoritarianism contribute to this assumption (Gehlback *et al* 2015; Knutsen and Nygard 2015; Pepinsky 2014; Roller 2013).

Even the literature on populism, which emphasizes the ways in which demagogues articulate claims for the public, tend to fall into such theoretical traps (de la Torre 2014; Grauvogel and von Soest 2014). Though this literature acknowledges that populist figures can articulate powerful platforms that appeal to marginalized constituents, scholars of populism frequently see these platforms as rational only when they articulate class-based platforms, and less so when they articulate culture wars or other populist platforms. Thinkers from critical and Marxist traditions such as Gramsci and Althusser work with variants of this assumption, calling for class liberation and dismissing other political agendas as forms of false consciousness.

Thus, the instrumentalist literature on authoritarianism and populism broadly assume that average citizens who support autocratic leaders do so at the expense of their manifest interest in liberal institutions. I do not argue that these institutional and critical perspectives are invalid. Indeed, I strongly agree with

scholars who have argued that sociology must devote more attention to the state as a key set of social institutions (Skocpol 1979; Evans *et al* 1985; Rueschemeyer 1992; Evans 1995). Nevertheless, I argue that the instrumentalist focus on individual liberties as a function of formal institutions prevents us from fully understanding the behavior of authoritarian regimes, or the reasons for their popularity. I now turn to literatures that have grown in response to this dilemma.

II. Non-Instrumental Explanations

As previously stated, it is difficulty to account for the popularity of authoritarian figures if we view authoritarianism as a concentration of power at the expense of the public. This conception extends back to the earliest treatises on individual liberty Western political philosophy has long treated topics such as freedom of conscience, pluralism, and a choice between freedom and unfreedom — between institutions that either secure rights for citizens, or deny them. While this emphasis on civil liberties has provided an invaluable source of moral guidance, it has also left scholars struggling to explain why reasonable citizens would support authoritarian policies that attack those liberties, and cheer the leaders that enact such policies to consolidate power seemingly at their expense.

Entire literatures have emerged to offer explanations for why citizens act against their seemingly manifest interest in liberal institutions that maximize individual freedoms. Wide-ranging scholarship on ‘identity politics’ has sought the answer to this puzzle in stronger and weaker models of identity. Huntington’s (1997) similarly proposes fundamentalism as a factor that can explain such political agendas in his much loved and much maligned theory of the 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1997). What all such theories share in common, as Brubaker pointed out in his (2005) critique of the literature on identity politics, is that scholars use identity in a way that connotes a non-instrumental logic of sameness and selfhood, which supposedly trumps instrumental reasoning and individual motives of self-interest. Strong theories of identity politics postulate that people embrace parochial and essential identities over their own rational interest in liberal democracy — that they embrace symbolic and cultural victories at the expense of substantive losses in government accountability. Similarly, scholars contrast the healthy ‘civic nationalism’ of western democracies, from the destructive ‘ethnic nationalism’ of struggling democracies (Smith 1991).

Castells (2010) who seeks to produce a general theory by grounded “the power of identity” in rational motives for collective empowerment. Castles

distinguishes three forms of identity according to group relations to the dominant institutions of society - especially states and markets. Legitimizing identities perpetuate existing power relations; resistance identities resist domination by those institutions; and project identities seek to subvert existing relations of power (Castells 2010:8). This theory does help to incorporate related phenomena that have conventionally been treated as separate by theories of pluralism and nationalism. Castells points out nationalism can form the base of a legitimizing or resistance identity, for example, and that socialism similarly can be the basis of project or legitimizing identities.

Castells' model provides some illuminating comparisons by treating power relations as more significant than the content of particular group identities. Despite his focus on power relations between groups, however, Castells reifies "identities" as internally homogeneous and socially "real." He invokes a universal urge for groundedness and meaning amid global processes of economic, political, and cultural integration:

> When the world becomes too large to be controlled, social actors aim to shrink it back to their size and reach. When networks dissolve time and space, people anchor themselves in places, and recall their historic memory. When the patriarchal sustainment of personality breaks down, people affirm the transcendent value of family and community, as God's will (Castells 2010:69).

Castells never entertains the possibility that individuals might not see their empowerment and opportunity in terms of shared identities, or feel that these identities are delineated in a way that doesn't serve their interests. He does not give a central place in his theory to variation and power relations within ethnic, national, and religious categories, but reifies images of homogeneous groups with unified interests - the primary of which is to work for the preservation and benefit of the group itself.

Some literature on authoritarianism reduces this concern to unsalvageable relativism. Scholarship on the "narcissism of minor differences" (Hitchen 2010) asserts that people are bound to construct an external enemy - an "other" - no matter how minor the discrepancies are between the antagonistic groups. When major religious and ethnic cleavages are absent, authoritarianism can make equal use of smaller differences that gain greater salience simply by virtue of the background homogeneity.

Theories of 'identity politics' appeal to scholars and other observers because they allow scholars to explain why many citizens seemingly act against their own interests in liberal democracy. Treating 'identity' as a causal factor also allows scholars to draw directly from the rhetoric that political entrepreneurs themselves use. Despite its theoretical and explanatory shortcomings, 'identity'

provides scholars with a rationale for seemingly irrational behavior. As we have seen, however, policies that ostensible protect traditional religions from non-traditional groups in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan do not in practice defend the local from the foreign, the familiar from the unfamiliar. Instead, they defend the establishment's monopoly over public authority — it's ability to reserve public authority for loyal agents of the establishment itself. If we wish to explain the popularity of restrictive policies, therefore, we must be able to explain why such a monopoly of public authority is popular among certain segments of the public.

"Identity" and Non-Instrumental Reasoning

Fifteen years ago, Rogers Brubaker published a seminal piece on the "identity" crisis in the social sciences (2000). He diagnosed two major problems with much of the literature that concerns itself with "identity politics." First, he cautioned that references to identity often conflate categories of analysis with categories of practice (Brubaker 2004; 2013). Social scientists frequently employ the terms of identity politics - ethnicity and nationality - that political "entrepreneurs" themselves utilize, and thereby reproduce the notion that these groups are discrete homogeneous and have a unified will. Second, identity connotes a a non-instrumental logic of sameness and selfhood that supposedly trumps individual

motives of self-interest. Here the literature makes implicit distinctions between civil society, where rational self-interest prevails, and less civil polities where primordial sentiments of in-group solidarity and out-group animosity reign.

Brubaker's critique is far ranging. He argues that rather than reifying categories of practice, scholarship on "identity politics" should investigate how such categories are used by political entrepreneurs "to persuade people to understand themselves, their interests, and their predicaments in certain ways, to persuade certain people that they are (for certain purposes) 'identical' with one another and at the same time different from others, to organize and justify collective action along certain lines" (Brubaker 2000:4-5). Brubaker aimed this criticism primarily at the literature on nationalism, which features overly clean and global distinctions between civic and ethnic nationalism. It also applies to the literature on religious politics, however, where concepts such as pluralism and secularism tend to treat religious tension as social regress away from the manifest benefits of civility and liberalism (Brubaker 2011; 2012). I will address each of these literatures briefly, before turning to the accounts of religious restriction provided by scholarship on Central Asia.

The literature on nationalism contains a wealth of careful historical studies of nation building (Hobsbawm 1983; Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991), and empirical

accounts of contemporary nationalist politics (Kymlicka 1996, Horowitz 1985, Brubaker 1996). In the framing of these studies, scholars of nationalism tend to split the subject matter between the growth of civic nationalism in Western Europe, and the flaring of ethnic and nationalist tensions in contemporary post-colonial and post-socialist states, i.e. between the instrumental reasoning of civil society and the reactionary parochialism of ethnic nationalism. Scholars who have sought to bridge this divide often do so by either drawing our attention to the ethnic component of civic nations (Smith 1991), or exploring the prospects of civility and pluralism in ethnically-divided states (Kymlicka 2001). Scholars have offered few general theories that can account equally for both the tensions and the complimentarily of civic and ethnic bases of public authority. While tensions arise in some cases between inclusive, civic and exclusive, ethnic forms of nationalism, the two commonly coincide. Ethnic understandings of nationhood also have great utility for the civic, ostensibly universal mode of civic engagement espoused by liberal democracies and totalitarian regimes alike.

Religious Belief

Literature on religion and politics has produced similar distinctions between the instrumental logic of secular politics and the non-instrumental logic of religious

belief. Scholars of religion long held to a particular image of secularism that banished religion to the private sphere in order to preserve an image of rational public politics. The resilience of religion in public life has forced scholars to abandon such rigid conceptions. Casanova (1994; 2009) distinguishes three forms of secularism - institutional differentiation between religious organizations and the state, the declining place of religion in public life, and declining religiosity in people's private lives. He argues against assumptions that the three reinforce each other, and suggests that religious organizations have regained a legitimate role in public life by acquiescing to institutional secularization - abandoning any claims to a monopoly on the souls that populate the public sphere.

Scholars have rethought the concept of religious pluralism along similar lines. James Beckford (2003) distinguishes pluralism as an empirical phenomenon vs. a social value. Diversity in religion - whether measured according to number of distinct faiths, proportions of the population belonging to different faiths, or processes of denominationalism within faiths - does not necessarily entail public acceptance of religious diversity. Beckford asserts that the legal and constitutional enshrinement of religious freedom pales in comparison to "subtle understandings, conventions and practices that allow some religious groups to function as the 'normal,' taken for granted point of reference" and the

“willingness of 'accepted' or 'recognised' religious groups to accept others as worthy partners or competitors in the public sphere” (77).

Demerath (2003) provides one of the most lucid models of religious politics by treating the *sacred* as something that both religion and politics are drawn to, but neither monopolize. Durkheim’s sense of sacred groupness underpins all public politics - a flame to which the moths of religion and politics are both drawn in Demerath’s narrative. To obtain power and become an arbiter of the sacred, however, is to generate resistance and lose the flame of public support. Religious monopolies are apt to produce disillusionment and spur secular or pluralist civil society, just as secular governments are apt to produce religious bases of civil society, in which the church or mosque becomes a place for people to congregate and express their will. Demerath pursues these nuances through an array of careful empirical studies, but his Durkheimian foundation prevents him from producing a general theory of how religion relates to social power and its reproduction.

Although scholars are right to abandon such rigid views of secularism and pluralism, they have struggled to offer equally clear narratives that do not devolve into moral relativism and constructivism, which treat all religious and national sentiments as arbitrary and socially constructed. Yang (2011) asserted

with regard to China that such regimes have a tacit mistrust for private life and free, interest-based association, not due to the immediate threat that such affiliations pose to the regime, but merely by virtue of the choice that they represent to associate freely in venues of private or civic life other than those set up by and in support of the regime. Such “deviance” represents a slight toward the "civic" apparatus that the regime has developed to compel citizens (especially students, public servants, government officials, and other cadres directly connected to public institutions) to participate in a highly scripted and ritualized spectacle of support for the regime, its leadership, and nation for whose benefit the regime ostensible serves.The secularization thesis and classic liberal ideals of pluralism and civic nationalism present a clear models of public politics precisely because they place civic identity above ethnic and religious identities in a normative hierarchy. Scholars have struggled to retain analytical power while abandoning this moral hierarchy.

In sum, these literatures present many careful empirical discussions of religious politics and nationalism in cases across the world, but have largely failed to produce a general theory of “identity politics” that responds Brubaker’s critique without lapsing into moral relativism. The general models that scholars have offered either conflate categories of analysis with categories of practice, or

revert to social constructivism. As I will show, the literature on religious politics in Central Asia similarly attribute ethnic or religious chauvinism to elites and masses who have misrecognized liberalisms' inherent benefits, allowing the non-instrumental reasoning of sameness to trump the instrumental reasoning of self-interest.

III. Accounts from the Region

The literature on post-Soviet Central Asia reproduces this dual focus on elite interests and mass identity with an emphasis on regime strength. Some observers emphasize the strength of the regimes and the weakness of civil society in the post-Soviet space, while others depict the secular states as weak in comparison to the resurgence of public religiosity and potential extremism. Scholars and human rights watchdogs (Epkenhans 2009, 2010; Norwegian-Helsinki Committee 2010) tend to assert that the attempt to regulate religious belief and expression is at best futile, and at worst damaging to regimes' own security interests. In keeping with the view of liberalism as a panacea to all ills facing former socialist states, they criticize these regimes for imagining a tradeoff between rights and security, whereas the two reinforce each other.

It appears that retaining or increasing short to medium term control by

> governments over independent movements within society is the primary aim of policies and actions affecting freedom of religion or belief. (Norwegian-Helsinki Committee 2010:5).

These critics argue that rather than keeping religious organizations, attitudes, and practices within the state's field of view, government restriction forces them underground and contributes to further alienation and possible radicalization.

In contrast, McGlinchy (2009) sees the regulation of religion as a state response to Islamic revivalism, which he in turn attributes to the failure of these transitioning states to hold up their end of the social contract. Olcott (2007, 2012) argues that secular governance was never a given in the region from the moment of independence, and remains deeply threatened by Islamic revivalism. She justifies the state in defending secular politics through any means necessary, so long as its policies are effective at curtailing extremism and do not unintentionally contribute to the further alienation and radicalization of the population.

Still other scholars point to regional convergence on a single, illiberal policy framework, primarily under the influence of Russia (Roberts 2015; Tolstrup 2015; Lankina *et al* 2016). Omelicheva (2009; 2011) argues that Central Asian states are simply replicating the religious and security policies enacted by Russia under a policy of "sovereign democracy." She employs a reference group model of

institutional convergence to show that similar counter-terrorism policies are emerging across the region through a combination of emulation, initiatives to coordinate and harmonize efforts, and coercion by great powers - mostly Russia but also China. The states of Central Asia often follow Russia's lead for the sake of retaining a lax visa regime and being included in multilateral trade and security agreements.

This explanation finds ample support in both the influence and the rhetoric that Russia wields in Central Asia. In 2005, Russia declared a policy of "sovereign democracy" that the other states in Russia's sphere of influence have adopted tacitly or overtly. The main pillars of sovereign democracy are non-intervention by foreign powers, and the notion that all states have their own equally-valid path toward democracy, which no other state can judge. The regional integration perspective addresses this problem in part, but only by stripping the local regimes of any agency in choosing their policies. The most obvious limitation of Omelicheva's approach is that she never explains why Russia should itself be so concerned with marginal religious groups. She shifts the puzzle from the Central Asian states to multilateral organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization that operates under Russia's aegis, but the policy initiatives of Russia are left as a black box.

The primary issue with these explanations is that they point alternately to regime strength and regime weakness as explanations for the same policies (Dufour 2006; Myrzabaev 2009; Bleuer 2012). Strong regimes like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia regulate religion because they can; they are capable of and disposed to regulating every aspect of civic life. Weak regimes like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan regulate religion because they are insecure; they feel compelled to preempt all challenges to their tenuous public authority. Both explanations have their logic, but taken together they explain a constant phenomenon with a variable one, indicating a clear lack of consensus in the literature on the region. Both approaches, moreover, reproduce the broader tendency in the literature to uphold liberalism as the clear path to stability and security, and explain regime actions in terms of a conscientious rejection of this path.

Thus, despite the wealth of careful empirical work on nationalist and religious politics (Surucu 2002; Hayat 2004; Laurelle 2007; Guilette and Heathershaw 2010), there remains a gap between nuanced case studies and general theory. Nuanced case studies such as those presented above often refer back to conventional theory, which tends to place causal weight alternately on primordial identities, or on elite interests and manipulation. Again, proponents

of both explanations frequently present liberalism as a panacea for challenges to stability and prosperity, which leaders and masses reject to their own detriment. Neither explanation adequately accounts for the relations of power beneath ostensibly rigid categories of ethnicity and race, national and religious belonging.

IV. Representation as a "Mystery of Ministry"

Rather than treating support for authoritarian politics as a result of irrationality or malleability, we should rather seek to explain the instrumental interest in supporting authoritarian policies. Authoritarianism does indeed impinge on the liberty of citizens to mobilize according to common interests, autonomous from the state, which would seem to undercut the position of common citizens. What most scholars fail to acknowledge is that the means to mobilize autonomously are unevenly distributed. Liberal democracy ideally expands the capacity of individual citizens to organize according to shared political interests. And while we certainly should advocate for the freedoms that liberal democracy secures for the general public, we must also recognize that not all citizens have equal means to mobilize autonomously for their collective interests.

For this reason, Bourdieu saw democracy as hijacked by those with greater

volumes of capital — economic, cultural, social, etc. Bourdieu’s later work on public politics treats democracy not as a system of representation, so must as a means of legitimately dispossessing the masses of their voices. He describes representation as a form of *ministry*, in which public figures 'speak for those who would not speak unless someone spoke for them.' In Bourdieu’s analysis, democratic institutions do not simply aggregate the popular will, but rather *create* constituencies in a process he calls the *mystery of ministry*: “When the spokesperson speaks, it is the group who speaks through him, but one that exists through the speaker and the speech” (Bourdieu 2004:41).

It is no surprise, therefore, that class background strongly affects what institutions people most trust — those that promote liberal and pluralist ideals, vs. those espousing collective identities that ostensibly define the *essential* will of the people. The chart below demonstrates this relationship. Working with data from the latest wave in the World Values Survey, I created a composite index of socioeconomic status consisting of education, income, kind of occupation, and rural vs. urban residence.[1] Though Bourdieu’s native France was not included in

[1] I created this SES index from four different measures from wave 6 of the World Values Survey, data from wave 6 of the World Values Survey, accessible at www.worldvaluessurvey.org. I retained the same scales and weights used in the original survey. The first three measures are class (on a scale of 10 relative to each country), education (on a scale of 9), urban vs. rural residence (on a scale of 8). The fourth measure is itself a composite scale of 10 based on three measures of the kind of work done by the respondent currently or in the past if not currently

this wave of the World Values Survey, by examining all current EU states that were included, we can see a significant relationship between level of SES and opinion on issues related to religious tolerance. As we might expect, people with relatively higher SES, whom we might expect to be more cosmopolitan are less likely to view their religion as the only valid religion, and more likely to view members of other religions as being moral.[2]

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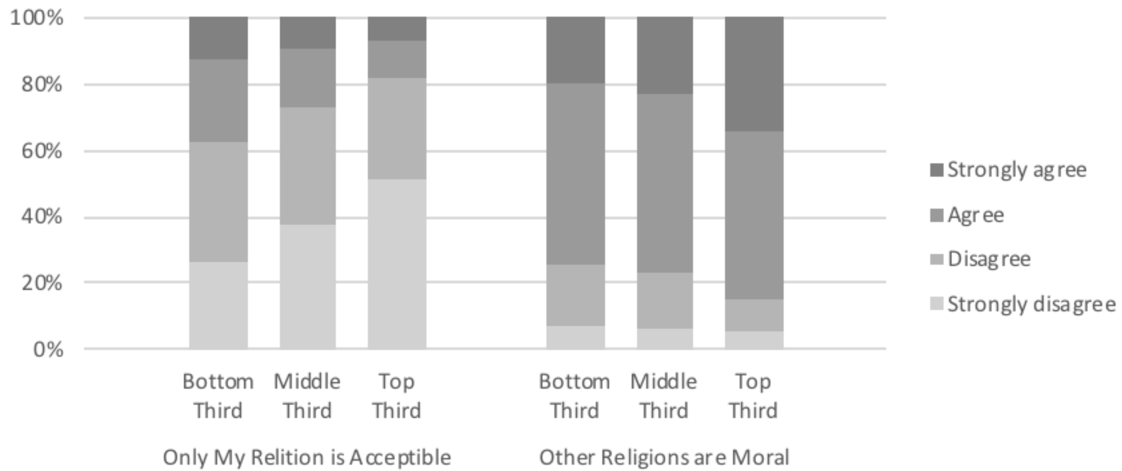
employed — degree of manual vs. intellectual, routine vs. non-routine, and supervised vs. autonomous, all measured on a scale of 10. I broke the resulting index down into textiles, representing three equal segments of the sample population.

[2] The chart below includes aggregate scores for all current EU states included in wave six of the WVS, including Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, and Sweden. Though the inclusion of some post-Socialist states may introduce greater variation within the independent variable, all the relationships demonstrated are still significant at the .001 level; SES and agreement that "only my religion is acceptable" significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 8749) = 446.8, $p < .001$; relationship between SES and agreement that "members of other religions are moral" significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 8617) = 216.7, $p < .001$.

Figure 8: Support in aggregated EU states by SES (in tertiles) for the statements "the only acceptable religion is my religion" and "people who belong to different religions are probably just as moral as those who belong to mine"



The relationship between education, socio-economic status, and identity politics is well-known, however, and scholars on identity, fundamentalism, and populism readily embrace this point to argue that the uneducated masses cling to primordial identities. This perspective, however, again relies on the assumption that common citizens have a manifest interest to maximize individual liberties. The value of Bourdieu's model is that it allows us to understand politics not simply as an expression of rights, but as an exchange of symbolic capital — a competitive process in which multiple institutions fight to redistribute power and authority among constituencies.

Bourdieu saw liberal democracy as one more means whereby the dominant

Bourgeois class dispossesses dominated classes of symbolic capital — of their very voices. He did not thoroughly consider the ways in which spokespersons can also champion the interests of their supporters and constituents. His model can be readily modified, however, by examining how ministries do not merely accumulate symbolic capital for themselves, but also redistribute symbolic capital among the citizenry. Rather than dispossessing their own constituents of their voices, ministries propagate the voices of some constituents, and marginalize those of others. They consecrate a particular effigy of the popular will, promoting the interests and values of some at the expense of others. All ministries can thus be seen as redistributing symbolic capital in a core/periphery structure.

Pluralism and essentialism thus represent distinct political strategies for the redistribution of symbolic capital among the population. Liberal or illiberal, all public figures propagate the interests and values of certain constituencies at the expense of others. By enshrining pluralism, liberal regimes redistribute symbolic capital toward those strata with greater means for autonomous mobilization — greater means to articulate and promote their politics without apparatuses that speak for them. Authoritarian establishments promote a sacrosanct will tailored to enfranchise those strata that are relatively poorly endowed for autonomous

political mobilization and articulation. Populist leaders may claim to speak in the name of the entire collective — the sacrosanct will of the people — but they formulate those values and interests specifically with reference to stratified power relations — particularly the stratification between those who have relatively greater means to formulate and promote their own politics in a competitive public sphere.

The strategy of essentialism thus benefits those who are in relatively greater need of party, religious, and other apparatuses to provide them with a collective voice. We would thus expect individual preferences for democracy vs. authoritarianism to be strongly related to socioeconomic status, and that is what we indeed find when examining these preferences in the context of European nation-states — the political context in which Bourdieu was primarily writing.[3]

[3] Relationship between SES and support for a "having a strong leader" significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 9015) = 283.1, $p < .001$; relationship between SES and support for "having a democratic system" significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 9201) = 130.6, $p < .001$.

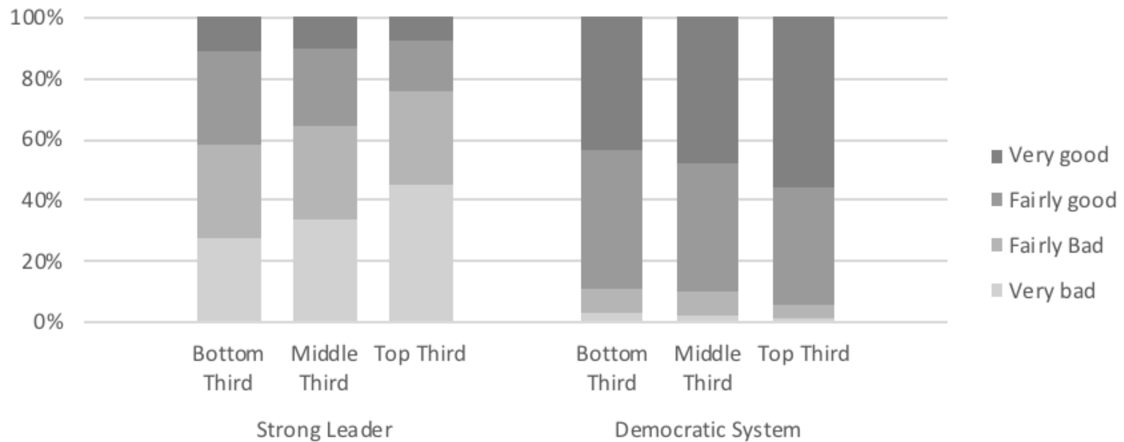


Figure 9: Support in aggregated EU states by SES (in tertiles) for "having a democratic system" vs. for "having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections"
Source: The World Values Survey, wave 6

Viewed through this lens, identity politics is not motivated by deep, essential, and non-instrumental feelings of sameness, but rather by rational calculations on the part of such constituencies within the stratified and competitive space of public politics. One cannot help but feel that this oversight is partially influenced by scholars' own stakes in public politics. Scholars are among the best endowed strata to pursue their political agendas through deliberation. They thus have clear reason to promote Habbermasian ideals of deliberative democracy and to deride populist and identity politics as vulgar and irrational.

Authoritarian and essentialist politics can thus provide a crucial facet of self-determination among those strata that struggle to assert such ownership in a

more cosmopolitan environment — one dominated by deliberative democracy and sophisticated status performances. A monopoly over the *means of consecration* ensures that all legitimate authority rests in the name of the people, and the regime articulates the will of the people in a way that expands the authority of its base. Restrictive religious policies can thus enjoy genuine popularity among broad segments of the population, because the regime's base recognizes that pluralism is as much a threat to their own public status and authority as it is to the regime's, and that essentialism consecrates and preserves their authority in the face of such competition.

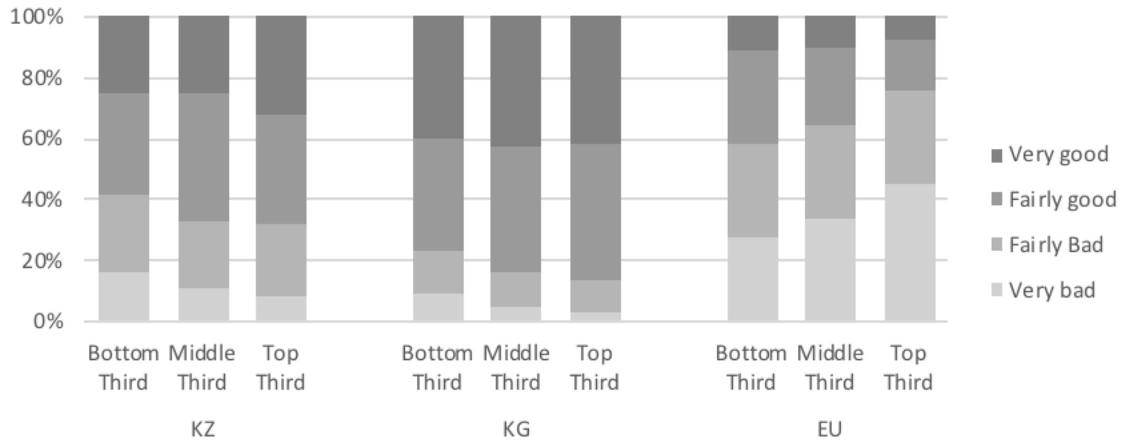
Bourdieu was primarily writing of his native France, whose distinctive class politics often do not translate well to other cases. Bourdieu also wrote during a period of great expansion for globalism, neoliberalism, and the European project; he never lived to see fully realized populist backlash against these projects. With the modifications I have suggested above, however, his model of the *mystery of ministry* can account for authoritarian and populist politics, and thus for identity politics and even fundamentalism. His theories can thus be fully transported to the post-Soviet space and other contexts.

Public Politics as a Battle over the Means of Consecration

I suggest that public politics should be understood as a battle over the *means of consecration*. I argue that authoritarian leaders maintain popular support by accumulating sufficient symbolic power to render the interests of their political base sacrosanct, thereby placing those interests beyond the jurisdiction of mundane politics. Their very mandate is to 'defend' this sacrosanct, quasi-divine national will from the realm of deliberation, negotiation and compromise, in which their constituents are at a distinct disadvantage. In former socialist states across Eurasia, wide bands of citizens have little access to civic institutions or avenues of public engagement — aside from the hierarchical apparatuses of political parties and government institutions themselves. For such strata, populist rhetoric and identity politics can provide a means to elevate the interests of such constituents above politics - to consecrate their values as sacrosanct and essential to the very constitution of 'the people.'

Strong discourses of identity result when such public figures obtain a near monopoly over the means of consecration. The values that these leaders consecrate, in turn, are not derived from rigid traditions or essential identities, but rather serve as flexible conceptual tools that adapt to the struggle for authority within stratified power relations. Religious orthodoxy, ethnic and national solidarity, even ‘class consciousness’ rely on ‘invented

traditions' (Hobsbawm 1983) that can enhance the claims of key strata to greater political participation and representation. Per the above discussion, we would expect to see a strong relationship between socioeconomic status and support for authoritarianism, and indeed we do, but following a strikingly different pattern than in EU states.[4]



In these more authoritarian regimes, support for "strong leadership"

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[4] Relationship between SES and support for a "having a strong leader" in Kazakhstan significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 1499) = 27.4, p < .001; relationship between SES and support for a "having a strong leader" in Kyrgyzstan significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 1434) = 26.6, p < .001; relationship between SES and support for a "having a strong leader" in aggregated EU states significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 9015) = 283.1, p < .001;

unencumbered by democratic constraints actually increases with SES. Thus, authoritarian and nationalist discourses serve to reinforce rather than subvert elite domination, consolidating a political base among the relatively more privileged classes. Though populist figures may articulate their political programs in terms of sacrosanct values, the popular appeal of these values comes from their capacity to redistribute symbolic capital among the population — to propagate some voices and marginalize others.

Similarly, the relationship between SES and support for a "democratic system" in Kazakhstan is inverse to the relationship in EU states, with higher levels of SES corresponding to less support democracy. As figure 11 shows, ambivalence about democracy is greatest in Kyrgyzstan across all strata, but marginally lower among higher SES strata, as in Kazakhstan.[5]

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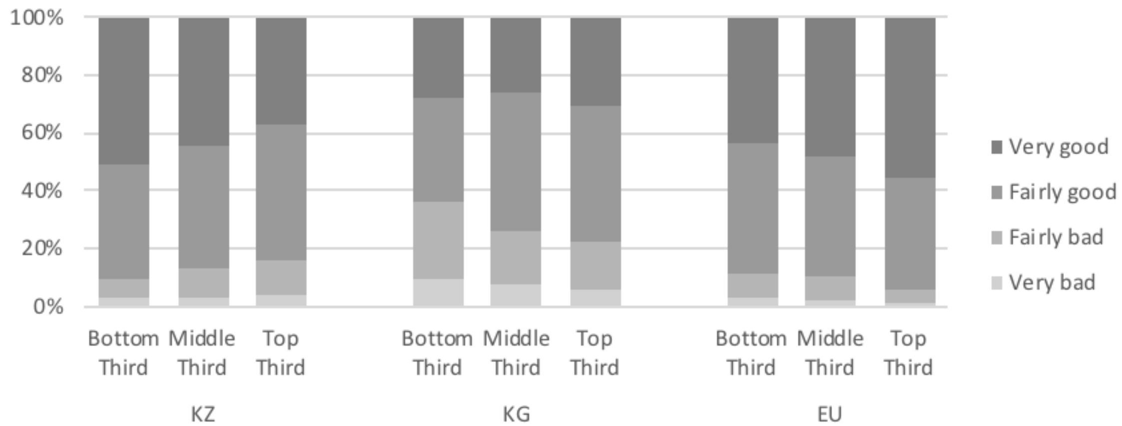
[5] Relationship between SES and support for a "having a democratic system" in Kazakhstan significant at the .01 level: X^2 (6, 1499) = 21.3, p = .002; relationship between SES and support for a "having a democratic system" in Kyrgyzstan significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 1431) = 29.4, p < .001; relationship between SES and support for a "having a democratic system" in aggregated EU states significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 9201) = 130.6, p < .001.



As shown in figure 11 below, this support need not be attached to the charisma of a particular figure or the efforts of a consolidated regime to manipulate the public. Once again, this chart demonstrates significantly greater support for order over liberties in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan, which runs counter to any explanations of identity politics that rely on factors such as elite manipulation, given the difference in degree of regime consolidation between the two states. By comparison, citizens of European Union member states show a much stronger preference for increased participation in government decisions and protecting freedom of speech.[6]

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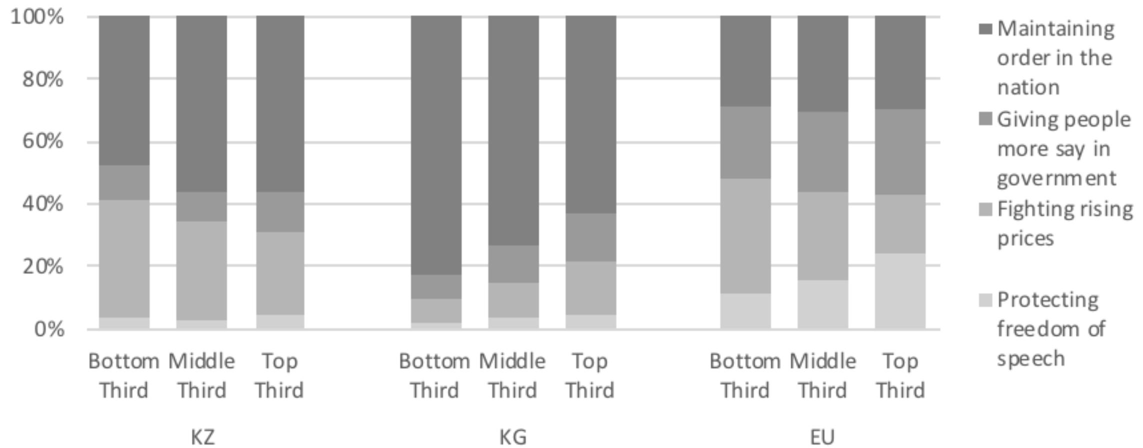
[6] Relationship between SES and preferred political agenda in Kazakhstan significant at the .01 level: X^2 (6, 1499) = 17.2, $p = .008$; relationship between SES and preferred political agenda in Kyrgyzstan significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 1434) = 48.6, $p < .001$; relationship between SES and

Figure 12: Preferred political agenda in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and aggregated EU states by SES (in tertiles)

Source: The World Values Survey, 2011



I should note that the differences may be exaggerated in this chart because of the events of 2011 in both countries — namely the violent deposition of President Bakiev in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, which precipitated ethnic clashes in the south of the country, and the economic downturn and inflation that Kazakhstan experienced in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, which precipitated strikes in the state-run energy sector that were violently put down by the regime. These recent events were assuredly fresh in the minds of many respondents, but as I will show further on, respondents from Kyrgyzstan expressed a preference in

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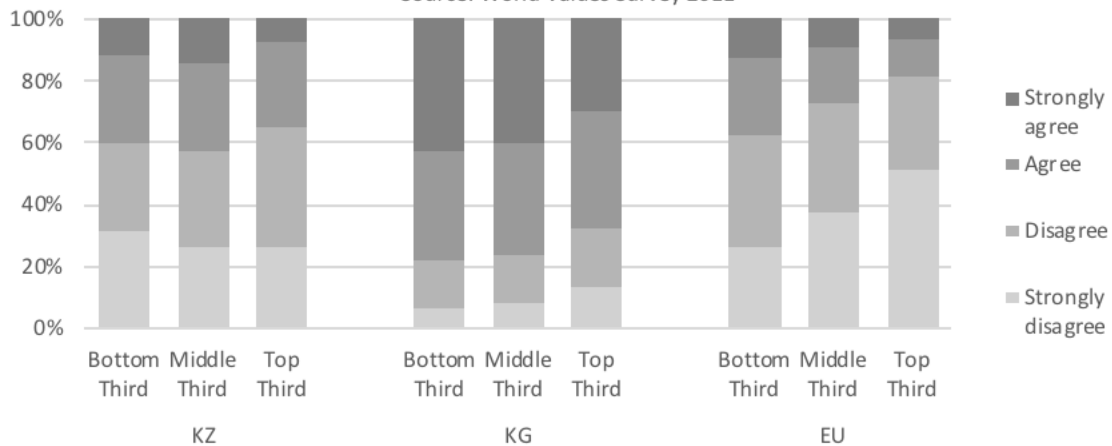
preferred political agenda in aggregated EU states significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 9657) = 348.8, $p < .001$.

2011 not only for "order in the nation," but also for having a "strong leader" unencumbered by democratic constraints.

Policies designed to curtail religious pluralism are popular for precisely these reasons. Religious orthodoxy can be seen not as any particular set of doctrines, but rather as a series of institutional arrangements that support the authority of a sacrosanct popular will — the authority of an essential 'Kyrgyzness' of 'Kazakhntess' promoted by the political and religious establishments of the respective countries. This sacrosanct will bolsters titular nationals' sense of ownership over public life and public institutions, but not equally. Once again, orthodoxy and the sacrosanct popular will may invoke the name of 'the people' inclusively, but the values and interests attributed to the people serve to redistribute symbolic capital — authority and legitimacy — toward the regime's political base. Thus, just as we see class variation in support for authoritarianism, we also see class variation in support of religious essentialism.[7]

[7] Relationship between SES and agreement that "the only acceptable religion is my religion" in Kazakhstan significant at the .01 level: X^2 (6, 1324) = 21.2, $p = .002$; relationship between SES and agreement that "the only acceptable religion is my religion" in Kyrgyzstan significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 1369) = 26.7, $p < .001$; relationship between SES and agreement that "the only acceptable religion is my religion" in aggregated EU states significant at the .001 level: X^2 (6, 8749) = 446.8, $p < .001$.



Interestingly, support for religious pluralism in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan follow a somewhat similar pattern as in EU states. Increases in SES generally correspond to greater support for religious pluralism, although the effect is not as strong as in European states. These charts would seem to indicate that while higher SES correlates with both democratic and cosmopolitan values in Europe, the elites in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are more inclined to authoritarianism than lower classes, despite being more cosmopolitan.

The popular ownership over public life that such regimes offer is thus ephemeral, however. My purpose in articulating this model is not to reify these regimes' own rhetoric and treat them as genuine champions of their constituents' interests. Authoritarian regimes by definition seek to establish themselves as the

sole legitimate arbiter of the popular will. Such monopolies can reduce politics to a mere spectacle of popular participation, which “enable[s] elites to close opportunities for input from below, but without making the masses feel left out” (Adams 2010:3). As with the values they propagate, populist and autocratic leaders elevate themselves above the political arena as unimpeachable champions of these values, whose very mandate it is to defend the 'true' will of the people (or, alternately, the will of the 'true' people) against unruly pluralism. In sum, authoritarian leaders articulate a *sacrosanct popular will* - a mandate to rule in the name of a presumed constituency that is unencumbered by conventional electoral politics.

Authoritarianism as a form of Ordination

Thus, through discourses on national tradition and religious orthodoxy, state and religious officials claim a mandate to defend this sacrosanct popular will from heterodox threats, as discussed above. But simply claiming a mandate is not equivalent to exercising it. A full theory of authoritarian rule must account not only for the regime’s claim to legitimate authority, but also how the regime consolidates the power to enforce that claim.

This model I also draw from Bourdieu, who spoke of the *power of nomination*:

the power of established elites to nominate others to power. Within the bourgeois democracy that Bourdieu was investigating, this power is largely limited to the capacity of democratically elected officials to nominate other officials to various state functions and supporting roles of governance. In an authoritarian context, however, the power of nomination takes on a far greater role. Authoritarian regimes seek to use this power of nomination to monopolize public authority itself. Under authoritarian rule, established elites control access to public authority, and nominate to power only on those who have demonstrated their loyalty to and utility for the establishment.

Authoritarianism is thus a form of quasi-ordination, in which established elites confer public authority on agents who can be relied on to reproduce the established order. Only elect, ordained, loyal representatives of the establishment are given the authority to represent the sacrosanct will of the people. In the present cases, both states align strongly with the religious hierarchies of the two main 'traditional' religions — the Spiritual Administration of Muslims or *Muftiate*, and the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate. Authoritarian regimes jealously guard this monopoly over the power of nomination, and regime consolidation can be understood as the degree to which the establishment exerts control over these channels of power. This model allows us to account for two puzzles that

my cases present:

First, we can explain why authoritarian regimes restrict marginal and benign religious groups, and why the discourse on 'tradition' is so misaligned with the historical record in Central Asia. To the establishment, it matters not where a religious group comes from — only whether that group's ministry helps the regime reproduce this monopoly. Thus, groups with a strong local vintage can still be considered heterodox if they challenge the regime's monopoly over public authority. Conversely foreign groups can be accepted as orthodox if they help the regime reproduce this monopoly, as the Russian Orthodox and many foreign Islamic foundations do. All that matters is which groups help the regime reproduce their presumed mandate to speak for the people, and which groups challenge this mandate.

Second, we can account for the reasons why Kyrgyzstan has implemented similarly illiberal policies as Kazakhstan, despite being considered an 'island of democracy' in Central Asia. Treating authoritarianism as a claim allows us to examine what all illiberal regimes share in common, and does not preclude discussing how such regimes consolidate power. No matter how secure or tenuous their hold on power may be, authoritarian regimes claim similar mandates to enact the 'true' will of the people. From populist upstarts to

entrenched dictators, authoritarian figures claim to speak for a sacrosanct popular will that transcends mundane politics. By treating authoritarianism as a system of quasi-ordination, we are able to compare cases according to both the claims regimes make to authority, and the degree to which these claims dominate within the ranks of the state and the public sphere more broadly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to reassess the concept of the *sacred* and its role in self-determination, in light of the discussion of instrumental and non-instrumental reasoning. Durkheim's discussion of the sacred remains essential to sociological discussions of religion, nationalism, and other bases of collective identity (1972). While scholarly definitions of the sacred vary, many hew close to Durkheim's classic discussion of religious life. Many scholars note that the sacred consecrates our sense of collective belonging, that it is expressed through rituals that elicit heightened emotional commitment to the group, and that it is represented in symbols and totems that command special reverence. Demerath, for example, defines the sacred as "things set apart that inspire special awe and veneration, that excite moments of self-transcendence and confer a measure of collective

identity, and that generally involve some form of ritual and the odd leap of faith”(2003:6).

But all too often such definitions focus on the social power of the sacred, and overlook elements of disaffection and dissent. Scholars such as Castells (2001) often focus on the power that the group wields over the individual, especially when focusing on non-Western contexts, while downplaying dissent. A definition of the sacred that avoids such essentialism must be able to account for individual motivations for identifying with the values that are propagated on them in the name of sacrosanct groups, as opposed to dissenting from them.

People invest emotional energy where they expect returns: in identities that reward them with a sense of meaning and status. We confer special reverence on groups, associations, professions and movements that expand our capacity for self-determination. But self-determination often comes at the price of deference — to the moral authority of the group, or to the doxa of competitive social fields. To be part of a group or community is to defer our individual will to the collective will (often to those who simply wield greater authority to define the collective will). The sacred derives its power from our need to retain a sense of personal meaning and agency, even as we compromise our individual will to structures of power and authority.

I therefore define the sacred simply as that to which individuals defer for the sake of self-determination. Consecrating the group as sacred provides us with a sense of collective self-determination, even in the act of compromising our individual interests. Individual deference becomes a ritual sacrifice for the sake of the group. Thus, I argue that the sacred is closely linked to self-determination, both individual and collective, because it provides us with a sense of meaning and agency even in the act of deference and compromise.

But the returns on deference are never evenly distributed. Individuals face different opportunity structures for self-determination, and they respond by investing emotional energy instrumentally, where they anticipate greater returns. Some are accorded greater status by the moral authority of the communities in which they live, and thus hold as sacred the symbols of their nation, religious community, or other social group. Those who feel disaffected from the collective will, in contrast, may divest from the moral authority of the collective, and see that sacred will as a form of domination and dispossession. They thus invest themselves in dissident movements and other volitional associations that offer an alternate means of self-determination, separate from the collective will propagated on them by the establishment.

CHAPTER 3

Data and Methodology

The relational analysis I propose in this dissertation does not examine orthodoxy and heterodoxy as distinct doctrines, but rather as contending sets of claims within a competitive political field. Bourdieu's relational approach starts from the proposition that all fields are structured around competition between orthodox and heterodox positions — between dominant strata who wish to reproduce their power, and dominated strata who wish to resist and subvert existing power relations. Indeed, one of my major assertions is that claims to authority change over time through the shifting dynamics of competition between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Thus, the goal of my analysis is neither to trace genealogies of religious thought nor to provide an exhaustive overview of the political rhetoric pervading public life in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, but rater to show how a particular set of claims can be understood as contributing to strategies pursued by actors with determinable interests in a competitive field.

The data for this research draws from a combination of public documents,

interviews, and primary observations of government practices. I collected approximately 5,000 primary documents from two government databases in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. I also conducted 36 in-depth interviews with religious leaders, practitioners, government officials, and experts on religious politics from NGOs and universities. Finally, I directly observed government practices in the religious sphere in Kyrgyzstan, where I was able to gain access to a number of court proceedings and government trainings, as well as the Kurultai summer in which the Muftiate selected a new head Mufti. I will address each of these methods in turn.

I. Primary Dataset

The bulk of the data comes from two databases of public documents — *Paragraf* in Kazakhstan and *Toktom* in Kyrgyzstan. These databases contain full records of all of the legislation and policy enacted by the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan extending back to independence, as well as court rulings, policy recommendations, procedural documents (e.g. forms that religious organizations must fill out when registering), and even select news sources. Paragraf and Toktom are both proprietary databases that offer subscribing institutions and

individuals access to the official electronic archives of public documents in their respective states. I gained access to Paragraf and Toktom through research appointments at the Department of Political Science at the Kazakhstan Institutions of Management in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Neither database is designed to allow mass export of documents. Quite the opposite, both databases make exporting documents a cumbersome process and instead focus on providing a powerful working environment within the databases, so as to keep institutions subscribed. I therefore had to improvise a manual export workflow in order to collect as much data as possible in limited time. In the case of Kazakhstan, I had to divide my limited time in Almaty between conducting interviews and accessing Paragraf, and extracted the data over the course of three intensive days. In Bishkek I was able to access Toktom more casually, but still sought to streamline my workflow as much as possible.

I first retrieved documents using keyword searches. Searching for keywords individually would have yielded excessive amounts of redundant documents, however, so I developed a set of 82 keywords, and used the Boolean operator OR to retrieve documents that contained any one of those keywords anywhere in the text. These keywords ranged from the names of religious groups such as Baptists

or Tablighi Jamaat, to terms such as religious extremism, destructive sect, and religious affairs. Being built for the Russian language, both Toktom and Paragraf searched for all case declensions of these terms automatically. I used this same set of keywords to retrieve documents in each of the major categories separately, i.e. legislation containing any of these keywords anywhere in the text, court rulings containing any of the same terms, policy statements and expert commentary containing these terms, etc.

After each keyword search, I manually exported every document that the system retrieved to a flash drive. Due to the limitations of these databases, unfortunately, this manual export stripped the files of all metadata. All publication data was preserved in the headers of the documents themselves, but each document had to be saved manually as a generic RTF file. Rather than spending excessive time manually copying the title of each document into the file name when saving it, I exported the files with generic names into a folder system based on the kind of document and the year of publication. Overall, this process yielded approximately 5,000 unique documents — 2,497 from Kazakhstan, and 2,751 from Kyrgyzstan — covering the period between independence in 1991 and the summer of 2013.

Before discussing my data analysis strategies, I must make one note on how

these sources are cited throughout the dissertation. Post-Soviet statecraft presents its own conventions of writing, citing, and presenting publication data. Entire books have been written just on the idiom that state officials employ in public documents and official press statements (Yurchak 2003; 2006). Suffice it to say that the conventions of state apparatchiks often diverge significantly from the standards that define clear and cogent scholarly writing. Publication data can be similarly ambiguous, in part because my primary sources range from newspaper articles to legislation and court rulings, to policy memos intended for internal circulation. Some sources are attributed to no author, while others list alongside the author's name his or her full credentials, which in the case of Kazakhstan might even refer to their service under "The First President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayeve, Leader of the Nation."

When translating and citing my sources, I endeavor to reproduce these conventions, rather than molding my sources to match the conventions of English-language scholarship. My translations reproduce the long and often opaque sentences used by officials. I also cite my primary sources in footnotes with whatever publication data were preserved by the state archiving services and the proprietary databases that I used to access these archives. Wherever possible, I have recollected full publication information on each source. Where

this was not possible, however, I rely on the authority of the databases and public archives from which I drew the sources as a verification of their authenticity.

Although my research yielded a relatively similar number of documents from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, by sheer coincidence, the proportions of document types varied greatly between the two. This variation represents both organizational differences between the two databases, as well as different governmental priorities and approaches between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan over the past two decades. For example Kyrgyzstan has produced far more legislation than Kazakhstan over the past twenty years, no doubt due to its two regime changes and frequent referendums that introduce sweeping constitutional changes. Nevertheless, many of the laws passed in Kyrgyzstan simply serve to reintroduce the same language as previous laws that had been nullified by a constitutional referendum. The totals from each database are presented in the table below.

Table 2: Number of documents in dataset by case and document type

Document type	KG: Toktom Database	KZ: Paragraf Database
Legislation	1,758	628
Court rulings	107	198
International agreements & treaties	447	117
Policy & expert analysis	286	610
Procedural documents	152	151
News articles	Na	793
Total	2,750	2,497

After retrieving these documents, I used an automator script to assign each file a unique name according to the kind of document, the date of publication, and the keywords that appeared in the text of the document. In other words, a law passed in Kyrgyzstan in 2007 that contained the words "cult," "sect," and "religious affairs" would be titled "KG_Law_2007_cult_sect_religious affairs." Again, this naming scheme only served to provide each file with a unique name that revealed some clues as to the document's contents. The full publication data of each document was preserved in the heading of each document, however, and could be accessed once opened.

II. Data Analysis

For analysis of this dataset, I used MAXQDA, a leading program designed for qualitative data analysis in the social sciences. MAXQDA offers a similar feature set to NVivo, but offers a number of additional utilities that made it preferable when handling such a large dataset. After importing my data to MAXQDA, preserving the same folder and file structure that I used when saving the original files, I automatically coded all files using the same keywords that I originally used to retrieve them from the databases. This involved running lexical searches for each keyword separately, and auto-coding every sentence that contained that keyword. Due to the intensive computing demands of this task, each keyword took about eight hours of processor time to complete, and the entire dataset was coded over the course of approximately three months.

This process yielded a total of 95,025 coded segments, and 102,337 total codes. Of these coded segments, 78,482 contain only one code, while 16,543 contain overlapping codes, i.e. contain multiple keywords in the same sentence: 12,020 segments contain two codes, 2,974 contain three codes, and 1,549 contain four or more overlapping codes. The table below breaks down the total count of coded segments by document system.

Table 3: Number of coded segments in dataset by case and document type

Document type	KG: Toktom Database	KZ: Paragraf Database
Legislation	19,410	23,359
Court rulings	586	6,174
International agreements & treaties	7645	8174
Policy & expert analysis	3846	18930
Procedural documents	791	1268
News articles	Na	12154
Total	32,278	70,059

The most striking feature of this table is the disproportionately greater number of codes in documents from Kazakhstan as compared to documents from Kyrgyzstan, even if we discount the news sources that Paragraf includes. This observation is especially true of laws, where Kazakhstani legislation contains 20% more coded segments, despite representing just over a third of the number of documents that Kyrgyzstani legislation presents. Court rulings and expert commentary from Kazakhstan also contain nearly five times the number of coded segments, despite containing only twice the number of documents.

This variance in number of codes per document can be in part attributed to the greater discipline that Nazarbayev's administration exerts over Kazakhstan's parliament and cadres of government officials. Representatives and officials alike

are careful to repeat the language of Nazarbayev and upper echelon officials continually, and refer to key nomenclature and euphemisms when making public statements. I observed this discipline first hand when interviewing government officials in Almaty and Astana, who were extremely careful to repeat the same talking points, seemingly aware of how much their position rested on their capacity to execute locally the policies that are decided at the upper echelons of government. Kazakhstan's government also maintains tighter control over the media than does Kyrgyzstan's and sponsors a wide network of NGOs that reproduce the government's talking points in the public sphere. All of these factors lead to greater consistency in the language of public politics, and greater repetition of the regime's key talking points.

By contrast, Kyrgyzstani government officials often enjoy a degree of autonomy from the Presidential administration, and members of Parliament often express outright antagonism to the politics of the President. As David Seigal has demonstrated in great detail, this is in part due to the far greater regional devolution of power in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan. Although Kyrgyzstan may not quite be an "island of democracy," cronyism and kleptocracy in the country has multiple, competing centers of gravity, leaving far more room for debate, disagreement, and input from local government and the

courts. As a result, both in legislation and in interviews, sources from Kyrgyzstan were far less taken to repeat the sane language and talking points. Table three breaks the number of coded segments down by code system.

Table 4: Number of coded segments in dataset by parent code group

Parent code group	Segments
Religious affairs	5089
Belief/confession	5814
Religious leadership (e.g. priest, imam, muftiate)	6686
Religious entity (e.g. church, mosque, congregation)	6065
Extremism and security	54407
"Non-traditional" religious group (not including the names of groups themselves, but terms such as “non-traditional” and “destructive sect”)	8058
Islam and islamic groups	11298
Christian denominations	4143
"Eastern" traditions and groups	560

The most striking feature of this table is that just over half of all codes are related to religious extremism and security. The term “extremism” occurs nearly 10,000 times in the dataset, “terrorism” occurs nearly 20,000 times, and “security” occurs nearly 25,000 times. In terms of coded segments, these three terms alone account for 47,099 of the 78,482 segments that contain only one code, and occur

in 5,583 of the 16,543 segments that contain overlapping codes. In other words, these three terms alone account for 60% of the coded segments that occur in isolation, while they only occur in one third of the segments that contain overlapping codes. Just because codes do not overlap, of course, does not necessarily mean that they do not occur nearby. With any document, isolated statements on extremism in the abstract may be followed up by more substantial comments on whom the state considers extremist. Nevertheless, having explored many of these documents first-hand, I can confirm that these numbers speaks to officials' tendency to invoke extremism and security in isolation, often without context, corroborating evidence, or even a specific objects of this discourse.

It is easy to understand why the terms extremism, terrorism, and security occur so frequently in isolation throughout the dataset. These terms give voice to vague threats that legitimate, even necessitate state power and restrictive policies. The utility of these terms is not hampered, but rather enhanced by their continuous repetition without corroboration or reference to specific groups. For the purposes of my research, however, these isolated occurrences of extremism, terrorism, and security, offer less information about the profile of public discourses on religious politics than do segments in which these terms co-occur with others. Thus, by minimizing my attention to isolated occurrences of the

terms security, extremism, and terrorism, I was effectively able to reduce the number of coded segments I considered in my analysis by half.

Even excluding these terms, however, the dataset still presents a dauntingly large quantity of coded segments. Exploring the data and extracting relevant segments for the dissertation required a variety of qualitative analysis techniques. I primarily relied on four approaches to data analysis that allowed me to find and extract relevant coded segments and their contexts.

First while developing my theoretical framework and before beginning my empirical chapters, I focused on densely-coded documents, especially those containing more than one hundred coded segments. More than one hundred documents in the dataset contain more than one hundred coded segments, some of them more than five hundred. These documents include key laws that lay out the legal basis for state regulation of religion, rulings on cases in which the plaintiff or defendant was a "non-traditional" religious organization or an official at such an organization, commentary on religious politics, or other highly substantive documents for the dissertation.

Second, I browsed the dataset manually by calling up coded segments according to document and code variables. Like NVivo, MAXQDA allows researchers to activate any combination of document sets and code sets,

displaying only relevant coded segments in the code browser. In other words, if I wanted to look for Kyrgyz laws on "destructive sects" that were passed only since the most recent constitutional referendum, I could activate only the code "destructive" and only documents for legislation since 2010. The coded segment browser would then display all coded segments that matched these criteria and arrange them chronologically and by position within their respective documents. By clicking on any segment as I browsed, I could bring up the segment in its containing document. This approach helped me to focus my initial explorations of the data on specific issues, and allowed me to extract relevant segments for incorporation into my empirical chapters.

Third, I made extensive use of MAXQDA's code relations browser to explore the intersections of codes. MAXQDA allows users to produce matrices that display the number of overlapping segments between any two codes. These matrices display the selected codes along the x and y axis, and show the number of overlapping segments where each row and column meet. By clicking on any cell, the user can bring up all of the relevant segments where the codes overlap in the code browser. Once again, the scope of these matrices can be limited by activating only a limited set of documents and codes, and clicking on any segment in the code browser will bring up the segment in its containing

document. The code relations browser provided both a useful visual tool for seeing which codes tended to overlap, e.g. the relative frequency with which terms such as “extremism” or “destructive” are invoked in relation to Islamic groups as opposed to Christian groups. It also provided an invaluable means to immediately access the coded segments that lay at the intersection of these codes, allowing for very targeted browsing and extraction of my data.

Finally, I used complex coding queries to access segments that contained three or more overlapping codes. Using the query function, MAXQDA allows researchers to retrieve segments that match a a precise set of criteria. Based on the code intersections that I observed in the code relations browser, I focused my queries on the intersections of certain codes, and reduced the number of results by increasing the number of overlapping codes per segment. For example, these queries allowed me to limit the results in the code browser to segments in which multiple key terms occurred simultaneously, such as a more substantial discussion of which religious groups Kazakhstan’s Agency for Religious Affairs considers destructive. This approach proved particularly useful when searching for segments to include in my empirical chapters, as it allowed me to narrow the scope of each search to the codes and documents that were particularly relevant for each chapter, and to limit the results further to highly substantial segments

where multiple codes occurred in conjunction.

These four qualitative analysis methods allowed me to sift through the nearly 100,000 coded segments in my dataset and arrive at several thousand segments that most substantively depict religious politics and regulation in my two cases. These segments form the empirical base of my dissertation, and the bulk of the data that I cite in my empirical chapters. But they are nevertheless supplemented by the data I collected through interviews and direct observations of court proceedings and other government activities.

III. Additional Fieldwork

I conducted 36 semi-structured interviews over the course of a second round of data collection in the summer of 2014. These interviews involved government officials, leaders and members of religious groups, and experts on religious policy from local universities and NGOs. In these interviews, I sought to elicit my respondents' personal experiences and interpretations of religious policy and the religious situation in the country. Having a wealth of information on formal policy through my primary dataset, I focused these interviews on observations and commentary that would elucidate how these policies are executed in

practice.

While some government officials deflected and deferred to government talking points, most of my respondents were quite forthcoming, particularly if I indicated sympathy with their position. Most heterodox religious leaders assumed at the outset of our interview that I, as a Western scholar, was sympathetic to their position, and were ready to share their experiences so long as I guaranteed their anonymity. Orthodox religious leaders and government officials, in contrast, often assumed that I would be critical of the government and religious establishment, but eagerly shared their perspective when I indicated openness to their position. I enjoyed very candid responses to my questions from representatives of the SCRA, Kyrgyzstan's state security services, pro-government scholars, and even the head of the Kazakhstan NGO *Information Center for Religious Questions*, which maintains a network of "treatment centers" to help those who "suffered" from the activities of destructive cults.

I made great efforts to comply with the wishes of my respondents for anonymity and confidentiality. I presented each of my respondents with an informed consent form in Russian, but then invariably chose verbal consent rather than written consent, as they were unnerved by the prospect of personally signing off on the contents of the interview. Although respondents appreciated

being informed of their rights and being provided with a copy of the informed consent form, they generally wished for greater anonymity, some even opting for written interviews only and asking that I not record their voices. While in the field, I stored all audio files and interview transcripts not on my computer directly, but rather on encrypted hard drives, and only later transcribed the interviews for importation into MAXQDA for qualitative analysis. I assigned monikers to all representatives of heterodox religious groups and other respondents who shared confidential information with me, but I use the true names of government and other public officials who simply elaborated on the same positions that they articulate in public regularly.

Finally, I directly observed religious policy in practice in Kyrgyzstan, where my contacts in the State Commission for Religious Affairs (as well as the overall greater transparency of Kyrgyzstan's government) afforded me greater access to state institutions. I attended four court cases in which the State Commission for Religious Affairs either sought to deny registration to a heterodox religious group, or defended its decisions to deny registration. The first case was between the administration of Batken Province in the South of Kyrgyzstan and a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses that had been denied the right to register and practice in the province. The Jehovah's Witnesses were the plaintiffs in the

case, and representatives of the SCRA testified in support of the Batken government's position. The court ultimately upheld the government's position.

The second case was between the government of Chui Province, which contains the capital city of Bishkek, and the Church of Scientology. In this case, the government was the plaintiff, and sought to close down scientology centers operating in the province. The case was repeatedly adjourned to allow both sides to submit new documents to the judge, and no decision was reached during my year of fieldwork. The third case involved the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon, popularly known in the U.S. as the Moonies, which contested the SCRA's decision to deny them registration as a religious organization in Kyrgyzstan. The hearing was held in Kyrgyzstan's highest court, the Constitutional Court, and while the panel of judges was highly critical of the SCRA's authority in the case, they ultimately upheld the government's policy.

The final case involved a group that sought to register Tengrianism as an official religious organization. The group had been denied registration repeatedly by the SCRA, and appealed to the regional court in Chui to overrule this decision. This case too was repeatedly adjourned for the panel of three judges to consider new documents and evidence from both sides, but also led to incredibly heated debates in the halls of the Pervomajskij Regional Court. Although the

court never reached a decision during my year of fieldwork, the case did become so hostile that the SCRA official who was representing the government's position eventually resigned after receiving multiple threats to his safety from members of the Tengrians and some of their nationalist Allies who saw the government as standing in the way of national solidarity and patriotism.

In addition to these court cases, I attended a training conducted by the SCRA with officials from the Chui regional governance, at which SCRA officials and other experts informed these state officials of the religious "threats" facing their populations. The training involved roughly one hundred officials from all branches of the regional government and the security services, and sought to coordinate law-enforcement efforts in the sphere of religion. I similarly attended two conferences organized by local universities to discuss similar concerns of religious extremism. Although not focused on law-enforcement methods to the same degree, these conferences included a combination of government officials and scholars, all of whom contributed to the discourses on extremism and security that legitimate state policy in the religious sphere.

Finally, I attended the 2012 Kurultai in Bishkek, at which the Muftiate of Kyrgyzstan elected its head Mufti. As opposed to Kurultai summits in Kazakhstan, which are largely scripted and produce outcomes that are favorable

to the government, the Kurultai in Kyrgyzstan is generally independent, highly animated, and features legitimate contestation between competing factions. While officials of the SCRA attended the 2012 Kurultai in Bishkek, facilitating my own access to the event, their presence and support of a more conventional candidate likely contributed to the victory of a candidate whose base of support lay in the Tablighi Jamaat missionary movement, banned in other states of the region and embattled even in Kyrgyzstan right up until that moment. Since the 2012 Kurultai, Tablighi Jamaat has become far more mainstream in Kyrgyzstan, and its networks have deeply penetrated the Muftiate structure.

Conclusion

All of these methods in conjunction provided extensive and multi-layered data on religious policy and politics in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the combinations of sources allowed me to gain strong data on both of my national cases. While I had fewer contacts and spent less time conducting interviews in Kazakhstan as opposed to Kyrgyzstan, my primary data set returned far more coded segment for Kazakhstani documents as opposed to Kyrgyzstani documents. This circumstance results in my having far more familiarity with the

practice of religious policy in Kyrgyzstan, and the formalities of religious policy in Kazakhstan. Given the more authoritarian nature of Nazarbayev's administration, however, the practice is far closer to the formal language of policy in Kazakhstan than in Kyrgyzstan.

One final note concerns the use of this data for theory-building vs. theory-testing. The methodology I employ in this dissertation is not primarily focused on theory testing, in that it is not my intention to show that my empirical puzzles can only be answered using the analysis I present herein. As I have stated, many nuanced case studies have provided in-depth discussions of religious and populist politics in Central Asia, as well as of authoritarian and identity politics in other cases across the globe and in many different periods. This model presented herein in no way is meant to detract from the contributions of this existing body of work, but rather to supplement it. Thus, the goal of my data analysis is not to engage in testing my theory against alternative explanations or counter-factual cases. Rather, I seek to build a theory that can bridge the gap between the careful exploration of populist appeals in these case studies, and the prevailing instrumentalist perspective in political theory.

As a result, the analysis presented in this dissertation may be accused of using data in an uneven manner, focusing only on the statements that

corroborate my argument. Indeed, given the scope of my dataset, consisting of thousands of documents and over 100,000 coded segments, it would be impossible even in a full dissertation to explore every contour of the public discussion of religious and national tradition in both of my cases. Returning to the point with which I began this chapter, the goal of a relational analysis is not to examine religious doctrines or "lived" religious practices (Ammerman 2006; McGuire 2008). Rather, the purpose is to show how competing religious claims correspond to orthodox and heterodox positions in the religious field, and how these positions themselves reflect uneven relations of power in public life.

Thus, by focusing on statements that either serve to monopolize authority or to contest an existing monopoly, I do not focus only on data that corroborates my analysis to the exclusion of other data. Rather, I focus on the major contenting positions in this struggle over authority, acknowledging the existence of other actors, practices, and attitudes that have less bearing on this struggle. The merits of the relational analysis I provide rest on the cohesion of the orthodox and heterodox positions revealed by the data. With that final note on the use of my data, I now turn to the empirical discussion.

CHAPTER 4

Religious Policy and the Sacrosanct Popular Will

We must not allow our true religion, to which our ancestors held,
be divided by divergent tendencies that would knock us off our path.

Nursultan Nazarbayev
President of Kazakhstan

In 2011, scholars, experts, and religious and state officials from across the post-Soviet space gathered in Moscow for a conference titled "Revival of Traditional Islam - The Best Alternative to Religious Extremism." Like many such gatherings, this conference represented an effort to coordinate regional strategies in developing and enforcing religious policy across the successor states to the Soviet Union, in this case among states that contain significant Muslim populations. The conference focused on achieving consensus on what constituted "traditional Islam" in the region, how it differed from "extremism," and how the authorities might design and implement policies to defend the former from the latter.

The conference proceedings point to several "successful examples" that might serve as models for other states to follow, including the brutal regime of Islam

Karimov, the warlord to whom Vladimir Putin gave the task of subduing Chechen separatists:

> Successful examples of the use of traditional Islam in the fight against extremism in the territory of the CIS, including in Russian Northern Caucasus, namely in the Chechen Republic, where the leadership, in the person of Ramzan Kadyrov, applied the powerful mobilizing potential of traditional Sufi Islam for the region, allowing the government to virtually nullify Muslim radicalism and drive out alien extremist movements from the territory of the republic, in spite of some costs.[1]

This precise passage from the conference "resolution" was quoted in a news article by Kazakh political scientist Eldar Zhumagaziev, who was in attendance. He implored the government of Kazakhstan to modify the law "On Religious Freedom" to follow the "more efficient" work of state structures in Russia and Turkey. "In the era of globalization, which is an inevitable process, we must actively defend our point of view, our policy in the field of religion if we want to preserve our identity. Religion is already beginning to interfere in the affairs of the state, and the state can hardly sit on the sidelines."

Such conferences contribute to a concerted, coordinated effort by regimes throughout the post-Soviet space to depict religious pluralism as a threat to sovereignty and security. Across the post-Soviet space, freedom of conscience is

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[1] Sokolov, Andrey. 2011. "Religion should unite and not disconnect the society - Atyrau political scientist Eldar Zhumagaziev." *Inform KZ*, August 16. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://inform.kz:8080/arb/article/2398772).

being redefined as freedom *from* the influence of "non-traditional religions," "extremist movements," and "destructive sects." As the resolution above attests, state and religious officials alike actively promote "traditional" religion as a primary defense against the vague threat of pluralism.

In line with these efforts, the administrations of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have drawn increasingly rigid distinctions between "traditional" and "non-traditional" or "destructive" religious groups, and dramatically curtailed the freedom of the latter to practice and proselytize their faith. Kyrgyzstani law speaks of a need to,

> …focus the state policy in the field of religion on countering extremist manifestations in this sphere, to ensure effective protection of the secular nature of the state enshrined in the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, to strengthen interaction with traditional religions in the exercise of the citizens' right to freedom of religion.[2]

In Kazakhstan, meanwhile, religious experts advocated for passing a more restrictive law on religion with arguments that, "it is necessary for Kazakhstan first of all to ensure the rights of citizens, to preserve the interethnic and interfaith peace, and not to allow deep faults that can split our society."[3]

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[2] Anonymous. 2012. "National security of the Kyrgyz Republic." Policy Brief approved by Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic on June 9, 2012 N 120. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.vesti.kg/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=13270&Itemid=117).

[3] Kusainov, Dias. Date unlisted. "Dogmatism and Religious Radicalism Were Alien to the Inhabitants of the Great Steppe, Receptive to New Ideas and Open to Free Intellectual

Though this shift toward authoritarianism has surprised few observers of the region, scholars have struggled to explain the rationale behind policies that target marginal and benign religious groups such as the Jehovah's witnesses and the Islamic missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat. The regimes even chase largely illusory "threats," such as the dissident Chinese movement Falun Gong, which has almost no presence in the region, but which the states still list as a banned organization in a nod to the religious policy of neighboring China, which wields increasing influence in the region.

Even working from the assumption that authoritarian regimes primarily act to reproduce their power, scholars and religious leaders in the region have been hard pressed to explain how monitoring and restricting "non-traditional" religious groups helps to achieve this goal. Despite the regimes' invocations of security threats, none of the groups labelled "destructive" represent an imminent threat to the state or citizenry. And while it might be tempting to attribute these policies to banal identity politics, their intent and outcomes defy such explanations.

Rather than defend local religious groups against foreign incursions, the

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Communication." *Zakon*. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31051649#pos=1;-145).

religious policy of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan often do the opposite. In addition to targeting global religious groups such as Baptists and Ahmadi Muslims (who themselves have a decades-long history of peaceful coexistence in the region), the regimes have harassed local imams and proponents of truly local faith traditions such as Tengrianism — the animistic beliefs native to the Kyrgyz and Kazakh peoples before Islam penetrated the region in the 8th century CE. At the same time, the regimes recognize and tacitly support a public role for Orthodox Christianity and brands of Sunni Islam that represent a genuine intervention by outside powers. Russia, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia all finance religious groups in the region as a form of soft power, and even work to create religious environments amenable to that soft power, as the conference proceedings cited above demonstrate. [Here a 1-2 sentence example of how they donate to mosque construction]. These religious organizations and the states that back them arguably represent a far greater foreign intervention into public life than the grassroots missionary activity of marginal Protestant denominations or dissident imams.

I. Spiritual Sovereignty

Reviewing the puzzle and arguments that guide this dissertation, I once again ask: Why do illiberal democracies restrict marginal and seemingly benign religious groups? Why in particular has Kyrgyzstan enacted such similar policies to its more authoritarian neighbors such as Kazakhstan, despite its less consolidated regime and reputation as "an island of democracy in Central Asia?" Finally, given the discrepancies between the official discourse on tradition and the historical record in the region, what rationale governs the distinction between "traditional" and "non-traditional" religious groups?

To answer these questions, I suggest in this dissertation that we first turn to the concept of authoritarianism itself. I propose to treat authoritarianism not as a system of rule "in which political authority is concentrated in the hands of the few" (Cooley 2016), but rather as a distinct claim to authority — a claim to represent an essential popular will that must be "defended" from pluralism. From populist upstarts to entrenched dictators, authoritarian figures claim to speak for a sacrosanct popular will that transcends social differences and stands above mundane politics. Such leaders claim privileged authority to enact the "true" will of the people (or, perhaps, the will of the "true" people), whether they ground that sacrosanct will in ethnic identity, national tradition, religious belief, or even "class consciousness." Furthermore, illiberal regimes circumvent

democratic constraints by denigrating mundane political deliberation as something frivolous and petty in comparison to this sacrosanct will, and by condemning dissent as a form of false consciousness that leads constituents astray from their essential values and interests.

In short, authoritarian regimes consecrate a narrow effigy of "the people," and claim a privileged mandate to defend this sacrosanct will from external threats and internal dissidence. I argue, therefore, that illiberal democracies restrict marginal and apolitical religious groups because even seemingly benign forms of heterodoxy challenge authoritarian claims to represent an essential and sacrosanct popular will. To develop this model, I draw from Bourdieu's later work on public politics, in which he treats representation as a form of "ministry" whereby public figures articulate a unified will that substitutes for the many particular wills of their constituents. In other words, regimes, parties and other political establishments "speak for people who would not speak if someone did not speak for them" (Bourdieu 2004:42-3). Bourdieu sought to show how political figures dispossess their own constituents of their voices in democratic societies, but his theory is all the more relevant in the case of authoritarian polities.

This approach helps to explain why the discourse on religious "tradition" in post-Soviet Central Asia differs so sharply from the historical record. The

distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy derives its logic not from the actual vintage of a religious tradition, but simply from a regime's efforts to reproduce its authority to speak for the people. To the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, it matters not whether a religious group or organization is local or foreign, old or new, but simply whether that entity works in symbiosis with the establishment to reproduce the official effigy of "the people." I argue, therefore, that the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan label as "traditional" those religious organizations that they perceive as contributing to their own authority to speak for the popular will. In contrast, the regimes condemn as "non-traditional" and "destructive" all religious groups that are seen as challenging their authority, either by giving voice to dissident attitudes among the public, or simply by maintaining autonomy from the regime's vertical structures of ordination.

Those familiar with Central Asia may object to my usage of the term "authoritarian" in reference to Kyrgyzstan, whose government is generally regarded as more "liberal" than its neighbors. (Some may even object to my calling Kazakhstan authoritarian, given the popularity that President Nazarbayev enjoys.) But by treating authoritarianism as a distinct claim to authority, rather than as a series of institutions and practices of rule, we can

navigate the distinction between illiberal democracy and authoritarian regime more easily. All illiberal regimes seek to control who has authority to speak for the people — both within the state and beyond — but different regimes succeed in monopolizing this authority to varying degrees.

I demonstrate in this chapter, therefore, that illiberal regimes seek to control public life by establishing a system of "ordination" that reserves positions of authority for individuals who have demonstrated their loyalty to established elites. Bourdieu called such control the power of *nomination*, i.e. the power to name people to positions of power. To the degree that a regime succeeds in consolidating power, therefore, it restricts all forms of public authority to people who have demonstrated their loyalty to and utility for established elites.

The degree to which this power is consolidated varies significantly between my two national cases. President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has far surpassed any ruling party or cohort in Kyrgyzstan in consolidating such a system of rule and ordination beneath him, in a large part due to the greater energy wealth Kazakhstan affords to the state. Kyrgyzstan is considered the most liberal and democratic country in Central Asia largely because of the highly fragmented politics that divides elite cadres. Local politicians have significantly greater power in relation to the central government in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan,

and they continuously mobilize protest against the central government (Siegel 2016, Jones Luong, Radnitz). By comparing the policies of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, therefore, I will demonstrate that consolidated autocracies differ from illiberal democracies not primarily in the quality of their claims to authority, but rather in the degree to which they have consolidated their authority through this hierarchical power of ordination.

Propagating a Sacrosanct Will

Official discourses on nationhood in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan intimately link sovereignty and religion. Officials in both states credit religious traditions in "the formation of [national] psychology, culture, and statehood,"[4] and religious leaders in turn support the ruling elite in professing the sanctity of sovereign nationhood. This reciprocity is complicated by the multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional populations of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Though the titular ethnicity of each state constitutes the majority of the population, the significant Russian minority commands outsize deference and influence due to the legacy of Soviet rule and to Russia's continued engagement in the region.

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[4] Satybekov, Erlan. 2007. "Interview with the Director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs, Toigonbek Z. Kalmatov" *Vecherniy Bishkek*, N 191 (9363), October 5. Retrieved (http://members.vb.kg/2007/10/05/linia/1_print.html).

Orthodoxy itself is multi-confessional in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan's law *On Religious Activities and Religious Associations*, for example, "recognizes the historical role of Islam of the Hanafi school, and Orthodox Christianity in the development of culture and spiritual life of the people."[5] State officials note that "our two traditional confessions - Islam and Orthodoxy - despite their dogmatic differences, are united through their socio-political similarities, particularly in their relation to the institution of the state."[6] A memo from Kyrgyzstan's State Agency for religious affairs makes the same point more artfully, noting that:

> Islam and Orthodox Christianity from time immemorial are considered traditional religions [in the region], and the sound of azan [the call to prayer] is as familiar to the population as the bells [of the church] ringing. Both religions train their flock with such qualities as: honesty, diligence, charity, striving for peace, serving the common good, which are also a civic duty.[7]

As the quote above attests, this putative symbiosis between Islam and Russian Orthodoxy does not merely reflect current realities, however, but

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[5] Dairova, Oksana. 2013. "Based on Traditions and Customs." *Zakon*, February 28. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4544112-osnovyvajas-na-tradicijakh-i-obychajakh.html).

[6] Shlymova, Galina. 2013 "After the Adoption of the New Law on Religion, the Country Managed to Form a New Legal Framework Governing the Confessional Relations." *Zakon*, May 24. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4544112-osnovyvajas-na-tradicijakh-i-obychajakh.html).

[7] Osmonaliev, Kanybek. Date Unlisted. "Those with Ears Shall Hear." *MSN*, Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://msn.kg/showwin.php?type=newsportal&id=23194).

extends back to the very origins of the contemporary nations. State-aligned scholars and experts note that, “spiritual consent is necessary, first of all, between Islam and Christianity, which represent the creeds of the two super-ethnoses of the Eurasian continent: Turkic and Slavic.”[8] In the rhetoric of the regime, “these traditions can be considered primordially ours… since they have a centuries-old history on ancient Kazakh land, where Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Tengrianism, Zoroastrianism happily coexisted.”[9]

Islam receives particular attention in these discourses, given its significance to the claims of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh peoples to nationhood. Calling on the administration to “save spiritual sovereignty,” one Kazakh expert argues that:

> For Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the traditional form of Islam is Sunnism of the Hanafi mazkhab [school]… as well as the "Turkic" Sufism with its tradition of aulie (saints), originating from the sacred relation of the steppe people [i.e. nomads] to their ancestors.[10]

Top state officials in the sphere of religion similarly assert that national character is “inseparably linked with the Sunni Islam of the Hanafi madhhab, which

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[8] Artem’eva, Victoria. 2013. “Victoria” is a Pathway to Human Spirituality and Morality.” *Kazislam*, December 10. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://kazislam.kz/ru/dini-radikalizm-qauipteri/item/849-eislam).

[9] Argynov, Bek. Date Unlisted. “Tell Me Who Your Pastor is, and I'll Tell You Who You Are.” *Liter.* Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31056593#pos=1;-145).

[10] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. “To Save Spiritual Sovereignty.”*Liter*, September 14. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

determined the originality of the Kazakh people and its value orientations."[11] This melding of religious belief and local custom has even been compared to "a kind of 'social contract' among the members of the Muslim Ummah of Kazakhstan,"[12] Ummah in this case serving to indicate the entire ethnic Kazakh population.

Nevertheless, in an effort to avoid disparaging Moscow, state officials and state-aligned experts are careful to note the ecclesiastic jurisdiction that Orthodox Christianity holds over their Russian citizens. In the rhetoric of the regime, social order hinges on accord and dialogue between Orthodox Christianity and the state-endorsed brand of Hanafi Islam, whose "peaceful coexistence is the guarantor of the stability of our social and spiritual life."[13]

State officials and establishment scholars even assert that there is a stronger affinity between Orthodox Christianity and the uniquely "Eurasian" Islam of the post-Soviet space than that between Orthodoxy and other branches of

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[11] Baigarin, Meirambek. 2011. "Kairat Lama Sharif: Kazakh People Can Save their Unity and Peace Only by Following the Traditional Religion of their Ancestors." *Kazinform,* August 10. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.inform.kz/kz/kazahskiy-narod-mozhet-sohranit-svoyu-splochennost-soglasie-i-edinstvo-tol-ko-sleduya-obychayam-i-tradicionnoy-religii-svoih-predkov-kayrat-lama-sharif_a2397785).

[12] Amrebaev, Aidar. 2012."An Active Spiritual Dialogue is Being Conducted in Kazakhstan." *Zakon*, June 8. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4495565-v-kazakhstane-vedetsja-aktivnyjj.html).

[13] Republic of Kazakhstan: Religious Affairs and Religious Associations, Public Law of 2011. 253-III 3PK (2008).

Christianity, or between Central Asian Islam and global Islam. It should be noted here, that not only the so-called "Eurasianists," but Vladimir Putin himself stated that "for Orthodox, Muslims are closer than Catholics."[14] Similarly, officials in Kazakhstan cited a leading state attorney in Moscow when deflecting criticism of religious intolerance:

> The mentality of Muslims in this aspect is perhaps much closer to the mentality of the Russian Orthodox than to the mentality of the Protestant and even Catholic countries. Therefore, it seems that in this situation, rather than criticize the people [for intolerance toward "non-traditional" religions], it is more useful to give them such laws that fit into the "Procrustean bed" of the people's world outlook.[15]

As I address in the next section, the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have played an active role in mitigating potential tensions between these two orthodox faiths, primarily by supporting the established leadership structure of each religion in its claims to represent the ethnically-defined faith communities in the state's jurisdiction. Both states support the Russian Orthodox Church's claims to represent the essential religious values of ethnic Russians living in the region, and similarly promote the authority of the Muftiate of each country to speak for all "Muslim" peoples in their jurisdiction, which is expressly described in terms

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[14] Putin, Vladimir. 2010. "Orthodox Christianity is Closer to Islam than Catholicism." Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://vk.com/video-4121067_456245751).

[15] Kupriyanov, A. Date Unlisted. "Church Law and its Reception into Russian Lawmaking." *Duralex*. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.duralex.org/tserkovnoe-pravo-i-ego-retseptsiya-v-rossiyskoe-zakonotvorchestvo/).

of citizens' ethnic identity as opposed to their actual religious affiliations or practices.

Instituting an Exclusive Mandate to Represent the Sacrosanct Popular Will

This discourse on traditional religions draws directly on the Soviet-era institution of passport identity, which to this day classifies all citizens into mutually exclusive ethno-national categories at birth in many post-Soviet countries. Under the Soviet system, passport nationality assigned the individual irrevocably to a particular ethnic category, many of which were linked to a national homeland within the federated structure of the Soviet state (Brubaker 1997). This institution was so crucial within the vastly multiethnic Soviet state, because it allowed the many local branches of the Communist Party to claim a popular mandate from their presumed ethno-national constituencies (Martin 2001).

With the end of Soviet atheism, religious hierarchies have reasserted their power in mainstream politics and joined party hierarchies in the enterprise of appropriating the popular will. By incorporating religion into the discourse on national origins and consciousness, state and religious authorities shuffle the various peoples of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan into mutually-exclusive national-religious categories, for which they claim an exclusive right to speak. Public

officials speak directly to the fact that demographic “niches” are reserved for traditional religions and that these jurisdictions are central to their vision of religious accord:

> As a result of the centuries-old coexistence of Islam and Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan, a certain religious balance of interests and religious balance has formed, within which each of the two religions formed a niche, establishing interfaith dialogue and channels of social interaction.[16]

Even on the level of official statistics, both the state and religious authorities automatically assign religious denomination according to ethnicity. Thus, it is not uncommon to find statements that, “According to the latest census, 70% of Kazakhstanis profess Islam, 26% - Christianity, 0.09% - Buddhism and 0.03% - Judaism.”[17] Critics have argued that such classifications leave little space for substantive secularism, as virtually all citizens are assigned a religious affiliation irrespective of their beliefs or practices. The regimes have countered, however, that such steps are necessary in order to preserve the secular state, defending moderate religious traditions from destructive and extremist religious currents.

The regime derives clear utility from this close coupling of religion and

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[16] Sharif, Lama. Date unlisted. “The New Law on Religion in Kazakhstan Does Not Violate the Equality of Religious Associations.” *Zakon.* Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31068523#pos=1;-116).

[17] Ivanov, V. 2010. “Implementing Freedom of Faith: 20 years of Missionary Movements in Kazakhstan.” *Jurist*, December 12. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://journal.zakon.kz/207841-realizacija-prav-na-svobodu-sovesti-20.html).

nationhood, as well as from the invocation of primordial origins for contemporary nations and national consciousness. Such essentialism directly serves the regime's efforts to propagate an essential popular will, contiguous with the contemporary ethnic categories employed by the state. It confers on state and establishment religious officials the exclusive and sacrosanct authority to speak for the will of their presumed constituents.

With this goal in mind, we can understand the logic and utility of even some of the more doctrinally absurd statements made by the regime, such as to the effect that Orthodox Christians (and by extension all ethnic Russians) and Central Asian Muslims (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and minority communities such as Uzbeks and Uighers) are close in "mentality." Such rhetoric establishes a symbiosis between state and religious authorities, who simultaneously propagate compatible claims to speak for their overlapping constituencies. Despite religious pluralism, the people shares a uniform "mentality," an essential will that unifies them as a nation. Furthermore, this multi-confessional citizenry freely confers a unified mandate on the sovereign state by virtue of this essential and sacrosanct popular will. Such rhetoric demonstrate unambiguously that religious pluralism is tolerable for the political establishment, so long as the leadership structures of each religious group contribute to the political establishment's exclusive claims

to speak for the popular will. The leadership structures of "traditional religious groups," i.e. the Muftiate and the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate, each claim a mandate to speak for their ethnically-defined faith-groups, but both recognize a common "mentality" that unifies their presumed constituencies in civic life, and both support the regime's exclusive authority to speak for this essential will in the affairs of the state.

This authority is tantamount to structuring government around the power of ordination. It lays the groundwork for cooperation between the state (i.e. the ruling party or cadre that has monopolized much of the state's power), and the hierarchical bodies that govern officially recognized traditional religions. In the present cases, this religious establishment is primarily constituted by the Muftiate or Muslim Board that governs all officially registered mosques in each country, and the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate, which answers both to the state as well as to the Moscow Patriarchate.

These public institutions collectively monopolize the authority to speak for the popular will. They create spiritual jurisdictions that divide and encompass the entire population of these multiethnic nations, and use that jurisdiction to reinforce the authority of the state. The Muftiate and the Russian Orthodox Church both project essentialized voices for their presumed constituents that

reinforce the popular mandate claimed by the regime. Party, Church, and Muftiate all reserve the right to confer public authority within their respective spheres onto chosen representatives, and confer such authority only on individuals deemed reliable, loyal, useful, and interested in reproducing the ruling order. As I will show, however, President Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan has consolidated this monopoly over the power of ordination to a far greater degree than have the successive Presidents of Kyrgyzstan.

II. Traditional Religions and the "Threat" of Pluralism

Any dissident religious and political movements threaten this system of ordination. Irrespective of their character or content, heterodox ministries challenge the regime's claims to speak for a sacrosanct will that defines the essential values and interests of their constituents. Thus, government officials fret that there is "an expansion of the influence of non-traditional religious trends," which may lead to an "intensification of the contradictions between traditional and non-traditional denominations."[18] A government decree on defending the

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[18] Golikova, V. 2011. "Policy within the Religious Sphere of the Republic of Kazakhstan" Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://kazislam.kz/ru/dinaralyq-unqatysu/vnutrennie-kategorii/dinaraly-kelisimni-qazaqstandy-ulgisi/item/2892-politika-respubliki-kazakhstan-v-religioznoj-sfere).

freedom of religion in Kazakhstan states that:

> A certain tension in inter-confessional relations is caused by the activation of the activities of non-traditional religious associations aimed at involving citizens of Kazakhstan, especially young people, in their ranks. Their social danger lies in the fact that, by proclaiming and realizing their goals, they encroach on the freedom of the individual, do not take into account the cultural and spiritual traditions that have developed in the society, as well as the norms of legislation.[19]

This decree brings up an issue to which I will return later — treating religious pluralism as a threat to citizens' rights, rather than an expression of the freedom of religion. It also demonstrates the threat that the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan perceive to "cultural and spiritual traditions" in the form of heterodox religious groups. The head of Kazakstan's Agency for Religious Affairs asserts in an interview that "the transition of people from traditional confessions to non-traditional ones poses a threat to the unity of the nation and the state,"[20] and argues that it is non-traditional religions, rather than the ruling authorities, that are rewriting the history of the nation to fit their interests.

> According to [Lama Sharif, head of the SARA], it is already noticeable both in Kazakhstan and in some neighboring countries of the region that

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[19] Republic of Kazakhstan: Government Decree of approving the Program for Ensuring Freedom of Religion and Improving State and Confessional Relations in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2007-2009. December 5, 2007 No. 1185.

[20] Lama Sharif, Kairat. 2013. "It Is Necessary to Make it So That People Will Not Want to Leave the Largest Traditional Confessions." *Kazinform*, March 19. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.inform.kz/ru/nuzhno-sdelat-tak-chtoby-lyudyam-rashotelos-uhodit-iz-krupneyshih-tradicionnyh-konfessiy-kayrat-lama-sharif_a2543559).

> the supporters of unconventional currents… are engaged in the artificial construction and dissemination of alternative versions of the history of countries."[21]

Officials speak of these heterodox groups with great alarm, despite their relatively low numbers and marginal status. One expert in Kyrgyzstan noted that, "According to the State Agency for Religious Affairs, at present the number of Kyrgyz who have chosen non-traditional forms of faith already reached 10-15 thousand people!"[22]

Religious heterodoxy raises two disparate sets of concerns for the regime, which my subsequent chapters address. The first is the threat to "spiritual sovereignty" that both the states and much of the population of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan perceive in the conversion of their co-ethnics to "destructive sects," i.e. small, congregational groups. The second concern is that of Islamic radicalization among the nominally Muslim majorities of these nations. The leadership of both countries see this latter threat as omnipresent, in part out of a genuine concern with radicalization, but also as a potent tool for addressing popular dissent among the titular communities and certain ethnic minorities.

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[21] Kasymov, Daniyar. 2013. "The Conference on "Freedom of Faith in Kazakhstan" Took Place in Astana." *Zakon, March 20.* Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4547516-v-astane-proshla-konferencija-svoboda.html).

[22] Satybekov, Erlan and Bermet Malikova. 2007. "The Government Official Closest to God." *Vecherniy Bishkek*, October 5. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2007/10/05/linia/1.html).

A decree of Kyrgyzstan's government (on the implementation of another decree "On the religious situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Task of Authorities to Form a State Policy in the Religious Sphere") declares that:

> A subject of particular concern is Islam and tendencies within the Muslim confession of the republic, since more than 80 percent of the population of the republic traditionally adheres to Islam, and Kyrgyzstan neighbors with states where religious extremism and fundamentalist ideas are widespread. The low level of spiritual education of local Muslim clergy, combined with the financial dependence of individual mosques on foreign "sponsors and benefactors," creates a fertile ground for the spread of ideas of Islamic extremism and fundamentalism.[23]

Officials in Kazakhstan likewise assert that, "the Muslim community of the country is not consolidated enough: it is undoubtedly dominated by the Sunnism of the Hanafi madhhab, but there are various, including radical, currents."[24] State-aligned imams, meanwhile, warn the population about "the perniciousness and danger of unconventional currents, the main goals of which are misting of the brain and pumping out of material resources."[25]

Experts categorize these threats along numerous lines, but their analyses tend

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[23] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree "On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Task of Authorities to Form a State Policy in the Religious Sphere." January 17, 1997 No. 20.

[24] Kosichenko, Anatoliy. 2011. "Feeling of Faith." *Leninksaya Smena,* November 17. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://old.express-k.kz/show_article.php?art_id=57015).

[25] Musalimova, Gulnara. 2013. "In Aktau, Security Officials Together With Representatives of the Mosque Discussed the Problems of Extremism," *Lada,* March 12. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.lada.kz/aktau_news/society/8508-v-aktau-siloviki-vmeste-s-predstavitelyami-mecheti-obsudili-problemy-ekstremizma.html).

to reproduce a single prognosis about heterodox movements within Islam: any group that does not present an overt threat to security and stability still hides potential threats.

> Based on the analysis, the activities of non-traditional Islamic trends can be classified into the following types: extreme radicals (the extremist party "Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami"); radicals (jihadists and adherents of "at-Takfir val-hijra," salafites-orthodoxes… madhalits, sururites, al-banitas); and groups that do not yet resort to political actions but are "waiting" or "centrists" (numerous Sufi brotherhoods, the Pakistani missionary organization Tablighi Jama'at, etc.).[26]

In such classifications, the more "radical" groups present a direct threat to the state, while the "waiting" groups represent a more indirect threat. Salafi groups, for example, are thought to "oppose the secular principles of the state, as well as stand against the historically established traditions of Sunnism of the Hanafi madhhab [school],"[27] leading experts to conclude that, "If we do not want the spread of radical Islam under the guise of the Salafis, then the state should openly, actively support the traditional Islam of the Hanafi madhhab."[28]

In contrast, authorities see the missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat, which I

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[26] Izbairov, Asylbek. 2011."Activities of non-traditional Islamist organizations and trends in Kazakhstan." *Central Asia,* October 5. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.centrasia.ru/news2.php?st=1317759180).

[27] Amrebaev, Aidar. 2011. "The Authorities Have Gone on a Full Frontal Attack," *Zakon,* November 14. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4457950-ajjdar-amrebaev-vlast-poshla-v-lobovuju.html).

[28] Tekeeva, Shynar. 2011. "Religion Should Unite and Not Disconnect the Society," *Prikayspiyskaya Kommuna,* August 7. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://pricom.kz/?p=5153).

discuss further in subsequent chapters, as an indirect threat to the state because of its grassroots nature. The movement primarily spreads through "davatists" who go door-to-door encouraging men to attend prayer and discussion groups at the local mosque. Its leaders have not been reticent about their lack of regard for the Muftiate and establishment imams, however, leading to concerns that its members are "widely circulating in the cities of Kyrgyzstan, [and have] urged believers to remove from their posts imams loyal to the authorities, and appoint in their place true fighters of Islam."[29]

But Islamic, Protestant, or otherwise, the authorities see the very presence of religious heterodoxy as a sign of the weakness of national traditions and consciousness. Many religious leaders and experts attribute this "religious illiteracy" to the atheism forced on the region during the Soviet period. Officials lament that "religious traditions were interrupted in our country; that's why various unconventional currents, not only Islamic ones, are so magnificently growing on our "cleansed" religious time."[30] This break in the religious traditions leaves the population vulnerable to forms of heterodoxy that "destroy not only

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[29] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree "On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Task of Authorities to Form a State Policy in the Religious Sphere." August 10, 1995 No. 345.

[30] Gulnara, Musalimova. 2013. "In Aktau, Law Enforcement and Mosque Representatives Discussed Problems of Extremism." *Zakon,* March 12. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4545922-v-aktau-siloviki-vmeste-s.html).

the mentality of the Kazakh people, but also the Kazakh mentality, which was formed as a result of centuries-old traditions of tolerance and inter-confessional tolerance."[31] If Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are to survive as both secular states and cultural homelands for their titular nations, they must adjust to this new competition from the global religious marketplace:

> Our state bodies and power structures need to learn how to work in a competitive field, understand the religious space well, and if necessary, using an extensive scientific and theological apparatus, be able to prove the inconsistency or harmfulness of certain beliefs. It should be understood that this is not only about Muslim currents, but also non-traditional Christian sects and churches, some of which are even outlawed even in the West.[32]

Thus, the authorities of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have promoted a policy of strengthening traditional religions as one primary answer to the "threat" of religious extremism and "destructive sects." A resolution by the government of Kyrgyzstan, for example, states that "the most effective way to confront religious extremism and fundamentalism is to strengthen the Muslim faith – to streamline and strengthen its structure, and coordinate the activities of the clergy and

[31] Turysbekova, Aigul. 2008 "Religious Strife Undermines State Foundations." *Izgilik,* May 9. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://izgilik.blogspot.com/2008/05/1_08.html).

[32] Kusainov, Dias. 2011. "Why Salafism Ain't Our Way?" *Abai,* October 14. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://abai.kz/post/10441).

mosques through local authorities."[33] A legislative commission in Kazakhstan similarly concluded that,

> It is necessary to revise the present tolerant attitude of the state towards violations of religious associations; we must take into account the very fact of committing an offense, regardless of whether it entailed negative consequences… In the fight against extremism, an important role could be played by traditional Islam… and therefore there is a need to work out the issue of strengthening the role of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan, which should become a link between the state and religion.[34]

Such statements are predicated on the idea that Orthodoxy and "traditional" Islam are inherently moderate, and exert a stabilizing influence in society. The Russian Orthodox bishop of Astana, Kazakhstan's capital, asserted that "Orthodox Christians and Muslims, representatives of traditional confessions in the Republic of Kazakhstan, do not tire of calling for peace, harmony, and the preservation of moral principles."[35] A priest from the same eparchy warns that "if there is no imam or priest teaching the peace-loving traditional religion, there

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[33] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Resolution on "The activities of the State Commission Under the Government Of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs for the Development and Implementation of State Policy in the Sphere of Religions." July 7, 1998 No. 441.

[34] Conference Minutes. 2011. The Two-hundred and Fiftieth Meeting of the Interdepartmental Commission on Legislative Activity under the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. August 8, Astana, Kazakhstan.

[35] Metropolitan Methodius of Astana and Almaty. 2009. "Crisis Can Be Overcome, if the World Turns to Spiritual Traditions that Unite People Around Highest Ideals and the Sacred." Sermon given on the eve of the III Congress of World and Traditional Religions, June 15. Astana, Kazakhstan.

is a danger that a virtual mufti or virtual pastor will come to their place and teach our teenage children extremism."[36] One expert even invoked Marx when discussing the positive aspects of traditional religions as an "opiate of the masses," which "contributes to the consolidation of religious cohesion of the population."[37]

Officials and experts argue in particular that the brand of Sunni Islam that prevailed among Central Asian nomads was "a moderate ideological trend, condemning religious radicalism and extremism."[38] The primary goal of the state's policies in relation to Islam, therefore, is to "preserve" this ostensible history of tolerance as a bulwark against radicalism. To this end, state-aligned experts call on the authorities to take measures such as creating "a layer of Muslim intellectuals in Kazakhstan, combining Islamic and secular education, capable of equal discussions with religious extremists and winning in these

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[36] Nurseitova, Torgyn. 2013. "Metropolitan of Astana and Kazakhstan Alexander: There is No Need to Protect Schools, Universities, Prisons, Social Institutions From Religion." *ArVedi,* June 14. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.arvedi.kz/main/mitropolit-astanayskiy-i-kazakhstanskiy-aleksandr-ne-nuzhno-ograzhdat-ot-religii-shkolu-vuzy-tyurmy-.html).

[37] Asanbaev, Mukhit. 2008. "Contemporary Religious Situation in Kazakhstan: Risk Factors of Religious Conflict."*Sarap*, September 15. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.sarap.kz/index.php/kz/138-sovremennaya-religioznaya-situatsiya-v-kazakhstane-faktory-riska-i-potentsial-religioznoj-konfliktnosti-chast-1.html?tmpl=component&print=1).

[38] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save the Spiritual Sovereignty." *Bnews*, September 14. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://bnews.kz/ru/news/obshchestvo/sohranit_duhovnii_suverenitet).

discussions."[39] Imams should be able to "explain in detail the advantages of traditional Islam and the harmful essence of radical Islamic teachings."[40] And most importantly, this cadre of loyal Muslim intellectuals must work "to distinguish clearly between the true believers of Kazakhstan, Kazakhs practicing the traditional Sunni Islam of the Hanafi Madhab, and those who intend to use religion for destructive purposes."[41]

Authorities from all spheres of society reiterate this point actively, especially in relation to the youth. Establishment imams encourage their followers "to move from words to actions in preaching Islam for the spiritual and moral education of the population, especially the youth."[42] The director of the SARA advocated for "the introduction of the *true* [emphasis mine] teachings of Islam in the minds of the Muslim youth of Kazakhstan."[43] And President Nazarbayev

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[39] Nurseitova, Torgyn. 2011. "Political Scientist Timur Kozyrev: Testing with Hijab - A New Test for Tolerance?" *Islam in SNG*, January 21. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.islamsng.com/kaz/interviews/995).

[40] Baigarin, Meirambek. 2011. "The Calls for "Authentic Islam" Are Inconsistent With National Interests of Kazakhstan." *Kazinform,* August 16. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.inform.kz/en/prizyvy-k-chistomu-islamu-protivorechat-nacional-nym-interesam-kazahstana_a2398912).

[41] Smailov, Erlan. 2011. The Right Direction: The State Should Keep Control of the Situation in the Religious Sphere."*Zona,* September 2. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://zonakz.net/2011/09/02/столичные-студенты-могут-занять-мест/).

[42] No Author. 2012. "VKO Discussed Issues of Interfaith Harmony and Religious Tolerance." *Oskemen Info,* June 18. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://oskemen.info/9236-v-vko-obsudili-voprosy-mezhkonfessionalnogo-soglasiya-i-religioznoy-tolerantnosti.html).

[43] Lama Sharif, Kairat. 2012. "In May 2012, Astana Will Host the IV Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions." *Caravan,* January 27. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://

asserted that "the servants of mosques [i.e. imams and muftis] should be able to work with the population, especially with the youth, in order to correctly explain what the various destructive currents are, and what is the traditional direction in Islam."[44]

III. Core Policies

The governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have implemented a series of policies intended to address the "threat" to sovereignty and stability presented by religious pluralism. These policies provide a legal framework both for the regulation of "non-traditional" religious groups, as well as an institutional and ideological basis for cooperation between the state and the leadership structures of the two "traditional" religions in the region – the Muftiate, the Russian Orthodox Church. In this section, I will cover some of the key documents that establish this policy framework.

A few main documents structure the deployment of state power in the field of religion. They define the partnership between the state and the leadership

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www.caravan.kz/news/v-mae-2012-goda-v-astane-projjdet-iv-sezd-liderov-mirovykh-i-tradicionnykh-religijj-306456/).

[44] No Author. 2013. "Nazarbayev: Adherence to Islam Should Not be a Tribute to Trends." *Vesti*, February 21. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.vesti.kg/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=18615).

structures of “traditional” religions, and coordinate the efforts of these institutions to monopolize the authority to speak for the popular will. Most of these documents are executive orders that do not have the full weight of law, but they refer extensively to legislation to bolster their authority, and often are intended to direct legislation toward the administrations’ goals. Thus, these executive orders rely heavily on executive control over the legislative and judicial branches of government to avoid extensive challenges in the court. As I will discuss in the subsequent chapters on regulating heterodoxy, religious policy faces far greater challenges in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan, due to the greater autonomy of the parliament and judiciary in the former case.

In Kyrgyzstan, an administrative “conception” of “State Policy in the Religious Sphere” defines both the state’s authority to intervene in the activities of religious organizations, as well as the aims of the state in the religious sphere and the means it uses to attain these aims. These aims are expressed in a rote list that focuses on basic freedoms and the “maintenance of social stability, peaceful coexistence of religious associations, promotion of mutual understanding, and tolerance and respect among citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic in matters of

religious freedom."[45] The policy quickly turns to more concrete steps for partnering with orthodox religious organizations and regulating heterodoxy.

State Cooperation with Traditional Religious Groups

In terms of cooperation with the orthodox organizations, government policies enshrine a special role for the leadership structures of the two main "traditional" religions. A resolution of the government of Kyrgyzstan states that "A special role in preventive work among the believing part of the population should be played by the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, the Orthodox Church, and the State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic for Religious Affairs."[46] In relation to Islam in particular, the SCRA should work together with the Muftiate to "consolidate the Islamic faith, to seek the unification of efforts with the servants of Islam in the prevention and counteraction to religious extremism."[47] The State Agency for Religious Affairs in

[45] Kyrgyz Republic. 2006. State Policy in the Religious Sphere, Approved by Government Decision of the Kyrgyz Republic, May 6, 2006 N 324.

[46] Kyrgyz Republic. 2004. State Policy on Countering Religious Extremism in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2004-2005, Approved by Government Decision of the Kyrgyz Republic, April 5, 2004 No. 226.

[47] Kyrgyz Republic. 2004. Government Decree on the Work of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, Local government Administrations and Local Self-Government for the Prevention of Religious Extremism and Ethnic Hatred, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. July 20, 2004 No. 543.

Kazakhstan is similarly tasked with ”strengthening of the interaction of the state with the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan and other faiths.”[48]

The same government order on “State Policy in the Religious Sphere” in Kyrgyzstan notes that traditional religious organizations “act as a creative and unifying spiritual force of society aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the Kyrgyz Republic,” and calls for the following steps to expand cooperation between these organizations and the state:

> Development and implementation of state targeted programs in the spheres of education, culture and social services, which provide for the possibility of participation by traditional religious organizations in their implementation; implementation of information support for the implementation of state policy in the sphere of relations between the state and religious associations, promoting the dissemination of knowledge about the history and culture of the historically established traditional religions of Kyrgyzstan; cooperation of TV and radio broadcasting organizations and editorial offices of periodicals, whose founders are state authorities, with traditional religious organizations, in the production of television and radio programs covering the issues of history, cultural heritage, way of life, and the spiritual and moral values of the peoples of the Kyrgyz Republic.[49]

These goals are to be implemented though the combined work of the presidential administration, parliament, State Agency for Religious Affairs, and leadership

[48] Kusainov, Dias. Date unlisted. “Dogmatism and Religious Radicalism Were Alien to the Inhabitants of the Great Steppe, Receptive to New Ideas and Open to Free Intellectual Communication.” *Zakon*. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31051649#pos=1;-145).

[49] Ibid.

structures of traditional religious organizations, i.e. the Muftiate and Russian Orthodox Patriarchate.

Kazakhstan's administration outlines similar goals in a presidential decree "On the Approval of the Program for Ensuring Freedom of Religion and Improving State and Religious Relations in the Republic of Kazakhstan." (The government frequently packages restrictive measures in legislation and executive acts that ostensibly guarantee freedoms, likely a direct reflection of the more centralized power of the regime compared to Kyrgyzstan). This document heavily focuses on developing special programs within the ministries of justice, culture, and education, the last of which should serve to raise the "religious literacy" of both religious leaders and state officials.

But the decree also calls for more forceful state interventions into the spiritual lives of citizens. These steps include "Organizing fifteen agitation-propaganda groups to work on questions related to propagating state policy in the area of ensuring the right of citizens to freedom of religion," and "Intensifying the participation of non-governmental associations in advocacy for the prevention of religious extremism."[50] The degree even calls on experts to provide the state with

[50] Republic of Kazakhstan: Government Decree of approving the Program for Ensuring Freedom of Religion and Improving State and Confessional Relations in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2007-2009. December 5, 2007 No. 1185.

analyses and "forecasts" of the religious situation in the country by "conducting applied scientific and sociological research in the field of religion, aimed at developing practical recommendations."[51]

Such policies reveal the greater material resources of Kazakhstan's regime compared to Kyrgyzstan. Not only does the regime maintain an active and well-funded propaganda wing, but, in line with the government's efforts to mask regulation and propaganda in the guise of freedoms and rule of law, the administration maintains a network of state-funded NGOs that promote the government's interests in civil society.

The Role of the SCRA and SARA

In addition to these overarching concepts of government policy, the administrations of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan also issue decrees and decisions outlining the spheres of competency for their respective institutions for regulating religion, and the authority and jurisdiction of the leaderships of traditional organizations. Kyrgyzstan's State Commission of Religious Affairs, for example, is tasked with (among other things):

Suppressing the activities of religious organizations that damage or

[51] Ibid.

> threaten the health, morality, rights and legitimate interests [emphasis mine] of citizens, the foundations of the constitutional order, or the security of the state in accordance with applicable law; developing preventive measures of interaction between state bodies to prevent [redundancy in the original] religious extremism on the territory of the republic; developing and implementing programs aimed at strengthening the spiritual and moral foundations of society, preventing conflicts and establishing relations of mutual tolerance between followers of various religions and denominations.[52]

These goals are facilitated by an extensive list of functions and rights born by the SCRA, including the right to suspend the activities of "pseudo-religious" organizations.

Significantly, these decrees (which are revised periodically) provide for a division of labor between the SCRA and the leadership of "traditional religious groups." Addressing the need to "stabilize the situation inside the Muslim faith," one such decree notes that "the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan [SAMK or Muftiate] stands firmly in a position of cooperation with state bodies."[53] The decree then authorizes the Muftiate to engage in a series of tasks aimed at consolidating its authority, in conjunction with the SCRA. These tasks include:

> …completing the process of certification for imams and madrasah

[52] Kyrgyz Republic. 2009. Presidential Decree on the State Commission for Religious Affairs. December 18, 2009 No. 601.

[53] Kyrgyz Republic. 2009. Government Decree on Activities of the State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs for the Development and Implementation of State Policy in the Sphere of Religions. July 7, 1998 No. 441.

> teachers; conducting a study of the activities and religious education of imams, about whom rumors circulate of adherence to Wahhabism [the highly conservative brand of Sunni Islam promoted by Saudi Arabia]; prohibiting the conduct of religious ceremonies by persons who have not been certified and approved by the Spiritual Board of Muslims; prohibiting religious education outside officially registered Islamic educational institutions; prohibiting the use of Islamic literature not approved by the Spiritual Directorate for educational purposes; introducing a unified training program in all Islamic educational institutions; conducting constant monitoring of the situation in the Muslim community, developing and implementing preventive measures to preempt religious extremism and fundamentalism, politicization of Islam.[54]

Kazakhstan's administration has articulated a similar division of labor, but with a clear emphasis on the supreme power of the sovereign state over religious organizations. The state passed a law in 2011 abolishing the State Commission on Religious Affairs, which had been incorporated into the Ministry of Culture, and transferred its powers to the State Agency of Religious Affairs. This new state structure "enters into civil law relations on its own behalf," answering directly to the President, and "carries out its activities in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan, acts of the President and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, other regulatory legal acts, and this Regulation."[55] The SARA has an extensive list of functions and powers, and

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2011. Presidential Decree on the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Religious Affairs. May 18, 2011 No. 84.

maintains a network of departments across the expansive territory of Kazakhstan.

Conclusion: The Popularity of Authoritarian Policies

Despite such criticism, these religious policies remain broadly popular in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, especially among the titular nations and Russian populations. Common citizens generally view such policies, in line with the regimes' assertions, as defending their spiritual sovereignty as a nation, rather than infringing on individual rights to freedom of conscience. Moreover, this tendency holds true in Kyrgyzstan as well of Kazakhstan. In contrast to theories that attribute such "identity politics" to manipulation by a self-interested elite, Kyrgyzstan features a similar resurgence of nationalism, even in the absence of a strongman president. Broad swaths of Kyrgyzstan's public have grown disenchanted with democracy, and express a desire for a similar strongman president who would "defend" national values from pluralism.

As I noted above, however, this ownership is often ephemeral. Authoritarian regimes by definition seek to establish themselves as the sole legitimate arbiter of the popular will. Though populist figures may articulate their political programs

in terms of sacrosanct values, the popular appeal of these values comes from their capacity to help estranged strata regain ownership over public institutions and public life. Such monopolies can reduce politics to a mere spectacle of popular participation, which "enable[s] elites to close opportunities for input from below, but without making the masses feel left out" (Adams 2010:3). As with the values they propagate, populist and autocratic leaders elevate themselves above the political arena as unimpeachable champions of these values, whose very mandate it is to defend the "true" will of the people. Though they may enjoy popular support while initially vanquishing cosmopolitain and elite opponents of populism, such regimes inevitably use their authority, once consolidated, to pursue their own interests in the name of the people, and to quash any dissent that comes from the very people whose voices they appropriate.

CHAPTER 5

Consecrating Orthodoxy

Islam and Orthodox Christianity from time immemorial are considered traditional religions,
and the sound of azan is as familiar to the population as the bells ringing.

Kanybek Osmonaliev, Director of Kyrgyzstan's State Commission for Religious Affairs

One issue in particular stands out within official discourses on traditional religion: the supposed tension between individual and collective self-determination. The establishment discourse on national and religious traditions treats converts, i.e. individuals who are exercising their freedom of conscience, as an existential threat to the collective, particularly a threat to national self-determination. As one human rights lawyer noted during our interview, this treatment of religious heterodoxy as destructive to the nation raises the question of who owns the individual — himself, or the community to which he belongs?[1]

When the political and religious establishment treats religious conversion as an existential threat to the collective, when the regime treats the free choice of the

[1] Interview with Dmitri Kabak, Human Rights Lawyer based in Bishkek, July, 10, 2014.

individual as a threat to national sovereignty and solidarity, they implicitly assert that the collective owns the individual. The discourse on tradition in the post-Soviet space performs precisely this function. It reifies an essential set of values that defines the will of all constituents, and treats individual dissent as a threat to this sacrosanct will. Even the private religious beliefs of a relative handful of citizens become a dangerous and destabilizing form of dissidence.

As already mentioned, this essentialist view of the nation extends directly from Soviet nationalities policy (Brubaker 1996; Martin 2001). Through Soviet nation-building practices, peoples who had previously had clan or village identities came to understand themselves as belonging to distinct, mutually-exclusive nations, each with a distinct history, origin, and culture. Citizens also learned to think of citizenship and civic life in terms of the individual's obligations to these essential categories. For all of its Marxist ideology, the Soviet Union imposed a distinctly Durkheimian framework onto society.

In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which the government and religious establishments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan coordinate to propagate this Durkheimian framework onto their contemporary polities. This centralization has occurs primarily through registering and regulating mosques and churches, but also involves deeper cooperation with the state in the spheres

of education, charitable activities, and even law enforcement. I will examine both the institutions that enshrine a privileged position for the two main traditional religions, Hanafi Islam and Russian Orthodoxy, as well as the coordinated discourses through which the leadership structures of these religions support the regimes' claims to speak for an essential popular will that transcends social and political differences. I will also address points of conflict and competition among these distinct establishments over relative autonomy and predominance in public life and discussions of national traditions.

I. Coordination between the State and Traditional Religions

At the outset of independence, the Muftiates of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan lacked the capacity to exert control over individual mosques, as did the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate in relation to churches. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, "of the more than 1000 mosques operating at the beginning of 1996, about 70 were registered, out of 40 churches and parishes of the Orthodox Church only 15 were registered."[2] Even those mosques and churches that did formally register with their mandated leadership structures maintained only a weak affiliation with the

[2] Kyrgyz Republic: State Policy on the "Activities of the State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs." Approved by Decision of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on July 7, 1998 No. 441.

central authorities. As the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan stated in a 1995 governmental declaration,

> The religious centers officially operating in Kyrgyzstan, represented by the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims and the Episcopate of the Russian Orthodox Church, were not prepared either organizationally, from the staffing or from the financial point of view, to act in the new capacities assigned to them by their own charters. As a result, a significant part of the registered religious associations seemingly under their jurisdiction, especially Muslim ones, operate without control and are practically given to the local clergymen.[3]

Similar problems presented themselves in Kazakhstan, where officials complained that traditional religious communities maintain their own management systems, which "are poorly consistent with the Kazakh legislation."[4]

The Muftiates of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan faced particular challenges consolidating power, as they have weaker historical and doctrinal claims to authority than does the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate. As one Kazakh expert described the position of the Muftiate,

> The Kazakh Muftiyat needed credibility in the eyes of most believers… In Islam, muftis and imams are only for believers the first among equals; they do not possess any sacred power, unlike, for example, the bishops of

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[3] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree "On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Tasks of the Authorities to Formulate State Policy in the Religious Sphere." Signed by Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Djumagulov, August 1995 No. 345.

[4] Podoprigora, R. 2005. "Religious Associations as Subjects of Civil Law: History, Modernity and Foreign Experience." *Jurist*, No 4, Issue 23.

> the Orthodox or Catholic Church. Obviously, to earn real credibility Spiritual Management of Muslims of Kazakhstan requires a certain degree of freedom of action.[5]

And this struggle for authority coincided with a period of significant expansion in religiosity among the nominally Muslim populations of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Putting the numbers in perspective, from 1991 to 2008 over 1,500 mosques were built in Kazakhstan, compared to 170 Orthodox churches.[6] The number of mosques built over this 17-year period may sound outlandish, but such mosques are often small, single-room buildings with a simple tin roof. At the time of independence, few people lived in proximity to a local mosque, but since then mosques have proliferated in villages, towns, and neighborhoods across the country. By comparison, over 1,000 "non-traditional" congregations, missions, and other religious organizations were also registered over the same period, drawing off both the Kazakh and Russian populations of the country, and presenting further challenges to the authority of both.

In response to these challenges the Muftiates of both countries have engaged in a campaign of registering mosques, reminiscent of the Soviet state's efforts to

[5] Nurseitova, Torgyn. 2012. "Timur Kozyrev: A weak, 'pocket' Muftiate is of No Use to the Government," *Zakon.* Retrieved, May 9, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31102560#pos=1;-117).

[6] Saudabayev, K. 2008. "State Press Secretary of Kazakh Republic Participated in the Plenary Session of the Parliament Assembly of NATO." *Nomad,* November 21. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.nomad.su/?a=3-200811210435).

concentrate spiritual authority in Central Asia in SADUM — the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan.[7] This effort entailed a combination of both Muftiate and state authority. President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan forcefully asserted the authority of the Muftiate, for example, stating that:

> We must not allow our true religion, to which our ancestors held, be divided by divergent tendencies that would knock us off our path. The only recognized structure of traditional Islam in our country is the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan.[8]

The U.S. State Department noted such between the State and the Muftiate of Kazakhstan in 2007: "Although the Spiritual Association of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK), a coalition of mosques and clergy, is nominally independent and has no official status, there were reports that the government attempted to coerce independent mosques and Muslim clergy to affiliate with the

[7] The name of this institution demonstrated the unique conception of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic within the USSR as a "bridge" between Russia and it's "orient," between the colonizing power and its colonial subjects. As with the rest of Soviet statecraft in Central Asia, SADUM represented an effort by the central Soviet authorities to gain greater control over populations that they perceived as less patriotic and reliable. Soviet authorities were more than willing to use religion to achieve this goal, despite the nominally secular nature of the Soviet Union, and abandoned the policy of forced atheism in the region for one of forced registration of religious organizations.

[8] Baigarin, Meyrambek. 2013. "The President: The Only Recognized Structure of Traditional Islam in Our Country - the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan." *KazInform,* February 19. Retrieved 9, 2017 (http://www.inform.kz/ru/prezident-edinstvennaya-priznannaya-struktura-tradicionnogo-islama-v-nashey-strane-duhovnoe-upravlenie-musul-man-kazahstana_a2536207).

group to ensure liturgical orthodoxy."[9]

The registration process was marked by similar collusion between the state and the Muftiate in Kyrgyzstan, where the SCRA "studied and assisted in the activity of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan in strengthening its relations with the regional Kazyats [equivalent to parishes or episcopates]."[10] This assistance included the SCRA "instigating the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan to conduct certification of mosque imams. Certification covered 1424 imams, 1202 of whom were certified, 118 were conditionally certified, and 104 were not certified.[11] By 2012, these efforts had led to a dramatically different picture in Kyrgyzstan than that reported in 1995. Although the number of mosques operating had nearly doubled to 1,900, 1,400 of them were officially registered with the state and Muftiate, and 400 or those remaining were currently undergoing registration.[12] A similar pattern of consolidation could be observed in

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[9] Anonymous. 2007. "Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kazakhstan." *Bureau on Issues of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor*, US Department of State, March 6, 2007. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.usembassy.kz/documents/hrr-2006-kazakhstan-ru.html).

[10] Kyrgyz Republic: Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Measures of the Implementation of the Rights of Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic and Freedom of Faith." Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic K. Bakiev, April 5, 2001 No 155.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree "On the Implementation of International UN Treaties in the Field of Human Rights." February 20, 2012 No. 485.

Kazakhstan.[13]

Through this collusion of state and ecclesiastic authority, the leadership structures of Islam and Orthodoxy have gained more centralized control over their presumed constituents over the past two decades. This coordination of authority has even involved law enforcement agencies. Kyrgyzstan's Minister of Police, for example, signed an order on "complex reform" of training within the Ministry of Internal Affairs that called for the use of the "spiritual, moral and cultural potential of traditional confessions (Islam, Christianity) in the effort to form a positive image of law enforcement bodies.[14] And the State Commission of Religious Affairs has created regional departments with the goal of "coordination of the activities of state, law enforcement, religious and other interested structures on the prevention of unconventional religious movements of extremist persuasion."[15] Below, I address two further areas of cooperation between the state and the leadership of "traditional religions" — religious education and charitable activity.

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[13] Republic of Kazakhstan: Report on the Situation with Human Rights. Commission on Human Rights under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011.

[14] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Order "On the Complex Reform of the Disciplinary Work in the Agencies of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic." No. 944.

[15] Kyrgyz Republic: Decision of State Administration of Ysyk-Kol Region "On the State of the Religious Situation on the Territory of Issyk-Kul District." Karakol, March 13, 2009 No. 61.

Religious Education

As religious observance increased among the population during the early years of independence, officials in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan began to worry about the sources and content of the doctrines that imams and priests were sharing. Their concerns specifically focused on Islam, as Orthodox Christians were both fewer and were more integrated into an established hierarchy of authority seated in Moscow, a major strategic partner for both states. In contrast, the authorities worried about the education and training that imams were receiving in various schools of Islam. Through the Muftiates, therefore, both states sought to exert greater control over religious education and accreditation of imams.

While many imams received their training locally, their teachers were often educated abroad, in countries ranging from Egypt and Turkey, to Malaysia and Pakistan. Kyrgyzstan's administration fretted in the late 90s that "the low level of spiritual education of local Muslim clergy, the financial dependence of individual mosques on foreign "sponsors and benefactors" create a fertile ground for the spread of ideas of Islamic extremism and fundamentalism."[16] Kazakhstani

[16] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree "On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tasks Authorities to Form a State Policy in the Religious Sphere." Bishke, Government House, January 17, 1997 No. 20.

authorities have similarly called on the Muftiate to mitigate "foreign" influences by increasing control over religious education. One Almaty judge, for example, asserted to the Muftiate that "before the appointment of imams in the mosque, it is necessary to conduct preparatory work with them, a kind of specialization, so that they can resist the activities of new missionaries from banned religious parties and trends."[17]

The authorities expressed particular concern over perceived fundamentalist groups such as Salafi communities, who clearly placed the authority of Islam above the authority of the national community or secular state. One state-aligned expert in Kyrgyzstan noted:

> Many salafists are known for their harsh intolerance towards those who do not follow all their tenets. They are similar to early protestants in that way. At the same time, we are against taking punitive measures against them. There are very few Salafists. Some of them reside in Bishkek and its outskirts and in Tokmok. There is no proof of political manipulation. This way [if we take punitive measures], it may lead to persecution of any opponents, using one or another label. Solving the problem requires a more concerted and competent spread of traditional Islam, more serious work of the state, the Muftiate, and enlightening educational organizations.[18]

Once again, the authorities see the solution to this problem primarily in terms

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[17] Izbasarov, Azat. 2012. "Under the Cover of Faith." *Zakon*, December 14. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4530718-pod-prikrytiem-very-azat-izbasarov.html).

[18] Malikova, Bermet. 2009. "Salafism: Latent or Real Threat?" *Vecherniy Bishkek*, December 11. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2009/12/11/svyat/1.html).

of consolidating control over religious education, and producing cadres of state-aligned imams that would promote the administration's politics. The director of Kazakhstan's SARA has spoken of a "dire need for qualified specialists in the field of traditional Islam," who, among other qualifications, "have sufficient knowledge of the secular."[19] In response, Kazakhstan's Supreme Mufti resolved to "train 30 - 40 imams every year, in order to ensure that their cadres staff all the mosques of the republic."[20]

The government of Kyrgyzstan meanwhile, has initiated programs in conjunction with the Muftiate to address this lack of centralized control in the sphere of Islamic education.

> From 1997 to 1998, the structural reorganization of the SAMK [the Muftiate] was practically completed; six Kaziats of Muslims were formed for the provinces [of Kyrgyzstan]; the imams of mosques and madrasah teachers were trained; mosques and madrassas prepared their documents for registration [with the Muftiate] and state registration, uniform training programs were developed in all Islamic educational institutions.[21]

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[19] Anonymous. 2012. "Egyptian University in Almaty 'Nur-Mubarak' is Renamed." *Tengri News*, November 23. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/egipetskiy-universitet-nur-mubarak-v-almatyi-pereimenovan-224010/).

[20] Anonymous. 2011. "Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kazakhstan Plans to Train 30-40 Imams Who Work in Mosques of the Republic." *Tengri News*, October 15. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/dumk-namereno-kajdyiy-god-obuchat-30-40-imamov-mechetey-199232/).

[21] Kyrgyz Republic: State Policy on the "Activities of the State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs." Approved by Decision of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on July 7, 1998 No. 441.

These efforts to centralize control over religious education coincided with similar efforts to raise the religious "literacy" or competence of the broader population. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have both sought to achieve this goal through religious education in state primary and secondary schools, even characterizing religious education as an issue of national security. The head of Kazakhstan's Department for Combating Extremism stated in an interview that "it is necessary to conduct preventive work among Kazakhstanis from childhood on the subject of negative attitudes towards various unconventional Islamic trends."[22] And as recent as 2012, the administration of Kyrgyzstan incorporated the following statements into its policy proposal for national security:

> At present, due to the decline in the cultural, educational and intellectual potential of the population, the religious situation in the republic is characterized by a certain increase in the influence of foreign, non-traditional trends of the Islamic and Christian religions over certain areas of society.[23]

The goals of this religious education were laid out in the executive decree on state policy in the religious sphere discussed above. Among other goals, religious

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[22] Anonymous. 2013. "More Than 40 Residents of Zhambyl Region Studying Abroad are Adherents of Tabligi Jamaat."*Tengri News,* March 29. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/40-obuchayuschihsya-rubejom-jiteley-jambyilskoy-oblasti-230989/).

[23] Kyrgyz Republic: Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic "On the National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic." June 9, 2012 N 120.

education and training should:

> Secure the secular nature of the activities of state educational institutions in the Kyrgyz Republic; provide legal guarantees for the realization of citizens' right to religious education; assist in disseminating knowledge about the history of religions in state educational institutions; promote the preservation of cultural heritage sites (historical and cultural monuments) of the religious purpose of the people of Kyrgyzstan, to create an atmosphere of respect for cultural values in society; entail cooperation of the state with religious organizations in solving problems of spiritual, moral, legal and patriotic education of children and youth and other socially significant problems.[24]

However, these goals for religious education have not progressed significantly beyond the level of loose conceptions. The Ministry of Education has yet to create a standardized curriculum in primary and secondary education that would achieve these goals, and the Parliament noted in 2011 that "neither the State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic nor the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK) are working on the development of a single educational standard for primary and secondary educational institutions."[25]

The administration of Kazakhstan has gone even farther than religious education in schools, however. As a part of the State's efforts to "strengthen the

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[24] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree on State Regulation of Religious Sphere. May 6, 2006 No. 324.

[25] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree "On the State and Prospects of the Development of Religious Education in the Kyrgyz Republic." Jogorku Kenesh [Parliament] of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, November 4, 2011 No. 1279.

requirements for the conduct of religious studies," the SARA has engaged in an extended campaign to monitor and ban religious literature as "a kind of 'spiritual filter' that allows us to block the entry of religious literature of an extremist nature into our country."[26] The state has even mandated religious training for civil servants as a part of its broader efforts to incorporate religious authority into state authority. The administration's program for "Ensuring Freedom of Religion and Improving State and Religious Relations" states that religious education should "start from school and finish with the training of civil servants and highly qualified specialists in this field."[27] The methods of this continuous training include:

> Publishing educational and methodological manuals on religious and legal education in the state system for training and advanced training of civil servants; Organizing regular courses to improve the qualifications of public servants and public sector employees who are implementing state policy in the field of religious freedom; Disseminating popular scientific and methodical literature on paper and electronic media; Organizing round tables, scientific and practical conferences, seminars, cycles of educational radio and television programs, and publications in the media.[28]

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[26] Nakipova, Janna. 2013. "Lama Sharif: The Agency of Religious Affairs in the Republic of Kazakhstan Conducted Expert Analysis of Over Three Thousand Religious Books." *BNews*, February 1. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://bnews.kz/ru/news/obshchestvo/agentstvom_rk_po_delam_religii_provedena_ekspertiza_bolee_3_tis_religioznih_knig).

[27] Republic of Kazakhstan: Government Decree "On the Approval of the Program for Ensuring Freedom of Religion and Improving State and Religious Relations in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2007-2009." December 5, 2007, No. 1185.

[28] Ibid.

Once again, Kazakhstan's greater energy wealth facilitates such administrative efforts to train and discipline state and religious officials continuously. As a result, officials more closely reproduce the rhetoric of the President and the language of his policies in their media statements and in interviews.

Charitable Activity

The state similarly collaborates with the leadership of traditional religions in the realm of charity and social work. The governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have long taken note of the charitable activities of missionary organizations, and registered alarm at how these activities serve as a point of entry for their citizens into heterodox beliefs. In response, the governments have actively promoted social outreach with the cooperation of the Muftiate and Orthodox Church.

Again, the goals of Kyrgyzstan's administration for such cooperation are outlined in the executive resolution "On State Policy in the Religious Sphere." This resolution calls for state and religious authorities to work with numerous at-risk populations, but clearly formulates risk in dual terms: the greater risk among certain populations of engaging in harmful activities such as drug usage, and the concomitant propensity of foreign missionary organizations to minister to these

populations. When discussing the youth for example, the executive resolution calls for the urgent development of a "special program for the preservation of centuries-old traditions and customs — ethical principles for the formation of the moral education and moral outlook of the younger generation, taking into account age-old historical and cultural origins."[29] The resolution outlines a similar series of goals with reference to other populations, and calls for:

> …creating legal conditions conducive to supporting the activities of social service institutions and charitable organizations set up by religious organizations [understood in this case as "traditional religious organizations] in order to assist citizens in difficult life situations, as well as activities to prevent child and adolescent crime and neglect, strengthen the institution of the family, prevent drug addiction, alcoholism, and facilitate social rehabilitation of persons held in places of deprivation of liberty [primarily prisons] and those who have served their sentence.[30]

This mandate in the sphere of charity and social work has led to numerous state initiatives in Kyrgyzstan, although it is difficult to determine how much farther they go beyond symbolic gestures and public outreach designed to counter the activity of foreign missionaries.

For example, both the SCRA and the Muftiate collaborated on a project for

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[29] Kyrgyz Republic: State policy in the Religious Sphere. Approved by Government Decision of the Kyrgyz Republic, May 6, 2006 N 324.

[30] Ibid.

HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. The program operated from 2006 to 2010, but was formally abolished in 2012.[31] The SCRA and Muftiate also collaborated with the "Women's Religious NGO" Mutakalim on a project aimed at "Family Planning in the Islamic Heritage."[32] Finally the SCRA, Ministry of Health, and Department of Corrections collaborated on inter-faith outreach to prevent drug usage in local communities, as well as among prisoners, by "rendering religious, charitable, humanitarian, spiritual, cultural and educational assistance to persons in custody."[33]

The government of Kazakhstan has engaged in a similar set of initiatives, boasting "good relations of cooperation between the Spiritual Administration of Muslims and the Orthodox Church in the field of social service and charity, joint participation in the general civil projects, and promotion of moral values and interfaith harmony."[34] In the case of Kazakhstan, however, where the ruling party

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[31] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Program "For the Prevention of HIV/AIDS and its Socio-Economic Impact in the Kyrgyz Republic for the years 2006-2010." Approved by the Government Decree, July 6, 2006, No. 498.

[32] Anonymous. 2006. "Participation of Religious Associations and Leaders in the Program." Report by the Kyrgyz Alliance of Family Planning on the Results of the Project Implemented under the Aegis of the United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA). Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://refdb.ru/look/1350335-pall.html).

[33] Kyrgyz Republic: Decree of the President on "Countering the Spread of Drug Addiction and Drug Trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic." December 22, 2004 N 445.

[34] Lama Sharif, Kairat. 2012. "The number of Religious Associations Will Decrease by One Third After Re-Registration." *Spiritual Portal*, October 25. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://bahai.su/forum/viewtopic.php?t=129&start=45).

plays a much stronger role in public life, these initiatives often involve state institutions, the Muftiate, the Russian Orthodox Church, and in some cases the President's ruling political party, Nur Otan or "Light of the Fatherland." In 2013, for example, local affiliates of Nur Otan collaborated with churches, mosques and "community councils for combating corruption" in an initiative to prevent crime, alcohol, and drug usage.[35]

These charitable and social initiatives are targeted at similar "at-risk" populations as in Kyrgyzstan. For example, Kazakhstan's Committee of the Penitentiary System granted Muftiate imams and Orthodox priests access to prisoners in order to facilitate "moral and spiritual influence on the inmates in the prevention of religious extremism among inmates, as an answer to the re-socialization of individuals serving sentences."[36] However, the administration's greater resources also allow it to pursue more blatant efforts to monopolize spiritual authority. For example, Kazakhstan maintains a network of "treatment centers" for "victims" of destructive cults. These centers ostensibly help converts

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[35] Shpekbayev, Alik. No Date. "Act to pre-empt." *Zakon.* Retrieved May 9, 2017 (online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30167389).

[36] Rakhimberdin, K. 2012. Expert Review of the Implementation of the Recommendations by the National Human Rights Action Plan in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2009-2012." prepared by the Delegation of the European Union in the Republic of Kazakhstan and Legal Policy Research Center in the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law. *Zakon.* Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31221190).

to "totalitarian sects" return to mainstream society, although critics asserted in interviews that they primarily attract "patients" by offering room and board to homeless persons among whom Christian missionaries and Jehovah's Witnesses had ministered.[37] Even the director of the state-funded NGO that ran these treatment centers admitted to me in an interview that the authorities lost interest in the project because they were unable to enroll sufficient numbers of clients.[38]

II. Conflicts over the Autonomy of Leadership Structures

The prevailing dynamic between the state and the leadership structures of "traditional" religions, i.e. the Muftiate and the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate, is that of cooperation and coordination in their shared goal of monopolizing the authority to speak for their presumed constituents. Nevertheless, tensions do arise between the state and these structures, as well as among the leadership structures themselves. These tensions often focus on inevitable struggles over autonomy from the state, as well as preeminence among the traditional religions in public life. In Muftiates of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in particular, more

[37] Interview with a lead expert at an NGO promoting Human Rights in Kazakhstan, July 17 2014.
[38] Interview with Yulia Denisenko, Director of the Information Center for Religious Questions, Astana, July 21 2014.

overtly political elements occasionally push for greater autonomy and a greater public role for Islamic beliefs in the discussion of national identity, to the exclusion of Russian Orthodoxy and Russians as an ethnic minority. One particularly contentious issue revolves around the financing of mosques and the Muftiate, in which the states claim an interest due to the potential for manipulation by foreign donors with hidden agendas.

These tensions have produced decidedly different outcomes in Kazkhstan vs. Kyrgyzstan, evidencing the significantly greater control that Nazarbayev's administration exerts over the religious sphere than any of the past or current Presidents of Kyrgyzstan. Both the Muftiate and the Orthodox Church show far greater deference to the authority of the secular state in Kazakhstan, and the Muftiate in particular has conceded a great deal of autonomy to the President's administration.

Self-Governance

The Muftiates of both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan elect their own leadership in regular summits of imams, known as Kurultai, from across their respective countries. The first Kurultai was held in 1996, and led to "election of an Ulema Council of twenty-five people and a Head Mufti, composing a new, highest

governing body of the Muftiate."[39] Since then, the Muftiate of Kyrgyzstan has managed to conduct these summits every four years, independent of significant state interference, to elect their leadership and deliberate over various policy matters. I personally attended the Kurultai summit of 2012, at which a leading member of the Islamic missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat was elected head Mufti. I was privy to the consternation of officials from the State Commission for Religious Affairs, who generally view this movement as a form of Islamic heterodoxy from Pakistan, and had hoped to plant their preferred candidate in charge of the Muftiate.

In Kazakhstan, in contrast, the Muftiate serves almost at the pleasure of the President's administration, and conducts its Kurultai elections in a way that suits the administration. As one scholar of Islam in Almaty revealed to me in an interview, imams that do not show sufficient regard for and deference to "national interests," are prevented from occupying leadership positions. This expert recounted a power struggle that had taken place between the Head Mufti and the Director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs before the prior Kurultai. Though thoroughly deferential to state power and the authority of

[39] Kyrgyz Republic: State Policy on the "Activities of the State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs." Approved by Decision of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on July 7, 1998 No. 441.

President Nazarbayev, the Head Mufti had nevertheless fought for greater autonomy for the SARA in conducting its own affairs — particularly in managing its own finances. In the ensuing power struggle, Kairat Lama Sharif, head of the SARA, was able to successfully depose the popular Mufti through the Kurultai election and install a more loyal replacement.[40] In the classic manner of singly-party rule, this regime-aligned Mufti was elected by unanimous decision:

> In total, the number of Kurultai participants and their guests present at the event totaled more than 170 people, among whom were all the regional imams, officials of SAMK, and the Agency for Religious Affairs, as well as representatives of scholarly intelligentsia of Kazakhstan. The decision in favor of the proposed candidate for the post of Grand Mufti was adopted unanimously by the participants of the Kurultai.[41]

Critics have further complained about the secrecy that surrounds such elections, which take place without any announcement and are only attended by a handful of journalists from the state media.[42]

Self-Financing

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[40] Interview with a scholar of Islam based in Almaty, June 16 2013.

[41] Anonymous. 2013. "Kurultai of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kazakhstan: New Supreme Muftiy of the Republic of Kazakhstan is Elected." *Azan,* February 19. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://azan.kz/ahbar/read/vneocherednoy-kurultay-dumk-izbran-novyiy-verhovnyiy-muftiy-respubliki-2062).

[42] Anonymous. 2010. "Monitoring of violations of freedom of speech in Kazakhstan." Report by the International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech "Adil Soz." Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.adilsoz.kz/programmems/issledovaniya/situaciya-so-svobodoj-slova-v-kazaxstane-v-2010-godu-analiticheskij-doklad).

This story engages the second major area of struggle — the management of Muftiate finances. The Muftiates of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have both clashed with their respective states over the handling of zakat — tithes and charities offered by Muslims to mosques and other Islamic organizations and missions. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, once again, the Muftiate has managed to regain autonomous control of these finances, although it has faced scrutiny from the state. In Kazakhstan, in contrast, the state has engaged in a campaign of exhorting the dangers of unregulated mosque finances. A state-committee on anti-money-laundering measures warned of the easy use of zakat to finance terrorist organizations: "Supporters [of radical Islam] transfer money in the form of charitable donations, or "zakat," through mosques, imams, or non-profit organizations that are proponents of radical fundamentalism."[43] And state-aligned experts have pressed the Muftiate "on questions about the cash flows that pass through the SAMK and imams of local mosques."[44]

As a result of these efforts, zakat has essentially become state-administered

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[43] Anonymous. 2008. "Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Activities on Countering Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism." *Council of Europe*, 27th Plenary Session, July 7-11. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://eurasiangroup.org/files/MONEYVAL_typology_reports/ML_and_counterfeiting_rus.pdf).

[44] Toguzbaev, Kazis. 2010. "Representatives of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims Defend the Honor of the Imams." *Azzatyq*, September 16. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://rus.azattyq.org/a/religious_board_muslims_kazakhstan_/2158805.html).

financing for mosques, as my respondent related.[45] Collection bins in mosques across the country are locked, and opened in a joint procedure involving local representatives of the SARA and mosque imams. The finances are essentially managed by the state, which provides a cut to the mosque. This control over zakat ensures that imams have a strong financial incentive to minister in line with the regime's politics.

One area where the Muftiate of Kyrgyzstan has lost a significant degree of autonomous control is the administration of visas for the yearly hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. Saudi Arabia supplies a limited number of visas to nations for participation in the hajj, leaving it to the authorities of those countries to decide how to administer those visas. Initially, the Muftiate distributed these visas, but was required to "submit to the State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic for Religious Affairs reports on the number of groups and their numerical composition.[46] After years of criticism for opacity and corruption, however, including accusations of rampant bribery, the Muftiate of Kyrgyzstan lost the authority to grant hajj visas autonomously. Instead, these visas are now administered by a "State Commission for Assistance in Organizing

[45] Interview with a scholar of Islam based in Almaty, June 16 2013.

[46] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree "On the Organization and Implementation of Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj, Umrah)."Approved by the Government Kyrgyz Republic, February 19, 1998 N 83.

the Pilgrimage to Mecca," composed of an impressive list of state and religious officials:

> The Vice-Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic (committee chairman), Director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (Vice-Chairman of the Committee), Deputy Head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Health, Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Kyrgyz Republic, the State Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic for National Security, State Agency for Information Resources and Technologies of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Border Service of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Mufti of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan.[47]

The sheer scope of the government officials mentioned in this list speaks to the lucrative nature of the hajj visa lottery. While the list might seem at first glance to include representatives of government agencies that can provide technical and logistical support to hajj pilgrims, the more likely reality is that the list includes officials who receive part of the revenue generated by the distribution of hajj visas.

As with the areas of education and charitable activities, the self-governance and self-financing of the Russian Orthodox Church presents fewer challenges to the state, and is, in turn, less challenged by the state. The finances and property

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[47] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree "On the Organization and Implementation of Pilgrimage Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic to Mecca (Hajj, Umrah)." Approved by the Government Kyrgyz Republic, September 19, 2008 N 521 (As amended by the Decree of the Government on September 17, 2009 N 584).

of the Russian Orthodox Church are managed by the central Moscow Patriarchate, with official sanctioning by Russia and the other states in whose jurisdiction the Church functions. Priests and local patriarchs are likewise appointed by the central Patriarchate, with few local conflicts. One notable conflict did arise in Kyrgyzstan, however, when the local Patriarch tried to declare the property of the Church sovereign Russian territory. As an official of the SCRA explained to me, the patriarch's primary motive was to import wine into the country without paying customs duties.[48] In a testament to the integrated power of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state in the region, the government of Kyrgyzstan appealed to the Russian embassy to resolve the matter, rather than asserting direct sovereign authority over the church as a religious entity operating in its jurisdiction. At the behest of the Russian embassy, the Moscow Patriarchate removed the local patriarch from his post, and installed a less confrontational figure in his place.

III. Inventing Traditions

"Tradition" is one of the more maligned concepts in the social sciences. Sociology

[48] Interview with the Head Legal Experts at the State Commission for Religious Affairs, Bishkek, March 29, 2013.

in particular established itself as a discipline in part with the mission to unmask the authority claimed by religious and other spokespersons for tradition. Thus, there is little need to document the many ways in which the origin myths of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh nations are constructed and sanitized to match contemporary political realities. As with all nations, the official history of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz nations amplifies certain voices while marginalizing others, endorses certain claims on a shared history while negating others. Nevertheless, some efforts to *invent tradition* (Hobsbawm 1983) shed a particularly clear light on precisely how contemporary political interests shape representations of the past.

Two cases exemplify the regimes' efforts to mold the past in service to contemporary discourses on tradition. First, the governments of both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have struggled to downplay or appropriate the historic significance of *Tengrianism* – the animistic beliefs of Kyrgyz and Kazakh peoples prior to the penetration of Islam in the region. Though both governments distrust grassroots activism, neither has quite known how to handle the small, patriotic, and troublesome groups that have sought to raise the public profile of Tengrianism as the original and authentic source of sacred beliefs for both nations. Second, The Congress of World Historical Religions in Kazakhstan

deserves particular attention, as one of the trophy projects that President Nazarbayev has created using Kazakhstan's oil wealth. Meeting annually in the top of a glass pyramid in Astana, the Congress of World Historical Religions presents a particularly ambitious effort to manufacture religious accord and political authority.

When Tradition is not Traditional: The Case of Tengrianism

Tengrianism refers to the loose assemblage of animistic beliefs that prevailed among the Turkic and Mongol peoples of Central Asia before the penetration of Islam. It derives its name from Tengri, the ruler of a pantheon of folk gods and spirits, embodied in the infinite blue sky. Tengrianism had already spread across the Eurasian subcontinent at the beginning of the historical record of the region, and was later influenced by Zoroastrianism from Persia. The belief system spread orally among the semi-nomadic peoples of Central Asia, and thus remained a largely unformalized series of beliefs and myths.

Thus, if any belief system has the right to "traditional" status, it is Tengrianism. Contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have seen the rise of many popular and intellectual efforts to revive Tengrianism as a spiritual core of the nation. Anthropologists and historians have excavated (literally and

figuratively) minute details from the historical record to place Tengrianism at the core of national origin myths. Popular movements have promoted Tengrianism as the only authentic source of national distinctiveness and cultural self-determination, and denounced Islam as a foreign import and obstacle to true national autonomy. One Kazakh expert, Nurtai Mustafayev, head of the analytic center "Nashe Delo" [Our Affairs] went so far as to compare the expansion of Islam among Central Asian nomads as a “spiritual genocide.”

> The Islamic genocide was a spiritual “Hiroshima” that exploded all the national sacred objects of the Kazakhs; The Arab Caliphate, which suffered a number of major defeats from the "Kok-Türks" - the Tengrians of the Great Turkic Kaganate - finally established itself among the Kazakhs through the creeping expansion of trade and financial capital, having won its main victory: convincing the naive steppe people to renounce the faith of their ancestors, Tengrians, in favor of foreign religion, Islam, as a form of Arab chauvinism and Arab expansion![49]

Many commentators repeat this refrain of contemporary support for Islam representing a loss of historical identity, although not always through such fantastic analogies. As one religious scholar in Kyrgyzstan lamented:

> Our businessmen contributed great sums to the development of Orthodoxy and Islam. However, they contributed one tyiyn [penny] to the popularization of the cultural heritage of the Kyrgyz: Tengriansim.[50]

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[49] Mustafayev, Nurtai. 2011. “Islamic Dictatorship in Kazakhstan?” *Central Asia,* November 24. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1322112660).

[50] Tuzov, Alexander and Bermet Malikova. 2009. “How to Preserve Secular Kyrgyzstan.” *Vecherniy Bishkek,* November 4, 2009. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2009/11/04/polit/1.html).

Thus, a range of local actors seek formal recognition of Tengrianism's unique and incontrovertible place in local traditions.

And yet, the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have consistently denied these efforts to register Tengrianism as a "traditional religion." The states have sought to keep the profile of Tengrianism limited to a cultural heritage, distinct in status from formal religions such as Islam and Orthodox Christianity. State-aligned experts have sought to discredit overly-zealous proponents of Tengrianism, discrediting their ideas as loose assemblages of custom and superstition, rather than formal religious doctrine. Political Scientist Timur Kozyrev wrote, "Neo-pagan ideas get 'thrown around' in public discourse periodically, right down to the preaching of a return to Tengrianism."[51] Agitators for Tengrianism have even been depicted as a threat to inter-faith tolerance and the "religious literacy" of the population.

Why, and on what grounds have the states denied these efforts to establish Tengrianism as a traditional religion? Tengrianism is not merely a dissident group or religious minority, after all. Tengrianism is indeed a point of origin for the Kyrgyz and Kazakh nations. It is truly part of a shared past, even if the

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[51] Nurseitova, Torgyn. 2011. "Political Scientist Timur Kozyrev: Testing with Hijab - A New Test for Tolerance?" *Islam in SNG*, January 21. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.islamsng.com/kaz/interviews/995).

contemporary beliefs are merely a reconstruction of that past. What can we conclude about the official discourse on tradition, then, when a genuine tradition is denied traditional status, and when those agitating for the belief are labelled a threat to national stability?

The battle over the status of Tengrianism is nothing short of a battle over who has the authority to speak for the past in the present. In a society where preserving "tradition" is equated with preserving national sovereignty and self-determination, the authority to speak for the past — for the primordial origins of "the people" — becomes an authority to speak for the essential will of the nation in the present. For this reason the regimes have sought to frame Tengrianism simply as a local custom that has contributed to the distinctive character of Central Asian Islam, not as an autonomous spiritual pole of the nation. As one government affiliated Kazakh expert wrote, defending the idea of "spiritual sovereignty,"

> In the 9th-10th centuries, Sufism began to spread in Central Asia and Southern Kazakhstan. Various Sufi schools and orders operated on the territory of the republic. Specificity of Islamization of nomadic Turks consisted in the organic combination of elements of traditional pre-Islamic (Tengri and Zoroastrianism) and Sufi ideas.[52]

[52] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save Spiritual Sovereignty."*Liter*, September 14. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

As we have seen, Islam has already been coopted for this purpose through the advent of an institution that had no precedent in Islamic practice — the Muftiate. This hierarchical body was instituted by the Soviet Union to exert centralized control over imams and mosques, and thereby promote the authority of the Soviet state and Communist Party to speak for the popular will. Even after gaining independence, the Muftiates of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan do what religious establishments have always done according to Weber (1978): doggedly pursue a monopoly on the authority to speak for the divine.

Tengrianism lacks any such historical or contemporary institutions, whereby the regime might dispossess common people of the authority to speak for the sacred — and thereby for the popular will itself. As such, this shared heritage represents an extremely problematic heritage for the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The regimes have thus sought to appropriate Tengrianism by treating it as a source of unique national identity — especially of an ostensible history of religious moderation and tolerance.

> In general, the Kazakhs were, at least until the XIX century, much less religious than a number of other Turk-Muslim peoples such as Uzbeks, Tatars, Uighurs, Turks, Azerbaijanis, and in the Kazakh culture were very

strong Remnants of pre-Islamic beliefs.[53]

In this discourse, efforts to extricate Tengrianism from Islam as a tradition in its own right represent an effort to radicalize the nation, in opposition to its history of religious tolerance. Kanat Kanafin, lead expert at the *Foundation of the First President, Leader of the Nation*, put it this way:

> During the one and a half millennia before the advent of Islam, Tengri, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Manichaeism developed side by side in Kazakhstan, and Christianity and Judaism, recognized by Muslim theologians as religions of Scripture, continued to exist even after the establishment of Islam. Again, in the heart of Eurasia formed a special cultural environment of tolerance. Was it blurred in our time?[54]

Both states have engaged in concerted efforts to appropriate Tengrianism as an element of national and spiritual consciousness, and to marginalize the intellectual and popular movements surrounding Tengrianism that they cannot co-opt. Proponents of Tengrianism have repeatedly petitioned for the right to register their collectives as religious organizations, but have been denied. They have neither been granted status as members of a "traditional" religious organization, nor have they been allowed to register under the requirements for "non-traditional" organization established by the SCRA in Kyrgyzstan or the

[53] Nurseitova, Torgyn. 2011. "Political Scientist Timur Kozyrev: Testing with Hijab - A New Test for Tolerance?" *Islam in SNG*, January 21. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.islamsng.com/kaz/interviews/995).

[54] Kanafin, Kanat. 2012. "Islam in Kazakhstan: Remedy for Religious Radicalism." *Islam in the Commonwealth of Independent States,* March 5. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.islamsng.com/kaz/opinion/4271).

SARA in Kazakhstan.

One collective of Tengrians in Kyrgyzstan sued for the right to register as a traditional religious group, claiming that the requirements established by the SARA were unlawful. I attended the proceedings where the representatives of the Tengrian group hurled accusations at officials from the SCRA, declaring that they were "not Kyrgyz."[55] Ultimately, however, their petition for the right to register was rebuffed by the court.

As a result of these struggles, Tengrianism has been denied "traditional" status in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. While Tengrian customs as a whole remain part of the mythology of the nations' origins and distinctiveness, those who promote Tengrianism as a source of national identity in competition with Islam are censured as members of "destructive cults" and threats to the stability of the nation. The regimes actively work to keep Tengrianism isolated in a proto-national past, distinct from modern nationhood.

Kazakhstan's Congress of World Historical Religions

Resource wealth has enabled the administration of Kazakhstan not only to assert

[55] Court Case heard in the Chui District Court in Bishkek, August 17 2013.

greater control over the leadership structures of traditional religions than that of Kyrgyzstan, but has also allowed the regime to spend lavishly on trophy projects that exalt the Kazakh nation (and to a lesser degree civic Kazakhstani nation-state) and the persona of President Nazarbayev, and consecrate a particular effigy of the popular will. Among these projects is the Congress of Leaders of World Historical Religions — an assembly of leaders from the world's "traditional" religions that meets annually to discuss matters of doctrine and prevent interfaith tensions.

The institution is reminiscent of the Soviet era House of Cultures, which gathered representatives of the more than 100 ethno-national groups in the Soviet Union in a gesture of solidarity and "friendship of peoples." As with the House of Cultures, the Congress of World Religions serves to confer a popular mandate on the civic state that encompasses a multinational and multi-confessional population. The Congress gathers presumptive representatives of the various religious groups that compose Kazakhstan's traditions, including not just Islam and Russian Orthodoxy, but also Judaism and Buddhism, which have a historical presence in Central Asia. But the Congress also includes leaders from various other world religions such as Hinduism and Catholicism, conferring special legitimacy on certain other religious traditions.

At these congresses, delegates praise Kazakhstan as a singularly peaceful land and the Kazakh nation as a uniquely tolerant people with a centuries-long history and mentality of interfaith moderation and accord. The Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, for example, reflected on Kazakhstan's place as a global leader on religious dialogue at the fourth Congress:

> "Kazakhstan and its hospitable capital has for the fourth time served as a global platform for discussing problems of a global character on the basis of dialogue between religious traditions. One cannot but rejoice that the participation of the world's government structures and traditional religions have here a great opportunity to come together and reflect on how to respond to the challenges common not only to our religious communities, but also for the majority of the peoples of the world."[56]

And President Nazarbayev himself categorically asserted at a related assembly that "Kazakhstan is the only place in the world where Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, and Jews live in harmony. This is the only place where they can get together and talk about all of their problems. We have created the perfect model of friendship and must protect it from external threats."[57]

Nazarbayev himself is credited with creating this unique forum of interfaith

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[56] Anonymous. 2012. "Speech of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the Fourth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions." *Official Website of Moscow Patriarchate*, May 30. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2255100.html).

[57] Speech by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev to the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, Chairman at the XVII session of the ANC (Astana Palace of Peace and Accord, April 18, 2011).

dialogue. He is particularly reverenced for the congresses themselves, and subsequently for sustaining interfaith accord in Kazakhstan. One Rabbi for example, a delegate of Judaism at the Congress, remarked that, "when President Nursultan Nazarbayev for the first time brought together the heads of different faiths, and all sat at the same table at the first Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional religions, they did not talk about what separates the representatives of different religions, but of what unites them."[58] And a state-aligned expert wrote of the Congress and of Nazarbayev's broader efforts in the sphere of religion, "No, it is no coincidence that President Nazarbayev placed his two hands on the table of the spiritual leaders of the two main confessions in the Muslim and Orthodox country. And the two religions coexist peacefully in the country."[59]

Thus, the administration of Kazakhstan expends significant resources on institutions and projects that confer a sacrosanct mandate on the state and on the administration of Nazarbayev. The regime makes a concerted effort to ensure

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[58] Brusilovskaya, Elena. "Rabbi Yeshayah Cohen: Many Countries Can Follow the Example of Kazakhstan." *Zakon*, October 6. Retrieved May 9, 2017: (https://www.zakon.kz/4451997-eshaja-kogen-mnogie-strany-mogut-brat.html).

[59] Bondartzova, Lyudmila. No date. "Leonid Dyukov: I am an Incorrigible Idealist." *D&K Company*. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://dk.all-docs.ru/index.php?page=23&vi1=100166.000&tit=Леонид%20Дюков:%20Я%20-%20неисправимый%20идеалист).

that state officials, religious leaders, and even rank-and-file civil servants propagate a consistent message on religious and national traditions, which confers authority on established elites and institutions. Anyone hoping to climb up the ranks of state institutions, which are pervasive, must demonstrate a willingness and ability to perpetuate these politics, often including an aptitude for suppressing competing claims for representation and recognition from the public.

I must note once again that although Kazakhstan more closely fits the conventional model of authoritarianism because of this consolidated power, religious politics and policy in Kyrgyzstan is no less dominated by such claims. The state features more fragmented cadre politics among competing sets of elites, preventing the consolidation of such a clear hierarchy of authority that might project consistent messages downward, but the political and religious elite as a whole claim a privileged mandate to represent the essential and sacrosanct values of the people -values that ostensibly transcend politics. Religion necessarily plays a strong role in these efforts to consecrate the nation and claim a mandate to govern in the name of a sacrosanct popular will.

IV. Space for Secularism?

Although Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are both secular states, often aggressively so, this conflation of faith and nationality has infused the public sphere with a religious devotion to the nation — and to the sacrosanct popular will for which state and religious officials presume to speak. Under such circumstances, religious dissidence becomes tantamount to betrayal of the nation. Despite the formal secularity of the state, therefore, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have cracked down on an increasingly wide range of dissent that is viewed as "morally harmful" or disrespectful to the sacrosanct values and symbols of the nation.

Advocates for greater separation of church and state have argued that such policies essentially undermine the secular nature of the state. Speaking of the tendency to assign religious affiliation according to ethnicity in official statistics, one critic states:

> According to the 2009 Population Census, 98% of Kazakhstanis are believers… Contrary to the declarations of imams and priests about the non-ethnic, but universal nature of "world religions," the religious hierarchies of Islam and Christianity in Kazakhstan totally enroll all believers on ethnic grounds. According to their estimates, it turns out that in Kazakhstan, ethnic and religious identity completely coincide.[60]

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[60] Mustafayev, Nurtai. 2011. "Islamic Dictatorship in Kazakhstan?" *Central Asia,* November 24. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1322112660).

Such conflation of religious and ethnic identity makes it virtually impossible to carve out a secular space in the public sphere, as everywhere "traditional" religious beliefs have a privileged status. Rather than representing the norm in public life, secularism and pluralism must be marked by citizens "who consciously left [establishment Islam and Orthodox Christianity] for other religions, or are ardent atheists, of which we have very few."[61] As I will address in the chapters to follow, this compromised secularism necessarily entails a crackdown on the religious freedoms of minorities, especially practitioners of "non-traditional" religions.

The regimes have responded to such criticism by asserting that they are in fact defending the secular character of the state and the rights of citizens to freedom of conscience. Key formal goals of Kyrgyzstan's religious policy include "strengthening… respect for the principles governing relations of the secular state and religious communities," and "creating conditions for the realization of the fundamental rights of citizens to freedom of religion."[62] In Kazakhstan, once again, this rhetoric places particular emphasis on the nation's unique history and

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Kyrgyz Republic: State Policy on the "Activities of the State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs." Approved by Decision of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on July 7, 1998 No. 441.

traditions of tolerance, to which religious extremism represents a grave threat.[63] One Kazakh political scientist asserted, for example, that "concerning nontraditional cults and currents, it is necessary for Kazakhstan first of all to ensure the rights of citizens, to preserve the interethnic and interfaith peace, not to allow deep faults that can split our society."[64]

State-aligned experts have also been quick to point out the shortcomings in religious freedoms in Western democracies:

> For the sake of Western standards, we were trying to comply with all applicable laws, even those that even in the West don't work… We were required to uphold absolute liberalism with all religious communities. Whether it was the spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan — with 2500 mosques [covering] 70% of the population — or whether it was any of the smallest communities, they had to be absolutely equal in status… Nowhere in the world is there such an absolute formal equality.[65]

In this rhetoric, aggressively secular and protectionist policies represent a legitimate effort to defend the secular character of the state from "radical and non-traditional religious associations" that "contradict national interests in terms

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[63] Dairova, Oksana. 2013. "Based on the Traditions and Customs." *Zakon,* February 28. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4544112-osnovyvajas-na-tradicijakh-i-obychajakh.html).

[64] Kusainov, Dias. Date unlisted. "Dogmatism and Religious Radicalism Were Alien to the Inhabitants of the Great Steppe, Receptive to New Ideas and Open to Free Intellectual Communication." *Zakon*. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31051649#pos=1;-145).

[65] Anonymous. 2011. "It Is Necessary to Toughen Requirements for Registration of Religious Associations in Kazakhstan." *Zakon*, June 2. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://www.zakon.kz/217646-neobkhodimo-uzhestochit-trebovanija-k.html).

of building a tolerant society, forming a healthy and competitive nation, and ensuring the sovereign right to strengthen the secular and democratic foundations of the state."[66]

Conclusion: Religious Conversion and the Paradox of Self-Determination

Returning to the discussion with which I opened this chapter, we can further elaborate on the Durkheimian framework that these policies impose on the individual, and on the nature of the paradox that they create between individual and collective self-determination. The political and religious establishments in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan view national traditions (or rather, their authority to speak for national tradition) as essential to national stability and self-determination. Their critics, however, see these regimes as appropriating the sacred to legitimate their power.

Herein lies the supposed trade-off between individual and collective self-determination articulated by my respondents. Disaffected individuals divest themselves from the cults of the nation propagated by the establishment, and pursue autonomous, heterodox paths of self-determination. The discourse on

[66] Anonymous. 2013. "The Military of Kazakhstan is Fighting Extremism." *Zakon*, March 11. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4545769-voennye-kazakhstana-vedut-borbu-s.html).

national tradition represents an effort to contain such disaffection by monopolizing the means of consecration — monopolizing the public authority to consecrate a collective will that ostensibly encompasses all citizens.

This dilemma of individual vs. collective self-determination came up repeatedly in my interviews, and is fundamentally woven into the laws that govern religious regulation. Government officials spoke of the threats that destructive sects represented to stability and security, never doubting their conviction that the security of the regime and the security of the nation are one and the same. Converts and pastors spoke of how their practices are singled out and scrutinized to demonstrate their destructive character and incongruence with wholesome national traditions.

It would seem that authoritarian regimes fear precisely what Goffman articulated about individualism: Modernity has seen the death of so many gods, so many sacred symbols of group solidarity (and bondage), but in their place the individual has risen as a "little god" in itself, sacred, sovereign, and "owed due ritual respect" (1967:95). Not only did officials describe such individualism as a threat; they also consciously draw distinctions between their own political establishment and the greater capacity for individual freedoms in Western democracies. Independent scholars and experts engaged me in theoretical

discussions of the greater capacity for individualism in Western societies: "You are better equipped to handle individualism in America, but it would undermine social stability here in Kyrgyzstan."[67] Individual dissent can be intolerable for those whose power is predicated on monopolizing the means of consecration — predicated on an essential and sacrosanct popular will. In the chapters to come, I will address the various means that the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have developed for restricting the expression of such dissidence.

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[67] Interview with Bakyt Sadyrbekovich, Specialist on Religious Affairs in the Bishkek branch of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, July 7, 2014.

CHAPTER 6

State Techniques for Censuring Heterodoxy

What is more important — the spiritual unity of the nation,
or the individual's right to choose?

Kairat Lama Sharif
Director of Kazakhstan's
State Agency for Religious Affairs

In the previous chapter, I examined how the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan seek to entrench the authority of "traditional" religions, primarily their respective Muftiates and the Russian Orthodox Church. But along with these efforts to consecrate an essential and sacrosanct popular will, both states have developed an expanding repertoire of restrictions designed to curtail the freedoms and activities of "non-traditional" religious groups. Across much of the post-Soviet space, freedom of conscience has been redefined as freedom *from* destructive sects and radical currents. In this logic of statecraft, the state's commitment to defending religious freedom translates into defending individual

citizens from "various non-traditional destructive religious trends, striving to penetrate all spheres of public life."[1]

In this chapter, I will explore the methods through which various state agencies monitor and regulate the activities of heterodox religious groups. I will focus in particular on the activities of Kazakhstan's State Agency for Religious Affairs and Kyrgyzstan's State Commission for Religious Affairs, but I will also engage the coordination between these entities and the other state and non-state apparatuses that support this agenda. These supporting institutions include both the security and law-enforcement agencies of the state, but also the manifold institutions that produce the "power-knowledge" that structures and legitimates these policies, including intellectuals, the media, and state-aligned NGOs.

I have argued that heterodoxy is understood as such by the regimes, and construed as a threat to sovereignty and security, precisely because of the autonomy that heterodox religious groups and movements exercise from the religious and political establishment. The government of Kazakhstan has noted with alarm the expansion of religious movements that are "new and non-traditional, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonites, Mormons, Moonies,

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[1] Izbairov, Asylbek. 2011. "Activities of Non-Traditional Islamist Organizations and Trends in Kazakhstan." Zakon, November 24. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31085701#pos=0;1).

Wahhabis, Hare Krishnas, Scientologists, Baha'i, Transcendental Meditation and more."[2] Heterodox groups do not threaten the regimes' hold on power directly through political or dissident activity, but the very appeal of autonomous groups threatens the presumptive mandate of the regimes to speak for a sacrosanct popular will — an essential will that ostensibly defines the values and interests of all constituents. This concern with autonomous groups extends back to the Soviet period. A resolution by the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic from 1987 identified a similar series of threatening organizations, including "unregistered associations of Muslims, supporters of the so-called council of churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses and others, unregistered self-styled mullahs."[3]

The leadership of contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan claim a popular mandate to monitor all such heterodox religious groups, and restrict any activities deemed damaging to the public, which, by no coincidence, is measured according to individual deviance from the ideals of national consciousness and

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[2] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2008. Government Decree on the Implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. July 17, 20088 No. 701

[3] Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic. 1987. Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Kyrgyz SSR on the work of the executive the committees of Tokmok city, Kant, Issyk-Ata and the Moscow District Councils of People's deputies to monitor compliance with the legislation on religious cults. December 7, 1987 No. 558.

patriotism. In other words, defending individuals' freedom of conscience becomes tantamount to defending the sacrosanct will for which the regime claims the ultimate right to speak. And yet, as I will show in this chapter, there is often a wide gap between these official discourses on religious "threats," and actual enforcement practices. This gap results from the sheer disconnect between the rhetoric that justifies religious regulation, and the actual religious landscape in the region.

For example, the regimes point to groups such as Hizbut-Tahrir as serious security threats, though there is scant evidence that the group has ever engaged in terrorist or otherwise extremist activities. Hizbut-Tahrir simply serves the regimes as an effective example of the security threats that pluralism can represent, and the regimes justify this characterization of the group by pointing to the global tendency (including among liberal democracies) to securitize concerns over radical Islam. The regimes also single out for censure groups such as Falun Gong, the Chinese dissident movement with no known presence in the region, as a diplomatic nod to China and as evidence of regional cooperation in combating "destructive" religious movements. The regimes even draw attention to groups such as satanists, again with no genuine presence in the region, simply because of the utility of satanism as a justification for curtailing religious

freedoms and according more rights to "traditional" groups than to "non-traditional" groups. One political scientist in Kazakhstan, for example, took issue with the fact that small and subversive religious groups should have the same formal rights as large traditional religions:

> To this day, we have some sort of sect of Satanists from "Jerdingbirjerova," consisting of five people, which is legally equal to the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan. Is this right? For comparison: in democratic states, all political parties are equal before the law, but in order to get seats in the Parliament, they must gain a certain percentage of the votes in the elections.[4]

Kozyrev undermines his own point, ultimately, which his analogy of democratic elections. Indeed, just like marginal political parties, marginal religious groups are protected by law, but their social impact is directly limited to the size and devotion of their following. Nevertheless, this quote demonstrates how the ideological needs of the establishment to attack heterodoxy can at times inflate the profile of heterodox groups far beyond their actual social impact. This divide between rhetoric and reality often results in enforcement practices that either deviate from official rhetoric in key respects, or hew close to official rhetoric at the expense of practical enforcement.

I will explore this tension between the theory and practice of religious

[4] Kozyrev, Timur. 2011. "Homeland or God?" *Zakon*, September 20. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4449591-timur-kozyrev-rodina-ili-bog.html).

regulation in this chapter and the chapters that follow. I will first return to the two main discourses that I identified earlier on the "threats" that religious heterodoxy represents — the distinction between "destructive sects" and "extremist" groups. As I will demonstrate, each of these overarching discourses calls forth a different response from the state that engages different governmental apparatuses. I then explore the primary methods through which the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan regulate and restrict heterodox religious groups. These methods include registration and monitoring of heterodox groups, but most importantly involves producing the *power-knowledge* that links official policy to the harm that religious heterodoxy ostensibly inflicts on the public. I subsequently pursue the discourses on "destructive sects" and "extremism" more thoroughly in the two chapters that follow.

I. Defining Heterodox Threats

The primary way in which this divide between theory and practice plays out is in the rationales for targeting particular religious groups. The regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan identify a number of characteristics that distinguish religious heterodoxy from orthodoxy in general. These characteristics draw

particular attention to the supposedly positive impact of traditional religions on society vs. the negative impact of non-traditional religious groups. In practice, however, local observers frequently distinguish heterodox religious groups from orthodoxy purely in terms of affiliation. Mere association with an already established "non-traditional" religious groups serves as a justification in and of itself for state and social scrutiny and censure.

Thus, when categorizing active religious groups in Kazakhstan, one local scholar casually carved up the religious landscape into the following three mutually-exclusive categories:

> The religious associations operating in Kazakhstan are conditionally divided into three groups. The first is Islam and Orthodox Christianity, the main religions that have existed for a long time on the territory of Kazakhstan. The second group is the unification of Catholic and Protestant Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism. The third group is represented by new religious trends that appeared in Kazakhstan in the early 1990s. Of these, Christians are Jehovah's witnesses, the Holy Spirit Association for the unification of world Christianity, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[5]

Religious policy and enforcement practices may be guided informally by such typologies and the underlying prejudices they represent, but affiliation alone cannot serve as a basis for religious regulation. The governments of Kazakhstan

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[5] Gubaydulin, Oleg. 2008. "Whom to believe?" *Caravan*, July 25. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.caravan.kz/gazeta/komu-verit-52048/).

and Kyrgyzstan are both heavily invested in their image as secular democracies and members of the global community, and neither can maintain this image if they nakedly target religious groups based purely on group affiliation, and subsequently according to each affiliation's autonomy from establishment political and religious apparatuses.

In order to avoid the appearance of religious discrimination, therefore, state policies in the religious sphere must distinguish heterodox groups from orthodoxy not merely according to their affiliations, but rather on the basis of certain determinable *qualities*. We have already seen the qualities attributed to "traditional" religious groups in the previous chapter. We will now examine some of the general features that ostensibly distinguish "non-traditional" and "destructive" religious groups from orthodoxy.

These discourses address a wide range of religious groups and movements that are not officially registered with either the Muftiate or the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate. Before turning to particular methods of regulation, therefore, I wish to elaborate on two overarching official discourses about the "threat" of religious heterodoxy. As I discussed in chapter three, the regimes divide religious threats into two broad categories: 1) proselytism and conversion by "destructive sects," and 2) radicalization within the recognized traditional religions, especially

radical Islam.

Destructive Sects vs. Extremist Groups

First, the regimes speak of the threat represented by citizens converting to "destructive sects" and "totalitarian cults," whose proselytizing activities erode the essential link between ethnicity, religious affiliation, and nationality: "The transition of people from traditional confessions to non-traditional ones poses a threat to the unity of the nation and the state."[6] This language of "destructive sects" primarily gets applied to "Protestantism of various persuasions, including unconventional and charismatic," and "neoplasms such as the Baha'is, Krishnas, Vaisnavas, Moonies, etc."[7]

By eroding the link that the regime seeks to make between national groups and religious affiliations, such pluralism "brings theological confusion to Kazakhs," in the words of one pro-government scholar, cutting co-nationals off from their 'rightful' religious traditions, "which lasted for centuries in human

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[6] Bimendin, Askar. 2013. "It Is Necessary to Make it So That People Will not Want to Leave the Largest Traditional Confessions." *Zakon,* March 19. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4547349-nuzhno-sdelat-tak-chtoby-ljudjam.html).

[7] Burkhanov, K. 2011. "Constructive Dialogue Between Cultures and Civilizations." *Zakon,* April 6. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://www.zakon.kz/208013-konstruktivnost-dialoga-kultur-i.html).

history."[8] A parliamentary commission in Kyrgyzstan similarly concluded that the proliferation of religious affiliations "complicates the religious situation in the republic and requires a serious approach and direct involvement of the state."[9] The director of Kyrgyzstan's SCRA noted with dismay, similarly, that:

> According to the Constitution, every citizen is free to choose, at his own will, which god to pray to. But apostasy is much more complicated than it may seem at first glance… There are examples, especially in the south of the republic, when the father and mother of a household are Muslims, while the daughter is a Baptist and the son is a Krishna; traditional family values are crumbling.[10]

"Destructive sects" are thus seen as a threat to the cultural coherence on which national and "spiritual sovereignty" ostensibly relies.

If destructive sects blur religious-national boundaries, however, other heterodox groups are feared to sharpen them. A second discourse on heterodoxy therefore details the "hidden threat" of extremism within the traditional religions that are increasingly central to national identity. In Central Asia, this discourse

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[8] Nam, David. 2011. "New Religious Movements and Their Influence on the National and State Identity of Modern Kazakhstan." *Zakon,* March 16. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30951074#pos=1;-117).

[9] Kyrgyz Republic. 2008. Decree of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic on Formation of the Parliamentary Committee on Examining Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic. May 22, 2008 No. 409-IV.

[10] Benliyan, Amaliya and Azamat Kasybekov. 2008. "God Sees Everything, but Waits." Interview with the Director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs under the government of the Kyrgyz Republic Kanybek Osmonaliev. *Vecherniy Bishkek,* July 11. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2008/07/11/linia/1.html).

particularly centers on Islam and the threat of radicalization and terrorism. An official review of government policies in response to extremism in Kyrgyzstan, for example, noted that "the measures taken by the State Commission [for Religious Affairs] together with the leadership of SAMK [the Muftiate] are aimed at preventing the split of the Muslim community and the penetration of "new" tendencies such as Wahhabism, Akramia, etc."[11] But officials extend the threat of radicalism and fundamentalism to all "traditional" religions.

> Here it should be noted that the very concept of "fundamentalism" has the same relation to the distortion of Islam, as well as the distortion of Christianity and Judaism. Since fundamentalism is inherent in every religion, we must realize that its danger as an antisocial phenomenon is a threat to every society, regardless of its confessional affiliation.[12]

The regime and media have remained fixated on conservative and fundamentalist movements such as Wahabbism and Salafism, which ostensibly "call for a caliphate, a rejection of the secular state, consistently fight for the creation of a theocratic state and advocate the introduction of Shariah laws and the Shariah court," and supposedly agitate for achieving such methods through

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[11] Kyrgyz Republic. 1998. State Policy on the Activities of the State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs. July 7, 1998 No. 441.

[12] Anonymous. 2013. "The Military of Kazakhstan is Acting Against Extremism." *Zakon*, March 11. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4545769-voennye-kazakhstana-vedut-borbu-s.html).

"armed jihad."[13] The regimes point to certain perennial threats that have been thoroughly established in the minds of their citizenry, such as the ostensibly extremist group Hizbut Tahrir. Though this group has never been linked to any public protests or social movements, let alone violent activities, it nevertheless causes anxiety for the regimes because of its cell-based structure and distribution of pamphlets that call for the creation of a single, global caliphate in place of nation-states.

These two discourses thus depict two qualitatively different threats to the nation — blurring vs. sharpening religious boundaries. "Destructive sects" threaten the sovereignty of "the people" by disrupting the contiguity between ethno-national group and religious belief. "Extremist" groups, in contrast, ostensibly sharpen these boundaries and escalate inter-faith tensions by radicalizing traditional religious groups "from within."

And yet, these discourses are not mutually-exclusive in their application. They represent messy categories of practice more than formally operationalized categories of theory. The terms are often used in conjunction, and are regularly applied with intentional imprecision to implicate a wide range of heterodox

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[13] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save Spiritual Sovereignty." *Liter*, September 14. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

groups:

> More than 80 non-traditional religious organizations operate on the territory of our state. How to distinguish a true religious association, the church, from extremist, totalitarian and destructive? How to classify these organizations? The very name - "pseudo-Christianity" speaks to the fact that so-called new religious movements are Christian only in word, masking their true direction behind the title.[14]

There is often significant overlap between the two discourses, with groups such as Baptists occasionally being called "extremist," and groups such as Tablighi Jamaal frequently being lumped in with western missionary movements as "destructive."

State Responses

Despite their imprecise and often overlapping application, however, these two discourses retain a degree of autonomy from one another as categories of practice, because they engage distinct mandates of the state. The "threat" posed by blurred religious boundaries calls forth different forms of state power than that posed by sharpened religious boundaries. I thus compare and contrast these two policy discourses below and in the chapters that follow, but not with the

[14] Novikova, G. 2009. "New Religious Movements of a Pseudo-Christian Orientation." *Zakon*, April 21. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30406775#pos=1;-107).

intention of reifying the regimes’ distinctions between destructive sects and extremist groups. Rather, I engage this distinction in order to explore the different “governmentalities” associated with each discourse (Foucault 2009).

Destructive sects are far more likely to be invoked as a threat to national sovereignty — “spiritual sovereignty” in the words of local actors — and to be treated as a matter for civic institutions and legal action. As one observer put it, when asking whether “secular Kyrgyzstan” can be saved:

> We on the Kyrgyz "island of democracy" also face a flip side to our healthy constitutional liberalism: painful symptoms in the form of expanding totalitarian sects and proselytism that insults the so-called traditional denominations - when some overly active, more or less new religions shamelessly recruit people into their ranks.[15]

In this view, destructive sects may appear outwardly docile and law-abiding, but they represent a grave existential threat to the nation. Even as they defer to the laws of the sovereign state, destructive sects can take advantage of overly liberal laws to subvert the sovereignty of “the people’ themselves. As the director of Kazakhstan’s SARA, Lama Sharif, put it, destructive sects “actively penetrate into the secular and state institutions of the country, into the education and

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[15] Tuzov, Alexander and Bermet Malikova. 2009. “How Can We Save Secular Kyrgyzstan?” *Vecherniy Bishkek,* November 4. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2009/11/04/polit/1.html).

culture systems."[16] Efforts to contain destructive sects are thus often depicted as a battle for national survival in the face of globalization, but a battle to be fought in the courts, in the government house, and in the other civic institutions that are meant to secure sovereign nationhood from Western hegemony — economic, intellectual, military, and spiritual.

Islamic extremism, in contrast, is often depicted as a direct threat to the security of the population and the regime, which must be addressed by the security apparatus of the state. A resolution by Kyrgyzstan's ministry of internal affairs, for example, stated that:

> Among the religious movements and organizations to date, the most dangerous security threat to the Kyrgyz Republic is the religious extremist party Hizbut-Tahrir, which since 1995 has transferred its activities to the territory of Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan.[17]

This discourse draws its legitimacy not only from the ongoing war on terror, but from the deeper history of political and radical Islam in Muslim majority countries. Revolutionary groups have succeeded in winning popular support in

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[16] Tynyshbaeva, Ayman. 2011. "Religion Requires Constant Attention and Painstaking Work." Interview with Lama Sharif, Chairman of the Agency of Religious Affairs in the Republic Of Kazakhstan. *Bnews,* November 15. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://bnews.kz/ru/news/obshchestvo/kairat_lama_sharif_religiya_trebuet_postoyannogo_vnimaniya_i_kropotlivoi_raboti).

[17] Kyrgyz Republic. 2004. Government Decree on the Work of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, Local government Administrations and Local Self-Government for the Prevention of Religious Extremism and Ethnic Hatred, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. July 20, 2004 No. 543.

many nations using Islam as a populist front. "Extremist" groups can similarly win hearts and minds within mainstream Islam in their own nations, officials fear, radicalizing the population from within the ascribed traditional religious categories. Indeed, members of the establishment are not entirely wrong to conceive of these groups as a threat to their security, given the capacity of autonomous discourses on Islam to strip the regime of moral authority in the eyes of the majority. Therefore, populist and even radical Islam can directly undermine the security of the regime. In a classic act of symbolic violence, however, the regimes transform this concern with their power into an ostensible concern with the physical security of their populations in the face of violent extremist threats.

The distinction between destructive sects and extremist groups thus provides two overarching narratives of the "threat" posed by heterodoxy to national traditions and to spiritual sovereignty. In the sections and chapters that follow, I will examine how these discourses translate into policies and practices of regulation. I treat these two discourses critically, however, bearing in mind Brubaker's (2000) admonition that social scientists should not reproduce the very categories of practice that we analyze. Initially, I sought to explain these regimes' aversion to heterodox groups according to the doctrine and organizational

dynamics of the groups themselves. I compared groups that had received more and less scrutiny from the regimes, hoping to determine what, if any determinable characteristics of heterodox groups brought greater pressure and censure from the state. By comparing dozens of religious affiliations and hundreds of individual organizations, I hoped to test the link between the states' formal rationale for restricting particular groups, and the actual qualities of religious groups that seemed to trigger state attention and action.

Searching for causal factors in the religious groups themselves proved problematic, however, both empirically and ethically. Empirically, I quickly discovered that the regimes applied these discourses on "threat" and "harm" without particular regard for careful or consistent observation of the actual beliefs or practices of heterodox groups. Rather than linking these discourses to actual practices, authorities used them as justifications for the deployment of particular forms of state power in the religious sphere and civil society. Official policy in the religious sphere is both created and enforced in an ad hoc manner, often focusing more on expedience and symbolic enforcement than on consistent governance of religious groups. Ethically, focusing on the characteristics of religious groups themselves served to turn the lens of my research and scrutiny on the religious groups that frequently suffer harassment from the state. Were I to

pursue this approach, my analysis would implicitly argue that heterodox groups' own beliefs and practices were responsible for the pressure and harassment they received from the state and society. For these reasons, I have chosen to devote most of my analysis to the state itself, examining the rationale of authority that has conditioned such policies.

These two relatively distinct discourses — on destructive and extremist groups — are articulated in a way that maximizes the government and religious establishments' mandate to speak for a sacrosanct popular will. When state officials distinguish the threat of religious extremism from that of destructive sects, they assert the contiguity of ethnic and religious identity: Citizens *convert* to destructive sects such as Scientology or the Jehovah's Witnesses, but are *radicalized* "from within" by extremist groups such as Hizbut Tahrir. The separation of these two discourses only makes sense within the establishment discourse on religious tradition, which promotes the jurisdiction of the Muftiate and Orthodox Church to speak for entire ethno-national groups. I will therefore address the many overlaps and ambiguities between these two discourses, which call into question the validity of the regimes' claims to be defending their populations from distinct and determinable threats.

II. Methods of Regulation

Against these "threats," the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have deployed a variety of regulations and other methods of obstruction. These vary from formal requirements such as registration and compliance with often burdensome policies, to less formal obstacles such as opaque bureaucracy and a lack of government enthusiasm for protecting the rights of heterodox religious groups. The primary means by which the states regulate heterodox religious groups, however, is through the registration requirements and through continuous monitoring by their respective agencies for religious affairs, and by other security and law-enforcement apparatuses.

In some respects, registering and monitoring non-traditional religious groups simply reproduces the oversight that the traditional religious establishments exercise over the mosques, churches, and other organizations under their jurisdiction. "Traditional" religious organizations register with the Muftiate and Russian Orthodox Church, respectively, while non-traditional groups register with the SARA and SCRA. The state's efforts to monitor heterodox groups in many ways duplicates the oversight that the Muftiate and Orthodox Patriarchate exert over the doctrines and activities of their member congregations. But while these two governing bodies have direct (if imperfect) control over the doctrines

and practices propagated within their jurisdiction, the SARA and SCRA claim a mandate to monitor religious groups in defense of the principles of secularism and freedom of conscience. In practice, these agencies devote a significant amount of their activity producing and defending the technical criteria that justify these distinct religious jurisdictions.

Thus, the state essentially maintains two sovereign jurisdictions for traditional and non-traditional religious groups. As a point of design, the criteria for registration become self-legitimating. Heterodox groups are required to submit their doctrinal texts and supporting materials to the agencies for analysis, resulting in policies that highlight and even inflate the deviations of these "non-traditional" groups from "traditional" religions. These policies in turn reinforce the need for such scrutiny of heterodox religious groups, and provide technical justifications for specific methods of regulation. Just as the justification for religious regulation masks discrimination based purely on affiliation, so too the methods of regulation are designed to obscure the regimes' ultimate concern with preserving their authority to speak for a sacrosanct popular will.

In the sections below, I will focus on the two primary means by which the SCRA and SARA regulate the activities of heterodox religious groups: registration requirements and monitoring religious activities. I will also examine

a number of informal means whereby the state obstructs the practices of heterodox groups.

Registration

The governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan restrict heterodoxy by requiring all religious groups not under the purview of the Muftiate or Patriarchate to apply for registration with the SARA and SCRA, respectively. In the early 1990s, both states had a more *laissez faire* attitude toward religion, leading to lax enforcement of these requirements. In the mid-late 90s, however, both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan became increasingly alarmed by the proliferation of unregistered and unmonitored religious groups — Muslim, Christian, and otherwise. A resolution of Kyrgyzstan's government from 1997 notes:

> For example, in Osh Province there are about 600 mosques, of which only 60 are registered; in Jalal-Abad Oblast only 68 out of 157 active mosques are registered; not a single mosque in Naryn oblast is registered, and there are more than 10 churches of the Union of Churches of Evangelical Baptists of Kyrgyzstan that operate without registration, as well as more than 15 churches of Seventh-day Adventists.[18]

As a result, registration requirements have become increasingly strict over the years. Both states have sought legislative means to prevent non-traditional

[18] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree "On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Task of Authorities to Form a State Policy in the Religious Sphere." August 10, 1995 No. 345.

groups from starting new congregations, and even to prevent them from re-registering existing ones.

Religious organizations that wish to register with the SCRA and SARA must submit their charters and core religious texts for analysis, along with a list of their founding members.[19] "Founders" are understood as the initial members of the group, including the leadership and the members that confer authority on that leadership. This list must include each members' full address of permanent residence, proving that they reside in the locality where the organization is to be established. Religious organizations must further provide updated rosters of their broader membership to the state regularly.

Some religious organizations face difficulty registering because of the content of their core religious texts. The Church of Scientology, for example, came under scrutiny in Kazakhstan when its literature was examined by the court and SARA officials, who "conducted the expertise analysis of the package of documents of the religious association Church of Scientology, Pavlodar Dianetics Center, and came to the conclusion that these documents do not meet the requirements of the

[19] Ibid.

law."[20] However, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have increasingly relied on membership quotas to tighten regulations, increasing the number of founders and members required for a religious group to register. As opposed to labor-intensive processes like inspecting charters and core religious texts, quotas for founders are easy to implement, and place the membership of the organizations under surveillance.

Quotas for minimum number of members have thus become increasingly difficult to obtain. In 2001, for example Kyrgyzstan dramatically increased the number of founders and members necessary for registering a congregation as part of a denomination. Initially, congregations required a minimum of ten founders and fifty members in the district in which the groups sought registration.[21] Under the law passed in 2001 and further tightened in 2012, this requirement shifted to fifty founders per congregation (who must be citizens) and 200 members country-wide in affiliated congregations:

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[20] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2002. Court ruling of the Pavlodar regional court refusing a religious association "Mission of the Church of Scientology - Pavlodar Center" Dianetics" the right to register. September 20, 2002 No. 3-1-2-2002.

[21] The older, more lenient provisions can be found in the 2012 Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organization, and the identically named law of Kazakhstan from 1992. Both laws are undergoing revision, and pastors of several Protestant congregations in Bishkek, KG, Almaty, KZ, and Astana, KZ attested to greater restriction on their capacity to register even as the stricter provisions work their way through various drafts on their way to ratification.

> The new standard requires no less than 200 signatures [to found a religious organization], whereas current legislation requires only ten. This is quite a strict measure, but, in my view, this approach will protect our citizens from the active expansion of destructive, totalitarian dogmas and the ruinous interaction of different occult, quasi-religious sects.[22]

Officials have openly stated that the goals of such changes are to decrease religious pluralism. They noted that the initial requirements allowed too many small religious groups to register and practice with ease. In their rhetoric, of course, small groups are not benign, however. Rather small religious groups are viewed as fringe and radical.

> The former law allowed such religious organizations to go through the registration process without hindrance and conduct further activities: it was enough to gather 10 like-minded people. Take such groups as Satanists, Baha'is and others. After the new law is put into effect, they will fall out of the legal field. The organizations that the law allows to register on the territory of the republic will have to bring their charters in line with the national legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic.[23]

In this rhetoric, small religious groups are small because they could not gain the support and consensus of larger numbers of people. Their beliefs and practices, therefore, must be extreme and destructive. In this view, increasing the quotas for registration provides an effective means of reducing the threat that fringe and

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[22] Benliyan, Amaliya and Azamat Kasybekov. 2008. “God Sees Everything, but Waits.” Interview with the Director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs under the government of the Kyrgyz Republic Kanybek Osmonaliev. *Vecherniy Bishkek,* July 11. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2008/07/11/linia/1.html).

[23] Pavlovich, Lyudmila. 2009. “Separate the Wheat From the Chaff.” Interview with the Director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs Kanybek Osmonaliev. *Slovo Kyrgyzstana,* March 20, No. 29.

radical religious groups represent to the population.

Given the political environment in which heterodox organizations operate, these quotas represent a significant source of anxiety and intimidation for the members of heterodox groups. Congregation members are increasingly loathe to submit their personal information to the government in order to help their congregation meet the registration quota, for fear of persecution or of simply being on the government's radar. Those who list themselves as founding members have legitimate reason to anticipate harassment by state officials, especially if they are known to engage in proselytizing activity. For this reason, some congregations and missionary groups refuse registration:

> For many years the community of Evangelical Baptist Christians of Aktobe and Alga of Alginsky region have categorically refused state registration, referring to the fact that this contradicts their doctrine. Leaders and members of the community have categorically refused offers of registration, demonstrating their inherent religious fanaticism and intolerance to others' opinions.[24]

This pressure to register applies not simply to "destructive" Christian sects, but also extends to unregistered mosques, which have refused to register with the Muftiate. Such mosques come under similar pressure to register and disclose lists of their founders and members. Thus, registration serves not only to limit the

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[24] Turganbaev, Aidyn. 2008. "Fines Do Not Scare Missionaries."*Zakon,* July 27. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/119093-shtrafy-missionerov-ne-pugajut.html).

ability of marginal and "non-traditional" religious groups to attain legal status and practice freely, but also serves to put the groups and their members under state surveillance.

Monitoring

The SARA and SCRA also monitor religious activity throughout their respective countries, and provide vital statistics and forecasts to the administration to guide religious policy. These activities are frequently undertaken in conjunction with the law enforcement and security apparatuses of the state, as well as in partnership with the Muftiates of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which actively monitor the mosques and imams under their jurisdiction.

Monitoring is not merely seen as a passive activity, however, but rather a means of direct intervention in the religious field, as one proponent asserted:

> How can we resist the aggressive policy of missionaries, the dangerous doctrine of destructive sects and totalitarian cults, their elaborate methods of myth-making? The only way out is to analyze their activities, study the internal documents, dogmas and policy statements of their leaders.[25]

Thus, in Kyrgyzstan, the SARA and the government more broadly has used its

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[25] Sakenova, Asem. 2013. "Mechanisms of Predicting Risk." *Zakon*, January 21. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4536601-mekhanizmy-prognoziruemosti-riskov..html).

mandate to monitor as a means to engage in contentious political issues such as women's rights:

> The State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic for Religious Affairs shall organize monitoring of the religious situation among women by region, in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic, to take legislative measures to regulate the missionary activities of various faiths.[26]

This ostensible concern with women's rights thus provides the state with a broad mandate to interfere in Islamic missionary movements that promote more "traditional" gender roles. Such conflict between two discourses on tradition — national traditions and ostensibly more conservative Muslim traditions for women — provides a prime example of how officials understand radicalization "from within" traditional religion.

Even more brazen, following a 2010 coup d'etat that ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev, which was accompanied by inter-ethnic violence in the south of the country, the Kyrgyz government appointed a commission to investigate the role of religious extremism in inciting ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. The cause of the violence was an extremely sensitive issue at the time. The Kyrgyz majority simply wanted to lay the blame at the feet of a "belligerent"

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[26] Kyrgyz Republic. 1996. Government Decree on the Situation of Women in the Kyrgyz Republic and Measures of Assistance in the Transition Period. May 13, 1996 No. 212.

Uzbek minority, but independent observers generally concluded that the ousted Bakiev, who took refuge in his southern home district, fomented enmity between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks to shore up his base of support among southern ethnic Kyrgyz.

The riots that resulted brought death and dispossession to Uzbek communities across the South at the hands of the state and the local Kyrgyz population. But the commission concluded that, "The State National Security Committee, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the State Commission for Religious Affairs, [should] intensify their explanatory work on the activities of Hizbut-Tahrir, and the Islamic radical groups Ahmadiya and Salafiya."[27] This conclusion represents a clear agenda to blame the violence on Uzbeks, who are considered generally more religious than Kyrgyz. Terms such as "Salafiya" and "Ahmadiya" can be used as euphemisms for the "foreign" form of Islam followed by Uzbeks, as opposed to the moderate form of Islam native to ethnic Kyrgyz.

Kazakhstan's SARA expends significantly greater resources on monitoring the activities of religious groups — both "traditional" groups such as mosques

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[27] Report of the National Committee on Comprehensive Examination of Causes, Consequences and Recommendations for the Tragic Events in the South of the Republic in June 2010. 2011. *Belyi Parus*, January 20. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://www.paruskg.info/2011/01/20/38564).

and churches under the purview of the Muftiate and Orthodox Church, and non-traditional groups. Routine checks of registered religious organizations frequently find "violations" of the religious law:

> Violations of the law were also found during the investigation of the activities of the religious association "Evangelical Christian Baptists." It was verified that the leader organized the work of his community in a private house without registering a religious association. In addition, he opened a prayer house at this address, where he conducted a sermon and gathered parishioners three times a week. The total number of members of this religious association is approximately 30-35 people, "M. Turubaev said.[28]

Kazakhstan's government not only monitors activities of registered organizations, but also uses its considerably greater resources to scan for evidence of underground congregations. Authorities have even targeted individuals who have shared their religious beliefs or attended religious gatherings, charging them with violating the rules governing religious proselytization:

> Investigators stated that the activities of foreign missionaries were in violation of the provisions of the Criminal Code and the National Security Law, directed against the threat to the state constitutional system. In September, authorities detained and issued warrants for the deportation of six non-accredited Muslim missionaries from Pakistan, who intended to

[28] Anonymous. 2007. "Since the Beginning of the Year Three Religious Associations Were Revealed in Semei Operating Without Official Registration." *Semipalatinsk,* August 21. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://www.semsk.kz/archive/2007/relig.htm).

attend a religious conference in Zhambyl.[29]

The government has even been known to conduct raids. In the case of Scientology, a raid by the SARA in conjunction with law enforcement officials led to the confiscation of the confession files that the center kept on its members:

> "More than 300 complaints were filed by parishioners of the Church of Scientology in the prosecutor's office and the KNB [the National Security Service, successor to the KGB or *State* Security Service] about the return of materials previously removed from the church. The parishioners demand immediately to return the files with confessions and insist that the KNB keep the secret of confession for the faithful of all religions, "it was written in the message of the church… In addition to confession materials, officials also confiscated books, religious tools and artifacts containing Scientology writings, and other items without which parishioners of the church are unable to continue to confess or study the writing of Scientology.[30]

In some cases, these raids are also conducted in coordination with regional organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Treaty Organizations — two entities that arose after the dissolution of the Soviet Union to preserve elements of economic and defense coordination:

> In February, the authorities of the North-Kazakhstan region conducted a preventive action called "Operation of religious extremism", which resulted in the arrest of eight pastors and church leaders for violating

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[29] Report on the Situation with Human Rights in Kazakhstan for 1998. 1999. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor*, US Department of State.

[30] Anonymous. 2009. An Open Letter to the Head of State from the Leadership of the Church of Scientology in the City of Almaty. *Zakon*, February 16. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://www.zakon.kz/133481-rukovodstvo-cerkov-sajjentologii-goroda.html).

> legislation on the registration of religious associations. The authorities said that this operation was part of a wider program conducted within the framework of the CIS aimed at combating terrorism and violent extremism. In most cases, church leaders of the Baptists and Christian Evangelicals were fined.[31]

The SARA and SCRA are also tasked with resolving interfaith disputes, which in practice comes down to mediating disputes between non-traditional religion and the local populations that take issue with their activities. One of the most frequent disputes has been over burial rights in rural areas. Villages often take exception if a convert to a religion such as Baptism is to be buried in the local cemetery, which suddenly transforms in status from the village cemetery to a Muslim cemetery.[32] Other disputes involve local imams taking issues with non-traditional congregations and activities.[33] Almost invariably, the agencies seek to resolve these conflicts in favor of the traditional religion.

Finally, if such complaints go to court, experts from the agency frequently testify in support of the government's position. Court cases are frequently brought by non-traditional religious groups as well, who wish to appeal rejected

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[31] Report on the Situation with Human Rights in Kazakhstan for 2007. 2008. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.* Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100615.htm).

[32] Interview with the director of a human rights NGO specializing in freedom of conscience, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, July 2014.

[33] Interview with professor of anthropology specializing in local religious activities, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, June 2014.

applications to register as an organization or establish a new branch. In this respect, the application of religious policy differs dramatically between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's legal system is far more dependent on and loyal to the administration than Kyrgyzstan's, resulting in expedited decisions in favor of the government's position.[34] Courts in Kyrgyzstan have a modicum of political autonomy, although judges tend to be conservative to national and even Soviet ideals. Nevertheless, in the cases that I attended - appeals for registration brought by the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon,[35] Jehovah's Witnesses,[36] Scientology,[37] and even Tengrians[38] - it was common for judges to question the legality of government policies, and even the expertise and qualifications of officials from the State Commission for Religious Affairs.

Bureaucratic Obstruction

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[34] Interview with representative of the Kazakh Human Rights Council, Almaty, KZ, July 2014.

[35] Kyrgyz Republic. 2013. Court hearing about the appeal to the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan by the representatives of the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon, July 24, 2013.

[36] Kyrgyz Republic. 2012. Court hearing about the appeal to the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan by the representatives of Jehova's Witnesses, November 18, 2012.

[37] Kyrgyz Republic. 2013. Court hearing about the appeal to the *Pervomaysk* Regional Court by the representatives of the Church of Scientology, July 19, 2013.

[38] Kyrgyz Republic. 2013. Court hearing about the appeal to the *Pervomaysk* Regional Court by the representatives of Tengrians, August 17, 2013.

Possibly none of these formal methods is as onerous, though, as the multitude of informal means whereby the governments and peoples of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan obstruct the practices and circumscribe the rights of heterodox religious groups. These methods, known to all authoritarian regimes, exploit the mercurial relations between state and society, regime and supporters. The state exerts concerted pressure on dissident groups at certain moments, and obscures or deflects all traces of such coordination at other moments. State authority can appear menacingly, and vanish just as quickly without a single, culpable trace.

Possibly the most formidable weapon in the state's arsenal of obstruction is simple bureaucratic procedure. Of the registration process, for example, a 2001 State Department report on Kazakhstan noted, "Usually this is a quick and simple process. However, some religious sects had difficulties registering in some instances. These are the sects of Jehovah's Witnesses, some Protestant sects, as well as Muslim sects, independent of the spiritual leader of the Mufti Muslims."[39] The report went on to mention several technical hurdles that tend to impede the registration of heterodox groups, including special requirements for any form of religious education:

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[39] Report on the Situation with Human Rights in Kazakhstan for 2001. 2002. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor*, US Department of State.

> One human rights activist reported that the government usually refuses to appeal allegedly because the statutes of religious organizations are inconsistent with the law. For example, the law does not allow religious sects to engage in the education of children without the consent of the Ministry of Education, and many religious sects include education in their statutes.[40]

Representatives of Scientology were blocked from establishing a dianetics center in Almaty due to such provisions. Scientology's practices were deemed educational in character, subjecting the church to a series of onerous regulations:

> Article 7 of the same Law provides that only religious departments and associations operating in the territory of two or more oblasts [provinces] of the Republic have the right to establish religious educational institutions; therefore, this association can not engage in educational activities.[41]

When challenged by religious groups and rights watchdogs on the intentional, coordinated, and targeted application of such requirements to specific groups, the regimes easily deflect and present themselves as a moderating influence on inter-faith relations. This tactic can even incorporate media campaigns against heterodox groups.

In the case of a Hare Krishna commune in southern Kazakhstan, for example, local authorities baited popular disapproval of the group in order to justify the

[40] Ibid.

[41] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2002. Court ruling of the Pavlodar regional court refusing a religious association "Mission of the Church of Scientology - Pavlodar Center" Dianetics" the right to register. September 20, 2002 No. 3-1-2-2002.

wholesale demolition of the community. The leader of the commune "alleged that the authorities arrived for the April inspection with television camera crews and then ordered the stations to report on the raid. In one television report, the Krishnas were described as extremists and criminals."[42] The commune was subsequently ordered to be demolished, with some claiming that the local government was simply trying to clear the land for an opaque deal with a local business. Demolition began even as the Krishna commune appealed the decision, but encountered a smokescreen of diffuse bureaucratic authority.

When the Krishna commune appealed to the (at that time) Committee for Religious Affairs, "the Committee recommended that the "Society for Krishna Consciousness", in accordance with the procedure established by law, apply to the local executive bodies of the Karasai District."[43] When the leadership then appealed to the *Akimat* or district government, "the Akimats of Almaty oblast and Karasai district assured the representative of the Committee on Religious Affairs that they do not have information about who gave the order for the

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[42] Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. 2003. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor,* U.S. Department of State. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18373.htm).

[43] Anonymous. 2007. "The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan Summarized the Work of the Committee on Issues Related to Land Disputes of Individual Members of the Society for Krishna Consciousness." *Zakon,* January 5. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30083020#pos=1;-117).

demolition of the houses of the Hare Krishnas."[44] Despite this supposed lack of clarity about who gave the order for demolition and on what authority, the demolition was carried out, and the Hare Krishna community entered into a protracted legal battle for compensation, monetary or in the form of a new plot of land, during which their capacity to practice their faith was dramatically curtailed.

Such informal uses (and abstentions from use) of state authority can thus present far more onerous burdens on the free practice of religions and the exercise of religious rights than do formal regulations. Of course, there need not be any tradeoff between formal and informal obstacles; both levels of state authority and discretion can and do reinforce each other. This point especially holds true when policy goals extend beyond the limits of state capacity for policy enforcement. I explore this point more thoroughly in the following section.

III. State Weakness and Informal Enforcement Practices

Despite the increasingly restrictive stance that the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have taken in regard to religious heterodoxy, state practices

[44] Anonymous. 2007. "Demolition of Hare Krishna Houses in Almaty Region is Suspended." *Zakon*, May 7. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/86847-snos-domov-krishnaitov-v-almatinskojj.html).

betray a more piecemeal approach to enforcement. The very policies designed to make religion legible (Ferguson 1994; Scott 1998) to the state also establish formal standards that would be cumbersome and prohibitively expensive to enforce consistently. Furthermore, the various state structures tasked with enforcing these policies make little effort to coordinate their efforts. Officials often seem more concerned with ensuring that the state's authority is felt in the religious sphere than with enforcing religious policy consistently.

The result is that religious policies tend to be enforced in an ad hoc manner, to cases that come into the authorities' field of view. The political will for enforcement comes and goes, and with it the resources for enforcement. Even in the better funded SARA of Kazakhstan, an official admitted in an interview that they monitor heterodox groups actively only when funds allow, and otherwise sit in their offices analyzing broader trends. Their capacity to monitor primarily depends on religious groups complying with the law and applying for registration, which most groups do voluntarily in order to avoid scrutiny from the state security services.[45]

Thus, despite the state's awesome authority over the fate of any particular religious group, the state is also quite weak in many ways, and must rely on

[45] Interview with official in the Analytics Department of the SARA, Astana, August 11th 2014.

enforcement mechanisms that emphasize authority over capacity. In this section, I will examine many of the limitations of policy enforcement, and examine two mechanisms that the states employ to make up for these limitations: token enforcement and promoting a common language of state authority over coordinated practices of enforcement.

The Limits of Enforcement Capacity

State officials and orthodox religious leaders frequently complain about the limitations of religious policy and enforcement strategies. The primary complaint is the limitations placed on the state by "overly-liberal" religious laws. Thus, one Kazakh political scientist noted that, "our legislation is some of the most liberal in the world, [which…] sometimes gives rise to unexpected effects, such as the uncontrolled penetration of missionaries of other faiths into the Kazakhstan 'religious market.'"[46] An expert on religious affairs in Kyrgyzstan similarly lamented that, "Scientologists are banned in Russia and other countries, while their churches openly work in the Kyrgyz Republic. [Meanwhile] there are twelve Turkish lyceums in the country, which divorce our children from their

[46] Nurseitova, Torgyn. 2011. "Political Scientist Timur Kozyrev: Testing with Hijab - A New Test for Tolerance?" *Islam in SNG*, January 21. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://www.islamsng.com/kaz/interviews/995).

national cultural heritage."[47]

Even when laws introduce greater restrictions on religious freedoms, these laws are often poorly written, incompatible with existing laws that defend religious freedoms, and face significant obstacles to implementation and enforcement. One exasperated legal expert noted of Kyrgyzstan's 2012 law on religious freedom that:

> Despite the fact that the law has been in force for more than five months, there are still no by-laws regulating the procedure for re-registration, evaluation of literature, etc. According to many interviewers [of religious organizations], this further aggravates the general mood of anxiety. However, even when all the papers are aligned, it is naive to hope for the opportunity to legislatively solve the problems associated with the growth of religious extremism, proselytism and religious expansion.[48]

Thus, the legislation governing religious activities reveals numerous shortcomings and sources of state weakness.

A second weakness involves limitations on monitoring the activity of groups deemed non-traditional and threatening. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan both have many remote areas to cover, and each state has outlined a wide variety of activities to police in relation to religious groups. With respect to the first

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[47] Shvets, Sergey and Bermet Malikova. 2010. "Terror for Terror! And Not Otherwise" *Vechernyi Bishkek*, December 15. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2010/12/15/oboron/1.html).

[48] Grebenyuk, Olga. 2012. "About Religions and Laws" *Zakon,* March 13. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/4479198-o-religijakh-i-zakonakh-o.-grebenjuk.html).

challenge, both countries have set up local offices to assist local government in implementing religious policy. Kyrgyzstan's government established a Coordination Council for Combating Religious Extremism in Issyk-kul province, for example, to "create and implement state policy in the field, countering religious extremism and fundamentalism, destructive and totalitarian groups and organizations, as well as preventing conflict on a religious basis."[49]

Such offices have limited capacity to monitor the activities of local religious groups however, and do little to allay the broader concern with the proliferation of "destructive" and "extremist" practices. One report noted, for example, that even so common an activity as tithing can directly support radical and even terrorist causes:

> The supporter transfers money in the form of a charitable donation, or "zakat" (a form of tithe based on a religious commitment in Islam) to mosques, imams or non-profit organizations, which in turn support radical fundamentalism.[50]

As I discuss below, this concern is even more acute in relation to the distribution of "extremist" religious content online.

Finally, state officials express frustration with the limitations placed on

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[49] Kyrgyz Republic. 2003. Ysyk-Kul State Administration Decree on the State and Measures for the Prevention of Delinquency. May 12, 2003 No. 4.

[50] Anonymous. 2008. Moneyval: Counteracting Money Laundering and Financing Terrorism. *Council of Europe*, July 7-11. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://www.cbr.ru/today/anti_legalisation/ec/ML_and_counterfeiting_rus.pdf).

enforcement by the rule of law — by the capacity of religious organizations to fight back through the courts. One proponent of greater freedom of religion in Kazakhstan spoke candidly of this limitation:

> I would like to note that the religious associations and groups of the Protestant movement have adapted quite well to the strict requirements of the authorities, and have learned to counteract them in the legal field. They have learned to circumvent the absurd illegal demands skillfully. That is, they have the most experience in protecting their rights. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses hold an experienced lawyer among their adherents, who successfully provides legal assistance to their religious association.[51]

Such experience in fighting for religious rights produces victories for heterodox groups on some occasions, to the chagrin of the political and religious establishment:

> In May, the Taraz City Court dismissed the appeal of the town's prosecutor demanding to revoke the registration and suspend the activities of one of the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses operating in Taraz. This appeal, directed against only one of the seven congregations operating in the area, claims that Jehovah's Witnesses violate the constitution by their actions, urging their members to renounce military service [still required of young men in most post-Soviet countries].[52]

Precisely this opposition to military service led to the official disbanding of the

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[51] Nurseitova, Torgyn. 2012. "In Kazakhstan, Radical Islam Has Formed Underground." Interview with an independent lawyer Zhangazy Kunserkin. *Military Magazine of Kazakhstan*, May 30. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://military-kz.ucoz.org/news/zhangazy_kunserkin_v_kazakhstane_sformirovalsja_podpolnyj_islam_radikalnogo_tolka/2012-05-30-2559).

[52] Report on the Situation with Human Rights in Kazakhstan for 2001. 2002. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.*

Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the whole of the Russian Federation in 2017 and the seizing of property.[53] In this case, however, a congregation was able to enact their rights through the courts, placing a direct limit on local government's capacity to restrict their activities.

Token Enforcement

These instances of state weakness lead to a series of strategies that focus on projecting enforcement. State officials are often far more concerned with addressing symbolic challenges to the regime than with actually governing individual conduct. For example, the governments of both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan initiated special legislation and litigation to ban the 2012 film *The Innocence of Muslims*, which drew global criticism for slandering the name and life of Muhammad. This obscure film, posted to youtube, received a level of attention that was in absurd disproportion to its amateurish production. And though the film was produced in the U.S. for no particular audience, lacking even an official translation into Russian, its notoriety alone sufficed for concerted attention from the highest levels of government in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

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[53] Higgins, Andrew. 2017. "Russia Bans Jehovah's Witnesses, Calling It an Extremist Group." *New York Times*, April 21. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/world/europe/russia-bans-jehovahs-witnesses.html?mcubz=1&_r=0).

The parliament of Kyrgyzstan, for example, approved a declaration condemning the film as an effort "to stir up interfaith hatred, enmity and Clashes of civilizations," and directing the Prosecutors office to "take measures to prohibit the access and distribution of the film "Innocence of Muslims", including in the Internet space."[54] The prosecutors in Kazakhstan similarly petitioned the court to ban multiple internet domains where the film could be watched, citing the film's "extremist" content, which "offends the religious feelings of people professing Islam, and is aimed at inciting religious hatred and discord."[55]

Presumably, even the authorities were aware that this attention to one film would do nothing to restrict their citizens' access to countless other online sources of "extremist" content. The court ruling in Kazakhstan lists half a dozen URLs where the film can be watched, attesting to state officials' recognition that litigation can hardly keep pace with distribution online. The film was already available at dozens of other URLs by the time the court had ruled on the matter. And yet, despite these clear limitations in the efficacy of legislation and litigation, the governments of both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan felt compelled to ban *The*

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[54] Kyrgyz Republic. 2012. Court Ruling About the Film "Innocence of Muslims." September 20, 2012. The judge cites the relevant statement from the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic.

[55] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2012. Court Ruling of the Saryarka District Court of Astana City, October 4, 2012 No. 2-6251/12.

Innocence of Muslims as a particularly egregious form of "extremism."

What logic guides such enforcement strategies? What is the purpose of policies that make religious dissidence legible to the state, if they defy consistent enforcement? To answer these questions, I turn to one more example.

Coordinated Language of Enforcement

This disconnect between formal and informal politics — and the utility of largely symbolic formal policies — becomes more clear if we again make use of Bourdieu's model of representation as a *mystery of ministry*. It would be an over simplification to treat the ruling party in a given polity as a single ministry — a single voice that substitutes for the voices of all its constituents. Even highly unified and disciplined parties struggle to coordinate their outward message, and at best represent a messy assemblage of symbiotic ministries. Single-party rule, as in Kazakhstan, makes such coordination even more complex, as the messages propagated at the top must be translated across numerous functional divisions within the government — diverse sets of officials who propagate variations on the core ministry when interacting with the public in their own spheres of competence.

This process is made significantly easier by coordinating around a particular

effigy of “the people.” Regimes — i.e. the multitude of ministries that constitute a regime — need not coordinate every facet of their message, so long as they can lay out certain consistent signposts to demarcate who “the people” are, what the popular will is, and who has authority to speak for that will. Even inconsistently enforced policies can thus be useful, so long as they assist state officials (as well as state-aligned public figures in the religious and other spheres) to coordinate their ministries in a consistent effort to appropriate the voice of the people. They serve as signposts of the collective consciousness to both the public and the agents of the regime itself.

This function was vividly displayed at government trainings on religious extremism. At the trainings I attended in Kyrgyzstan, the SCRA presented analyses of the latest tendencies in the religious sphere to agents of the state security services, local government and law-enforcement officials, local prosecutors, academics, and various other experts. However, the presentations and accompanying conversations were minimally devoted to coordinating enforcement strategies. Rather, they primarily served to ensure that all officials in the room spoke a single idiom of governance.

SCRA officials provided textbook definitions of extremism and radicalism, and connected them to perceived threats. They recounted the numbers of

mosques and madrassas in the country, expressing concern over the perceived growth in unregistered entities. They made frequent reference to perennial boogeymen such as Hizbut Tahrir and Tablighi Jammat, recounting the list of known and suspected chapters of these organizations and their sources of funding. They listed the number of Protestant churches operating in the country, and spoke of the great potential these congregations presented for interfaith conflict. Particular attention was devoted to the "destructive" methods employed by Scientology and the Jehovah's witnesses. After half a dozen such presentations, the organizers noted that the combined efforts of those in attendance had managed to keep the religious situation under control over the previous three years, and concluded by encouraging continued vigilance.

All of this served to ensure that local branches of government and law enforcement use, in the words of Gellner, a unitary *conceptual currency* to enact their public mandate in the religious sphere (Gellner 1983:21). Few of the officials that attended were likely to encounter the religious organizations that they discussed in the daily course of discharging their duties, and yet they diligently noted the concepts and rhetoric that define the official politics in the religious sphere. Such activities constitute most of the business of governance

Conclusion: "Defending" Secularism

The sum total of the policies covered in this chapter is to redefine freedom of conscience as freedom *from* non-traditional religious groups. Through these policies, and the various discourses that inform and legitimate them, the regimes seek to depict certain expressions of religious freedom as an attack on the rights of citizens, and present the state's authority to defend rights as a mandate to defend the citizenry from these destructive sects and extremist groups. In such a context, authorities speak frankly and without any irony of the ways in which heterodox groups "violate" the freedom of religions:

> We found twenty-seven violations of the law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" on the part of leaders and adherents of non-traditional religious associations. We confiscated materials propagating radical religious ideas, as well as the creeds of non-traditional religious associations. Alongside [the doctrines of] the Spiritual Administration of Muslims, jihadism is being propagated among the believing part of the population through active use of visual agitation, speeches and sermons.[56]

The "qualities" of heterodox groups that I have identified in this chapter contribute to this argument that non-traditional religious groups impinge on the rights of citizens, harming both the individual and society. Thus, the chief

[56] Anonymous. 2008. "Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan Will Submit a Report on All Religious Associations and Small Religious Groups of the Country." *Caravan,* July 29. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.caravan.kz/news/minyust-rk-predstavit-otchet-ob-izuchenii-vsekh-religioznykh-obedinenijj-i-malochislennykh-religioznykh-grupp-strany-balieva-242420/).

researcher officer at the Research and Analytical Center for Religious Affairs in Kazskhtan's Ministry of Justice, asserted that "among a multitude of religious associations, churches, and missions, a number of such organizations have appeared, whose activities run counter to the secular laws of our state, the doctrines of which directly or indirectly call for violence (physical or spiritual) over people who are not in their organization."[57] Law enforcement agencies "pay special attention to religious associations with sectarian content that do not recognize traditional religions and whose activities violate various rights of citizens, including health and religious freedom."[58] And criminal cases are even brought against missionaries and pastors for promoting "religious discrimination" when they preach their beliefs. One member of the Unification Church, for example, was charged "for propagating the superiority of one group of citizens over others on religious grounds"[59] after delivering religious lectures in Almaty, Kazakstan.

Again, these overarching discourses are applied to both "destructive sects"

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[57] Novikova, G. 2009. "New Religious Movements of a Pseudo-Christian Orientation." *Zakon*, April 21. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30406775#pos=1;-107).

[58] Anonymous. 2009. "In Almaty Law Enforcement Agencies Actively Suppress the Activities of Destructive Religious Sects." *Zakon*, 5 June. Retrieved November 6, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/139985-v-almaty-pravookhranitelnye-organy.html).

[59] Report on the Situation with Human Rights in Kazakhstan for 2008. 2009. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.*

and “extremist groups,” and transcend the myriad state and religious institutions that seek to reign in religious pluralism. In the chapters that follow, I will pursue each of these two main discourses on the “threat” of pluralism in more depth — destructive sects that ostensibly erode the link between national and religious boundaries, and extremist groups ostensibly that sharpen these boundaries and threaten to radicalize the population within them. The methods that I have discussed in this chapter contribute variously to each of these broader discourses, and I will explore them through more cases as I examine separate state responses to “destructive sects” and “extremist groups.”

CHAPTER 7

Destructive Sects and Totalitarian Cults

Heretic and sectarian movements are like poisonous mushrooms
that appear at the roots of true religions.

Nam, "New Religious Movements and their Influence on the
National and State Identity of Modern Kazakhstan"

"It goes without saying that if a religious group is 'non-traditional,' it is also destructive."[1] That is how the pastor of one Protestant church in Kazakhstan described the regime's attitude toward "destructive sects." The church had already seen its former pastor placed under house arrest, ostensibly for rendering spiritual and psychological harm to one of its members. During my interview, the current pastor, whom I call Daniyar, made clear that any activity that heterodox religious groups engage in can be labelled destructive, simply because that activity is performed by groups that operate independently of traditional affiliations.

Even the simple act of prayer, considered traditional and healthy when

[1] Interview with a pastor of a Presbyterian church in Astana, July 22, 2014.

performed by members of orthodox religions, is portrayed as destructive when practiced by heterodox groups.

> The key term is "destroy [razrushit']." Anything destructive sects do destroys traditions. This includes praying, singing, anything. [The authorities say] "They destroy traditions." If we pray for a person, and that person accepts God, they say, "You see, they prayed for that person. They influenced him." Anything that a traditional religious group might do without earning criticism, it all gets explained in negative terms when done by "destructive sects."[2]

And Daniyar was quick to point out that these discourses converge in the pro-government and pro-Russia media outlets that dominate the region, which seek to paint a vivid picture of the destabilizing effect of "destructive sects" on society.

> Two days ago, there was a prayer on the main square of Kiev by Christians of all denominations [during the 2014 Maidan square protests, which eventually led to Ukraine's regime change and ongoing civil war] to pray for the current situation. There were Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants from various denominations. Our media outlets specifically covered the Protestant worshippers, and said, "You see, those Protestants, they are fueling national conflict. They are the ones responsible for the situation in Ukraine."[3]

Thus, Daniyar saw the terms "non-traditional religious group" and "destructive sect" as interchangeable. At the same tame, he also saw the label "destructive" as politically motivated, serving to associate religious heterodoxy with other forms of dissent and dissidence that the Kazakhstan's regime sought to demonize.

[2] Interview with a pastor of a Presbyterian church in Astana, July 22, 2014.
[3] Ibid.

Thus, he tacitly recognized a distinct discourse on “destructive” religious activities that served to distinguish certain forms of heterodoxy as deserving particular state scrutiny.

In this chapter, I examine the rationale and strategies of power that determine how and where the state employs the discourses on “destructive sects” and “totalitarian cults.” I argue that the religious and political establishments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan deploy these discourses strategically, if not always consistently. Distinguishing destructive sects from other non-traditional groups serves to make the heterodoxy more legible (Scott 1998) to both the state and the public.

As I will show in this chapter, the labels “destructive,” “totalitarian,” “sect,” and “cult” are not used as precise and mutually-exclusive categories, which apply to some groups and not others based on technical criteria. Rather, the terms are used as moral injunctions that police the boundaries of acceptable religious heterodoxy. The labels can be applied and rescinded in order to discipline heterodox religious groups. In addition, distinguishing particularly malevolent forms of religious heterodoxy serves to make arbitrary and often erratic uses of state power appear as consistent enforcement strategies.

In a context where states have limited capacity to regulate all forms of

religious heterodoxy, distinguishing various grades of heterodoxy gives the appearance as though state actions in the religious sphere are calibrated to a determinable metric of threat. Terms such as destructive sect and totalitarian cult (as well as extremism and terrorism, which I address in the subsequent chapter) serve to establish this metric symbolically, even if they are applied without particular concern for consistency. As I will show, clamping down on dissidence is more a form of public theater than it is a consistent practice of governance. I will first examine how the discourses on destructive sects and totalitarian cults serves to make both religious heterodoxy and religious policy more legible, and then I will turn to various cases and enforcement strategies that bear out these discourses.

I. Making the "Destructive" Character of Sects Legible

The terms "destructive sect" and "totalitarian cult" have no precise definition in the rhetoric of the regime, but rather vaguely connote the pernicious role that such sects ostensibly play in society. Some definitions have been offered by experts in support of religious policy, but there has been little interest in establishing a single, conventional definition for either label. These terms do not

derive their utility from their technical precision, after all, but rather from their connotations and associations. And as Pastror Daniyar pointed out, any non-traditional religious group can be labelled “destructive,” according to the circumstances.

Nevertheless, two common features define destructive sects in the rhetoric of the regimes: First, they are *destructive*, i.e. they have a negative impact on the well-being of their followers. Second, they are duplicitous, i.e. they only use religion as a facade for ulterior motives.

First, I will address the supposedly destructive nature of sects and cults. One scholar of religion in Kyrgyzstan defined destructive sects in the following manner:

> Destructive Sect: A variety of cults that subvert the natural, harmonious state of the personality - spiritual, psychological, and physical — as well as the creative traditions prevailing in the social structures, culture, belief system and society as a whole. By their nature, destructive sects oppose traditional creeds, although they frequently bear certain outward similarities with them (Galkina 2013:498).

This definition offers a Durkheimian analysis of religion, in which individuals are social atoms that can either bond harmoniously with each other, or repel chaotically. It contrasts creative religious traditions from destructive sects precisely according to this atomistic understanding of individuals in society.

Traditional religions are presented as those that encourage individuals to bond together in a coherent and harmonious social whole (a social whole that conveniently submits to the ruling order). Destructive sects, in contrast, "fundamentally oppose" tradition, and by extension oppose social order and stability.

Thus, while non-traditional religions are not traditional *to the region*, they are traditional somewhere. In the rhetoric of the regime, they play a valid, "creative" and stabilizing role in other societies, but simply demand special safeguards when imported to new regions. (Although as I noted in previous chapters, the distinction between traditional and non-traditional cannot be understood as a euphemism for *native* vs. *foreign*, despite the regimes' rhetoric). Destructive sects, in contrast, are regarded as fundamentally pernicious. They are portrayed as playing no virtuous role in any society, and thought to prey off traditional religions.

The concept of a totalitarian cult, meanwhile, implies a closed religious organization that regulates all aspects of its members' lives. For example, in discussing one such cult, *Allya Ayat*, one expert described the group in the following terms:

By its structure, this organization is a totalitarian sect, completely

> subordinating its followers to the leadership. Allya Ayat lacks official registration as a religious organization, and thus all activities carried out by the organization's supporters are illegal. In this sect, parishioners are subjected to psychological treatment, as a result of which they fall into psychological dependence on their leaders.[4]

Totalitarian cults are portrayed as exerting especially thorough control over their membership, requiring in particular that members cut all ties with friends and family beyond the group and restrict their social world to the membership of the group. The term totalitarian cult can thus be applied to any group that is seen as particularly insular and controlling of its members.

The *Allya Ayat* cult, incidentally, represents one of the few "homegrown" cults in Kazakhstan, started in a rural area of East Kazakhstan by a simple farm hand who "imagined himself nearly equal with the Almighty."[5] The founder of *Allya Ayat* supposedly called for "the burning of the Koran and the radical rejection of both Islam and Christianity."[6] The group was quickly outlawed by the authorities, and the leader died within two years of the group's establishment, but the cult has apparently survived his death and continues to operate under

[4] Anonymous. 2008. "Sects in the Big City-2." *Zakon*, July 3. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/106355-sekty-v-bolshom-gorode-2.html).

[5] Gorbunov, Sergey. 2010. "We Have to Help People Orient Themselves in Confessional Diversity." Interview with Daulet Zakaryanov, Deputy Head of the regional Department of Internal Policy. *Zakon*, July 9. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/177719-d.-zakarjanov-nuzhno-gotovit-ljudejj-k.html).

[6] Anonymous. 2008. "Sects in the Big City-2." *Zakon*, July 3. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/106355-sekty-v-bolshom-gorode-2.html).

new names.

The second common thread running through official discourses on destructive sects and totalitarian cults is their supposed duplicitous character. Whereas non-traditional religions may challenge the authority of traditional religious groups, the veracity of their faith is seldom questioned. The leadership of sects and cults, in contrast, are often presented as merely using a religious guise to pursue ulterior motives. As the Russian Orthodox Patriarch from MoscowBishop of Astana in Kazakhstan argued in a speech to Kazakhstan's Congress of World Religions:

> Sects are a disease to society. Under the mask of religion, activities are carried out that often stray far from religious goals and principles. There are sects that forbid injecting sick children [with medicine]; others do not let young people serve in the army. These are anti-civil, destructive manifestations. Throughout the world, 'Christianity' customarily refers to representatives of traditional religions — Catholics, Orthodox and Lutherans; the [other denominations] we refer to as sects.[7]

Destructive sects and totalitarian cults are seen as lacking genuine religious dogmas and principles, and instead follow fabricated dogmas intended to defraud their followers or otherwise render social and psychological harm. Experts have declared that "faiths as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of the

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[7] Il'inskaya, Elena. 2011. "Since Independence in Kazakhstan, Friendship and Understanding Between People of Different Faiths and Nationalities Have Formed." Interview with Aleksandr, the Bishop of Astana in Kazakhstan. *Inform,* April 27. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (http://www.inform.kz/arb/article/2375192).

Reverend Moon, the Church of Scientology…create transnational empires and manage very large finances and means of psychological influence."[8] Members of Grace Presbyterian Church in Astana have even been accused of "spying for the benefit of other states," which according to Kazakhstan's security officials is "not a unique case" among Protestant churches.[9] Thus, destructive sects are depicted as having a variety of motivations for propagating their ministry in the region, but none of them related to the genuine practice of their beliefs.

When attempting to distinguish totalitarian cults from destructive sects, one Kazakh expert defined the two concepts precisely in relation to the kind of ulterior motives that guide their activities:

> I would like to dwell on the definitions of the concepts "totalitarian sect" and "destructive cult." To put it briefly, the totalitarian sect is an organization that has two goals - power and money. A destructive cult is understood as an organization that destroys the personality, family, society and state.[10]

In both common usage and application, however, the terms "non-traditional

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[8] Tuzov, Alexander and Bermet Malikova. 2009. "How Can We Save Secular Kyrgyzstan?" *Vecherniy Bishkek,* November 4. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2009/11/04/polit/1.html).

[9] Djaldinov, Askar. 2008. "Deceptive 'Grace.' Foreign Spies Worked Under the Roof of the Church." *Zakon,* January 29. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/102922-obmanchivaja-blagodat.-pod-kryshejj.html).

[10] Nurseitova, Torgyn. 2012. "The New Law Has Positively Influenced the Religious Situation in the Country. Interview Kairat Lama Sharif, Chairman of the Agency of Religious Affairs in the Republic of Kazakhstan. *Zakon,* October 22. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31276559#pos=3;73).

religion," "destructive cult," and "totalitarian sect" overlap heavily. And as the quote above demonstrates, the terms "sect" and "cult" in particular are used interchangeably, so that officials also speak of "destructive cults" and "totalitarian sects."

Galkina's definition of destructive sects above even acknowledges that "destructive sects" may share "certain outward similarities" with traditional religions. In keeping with Pastor Daniyar's observations, this contrast between outward appearance and underlying motivation gives the authorities sufficient leeway to label any activities as "destructive," depending on which religious group is performing them. As I will show, nevertheless, there is a rationale to the application of the labels "destructive sect" and "totalitarian cult," even if the terms do not constitute logically-delineated, mutually-exclusive categories within the broader set of non-traditional religions.

The Logic of Labels

Distinguishing between various grades of heterodoxy can help the state to signal its enforcement priorities, and make its enforcement strategies appear more consistent. The label "destructive" can be applied to any religious group that has has drawn particular state scrutiny and censure, presenting these often arbitrary

enforcement strategies as calculated responses to the most significant risks to the public. Furthermore, the state can signal to heterodox groups the boundary of what behavior is permitted and what behavior is forbidden by publicly applying and rescinding these labels in response to the ever-evolving dynamic between orthodox and heterodox religious groups.

Thus, the labels “destructive,” “totalitarian,” “sect,” and “cult” represent a mix between arbitrary and calculated uses of state authority, calibrated to both technical criteria and pure discrimination. In this respect, the distinction between non-traditional religion and destructive sect harkens back to the rhetoric used by the Soviet security services during the Stalinist purges. As Solzhenitsyn pointed out so vividly, the regime used various euphemisms and labels to distinguished between several grades of dissidents, but applied the labels without great concern for logic or consistency:

> Of course, the OSO [review boards that levied sentences on political prisoners] itself also needed for convenience some kind of operational shorthand, but for that purpose it worked out on its own a dozen "letter" articles which made operations very much simpler. It wasn't necessary, when they were used, to cudgel your brains trying to make things fit the formulations of the Code. And they were few enough to be easily remembered by a child. Some of them we have already described: ASA — Anti-Soviet Agitation; KRD — Counter-Revolutionary Activity; KRTD — Counter-Revolutionary Trotskyite Activity (And that "T" made the life of a zek [prisoner] in camp much harder) (Solzhenitsyn 2003).

As Solzhenitsyn recounts, incurring the "T" had less to do with the underlying nature of one's "counter-revolutionary activities." Famously, such convictions had little to do with loyalty to the state at all, but more to do with the young Soviet state's need to purge all autonomous centers of civic association and authority from society. And to this end, the state needed to publicly demonstrate the many gradations of "enemies of the state."

For the Soviet authorities, Trotsky embodied the highest grade of public enemy. Couched in a history of populist anti-Semitism, Trotsky served as a magical fetish for the Soviet regime to denote who deserved the greatest wrath of the regime. Historians would never be able to make sense of the label if they sought to link it to Trotsky or his ideas. Rather, Trotskyites were meant to be pariahs even among prisoners, thus ensuring discipline among those with seemingly nothing left to lose. The "T" showed that there is always more to lose, and could be incurred simply by annoying one's prosecutors, especially with claims to rights and due process.

Although the contemporary regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have little need for or interest in purges and repression comparable to those propagated by Stalin, they do continue a direct lineage of Soviet statecraft that makes particular utility of labels for dissidence. The contemporary regimes have

their own shorthand for varieties of religious heterodoxy: "non-traditional religion," "destructive sect," "totalitarian cult." As with the distinction between Counter-Revolutionary Activity and Counter-Revolutionary *Trotskyite* Activity, the distinction between non-traditional religions and destructive sects serves to distinguish fine gradations of dissidence — not in the actual quality of a particular religious belief, practice, or ministry, but in the degree to which officials wish to present that religious group as an enemy of the state and the public.

"Destructive sects" are not merely presented as a form of religious heterodoxy that requires regulation and due diligence. In the discourse of the establishment, destructive sects destroy the very fabric of society, as well as the psyches of their individual members. Destructive sects are more closely invoked in proximity to extremism, fundamentalism, and even terrorism, even if they are not directly accused of terrorist activities. Policy documents assert, for example, that "there is increasing alarm over the propagation of extremist and fundamentalist ideas, expanding the activity of different destructive religious and terrorist groups."[11] And as with Islamic extremism, the regimes express

[11] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree on State Regulation of Religious Sphere. May 6, 2006 No. 324.

concern over the perceived vulnerability of youth to influence by destructive sects.

> As a result the government's passive attitude toward this problem in the first years of the formation of an independent republic, in combination with insufficient religious literacy of population, many of the citizens of Kazakhstan, especially the representatives of the young generation, fell under the influence of destructive religious forces.[12]

Both states have thus designed special programs to combat "manifestations of religious extremism, fundamentalism and to the destructive flows of religions."[13] I will discuss the nature of such programs further in the chapter.

Government officials in Kyrgyzstan invoked the threat of destructive sects to justify stricter registration requirements for all non-traditional religious groups. In the run up to passing a new law on religious organizations, officials from the SARA explained the motivations for stricter registration requirements in numerous interviews and public statements:

> The new standard requires not less than 200 signatures; in the current legislation, only ten are needed. This is a very strict measure, but, in my view, this approach will protect our citizens from the active expansion of destructive, totalitarian dogmas and the ruinous interaction of different occult and quasi-religious sects.[14]

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[12] Anonymous. Dossier on the Draft Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Religious Activities and Religious Associations." September 1, 2011.

[13] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree on State Regulation of Religious Sphere. May 6, 2006 No. 324.

[14] Benliyan, Amaliya and Azamat Kasybekov. 2008. "God Sees Everything, but Waits." Interview with the Director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs under the government of the Kyrgyz

Such statements draw tacit distinctions between non-traditional religious groups and destructive sects, but still invoke the threat presented by the latter to justify blanket policies that impact the former.

While the discourse on "destructive sects" is often left in the abstract, it also has concrete applications, denoting groups or activities that have aroused particular ire in the authorities. The label may be incurred due to the methods of recruitment or proselytizing that a group employs, to an especially rapid pace of growth, or simply due to a lack of sufficient deference and docility when interacting with the state. And as with the Soviet state, officials in the SCRA and SARA have wide latitude when employing the term "destructive." The application of these distinctions need not follow any clear logic, nor are the labels permanent and binding. Nevertheless, the regime consistently points to particular groups as exemplars of destructive sects and totalitarian cults. Below, I briefly address one such group, which has come to represent the quintessential "destructive sect" in the rhetoric of the regimes – the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Jehovah's Witnesses: Archetype of a Destructive Sect

Republic Kanybek Osmonaliev. *Vecherniy Bishkek*, July 11. Retrieved December, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2008/07/11/linia/1.html).

The Jehovah's Witnesses established themselves in the region already during the Soviet period, and have long been a target of religious animosity and oppression. Whereas many of the religious organizations that began to grow after independence enjoyed a grace period of limited regime scrutiny, the Jehovah's Witnesses already faced a legacy of pressure from the Soviet state. Individual congregations face pressure from local authorities due to their door-to-door proselytizing and communal housing for some members, and some states have introduced legislation that specifically targets the religion as a whole. Russia finally banned the Jehovah's Witnesses outright in April of 2017 as an "extremist" organization, and began expropriating property that belonged to individual congregations.[15]

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan both saw a great increase in Jehovah's Witness congregations in the early years of independence. According to one member of a such a congregation in Almaty, the group boasts over 30,000 members across all of Kazakhstan.[16] Due to such large numbers neither state has been able to deny the Jehovah's Witnesses registration based on membership criteria, and the

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[15] Higgins, Andrew. 2017. "Russia Bans Jehovah's Witnesses, Calling It an Extremist Group." *New York Times*, April 20. Retrieved October 25, 2017 (https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/world/europe/russia-bans-jehovahs-witnesses.html?_r=0).

[16] Interview with member of the Almaty Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, July 17, 2014.

group is even growing in both countries. Nevertheless, both states have sought to hamper such growth by other means.

In Kyrgyzstan, the state has largely pursued the Jehovah's Witnesses financially, as revealed in both court documents and in an interview with a member of the Bishkek congregation's leadership. In 2011, the state deemed the Jehovah's Witnesses an employer of their clergy, and therefore subject to paying taxes on all revenue to state medical insurance programs and the social fund [social security]. The court ruled that the Jehovah's Witnesses owed the government 614,718 som (approximately 170,000 USD at the time) and back payments on that amount totaling 388,2017 som (around 86,000 USD).[17]

In an interview however, a leader in the Bishkek congregation attributed these fines to the state's unease with two characteristics of the Jehovah's Witnesses: their unwillingness to engage in military service, and the communal housing they offer to members of their congregation.[18] Following Soviet conscription practices, all young men must serve two years in the military in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, or seek alternative forms of service. The

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[17] Kyrgyz Republic. 2011. The Verdict of the Judicial College on Administrative and Economic Affairs of the Supreme Court. December 13, No. ED-700/10MB N/P N 6-195/11 ED. Presiding judge Alybaeva N.A., judges Arapbaeva N.M., Osmonalieva K.T. and the secretary of the court session: Bekenov T.

[18] Interview with leader of the Bishkek Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, July 8, 2014.

Jehovah's Witnesses have been subject to great harassment from the state because of their principled opposition to such service. Furthermore, the Jehovah's Witnesses offer a limited amount of housing in dormitories and small units for families. This communal housing arrangement has fueled state scrutiny of the Jehovah's Witnesses as a destructive cult.

The same factors have led to state scrutiny in Kazakhstan, but members of the congregation in Almaty placed more emphasized on their distribution of literature and door-to-door proselytizing as reasons for pressure from the state. Local observers have depicted such active proselytizing methods, and the success they breed, as evidence of the group's destructive character:

> The "Jehovah's Witnesses" are listed by the Russian Orthodox Church as a totalitarian and very dangerous sect, and are currently banned in Moscow… Approximately 700 centers have been established in various countries around the world in order to monitor the activities of sects, which are very harmful to the psychological health of their citizens. This sect has firmly established itself in Kazakhstan, and intends to build a huge center in Esik city near Almaty, including all the services necessary for successful expansion.[19]

My respondent in the Almaty congregation depicted state enforcement strategies as mostly seeking to dissuade Jehovah's Witness congregations from active

[19] Sapar Ali, B and Eldesbay T. 2010. "Religious Situation in Kazakhstan. Structural Reform of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kazakhstan Cannot be Delayed." *Central Asia,* March 15. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1268604000).

proselytizing, and less interested in banning the group outright.

Finally, my respondent noted that the Kazakhstani state has viewed the group's very professionalism as evidence of it's subversive nature. The Almaty congregation maintains a legal office that monitors changes in the legal and policy environment, and studies ways to expedite registration of new Jehovah's Witness congregations across the country.[20] The very presence of such a dedicated office, which in principle is intended to keep the Jehovah's Witnesses within the bounds of the law, is perceived with suspicion by the state. In this respect as in many others, the very features that have made the Jehovah's Witnesses a strong and resilient heterodox movement have also lead to a reputation as the quintessential destructive sect.

II. The Rule of Law vs. the Rule of Rulers

The governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan tend to treat "destructive sects" not as a direct security threat, but rather as a covert threat that merely appears outwardly docile. The regimes frequently present such groups as using religion as a means to subvert national traditions and "spiritual sovereignty," but within

[20] Interview with member of the Almaty Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, July 7, 2014.

the bounds of law. As I have noted throughout, state officials see "destructive sects" as taking advantage of overly-liberal religious policies to propagate subversive ministries:

> The liberal legislation of Kazakhstan today does not actually regulate the activities of totalitarian sects, followers of neopaganism, esoteric, pseudo-medical teachings with elements of mysticism and occultism. This sphere of spiritual life falls out of the state's field of vision. Is it for this reason that new messiahs slowly but surely appear within Kazakhstan's "market of revolting souls," introducing and honing their own philosophies and worldviews into the minds of people almost unhindered. And they act often legally, under the guise of various kinds of public associations.[21]

In the view of these officials, it should not be so easy for formally law-abiding organizations to engage in "destructive" activities. If heterodox sects are able to undermine "spiritual sovereignty" entirely within the bounds of law, then clearly the law itself has failed in its public mandate, and must be strengthened.

Both states have thus responded to this "nascent threat" through legislation and litigation intended to bring the rule of law more in line with the populist mandate of the ruling elite. Through the court, the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan claim their mandate to protect the rights and well-being of their citizens, plaintiffs come forward with claims of harm at the hands of religious

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[21] Kuryatov, Vladimir. 2008. "Sleep of Reason, or Awakening of Monsters. Liberal Legislation Left Kazakhstan to the Mercy of Sectarians of all Stripes." *Central Asia*, June 16. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1216204020).

groups, as well as at the hands of the state. In this effort as in others, however, President Nazarbayev's regime has consolidated far greater control over Kazakhstan's legal branch of government than has any presidential administration in Kyrgyzstan. Below, I will first examine Kazakhstan's recent campaign of litigation against Evangelical Churches, and then contrast two different cases against the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon (a.k.a. the Moonies) in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the latter of which I attended personally in the summer of 2014.

Evangelical Churches

The primary front in legal battles is that of registration. In both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the state and religious groups alike have used the courts to challenge the legal status of congregations and denominations. Groups that have been denied the right to register through the SARA or SCRA appeal that decision through the courts, or contest the very legality of the need to register, while the state at times builds cases to void the registration of active religious groups. All heterodox groups are required to renew their registration at regular intervals, but at times the state may choose to void a particular group's registration early based on real or manufactured violations of the laws governing religious freedom.

While the struggle over registration encompasses a wide range of religious groups, I will focus in particular on evangelical churches, which have been singled out among other Protestant denominations as "destructive sects" in the region. Evangelical groups range in scope from small prayer groups that meet in private homes (but are deemed congregations by the authorities because of their religious activities, and thus require registration) to large congregations. While many evangelical churches are unaffiliated, the regime frequently targets evangelical Baptist groups, drawing off a longstanding animosity toward Baptists during the Soviet period.

The governments of both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have used various legal means to suspend the activities of religious groups. In most cases, religious groups simply fail to meet the registration criteria, particularly the mandated number of followers. In other cases, however, the state may draw on diverse reasons to initiate litigation against registered groups. In Shymkent, Kazakhstan, for example, one congregation was ordered to suspend services because of insufficient fire prevention systems.[22] While this may seem a perfectly reasonable requirement, it can only be understood as politically motivated in a country

[22] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2012. Decision of the Specialized Inter-District Economic Court of the South-Kazakhstan region. June 21, No. 2e-2716/12. Presiding judge Klyshbaeva Z., secretary of the court session Umarov N.K.

where a major proportion (quite possibly the majority) of residential and commercial buildings fail to meet formal building codes. Non-Traditional religious groups have also been brought to court for taxes owed to the state,[23] as well as for allowing minors to attend services without the direct written permission of both parents.[24] When the religious organization or individuals are found guilty in such cases, the most common punishment is fines rather than criminal prosecution for wrong doing.

Legal battles over registration play out differently from case to case even among evangelical Christians, especially when comparing cases in Kazakhstan to those in Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan, a number of Evangelical churches have refused to seek registration out of principle, possibly recognizing that their requests will be denied, and that even attempting to register will only serve to lend legitimacy to the government's religious policies. In one such case, a small congregation that met in a private home refused to seek registration with the state, arguing that, "registration of the church is contrary to the principles of their

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[23] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2002. Resolution of the Supervisory Board of the South Kazakhstan Regional Court. March 21. Presiding officer Nurbekov M.N., judges of the supervisory board Agadilova G., Kaldarova A.B., Kayypzhanov N.U., Rysbekov T.P., Sambetova G.K. and Yuzkov V.A.

[24] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2010. The decision of the Court of the North-Kazakhstan region on the Case of an Administrative Offence. January 20, No. 3-28. Presiding judge Izmukhamedova O.A., assistant to the district prosecutor Baitusova I.E.

faith, since the church is separate from the state."[25] The owner of the home was brought to court for carrying out religious activities without registration. Despite his adamant claims that he was not a pastor, but merely a member of a faith group, the court fined him, stating that "no one has the right to refuse to fulfill civil duties on grounds of his religious beliefs, except for cases provided for by law."[26]

In Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, most Evangelical churches have sought registration, and have sued the state to contest the SCRA's decision in cases where they were denied, based on requirements such as a minimum number of founders. The courts are far more politically autonomous in Kyrgyzstan, and have thus offered heterodox groups a means of recourse when they have been denied registration. The evangelical group *Tynchtyk Tuzuuculor* for example, successfully sued for registration when the SCRA refused to process its application. The court ruled that actions of the SCRA were illegal, and that "the state body had an obligation to register the Association of Evangelical Religious

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[25] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2011. Decision of the Specialized Administrative Court of Temirtau city of Karaganda region on Administrative Violations Against Yantzen Ivan Isakovich. December 21, No. 3-2197/2011. Judge of the Specialized Administrative Court of Temirtau, Kirillova E.A., prosecutor Rakhimbekova D.T.

[26] Ibid.

Organizations *Tynchtyk Tuzuuculor Alliances*."[27] Needless to say, the courts do not always rule in favor of religious groups in such cases, but such examples do serve to demonstrate the greater autonomy of the legal system in Kyrgyzstan.

Individual Baptists in Kyrgyzstan have also successfully used the courts to fight for the right to bury their relatives in village cemeteries. A number of high profile cases emerged in rural regions, in which villagers refused to allow a convert to Christianity to be buried in the village cemetery, which suddenly became a "Muslim" cemetery by virtue of the very prospect that a Baptist might be buried there. In one case, residents even exhumed the body of a Baptist villager, incited by local imams.[28] The family of the deceased Baptist turned to the courts for justice, but was awarded only a partial victory. Though the body of the deceased had gone permanently missing, the presiding judge handed down only a commuted sentence to the men charged in the case.[29]

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[27] Kyrgyz Republic. 2007. The Verdict of the Judicial College on Administrative and Economic Affairs of the Supreme Court. November 1, Case No. AD-000081/07MO. Presiding judge Davletov A., and judges Alpieva A. and Mukhamedzhanov A.

[28] Bayram, Mushfig. 2016. "Kyrgyzstan: Mobs Twice Exhume Body – With Impunity?" *Forum 18*, October 20. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2226).

[29] Bayram, Mushfig. 2017. "Kyrgyzstan: No Effective Punishment for Body Snatching" *Forum 18*, January 20. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2248).

The Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon

Two cases involving the Unification Church serve to demonstrate the different degree to which the government of Kazakhstan seeks to use the courts as a political tool, versus the government of Kyrgyzstan. Both cases represent appeals of earlier decisions, in which the plaintiffs were representatives of the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon (commonly known as the *Moonies*), who had previously been ruled against in lower courts. The charges in each case, however, were quite different.

In Kyrgyzstan, the State Commission for Religious Affairs, in conjunction with local government officials, had initiated proceedings against a charitable organization that they claimed was a front for the Unification Church. The goal of their case was to force the organization to seek registration as a religious group. A lower court had ruled in favor of the government's position, and members of the charitable organization appealed that decision. I attended this appeal on July 24th, 2013.

In Kazakhstan, the state also brought charges against what they claimed was a covert Moonie church, but the officials charged the leader of this group with inciting religious animosity. A lower court had already ruled that the plaintiff, Ms. Drenicheva, had violated the law on religious freedom, which "prohibits the

propaganda of inferiority of citizens on the basis of their attitude to class and clan membership, deliberately, by engaging in public lectures that promoted the inferiority of citizens on the basis of their clan and class."[30] In other words, the plaintiff had been found guilty of propagating the superiority of one set of religious beliefs over others by virtue of speaking of her faith. She appealed that decision on January 9th, 2009.

The difference of tone in the two court proceedings is striking. In Kazakhstan, the more tightly controlled prosecutors office sought to use the laws and the courts to attack heterodox religious ideas directly, declaring them in violation of the nation's values and legal principles. A special witness brought in to testify against Drenicheva stated that the ideas of the Unification Church "are in clear contradiction with the official state policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the need to cultivate the social ideal of responsible, active citizens, actively participating in the creation of their own destiny, and complying with Kazakhstan's legal and moral norms."[31] A witness also confessed that in the previous case, he had been pressured into giving false testimony against the

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[30] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2009. The verdict of Almaty Almalinsky District Court on the Case of Elizaveta Drenicheva. January 9. Presiding judge Keikibasova Z.B., secretary of the court session Muhamet A.M., and the state prosecutor Mambetbaeva N.N.

[31] Ibid.

plaintiff, declaring that "he was allegedly humiliated while listening to a lecture [by Drenicheva], which allegedly belittled his parents' dignity."[32]

Finally, in a moment of exceedingly dense and ironic testimony, the government's expert witness spoke at length on the fabricated nature of the Unification Church's doctrines, by virtue of their deviation from traditional Christian doctrines:

> In fact, under the reproduction of fragmentary biblical episodes, which were voiced by the lecturer arbitrarily, with reference to the interpretation of the canvas and the causes of the actions of pseudo-historical (mythological) heroes (God, Adam, Eve, the snake tempter, archangels, Jesus and his disciples, Satan, etc.) and in modernized terminology (often of the slang type), as well as in drawing parallels between biblical episodes and examples from everyday modern life, the lecturer pursued the goal of bringing the listeners' understanding in line with her artificially-constructed mythology, substituting meanings, false analogies, logical manipulation of cause-and-effect dependencies on the understanding of the nature and essence of a person, the nature and content of the relationship between the sexes (male and female), and of relations in the family — between husband and wife and between parents and children.[33]

The case in Kyrgyzstan also delved into broader arguments on the destructive nature of the Unification Church, but the state primarily sought to argue that the charitable foundation is a front for Unification Church, and therefore must register as religious organization. The judges requested clarification from officials

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

of the SCRA as to precisely what destructive activities the Moonies engage in, and the officials obliged by mentioning the notorious Moonie mass marriages, and asserting that many young girls had been forced into marriage through this practice. The case even took on an ethnic character, with the judges asking whether such practices were limited to the (small but significant) Korean minority in Kyrgyzstan, and SCRA officials declaring that it was in fact young Kyrgyz girls who were being married off to Korean men.[34]

In general, however, the panel of three female judges that presided in the case pushed back heavily against any uncorroborated claims by the SCRA or other state officials, and even peppered SCRA officials with questions as to the nature of their expertise. One judge aggressively questioned an official from the SCRA over his qualifications, asking "What is your educational background? What qualifications do you have to render such expert analysis in this case?"[35] Outside of the court room, the SCRA officials griped that such scrutiny from the judges may be a sign that the Moonies had paid off the judges in advance, hoping for a favorable decision.

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[34] I personally attended this case at the Pervomayskiy Regional Court on July 24, 2013. The case was an appeal by the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification of a ruling to ban all organizations associated with the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon, rendered by the Sverlovskiy District Court on February 22nd 2012.

[35] Ibid.

These cases exemplify a broader tendency in the how the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan seek to use the courts in their efforts to regulate religious heterodoxy. Whereas the government of Kazakhstan tends to pursue dissident groups and individuals through the courts, charging them with violating the law, Kyrgyzstan's government tends to avoid such litigation, relying on the courts primarily to defend its policies and decisions when challenged by heterodox groups. Neither strategy guarantees that the government will prevail in such cases. Ultimately, the case in Kazakhstan was ruled in favor of the plaintiff, i.e. in favor of the Unification Church, while the case in Kyrgyzstan was ruled in favor of the state. The Kazakhstani government's case was undone by its own efforts to manipulate the court proceedings, pressuring witnesses to give false testimony and relying on expert testimony that treated the "destructive" nature of Unification Church doctrine as self-evident. In contrast, the state prevailed in the case in Kyrgyzstan, in part due to its more modest ambitions. The charitable fund in question would be allowed to seek registration as a religious organization (although there was no guarantee it would be granted registration), but it could not continue to operate without such registration. These outcomes demonstrate that the courts retain a degree of political autonomy in both states, but nevertheless demonstrate the somewhat

different role that the courts play in enforcing the religious policies of both countries.

III. Brainwashing by Other Names: Discourses on Religious Heterodoxy as a Form of Psychological and Moral Harm

Both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have employed psychological discourses to crack down on the activities of certain "destructive sects." These discourses claim that converts have been subjected to various forms of psychological influence, which they typically refer to as *hypnosis* or the more elaborate term *neuro-linguisitic programming* (or NLP). As one pastor asserted, both of these terms are used to shed a nefarious light on otherwise ordinary religious acts such as prayer: "We speak; my words have an influence on you; therefore I have reprogrammed you with my words."[36] Nevertheless, both regimes have actively propagated psychological discourses on religious activity in order to erode the legal standing of both heterodox groups and their members.

Kyrgyzstan's 2012 law on religious freedom allows for the ban or religious organizations that are found to use of hypnosis, psychotropic drugs, and other acts "deemed damaging to the morals and health of citizens":

[36] Interview with a pastor of a Presbyterian church in Astana, July 22, 2014.

> Grounds for the liquidation or ban of a religious organization or mission in court include: 1) the violation of public security and public order, or undermining the security of the state; 2) actions aimed at the forcible change of the constitutional order and the violation of the integrity of the Kyrgyz Republic; 3) the creation of armed formations; 4) actions that, in accordance with the law, are deemed damaging to the morals and health of citizens, including the use in connection with their religious activities of narcotic and psychotropic drugs, hypnosis, indecent or other unlawful acts.[37]

This article in the religious law enshrines "psychological harm" as a high-level religious offense, placing such activities on the same level of offense as forming an armed militia.

A similar law in Kazakhstan has led to direct litigation on several occasions. One case was brought against an unaffiliated evangelical church named *New Life* in the city of Taraz. The pastor was charged with engaging in a practice of "mass hypnosis" during a healing ceremony. Court documents state that "during the so-called religious ritual 'healing' many religious churches fell into a psychic trance and there was a mass psychosis."[38] State security services subsequently conducted a search of the pastor's home, and claim to have found a book titled *Modern Hypnosis*, which the pastor and his wife both claim was planted by the

[37] Kyrgyz Republic. 2012. Law On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic. 7 December 2012 No. 196 (Revised from Law No. 282 from December 31, 2008).

[38] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2011. The Verdict of the Court No. 2 of the City of Taraz from September 5, No. 1\812-11. The hearing was declared closed. Presiding Officer Dauylbaev N.A., Secretary of the Court Session Uderbayeva N.B.

officials: “And here at our house, the KNB [Committee for National Security, offspring of the Soviet KGB] officers searched and planted the book "Modern Hypnosis." We never had such a book. On the contrary, the church teaches that one should not engage in hypnosis; it is a sin.”[39]

During the case that followed, one particular plaintiff was brought forward to testify to the psychological harm rendered by the pastor of New Life Church. The prosecution drew off both the plaintiff’s testimony, as well as psychological analyses conducted by officials:

> Also during the judicial investigation, interrogated experts forensic medical examination Mashanlo PP and Akhmetov B.K. Showed that Kireyev A. Yu. revealed signs of a mental disorder, namely, a disease in the form of "obsessive-compulsive disorder,” which arose as a result of external mental and psychological impact using neurolinguistic programming (NLP), and [hypnotic] suggestion. In view of the absence of any chronic diseases on the part of Kireyev A. Yu prior to the visit to the religious organization "Church of the Full Gospel New Life,” it is possible to conclude a direct cause-effect relationship between the onset of a mental disorder and the visit of Kireyev A. Yu to the "Church of the Full Gospel New Life." This disorder caused a "serious" injury to health.[40]

Although the pastor managed to avoid conviction on criminal charges, the case led the way for a series of burdensome fines placed on the church, its leadership,

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

and even simple church members.[41]

The purpose of these psychological discourses is to portray converts to heterodox groups as victims of powerful forms of *suggestion*, thereby absolving the state of its legal obligations to respect individual freedom, choice, and rights. By drawing off precedents in mental health, the state is able to curtail the rights of its citizens and designate itself (or relatives) the proper wardens of those rights. "Victims of destructive sects" are depicted as incapable of taking responsibility for their own actions, and therefore unfit to bear civil rights and fully participate in public life.

In the case against Grace Presbyterian Church, mentioned previously in connection with alleged espionage activities, the pastor was accused of overseeing activities such as laying on of hands, fraternal kisses, [speaking in tongues], hymns, prayers, cries and other NLP techniques.[42] Charges were brought forward in the name of one member of Grace Church, whose mother and sister complained that their relationship with their daughter/sister had been

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[41] Corley, Felix. 2013. "Kazakhstan: At Least 153 Fines in 2013 and Counting." *Forum 18*, November 18. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1895).

[42] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2010. The Verdict of the Court on the Case of Kim Visa Andreevich, the Head of the Religious Association "Grace – the Love of Light." April 1. Presiding judge Tlepov, A.S., Secretary of the court hearing Ilyasov E., and the state Prosecutor Baymoldaev S.

harmed by her participation in the church. Yet during the trial that handed the pastor a commuted, four-year prison sentence, this supposed plaintiff was not allowed to testify in defense of her pastor. Instead, the "plaintiff's" mother and sister testified on her behalf that she had been brainwashed, and "reprogrammed" by the prayer and worship services at the church.[43] In this way, psychological discourses provide a powerful weapon for suspending the rights of both heterodox religious groups and individual citizens who choose to participate in them.

Psychological discourses also allow the authorities to portray these "victims" as not guilty of their trespasses against the nation. Informally, converts have committed a spiritual offense against national traditions by participating in a non-traditional faith. Rather than judge converts for their actions, however, they are portrayed as having acted under the hypnotic suggestion of a destructive religious group. Guilt lies not with the victim, therefore, who must be restored to the nation through treatment, but rather with the destructive sect. For these reasons, mental health discourses were used throughout the Soviet period against all manner of political dissidents — questioning the establishment could

[43] Corley, Felix. 2014. "Kazakhstan: Criminal Conviction, Large "Moral Damages" – and New Crominal Case?" *Forum 18,* February 17. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1929).

very well bring one's own mental state into question. In contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, however, mental health discourses are primarily applied to cases of "brainwashing" by sects and cults, allowing the state to suspend the rights of both religious groups and its own citizens.

Scientology and Psychological Harm

These psychological discourses on "Destructive Sects" and "totalitarian cults" emerged in particular from the work of Alexander Dvorkin, President of the Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religions and Cults. Dvorkin's work has had a large influence on the religious policy of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, particularly in the use of psychological discourses to discuss heterodox sects. Followers of Dvorkin have spearheaded the effort to treat conversion and participation in such sects as a form of psycho-social illness, to be viewed through a psychological perspective.

Dvorkin defines destructive sects as religious groups that seek to destroy any individual identity by severing all ties between the individual and the broader society. Recounting the complaints of those whose family members have joined such cults, he states:

They all say the same thing: my son, my daughter, my husband, my

> mother was replaced, as if he has become a completely different person. He had one disposition, but now he has another; he loved whom he now hates, and so on. There are some phone calls; money goes missing; things are disappearing from home, etc. These are signs that a person has fallen into a sect… When we talk about the most influential sects, there are but a few. The first among them is Scientology — one of the most stringent international totalitarian sects… They climb into all cracks; they collect dirt on famous people.[44]

In this excerpt, Dvorkin accomplishes two goals. First he treats totalitarian cults as a psychological and social malady similar to drug addiction. He conscientiously draws parallels between membership in such cults and behaviors associated with "losing" a loved one to drug addiction, including dramatic changes in the personality, phone calls to the loved one from strange new associates, and even the disappearance of money and valuables.

Second, Dvorkin identifies the Church of Scientology as a poster child for destructive sects that render significant psychological harm. In interviews and in official documents, Scientology was consistently mentioned as an archetypal totalitarian cult that exerts "serious psychological power" on its followers.[45] This perception extends in part from Scientology's own self-styling as both a church

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[44] Moskalenko, Danil. 2009. "Non-Traditional Religions and Sects – Methods of Resisting Modern Society." Interview with Alexander Dvorkin, President of the Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religions and Cults. *Zakon*, March 17. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/135733-netradicionnye-religii-i-sekty-metody.html).

[45] Interview with Aman Saliev, faculty member of the Political Science department at Slavic University in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, July 8, 2014.

and a scientific practice for addressing spiritual needs. This double mission as both a faith and a "treatment plan" of sorts has earned Scientology a reputation as a particularly unabashed form of charlatanry in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

> Totalitarian sects and religious extremist organizations are a sad reality that many states have to face. At the same time, some attempt to use religion for more pragmatic goals, including not only commerce, when someone is enriched at the expense of those who are involved in their sphere of influence, but also political goals. For example, we in Pavlodar had a public association "Narconon", which dealt with the treatment of drug addicts. I will not speak about the effectiveness of their efforts; I will only say: it was not a secret to anyone that Narconon is one of the structures of the Church of Scientology.[46]

Indeed, Scientology has drawn particular scrutiny from the state as a psychologically harmful religion in part because of its self-styling as a form of spiritual treatment that can address psychological problems, including drug addiction. The parallels that Dvorkin draws between drug addiction and participation in Scientology thus carry a particular irony.

Scientology is certainly not the only group to be depicted as rendering psychological harm to its followers, but it is unique in terms of how visceral a reaction it has drawn from the leaderships of orthodox religions — the Muftiate

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[46] Gorbunov, Sergey. 2010. "We Have to Help People Orient Themselves in Confessional Diversity." Interview with Daulet Zakaryanov, Deputy Head of the regional Department of Internal Policy. *Zakon*, July 9. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (https://www.zakon.kz/177719-d.-zakarjanov-nuzhno-gotovit-ljudejj-k.html).

and the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate. Archpriest Alexander Ievlev of the Astana and Almaty diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church declared in one interview that, "The organization calling itself the Church of Scientology is one of the most aggressive totalitarian sects whose activities are aimed at destroying traditional society and traditional relations."[47] He also stated that Scientology has been known to engage in espionage, noting that, "it is not surprising that the activities of Scientologists often fall into the sphere of interests of the special services."[48] This reaction is again at least partially conditioned by Scientology's overt mixing of sacred belief with pseudo-psychological and medical knowledge. While all heterodox groups challenge the authority of orthodoxy, Scientology in particular presents a challenge to the very nature of religious authority based on received wisdom and prophesy, in favor of a pseudo-scientific approach to spiritual needs.

Interestingly, neither Kazakhstan nor Kyrgyzstan sought to deny registration based on psychological harm. Possibly this can be explained because of a political calculus to follow the precedent of European democracies, which have

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[47] Anonymous. 2009. "The Leadership of the Church of Scientology of the City of Almaty addressed an Open Letter to the Head of State." *Zakon,* February 16. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (http://www.zakon.kz/133481-rukovodstvo-cerkov-sajjentologii-goroda.html).

[48] Ibid.

sought to withhold tax-free religious status from scientology, rather than ban them outright. Whatever the reason, scientology currently operates in both countries, and has primarily been pursued by the states as a for-profit commercial entity masquerading as a religious group.

Treatment Centers for "Victims" of Destructive Sects

The government of Kazakhstan has made particularly active use of this discourse on psychological harm to justify intervention into the religious sphere. Not only has the state engaged in litigation, but it has also funded a series of NGOs and "treatment centers" targeted at the "victims" of destructive sects. Making full use of the state's greater resources, the Kazakhstani government publicized these treatments centers as a signature initiative in the battle against "destructive sects." These centers were overseen by Yulia Denisenko, a mentee of Dvorkin who rose to a prominent position within Kazakhstan's State Agency for Religious Affairs before moving into the *pro-government non-government* sector.

Through contacts, I was able to interview Denisenko in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana, in the summer of 2014. By that time, the state had already stopped funding these treatment centers, and Denisenko was instead heading a pro-government NGO named the *Information Center for Religious Questions*.

Nevertheless, Denisenko freely recounted the mission and activities of these treatment centers, maintaining the importance of the service they rendered to society. When questioned in particular the about techniques of brainwashing used by destructive sects, she asserted that the state had uncovered a real case in which a pastor administered psychotropic drugs:

> You're probably referring to the case of Pastor Kashkumbaev. Three members of his congregation noticed that he was adding some substance to the hibiscus tea that he offered people. When it was brought to the attention of the authorities, tests showed that there was indeed some substance there. It was all demonstrated by experts in court, and Kashkumbaev was force to pay moral compensation to the victims.[49]

In Denisenko's words, the state never initiated legal or treatment action against members of heterodox groups without the express request of the injured party. "Out of principle, I never consult a person without their agreement. You can read our code of ethics if you wish, where it is stated that it is forbidden to force our consultation on anyone."[50] Furthermore, she maintained that both the treatment centers and her current NGO always advised concerned families to distinguish between actual harm that religious groups may be rendering to their loved ones, and mere family tensions and misunderstandings that may result

[49] Interview with Yulia Denisenko at the Information Center for Religious Questions, July 21, 2014.
[50] Ibid.

from their loved ones' choices to participate in a non-traditional sect. "Most conflicts start with relatives. Rather than supporting [their loved one], trying to attract him to their side, they start by saying 'you've done this and that;' they contribute to the misunderstanding and mistrust, until the person leaves home; they lose him.[51] She also claimed that the treatment centers never advertised themselves as a "cure" for religious dissidence that could change a person's mind, but merely offered assistance to those desiring it. "They think they can just bring us a sick person, and we will return him in full health. 'Here you go.' As though it can be done in an hour."[52]

However, other respondents sharply critiqued Denisenko's account of these treatment centers. One respondent who desired anonymity described Denisenko as playing a very active role in manufacturing charges against non-traditional religious groups, both testifying in court to their destructive nature and coaching relatives on how to testify.[53] As to the methods employed by the treatment centers themselves, one expert at the independent NGO *Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law* stated that these treatment centers were known to fill their beds with homeless people. In the words of this expert,

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Interview with member of a Protestant Church, July 22, 14.

these homeless people, many of whom may well have been ministered to by various Protestant and other groups, claimed to be the victims of destructive sects in exchange for the room and board provided by the state.[54] While I could not independently verify this account, Denisenko did admit that these treatment centers eventually closed due to a lack of consistent demand from the public. This admission adds credence to the KIBHR expert's assertion that the state artificially inflated the demand for these centers at one point to justify its signature initiative in the battle against "destructive sects."

Conclusion

Throughout the first decade of the new millennium, religious policy was fixated with both identifying and curtailing the threats that destructive sects represented to the state and population. The discourses and methods that I have identified in this chapter represent a high point for this focus on destructive sects, at a time when the enthusiasm for liberal democracy began to give way to a popular desire for national solidarity and belonging. After the turbulence and criminality of the nineties, the new millennium marked a breaking point across much of the

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[54] Interview with an expert at the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law, July 17, 2014.

society, when the promises of economic and democratic liberalism had failed to produce sufficient dividends for much of the population. The result was a crackdown on many forms of dissent and pluralism, including actions taken against "destructive sects."

But this focus on destructive sects would itself not hold the popular attention long before it was replaced by another religious "threat." The same desire for popular unity and belonging that gave rise to the policies I have discussed in this chapter also contributed to overtly public and populist Islamic movements. The rise of populist Islam provided a collective voice to many citizens of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan who felt excluded by the political establishment, but also created anxiety within the establishment and the polity as a whole. Again, the battle to regulate religion has less to do with finding effective ways to control the population, and more to do with the regime picking a fight with the most visible symbolic challenges to its monopoly on public authority.

Already when I conducted my fieldwork in 2014, this fervor over destructive sects was in decline, and the official discourse on religious threats was shifting toward concerns with the rise of Islamic populism. As late as 2012, state officials calling for increased emphasis on the fight against terrorism argued in a report that the state is still too focused on "relatively harmless" Christian sects. They

proposed instead that the state focus on monitoring and even penetrating the "Wahhabi underground."

> It should be noted that law enforcement agencies are currently unprepared for war with the Wahhabi underground [not meaning a literal armed conflict in this context, but war in the same sense that a state may wage a "war" on poverty or drugs]. There is no political will to engage the many cells, that is, to pursue an approach of mass detention. The fact is that most members of the Wahhabi underground are not involved in direct military actions; for that reason, there are no open criminal investigations that might lead to criminal proceedings against them.
> The focus [instead remains on] the fight against Christian churches and non-traditional teachings, although they are rather harmless.[55]

These religious policies are themselves a negotiation of the priorities of the state in terms of what tendencies among the population represent a threat to regime authority and what tendencies support the state's authority. They are negotiating the very character of the regime's public mandate. Some elements within the state view the rise of Islamic populism as a force that can be controlled and used to bolster the state's authority to speak for the people. Other officials view the rise of Islamic populism as an alternate center of power over which they have insufficient control, shifting too much authority to the unruly masses and a kaleidoscope of independent religious figures who are all trying to harness this

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[55] Shibutov, Marat and Vyacheslav Abramov. 2012. "Report on Terrorism in Kazakhstan: Wahhabi Communities Will Only Grow Larger." *Regnum,* November 28. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (https://regnum.ru/news/1598478.html).

popular zeal — whose individual careers rise and fall with fickle popular sentiment.

The distinction between destructive sects and extremist groups thus represents a battle for resources between different state apparatuses, as much as it does a negotiation over the nature of heterodoxy as a "threat" to the regime's mandate. The SCRA and SARA contend with the security apparatus of the state to define which threats are greatest, and which methods of enforcement to utilize against them. Through this struggle, the public face of the state is itself defined, as well as images of precisely which wills among the public become elevated to this sacrosanct level. In the next chapter, I will address those policies focused on Islam and security threats.

CHAPTER 8

Radical Islam and Discourses on Threat

In the post-Soviet space, we are confronted with a wave of "new Islamization," in which part of the Muslim community actively absorbs radical religious ideas brought in from outside.

Kairat Lama Sharif, Director of Kazakhstan's State Agency for Religious Affairs

As the previous chapter demonstrated, religious sects present an object of great concern to the religious and political establishments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Of equal if not greater concern, however, is the increase in Islamic practice among the countries' nominally Muslim populations, especially the titular ethnicities for whom both regimes jealously guard the authority to speak. If "destructive sects" subvert the essential link between nation and "traditional" religion propagated by the regimes, Islamic movements challenge the regimes' capacity to maintain control over this identity politics and the populist energy it feeds into public life.

Some Islamic movements embrace the link between Islam and ethno-nationalism, but reject the authority of Muftiate and secular officials to speak for traditional Islam. Others reject the salience of ethnicity and nationality as vessels

for transmitting Islamic traditions, and promote fundamentalist or global brands of Islamic identity. After the 70-year efforts of the Soviet Union to either ban Islam or appropriate the faith to its ends, the religious and political establishments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan often must fight against a common perception that local Islam is less authoritative and authentic than brands of Islam coming from Arabic nations or Southern Asia.

Both regimes have responded to these developments by propagating a distinction between the "traditional" Islam promoted by their own Muftiates, and the "radical" Islam propagated by unaffiliated groups and movements. Kazakhstan in particular emphasizes radical Islam as a threat to the country's efforts to be seen as a modern nation with global aspirations:

> Our primary tasks today are the consolidation of the spiritual structures of Kazakhstani Muslims; Countering the spread of extremist ideas; Depoliticization of religion, counteracting the spread of Islamophobia; Modernization of spiritual structures of Kazakh Muslims.[1]

The regime makes extensive use of discourses on "radical" and "extremist" Islam to prop up the authority of the Muftiate. Officials assert that the "state has the right and is simply obliged to protect our traditional Muslim field, represented

[1] Derbisali, Absattar. 2012. "Without Spirituality and Moral Foundations No Education Will Be Complete." *Zakon*, May 29. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4493412-4493412-bez-dukhovnosti-i-nravstvennykh-osnov.html).

by Sunni Islam of the Hanafi type."[2] Authorities in Kyrgyzstan, note, for example:

> Of particular concern today are the intensifying activities of religious extremist organizations, whose main tasks are the promotion of radical Islam and the establishment of an Islamic state - the Caliphate. There is a trend of large-scale distribution of printed, audio and video that promotes violence and causing racial, religious and national hatred.[3]

The authorities are particularly concerned by the possibility of grassroots fundamentalism growing directly in the midst of the mainstream establishment. Imams in Almaty, for example, have expressed anxiety about the unregulated distribution of religious books and pamphlets, declaring to the media that "just right behind the mosque gates there is continually a brisk trade in religious literature, which, according to clergymen, is extremist."[4]

Inevitably, such discourses on Islamic extremism engage the issue of terrorism. Daunted by the task of regulating such covert challenges to their authority, and often at pains to substantiate the distinction between "traditional"

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[2] Kuandykova, Dariya. 2011. "What is the State of the Religious Sphere and What Should It Be?" *Zakon,* October 4. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4451588-chto-predstavljaet-sobojj-religioznaja.html).

[3] Yuldasheva, Nargiza. 2009. "In Kyrgyzstan in 2008 the Court Declared Religious Organizations "People's Congress of Kurdistan" and "Jihad Group" Terrorist and Their Activities." *24.kg,* February 3. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (https://24.kg/archive/ru/parlament/45766-2009/02/03/105193.html/).

[4] Kuan, Tatiana. 2011. "Jihadists Need Merely Strap Up, and They're Ready." *Moskovskiy Komsomolets – Kazakhstan,* August 31. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (http://mk-kz.kz/articles/2011/08/31/618967-shahidu-sobratsya-tolko-podpoyasatsya.html).

and “radical” Islam, the regimes have come to rely heavily on tying Islamic heterodoxy to vague security threats. A resolution of the local government of Issyk-Kul province in Kyrgyzstan from 2003, for example, lists a number of heterodox Islamic movements that ostensibly advocate for the establishment of a Caliphate — a single Muslim state — by violence if necessary.

> A special danger for socio-political stability supporters of the newly emerged Islamic extremist movements "Hizbut-Tahrir", "Wahhabits", "Davatchi" [missionaries from Tablighi Jamaat] and others are present in the region. Under cover of "Islam" they pursue a policy of disunity of citizens and integrity on the basis of religion, proclaiming the ideas of nationalism and radical Islamic fundamentalism with the aim of overthrowing by force the existing constitutional system in our country, under the false slogan of "uniting all Muslims into a single Caliphate."[5]

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the religious and political establishments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan deploy a wide range of discourses on security and authority to address the many Islamic groups and movements that have gained traction in the region. The regimes make distinctions between moderate and radical Islam to bolster the authority of the religious establishment against grassroots dissidence, and invoke terrorism and security threats to legitimate unchecked state power, including mass surveillance and arrest of ostensibly “extremist” groups. I elaborate this distinction further below.

[5] Kyrgyz Republic. 2003. Issyk-Kul Regional Administration’s Resolution on “The State and Measures of Further Improvement in Combating Religious Extremism, August 5 No. 181.

I. State Power at the Margins of Regime Authority

Weber showed us in his theory of legitimate domination that authority is lost the moment that those in power use force. Authority that is recognized as legitimate need not be enforced through coercion, and authority that is enforced through coercion is in danger of losing legitimacy. This principle has long been known to those in power, of course, and they have responded historically with a wide array of tactics to distinguish the populations against which they use force from the loyal subject or citizens whom they ostensibly protected *through* the use of state power and coercion.

The regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan both employ such distinctions in their efforts to maintain public authority. Both countries have experienced popular protests and even open revolts that have strained and at times broken the regimes' carefully orchestrated image of authority. Though these past upheavals have never been directly motivated by religious fervor, heterodoxy within Islam represents a key front in the regimes' battles to monopolize the authority to speak for "the people." Both regimes thus draw strict distinctions between the "moderate" form of Islam promoted by their respective Muftiates,

and "radical" forms of Islam that are often attributed to foreign influences, alien to the "traditional" Islamic values of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh peoples. In particular, both regimes make active use of the discourse on terrorism to convey the sense that dissident Islamic groups present a vague but omnipresent security threat.

Various statements by officials demonstrate how the regimes make use of distinctions among heterodox Islamic groups. Justifying the government's policies in regulating Islamic heterodoxy, one Kazakh historian and Islamic scholar categorized "non-traditional" Islamic groups and movements into three different types:

> Based on our analysis, the activities of non-traditional Islamic trends can be classified into the following types: *extreme radicals* (e.g. the extremist party Hizbut Takhrir al-Islami); *radicals* (e.g. jihadists and adherents of "at-Takfir val-hijra," the moderate wing of orthodox Salafists, which mainly consists of the groups madhalits, sururites, and al-banites); and groups that do not yet resort to political actions but are *waiting* or *centrist* (e.g. numerous Sufi brotherhoods, the Pakistani missionary organization Tablighi Jama'at, etc) [emphasis mine].[6]

This typology provides a succinct formalization of much of the rhetoric on Islamic heterodoxy found within my data. Implicit in the typology are

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[6] Izbairov, Asylbek. 2011. "Activities of Non-Traditional Islamist Organizations and Trends in Kazakhstan." *Zakon*, November 24. Retrieved January 6, 2017 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31085701#pos=0;180).

distinctions between threats to security and challenges to authority, as well as between latent and manifest threats. Hizb ut-Tahrir (often transliterated from the Russian spelling as Hizbut Takhrir) is presented as an extreme radical group, in keeping with the common perception that the movement presents a manifest security threat. Fundamentalist movements such as Salafism and Wahhabism, in contrast, are presented as radical groups, indicating the manifest threat they represent to the authority of traditional Islam and the Muftiate. The Islamic missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat, finally, which primarily encourages men to attend mosque regularly and observe basic Muslim rites, is presented as a latent or nascent threat. Though apolitical and moderate, the movement's autonomy and grassroots support appear to many in the region as presenting great potential for radicalism and mobilization in the future.

As with the discourses on "destructive sects" examined in the previous chapter, however, this typology derives its logic from the politics of the regime rather than from substantive distinctions between the dogmas or practices of different groups. Hizb ut-Tahrir, for example. is consistently held up as the primary example of an extremist and even terrorist group operating in the region, though its members have never engaged in overtly extremist activities. Their activity in the region is primarily limited to distributing pamphlets that call

for the creation of a unified Muslim community or *ummah* ruled by a single Islamic state or *Caliphate*. This factor alone has earned Hizb ut-Tahrir a reputation as a terrorist organization. The movement directly challenges the authority of the secular state and national leaders, and is thus portrayed as an extreme radical terrorist group.

In many respects, however, Hizb ut-Tahrir is more moderate than the fundamentalist ideals of Salafism.[7] Where Salafism devotes itself to preserving rigid interpretations and practices of Islamic doctrine, Hizb ut-Tahrir primarily envisions civic integration of Muslim peoples, and is driven by a pan-Islamic zeal that is only loosely codified. Nevertheless, Hizb ut-Tahrir has gained a reputation across the region as a violent jihadist group due to its overt calls for replacing autonomous nation-states with a single Islamic state. Salafism, in contrast, is viewed primarily as a puritanical threat to the authority of the Muftiates and to national Islamic traditions, and not a direct security threat.

But the problem with distinguishing *degrees* of radicalism is just part of a much broader problem with this typology, namely that the memberships of these

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[7] Montgomery, David W. and John Heathershaw. 2012. "Islam, Secularism and Danger: A Reconsideration of the Link Between Religiosity, Radicalism, and Rebellion in Central Asia." *Religion, State & Society,* Vol. 44, No. 3. Pp 192-218. Also see Alexander Wolters (2014) "The State and Islam in Central Asia: Administering the Religious Threat or Engaging Muslim Communities?" *Forschngspapiere Research Papers,* No. 3.

groups are less distinct than the typology would suggest. All of these movements spread through covert networks of cells, whose memberships frequently overlap. The same supporters of Hizb ut-Tahrir might also spread Salafi literature and participate in proselytizing activities with Tablighi Jamaat. Finally, many of the radical groups mentioned have no known presence in the region, and are mentioned nowhere else in documents that deal with practical issues of enforcing religious policy.

The authorities are aware of such discrepancies between their rhetoric and the actual religious landscape that confronts them. In particular, officials have directly warned of the threat of Islamic groups cross-pollinating through overlapping membership, or even unifying their efforts to subvert the secular state through Islamic revivalism. Expert testimony in a court case in Kazakhstan spoke to this effect:

> Presently, information comes from operative sources that when talking about the relationship with the Salafis and the Tablighs, the ideologists of the religious extremist party Hizb-ut-Tahrir recently began to [invoke] the founder of Hizbut-Tahrir, Tahuddin Nabahoni, who said the following: "If there is such a jamagat [alternate spelling of *jamaat* or *community*], which by its activity, scale, and scope will exceed the party of Hizb ut-Tahrir in the construction of a single Caliphate, then we must give them the

necessary support and join with them together."[8]

According to the expert, such calls for mutual support do not foretell of "organizational merger" per se, but rather speak to "the danger of merging strategy and tactics" among "religious extremist movements as Salafism, Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamagat."[9] Thus, even as the political and religious establishments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan propagate precise typologies of dissident Islamic groups, they demonstrate awareness of the far messier and more complex reality of Islamic heterodoxy in their countries.

In this chapter and the chapter that follows, I will structure the discussion of Islamic heterodoxy around this distinction between immanent security threat to the population and threats to the authority of traditional Islam — both latent and manifest. My intention is not to argue that the state employs the rhetoric of security and terrorism against one distinct set of heterodox Islamic groups, and the rhetoric of fundamentalism and radicalism against another. Rather, the state often deploys these discourses against the same groups (or generally projects them into the public sphere with no particular object). The discourses have different and complimentary goals, however — to dispel challenges to regime

[8] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2013. Court Ruling of the Saryarka District Court of Astana City, February 26, No. 2-1154. Presiding judge: Zhaksybergenov K. Zh., the secretary of the court session: Jahine N.Zh. and representative of the applicant, Dzhanakhmetov A.U.

[9] Ibid.

authority and to justify the use of state coercion and suspension of rights — which get mapped onto heterodox groups according to the circumstances. Thus, the discourses are not directly calibrated to the nature of the distinct groups; rather the discourses are calibrated to the different tools in the regimes' discursive repertoire, which are deployed in a manner that is only indirectly related to the nature of the "threats" posed by heterodox groups.

Heterodoxy among the Disaffected

Heterodox religious movements often spread most rapidly among disaffected strata (Niebuhr 1968). Those who feel deprived of status within the mainstream religious establishment provide a fertile ground for dissident movements. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, poorer strata, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized communities all have reason to feel that the Muftiate and its affiliated mosques and imams tend to affirm established political and social hierarchies. To such disaffected strata, heterodox Islamic movements can provide a powerful alternate source of moral authority. International Islamist movements, variously, criticize the secular elite as profane or *kafir*, espouse the virtue of the simple and pious believer, and claim to provide their followers with a direct link to more “authentic” forms of Islam.

The appeal of such subversive teachings has not been lost on the authorities of either country. In interviews, officials from both states articulated concerns precisely over the radicalization of the poor, ethnic minorities, prisoners, and other marginalized groups. This concern is particularly pronounced in Kazakhstan, however, where the regime has more effectively coopted "traditional" Islam to support the prevailing political and economic order. Speaking of recent trials to ban various Islamic groups, one judge from Almaty, Kazakhstan spoke of the efforts of such heterodox groups to "divide the Kazakh Muslim community" by exploiting such disaffection:

> Dissatisfied with their material and social position, people easily fall under the influence of representatives of such associations, which offer supposedly simple and understandable prescriptions for establishing justice.[10]

Authorities in Kazakhstan have reacted to such "subversive" ministries by seeking to police these disaffected strata where heterodoxy often takes root. Testifying for the state in a case against the Islamic missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat, one expert witness specifically outlined the "destructive" nature of this movement in terms of its appeal to alienated citizens:

> The destructive nature of Tablighi Jamaat's activity consists in the wide

[10] Emir, Dias. 2013. "The Danger of Extremist Views." Interview with the Judge of Almaly District Court No. 2 of Almaty Mukhtar Amirov. *Zakon*, May 2. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4554872-opasnost-krajjnikh-vzgljadov.-problema.html).

> involvement of young and middle-aged citizens, mainly from the poor, who often do not have basic knowledge of Islam, in the ranks of "daugatichkas" — preachers who carry out missionary activities.[11]

As this statement also notes, such disaffection finds a willing audience in the youth as well, but not only those coming from marginalized backgrounds, as the expert implies. One member of Parliament in Kazakhstan sees youth disaffection as a much broader issue, lamenting that "we see how deeply such sentiments [in support of religious dissidence] penetrate, and the first victims are young people."[12]

In Kyrgyzstan the relationship between orthodox Islam, heterodox Islam, and the status hierarchy is more complicated. The Muftiate retains greater independence from the political establishment, and it seeks to demonstrate its autonomy by occasionally admonishing that establishment. The Muftiate of Kyrgyzstan frequently plays the role of populist scion, denouncing a corrupt political elite for abandoning both Islamic doctrine and the values of the common people. At other times, however, the Muftiate seeks to elevate the prestige of Islam and its own leadership, and thus aligns with the the political and economic

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[11] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2013. Court Ruling of the Saryarka District Court of Astana City, February 26, No. 2-1154. Presiding judge: Zhaksybergenov K. Zh., the secretary of the court session: Jahine N.Zh. and representative of the applicant, Dzhanakhmetov A.U.

[12] Peruashev, Azat. 2012. "Social Modernization Should Guarantee the Strengthening of the Secular Nature of the State." *Zakon,* July 23. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4503635-socialnaja-modernizacija-dolzhna.html).

elite. The Muftiate of Kyrgyzstan thus plays a far more complex and contested role in the status politics of Kyrgyzstan than does the politically-controlled Muftiate of Kazakhstan.

As a result, the political and religious establishment in Kyrgyzstan focuses more on confronting a common foe — heterodoxy among ethnic minorities, especially the sizable Uzbek population in the south of the country that is feared to harbor secessionist aspirations. A government declaration from 1995 speaks to this focus on the Uzbek community:

> The most vulnerable to Wahhabism is the population of territories adjacent to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, in particular, Suzak, Ala-Bukin, Bazar-Korgon, Nooken, Naukat, Lyallak, Kara-Suu districts of Jalal-Abad and Osh provinces. Zakirov, a Wahhabist and spiritual leader from the Suzak district, and his supporters have advocated for the idea of creating Uzbek autonomy in the south of Kyrgyzstan under the guise of religion. Another group of Muslim confessors from Suzak district organized two illegal schools to teach the principles of Islamic fundamentalism, where students were taught the ideas of "jihad," and the creation of an Islamic party.[13]

This sentiment was repeated by another government declaration in 2001, which speaks of the insufficient outcomes of government efforts to reign in "religious extremism" among the "more religious" population in the south:

> Despite the measures taken, the religious situation remains complex in Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken oblasts, where there is high level of religiosity

[13] Kyrgyz Republic. 1995. Government Decree "On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Tasks of the Authorities to Formulate State Policy in the Religious Sphere." Signed by Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Djumagulov, August 1995 No. 345.

> of the population. Extremists in the person of the Islamic Party of the Renaissance of Uzbekistan (IWPU) and the religious extremist party Hizb ut-Tahrir (Liberation Party) have begun to actively implement their strategic plans. They act among the population with inflammatory appeals, actively involve young people in their ranks.[14]

Similar concerns with ethnic minorities have arisen in Kazakhstan, but are often muted by comparison. In a report on Kazakhstan's Department of Migration, a number of Uzbek migrants complained that the authorities had "insulted their religious feelings, refused to register them, calling them Wahhabis, terrorists, and radical extremists."[15] The authorities also expressed concern that Tablighi Jamaat was gaining a strong following among the small Dungan community — a long-existing community of Han Chinese who practice Islam:

> It should be noted that one of the active centers for the dissemination of the ideology of [Tablighi Jamaat] is Masanchi of Kordai district in Zhambyl Province, where the majority of local residents, Dungan by nationality, are followers of this trend. These "Tablighs" hold the opinion that the village is actually an autonomous territorial unit… Involving a large number of representatives of this ethnic group in the ranks of an unconventional religious trend can lead to complications in the religious situation in the future, as well as propagation of extremist and separatist

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[14] Kyrgyz Republic. 2011. Government Decree On the Work of the State Commission Under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs for the Implementation of Decree of the President of Kyrgyz Republic "On Measures of Reinforcing the Rights of Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic in Freedom of Conscience and Religion." April 5, 2001 No. 155.

[15] Mavloiniy, Dil'begim. 2010. "Department of Migration: If You Have Complaints About Torture – Bring A Doctor's Note." Interview with Gulsara Altynbekova, Head of the Department of Migration. *Azattyq*, August 19. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (https://rus.azattyq.org/a/refugees_asylum_almaty/2131181.html).

ideologies, threatening the national security of the country.[16]

Generally, however, authorities in Kazakhstan articulate fewer concerns about ethnic minorities than they do about other disaffected groups.

The authorities have focused extensively, for example, on the spread of Islam among prisoner populations. Reports have noted that many people convicted of terrorism are "just followers of Wahhabism and Salafism" who may only be engaged in "peaceful preaching and talking about the kingdom of God."[17] Once imprisoned, however, they may embrace more radical ideologies:

> Such measures as criminal prosecution and punishment, even in the form of long periods of imprisonment, not only do not have a deterrent effect on the spread of the ideology of religious extremism, but in some cases help fanatics acquire new supporters in isolation and imprisonment. In a number of penal colonies in the Aktobe region, there are constantly growing cells of extremist movements; the process began several years ago after the arrival of the first representatives of movements such as Al Vahhabiya and Hizbut Tahrir to serve their sentences.[18]

This high density of prisoners of conscience is true of other penal colonies, such as Akmola, where a rights watchdog found that "members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, pro-Wahhabist movements, the separatist organization of East Turkestan, and the

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[16] Anonymous. 2010. "An Unregistered Madrasah Revealed in the Zhambyl Region" *Zakon*, Feburary 9. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30565168).

[17] Anonymous. 2013. "On the Territory of Kazakhstan There Are Nearly 500 Participants of Radical Religious Groups." *KTK,* February 21. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (http://www.ktk.kz/ru/news/video/2013/02/21/21411).

[18] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2000. Government Decree on "the State Protection of Persons Participating in Criminal Proceedings." July 5, No. 72.

'Jamaat Mujahideen of Central Asia' are serving their sentences."[19] Officials from the National Security Committee (the KNB, successor to the KGB) have expressed concern that "Persons convicted for extremist activity" even "try to take the place of the imams in the [penal] colonies."[20] Kyrgyzstani authorities have expressed similar concerns that people convicted of participating in banned Islamic extremist groups are "sent to serve their sentence in colony-settlements where they continue their recruiting activities."[21]

Thus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan both grapple with the popularity of Islamic heterodoxy among disaffected strata of their citizenry, but often differ in their approaches. The distinctive position of the Muftiates of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan typify the different approaches of the two regimes in policing these marginalized populations. The former faithfully articulates regime talking points intended to legitimate the status quo and raise Kazakhstan's international profile as a modern nation with global aspirations. The latter, in contrast seeks to navigate an autonomous path between two social factions — as champion of the

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[19] Anonymous. 2012. Monitoring of Violations of Freedom of Speech. *International Fund Adil Soz.* Retrieved January 9, 2018 (http://geum.ru/next/art-374810.php).

[20] Anonymous. 2006. "Individuals Convicted of Extremist Activity Try to Take the Place of Imams in Mosques of the Colonies." *Kazakhstan Today*, February 2. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (http://nomad.su/?a=13-200602030218).

[21] Kyrgyz Republic. 2009. Decree of the Issyk-Kul Regional Administration on "The State of Religious Affairs in the Territory of the Issyk-Kul Region." March 13, No. 61.

simple people (who are often the most receptive and faithful to the ideal of religious submission), and as a revered institution that is elevated above mundane life and profane politics. This disparity represents one factor among numerous others that distinguish the relationship between the political and Islamic establishment in Kyrgyzstan in comparison to that of Kazakhstan. I address further discrepancies below.

II. Different Approaches to Islamic Heterodoxy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

Though the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan pursue broadly similar goals in their regulation of Islam, the scale and scope of regime responses to heterodox Islamic groups and movements differ dramatically. Authorities in Kazakhstan have engaged in a proactive campaign to propagate consistent narratives about Islamic heterodoxy, whereas authorities in Kyrgyzstan have pursued a more piecemeal and reactive approach. This difference extends in part from the markedly greater resources wielded by the political establishment of Kazakhstan in comparison to that of Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstani officials have long complained that they lack central control over the teachings of imams across the country. The political establishment has

struggled to establish greater control over the Muftiate structure, and the Muftiate, in turn, has struggled to exert central authority over the mosques and madrassas. This is especially true in the south of the country:

> A large number of mosques and madrassas are based in the south of the republic, where the purposeful missionary activity of [foreign] Islamic centers creates real conditions for the introduction of a split among the Muslims of the republic. The construction of many mosques was financed from abroad, which puts religious communities in a dependent position.[22]

Officials express particular concern over their continued lack of control in the sphere of religious education. The initial legislation that established greater government intervention in the religious sphere in the late 1990s noted that:

> Almost all religious educational institutions (the Islamic Institute under the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, madrassas under mosques, parochial schools in churches) operate without control by state bodies. Many of them do not have elementary sanitary conditions; their training programs are not worked out; as a rule, teachers are self-taught, and teaching basically comes down to a simple memorization of canons of sacred books.[23]

More than a decade later, in spite of subsequent efforts taken by the government to establish more control over the religious sphere, local observers still expressed

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[22] Kyrgyz Republic. 2011. Government Decree On the Work of the State Commission Under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs for the Implementation of Decree of the President of Kyrgyz Republic "On Measures of Reinforcing the Rights of Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic in Freedom of Conscience and Religion." April 5, 2001 No. 155.

[23] Kyrgyz Republic. 1995. Government Decree "On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Tasks of the Authorities to Formulate State Policy in the Religious Sphere." Signed by Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Djumagulov, August 1995 No. 345.

great concern that Muftiate-aligned imams in Kyrgyzstan "cannot ideologically resist the propaganda of Salafis, Wahhabis, and Hizbutites [followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir]."[24]

Such concerns dovetail with growing public religiosity among the Muslim population of the country. In this same period, religious participation has increased significantly among Muslims in Kyrgyzstan, especially among men, and it has became increasingly common for religious leaders to call men to public prayer on the main squares in Bishkek and Osh. As figure 14 below demonstrates, mosque attendance has increased overall between 2003 and 2011, but the percentage of men who report attending mosque once a week more than doubled.[25] This dramatic increase likely indicates wider participation in J*uma Namaz* — the Friday afternoon prayer that, for many Central Asian Muslim men, represents the primary form of participation in their local mosques and Muslim community. Thus, Islamic practices have proliferated in Kyrgyzstan, and the authorities have struggled to retain control over this growing public religiosity.

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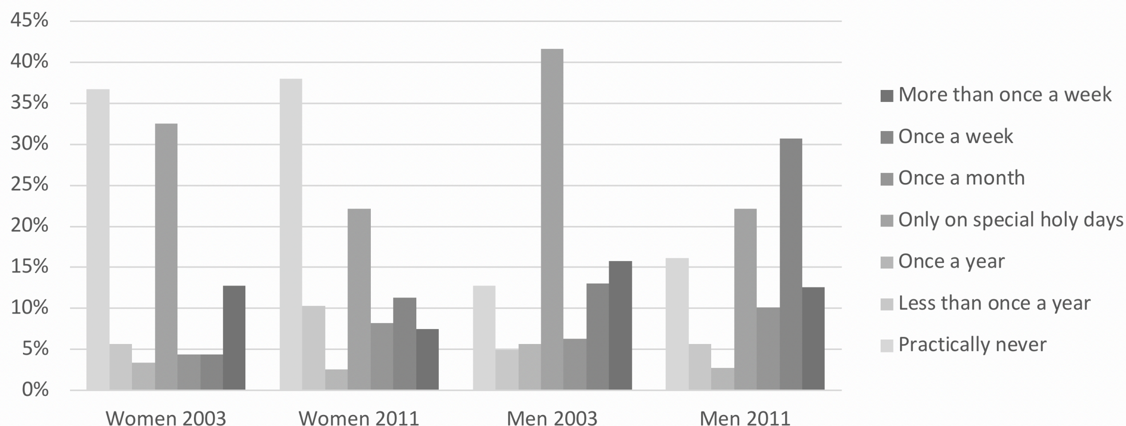
[24] Malikova, Bermet. 2009. "Inner Peace or a War for Hearts and Souls?" Interview with Taalaybek Osmonov, a PhD candidate at the Institute of Philosophy and Political and Legal Studies of the National Academy of Sciences; General Secretary of the World Ahmady Muslim Community. *Vecherniy Bishkek*, May 22. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (http://members.vb.kg/2009/05/22/dux/1_print.html).

[25] Relationship between gender and attendance significant at the .001 level for both waves of the WVS; wave 4 in 2003: X^2 (12, 775) = 72.3, $p < .001$; wave 6 in 201: X^2 (6, 1334) = 137.6, $p < .001$.



In contrast, Kazakhstan has a well-financed operation for monitoring activities within the Muslim community. While much of this mission is devoted to combating the influence of heterodox Islamic groups, the government also actively monitors the Muftiate and the mosques under its supervision. The U.S. Department of State reported of these efforts in 2010 that, "security officials informally monitor certain areas of religious activity, in particular, the preaching of Muslim imams."[26] This monitoring covers all aspects of Islamic teaching, proselytizing, prayer and public gathering. The government regularly discovers and investigates unregistered missionaries, madrassas, and even mosques.

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[26] Report on the Situation with Human Rights in Kazakhstan for 2009. 2010. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.*

In 2010, for example, the Department for Combating Extremism, Separatism and Terrorism within the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that it had uncovered an unregistered mosque in Zhambyl province in southern Kazakhstan.[27] The department similarly uncovered an unregistered madrassa on the territory of a neighboring mosque, "in the course of operational search activities."[28] The following year, the authorities of neighboring Almaty Province reported that they had detained 183 members of Tablighi Jamaat, who were accused of organizing five "agitational meetings." The media reported that all members "were held accountable, and a similar campaign was prevented in Talgar district thanks to the law enforcement officers of the region."[29] These few examples speak to an extensive and coordinated enforcement strategy, made possible by the greater capacity of Kazakhstan's regime compared to that of Kyrgyzstan.

This disparity has had a clear impact on the amount of data available from each country. Sources from Kazakhstan consistently repeat regime talking points,

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[27] Demidov, Vladimir. 2009. "Register, and Believe in Whoever You Want." *Zakon*, January 15. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/150190-ocherednojj-svjashhennosluzhitel.html).

[28] Anonymous. 2010. "An Unregistered Madrasah Revealed in the Zhambyl Region" *Zakon*, Feburary 9. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30565168).

[29] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2010. Court Ruling of the Military Court of the Shymkent Garrison. March 26, No. 1-3/10. Presiding judge Kaipov B., secretary of the session Turlieva A., and the state prosecutors Musaev M. and Sharipov B.

resulting in more extensive data from Kazakhstan than from Kyrgyzstan. Though this pattern was true to a lesser degree for data on Protestant groups and other "destructive sects" in previous chapters, the data were not as skewed toward Kazakhstan as they are in relation to Islamic groups. For example, references to Salafism and Wahhabism occur 374 and 302 times, respectively, in sources from Kazakhstan, and generally present these movements as a serious threat to public stability and security. In contrast the terms Wahhabism and Salafism together occur less than 50 times in roughly 2,500 documents from Kyrgyzstan. Where they do occur, the terms are often used to denigrate the ethnic Uzbek minority as more prone to fundamentalism and radicalism. I have therefore relied on my interviews and additional data from Kyrgyzstan to make up for these disparities in the dataset.

III. Extremism, Security, and State Power

As Agamben argued in *The State of Exception*, the state is a unique entity because of its capacity to suspend its own rules when "the public interest" requires it. Agamben was writing of situations in which otherwise democratic states suspend the rule of law "in the public interest," especially during emergencies

and other *exceptional* circumstances. Authoritarian regimes similarly invoke external threats and national crises, seeking to justify a more or less permanent suspension of certain rules that hinder their use of state power.

Discourses on security and terrorism serve precisely this function in the religious policy of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The authorities of Kazakhstan in particular have propagated a forceful narrative of Islamic heterodoxy as a source of security threats, justifying their pervasive use of state surveillance and security forces. As I mentioned in my methodology, the terms *extremism*, *terrorism*, and *security* collectively account for roughly half of the 100,000 coded segments in the dataset. These terms frequently occur in isolation from other codes, meaning that the security discourse is often invoked without naming specific groups as threats. This strategy provides clear utility to the regime: invoking a vague but omnipresent security threat justifies expansive state power unhindered by the rule of law. Although the label extremism does get applied to "destructive sects," the security discourse overwhelmingly targets Islamic heterodoxy. I can only cover a fraction of the thousands of statements in my data, but I provide a few examples below that capture the overall trend of how extremism, terrorism, and security are invoked in official discourses.

Officials in both countries frequently offer rote lists of suspected extremist

and terrorist organizations. The other organizations that have been deemed security threats in Kazakhstan, for example, include the following:

> From October 2004 to November 2006, 13 foreign organizations were deemed terrorist for the first time in Kazakhstan (Al-Qaida, The Islamic Party of East Turkestan, the Kurdish People's Congress and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Asbat al-Ansar, the Muslim Brotherhood, Bos Gurd, Jamaat of the Mujahyet of Central Asia, Lashkar-i-Taiba, The Taliban, "Social Reforms Society", "Aum Sensrique", "SHAT") and the extremist party "Hizb-ut-Tahrir."[30]

I must emphasize again that the majority of these groups have no presence in Kazakhstan (or Kyrgyzstan). The composition of the list does not reflect genuine security threats so much as nods to other regimes and the local authorities' own need to construct a discourse on threat. In this section, I will address the national and regional agendas that drive these security discourses.

National Security

Authorities in Kazakhstan in particular invoke Islamic extremism both as a threat to security and as a hindrance to the President's vision for modernization and democracy. Policy briefs that expound the administration's developmental vision — "Kazakhstan 2030" — note that "the fight against international terrorism is

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[30] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2008. Government Decree on "The Approval of the Fourth and Fifth Consolidated Periodic Report on the Implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination." July 17, No. 701.

seen as a priority in the work to strengthen statehood and the national security system.“[31] And in a speech to the OSCE[32] in 2010, President Nazarbayev asserted that terrorism is like “a metastasizing cancer, which step-by-step affects modern civilization across the world.”[33] Another source quotes Nazarbayev as stating that:

> In the current situation, with terrorist and extremist activities expanding, law enforcement bodies should be engaged in effective work to maintain the constitutional order and stability of Kazakh society, including protecting the security of Kazakhstani people.[34]

Kazakhstani authorities frequently invoke counter-terrorism efforts, but seldom give specifics of these efforts. The deputy head of Kazakhstan’s Secretariat of the Republican Security Council stated in a 2011 interview that Kazakhstan is working to "detect and limit the dissemination of materials containing signs of

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[31] Anonymous. 2012. “In Kazakhstan, It Was Decided to Create a Working Group on Religion.” *Kazakhstan Today,* June 30. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (https://www.kt.kz/rus/society/v_kazahstane_resheno_sozdatj_rabochuju_gruppu_po_voprosam_religij_1153558272.html).

[32] The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, an international organization created after the Second World War to prevent further conflict specifically in the context of post-War Europe. The OSCE has since taken on a broader mission across Eurasia to prevent conflict and promote democratization and government reforms. As a member state, Kazakhstan exercised its right to chair the OSCE in 2010, but was widely criticized during its chairmanship for its less-than-stellar record on human rights and curtailing corruption.

[33] Anonymous. 2010. “The Fate and Prospects of the OSCE” Interview with the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev. *Interfax*, January 28. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (http://www.interfax.ru/interview/120866).

[34] (Ayazbekov, Kuanysh. 2012. “Additional Attestation Will Boost People’s Trust in Law Enforcement Agencies.”*Zakon,* July 17, 2018. Retrieved January 6, 2018 http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31223394#pos=1;-145).

extremism, terrorist propaganda, and appeals via internet resources for help in committing acts of terrorism."[35] Similarly opaque, the Kazakhstan 2030 development plan mentioned above notes few specifics of how this "priority issue" will be approached, aside from general comments such as assigning a "special role to the expert scientific community, which must urgently develop a new, systematic approach to the analysis of the religious situation in the country."[36]

Sources from Kyrgyzstan differ in the quantity of appeals to security, if not the quality. Kyrgyzstani officials invoke extremism and terrorism less frequently than their Kazakhstani counterparts, but generally call for similar expansions of state power to address unspecified extremist threats. A 2012 Presidential decree, for example, states that:

> Particular attention should be paid to the reform of special services and law enforcement agencies, aimed primarily at preventing and suppressing threats and security challenges, especially from terrorist and religious extremist organizations.[37]

The Ministry of Justice has also called for legal reforms such that the judiciary

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[35] (No Author. 2012. Monitoring Violations of Freedom of Speech In Kazakhstan. International Foundation for Freedom of Speech "Adil Soz." *Zakon*, Feburary 25. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31130721&mode=p#pos=1;-117).

[36] Ibid.

[37] Kyrgyz Repblic. 2009. Government Decree on the "Work of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, Local Government Administrations and Local Self-Government for the Prevention of Religious Extremism and Inter-Ethnic Conflict." Febrary 18, No. 115.

can fight terrorism more effectively (meaning less hampered by due process in many cases):

> Special attention of the courts is drawn to the need for strict compliance with the requirements of the law providing for criminal liability for crimes against public safety and public order in cases of terrorism and extremism.[38]

To this end, the SCRA has been authorized to work directly with the Ministry of Justice to "prohibit or suspend the activities of religious organizations engaged in the dissemination of religious extremism, fundamentalism that violate the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic, which threaten the rights and legitimate interests of citizens and the security of the state."[39]

As in Kazakhstan, these policies frequently invoke the threat of extremism and terrorism without specifying objects or criteria. As such, they feed into a broader tendency to see Islam itself is through the framework of security. Even as the government and Muftiate seek to bolster "traditional Islam," this security discourse contributes to public and media narratives that equate Islam with extremism, and subsequently with terrorism. As one public figure in Kyrgyzstan complained: "Look at the content of state television programs: as soon as it

[38] Kyrgyz Republic. 2011. Decision of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic on the "Work of the Judicial Board of Criminal Cases and Cases on Administrative Violations of the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic." February 24, No. 5.

[39] Kyrgyz Republic. 2012. Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic about the State Commission for Religious Affairs. March 23, No. 601.

comes to extremism and terrorism, the Bishkek central mosque is shown as Muslims pray there; an unsightly image of Islam is being planted."[40]

Although both regimes often invoke security threats without pointing to particular incidents, they do quantify the threat of extremism in ways that contribute to the narrative of omnipresent threat. For example, President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan asserted in 2012 that:

> Radical extremist elements are exerting full-scale pressure on the state and society as a whole ... So, just between 2011 and 2012, there were over a hundred crimes related to terrorism and extremism. Dozens of citizens and law enforcement officers became their victims.[41]

Due to the regime's lack of transparency, it is impossible to verify how many of these crimes actually had to do with Islamic radicalism or terrorism. This opacity leaves open the possibility that the numbers are inflated for political reasons, possibly even labelling other popular actions as terrorist threats. During this time period mentioned above, for example, Kazakhstan's regime was quelling numerous popular protests across the country due to economic unrest.

In 2011, the regime violently put down a major, coordinated strike in Aktau

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[40] Tuzov, Alexander and Bermet Malikova. 2009. "How Can We Save Secular Kyrgyzstan?" *Vecherniy Bishkek,* November 4. Retrieved December 2, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2009/11/04/polit/1.html).

[41] Peruashev, Azat. 2012. "Social Modernization Should Guarantee the Strengthening of the Secular Nature of the State." *Zakon,* July 23. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4503635-socialnaja-modernizacija-dolzhna.html).

(in the far east of the country) by workers in the country's booming energy sector — the major source of the regime's wealth.[42] That very same year, state-aligned media openly speculated that another clash between authorities and locals near Aktobe city had its origins in Islamic extremism:

> As it is known, in the beginning of June in Aktyubinsk region there was an armed conflict between the police and an outlawed group consisting of local residents. As a result, two policemen, one special forces officer, and two others were wounded. Nine members of the criminal group were killed in detention, and two survivors were sentenced to life imprisonment. Local media did not rule out the possibility that supporters of the Islamic radical movement "Salafia" could have been involved in the killing of the policemen. However, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan denied this version. After these events, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK) stated that the Salafi current is dangerous and called on the authorities to ban it.[43]

In this quote, the pubic speculations of the media helped to drive the regime's broader warnings of Islamic extremism. Though the Ministry of Internal Affairs denied the involvement of religious extremists, the state-aligned media reported that it *could not rule out* the possibility of an extremist element, prompting the Muftiate to call for a ban on Salafism.

Thus, while it is possible that the above-cited events did indeed involve a

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[42] Anonymous. 2012. "Kazakhstan: Abusive Response to Oil Worker Strikes." *Human Rights Watch*, September 10. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/09/10/striking-oil-striking-workers/violations-labor-rights-kazakhstans-oil-sector).

[43] Porokhova, Valeriya. 2011. "Salafis Must Be Evicted." *Zakon*, October 20. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4454265-valerija-porokhova-Salafistov-nado.html).

local religious group that sought autonomy from the establishment, it is equally possible that the state is simply allowing state-aligned media to attribute the conflict to a scapegoat that has already been well established in the public's mind. This incident, along with the broader rhetoric of extremism and terrorism discussed above, demonstrate how the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan use the security discourse to justify the use of state power against their own populations. The states have devised even further means of circumventing the rule of law, however, including by entering into regional security agreements that supersede national legislation. As I discuss below, these transnational security agreements also make active use of discourses on Islamic extremism and terrorism to justify their policies and activities.

Regional Security

Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are both parties to numerous bilateral and multilateral agreements on combatting religious extremism and terrorism. Bilateral agreements and multilateral organizations have proliferated in the region since the 1990s, creating a web of overlapping policy commitments and initiatives, including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Shanghai Cooperation

Organization (SCO). And while such agreements often lack effective institutions for enforcement or transnational governance, they signal global alignments among their member states. Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Internal Affairs affirmed in 2012 that, "Kyrgyzstan fruitfully cooperates in the fight against terrorism and extremism within the CIS, CSTO and the SCO."[44] Toward this ultimate goal — projecting sovereignty over the Eurasian landmass — invocations of Islamic extremism and terrorism contribute significantly.

This emphasis on counter-terrorism began even before the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 and the subsequent U.S. military engagement in Afghanistan. The SCO, for example, issued a statement in 2000 expressing "deep concern over the growing manifestations of international terrorism, religious extremism and national separatism," and declaring that "these forces constitute the main threat to security and stability in the region."[45] The CIS similarly issued a statement in May of 2001 calling for "the development of cooperation by CIS member states in the fight against international terrorism and other

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[44] Kyrgyz Republic. 2009. Government Decree on the "Work of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, Local Government Administrations and Local Self-Government for the Prevention of Religious Extremism and Inter-Ethnic Conflict." Febrary 18, No. 115.

[45] Joint Public Statement Following the Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan. 2000, July 4. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://russian.china.org.cn/russian/43607.htm).

manifestations of extremism."[46]

Since 2001, however, terrorism and religious extremism have served as a constant refrain for these organizations, bolstering their claims to a strong mandate to project regional sovereignty. The SCO calls for an approach to counter-terrorism based on "regional, sub-regional and national structures" that enact security policies based on "mutual trust, mutual benefit, and equality of interaction" aimed to "eradicate the sources of terrorism."[47] The situation in Afghanistan in particular is frequently invoked:

> The complex military-political situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which have become the main training camps for the al-Qaida, the Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Movement of East Turkestan, the "Groups of Jihad" or "Union of Islamic Jihad," and others, poses a serious threat to security throughout the region.[48]

And while such extremist and terrorist networks are undoubtedly active to varying degrees, these organizations drastically overstate the threat of cross-border terrorism in order to justify their primary goal: projecting transnational sovereignty over the Eurasian space.

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[46] Plenipotentiary Representatives of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States under the Antiterrorist Center of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2001, May 31. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://russian.china.org.cn/russian/43607.htm).

[47] Joint Public Statement of the Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States. 2002, January 7. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (eng.sectsco.org/load/193506/).

[48] Anonymous. 2012. Monitoring of Violations of Freedom of Speech. *International Fund Adil Soz.* Retrieved January 9, 2018 (http://geum.ru/next/art-374810.php).

The CSTO and CIS both emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union to reconstitute military and economic (respectively) cooperation among all but a few Soviet successor states. The organizations collectively assert transnational sovereignty over what was perceived as Moscow's sphere of influence. The SCO integrates many CIS and CSTO member states into a larger economic and military block with China.[49] The SCO projects power over 60% of the Eurasian landmass, even as the economies of China and Russia remain more deeply entangled with those of Europe and the US than they are engaged with each other.

These organizations facilitate the efforts of the larger powers to exert influence over smaller member states. Kyrgyzstan, for example, has sought to pursue a more multipolar foreign policy by hosting a U.S. airbase that supported the war in Afghanistan, but is increasingly aligned with this Eurasian bloc. The country's foreign policy statements speak to these efforts to navigate a path between national autonomy and regional cooperation in the fight against religious extremism and terrorism:

> The Kyrgyz Republic, realizing that terrorism and extremism pose a threat to international peace and security, the development of friendly relations

[49] India joined the SCO in 2017. The inclusion of a large, western-aligned member state may change the dynamic of the organization, but it remain too early to tell.

> between states, as well as the exercise of fundamental human rights and freedoms, and to effectively combat such threats, has joined the various conventions on combating terrorism and extremism within the framework of international organizations such as the CIS, the SCO, the United Nations, and others.[50]

Although Kyrgyzstan has occasionally chaffed at its relatively weak position within these organizations, officials generally see the goals of such multinational organizations as falling largely in line with their own interests.

As a larger and wealthier state, Kazakhstan has managed to pursue multilateral foreign policy more effectively, participating in numerous multinational organizations with ties beyond the post-Soviet space. Kazakhstan chaired the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2010, and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation in 2012, exerting a leadership position (albeit a small one) in two distinct poles of global governance. In these capacities too, Kazakhstani officials placed a central emphasis in their mandate on fighting transnational forms of Islamic extremism and terrorism. Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister at the time noted: "Kazakhstan considers its main task of chairing the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) the elimination of fertile soil for

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[50] Kyrgyz Republic. 2012. The Second National Report of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Implementation of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment for the period from 1999 to 2011. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CAT/Shared%20Documents/KGZ/INT_CAT_NGO_KGZ_15547_E.pdf).

extremism and terrorism."[51]

Despite the religious and ideological diversity encompassed by these blocs — representing both Christian majority and Muslim majority countries (not to mention formally Communist China with its Maoist civic cult) — any differences that might result from such diversity are overshadowed by common regime goals in all member states: The political establishments of each state share the objective of propagating a sacrosanct popular will that allows them to appropriate the voices of their citizens. A security official in the Bishkek office of the CSTO confirmed in an interview that Russian dominance in the region presented no threat to Kyrgyz sovereignty, or even the "spiritual sovereignty" of traditional Islam. He rather saw Russia, with its large Muslim population, as a leading force for moderate Islam, producing "high quality" Islamic literature and actively contributing to a dialogue between Christianity and Islam.[52] The coherence of these multinational organizations is thus a testament to how successfully a similar authoritarian mode of governance can transcend very different cultural contexts, claiming a unique and privileged mandate to speak

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[51] Kazyhanov, Erzhan. 2011. "Kazakhstan Considers its Task in the OIC to Eliminate the Fertile Soil for Extremism." *Zakon*, September 10. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4448228-kazakhstan-schitaet-svoejj-zadachejj-v.html).

[52] Interview with Bakyt Sadyrbekovich, expert on counter-terrorism and counter-extremism in the Bishkek branch of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, July 18, 2014.

for “the people” no matter what principles they draw on in building a national cult.

IV. Hizb ut-Tahrir: Poster Child for Local Extremism.

As I argued above, the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan regularly deploy discourses on extremism, terrorism, and security without any particular object, merely invoking a vague, undefined and omnipresent threat in order to justify the use of state power. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of security is frequently deployed against specific groups that serve as exemplars of local extremism. The regimes of both countries hold up a few such groups to substantiate their claims that the region is beset with extremist, even terrorist organizations and activities. Governments throughout the region have long held up one particular movement as a poster child of local Islamic extremism: Hizb ut-Tahrir al Islami.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is a pan-Islamic movement consisting of a loose network of supporters and sympathizers who call for the establishment of a single Islamic state — a Caliphate — to rule the global Muslim community or *umma*. In the words of one Kazakh expert, the organization calls for “the concentration of secular and spiritual power over the Muslim community and society in the

hands of the theocratic ruler — the Khalif."[53] Though the movement has never directly orchestrated or called for terrorist acts, it does reject the legitimacy of autonomous nation-states for Muslim peoples, earning the ire of local authorities. Kyrgyzstan's 2012 law on State Policy in the Religious Sphere, for example, expresses alarm over the "activation of religious extremist manifestations, especially Hizbut-Tahrir al Islami."[54] In the following section, I examine a court case against Hizb ut-Tahrir in Kazakhstan, while in this section I primarily address statements and policies against the movement in Kyrgyzstan.

Whether Hizb ut-Tahrir's call for a Caliphate constitutes advocacy for violent insurgency remains a point of open and intense debate. Nevertheless, the movement has earned a reputation as "the most dangerous security threat" operating in Central Asia (outside of Afghanistan), possessing "significant financial capacity" and "actively pursuing agitation and propaganda work among the population, as well as the recruitment and training of new candidates."[55] This reputation in part also results from the movement's self-

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[53] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2004. Court Ruling of the Shymkent City Court Following the Open Trial. March 29, No. 1-170. Presiding judge Isabaeva Sh.A., secretary Kabylbekova A. with participation of the prosecutor Srazhdinov K. and lawyer Yavorsky E.

[54] Kyrgyz Republic: Government Decree on State Regulation of Religious Sphere. May 6, 2006 No. 324.

[55] Kyrgyz Republic. 2004. Government Decree on the Work of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, Local government Administrations and Local Self-Government for the

stylings as a revolutionary front or party. As one Kazakh expert noted:

> Hizb-ut-Tahrir" proclaims itself "a political party whose ideology is Islam." The party's goal is to promote the return of Muslims to the Islamic way of life ("all aspects of life should be based on the norms of the Shariah") and the spread of Islamic faith in the world. At the same time, it is declared that the realization of this goal is possible only by re-creating a unified theocratic state — a Caliphate that would unite the entire Islamic world. In the documents of Hizb-ut-Tahrir the governments of Muslim countries are characterized as non-Islamic, and all contemporary problems of the Muslim Ummah are attributed to the "absence of Islam in its daily life," including "the absence of an Islamic system of government."[56]

While there is no doubt that Hizb ut-Tahrir envisions itself as a revolutionary movement that seeks to subvert the existing inter-state system of governance, there are legitimate questions as to whether the group advocates for armed insurgency. In general local supporters have engaged in little agitation aside from spreading pamphlets that propagate the movement's agenda. The government of Kyrgyzstan, for example, released a statement declaring that:

> Members of Hizb ut-Tahrir openly declare in their leaflets the need for mass Islamization of the population, the violent change of the existing constitutional order, and the establishment of an Islamic state — the Caliphate.[57]

Prevention of Religious Extremism and Ethnic Hatred, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. July 20, 2004 No. 543.

[56] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save Spiritual Sovereignty." *Liter*, September 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018: (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

[57] Kyrgyz Republic. 2011. Government Decree On the Work of the State Commission Under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs for the Implementation of Decree of the President of Kyrgyz Republic "On Measures of Reinforcing the Rights of Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic in Freedom of Conscience and Religion." April 5, 2001 No. 155.

The content of such leaflets range from passages “about the meaning of the holy month of Ramadan with the call to fulfill the Muslim duty” to criticism of the politics of various Western and Muslim-majority states, to “advocating for the establishment of the Caliphate” and “ appeals to the military forces of Muslim countries.”[58]

In statement after statement, the authorities invoke Hizb ut-Tahrir as an immanent threat to security. But they seldom point to particular activities aside from the spreading of illicit pamphlets and other materials. In 2003, for example, Kyrgyzstani authorities noted with alarm that they had detained men distributing leaflets from Hizb ut-Tahrir in a market in the Tyup district, among whom were “imams of the Muslim clergy who preach the ideas of reactionary Islam.”[59] The report concluded that this revelation “gives grounds to believe that the first underground cells ‘Hizbut-Tahrir’ have been created, and have started operating on the territory of the region, which are ready for any manifestations of religious extremism to achieve their own goals.”[60] A 2009 report on human rights

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[58] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2005. Court Hearing at the Pavlodar Regional Court. Presiding Officer Abnasirova S.K., the judges of the collegium Suleimenov R.K. and Tarasenko I.V., with the participation of the Prosecutor of the Judicial Department of the Pavlodar Oblast Prosecutor's Office Makasheva Zh.A.

[59] Kyrgyz Republic. 2003. Issyk-Kul Regional Administration’s Resolution on “The State and Measures of Further Improvement in Combating Religious Extremism, August 5 No. 181.

[60] Ibid.

in Kazakhstan from the U.S. State Department noted that, “The authorities continued to consider the distribution of leaflets by members of the banned extremist political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir as incitement, pursuing political and terrorist goals, and being beyond constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech.”[61]

Despite this lack of extremist or terrorist activity, both governments regularly invoke Hizb ut-Tahrir as a justification for security initiatives. In 2003, the administration of Kyrgyzstan decreed the creation of regional councils “to coordinate the activities of law enforcement bodies, state and other structures in the fight against religious extremism.”[62] These councils were intended to generate ”concerted and thoughtful actions on the part of state bodies with religious organizations of the traditional conventions (Islam and Orthodoxy) in the prevention of religious extremism spread by supporters of newly emerged Islamic movements, in particular, Hizb-ut-Tahrir.”[63] Local governments have taken the initiative to participate in such coordinated activity, vowing to “increase the population's knowledge about the negative influence of the ideas

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[61] Report on the Situation with Human Rights in Kazakhstan for 2008. 2009. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.*

[62] Kyrgyz Republic. 2003. Issyk-Kul Regional Administration’s Resolution on “The State and Measures of Further Improvement in Combating Religious Extremism, August 5 No. 181.

[63] Ibid.

disseminated by the religious extremist party "Hizb-ut-Tahrir."[64]

Hizb ut-Tahrir was even invoked as justification for an uncharacteristically heavy-handed 2002 moratorium in Kyrgyzstan "on holding meetings, rallies, pickets, street processions and other public events in the Kyrgyz Republic," ostensibly in the public's own interest:

> This Law is aimed at ensuring the protection of the rights and freedoms of citizens, protecting public order and ensuring internal security in the Kyrgyz Republic, in connection with the illegal actions of certain extremist elements with the activities of the religious extremist party Hizb ut-Tahrir, which pursue the goal of destabilizing the situation in the republic.[65]

Thus, Hizb ut-Tahrir provides the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan with a highly serviceable justification for exerting state power and even suspending core civil rights when necessary. At the same time, the movement has also served as a key case for introducing strong legal precedents abolishing religious dissidence, as I discuss in the following section.

Prosecuting Representatives of Hizb-ut-Tahrir

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[64] Kyrgyz Republic. 2009. Decree of the Issyk-Kul Regional Administration on "The State of Religious Affairs in the Territory of the Issyk-Kul Region." March 13, No. 61.

[65] Kyrgyz Republic. 2002. Government Decree on the "Moratorium on Holding Meetings, Rallies, Pickets, Street Processions and Other Public Events in the Kyrgyz Republic." September 7, No. 615.

Just as the Soviet Union found it difficult to eradicate the many home-based churches that violated the state's rigidly secular politics, so too have its successor states found it difficult to enforce their laws against mercurial, cell-based movements such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. If the Protestant and other organizations investigated in the previous chapter operate largely in the open, seeking legal status, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jamaat, and a handful of other Islamic movements have largely eschewed legal status, either because they reject the authority of the secular state or because they simply lack a formal leadership and organizational structure.

This informal structure has led governments in the region to view any sympathizers of banned groups as potential members (especially if they are found to possess banned literature). In terms of law enforcement strategies, governments tend to pursue groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir through sting operations. The governments bring charges against multiple plaintiffs simultaneously, similar to taking down a mafia or protection racket (Tilly 1985). One court case in Kazakhstan in 2009 goes into particular detail on the structure and activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir .

All activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir had been prohibited by the earlier ruling of an Astana court in 2005, after the Ministry of Internal Affair's Pavlodar Regional

Department for Combatting Extremism discovered during "joint operational-search activities" with the KNB (the successor institution to the KGB) that "supporters of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami planned through leaflets to hold mass protests in Kazakhstan in educational institutions, mosques, and other places of gathering."[66] Multiple individuals were charged with crimes related to inciting riots, including the defendant in the 2009 case, a man by the name of Gunatulin: "Ginatulin AG was detained while distributing leaflets with extremist information published by the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami publishing house."[67]

Ginatullin was prosecuted, but later released as part of a general amnesty in 2006. The official notes that as a part of this amnesty, Gunatullin "wrote a formal refusal to participate in Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami, but without effective repentance on his part, as he did not identify any leaders of the extremist party."[68] In 2008, Gunatullin was detained again for distributing literature "aimed at inciting interreligious hostility,"[69] prompting the 2009 court case.

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[66] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2009. Court Ruling of the Court No. 2 of the City of Pavlodar from May 27, No. 1-492. Presiding judge Akhmetova A.S. with the participation of the secretary of the court session Shushaeva G.S., state prosecutors of the judicial department of the prosecutor's office Baimagambetova L.A., Aushakhmetova M., defender of the lawyer Moldabayev B.K., defendant Ginatullin A.G.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

The trial is most revealing because of the prosecution's exhaustive recounting of the cell-based structure and work of Hizb ut-Tahrir. A government witness describes local cells of the movement as designed to preserve secrecy and accountable to higher ups for the volume of their activities:

> Each group (*khalaka*) consists of 5-6 students (*Doris*) and obeys the eldest (*mushrifu*), which organizes training and initiates the best prepared adherents after passing two stages of training. The *mushrif* can simultaneously manage up to five *khalaka* groups. *Doris* communicate only by their names; their *mushriff* is only known by a pseudonym, and, for the sake of conspiracy, they are not aware of the members of other groups. *Mushrif*, engaged in training 1-5 *khalaka*, report to an *amir* for the quality and quantity of activities conducted, and the *amir* controls the activities of up to five *mushrifs*.[70]

Above this local level, the witness describes an extensive hierarchy, in which up to five *amirs* constitute a *jihaz* run by a *jihaz azosi*, and several *azosi* report to a *nakib* who is in charge of a district or *mahalli*. At the national level, several *nakibs* report to a *musoid*, who in turn reports to *mintah masul*, who finally report to the *bas masul* or head of an entire country branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir. At the international level, country heads report to regional leaders or *mubamada* (one of which ostensibly runs Hizb ut-Tahrir in all of Central Asia, though he is not identified in the proceedings), who finally report to the *Amir-ul-Azam* — "the leader of the entire international extremist organization Hizb-ut-Tahrir-al-

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[70] Ibid.

Islami."[71] The prosecution ostensibly derived this organization structure from Hizb ut-Tahrir's own literature, and names a number of figures who supposedly occupied these higher echelon leadership positions. Nevertheless, this structure might represent Hizb ut-Tahrir's aspirations more than its actual practices of self-governance.

The charges brought against Ginatullin detail his activities as a subordinate (*doris*) in Hizb ut-Tahrir. These include, "fomenting religious and national enmity," "encroaching on the current constitutional order and territorial integrity of [Kazakhstan]" and "propagating the superiority of one religion over another."[72] The last of these charges is a favorite formulation of the regime, which contorts belief in one's own religion into an act of discrimination against other religions. The prosecution exhaustively recounted its methods of observing Ginatullin in performance of the many (mostly mundane) activities he engaged in as a *doris* in the movement. These include tracking his movements to and from internet cafes, monitoring his posts to message boards, monitoring his mail, and eventually searching his apartment as part of his arrest. All of these monitoring activities were initiated based on Ginatullin's earlier history of engagement with

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

Hizb ut-Tahrir.

After the prosecution presented its case, Ginatullin offered a verbal defense (without the assistance of neutral legal representation), in which he acknowledged his guilt and expressed remorse for his actions. The court sentenced him to three years imprisonment in a penal colony, “in order to correct the defendant and prevent him from committing new crimes.”[73] Ginatullin was not convicted in isolation, however. The case proceedings make direct reference to charges pending against his “accomplices.” The law enforcement strategy that authorities often pursue in relation to movements such as Hizb ut-Tahrir thus focuses on rooting out networks of supporters and keeping them under observation. It is precisely in relation to such uses of state power that discourses on security provide such a powerful justification. In the next chapter, I discuss the complimentary discourse on radical Islam that helps to differentiate “legitimate” forms of Islam from “illegitimate“ forms of the religion.

Conclusion

The political philosopher Will Kymlicka, best known for his work on

[73] Ibid.

multicultural citizenship, once wrote that states in Eastern Europe often treat minority rights as a security issue because they make three interrelated assumptions: that minorities are disloyal, that a strong nation requires weak minorities, and that the security framework provides the most effective means of dealing with minority claims (Kymlicka 2002). In Kymlicka's analysis, Ethnic divisions thus come to designate boundaries where rights end and the security apparatus of the state begins. The case of Islamic heterodoxy in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan shows that the state can make the same assumptions not only of ethnic minorities and religious minorities, but also of heterodox movements that have gained traction among the titular populations.

Whereas ethnic minorities represent distinct populations that are entitled to rights, religious movements represent diffuse affiliations. If the officials perceives such a movement as subversive, they may feel even stronger incentives to engage the movement through the security apparatus of the state. The murky boundaries of the Islamic movements discussed in this chapter translate, in the eyes of state officials, into a similarly vague boundaries between rights and security. For this reason, the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan often deploy discourses on security and threat in conjunction with discourses intended to bolster the authority of the regime and traditional Islam. In the next chapter, I

examine these latter discourses intended to combat the legitimacy of Islamic heterodoxy and bolster the authority of the local religious establishment.

CHAPTER 9

Islamic Dissidence and Regime Authority

Today, Wahhabis also declare the [secular] authorities in Islamic states to be takfir [unfaithful], as well as the law enforcement and security agencies that these states protect and support, and those Muslims who, by the very act of refusing to support Wahhabis, put themselves in league with their leaders — a league of "apostates."

Erjan Malgajuli Mayamerov
Head Mufti of Kazakhstan

The typology that I introduced in the previous chapter makes a distinction between forms of Islamic hetorodoxy — groups that present an immanent security threat, groups that present a manifest threat to the authority of "moderate" and "traditional" Islam, and groups that seem to present neither of these threats, but still have "hidden potential" to do harm. In keeping with this approach, I will structure this chapter around the distinction between latent and manifest threats to the authority of the secular regimes and of "traditional" Islam. I will focus in particular on three movements that exemplify this distinction between latent and manifest threats: Wahhabism, Salafism, and Tablighi Jamaat.

The fundamentalist movements Wahhabism and Salafism are both seen as overt threats to the authority of the local religious establishment. Their conservative doctrines ground Islamic authority in Arabic civilization and the practices of the first generations of Muslims. These movements thus overtly dispute the legitimacy of distinct national traditions of Islam such as the Hanafi traditions promoted by the Muftiates of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The Islamic missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat, in contrast, is seen as a latent or covert threat to the Muftiate. The practices of the movement are grounded less in doctrine than in an ideal of service and community. Participants of the movement go door-to-door encouraging men to attend their local mosque (often Muftiate-affiliated) regularly. Most of the movement's requirements of its members focus on missionary activity and similar forms of devotion through service. Thus, the movement presents no direct challenges to the doctrinal authority of the Muftiates, but still creates an autonomous structure of authority and governance that competes with the local religious establishment.

Whether latent or manifest, however, religious and state authorities have monitored the gains made by these movements in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan with significant anxiety. The authorities see their task as an effort to prevent the formation of fissures in their civic and spiritual constituencies. A declaration by

the government of Kyrgyzstan attests to this approach:

> Together with the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Kyrgyz Republic, we will continue to work to consolidate the Islamic faith, and to seek unification through our efforts with the servants of Islam [i.e. the Muftiate] in preventing and counteracting religious extremism.[1]

And while the "traditional" Islam promoted by the Muftiates of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan enjoy significant popular support, they do face significant challenges in curtailing the activities of heterodox Islamic movements. As previously noted, the national religious establishments must contend with a widespread public perception that Islamic movements from the Middle East and Southern Asia are more "authentic" and "authoritative" than local Islam.

In this chapter, I will examine the discourses propagated by the religious and secular establishments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan about latent and manifest threats to traditional Islam. In the sections that follow, I will first examine the cases of Salafism and Wahhabism, and then turn to that of Tablighi Jamaat. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have employed relatively similar approaches toward Salafism and Wahhabism, but differ significantly in their response to Tablighi Jamaat. For reasons I will address below, the latter group is banned outright in Kazakhstan, but has flourished in Kyrgyzstan (although under

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[1] Kyrgyz Republic. 2009. Government Decree to Introduce Amendments to the Law on Countering Financial Support of Terrorism and Money Laundering. June 2, 2009 No 179.

scrutiny), and has even penetrated the leadership structure of the Muftiate.

I. "Manifest Threats" to Authority: Global Fundamentalist Movements

In contrast to the discourse on terrorism and security, which is often used without any clear object to justify state power, a complimentary discourse on fundamentalism is deployed to defend the authority of the religious and political establishment — including the regime's authority to suspend its own rules. Discourses on various forms of radical and fundamentalist Islam are deployed against groups that specifically challenge the authenticity and authority of "traditional" Islam in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, including the symbiotic relationship between traditional Islam and the secular nation-state.

Two movements in particular have come to dominate regime discourses on fundamentalist Islam: Wahhabism and Salafism. Both movements have become euphemisms for foreign, radical, and reactionary Islamists that threaten to undermine the authority of local, traditional Islam. Wahhabism is often presented as the official religious ideology of Saudi Arabia, an ultra-conservative dogma which the regime promotes globally as a form of soft power. Salafi, meanwhile, looks back to several 19th-century Islamic figures who called for

strict adherence to the way of life practiced by the first generations of Muslims or the *salaf*. According to one Kazakh expert:

> Salafism is a religious trend that calls for the orientation towards the lifestyle and faith of the early Muslim community, the so-called "righteous ancestors"… a return to the original "purity of Islam" that existed under the prophet and the first generations of Muslims. That is, the actual ideological basis of this religious teaching is classic utopianism and an unrealistic idealization of the past.[2]

Kazakhstani authorities maintain that Salafism has grown with remarkable speed, reporting in 2013 that "according to the KNB, there are 24 radical Salafi jamaats numbering 495 people."[3] Authorities in Kyrgyzstan have voiced similar concerns. The Head Mufti of Kazakhstan offered the following definition of Salafism:

> Islamologists define Salafi as a fundamentalist trend, whose supporters call for the renunciation of "alien," untrue Muslim rites — including from Hanifite Islam, which is practiced in Central Asia, Turkey and a number of other countries — and return to the way of life of righteous ancestors, which is directly determined by the norms of the Koran and Sura.[4]

He went on to state that "Salafism in this interpretation is not much different

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[2] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save Spiritual Sovereignty." *Liter*, September 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018: (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

[3] Korolev, Andrey. 2013. "The Work Carried Out by Competent Authorities is Designed to Preserve Stability in the Country." *Zakon*, February 27. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31338549#pos=1;-145).

[4] No Author. 2011. "Salafi Became a Dangerous Religious Movement in Kazakhstan." Interview with the Press-Secretary of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kazakhstan. *Bnews*, July 13. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://bnews.kz/ru/news/obshchestvo/salafiya_stala_opasnim_religioznim_techeniem_v_kazahstane__dumk).

from Wahhabism, which has become a symbol of militant Islam in the West and in Central Asia.“[5]

Other experts, however, have questioned how deep the fundamentalist dogma of the Salafism goes, and have asserted that calls for “a return to the times of the prophet, so-called ‘pure’ Islam, is nothing more than an advertising ploy.”[6] Authorities frequently point to the similarities between Wahhabism and Salafism rather than dissect their differences. Officials from Kazakhstan’s Muftiate have stated, for example, that Salafism “differs little from Wahhabism” in this desire for a return to a “way of life determined directly by the rules of the Koran and the Sura.”[7] Other Kazakhstani officials have directly conflated the two, stating that ”Wahhabism is one manifestation of Salafism,”[8] or that “radical Salafis are Wahhabis in their fanatical striving for the pristine sources of Islam.”[9]

Debates between Salafism and Wahhabism go beyond Central Asia, and I will

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. “To Save Spiritual Sovereignty.” *Liter*, September 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018: (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

[7] No Author. 2011. “Salafi Became a Dangerous Religious Movement in Kazakhstan.” Interview with the Press-Secretary of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kazakhstan. *Bnews,* July 13. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://bnews.kz/ru/news/obshchestvo/salafiya_stala_opasnim_religioznim_techeniem_v_kazahstane__dumk).

[8] Kuandykova, Dariya. 2011. “What is the State of the Religious Sphere and What Should It Be?” *Zakon*, October 4. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4451588-chto-predstavljaet-sobojj-religioznaja.html).

[9] Amrebaev, Aidar. 2011. “The State Has Initiated a Frontal Attack." *Zakon*, November 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31080933#pos=1;-145).

not pursue distinctions between the two movements further here. The important point is that both Wahhabism and Salafism are seen as an assault on local traditions, and as a more radical form of Islam prone to extremist and even terrorist activities. The director of Kazakhstan's SARA, Kairat Lama Sharif, addressed this issue specifically with reference to the principle of *takfir:*

> Takfir is an accusation of kufr (unbelief) against all those who do not share the ideas of Wahhabi followers, who are in general fundamentalists. The main object of takfir is, first of all, those Muslims who disagree with their interpretation of Islam… In this case, Muslims who are accused of unfaithfulness — kufr, are given the status of apostates (in Arabic - murtadd, that is, those who have departed from Islam).[10]

Authorities have not hesitated to draw a direct connection between this criticism of local Islam and the potential for terrorism. In the words of Sharif, this challenge to the authority of local Islamic traditions awakens feelings of national shame that provide fertile ground for extremism:

> All of the foregoing allows us to assert that takfirism can deal a serious blow to the psychology and mentality of young Kazakhs as representatives of the state-forming ethnos [i.e. the titular ethnicity], awakening among current generations of Kazakhs a sense of "shame" for their history and for the path of their ancestors… This guilt provides at least an ideological basis for the possibility of conducting armed jihad against their fellow citizens.[11]

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[10] Lama Sharif, Kairat. 2013. "Takfirism is a Betrayal of One's Religion and One's Own People." *Islam in CIS,* June 10. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://www.islamsng.com/kaz/opinion/6954).
[11] Ibid.

Officials and experts have been quick to point out that "a number of extremist organizations adhere to Salafi ideas in one form or another, including those banned in Kazakhstan,"[12] putting Salafis at odds with the ostensibly moderate and civic-minded form of Islam promoted by the Muftiate. The same is regularly said of Wahhabism:

> Wahhabism is the ideological platform of such known terrorist and extremist organizations and movements as Al Qaeda, the Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb ut Tahrir, Salafi, Tablighi Jamaat, Jamaat of the Mujahideen of Central Asia, th e"AlAksi Martyrs Brigade," Hamas, etc.[13]

Wahhabism is thus seen as a potential security threat both because it challenges the authority of local Islamic traditions, and also because it has been used to justify terrorism. Kazakhstani authorities, for example, asserted that in 2013 "more than 100 people were convicted on charges of terrorist activities, most of whom were followers of Wahhabism and Salafism."[14] Below I discuss a court case that reveals some of the state's approaches to enforcing laws against propagating Salafi and Wahhabi ideas.

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[12] Amrebaev, Aidar. 2011. "The State Has Initiated a Frontal Attack." *Zakon*, November 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31080933#pos=1;-145).

[13] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2000. Government Decree on "the State Protection of Persons Participating in Criminal Proceedings." July 5, No. 72.

[14] Anonymous. 2013. "On the Territory of Kazakhstan There Are Nearly 500 Participants of Radical Religious Groups." *KTK*, February 21. Retrieved January 9, 2018 (http://www.ktk.kz/ru/news/video/2013/02/21/21411).

The Muftiate of Kazakhstan asserts that at present the "overwhelming majority of Muslims in Kazakhstan remain immune to the preaching of Wahhabi missionaries,"[15] but authorities nevertheless emphasize the need to remain ever vigilant. At a round table on "Terrorism in the Modern World," one official attributed "the growing influence of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia" to a "crisis in the public consciousness."[16] The answer offered to this crisis invariably involves consolidating the authority of "traditional" Islam under the stewardship of the Muftiate. One expert asserted that the Muftiate is the only structure that can keep followers of Wahhabism and Salafism grounded in "normal life, in harmony with the world around them," stating:

> In Kazakhstan today, even takfiristy, as a rule, regularly visit the mosque and line up behind the imam during the prayer. Thus, today's mosque is the last thread connecting these people with the rest of society, not allowing them to cross the final line, at which they already stand.[17]

Religious scholars in Kazakhstan have called for the creation of "enlightened

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[15] Anonymous. 2011. "The Goals of the Wahhabis Are Absolutely Inconsistent with National Interests and Pose Threat to Kazakhstan's Independence." *Zakon,* August 17. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4444902-celi-vakhkhabitov-absoljutno-ne.html).

[16] Anonymous. 2011. "Kazakhstan Intends to Protect Itself Legally From Religious Extremism." *Zakon,* September 1. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4446898-kazakhstan-nameren-zakonodatelno.html).

[17] Nurseitova, Torgyn. 2013. "In the Islamic Field of Kazakhstan There is a Serious Ideological Struggle." Interview with Timur Kozyrev, deputy director of the research and analytical center of the Agency of Religious Affairs in the Republic of Kazakhstan. *Zakon,* February 26. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4543537-timur-kozyrev-na-islamskom-pole.html).

Islam and mosques" to fill the nation's "ideological vacuum," lest it be filled by "radical and fundamentalist interpretations."[18] A government report in Kyrgyzstan, similarly, notes that cooperation between the state and the Muftiate is vital to "prevent the split of the Muslim community [due to] the penetration of "new" directions such as Wahhabism, Akramia, etc.[19]

As I detail below, the religious establishments in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan face significant challenges in this battle for authority. The popularity of Salafisim and Wahhabism is bolstered by the perceived authenticity of these forms of Islam relative to local traditions. Furthermore, the Muftiates in both countries frequently come under fire for being too politically controlled and pliant, undermining their authority. These and other factors have drawn the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan into extended battles to monopolize the authority to speak for the sacrosanct values and interests that ostensibly define the popular will.

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[18] Anonymous. 2011. "Kazakhstan Needs Enlightened Islam, Mosques Should Have the Status of Cultural Institutions." Fragments from the meeting of experts representing the Club of the Institute of Political Decisions. *Zakon*, April 28. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/212154-kazakhstanu-nuzhen-prosveshhennyjj.html).

[19] Kyrgyz Republic. 1998. State Policy on the Activities of the State Commission under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Religious Affairs. July 7, 1998 No. 441.

Hanafi and the Authority of Local Islamic Traditions

The major theological argument against Salafism and Wahhabism in Central Asia is their rejection of Hanafi Islam, the dominant form of Sunni Islam among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. The Hanafi school gained popularity in Central Asia under the influence of Ottoman emissaries to the Muslim peoples of the Russian Empire. The Ottoman Empire officially embraced Hanafi Islam because it was the only school that accepted the legitimacy of a non-Arabic Caliph as the figure head of global Islam. Based largely on Turkish rule, the Ottomans had an obvious incentive to propagate Hanafi Islam within their territories and beyond, and the school gained popularity among the Turkic peoples of the North Caucasus and Central Asia for reason of both regional and cultural proximity to Ottoman Empire (Brower 1997; Deringil 1994; Landau 1981; Stone *et al* 2004). An official from Kazakhstan's Muftiate summarized this history succinctly:

> Kazakhstan, like other countries of Central Asia, since the first centuries of spreading Islam in our territories, took the path of the Hanafi madkhab [school], to which belong more than half of all Muslims around the world. In turn, the Hanafi madkhab is one of the trends in Sunnism, to which more than 90 percent of Muslims profess, including almost all Turkic peoples.[20]

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[20] Anonymous. 2011. "The Goals of the Wahhabis Are Absolutely Inconsistent with National Interests and Pose Threat to Kazakhstan's Independence." *Zakon,* August 17. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4444902-celi-vakhkhabitov-absoljutno-ne.html).

As puritanical movements, Salafism and Wahhabism reject such perceived improvisations on Islamic legal doctrine. Many authorities see Wahhabism merely as "a nationalist ideology of the Arabs (designed as a religious doctrine)," which emerged as a part of "the national liberation struggle of the Arabs against the Turks."[21]

The battle over Hanafi Sunnism is thus no less than a battle over the authority of the national traditions of Islam propagated by the Muftiates of Central Asia. In the words of one Kyrgyz expert, for example, Salafis "deny other currents in Islam, and consider the followers of the Hanafi order (to which the majority of the population of Central Asia belongs, by the way) to be incorrect Muslims."[22] The Muftiate of Kazakhstan has asserted that Salafism "has become one of the most dangerous religious trends in the country," because it "contributed to the weakness of Kazakhstan's legislation in the sphere of religion, as well as active propaganda carried out by missionaries from Arab countries."[23] Similarly, religious authorities assert that Wahhabis "criticize the Kazakhs, questioning

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[21] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save Spiritual Sovereignty." *Liter*, September 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

[22] Malikova, Bermet. 2009. "Salafism: Latent or Real Threat?" *Vecherniy Bishkek*, December 11. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2009/12/11/svyat/1.html).

[23] No Author. 2011. "Salafi Became a Dangerous Religious Movement in Kazakhstan." Interview with the Press-Secretary of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kazakhstan. *Bnews*, July 13. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://bnews.kz/ru/news/obshchestvo/salafiya_stala_opasnim_religioznim_techeniem_v_kazahstane__dumk).

their historical religious affiliation with Islam."[24]

In this battle, local religious authorities face a number of challenges. Despite the common desire for national distinctiveness, many locals still view Islamic teachings and practices from Arabic countries as more "original," "authentic," or "pure."[25] There is particular concern that such popular perceptions are driving both the success of Islamic missionary movements in Central Asia, and recent trends of locals seeking religious education abroad:

> A number of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic have travelled abroad on tourist visas and by private invitation, and enter religious schools in violation of existing rules [governing religious education for imams]. According to operational data, their number exceeds 300 people. These citizens often find themselves in educational institutions of an extremist nature.[26]

Religious authorities have expressed concern that "Takfirites in Kazakhstan are very critical of the madkhab of Imam Abu Hanifa [from whom the school of Hanafi derives its name] and his followers," and "do not recognize the authority

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[24] Lama Sharif, Kairat. 2013. "The Transitional Processes in Our Republic Predetermined the Complexity of the Formation of the Islamic field in Kazakhstan." *Zakon,* June 8. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31402597#pos=1;-105).

[25] In the pilot survey on religious attitudes in Kyrgyzstan, nearly half of the respondents answered yes to the question "Should the way that Islam is practiced in other Muslim countries have more influence on the way Islam is practiced in our country?" When asked to elaborate, most respondents who answered yes listed Turkey and Arabic countries as sources of more "authentic" Islam, in comparison to the perceived lapses in local traditions due to the Soviet period.

[26] Kyrgyz Republic: Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Measures of the Implementation of the Rights of Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic and Freedom of Faith." Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic K. Bakiev, April 5, 2001 No 155.

of local imams."[27] One Kyrgyz religious expert argued that such ideological struggles represent the primary threat of Salafism, which he felt is otherwise politically benign:

> Politically, Salafism does not represent a threat to Kyrgyzstan. Why? In its ideology there are no calls for power or for a change in the structure of the state and its secular foundations. But if we take into account the fact that Islam of the Hanafi madkhab and mathuridism is traditional for us, the threat of this theological school can be expressed in the form of intra-confessional conflicts among practicing Muslims. That is, Salafism as a movement for the purity of Islam represents a danger to the integrity of the [Muslim] community itself.[28]

Other officials do not share this benign view of Salafism, however. Many local authorities have not hesitated to associate Salafism and Wahhabism with known extremist and terrorist organizations. In the rhetoric of these officials, these movements come from countries with traditions of more political and radical Islam — primarily in the Middle East and Southern Asia:

> A number of extremist organizations adhere to Salafi ideas in one form or another, including those banned in Kazakhstan. Among them are Al-Qaeda, Asbat al-Ansar, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and the Muslim Brotherhood. The listed organizations, preaching the Salafi ideas, oppose the secular principles of the state, as well as the historically established traditions of the Hanafi madhhab of Sunnism, spread not only in

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[27] Lama Sharif, Kairat. 2013. "The Transitional Processes in Our Republic Predetermined the Complexity of the Formation of the Islamic field in Kazakhstan." *Zakon*, June 8. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31402597#pos=1;-105).

[28] Malikova, Bermet. 2009. "Salafism: Latent or Real Threat?" *Vecherniy Bishkek*, December 11. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2009/12/11/svyat/1.html).

Kazakhstan, but throughout Central Asia.[29]

By associating Salafism and Wahhabism with groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, the regimes draw a direct link between challenges to Hanafi Islam and challenges to national sovereignty. Officials assert that "Modern extremism, in particular Islamic in the form of Wahhabism, has set as a key goal the creation of a state that does not recognize the borders between Muslim countries."[30]

The authorities have responded to this challenge by trying to elevate the Islamic credentials of their imams, as well as by attacking Salafism and Wahhabism as foreign imports that have no traditional roots in Central Asia. In contrast to the supposed extremism of Wahhabism and Salafism, both regimes promote ideals of national Islam as modern, moderate, civic, and authentic for the people of Central Asia:

> Thus, Sunnism, characteristic of Kazakhstan, was originally a moderate ideological trend, condemning religious radicalism and extremism, it was within the framework of moderate Sunnism that the traditional Hanafi madhhab developed for the Kazakhs.[31]

But local authorities are concerned with the capacity of local Islam to retain its

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[29] Amrebaev, Aidar. 2011. "The State Has Initiated a Frontal Attack." *Zakon*, November 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31080933#pos=1;-145).

[30] Ahmetova, Albina. 2012. "Over 20 Percent of Kazakhstanis are Convinced of the High Probability of Spreading Religious Extremism in the Country." *Zakon*, November 29. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4527713-bolee-20-procentov-kazakhstancev.html).

[31] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save Spiritual Sovereignty." *Liter*, September 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

position of authority in the eyes of their co-nationals. In Kyrgyztan in particular, the establishment is concerned that the nation lacks the financial resources to compete with well-funded fundamentalist groups from abroad. Officials have voiced concern that poor "spiritual education of local Muslim clergy" and the financial dependence of many mosques on "foreign sponsors and benefactors" create "a fertile ground for the spread of ideas of Islamic extremism and fundamentalism."[32]

Outward Piety as a Symbolic Battleground

One particular point of dispute in this debate involves outward expressions of piety. This issue inevitably involves debates over the hijab or headscarf worn by women, as I discuss below, but generally the more contentious debate in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan has involved men's manner of dress and personal grooming. Establishment religious officials — imams and muftis — have carefully cultivated a distinctively national form of ceremonial dress, pairing skull caps and head wraps that evoke solidarity with perceived global Islamic convention, with ceremonial robes in the local tradition — highly ornamented

[32] Kyrgyz Republic. 1995. Government Decree "On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Tasks of the Authorities to Formulate State Policy in the Religious Sphere." Signed by Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Djumagulov, August 1995 No. 345.

versions of the thick felt *chapan* worn by shepherds and associated with Kyrgyz and Kazakh nomadic and pastoral traditions.

Image 2: Erjan Malgajuli Mayamerov, Head Mufti of Kazakhstan from 2013 to 2017, in a ceremonial version of the chapan or cloak attributed to the nomadic past.

Recently, however, many locals Muslims have taken to demonstrating their "piety" by embracing styles of dress and grooming from the Middle East and Southern Asia, which they perceive to be sources of more "authentic" Islam. This tendency has sparked a vigorous public debate on the proper expression of religious piety and national pride. In support of a broader bill on "religious activities and religious associations" being considered by Kazakhstan's

parliament, one official asserted:

> Yes, Kazakhs belong to the peoples of Muslim religious beliefs and, being the bearers of Islamic religious spirituality, we continue to be Kazakhs — with our material and spiritual culture, with our traditions of decorative and fitting art, with our customs and rituals, among which national clothes play an important role. Kazakh clothes; not Arabic. In the pursuit of Islam... we cannot change the culture of our ancestors; we do not need to rush between Kazakh culture and the culture of the Arabs.[33]

In keeping with the discussion above about heterodoxy and disaffection, I have observed anecdotally that this "foreign" manner of dress tends to be relatively more popular among lower classes and ethnic minorities. Although I lack robust data to corroborate this tendency, officials themselves have noted that such disaffected strata disproportionately embrace these outward expressions of piety as a means to subvert the authority and status hierarchy propagated by the Muftiates. One Kazakh expert compared such styles among men to "teenage and youth movements, which in this way try to assert their shaky identity."[34]

Clothing and grooming provide disaffected groups with a cheap and effective means of challenging the Muftiate's authority by affecting a style that is commonly associated with the lands where more "authentic" Islam is practiced.

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[33] Press Service of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2011. "A Bill On Religious Activities and Religious Associations was Considered by the Public Chamber of the Majilis." *Zakon*, September 15. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31053921#pos=1;-108).

[34] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save Spiritual Sovereignty." *Liter*, September 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

The religious establishment has indicated that it fully recognizes this symbolic challenge to its authority:

> The most vivid manifestation of the global struggle for the souls of our fellow citizens is the discussion that has developed in our society around the external attributes of faith, in particular, the form and style of clothing. It is known that radical Salafis — Wahhabis in their fanatical striving for pristine sources of Islam — not only literally interpret the Koran and the Sunnah, but also try to follow the medieval way of life characteristic of the era of the first Muslims. They diligently copy the style of clothing and hairstyles of that time. So, in particular, they shave their heads, wear long unkempt beards, narrow and short trousers. But you will agree that people who decide to wear glasses to give themselves a more intelligent look do not become more intelligent and educated. The superficial attributes of faith can not add spiritual depth to a man.[35]

Once again, authorities have not hesitated to associate such outward expressions of piety with radical Islam. One Kazakh expert, for example, stated that "short pants and beards are a kind of ideological manifestation of radical Salafism, a symbolic challenge to traditional, moderate Islam."[36] However, other public figures have warned against trying to associate radicalism with any particular outward appearance. One religious expert warned that "adherents of traditional Islam in Kazakhstan, belonging to the Hanafi madkhab, may also be suspected of propagating Salafism, since by their appearance they can not be

[35] Ibid.

[36] Brusilovskaya, Elena. No date. "Our People Have Their Own Path in Religion." Interview with Kamal Burhanov, doctor of political science and member of the Parliament in the Republic of Kazakhstan. *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://yk.kz/news/show/11509?print).

distinguished." He emphasized that "Among these bearded men there are both Wahhabis and ordinary Sunnis."[37]

These debates took an interesting turn in Kyrgyzstan, with the ascent of the Pakistan-based missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat. Members of this movement commonly embraced Pakistani styles of dress to indicate their piety as they proselytized door-to-door. The growth of the organization led to similar concerns as those stated above in Kazakhstan. An official of Kyrgyzstan's SCRA asserted in an interview that the looser clothing frequently worn by men in Pakistan and some Arabic countries makes no sense in Central Asia — neither in terms of the region's climate nor in the cultural context, and should thus be viewed as a foreign expression of Islam.[38]

As the movement gained mainstream support within the Muftiate, however, they made a conscious decision to abandon Pakistani garb and embrace a more Malaysian form of dress. One respondent in Kyrgyzstan, an anthropologist and a participant in Tablighi Jamaat, noted that the leadership made this change as part

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[37] Sokolov, Andrey. 2011. "Religion Should Unite and Not Disconnec." Interview with Eldar Zhumagaziev, Atyrau political scientist. *Inform,* August 16. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://www.inform.kz/kz/religiya-dolzhna-ob-edinyat-a-ne-raz-edinyat-obschestvo-atyrauskiy-politolog-el-dar-zhumagaziev_a2398772).

[38] Interview with Janybek Tolonovich, Head Legal Expert at the State Commission for Religious Affairs, March 29, 2013.

of a conscious effort to change the group's public image as it became more mainstream.

Image 3: Maksat aji Toktomushev, Head Mufti of Kyrgyzstan, pairing a kalpak or traditional Kyrgyz hat with the more "modern" style of Muslim dress attributed to Southeast Asia and recently embraced by the Muftiate.

This selective borrowing from different Islamic traditions demonstrates how "spiritual sovereignty" gets constructed in a global religious field. On the surface, it would seem absurd to "defend" the Kyrgyz tradition of Islam from cultural assimilation by Middle Eastern or South Asian traditions by adopting Malaysian practices. These efforts make perfect sense, however, if we consider what these different regions *represent* to local actors in Kyrgyzstan. Malaysia is commonly associated with moderate and progressive Islam. Malaysia has become a hub in

the global expansion of Islamic finance and Halal certification agencies, and is thus seen as bridging progressive and global Islamic aspirations to authentic Muslim traditions.[39] Local Muslims thus see Malaysia as a Muslim nation that has become a global actor, but has also remained true to its national traditions. Thus, adopting Malaysian dress is construed not as a loss of spiritual sovereignty, but as a symbol of Kyrgyz Muslims' national aspirations.

Of no less significance, the issue of Islamic dress has brought up debates on the hijab for women. Here too, many locals have argued that the hijab is a foreign form of Islam, authentic only within Arabic traditions. Many have argued that the hijab is neither essential to Islam as a whole, nor compatible with local traditions:

> Encouraging young women, girls to wear a hijab, one should remember that never did a Kazakh woman wear a hijab! How could she wear one in such a spartan nomadic life? She wore trousers, she deftly rode atop a horse. Women were engaged in life, with children, sharing with men all the hardships of nomadic life.[40]

In both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the hijab has become a subject of spirited

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[39] Botoeva, Aisalkyn. 2017. "Transnational Islamic Banks & Local Markets in Central Asia." *Islam, Society and Politics in Central Asia*, ed. by Pauline Jones Luong. Pittsburgh, PA: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press.

[40] Press Service of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2011. "A Bill On Religious Activities and Religious Associations was Considered by the Public Chamber of the Majilis." *Zakon,* September 15. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31053921#pos=1;-108).

debate, but the only real battleground for this debate thus far has been legal battles over the right of girls and young women to wear hijabs in public schools and universities. In Kyrgyzstan, the Ministry of Education and Science issued an order "On the religious situation in the educational organizations of the Kyrgyz Republic," according to which “girls and young women are forbidden to wear headscarves and hijabs in schools.”[41] The debate took a similar course in Kazakhstan, where a number of parental groups protested the informal ban on the hijab in public schools:

> The Commissioner received a collective appeal of Muslim women from the city of Taraz (No. 842/03 of 02.09.07) with a complaint that the directors of secondary schools where the applicants' daughters are studying prevent Muslim girls from wearing hijabs; they also intentionally produce an artificial decline in their academic performance, in fulfillment of a directive from the head of the Department of Internal Policy of the Akimat [city council] of the city of Taraz.[42]

The public debate that ensued led to an official statement by the Ministry of Justice, siding with the informal ban on hijabs. In the words of the Ministry, “although the constitution guarantees everyone the right to profess any religion, students of state educational institutions must comply with established rules of

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[41] Pavlovich, Lyudmila. 2009. “Separate the Wheat From the Chaff.” Interview with the Director of the State Agency for Religious Affairs Kanybek Osmonaliev. *Slovo Kyrgyzstana,* March 20, No. 29.

[42] Report on the Activities of the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2007. 2008. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.*

the school uniform."[43] Thus, both men's and women's manner of dress have served as key sites in the struggle to establish the authority of local Islamic traditions and practices in the face of easily accessible alternate sources of authority.

Banning Salafism in Court

Though Salafism is banned in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, enforcing such bans is difficult in practice. The Salafi and Wahhabi movements are nebulous in nature, and have gained influence within mainstream Islam even as the authorities have sought to crack down on individuals and groups that actively propagate such puritanical beliefs. As one Kazakh expert put it:

> It is impossible to prohibit literally, as the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Kazakhstan suggests, since the Salafis do not have a clearly delineated, visible organizational structure. This is not a public organization or a political party that has a charter, some constituent documents, or open membership rolls. And in a crowd of believers, on the street, in any other public place, it is impossible to identify a Salafite, since he does not carry a party card with him.[44]

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[43] Report on the Situation with Human Rights in Kazakhstan for 2009. 2010. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.*

[44] Sokolov, Andrey. 2011. "Religion Should Unite and Not Disconnec." Interview with Eldar Zhumagaziev, Atyrau political scientist. *Inform,* August 16. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://www.inform.kz/kz/religiya-dolzhna-ob-edinyat-a-ne-raz-edinyat-obschestvo-atyrauskiy-politolog-el-dar-zhumagaziev_a2398772).

Nevertheless, authorities have actively monitored and prosecuted those suspected of propagating Salafi and Wahhabi ideas.

As I argued in previous chapters, terms such as Salafi often lack a precise definition, but rather serve to police the boundaries of accepted behavior simply through their public application. As with the term "destructive sect," authorities use "Salafism" often without reference to a precise or consistent doctrinal lineage. Rather, the meaning of the term is negotiated as it gets hurled around publicly. Unlike the discourses on destructive sects, however, terms such as Salafi engage discourses on terrorism, which bring state security services into play. The messy public negotiation of Islamic heterodoxy can thus lead to criminal charges, based merely on the association of individuals and groups with alleged extremist organizations.

The gravity of such labels is exemplified by a court case against a group of men accused of spreading radical Salafi ideas in the city of Taraz in southern Kazakhstan. The prosecution alleged that Abdrakhmanov, a taxi driver who frequented a local mosque and had many regular clients in the area, was the leader of a radical cell that promoted armed jihad in Kazakhstan and sought to join jihadi groups fighting abroad. The accused included two military officers, prompting the trial to be held in a military court. According to the court

transcript:

> In early February 2009, Abdrakhmanov, in pursuit of criminal intent to disseminate materials promoting terrorism, entered into a preliminary conspiracy with the deputy commander Eraliev of a communications platoon and sergeant Elubaev of military unit 63563, and handed the latter 4 DVDs for distribution in the mosques of the city of Taraz, containing video and audio materials, propagandizing terrorism.[45]

Based on these four DVDs, twelve men were charged with criminal conspiracy and terrorist activity. Abdrakhmanov was allegedly apprehended while attempting to acquire firearms in order to join jihadist groups in Afghanistan or the North Caucasus (implying Chechnya or Dagestan from whence hailed the Tsarnaev brothers who were responsible for the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013).

The investigation began when a bag containing informational DVDs was discovered at a mosque in the city of Taraz. The bag was brought to the imam, who watched the DVDs and determined that they contained "religious content," in which "sheikhs talked about *jihad*, about the war in Palestine, Chechnya and Afghanistan against *infidels*, namely Americans, Jews and Russians."[46] The imam reported the find to the Committee for National Security (the KGB successor

[45] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2010. Court Ruling of the Military Court of the Shymkent Garrison. March 26, No. 1-3/10. Presiding judge Kaipov B., secretary of the session Turlieva A., and the state prosecutors Musaev M. and Sharipov B.
[46] Ibid.

institution), and volunteered the name of Elubaev when agents arrived to confiscate the disks. Security services later asserted that "operational research activities" had confirmed that the accused "adhere to the unconventional Jihadist Salafi trend in Sunni Islam."[47]

According to the court transcript, Abdrakhmanov became acquainted with Eraliev, Elubaev and the other accused through their local mosque, where they participated in the *juma namaz* together — the Friday afternoon prayer that, for many Central Asian Muslim men, represents the primary form of participation in their local mosques. He then encouraged them to participate in private discussion groups, where he introduced them to internet sources that promoted "Salafist" ideals, which ostensibly include calling for armed jihad domestically and as part of a global battle against secular authorities. According to the testimony of Kurshkin, one of Abdrakhmanov's acquaintances:

> Together with [Ramazan] Mashanlo, [Kurshkin] began attending religious studies at home with Abdrakhmanov, who could explain certain Islamic concepts in the Russian language, since he could not understand the imams of mosques due to poor knowledge of the Kazakh language… Abdrakhmanov told them that they need to visit the Internet sites "Kavkaz [Caucasus] Center," "Hunafah.com," "Imam TV," "Islam Media," and "Ummah Islam" in order to gain in-depth knowledge. From these sites, he downloaded a variety of videos with lectures by Muslim sheikhs on the themes of jihad, hijrat, and shahid. In class, Abdrakhmanov

[47] Ibid.

> propagandized terrorism and religious extremism, saying that the imams of mosques do not generally adhere to the rules that are binding for true Muslims, but live according to the "Tagut" laws, and obey the tyrant "kafirs," that is, the government of the country. Abdrakhmanov also said that to obtain the position of Supreme Mufti in the Republic of Kazakhstan, bribes should be given to officials, and that Imams are all corrupt and are not true Muslims.[48]

The main evidence presented against Abdrakhmanov was simply the propagation of "radical" ideas via these web resources and the DVDs, and yet the entire group of men was convicted of attempting to propagate armed jihad — primarily based on defendants testifying against one another. Kurshkin, for example, testified that Abdrakhmanov encouraged his acquaintances to travel to the north Caucasus to join the militant groups there that are hostile to Russian federal rule.

One expert witness provided a direct rationale for treating the mere possession of dissident information as a criminal assault on the security of the state. The expert, a professor of Political Science Department of the Modern Kazakh-Russian Humanitarian University, summarized the threat posed by such activities in the following manner:

> Considering that a significant part of the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan is Muslim and, taking into account their growing pseudo-religiosity, using DVDs it is possible to create a certain threat in the sphere of information security of our society, namely, to violate the established

[48] Ibid.

> inter-confessional consent of the people of Kazakhstan and provoke extremist moods that affect the formation of deviant types of political behavior and agitational propaganda work, like extremism and terrorism, which contradicts the norms of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan.[49]

The expert witness further recounted the use of such DVDs to recruit young Muslims to the cause of jihad in Afghanistan and Chechnya, solidifying the guilt of the accused by associating them with militant activities in neighboring countries.

This case reveals some of the approaches that security and law enforcement officials have taken to monitoring and prosecuting individuals suspected of propagating dissident Islamic ideas. As the accounts from the court case demonstrate, officials treat these informal networks of dissidents as part of a coordinated effort to subvert the authority of the political and religious establishment. I now turn to the final discourse on Islamic heterodoxy — the concern that a "hidden insurgency" is taking place from within the mainstream Muslim community of the region.

II. "Latent Threats" to Authority: Tablighi Jamaat as a Hidden Insurgency

The sum of all these various movements and their activities is often seen as a

[49] Ibid.

“covert insurgency” that threatens to undermine national sovereignty and stability from within traditional Islam. Although movements such as Wahhabism, Salafism, and Hizbut Tahrir are presented as alien forms of Islam that are incompatible with local traditions, they are simultaneously seen as making great gains in establishing themselves among the mainstream Muslim population, subverting the authority of traditional Hanafi Islam and local customs of practice. Even groups that seem docile and benign currently are feared as hiding great potential to pursue more aggressive and subversive activities once they have amassed a sufficiently strong base of support.

The discourse of a hidden insurgency gets applied to many groups that have already been discussed. One religious scholar and expert in Kyrgyzstan, for example, stated that Salafi ideas represent a “hidden, slowly manifested threat.”[50] Even Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is frequently invoked as an immanent security threat, is also frequently discussed as a covert threat due to its cell-based structure and as-yet unrealized aspirations to mobilize Muslims in the erection of a Caliphate. Officials in Kyrgyzstan have warned of the capacity of such groups to expand their cells using the official infrastructure of the Muftiate:

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[50] Malikova, Bermet. 2009. “Salafism: Latent or Real Threat?” *Vecherniy Bishkek*, December 11. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2009/12/11/svyat/1.html).

> Recently, "Hizbutists" have been actively using many mosques and their imams to spread their ideas, as have the daavatists [Islamic missionaries, likely referring to Tablighi Jamaat] expanded their missionary activities [using mosques], which provide good cover for them.[51]

Officials have also warned of the potential for these groups to serve as gateways to further radicalization, and even as a recruiting ground by known terrorist groups. For example a government official asserted in one 2013 court case in Kazakhstan stated that al-Qaida and the Taliban view Tablighi Jamaat as a "potential base for replenishing their militants because of the similarity and proximity of the radical religious views advocated by the adherents of Tablighi Jamaat."[52]

Possibly no group exemplifies these fears of a covert insurgency more than the Islamic missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat. This movement, started in northern India in the 1920s, formally declares its mission to engage in a holy war for Islam, but one that is to be fought not through armed insurgency, but rather "over the hearts of Muslims." The movement strictly prohibits engagement with politics, which it proclaims to be something worldly, profane, and in need of insulation from its divine mission (Balci 2012; Epkinhans 2011; Montgomery and

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[51] Kyrgyz Republic. 2009. Decree of the Issyk-Kul Regional Administration on "The State of Religious Affairs in the Territory of the Issyk-Kul Region." March 13, No. 61.

[52] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2013. Court Ruling of the Saryarka District Court of Astana City, February 26, No. 2-1154. Presiding judge: Zhaksybergenov K. Zh., the secretary of the court session: Jahine N.Zh. and representative of the applicant, Dzhanakhmetov A.U.

Heathershaw 2012; Wolters 2014). This open advocacy for "jihad," but a form of spiritual warfare that is non-violent and apolitical, has made the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan deeply suspicious of Tablighi Jamaat, all the more so because of the group's success at cultivating a following. Officials fear that Tablighi Jamaat's independence and cell-based structure give the movement great "hidden potential"[53] to serve as a source of radicalism and political mobilization in the future.

I will demonstrate how the regimes present the pan-Islamic and revivalist program of Tabligh Jamaat as a covert insurgency and potential gateway to radicalism and terrorist activities. The position of Tablighi Jamaat also presents one major point of distinction between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Whereas the government of Kazakhstan treats Tablighi Jamaat as a cell-based extremist group essentially identical to Hizb ut-Tahrir, the movement has gained mainstream recognition in Kyrgyzstan, and has even succeeded in incorporating itself into the Muftiate structure.

Tablighi Jamaat in Kazakhstan

[53] From my fieldwork notes of statements by administration and security officials at a conference on *Religious Groups and their Activities in Kyrgyzstan*, organized by Turkish Manas University, Bishkek, KG, June 26, 2014.

Tablighi Jamaat is a missionary movement that promotes Islamic revivalism and pan-Islamism across Central and Southern Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, where the movement operates openly, followers devote themselves to regular, faithful practice of Islam, primarily through *davaat* or proselytizing activities. In Bishkek, I regularly encountered adherents of the movement going door to door encouraging men to attend their local (often Muftiate-controlled) mosque. This goal would seem innocuous -- even symbiotic with the Muftiate's own goal of expanding its authority. And yet, despite having no greater social agenda than encouraging men to attend prayer at their local mosques, the movement remains banned in Kazakhstan, and has only recently gained mainstream acceptance in Kyrgyzstan. I will first address Kazakhstan's response to Tablighi Jamaat, and then discuss the position of the group in Kyrgyzstan below.

President Nazarbayev warned in 2005 that, "A certain part of the religious community is falling under the influence of missionaries from foreign Islamic centers that carry the idea of religious intolerance," noting in particular the threat posed by "the foreign radical movement Tablighi Jamaat, which has created an underground network of cells,"[54] Despite the movement's focus on patronizing

[54] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2000. Government Decree on "the State Protection of Persons Participating in Criminal Proceedings." July 5, No. 72.

establishment mosques, the authorities regard its autonomous, grassroots activism as a threat to established religious and civic traditions:

> Although Tablighi Jamagat corresponds to the Sunni orientation in Islam in the theological sense, according to experts its ideology is similar to radical Wahhabism, in that it does not accept innovation or dissent in the faith… Formally, Tablighi Jamagat only calls adherents to devotion to Allah, observance of proper forms of prayer, respect for fellow believers and propagating Islamic values. At the same time, the doctrines of Tablighi Jamagat [incite followers to reject] a tolerant attitude towards representatives of other religions, and, most importantly, toward observance of secular laws and customs, including the traditions of [Kazakh] society.[55]

As with the other movements discussed, Tablighi Jamaat is a diffuse network structured around outreach more than doctrinal rigidity. Thus the statement above to the effect that Tablighi Jamaat dismisses the authority of secular laws is at best drawn from marginal figures within the movement, and does not constitute an official doctrine. Though Tablighi Jamaat emphasizes that Allah is the sole object of legitimate worship, the main principles of the movement do not mention secular authority, either in support or opposition (Siddiqi 2018). Nevertheless, the movement's open support of a "holy war for the hearts of Muslims" has drawn swift condemnation from the establishment.

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[55] Anonymous. 2013. "Throughout All the Years of Existence in Kazakhstan, the Communities of Tablighi Jamaat Have Never Officially Registered." *Zakon*, March 29. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4548940-za-vse-gody-sushhestvovanija-v.html).

Though leaders of Tablighi Jamaat stress that they call for an apolitical and non-violent form of jihad, the authorities of Kazakhstan recognize that this "inward jihad" is meant to be waged against the authority of secular and national leaders such as themselves. Local experts express the regime's opposition to the groups precisely along the following lines:

> The movement is apolitical only in the sense that it does not pursue or attach much importance to short-term political goals, such as mobilizing the Muslim community for establishing Islamic rule in individual countries. This [political detachment] is explained by the fact that Tablighi Jamaat does not recognize the state as a legitimate entity. Instead, it deals with the entire Muslim community - the ummah. The purpose of the movement, according to Mark Gaborio, a French specialist in this matter, is nothing more than the "systematic capture of the world" by means of jihad. In practice, this thousand-year-old dream is pursued by a two-fold way — strengthening fundamentalist zeal among Muslims, and converting non-Muslims to Islam.[56]

At times, officials link this "fundamentalist zeal" with extremist and terrorist activities, depicting Tablighi Jamaat as "a driving force of religious radicalism, extremism and even terrorism in the world." Nevertheless, the prevailing approach in Kazakhstan is to treat Tablighi Jamaat as a nascent threat, qualitatively different from Hizb ut-Tahrir's consciously malicious intent:

> In fact, members of Tablighi Jamagat, consciously or unconsciously, are preaching a version of Islam that is almost indistinguishable from the

[56] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save Spiritual Sovereignty." *Liter*, September 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

> ideology of jihad practiced by all terrorists. For most young Muslims, the first step towards radicalizing their religious consciousness is joining the Tablighi Jamaat.[57]

The authorities also stress the Southern Asian origins of Tablighi Jamaat. As one news article notes the movement's major centers "are located abroad — in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh," and its "installations are known only to a narrow circle of leaders of the movement."[58] And in the words of one expert, the movement places great emphasis on convincing adherents to travel to these centers for re-education:

> The most promising of the new adepts and converts undergo additional training at the Tablighi Jamaat headquarters in Ravinda. Usually, they are recruited into the ranks of terrorist groups after arrival in Pakistan… Indeed, for the majority of young Muslims, joining Tablighi Jamaat becomes the first step towards radicalizing their religious consciousness.[59]

This last statement in particular, that Tablighi Jamaat is the leading gateway toward radicalism, is backed up by no evidence.

Thus, although the movement openly promotes a moderate and apolitical form of Islamic revivalism, Kazakh authorities have actively associated it with a region notorious for both its religious conservatism and the informal sovereignty

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[57] Anonymous. 2013. "Throughout All the Years of Existence in Kazakhstan, the Communities of Tablighi Jamaat Have Never Officially Registered." *Zakon*, March 29. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (https://www.zakon.kz/4548940-za-vse-gody-sushhestvovanija-v.html).

[58] Ibid.

[59] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save Spiritual Sovereignty." *Liter*, September 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

asserted by groups such as the Taliban in the absence of strong states. The regime portrays local cells and networks of Tablighi Jamaat as deeply integrated in South Asia, and, similar to the official stance toward Hizb ut-Tahrir, the regime has sought to enforce its ban on Tablighi Jamaat on rooting out these networks through active monitoring and criminal prosecution.

Banning Tablighi Jamaat in Court

Tablighi Jamaat was outlawed in Kazakhstan in 2013, when agents of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Security Committee, and the Agency for Religious Affairs appealed to the Astana District Court to declare the movement illegal. The state prosecution brought no charges against any persons in the case, nor were any representatives of Tablighi Jamaat allowed (or inclined) to represent the group in court. Rather, the prosecution called on assistance from the relevant government agencies to meet the conditions mandated by "Procedural Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan… for recognition of an extremist or foreign organization carrying out extremism in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan."[60]

[60] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2013. Court Ruling of the Saryarka District Court of Astana City, February 26, No. 2-1154. Presiding judge: Zhaksybergenov K. Zh., the secretary of the court session: Jahine N.Zh. and representative of the applicant, Dzhanakhmetov A.U.

The District Attorney in the case charged that Tablighi Jamaat is only moderate in outward appearance, but in fact is aimed at the forcible overthrow of the civic and secular government of Kazakhstan:

> Officially, the official goal of the Organization is the spiritual transformation in Islam by preaching among adherents and among the broad masses of people and appealing to Muslims regardless of their social and economic status in order to bring them closer to religious practice. However, the true goal of the Organization is to create a single "caliphate" that would include in the territory of Kazakhstan, which involves the forcible change of the constitutional system, violation of the sovereignty of the Republic of Kazakhstan — of the integrity, inviolability and inalienability of its territory. Followers of the movement do not recognize the state as a legitimate entity.[61]

To corroborate this claim, the prosecution cited a decision by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation to ban Tablighi Jamaat as "an extremist organization" aimed at "the establishment of world domination by spreading radical religious views and creating a single Islamic state, the 'World Caliphate,' based in regions with traditionally Muslim populations."[62]

Typical of coordinated efforts to ban a religious group, agents of the State Agency for Religious Affairs reiterated many of the points made by the prosecution. An official from the SARA stated that although the formal mission of Tablighi Jamaat is "the spiritual revival of the Islamic world through "daavat"

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

of proselytizing," the organization is "inspired by an extreme interpretation of the Sunni trend of Islam; over the past three decades, this propensity has escalated to such an extent that it has become the driving force of religious radicalism, and the main organizer of the training of violent extremists and terrorist acts around the world."[63] This fantastic claim is left uncorroborated, however, and the SARA official went on to discuss the doctrine and structure of Tablighi Jamaat.

The official noted that Tablighi is "not just an organization in the usual sense of the word, but rather a community of Muslims" that is committed to "the fulfillment of the Islamic call." In the words of the official, this community follows a "Wahhabi-Deobandian doctrine, which does not accept innovations or dissent in faith."

> Everywhere the followers of Tablighi Jamaat preach a version of Islam, almost indistinguishable from the theology of Wahhabi jihadists, professed by all terrorists. For most young Muslims, the first step toward radicalizing their religious consciousness is joining the Tablighi Jamaat.[64]

The near identical formulation of this official's statement to that of the government-aligned expert quoted above is no coincidence. Such repetition of key talking points is central to the strategy the regime of Kazakhstan has

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

pursued to consolidate authority over the religious sphere. The SARA official concluded that "the activity of the international religious missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat creates a real threat to the national security of the Republic of Kazakhstan,"[65] because of its doctrinal rigidity and supposed calls for a global Caliphate.

An agent from the Committee for National Security further asserted that "adherents of Tablighi Jamaat categorically deny the right to exist not only of other religions, but also of other Muslim movements," leading to "an inevitable clash" with [other] religious groups.[66] The official further asserted that "adherents of Tablighi Jamaat maintain contact with terrorist organizations, and in some cases… propagandize the ideology of international organizations that are recognized in Kazakhstan as terrorist."[67]

Predictably, the judge ruled in favor of the government's position to ban Tablighi Jamaat on the territory of Kazakhstan. The determination and expedience with which the regime of Kazakhstan has banned Tablighi Jamaat makes the movement's different trajectory in neighboring Kyrgyzstan all the more striking.

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[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

Tablighi Jamaat and the Muftiate of Kyrgyzstan

Although Kyrgyzstan also sought to ban Tablighi Jamaat initially, the movement has experienced a very different trajectory there. Tablighi Jamaat operates under perpetual suspicion and scrutiny from the state in Kyrgyzstan, but has yet to be officially banned.[68] The movement continues to grow in popularity precisely because of its inclusive, grassroots nature, and has even established itself within the Muftiate of Kyrgyzstan, garnering more mainstream recognition.

As early as 1995, a government report noted that supporters of Tablighi Jamaat were working to insert their figures into the Muftiate structure in Kyrgyzstan:

> In recent years, the movement of the so-called "davatists" — small groups of Islamic preachers from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan that are widely circulating in the cities of Kyrgyzstan — have urged believers to remove from their posts the imams of mosques loyal to the authorities, and appoint in their place the true fighters of Islam.[69]

Despite efforts to reign in the movement, however, Tablighi Jamaat continued to

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[68] An SCRA official informed me on March 29, 2013 that he had been questioned by security officials as to why Tablighi Jamaat had not been banned in Kyrgyzstan when it was banned in all neighboring states. In response, he replied that if these agencies could find evidence of wrongdoing, the SCRA would be able to ban them.

[69] Kyrgyz Republic. 1995. Government Decree "On the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Tasks of the Authorities to Formulate State Policy in the Religious Sphere." Signed by Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Djumagulov, August 1995 No. 345.

grow in Kyrgyzstan through the early 2000s, while to the majority of practicing Muslims in Kyrgyzstan, Tablighi Jamaat remained a movement "which competes with SAMK [the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan, or the Muftiate] in certain respects."[70]

These circumstances changed dramatically in 2012, however, when supporters of Tablighi Jamaat managed to get one of their leading figures, Maksat haji Toktomushev, elected as Head Mufti of Kyrgyzstan.[71] This upset was made possible in part by the greater autonomy that the Muftiate and Kurultai elections enjoy in Kyrgyzstan compared to their counterparts in Kazakhstan. But supporters of Tablighi Jamaat were only able to capitalize on this democratic structure because of their growing mainstream status in the country. This increased profile for Tablighi Jamaat also coincided with a series of scandals that discredited both the Muftiate and the incumbent head Mufti, Rahmatulla Egamberdiev. The Muftiate was criticized for distributing visas for the hajj (of which Saudi Arabia issues a limited number to each nation) in exchange for

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[70] Malikova, Bermet. 2009. "Salafism: Latent or Real Threat?" *Vecherniy Bishkek*, December 11. Retrieved May 9, 2017 (http://members.vb.kg/2009/12/11/svyat/1.html).

[71] I was able to observe part of the Kurultai summit in December 2012, at which Mackat ajii Toktomushev was elected Heat Mufti.

bribes.[72] The Head Mufti, meanwhile was undone by the release of a damaging sex tape with a young woman. Not only did the tape undermine the Mufti's reputation, but his line of defense — claiming that the woman was his second wife and that polygamy is an Islamic value — placed him outside the purview of mainstream Islamic values in Kyrgyzstan.

These two scandals sealed the victory for Maksat haji Toktomushev, and consequently for Tablighi Jamaat. This transfer of power has had an impact both on the Muftiate and on Tablighi Jamaat. In an interview Emil Nasritdinov, professor of anthropology at the American University of Central Asia and a vocal supporter of Tablighi Jamaat, stated that the government has come to see in Toktomushev a figure who can wield authority both in the Muftiate structure, and among the ranks of Tablighi Jamaat. On the side of the Muftiate, Nasritdinov spoke of a move toward greater transparency and constriction of the Muftiate bureaucracy, whereas the norm had previously been continuous bureaucratic expansion. On the side of Tablighi Jamaat, Nasritdinov noted that the movement had generally embraced its increasingly mainstream status (of which the shift to Malaysian manners of dress constituted a major indicator, in his opinion). He

[72] Interview with Emil Nasritdinov, Professor of Anthropology at American University of Central Asia, June 19th, 2014.

also noted that the movement has inevitably become more engaged in politics, working informally to consolidate its position against other movements such as Salafism.[73]

Nevertheless, popular suspicion and critique of Tablighi Jamaat has continued even beyond the movement's establishment within the Muftiate. One of the major criticisms is the degree of devotion to missionary activities demanded of members. One expert summarized the conventional understanding of the group's activities:

> Their proselytizing activity is carried out in small groups of adepts… in a door-to-door manner known as *haruj*... Once attracted to Tablighi Jamaat, new members subordinate their lives to the movement and become professional missionaries. The organization requires that they be engaged in the activities of the movement for forty days a year, three days a month, two half-days a week, and two hours every day.[74]

Note that these numbers are not cumulative. Davaatists are ostensibly required to engage in full-time missionary activity three days per month plus one 40-day period per year, in addition to proselytizing door-to-door for two hours daily and two half-days per week. Compliance with these requirements assuredly varies, but this hypothetical regimen has nevertheless provided a common point

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Smagulov, Amanzhol. 2011. "To Save Spiritual Sovereignty." *Liter*, September 14. Retrieved January 6, 2018 (http://abai.kz/post/10492).

of criticism. Stories circulate about members of Tablighi Jamaat that abandoned their families and jobs to pursue missionary activities. One witness at a court case in Kazakhstan asserted that, "the visits of such groups to various regions of the country are financed by the 'Tablighs' own contributions, and most of them leave their families without means of subsistence."[75]

Many of these stories have the feel of an urban legend, recounting the plight of impoverished wives and children neglected while their husbands are away doing "God's work." I heard numerous, similar stories to this effect while attending various conferences organized by local universities and policy organizations to discuss the religious situation in Kyrgyzstan. These cautionary tales seem to have become part of the local mythology about Tablighi Jamaat, even if they cannot be verified.

Thus, Tablighi Jamaat remains an object of both popular support and popular mistrust in Kyrgyzstan. Though the movement has grown in both profile and mainstream legitimacy, many still regard it as a foreign entity that seeks to subvert the authority of traditional Islam from within the mainstream Muslim community. Despite the movement's formally moderate and apolitical doctrine

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[75] Republic of Kazakhstan. 2013. Court Ruling of the Saryarka District Court of Astana City, February 26, No. 2-1154. Presiding judge: Zhaksybergenov K. Zh., the secretary of the court session: Jahine N.Zh. and representative of the applicant, Dzhanakhmetov A.U.

and practices, Tablighi Jamaat is still regarded by many in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as a covert insurgency.

Conclusion

In these final chapters, I have examined the regimes' motivations for treating certain heterodox Islamic groups primarily as security threats, and others primarily as threats to authority. As I argued in my discussion of "destructive sects," such distinctions aid the regimes in establishing boundaries of permissibility in the public negotiation of orthodoxy as opposed to heterodoxy. They also imbue often arbitrary religious policies and enforcement strategies with a more consistent narrative. In the case of "destructive sects," the regimes seek to legitimize their restrictive policies primarily by emphasizing the "otherness" of heterodox groups. In relation to Islamic heterodoxy, however, the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan must justify the policing of religious beliefs and practices that many see as central to their ethnic and national identities.

I have sought to show how these factors motivate regime distinctions between threats to security and threats to authority, as well as between latent and

manifest threats. Salafism and Wahhabism in particular present overt challenges to the authority of local traditions of Islam. Both movements assert the authority of a more "authentic" and "pure" Islam rooted in the time and place of the religion's origins — the first generations of Muslims living in Arab-majority lands. The regimes actively deploys the discourse of radicalism against these movements in an effort to undermine the authority of these movements and bolster that of the Muftiates of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Hizb ut-Tahrir actively challenges the legitimacy of sovereign nation-states. The regimes interpret this desire for a global Caliphate as an immanent security threat, and call for cooperation between religious and secular authorities to combat this ostensible extremism. Tablighi Jamaat, finally, seeks to promote general Islamic revivalism, which in principle should be compatible with the goals of Muftiate in each country. However, the movement also represents an autonomous source of authority and popular mobilization, which the regimes see as a source of "hidden potential" for radicalization.

Thus, in the rhetoric of the regimes, Hizb ut-Tahrir is depicted as an immanent security threat, whereas fundamentalist movements such as Salafi and Wahhabis are presented as manifest threats to "spiritual sovereignty," and

Tablighi Jamaat is viewed as nascent threat. In the effort to combat these different challenges to the authority of the secular and religious establishment, the regimes derive significant utility from discourses on security and radicalism. The latter allow the regimes to introduce distinctions within Islam between proper and improper beliefs, practices, and affiliations. The former invoke a vague threat of extremist and terrorist activity to justify the pervasive use of the state's surveillance and security apparatus. Together, these two discourses assist both regimes in policing and critiquing various forms of Islamic heterodoxy that ostensibly threaten to introduce division and instability into the Muslim community.

CONCLUSION

Orthodoxy and the Political Field

In this dissertation, I have argued that authoritarianism should be modeled as a distinct claim to authority, rather than a mere concentration of power by a political elite. Authoritarian regimes claim to represent essential and sacrosanct values that define the will of their presumed constituents, but for which the regime has exclusive authority to speak. Authoritarian figures can and do propagate such claims even without the power to enforce them, but to the degree that such claims take on the form of a regime, they do so through a system of political ordination. Using Bourdieu's model of the *power of nomination*, I showed that authoritarian regimes confer public authority only on those who demonstrate their loyalty to and utility for established elites.

I further argued that religious pluralism threatens this monopoly of public authority by subverting the regime's exclusive claims to represent an essential and sacrosanct popular will. This approach to authoritarian politics further

allows us to account for why official discourses on “traditional” and “non-traditional” religions differ so greatly from the historical record in Central Asia. To the political and religious establishments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, it matters not whether a given religious ministry is local or foreign, apolitical or overtly political. The major factor that distinguishes orthodoxy from heterodoxy in the eyes of these regimes is whether a given ministry reproduces or subverts the regime’s claim to speak for an essential and sacrosanct national will.

Finally, I argued that authoritarian regimes are often popular among a particular political base because they consecrate the interests and values of that base. Authoritarian leaders — and the policies the promote — render the values of their core constituents sacred, elevating them above the realm of mundane politics and deliberation, at which their constituents are often at a disadvantage. Drawing from Bourdieu’s theory of public politics as a 'mystery of ministry,' I showed that democratic and authoritarian politics alike serve to redistribute symbolic capital — propagating the interests and values of some constituents at the expense of others.

Citizens do not face a tradeoff between freedom and unfreedom, as much of the literature on post-socialist democratization asserts, but rather a competition among opposing constituencies for authority and legitimacy. By modifying

Bourdieu's theory of the 'mystery of ministry,' I argued that the politics of pluralism and the politics of essentialism represent opposing political strategies that distribute symbolic capital to competing strata within the polity.

Restating the Puzzle

Popular authoritarian regimes present a conundrum for social scientists. Common citizens would seem to have little reason to support autocrats who restrict public input into governance, and yet such leaders often garner wide support with claims to embody and champion the will of the people. People defend the symbolism of a united nation, and frequently join the regime in denouncing opposition and dissent. The very citizens who might benefit from checks on power often view pluralism as a treasonous attack on the people, rather than a constituent part of the popular will. The utility of such rhetoric for authoritarian leaders themselves is no mystery, but scholars have struggled to explain why reasonable citizens would endorse figures that claim such sweeping mandates to rule, while often displaying dubious interest in the the will and

welfare of their actual constituents.

The dominant answer offered by political theory is that supporters of authoritarian politics are acting against their own interests. Conventional political thought puts a premium on the individual freedom to articulate autonomous political programs and to mobilize according to common interests — even against the ruling party. To the apparent detriment of their own liberty, therefore, people rally to leaders who reject such freedoms, and who instead claim intrinsic and total authority to speak for national values, religious beliefs, revolutionary culture, or other presumptive traits of their public. Many scholars see this shift toward hard-line leadership as part of an inexorable rise of reactionary identity politics — immutable feelings of ethnic, national, or religious solidarity — in the aftermath of 20th century political paradigm. Such observers, however, who argue that identity politics goes against instrumental politics, fail to consider the role that essentialist identities can play in redistributing power among the citizenry.

Deliberative democracy favors those strata with relatively greater means to participate in deliberation, including greater volumes of cultural capital and access to consequential arenas of deliberation. In former socialist states across Eurasia, for example, wide bands of citizens have little access to civic institutions

or avenues of public engagement - aside from the hierarchical apparatuses of political parties. For those strata who are relatively less equipped to pursue their political interests through deliberative democracy, populist rhetoric and identity politics can provide a means to elevate their interests above politics - to consecrate their values as sacrosanct and essential to the very constitution of "the people."

In this dissertation, I suggested that public politics should be understood as a battle over the *means of consecration*. I argued that authoritarian leaders maintain popular support by accumulating sufficient symbolic power to render the interests of their political base sacrosanct, thereby placing those interests beyond the jurisdiction of mundane politics. Their very mandate is to "defend" the presumptive will of the people from the realm of deliberation, negotiation and compromise, in which their constituents are at a distinct disadvantage. Strong discourses of identity result when such public figures obtain a near monopoly over the means of consecration.

I developed this model by drawing off Pierre Bourdieu's theory of public politics as a "mystery of ministry," a competitive process whereby public figures — those with relatively greater capacity to articulate political programs — dispossess their constituents of their voices. Bourdieu theorized public politics

primarily in consolidated, liberal democracies such as his native France, where even disaffected classes often have greater access to institutions of civic engagement. I extended his observations to “illiberal democracies”[1] and authoritarian states, however, where many have suggested Bourdieu’s theories do not translate. It is in these contexts that Bourdieu’s theories can shed light on the appeal of authoritarianism — where politics is often dominated by hegemonic parties propagating religious and national ideologies. I wish to show that identity politics, like other forms of disposition that Bourdieu examined, extends from strategies of competition for power within stratified social fields.

I elaborated this model of popular politics as a struggle over the means of consecration through an investigation of one of the former Soviet republics in Central Asia — Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan’s neighbors such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan fit the conventional mold of an authoritarian state, in which a consolidated regime has a both the motive and the means to maintain power by manipulating the masses with nationalist and religious symbolism. The politics of Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, features far more infighting and disarray among its fragmented cadres of elite. There is no single ruling figure or party in Kyrgyzstan that has consistently monopolize discourses of patriotism and national values in

[1] Fareed Zakaria

order to retain power. Despite the greater freedom that has resulted from this fragmented cadre politics, there is a pronounced desire in many sectors of Kyrgyzstan's politics for greater national unity under a strong leader like President Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan.

The politics of Kyrgyzstan thus clash with models of authoritarian identity politics that postulate a strong role for elite manipulation. By examining popular politics as a battle over the means of consecration, we will be able to understand how these authoritarian tendencies emerge from within stratified relations of power. Even without a strongman at the helm, Kyrgyzstan has retained a Soviet-style hierarchy of power, wherein established elite control access to positions of power, and only confer public authority on functionaries who first demonstrate their loyalty and utility to the establishment. As I will demonstrate, this structure was able to reproduce itself through the period of democratic transition, and is heavily responsible for the current expansion of identity politics in ostensibly democratic Kyrgyzstan.

I see authoritarian governance not just as a series of outcomes, i.e. the concentration of power, but also as an ideal type of claim to public authority. Rather than derive their mandate from a self-selecting constituency, authoritarian leaders claim *a priori* to represent the interests of a presumed constituency — e.g.

an ethnic or religious group, or even a class such as "the proletariat."

Authoritarian regimes therefore rely on identity politics to claim the unilateral authority to speak for their presumed constituency. Identity politics, in turn, requires a degree of authoritarianism in order to be politically viable. As ideal types, these two concepts obtain to varying degrees in real cases. We can thus speak of authoritarian leaders even in cases where civic institutions prevent such leaders from realizing their political ambitions. Similarly, identity politics may appeal to a wider or narrower proportion of the population from case to case, but it shares certain ideal-typical features in all cases irrespective of this variation in popular support. Though the efficacy of such politics varies from case to case, I argue that this elective affinity between authoritarian and identity politics transcends any particular political context.

Key Findings

In the present cases, we can acknowledge that the regimes of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan claim public authority through similar discourses on national and religious tradition, but vary greatly in terms of regime consolidation. Tensions do occur between the state and the orthodox religious establishments — the

Muftiate and Patriarchate. The relative strength of the two regimes has played a definitive role in shaping the disparate outcome of these tensions in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The long-serving and popular supreme Mufti of Kazakhstan resigned in 2013 after a series of clashes with the SARA, including over the dispersement of zakat, the tithes that mosques receive from the faithful, as one well-connected expert related to me in an interview.[2] The election that followed installed a supreme Mufti that is more deferential to the state's policies and rhetoric. It is not uncommon, these days, for the current Supreme Mufti to call for prayer to the health of President Nazarbeyev.[3]

Similar jockeying in Kyrgyzstan resulted in greater rather than less independence for the Muftiate. The two most recent elections of the Kurultai assembly of imams have brought to power increasingly independent Supreme Muftis. Relations between the SCRA and Muftiate suffered after the former failed to aid their chosen delegate secure a victory in the 2012 Kurultai.[4] The current Supreme Mufti, Maksat-haji Toktomushev, emerged from within the Tablighi Jamaat movement, which is officially banned in Kazakhstan and is still considered threatening by many in Kyrgyzstan. And yet, relations between the

[2] Interview with professor of religious studies in Almaty, KZ, May 2013.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Interview with official from the SCRA, Bishkek, KG, December 2012

Muftiate and SCRA have eased considerably under Toktomushev's tenure, helping to move Tablighi Jamaat further into the mainstream of Islam in Kyrgyzstan, despite being banned in all neighboring states.[5]

Contribution and Implications

This dissertation makes several contributions to the literature on authoritarianism and identity politics. Conceptualizing public politics as a struggle over the means of consecration allows us to rehabilitate the concept of identity politics, by treating essentialist identities instrumentally. Rather than treating identity politics as a product of parochial fetishism, elite manipulation, or other form of non-instrumental reasoning that overrides instrumental interests, we are able to treat identity as a tool in struggles over relative power among citizens. By modeling public politics as a transfer of symbolic capital, we can treat collective identities — religious, ethnic, partisan — as important political investments, and key factors of individual and collective self-determination. Support for any given identity is an instrumental calculation based on anticipated returns, and treat supporters of identity politics as rational

[5] Interview on with local scholar of religion and member of the Tabligh Jamaat movement, Bishkek, KG, June 2014

political actors.Essentialist identities elevate the values and interests of presumed constituencies above the realms of democratic deliberation. This is particularly appealing for those constituencies that feel poorly served by deliberative democracy and civil society, with their urban and cosmopolitan orientations.

This framework also allows us to conduct better comparative analyses across the Global North and South. Conventional theories of authoritarianism and identity politics perpetuate the divide between the civil politics of liberal democracies and the supposedly banal and intolerant politics of "illiberal democracies." The framework I have developed in this dissertation allows us to compare the struggle over the means of consecration across cases. All political communities with sufficiently regularized public politics feature struggles to consecrate certain ideals of "the people" that confer a mandate on the state — a struggle between a camp that wants to constrict this definition, and a camp that wants to expand it. Comparative politics can gain from new analytical tools that help us to understanding the instrumental logic behind these struggles across cases.

The relational model of authoritarian and identity politics I have developed in this dissertation thus extends further than religious politics in post-Soviet states. It speaks to similar misconceptions of illiberal governance in cases across the

globe. Discussions of perennial issues such as the popularity of Shariah law in certain Muslim countries come into greater clarity if we relinquish dichotomies between secular and religious governance, and instead investigate how ideals of autocthony contribute to a popular sense of self-determination and popular rule. An explanatory theory of identity politics cannot treat those who feel threatened by pluralism as inherently mistaken about their own interests. Instead, scholars should acknowledge that public negotiation of religious and national categories is a form of civic politics, in which public figures and institutions play a key role, though not an inherently manipulative one.

This relational perspective helps separate normative arguments for greater liberalism from analytical discussions of the means by which common citizens overcome individual atomization and marginality and figures leverage this sense of individual powerlessness into public authority. Pluralism is not simply a social value or a measurable degree of religious diversity, but rather an obstacle to any form of essentialist claims — secular or religious, civic or ethnic — establishing a monopoly over the power to speak for the people. All political communities with sufficiently institutionalized rule and regularized politics feature a band of society that could increase their public voice and representation though a strategy of essentialism. These tendencies exist in plural democracies as well as

under nationalist, socialist, or fundamentalist regimes. A monopoly of ministry appeals to those whose interests and values it would amplify, but also works to prevent citizens from freely charting courses to greater individual self-determination.

Finally, this framework allows us to give Bourdieu's theory of public politics a greater comparative scope. By treating the 'mystery of ministry' as a process that redistributes symbolic capital among constituents, rather than one that dispossesses constituents, we can create a Bourdieusian model of public politics that has greater explanatory and comparative power. The reformulation fo Bourdieu's discussion of the *mystery of ministry* that I have presented in this dissertation allows us to understand how representation serves as a system of investment and return, in which people invest in public figures in the hopes of receiving dividends of social capital. This model of the 'political economy of symbolic power' (Swartz 1997; 2013) gives Bourdieu's work greater explanatory power in cases beyond bourgeois democracies such as France at the time of Bourdieu's writing. It allows us to take into account collective political projects that drive, to quote Chatterjee (2006), 'popular politics in most of the world.' It also helps us to account for the populist backlash to neoliberalism and globalization that have wracked western democracies as of late.

This modification allows us to link Bourdieu's theory of public politics to his more well known theories of class domination, creating a unified model of individual and collective self-determination. Modeling public politics as a struggle over the means of consecration has potential to situate Bourdieu's theory of public politics more strongly within his broader writings that dissect stratified power relations. Tying this model to a theory of the means of consecration gives us the capacity to have a truly comparative model of private and public power.

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