



The Postsocialist Religious Question

Faith and Power in Central Asia and
East-Central Europe

Chris Hann & the "Civil Religion" Group



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Questions of religiosity and secularization have generally been posed – and given a variety of answers – in contexts of capitalist modernity. The rapid social change and differentiation of domains that took place in Central Asia and East-Central Europe under socialist conditions was characterized by state repression of institutionalized religion and, in most countries, by a steep decline in religious belief and observances. Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, religion has again become prominent in the public sphere, often in association with nation-building strategies. But little is known about the lasting effects of the effervescence of the early 1990s on the private sphere – on the significance of religious faith and practices for persons and their social relations.

Research conditions have generally improved in Eurasia since the Soviet era, but the emergence of many new states there has led to new forms of interaction with powerholders. These states have come under international pressure to recognize ‘religious human rights’. They have also been exposed to aggressive targeting by evangelical Christian groups and to ‘Wahhabism’ and similar currents within Islam. Many regimes, both the authoritarian and the more liberal, have sought to resist these pressures by ‘nationalizing’ religion – that is, by converting it into ‘cultural heritage’. In these rapidly changing environments, what was previously unofficial can metamorphose into the official, and the questionable dichotomy between ‘orthodox’ and ‘folk’ is given a new twist. Both étatist and transnational interventions pose threats to long-established local forms of tolerance.

Following a general introduction by Chris Hann, the chapters in this book form two regional clusters. Part One covers the five former Soviet republics of Central Asia. Its main focus is on the changing face of Islam, everywhere dominant in this region, although some attention is paid to conversions to Christianity. The contributors to Part Two examine five countries of East-Central Europe, where both historically and contemporaneously the religious landscape has been even more variegated. The main focus here is on the eastern stream of Christianity, but the case studies include contexts in which eastern churches are a minority (Greek Catholics in Poland and Hungary), an exploration of religious practices among a stigmatized ethnic group (Roma in Transylvania), and an analysis of a local ideology of cosmopolitanism (in Odessa).



Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia

General Editors:

Chris Hann, Richard Rottenburg, Burkhard Schnepel

Volume 11

Chris Hann
and the “Civil Religion” Group

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<https://doi.org/10.52038/978-38258-9904-7>

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Cover Photo: Rag-fair in Tashkent, Uzbekistan: Selling of religious and socialist symbols (Photo: Irene Hilgers).



Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Werkdruckpapier entsprechend
ANSI Z3948 DIN ISO 9706

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN-10: 3-8258-9904-7

ISBN-13: 978-3-8258-9904-2

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Ziegelstr. 30
D-10177 Berlin

Auslieferung:

LIT Verlag Fresnostr. 2, D-48159 Münster
Tel. +49 (0) 2 51/620 32 - 22, Fax +49 (0) 2 51/922 60 99, e-Mail: lit@lit-verlag.de

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Preface

Our first Focus Group at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 'Property Relations' (2000–2005), was concerned primarily with decollectivization in the postsocialist Eurasian countryside (see volume 1 of this series). This volume presents a first sampling of the results of our second coordinated initiative, launched in early 2003. The planning for it dates back to the conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists in Cracow in July 2000, which had the general theme 'Religion and Politics'. Everyone there seemed to agree that more ethnographic studies were needed to illuminate religious developments in former socialist states that had experienced atheistic ideologies over varying periods of time and with varying degrees of efficacy. Because of the sensitivities of this field, it could not be adequately investigated by either local scholars or foreigners during the socialist era. In addressing this deficit, we wanted to explore variation within the former Soviet bloc and link postsocialist developments to current international debates, especially those concerning the place of religion in the public sphere. In the unique 'laboratory' that opened up after the political convulsions of 1989–91, we wanted also to demonstrate the relevance of anthropology's strong tradition of theoretical reflection on religion.

Whereas our decollectivization projects were scattered widely across Eurasia, this time we decided to aim for greater regional integration. When assessing applications for the positions we advertised in 2002, we saw that Central Asia and East-Central Europe were exceptionally well represented, and we recruited sub-groups accordingly. This volume is structured according to these two regional clusters, the former predominantly Islamic and the latter marked mainly by the eastern strand of Christianity. However, members of the Focus Group have worked throughout as a team, and it was instructive to pursue comparisons between these clusters as well as within them.

The formal name of the team was 'Religion and Civil Society'. For this volume we have compressed it to 'Civil Religion'. Although all members of the Focus Group paid attention to public and political aspects of the mainstream denominations in the countries where they worked, each researcher also followed up numerous specific themes. The diversity of interests has already been reflected in our workshops and conferences and will continue to find expression in the individual articles and monographs of group members.

For this collective volume we sought a common denominator in the idea of *civility*. I explain our use of this term in chapter 1. It allows us to range between concepts of *civil society*, including the currently fashionable definitions that emphasize voluntary associations (the ‘non-profit sector’), notions of a unifying *civil religion*, and *civility* in the sense of qualities and values such as recognition of others, tolerance, community, and solidarity. Of course terms such as *tolerance* have complicated histories, but we hope that our use of *civility* avoids the traps of Euro-centric analysis and allows us to open up to engage with multifarious local realities. Indeed, faced with the simplifications of both national governments and international bodies campaigning for religious human rights, one of the main messages to emerge from these studies is that better understanding of local beliefs and practices is urgently needed. But the authors combine their attention to ethnographic detail with comparison and generalization, and in the introduction I try to draw out some of the recurrent themes.

The emphasis developed here on civil norms and values has also helped to shape the direction our work will take over the next few years. With a largely new research group appointed in early 2006, we are embarking on studies of ‘Religion and Morality’ in three regional clusters: eastern Germany, European Russia, and South-East Asia. The Institute will publish a full report on all these projects in due course.

The chapters in this volume were first presented at an internal workshop held at the castle of Krasiczyn in south-east Poland during Corpus Christi week in May 2005. (Only Manja Stephan was unable to attend, following the birth of her daughter.) On Corpus Christi itself we adjourned to witness the Roman Catholics processing through the city centre of nearby Przemyśl, a spectacle banned from the public sphere under socialism. This procession encompasses not only Roman Catholics but also the city’s Ukrainian minority, most of whom belong to another Catholic rite. As such it is an example of what I term *civility*, which is reciprocated by some Roman Catholics when they participate in the Epiphany rituals of the Greek Catholic minority in January. But for people to acknowledge the main annual rituals of another group is not necessarily an indication of generalized civility in social life or of tolerance of diverse practices within one’s own group. Juraj Buzalka’s chapter elaborates local transformations of civility in this Polish case.

I am indebted to Juraj for helping to set up this meeting so close to his main field site and to Stanisław Stępień, director of Przemyśl’s South-East Scientific Institute, for additional local support. Judith Orland took charge of the logistics. I thank all my colleagues in this Focus Group for their cooperative spirit, especially during the lengthy iterative process that led to

this volume, which was skilfully coordinated by Kristin Walther, and Berit Westwood. Many scholars have given us valuable help and advice in the course of the work, and I should particularly like to thank Ingeborg Baldauf and Jürgen Paul (on behalf of the Central Asia Group) and Hermann Goltz and Paul Robert Magocsi (on behalf of the East-Central Europe Group). Once again, we are grateful to Jane Kepp for her expert copyediting.

Chris Hann

Halle/Saale, March 2006

Chapter 1

Introduction: Faith, Power, and Civility after Socialism

Chris Hann

Faith and power must always, however uneasily, take a stance
toward one another.

Robert N. Bellah, *Varieties of Civil Religion*

The title of this volume is of course a conceit. How could there possibly be a single unified ‘religious question’ in all the countries that, until recently, were socialist? The projects on religion that we have organized over the last few years at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology have been extremely diverse, theoretically as well as empirically. But before I explore that variation I want to begin with a defence of the robust singular title.

For better or worse, it is undeniable that the Soviet experience with socialism left a decisive mark on Eurasia in the twentieth century. This experience brought striking similarities across the landmass, e.g. in politics (‘democratic centralism’), in economics (central planning), and in law (‘socialist legality’). The socialists’ cultural aims were no less revolutionary: to construct a new ‘socialist man’ by disseminating new ideologies through institutions such as the ubiquitous ‘culture house’.

A great deal of all this was swept aside rapidly in the years after 1990. Paths of development have been highly diverse, within countries as well as between them (and the number of countries has of course risen substantially with the disintegration of three federal states). Nevertheless, the shared baseline and the many common patterns evident in the transformation processes have led us to specify ‘postsocialism’ as a framework for comparative anthropological research. We are now beginning to move beyond this concept, which inevitably becomes less meaningful subjectively as the proportion of the population with no direct memory of the socialist era increases. But when the projects on which we report in this volume were carried out, between 2003 and 2005, socialism was still a basic point of reference in the ‘lived history’ of most residents of the former Soviet Union and its allies.

As far as religion was concerned, a fundamental similarity prevailed throughout socialist Eurasia. In Marxist-Leninist ideology, religion was the ‘opiate of the people’. It was irrational superstition and potentially dangerous. Although some elements could be appropriated for folklorization, usually in the cause of supporting national ideology, faith as such could have no place in the public sphere of a mature socialist society. Religious freedom was constitutionally guaranteed, but it was ‘domesticated’ – confined to the private sphere (Dragadze 1993). Proselytizing and religious education in schools were prohibited, and any display of religious commitment could prejudice not only one’s own job but also the positions and prospects of a wide circle of relatives and friends. Instead, socialists attempted to provide substitutes for traditional forms of belief and practice. As Christopher Binns (1979–80) and Christel Lane (1981) showed, Soviet rituals formed the basis of a well-established system of ‘political religion’, with mixed success. Whereas weddings came typically to be highly secularized occasions, people were generally more reluctant to allow funerals to be stripped of their traditional religious frame.

In postsocialist conditions religion has posed quite different challenges to powerholders. The changes are least evident at the levels of constitutional and administrative regulation. In the regions we examine in this volume, new constitutions have continued to proclaim freedom of conscience and the separation of religion from the state; yet state interference in the organization of religious communities has in some respects actually increased relative to the socialist period. What is new is that religion has become much more visible in the public sphere and much more open to transnational influences – both themes that are pursued extensively by the contributors to this volume.

The increased social significance of religion is often inextricably bound up with the assertion of secular identities, above all ethno-national identities. But observers in the 1990s noted widespread evidence of an increase in personal religious commitment, expressed not just at major life-cycle rituals but also in the numbers of people attending regular services and observing other stipulations of a faith.¹ When such trends can be observed in

¹ Questions of belief are of course notoriously difficult to probe, but topics lending themselves to quantification, such as frequency of participation in rituals, have been addressed in a good deal of sociological survey work. For eastern Europe see Tomka and Zulehner 2000; see also various publications arising out of the ISORECEA network, such as Borowik and Babiński 1997 and Borowik and Tomka 2001. Central Asia is less well documented statistically; for a recent overview see the special issue of the journal *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2003). As I noted in the preface, our coverage was deliberately restricted to these two large

the industrialized societies of eastern Europe, they appear to contradict theories that postulate secularization as the unavoidable and irreversible concomitant of ‘modernization’. Of course secularization theses have been looking shaky in many parts of the world for a long time. But only in the former socialist countries was modernization accompanied by systematic repression of traditional forms of belief and practice in favour of a new secular ideology. The collapse of this ideology and international pressure to create and sustain an open ‘religious market’ form the basic frame of this volume. Whereas agricultural land and other goods previously in some form of collective ownership are now privatized, the demise of socialism moved religion in the opposite direction: it was in effect de-privatized and spilled out almost everywhere into the public sphere (Casanova 1994; Hann 2000).

Let me dwell for a moment on the drama of this conjuncture. Viewed in a long-term perspective, the twentieth century marked the apogee of a second major transformation of the religious world of Eurasia. The first occurred some two and a half thousand years ago with the emergence of the ‘Axial Age’ civilizations. The most important distinguishing feature of this controversial category was a new concept of the *transcendent*: supernatural agents were no longer identified only in humans’ natural environment. The implications of this ‘breakthrough’ (Bellah 2005) for human thought and social organization were far-reaching. It opened up the possibility for powerholders to define orthodoxy, and then condemned them to engage in a constant struggle to redefine and defend it against each new heterodoxy. The history of all the so-called world religions, including the Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – can be understood only in the context of the axial innovations, which ultimately paved the way for increasingly secular forms of ideological conflict.²

Marxist-Leninist ideology was, in its pure form, an attempt to eliminate this notion of the transcendent – not to marginalize or neutralize it, as has happened to varying degrees in recent centuries in many non-socialist countries in the course of modernization, but to eradicate it from human consciousness. How are we to explain the ultimate failure of this attempt to impose a faith based in the secular rationality of the European Enlighten-

regions. In consequence, other major religious traditions, such as Judaism and Buddhism, have been ignored. So too are the changes taking place among indigenous peoples in Siberia, the effects of ‘New Age’ and similar movements on urban populations, and the resurgence of magic under postsocialism, all themes that have been extensively studied by other anthropologists, natives as well as foreigners (see Vakhtin 2005; Lindquist 2006).

² See Arnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock 2005 for assessments of recent scholarship in this field.

ment? Where it was pursued most rigorously, it seems that for a significant proportion of the population, socialist ideology itself acquired the character of a new transcendent; texts such as the *Communist Manifesto* were accorded sacred status. Generally, however, the new texts were not confused with older sacred texts, and the two systems of belief persisted alongside each other uneasily until the ignominious collapse of the rationalist rival that dared to proclaim a form of salvation in this material world. How would the older traditions adapt to these unprecedented circumstances? What new institutions would develop in the field of religion? What stance would they take towards secular powerholders – and vice versa?

Recognizing Diversity

Having asserted the problem at a very general level, the next steps necessarily involve qualification and disaggregation. The first cautious note of qualification is that it is much too soon to draw firm conclusions about a general reversal of socialist secularization trends. Much is bound to depend on religious socialization, both inside and outside the family. This was a central focus of the projects of Manja Stephan in Tajikistan and Monica Heintz in Moldova. Whereas some significant changes may be under way in the former case, Heintz reports that the salience of religion in individual lives – for example, in the exercise of moral judgement – does not seem greatly altered in rural Moldova. Elsewhere, where economic progress has been more rapid, expanding leisure opportunities may be a factor contributing to a decline in religious practices, especially among young people. For example, recent surveys in postsocialist Poland offer support for classical secularization theses (Tomka and Zulehner 2000). High levels of religiosity in this country under socialism were commonly thought to confound general sociological models (though they were consistent with the persistence of an exceptionally large rural population). More careful inspection suggests that the remarkable institutional and political power of the Polish Roman Catholic Church did little to hinder the spread of secular norms and values in many domains, rural and urban (Marianski 2004).

Clearly, much hinges on exactly how one defines religiosity. In future projects we plan to look more carefully at questions of personal belief and the effects of religion on values and everyday behaviour. These aspects are by no means ignored in this volume; most contributors gathered materials in their fieldwork illuminating personal quests for ‘the sacred’ (for example, Pelkmans, Hilgers, and Fosztó share a common concern with conversion). Most chapters, however, are directed primarily towards questions of politics and contested collective identities. Through ethnographic studies we have sought to extend and deepen knowledge of topics already addressed by

specialists in disciplines such as sociology and political science, not to mention the many contributions of historians and area studies specialists.³

Among the questions our group addressed once we began to disaggregate the postsocialist religious question were the following:

- Were some religions subject to greater repression than others under socialism?
- Are some 'historic' religions better able than others to adapt to the new conditions?
- How does one explain differential success rates among new religious movements?
- To what extent can changes in religious behaviour be explained with reference to changes in socio-economic circumstances?
- Is there a qualitative difference between conversion to another denomination and a sharp strengthening of one's commitment to the religious tradition into which one was born?
- Are there significant differences between the eastern and western strands of Christianity, and if so, how are we to explain them?
- How do the circumstances of postsocialism act upon tensions between orthodox and popular or 'folk' expressions of religiosity, and how useful is this dichotomy?

Most of the researchers in our group lived over long periods in one or more local communities. They gathered data on basic sociological variables affecting religious behaviour, including age, gender, education, job, and class background. Rural-urban differences were often significant, and several members of the group carried out research in both sectors. In some cases the prevalence and historical significance of minority traditions were central to the project. Attention was paid in all cases to changing economic conditions, because it seemed plausible to assume that the loss of jobs and social security in the material sphere might be one motivation behind the quest for new certainties in the spiritual sphere. The speed and success of postsocialist political and legal transformations were carefully noted. Later in this introduction I explain how the authors have contextualized their case materials for this volume, usually by providing pertinent state-level documentation in the opening sections of their chapters.

³ We are by no means the first anthropologists to address these questions. However, as Douglas Rogers recently concluded his survey of the field, 'to date the anthropology of religion in the former Soviet bloc has been a rather ad hoc enterprise. While there is a substantial amount of solid research going on in the field, studies remain disparate and linked to each other only tenuously. Their insights are not always appreciated in the broader anthropology of the region and are even less recognized in the global anthropology of religion' (Rogers 2005: 14).

Although our main focus is on postsocialist developments, it is important to note that relations between the institutions of the state and those of religion(s) were quite diverse by the late socialist period. Eastern Europe offers a wide spectrum, from Albania, the only country in the bloc where religion was officially abolished, to Poland, where Karol Wojtyła's election as pope in 1978 and his first visit to his homeland the following year made clear to the world the enormous significance of the Catholic Church in the *pays réel* of the People's Republic. In the other countries of socialist eastern Europe, however, religiosity seems to have declined, in both the private and the public spheres. Moreover, it continued to decline even when political conditions relaxed, as they did, for example, in Hungary from the 1960s onwards. In contrast to the Polish case, the Hungarian Catholic Church, by far the largest denomination in the country, was increasingly criticized by a faction of its own membership for being too close to the state (see Mahieu, this volume). Yet the accommodation that Hungarian bishops reached with secular powerholders also brought positive results. Celebrations of the life of Saint Stephen, the country's first Christian king, allowed religion to re-enter the public sphere in very visible ways well before the demise of the Communist Party's monopoly on power (Hann 1990).

As in eastern Europe, so in the Soviet Union relations between the state and its various religious communities fluctuated greatly over time. Although the trials of the Second World War brought about a significant rapprochement with the Orthodox Church, anti-religious sentiments peaked again under Khrushchev, to be followed by a kind of repressive stalemate that lasted until the end of the Brezhnev era. The years of *glasnost* and *perestroika* ushered in a significant improvement – for example, by making it much easier to import religious literature from neighbouring countries. Especially in Central Asia, the relaxation that set in under Gorbachev facilitated the emergence of new groups of religious activists in the post-socialist years. The changes of the early 1990s were in many respects dramatic, but processes of change were already under way almost everywhere. The metaphor of a 'vacuum' to characterize the aftermath of socialism is of little help in any domain, but it seems especially unhelpful for religion. Even where socialism had been in place longest and appeared most thoroughly entrenched, both independent governments and new cohorts of well-educated religious activists could rouse many kinds of old traditions as well as insinuate new ones. As in eastern Europe, they often did so in combination with the propagation of particular ethno-national identities.

The politicization of religion under socialism meant that no aspect of religious identity after socialism could be free of the political. What Robert Bellah (1980) termed 'the religio-political problem' is perforce present in all

human societies, but it was posed with particular force under postsocialist conditions. In some cases this was a direct consequence of the emergence of new sovereign states, but even where the boundaries of political units were not altered, religious revival was intimately connected to the politics of ethnicity and nationalism.

There are compelling precedents in numerous Orthodox churches for fusing political and religious identities. It is therefore hardly surprising that, when freed from socialist repression, these churches attempted to assert historical privileges and to exclude competition. In this volume László Foszto outlines the dominance of the Romanian Orthodox Church among Romanians, and Monica Heintz explores high-level ecclesiastical politics in Moldova, where the novelty of the state makes the linkages complex and fragile. The Central Asian case studies show even more clearly how political interventions to maintain the religious status quo can undermine the religious rights nominally proclaimed in postsocialist constitutions. The president of Turkmenistan, perhaps fearful of tribal segmentation as well as religious pluralism, is determined that Turkmen should remain Muslims and Russian citizens should remain Orthodox Christians. Proselytizing and conversion are prohibited (Kehl-Bodrogi). The president of Uzbekistan pursues similarly rigid policies (Hilgers, Rasanayagam). Paweł Jessa shows that even in relatively 'liberal' Kazakhstan a good deal depends upon the personal interventions of the head of state.

Far from the model of a competitive religious market, the general trend in the newly independent Central Asian republics is a continuation of the 'government-sponsored Islam' (Akiner 2003) that began to emerge under Gorbachev. In the appropriation of religion for nation-building purposes, practices previously condemned as 'un-Islamic superstitions' by both Soviet authorities and the official *ulama* are converted into elements of 'national heritage'. This is typically accompanied by harsh criticism and even persecution of those identified as extremists ('Wahhabis'), who are perceived as a greater threat than those who proselytize on behalf of other denominations. As Julie McBrien shows for Kyrgyzstan, scripture-oriented Muslim purists lacking any political ambitions are liable to be branded potential terrorists. Islamic universalism is viewed with great distrust throughout Central Asia, in repressive and more liberal states alike, because it contradicts the states' efforts to emphasize the distinctness of nations.

The Politics of Civility

In order to establish some common ground for the meeting in May 2005 that gave rise to this volume, I encouraged all participants to focus on aspects of *civility*. I had in mind norms of pluralism, co-existence, and tolerance, in

secular domains influenced by religion as well as in religious institutions in the narrower sense. Some colleagues were suspicious of generalizing terms that have particular histories in European intellectual discourses. I have argued in more detail elsewhere (Hann 2006) that the term *civil* has a number of advantages. On the one hand, it invites us to engage with two pertinent bodies of academic literature, namely, the debates over ‘civil religion’ and the debates over ‘civil society’. On the other hand, one can escape the ethnocentricity of some of these debates by focusing on contemporary common-sense associations. Dictionary definitions of civil include ‘humane, gentle’, ‘educated, refined’, ‘decently polite’, and ‘pertaining to the ordinary life and affairs of a citizen’. The last is meaning number 11 in the listing of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The same source defines civility as ‘behaviour proper to the intercourse of civilized people’. Within these broad notions we are interested in understanding all attitudes and behaviour influenced by religion, both within one’s own group and towards other groups.

The spectrum of civility documented by our Focus Group is broad, ranging from a zealot in Tajikistan who is dismissive of what he sees as the corrupted religious practices of his own people (Stephan) to a local ideology in Odessa in which difference is embraced and indeed celebrated (Richardson). The cosmopolitanism of this latter case derives not so much from religion *per se* as from the city’s unique history in the later period of the Russian Empire. Elsewhere the religious expression of tolerance is often oblique, as when clergy show flexibility in assisting members of the Roma minority in Romania to bury their dead (Fosztó), or when the curator of a shrine in Uzbekistan refrains from implementing new rules intended to prevent practices deemed not to conform to scriptural Islam (Hilgers). Models of ‘Uzbek Islam’ and ‘Turkmen Islam’ might in theory create space for traditional elements and potentially strengthen a spirit of tolerance, but where this nationalizing of the sacred is accompanied by political repression and economic dislocation, intolerance is the more likely outcome (Kehl-Bodrogi). Even in states more open to pluralism, such as Kyrgyzstan, it is possible to detect an intensification of social pressure to conform to new, more rigid prescriptions of orthodoxy within Islam (McBrien).

The central issues here have been hotly debated of late in many disciplines, from philosophy and political theory to sociology and cultural studies. In anthropology, Robert Hayden (2002) has called for a distinction between negative (Lockean) and positive (Millean) tolerance. Whereas the former involves a limited recognition of the other that is never free of antagonism, the latter implies the affirmative evaluation of difference to which most modern proponents of multiculturalism aspire. Hayden argues

that the long-term histories of shared shrines in South Asia and the Balkans provide support for the Lockean position. Juraj Buzalka's distinction in this volume between the 'agrarian tolerance' found historically in what is now south-east Poland and the 'artificial tolerance' of modern multiculturalism seems very close to Hayden's dichotomy. Yet we know that the rates of intermarriage between eastern and western Catholics in the presocialist era in the region of Buzalka's research were high – good evidence for what I term *civility*, an engagement with the other that is more than merely 'negative'. (Hayden's work and problems with the concept of tolerance are discussed in the chapters by Heintz and Richardson.)

Recent decades have witnessed lively academic discussions concerning civil religion and civil society. The former might appear to be an oxymoron, because another of the basic uses of *civil* is to distinguish a realm outside that of the church (as well as outside the military). The concept of civil religion owes its position in the modern social science tool kit above all to Robert Bellah (1970, 1992; Bellah and Hammond 1980). The basic idea is that to understand the integrating functions of religion in a modern state it is insufficient to focus only on beliefs concerning a spiritual world and on churches and other formal organizations devoted to sustaining and spreading specific denominations. Rather, it is necessary to include other ideas and organizations that contribute to a sense of belonging, above all to a sense of belonging to a nation. In the secular ideology of nationalism it is the myth of the nation that becomes transcendent, the ultimate basis of an imagined community.

In some cases nations are strongly identified with a dominant church; the two forms of the sacred may be inextricably intertwined, as Buzalka shows in this volume for the Polish case. In cases of religious diversity, such as the United States – the main object of Bellah's own writings – in spite of the formal separation of church and state the symbols and myths of a dominant religious tradition may continue to provide the basis of a civil religion that is, at least in theory, inclusive of all citizens. In Britain the key unifying role has long been played by the monarchy: the sovereign is the head of the Anglican Church, but royal rituals integrate not only Anglicans but virtually the entire population. In such cases the civil religion is an overarching ideology, embracing more than just the churches of the land. For Bellah it constituted an open and humanistic vision of the good society, embracing tolerance and emancipation at all levels. To his chagrin, he found that his views were persistently misunderstood, and he seems to have abandoned the concept after 1980 as the tradition of American democracy was eroded by illiberal appeals to patriotism and the rise of the Christian right (Bellah 1992).

A civil religion is not to be confused with a political religion of the sort Lane (1981) identified in the rituals of the Soviet Union. Socialist efforts in the twentieth century to create binding ties on the basis of rational tenets grounded in Marxist historical materialism were considerably more successful than those of French revolutionaries in the eighteenth century. But the premises were quite different from those of the founding fathers of the United States. The doctrines of Soviet powerholders were fundamentally opposed to those of traditional religions. The tension between them could eventually be alleviated through a *modus vivendi*, but one-party rule precluded the emergence of the openness and tolerance that, for Bellah, were the essential vital elements of a civil religion.

Even today, few parts of the former Soviet Union come close to meeting Bellah's criteria. Some Christian churches, notably the Russian Orthodox Church, have sought to reoccupy a privileged position at the centre of the state while showing little inclination to respect the rights of those following other traditions. In other cases, including the republics of Central Asia, the leaders of new states have appropriated religious elements in their efforts to construct new national identities. Apologists might argue that what these postsocialist politicians are seeking ultimately to establish is a new framework for a civil religion, analogous to the 'social glue' that has evolved over centuries in Britain and the United States. Most Western observers, however, have commented negatively on the promotion of 'cultural Islam', because the tight links between secular and religious powerholders have brought distortions and prevented minority groups from enjoying full religious freedom. Several chapters in this volume (e.g. Rasanayagam, Kehl-Bodrogi) substantiate such criticisms.

By definition the civil religions of contemporary Western democracies allow plenty of scope for free competition on the 'religious market'. This metaphor is discussed by several contributors to this volume. Its flaws and the general limitations of economics-inspired approaches are systematically set out by Mathijs Pelkmans in chapter 2. The free religious market is the central aim of well-funded transnational pressure groups, agitating from what I have termed the stance of 'religious human rights-ism' (Hann 2000, 2002). Western governments as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have applied pressure on postsocialist states to embrace religious pluralism. This brings us to the second appropriation of *civil*, for the demand to open up the religious market is closely related to the propagation of new models of 'civil society'.

In the last two decades the debates around civil society have tended to silence the earlier discussions of civil religion. In a sense the terms have come to push in opposite directions. As deployed by Bellah, civil religion

was primarily an expression of, and a vehicle for, Durkheimian integration. Civil society, by contrast, epitomizes that strand in Western liberalism (associated above all with the work of Alexis de Tocqueville) which holds decentralized, voluntary associations to be the optimum basis for a healthy democratic society. This strand has little to say about society's 'vertical' integration: indeed, it is neoliberal rather than Durkheimian, and it seems frequently to undermine all notions of collective belonging. Thus civil society is nowadays often contrasted with 'the state', a dichotomy that would have been foreign to those who pioneered the concept in the eighteenth century.

Contemporary proponents of civil society tend to argue that, within a clearly specified legal framework, the precept of free association should apply in religion as in other spheres. Religion can itself figure prominently in the civic-associational model, because the boundary separating religion from other domains is easily blurred. In some postsocialist countries religious communities have expanded to the point that they have become, in some of their activities, indistinguishable from other civil society actors. For example, in combination with the provision of religious education, they may organize a wide range of leisure activities for young people. Stéphanie Mahieu suggests in chapter 14 that the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church is expanding its role in the provision of social services as part of a systematic strategy to raise its profile and recruit followers. Given the continued decline in state provision of such services, it seems likely that the role of religious groups in channelling 'charity' to the victims of transformation processes will grow in significance in years to come.

This example leads us directly to deeper issues. How far are contemporary adaptations in situations such as this, when more and more people are experiencing insecurity, shaped by the theological and historical traditions of different faiths? Certainly both eastern Christianity and Islam, the two traditions on which we concentrate in this volume, have roots that differ from the Anglo-American religious roots of the currently dominant model of civil society. But why should the latter model exhaust our notion of civility? Thus, an Orthodox church might well have difficulty in adapting to its new role as an agent in a competitive marketplace. But it might also be capable, in its social teaching, of articulating alternative understandings of what makes for a more humane and civilized society, such that citizens do not become dependent on impersonal charitable assistance in the first place. Similar objections can be posed from many other bodies of thought worldwide, religious and secular. Although some anthropologists have been reluctant to allow any extension of the model of 'civil society' outside the Western liberal tradition (Gellner 1994), others have called for more flexible

approaches and challenged the generalization of the currently dominant Western model (Hann and Dunn 1996, Layton 2006).

Of course the related words *civil*, *civilized*, and *civility* have many more connotations in Western discourses beyond the connotations of these particular academic debates. According to the celebrated account of Norbert Elias (2000), *civilité* was popularized above all by Erasmus in an educational work intended to improve the manners of elite young males. In this volume we are not concerned with the natural functions of the body, with table manners, or with the effete customs of elites and an exaggeration of interpersonal respect, all habits that may be viewed cynically by members of other social groups (and even by those who perform such mannered rituals). In any case, much of Elias's argument was highly ethnocentric. He implied that aggression towards other groups was a form of pleasure that 'primitives' failed to control. Yet it is by no means obvious that more technologically sophisticated civilizations have evolved better mechanisms for maintaining peaceful relations with each other than their predecessors. There is abundant evidence for peaceful co-existence among 'primitive' peoples who have not been exposed to either the nationalist secular transcendent or the religious transcendent that originated in the Axial Age (Howell and Willis 1989).

Civility in this minimal sense is not specific to contemporary Euro-American discourses about democracy, nor to post-Enlightenment liberal 'separation of powers', nor to the rise of the West. It draws attention to non-belligerent forms of social interaction and to qualities such as solidarity and caring for others, which can be found in all societies. *Civility* has an etymology that ties it to a specific part of Eurasia, but ultimately it is a good term to work with because it cannot be reified as a physical, cartographical entity in the way that the modern concepts of civilization and culture are routinely abused. Scholars in various disciplines have recently begun to open up the study of civility in interesting ways (Rouner 2000). I have the impression that non-anthropologists, perhaps because of the influence of Elias, tend to restrict the frame to modern Euro-American societies, or at any rate to see these as supplying the template. Adam Seligman (2000), for example, tied civility to trust and argued that neither was needed in 'traditional societies', where behaviour was taken to be dictated by kin groups, and conventions of civility were superfluous. On this view, civility is the recognition of 'individual agency' in complex societies. Seligman was worried, however, that the West might now be moving away from civility – in other words, from 'that principled conception of the individual upon which the rights and duties, liberties and obligations of a civil polity and society were seen to rest' (2000: 75). But there is no need to restrict the term *civility* to the interaction of non-kin individuals: anthropologists can usefully extend it to

include issues of collective recognition. Some might indeed question the way in which Western thought constructs the dichotomy between individual and collective, and suggest that this very mode of thought is generally associated with a decline in civility.

East and South-East Asia have been especially prominent in recent anthropological contributions. Robert Weller (2001) explored 'alternate civilities' in Taiwan and China, and Robert Hefner (2000), in his work on predominantly Muslim Indonesia, argued that Islam had its own distinctive civil potential. Although critical of relativist positions, Hefner argued that there could be no 'one final formula for civility and democracy. ... The desire for democracy and civil decency is not civilizationally circumscribed' (2000: 220–21).

My own recognition of the need for a broader understanding of civility derives not from work on Orthodoxy or Islam but from field research dating back to the 1970s in overwhelmingly Catholic Poland. The Church was the principal unifying institution of Polish speakers during a long period in which the state of Poland ceased to exist but the idea of the nation was consolidated through a messianic *imaginaire*. In the socialist era the Roman Catholic Church was the principal institutional vehicle of resistance. Even after the emergence of the social movement *Solidarity* in 1980, the Church maintained its leading role in the movement of civil opposition. It remained a peculiar expression of an encompassing civil religion, uniting even members of minority religious communities as well as intellectuals of secular orientation in opposition to a detested regime.

The situation changed after 1990. The Church, which had spearheaded *Solidarity*, now began to show its conservative colours, notably with regard to abortion policy. In the religious marketplace, many Catholics became alarmed at the proliferation of new cults and sects (the terms are deployed pejoratively in Polish, as they are in English). In short, the dominant Roman Catholic Church sought to retain its near monopoly over the moral life of the nation and had great difficulty accepting that, in a postsocialist society, norms of pluralism and competition would also have to be applied in the realm of religion (Mach 1997).

My fieldwork was based in the extreme south-east, in a region where Ukrainians (together with Lemkos and Lemko-Ukrainians) had historically formed the majority of the population. They were eastern Christians, predominantly Greek Catholics.⁴ Although their numbers were greatly

⁴ The Greek Catholics are eastern Christians who are in communion with Rome (in this Polish case for more than four centuries). Their interstitial position makes them an interesting group in which to examine questions of 'syncretism', not to mention theories that define the East as a distinct 'civilization'. See Hann 1988, 2003.

reduced by ethnic cleansing in the 1940s (Hann 1996), minority communities were able to reconstitute themselves in the later socialist decades. Some of these people were always suspicious of the Roman Catholic Church, which they saw as a vehicle of Polish nationalism. After 1990, members of the minority generally expected that the Greek Catholic Church, suppressed in 1946, would be allowed to reassume its position in the public sphere. The issue was especially sensitive in the city of Przemyśl, historically the centre of both a Roman Catholic diocese and a Greek Catholic eparchy but since the 1940s overwhelmingly Roman Catholic and Polish in its ethnic composition. Conflicts developed over the ownership of religious buildings. Ukrainians became visible again in the city, not so much because of the assertiveness of the minority inhabitants as because of the inflow of thousands of petty traders from the neighbouring state. For them, the bazaar of Przemyśl was a lifeline in their efforts to deal with the problems of economic dislocation.

In short, Przemyśl in the early 1990s was an instructive laboratory in which to examine Poland's fledgling postcommunist civil society. The Polish translation of the term was *społeczeństwo obywatelskie* (*obywatel* = citizen), and it was widely used by intellectuals in these years. In cities such as Przemyśl, however, most people were more concerned with the struggle to survive as swathes of socialist light industry closed down. The new markets, one consequence of the new freedoms, were therefore of great economic significance for Poles as well as Ukrainians. Yet their disorganized character and association with shady, if not illegal, transactions did little to foster more positive inter-ethnic relations. Rather, the consequence was increased mistrust, suspicion, and ethnic stereotyping (Hann 1998).

The new freedoms of civil society had mixed consequences in other spheres as well. It became much easier for organizations of every shade and hue to register themselves and publicize their goals in the local public sphere (e.g. in newspapers, now free of political censorship). Particularly prominent were veterans' associations with a strong nationalist orientation. Such groups were active in both majority and minority communities, but when it came to physical clashes on the streets there was no contest. The most contentious item of ecclesiastical property, the former Greek Catholic cathedral, was scheduled to be handed back to its former owners by the pope himself in 1991. As a result of *force majeure* – an occupation of the building by Polish militants – this handover never took place. The Greek Catholics, having emerged from their legal limbo, were obliged to adapt another building to serve as their cathedral.

In this and other examples, the open public sphere of postsocialist Przemyśl in the 1990s seemed decidedly *uncivil* in comparison with the repressive stagnation that characterized the later socialist decades (Hann 1997; cf. Richardson, this volume). The long-term causes lay in the history of ethno-national conflict, but the national movements were tightly aligned with Churches – Roman Catholic for the majority and Greek Catholic for the minority. Juraj Buzalka presents some of the results of his recent fieldwork in Przemyśl in chapter 13. Although the situation has undoubtedly improved greatly since the height of incivility in the mid-1990s, Buzalka finds that the role of religion in the recognition and legitimation of national causes remains strong. He shows that in the aftermath of socialism, a modern transcendent that clearly failed, the secular transcendent that focuses on the nation retains its power to inspire and to mobilize. But it does so in a holy clinch with a variant of a transcendental religion that took root in Central Europe over a thousand years ago with the respective conversions of eastern and western Slavs to eastern and western Christianity.

In its most general sense, then, civility is a concept that subsumes the more specialized and to some extent contradictory academic pairings of civil religion and civil society. What the studies in this volume show overall is that, at least in two large regions of Eurasia, the links between religion and nationalism, the familiar twin breeders of incivility, remain strong. Authoritarian politicians are manipulating and nationalizing religion in ways that would have been unthinkable under socialism (at any rate until the final years, when some of the seeds for later developments were sown). Sentiments of primordialism are being created where they did not exist previously. State boundaries have hardened (e.g. between Moldova and Romania, and between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan), and minorities of all types have been made to feel vulnerable.

But what are the alternatives? Some believe that genuine religious freedom, as enshrined, for example, in the International Declaration of Human Rights, can be attained only by extending the neoliberal gospel of the free market to religion. Yet excessive zeal in the implementation of religious liberty can itself fan flames of intolerance where they were not previously present. Several chapters hint at the problematic consequences of religious conversion for families. Many people take the view that choices of religious affiliation in the highly unstable conditions following the disintegration of socialist certainties should not be shaped by the ability of missionizing groups to fund their activities. In this respect, Reconstructionist Christians

financed from the United States and Wahhabi groups financed from the Middle East may elicit surprisingly similar responses.⁵

Since there is no way back to Soviet federalism, with its repression of religion and general closure to the wider world, for most of the countries discussed in this volume the postsocialist religious question boils down to a choice between opening up to the 'market' of global religious communities and a new religious autarchy grounded in nationalism. While other parts of the world may be moving to post-Durkheimian forms of religion and detaching the spiritual from political society, at least some of the postsocialist countries appear to be moving the other way. The transformation of elements of folk religion into a nation's cultural heritage is unlikely to be supported by zealots. Such instrumentalization of religion may backfire and strengthen opposition, especially if political repression and economic dislocation combine to undermine the legitimacy of the powerholders. On the other hand, such developments might be welcomed to the extent that they confer recognition on local practices, often deviant but attracting visitors from far afield, who come and go in peace (Kehl-Bodrogi).

Unfortunately, there is at present little evidence that the new secular-religious alliances taking shape in East-Central Europe and Central Asia can give rise to the attractive forms of civility discussed by Hefner, Weller, and Bellah. The uncomfortable truth in at least some places is that not only governments but also their citizens have little interest in or enthusiasm for embracing any forms of civility. Recent developments in Uzbekistan have been particularly tragic. The case studies in this volume offer no neat solutions to the 'religio-political problem'. Identifying a country's position on the spectrum between 'market-open' and 'state-closed' does not suffice to specify the intensity of religious activity and its obverse, the rise or persistence of secularization trends. These broad concepts clearly need to be broken down and more specific causal connections pursued in further research.

This Book and Its Gestation

Since the research agenda was the same for the two area clusters of our Focus Group, some readers might question why the chapters have been divided along regional lines. I did in fact toy with the idea of juxtaposing chapters in such a way as to highlight thematic affinities. For example,

⁵ The main difference is that whereas evangelical Christians are to be found everywhere, contemporary Muslim missionizing is largely restricted to regions where Islam has been deeply rooted for centuries. External Orthodox missionizing is comparatively insignificant.

Pelkmans's opening discussion of the concept of the religious market, which he illustrates with reference to his research in Kyrgyzstan, might well have been followed by Naumescu's account of religious pluralism in the very different conditions of western Ukraine. In fact it is followed by a chapter by Julie McBrien that provides further detailed insights into Kyrgyzstan. There are advantages either way. We have supplied plentiful cross-references, so readers should have no difficulty pursuing comparative links.

Because works of collective authorship are rare in anthropology, it might be useful for me to summarize the procedures through which the final version of this volume emerged. My role was that of catalyst and co-ordinator. I have addressed religious topics since the late socialist period, but I did not undertake significant new fieldwork in the framework of these projects. All the remaining chapters are based on recent fieldwork. The exact subjects and field sites were chosen by the authors. For this publication I was eager to provide readers, especially non-anthropologists, with sufficient background data to contextualize our case materials. It seemed important to include information about postsocialist laws regulating religion and the mechanisms of their implementation. This entailed paying some attention to states and state bureaucracy in the ten countries we cover (five in each area). These legal and historical sections are by no means exhaustive; they are intended to show some general contours of the religious landscape in each country and to help readers make at least rudimentary comparisons between them. In cases where more than one team member worked in the same country, care was taken to avoid duplication.⁶

After the authors had revised the original workshop drafts along these lines, I provided further (generally brief) comments. The third drafts were then made available for a month to all team members. By this time (early 2006) the majority had left Halle, and discussions could continue only electronically. Most were able to take advantage of this opportunity to make final changes to their individual contributions in the light of the developing collective embryo. In particular, I am grateful to all those who commented at this point on my introductory chapter, though of course the final responsibility for each chapter lies with its author.

Part One is devoted to Central Asia, or, more precisely, to the post-Soviet republics of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Islam is the dominant religion throughout this region,

⁶ This was the case for Ukraine (two researchers), Kyrgyzstan (two), and Uzbekistan (three). I am grateful to Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, one of the three researchers in Uzbekistan, for agreeing to base her contribution on the case of Turkmenistan, despite the fact that, for practical reasons, her fieldwork in that country was very limited in comparison with her work in the adjacent Uzbek province of Choresm.

followed by Russian Orthodox Christianity. Both experienced severe repression under socialism, and Islam in particular was cut off from the world and identified with backwardness and 'tradition'. The postsocialist states have all attempted to stress the local rootedness of Islam in their nation-building strategies, but they have done so in different ways, and their treatment of other religious groups has also varied considerably. The greater readiness to embrace religious pluralism in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan can perhaps be explained at least in part with reference to their historically distinctive economic and demographic profiles, which were generally conducive to 'laxer' forms of folk religion. The case of Turkmenistan shows, however, that nomadic and 'tribal' traditions do not always lead to openness and toleration. Uzbekistan is much more urbanized, and even certain rural areas there are densely populated; the country contains the major centres of Central Asian Islam, and it had a very different colonial history. Considerations of space, however, do not allow the authors to probe deeply into the pertinence of long-term history; the emphasis is on the postsocialist years.

We begin with Mathijs Pelkmans's chapter on Kyrgyzstan because it sets out concisely some of the key issues that recur throughout the volume, above all the notion of the 'religious market.' Pelkmans notes that Kyrgyzstan has been the most liberal of the Central Asian states in its religious policies, a factor that contributed to a large influx of 'religious entrepreneurs' in the 1990s. Although the resulting proliferation of religious communities illustrates the metaphorical value of the religious market concept, Pelkmans stresses the dangers of using the term analytically or prescriptively. Religious market theorists tend to forget that religious behaviour is historically, socially, and culturally informed. Moreover, whereas the term assumes a level playing field on which different denominations and religions compete, in Kyrgyzstan it is clear that the liberal policies created a favourable situation for those foreign actors who could mobilize financial and personnel resources. These asymmetries created new tensions in the religious landscape, and Pelkmans draws on his own fieldwork to suggest that the religious market model itself contributed to these tensions.

Julie McBrien's research, too, was based in southern Kyrgyzstan, but close to the Uzbek border in a settlement populated mainly by Uzbeks. Her main emphasis is on changing local, regional, and global discourses about how to be a 'proper' Muslim and how this should be reflected in everyday behaviour and clothing. McBrien argues that, while contemporary secular values such as freedom of religion have widened the possibilities for non-Islamic religious expression in Kyrgyzstan, the ubiquitous discourse of

fundamentalism has narrowed opportunities for alternative interpretations of Islam.

Uzbekistan is by far the most populous of the post-Soviet states of Central Asia. In chapter 4 Irene Hilgers sets out the legal regulations governing religion there today, before moving on to discuss how the regime of President Islam Karimov has sought to incorporate Islam into a new national ideology. It is becoming increasingly difficult in this country for members of the titular nationality to practice any religion other than Islam. In her ethnographic materials Hilgers shows how state ideology is manipulating 'Uzbek tradition' and constraining both the development of religious pluralism and individual religious expression.

Johan Rasanayagam's chapter is also set in Uzbekistan. He focuses on socio-political factors and argues that the manipulation of the Karimov regime is to a significant extent a result of Soviet legacies as well as post-Soviet state practices. The government insists on defining Muslim orthodoxy, and this imposes severe constraints on how Muslims are able to express their faith. The 'everyday vulnerability' that government policy creates in villages and towns alike means that, in addition to the direct influence of the state over the *ulama* and centralized vilification of Wahhabi extremism, state power can be readily instrumentalized by officials in local-level conflicts. Governmental policy thus undermines civility by sustaining 'conditions of possibility within which certain actors are able impose their particular version of Islam and suppress that of others'.

A different variation of state repression and the nationalization of religion is outlined in the following chapter, by Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi. What makes the case of Turkmenistan exceptional is the degree to which the process of nation-building there is centred on the person of the president. President Niyazov, like most other statesmen in the region a former Communist, has adopted the name Turkmenbashi, meaning literally 'the head of the Turkmen', and set extraordinary sacralization processes in motion. His history of the Turkmen people is compulsory reading and treated with quasi religious fervour. At the same time, Islam itself is instrumentalized as 'tradition' for the purpose of national consolidation. Turkmenbashi's 'national Islam' includes popular beliefs and practices that would normally be unacceptable to the *ulama*. No interpretations may rival those of the supreme leader. Although the constitution guarantees religious freedom, a registration law makes it impossible in practice for new groupings to operate openly. At present, extended field research in Turkmenistan is virtually impossible, but Kehl-Bodrogi was able during two visits to gather data concerning the effects of the official discourse on Islam and 'tradition' at the family level. Her most important finding is that those who

shift away from the traditional tolerance of everyday Islam and instead adopt intolerant, fundamentalist positions tend to be those who have lost out in some material way as a result of postsocialist transformation.

The Tajik case, addressed by Manja Stephan in chapter 7, differs from those of neighbouring states in a number of respects. For one thing, the country experienced five years of civil war in the 1990s, which fed into increased intolerance in social life – for example, in dress codes and gender relations in general. For another, Tajikistan can draw on its distinctive non-Turkic ethnic history to promote its nation-building. This has enabled President Rahmonov to place less emphasis on religion, and the state has maintained a more consistently secular stance than its neighbours. Nevertheless, the population is overwhelmingly Muslim, and pressures to inculcate Islamic values in schools seem to be growing. Stephan devotes the bulk of her chapter to an analysis of a Muslim activist whose goal is to change religious observances so that they lose their local character altogether. Unlike others who have been designated ‘Wahhabi’ by the authorities in Uzbekistan, Anushehr seems content to be recognized as such. But his message is not widely accepted, partly because he can communicate effectively only in Russian. Stephan explains his extremist position in terms of his minority (Ismaili) origin and long absence from his native country. His case demonstrates that foreign travel and command of ‘world languages’ are not necessarily conducive to a cosmopolitan outlook.

In the last chapter of Part One, Pawel Jessa outlines the relatively liberal situation that prevails in Kazakhstan, where elements of democratization and ‘civil society’ have regularly challenged the authority of the new autonomous muftiate. His ethnographic materials are devoted to several recent developments. First, Sufi traditions, notably that of the Yasawi order, have shifted from the ‘unofficial’ status they had in the socialist era to be attributed high official status as elements of national heritage. Paradoxically, since Sufi practices were repressed in the early socialist period, few citizens have any knowledge of them, and the communities attempting to revive them are perceived as exotic sects. At the same time, new forms of unofficial religious practice have emerged, such as those of the *Aq jol* movement, in which local forms of Islam are combined with an eclectic range of elements including foreign New Age ideologies. The movement is exceptionally tolerant: non-Kazakh speakers and Orthodox Christians may participate in its rituals and enjoy the *communitas* of a pilgrimage to Turkistan.

In Part Two the focus shifts to East-Central Europe. There the main aspirant to the role of religious monopolist is Orthodox Christianity, which has a long history of involvement in state- and nation-building, notably in

the tsarist empire. Yet Orthodox Christianity is perhaps even less homogeneous in East-Central Europe than Islam is in Central Asia, as the cases of Moldova, Ukraine, and Romania amply illustrate. Additional chapters address the situation of Greek Catholics in Poland and Hungary.

Monica Heintz begins by drawing attention to anthropology's long-running debates over moral relativism. Tolerance can never be unlimited and indiscriminate, and Heintz reminds us that the Puritan origins of the civil religion of the United States were by no means free of everyday intolerance. Her case materials are drawn from Moldova, a state that is largely a political legacy of Stalinist nationality policies. In the first part of the chapter she shows how a nationalist agenda underpinned the new state's dogged reluctance to recognize the re-emergence of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia as a second Orthodox church. From the state's point of view this church was a Romanian foreign body that threatened the essential congruence of faith and nation. The authorities permitted registration only when finally compelled to do so by a decision of the European Court of Human Rights and popular demonstrations. In the second part of her chapter Heintz provides insights into discourses and practices of tolerance with reference to the individual behaviour of clergy in the village where she undertook fieldwork. The sexual misdemeanours of a young monk are overlooked by the parishioners, not only because of his contributions to rebuilding their church and a nearby monastery but also because he has conformed to a certain standard of civic performance in the way in which he has provided for his lover and children. As a result the monk is not merely tolerated but retains high status in the community.

The next two chapters deal with Ukraine. Tanya Richardson outlines the fragmentation of the country's major churches, which has evidently facilitated a climate of pluralism more generally. She then focuses on the highly distinctive municipal cosmopolitanism of multi-national, multi-religious Odessa. The circumstances that produced Odessa's tolerant local discourse have long vanished, and Richardson questions whether the concept of tolerance can still be applied at all when socialist homogenization and secularization have 'muted' group differences. She identifies for the city a basic similarity with the nationalities policy at the level of the USSR as a whole, which simultaneously encouraged both the mixing of peoples and their separation. Nowadays the local trope of cosmopolitanism is carefully placed outside the spheres of secular and ecclesiastical politics and retains an appeal for the postsocialist population, at least imaginatively.

Vlad Naumescu draws on Charles Taylor's notion of the 'social imaginary' to illuminate the very different situation prevailing in western Ukraine. Naumescu's field research, like Buzalka's and Mahieu's, was

focused on Greek Catholics, members of a church suppressed by Stalin that persisted in the ‘catacombs’ and that since 1990 has become active in the postsocialist public sphere. The Orthodox Church in Ukraine is more divided than it has ever been, yet Naumescu suggests that the eastern Christian world is conceived by the faithful as a unity that embraces even the Greek Catholics, despite their ties to Rome and ‘the West’. Indeed, for some promiscuously devout Christians, even Latin Catholicism is potentially substitutable. The fact that the state is not identified with one particular church has been conducive to the development of religious pluralism and practices of tolerance. Naumescu emphasizes, however, the imagined unity that underpins the mainstream expressions of Ukrainian religiosity, something far from a replica of the denominational religious market of the United States. This imagined unity carries with it an exclusionary potential that can already be observed in cases such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The main focus of László Foszto’s field research was conversion to Pentecostalism among the Roma of Transylvania. For this volume he has written a chapter that places the experiences of this minority group in the context of long-term transformations of the relations between faith and power in Romania, where religious affiliation and nationality have shown a high degree of congruence. In the postsocialist years, animosities have existed at the higher levels of ecclesiastical hierarchies, and incivility has been expressed in violent conflicts over the ownership of contested buildings. New ‘sectarian’ groups have been subjected to harassment and violence in some places. Foszto criticizes the notion of the ‘religious market’ on the grounds that the historic coupling of faith and nationality (ethnicity) still works to inhibit competition and individual choice. Roma, however, as a marginalized group not tied to a single religious tradition, are free to exploit niches between the ‘monopolies’. They are prominent among converts to evangelical Protestantism, especially Pentecostalism. Conversion brings poor people a key element of security, for the religious assembly will assume responsibility for the costs of their funerals. Foszto finds evidence of tolerance towards Roma on the part of Protestant as well as Orthodox clergy. In urban settings it is possible to transgress denominational boundaries when arranging a funeral, but social controls exercised by the community inhibit this degree of individuation in the village, and converts to Pentecostalism there are likely to face difficulties. In the village studied by Foszto, the Reformed Church (Hungarian) pastor seems generally well disposed and sympathetic towards the needs of his Roma parishioners. He has been trying for years to end the custom in which Roma men play cards during a wake, but without success. (This is a good example of how a local norm of civility can deviate from elite notions of proper, civilized behaviour.)

The last two chapters deal with countries generally classified as belonging to the West, but Juraj Buzalka and Stéphanie Mahieu focus on the Greek Catholic minorities in Poland and Hungary, respectively. As noted earlier, Buzalka worked in and around Przemyśl, close to the Ukrainian border. He outlines the historical tragedy that culminated in violence in the 1940s and that was passionately evoked in the collective memories of the region's two remaining ethno-religious communities in the early post-socialist years. But the antagonism that I documented in this city in the 1990s has now ebbed, at any rate in the public sphere. Greek Catholic churches are being restored, and some Roman Catholics are coming to perceive eastern Christianity in a more positive way – for example, by valuing 'oriental' spirituality. Buzalka is sceptical and suggests that present forms of reconciliation, led by the respective national churches, can be viewed as the ultimate victory of the nationalizing processes that began there in the nineteenth century. He contrasts the 'agrarian tolerance' of the past, which persisted in attenuated form under socialism, in which Roman and Greek Catholics lived alongside each other in mutual recognition, with new forms of 'artificial tolerance' in recent years, propagated 'from above' – that is, by regional NGOs and ecumenically oriented intellectuals. The contrast is illustrated with reference to carol-singing practices in a village near Przemyśl where the parish priest stands for the local mode of agrarian tolerance, though it is largely thanks to his initiatives that this village has become a focus of attention from intellectual elites as far away as Cracow. Some local people are increasingly alienated by the heavily mediatized construction of a new 'multiculturalism'.

In the final chapter, Stéphanie Mahieu approaches civility from the angle of welfare and charity, with reference to the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church. She notes that Hungary's presocialist civil society was thoroughly imbued with religion and that since 1990 churches have again been encouraged to expand their activities into secular domains, partly because of the decline of the state system of welfare provision. Religious non-profit organizations are once again playing the role they played before socialism. Not all religious groups can draw upon the same degree of state support, and in Hungary, too, the position of the dominant churches has been strengthened in recent years. Mahieu suggests that establishing charitable foundations and engaging in social work is a rational strategy for a minority church seeking to raise its profile and to build up dynamic parishes outside its core territory. At the same time the Greek Catholic priests, the driving forces behind these initiatives, are motivated by a monastic ideal and powerful spirituality. Other Greek Catholic intellectuals, too, emphasize the distinctive eastern Christian traditions of their church and push for a further

‘orientalization’ to distinguish their religion from that of the dominant Roman Catholic Church. This strategy appears to be working well in the Hungarian case, but Mahieu’s materials indicate that different theological traditions have not hindered the Greek Catholic Church from adapting successfully to the new rules of postsocialist civil society.

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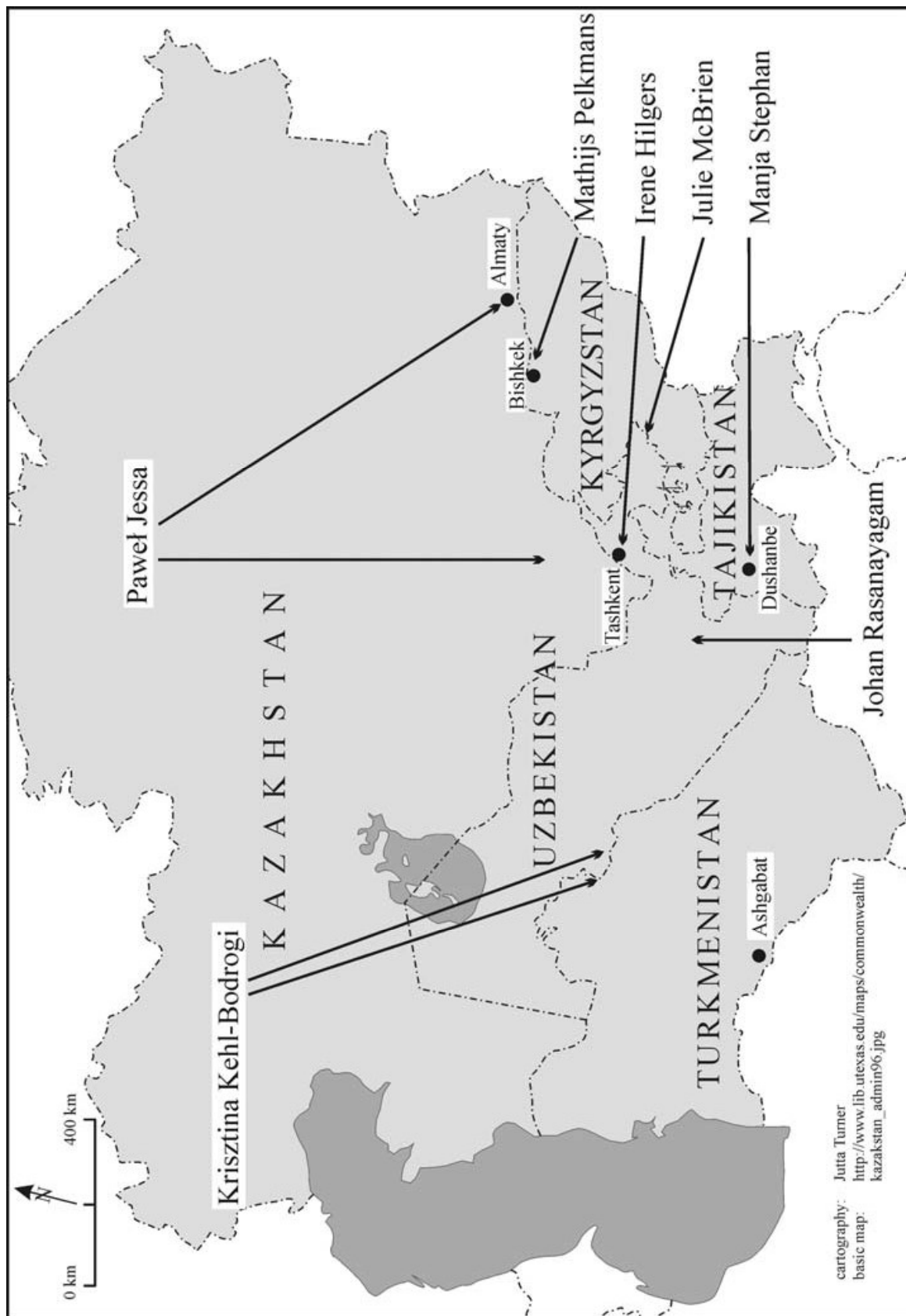
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PART ONE

CENTRAL ASIA



Fieldsites of the researchers of the Central Asia Group

Chapter 2

Asymmetries on the ‘Religious Market’ in Kyrgyzstan

Mathijs Pelkmans

Kyrgyzstan is what the US Center for World Missions is calling the most open Muslim country. . . . Years of being under Communist ruling have caused a vacuum in the hearts of its inhabitants. . . . Now there is a race being made to win the hearts of the natives who are seeking to know how to develop a relationship with God. . . . Cults and other teachings have flooded into the country as the harvest field is ripe.

Mark Palmer, coordinator,
Campus Crusade for Christ in Kyrgyzstan

The foregoing quotation describes the religious situation in Kyrgyzstan after the demise of the Soviet Union as seen through the eyes of a long-term Evangelical missionary.¹ In his view, a situation had emerged in which traditional religions were in disarray, missionaries had flooded the country, and inhabitants were choosing new religions. Without explicitly using the term, the quotation hints at the idea of an emerging ‘religious market’ in Kyrgyzstan, characterized by free competition and the dynamics of supply and demand. Phrases such as ‘most open’ country and ‘a race being made’ by missionaries who ‘have flooded into’ Kyrgyzstan reflect this market discourse. Moreover, by talking about a ‘harvest field’ of people with a ‘vacuum in their hearts’ who are ‘seeking’ new religions, the missionary effectively merges biblical language with a market model in which individual buyers engage with the offered products.

I begin with this ideologically charged text not only to provide an illustration of the themes addressed in this chapter – the deregulation of religious affairs, the role of missionaries, and the challenges that new religions pose to Kyrgyz society – but also to introduce the larger analytical statement

¹ The epigraph comes from a report by Mark Palmer, coordinator of the activities of Campus Crusade for Christ in Kyrgyzstan between 1992 and 2004. I obtained it at <http://www.wccpc.org/>.

I want to make. Using Kyrgyzstan as an example, I concentrate on the concept of the ‘religious market’, arguing that although it is analytically problematic, as an ideological category it has had very real effects on religious dynamics in Kyrgyzstan.

The terms *religious market* and *religious marketplace* were initially used in discussions of religious life in the United States,² but it has become increasingly common to use them to depict the religious environment in eastern Europe and Central Asia after socialism (Rogers 2005: 10). The main attraction of the terms may be that they draw a contrast between the positions of religion in the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts. Yet because the term *religious market* is also of central importance in specific paradigmatic and ideological agendas, it suggests a host of images that reach far beyond its everyday use. Rather than dismissing the term, I propose to differentiate between religious market as a metaphor or sensitizing concept, as an analytical tool, and as an ideologically informed prescriptive model. By differentiating among these three uses and showing how they tend to blend into one another, I aim to provide insight into the usefulness and limitations of the concept as well as to indicate the effects of the term on actual religious change.

The first approach to ‘religious marketplace’ is to employ it as a sensitizing concept, a metaphor for highlighting differences between the Soviet (or even pre-Soviet) period and the situation that emerged in Eurasia in the 1990s and early 2000s. The relaxation of laws on religious expression allowed a greater role for religion in the public sphere. Moreover, in a number of former Soviet republics, new religious dynamics also signalled the end of monopolies held by so-called ‘traditional’ religions (*traditsionnye religii*). From this perspective it makes more sense to speak of a religious market in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, which have relatively liberal policies on religious expression and demonstrate vibrant activity by ‘new’ religions, than in Uzbekistan and Georgia, where the state actively promotes one religious vision while restricting others. The metaphoric qualities of ‘religious marketplace’ are appropriate, however, only when the phrase is used in an off-hand manner. As soon as one starts to ask how such markets function, who the actors are, and what their motives might be, the image of the market becomes problematic.

² The concepts *religious economy* and *religious market* were first used as analytical terms by Stark (1985) and Finke and Stark (1988) in their effort to counter Berger’s (1967) argument that in pluralistic situations the authority of all religious traditions tends to decline. Instead they argued that open competition in a religious market boosts the effectiveness of religious institutions and thereby increases religious adherence (Finke and Stark 1988).

The second approach does exactly this – it uses the concept of the religious marketplace as an analytical tool to gain an understanding of religious phenomena. Sociologists and economists of religion writing within a rational choice framework apply economic concepts to the analysis of religious phenomena, assuming that 'religious economies are like commercial economies' (Stark 1997: 17). Indeed, they talk of pastors as religious entrepreneurs, of churches as firms, and of people who attend a church as customers (see, e.g. Iannaccone 1997). It is not so much the actual terms to which I object but rather the assumptions that underlie their use. Theorists themselves admit that their models are based on a number of assumptions: that religious institutions are structurally flexible (Warner 1997: 88) and that religious 'customers' and 'suppliers' act in similar and rational ways. They tend to ignore that religious behaviour is historically, socially, and culturally informed. Moreover, they fail to see that religious 'customers' are only rarely actively shopping for religions and therefore cannot easily be compared to customers on an economic market. Partly because of adherence to an economic model, these theorists tend to assume that religious markets are self-regulating systems that tend towards a stable equilibrium.

This brings us to the third approach, which is to use the religious market or marketplace as a prescriptive model in political agendas. This is the notion that informed the introductory quote and is upheld by representatives of religious rights groups such as Forum 18, which, backed by international organizations and sometimes by the diplomatic labours of powerful Western countries (when this is in line with their strategic interests), confront regimes with every perceived infringement of religious freedom. This religious rights activism is informed by the analytical use of the term *religious market* in that it believes free markets offer the best way to deal with religion.³ The discourse about and idealization of the religious market have been particularly prominent in Kyrgyzstan, and part of my aim is to analyze their effects on actual religious change as embedded in socio-political contexts. In analyzing these discursive practices I point out that, as with their economic counterparts, there are many unforeseen effects.

In sum, I see a range of difficulties connected to the concept *religious market*. Its ideological connotations make it problematic to use the concept analytically. It might be possible to apply the same critiques that have been levelled at neoliberal views of economic behaviour to address the deficiencies of current rational choice theories of religious markets. However, instead of remodelling the religious market concept to do greater

³ For an early critique of 'religious rights-ism', see Hann's (2000) discussion of Turkey and Poland.

justice to reality, my aim is more modest. I argue that the religious market concept is culturally constructed and ideologically charged, and because of this, the active promotion of the market model has unexpected asymmetrical effects on different religious groups.

In what follows, I first sketch the structural factors (social, political, and economic) that have created the conditions in which specific religions can prosper in Kyrgyzstan. Examining the ideologies and realities of the religious market, I show how a Western concept was imported into Kyrgyz society and how it has influenced the public sphere. By reconnecting the ideology and policies related to the religious market to its origins in *economic* theories and policies, I aim to show how the advancement of this Western concept has backfired on the state as the influx of new groups and the promotion of new ideologies result in new asymmetries and patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

I then turn to the Pentecostal Church of Jesus Christ, one of the largest and most successful Protestant churches in Kyrgyzstan, and analyze the attractions of this form of Christianity. This church is linked in more than one way to economic and religious market ideologies and practices. Its very existence became possible only after the relaxation of laws on religious expression. It thrived on the social disruptions created by ruthless economic reform, and it actively incorporated images of success and abundance associated with the expected transition to capitalism.

Market Ideology, New Laws, and Religious Movements

They come here and only want to talk about religious freedom. They only talk about rights, rights, rights! For them it is easy. After a few years they leave again, having no idea about the mess they leave behind.

With these words a functionary of the Kyrgyz State Committee for Religious Affairs described to me some of his experiences with Western missionaries. He continued by recounting several events in which the government was accused of having violated religious rights: one involved a Russian Baptist who refused to serve in the army, and another a controversy over the fining of a Pentecostal church. In both cases, the Committee for Religious Affairs received visits from religious rights activists, numerous calls from concerned Western politicians, and thousands of e-mail messages from Christians worldwide, which disrupted communication on the poorly protected computer systems in Kyrgyzstan for several days. The examples indicated the strength of Christian networks in pushing their ideals of religious freedom.

In addition, what struck me in the functionary's response was not so much his negative attitude towards religious freedom activists but the ostensible helplessness he displayed in dealing with them. It was telling that one of his colleagues wrote in an article, 'We need laws similar to those applied in the developed European states to keep within limits' disruptive religious trends (Murzakhilov 2004: 86–87). From these two commentators' perspective, religious liberalization had gone too far. And without making a moral judgement, it is certainly the case that the Kyrgyz laws had consequences that were unforeseen when they were designed.

During the 1990s Kyrgyzstan was frequently praised for its speed in reforming its political and economic structure, gaining status as 'the Switzerland of Central Asia' and an 'island of democracy'. President Akaev argued as early as December 1991 that 'the only way forward was through the development of private interest, private life, and private property' (Anderson 1999: 24). Guarantees of religious freedom were an inherent part of the reforms and were laid down in a series of laws. The first of them, signed by Akaev in late 1991, explicitly forbade any differentiation in the treatment of religious groups and held onto the Soviet separation of religion and state. Although several leaders, including Akaev, later suggested making specific reference in the constitution to the value of Islam (others wanted to stress the secular nature of the state), no reference was made to any particular religious group in the constitution adopted in May 1993 (Anderson 2003). Unlike some of the other former Soviet republics, which put restrictions on missionary activity or effectively favoured certain religious groups or visions, the Kyrgyz government preferred to stay away from religious affairs.

The reasons for this wholehearted embrace of 'religious freedom' had a lot to do with the economic difficulties Kyrgyzstan faced in the early 1990s. The country lacked raw materials and easy access to foreign markets, and the government became convinced that development could be achieved only with foreign aid. The plan that Akaev and others designed was to attract investors by radically liberalizing the economic and political sphere. Kyrgyzstan opted for a transition strategy of 'shock therapy' and closely cooperated with international organizations. In a few words, Kyrgyzstan was 'doing everything right, according to Western standards' (Connery 2000: 4). The tragedy was that although these policies were internationally applauded, attracted numerous economic gurus, and resulted in the highest per capita 'transition aid' in the region, they did not attract major investors or result in sustainable economic growth (see Pelkmans 2003, 2005). The new liberal laws concerning religious expression had similar unintended consequences. Although the government at the time may have had in mind the types of

Islam and (Orthodox) Christianity with which they were familiar, it is clear that the liberalization was most beneficial to a range of religious movements that had not been active (or were barely active) in the country before.

As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, the lifting of restrictions led to greater religious visibility in social life. The number of mosques rose, and people more readily asserted their Muslim or Christian identity.⁴ It is questionable, however, to what extent this meant more active participation in Islam, or in Christianity for that matter. Perhaps most striking was the stagnation of the Orthodox Church. Although it opened several new churches, these remained mostly empty. For example, in Kok-Jangak, which had a Russian population of approximately 600, the average attendance at church services in 2004 was six people, all over 60 years of age. During two previous stays in Kyrgyzstan (in 1995 and 1998–99), I was more struck by the lack of interest most Kyrgyz displayed in religion than by a ‘religious revival’. Other observers made similar statements. Gardaz (1999) wrote that Kyrgyzstan remained a country that was thoroughly secular, and Derluguan and Tabyshalieva (1997) noted that although it became popular to declare oneself religious, the percentages of those regularly praying and attending a church or mosque were not significantly higher than during Soviet times. Though these are certainly simplifications of the situation, partly overtaken by more recent trends, and although they apply more to northern Kyrgyzstan than to the south and more to Kyrgyz and Russians than to Uzbeks (see McBrien, this volume), an active interest in religion was far from self-evident.

But while interest in ‘traditional religions’ remained shaky, new religious movements quickly gained importance. In particular, religious groups that employed dreamlike images of ‘the West’ or that held other answers to the dislocations produced by ‘the transition’ became successful. Kyrgyzstan became a regional haven for numerous religious movements, which benefited from the government’s relatively *laissez faire* attitude towards religion. Among the missionary movements, Protestant groups are now conspicuous because of their large numbers and extensive financial resources and their success in attracting followers.

A number of processes, macro and micro, intersected to turn Kyrgyzstan into a sort of missionary hot spot. The first is that in the wake of the Gulf wars, interest in working in Muslim countries grew among Evangelical Christians. Second, there is the combined attraction of Kyrgyzstan as a Muslim and *post-Communist* society. It has been a long-held dream for Evangelical Christians to convert Muslims, but results have always been

⁴ The number of officially registered mosques increased from 39 before 1991 to 1,042 in 2003 (Mamayusupov 2003: 303).

meagre and the conditions of evangelism harsh and sometimes dangerous (Sharkey 2005). Post-Communist Muslim countries are perceived as easier to work in because of the limited influence of Islam in public (and political) life and the low level of religious knowledge among vast portions of the population. Third, of the Muslim post-Communist countries, Kyrgyzstan is seen as the most liberal and the easiest for missionaries to live in. Prohibition of missionary activities in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, in combination with the relatively strong position of Islam there, has limited their presence in those countries. Over the last ten years, Protestant missions have channelled their activities to a considerable degree into Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where their goals are more easily accomplished.

According to official data (Mamayusupov 2003), the number of Protestant congregations in Kyrgyzstan now exceeds the number of Orthodox Christian churches, which traditionally catered to the large Russian minority. The difference is particularly pronounced in Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, where 3 Orthodox churches compete with 40 to 60 Protestant churches. Though the majority of Russians may still affiliate with Orthodox Christianity, in terms of active membership Protestant churches have gained a remarkable lead. Moreover, the success of Protestant churches in Kyrgyzstan has not remained limited to people with Christian backgrounds or to ethnic minority groups such as Koreans and Tatars; these churches increasingly attract an ethnic Kyrgyz following as well. Up to 1990 there were virtually no Kyrgyz Christians, but ten years later Baptist, Evangelical, and especially charismatic Pentecostal churches boasted a significant Kyrgyz following. Recent estimates of the number of Kyrgyz who have converted to Christianity vary widely, from 10,000 to 100,000 (Iarkov 2002: 84; Ahmad 2004). This advance of Protestant Christian churches in Kyrgyzstan has astonished observers, motivating some analysts to speak of 'the Christianization of the North, which competes with the Islamization in the South' (Tabyshalieva 2000; Murzakhalilov 2004).

These changes in the religious landscape have triggered negative reactions from the media, the state, and representatives of 'traditional' confessions. The harshest criticisms have come from representatives of Orthodox Christianity, as this church has been most directly affected by the success of Protestant churches. Bishop Vladimir, claiming to speak for both Muslim and Orthodox Christian spiritual leaders, wrote: 'We support religious freedom. However [this freedom] is abused by sects and growing numbers of foreign missionary organizations. We are concerned by their actions, which sow discord in our societies, by their disregard for our culture and traditions, by their aggressive religious propaganda, and by the fact that

they are taking advantage of people's financial difficulties for purposes of proselytizing' (Vladimir 2002: 291).

The bishop's outrage was clearly informed not only by disagreement over theological issues but also by frustration over the means that different confessions had at their disposal. One of the grievances was that Protestant missions enjoyed extensive financial resources as well as voluntary personnel. But perhaps the biggest grievance and worry was rooted in the conviction that Russians were Orthodox and Kyrgyz were Muslim by nature.

Popular resentment against foreign missionaries is repeatedly brought up in the national media, especially in government-supportive newspapers such as *Vechernyi Bishkek*, which portrays the Evangelical churches as 'totalitarian cults' that use hypnosis and advanced psychological manipulation to brainwash their members. The most imminent fear is that these churches may destabilize the 'nation' by introducing foreign religion based on ideas that are alien to Kyrgyz traditions and culture. In both language and substance such criticisms recall views propagated during the Soviet period. Perhaps it should not surprise us that a reference was made to one of the most famous statements of the intellectual father of the Communist Party: 'Karl Marx was right after all when he announced: "religion is the opium of the people!"' (*Vechernyi Bishkek*, 19 April 2002).

Such negative views have also surfaced in popular comments on conversion that attribute it solely to material rewards. One widespread rumour held that converts would receive 50 dollars for every service they attended. Missionaries and local Protestant Christians were characterized as *lovtsy dusha* (soul catchers) who used 'satanic techniques'. Moreover, conversion often led to tensions on the local level that were manifested in actions such as the banishment of converts from local communities, demands that they renounce their new faith, and the exclusion of converts from burying their deceased in village graveyards.

This growing discomfort and resentment was one of the reasons the Kyrgyz government, in the second half of the 1990s, became more sensitive to the perceived detrimental effects of foreign religious influences. Within the state apparatus voices became stronger that urged for tighter controls over religion and particularly for checks on those aspects seen as non-traditional. In 1996 a special State Committee on Religious Affairs was created to coordinate relations between the state and religious communities. Religious groups were required to register with this committee, and some differentiation was made between 'traditional' confessions (Islam and Orthodox Christianity) and 'non-traditional' confessions (Pentecostalism, etc.). Only representatives of traditional religious organizations were allowed to preach in public places or through the mainstream mass media.

Fear of religious extremism was intensified by the violent actions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1999 and by the worldwide attention paid to the events of September 2001. Thus, organizations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is seen as a potential terrorist group even though its most 'violent' known act has been the distribution of leaflets, were banned. Similarly, government forces were behind a number of replacements of imams in mosques throughout the country (see McBrien, this volume).

Although such restrictions were quickly taken up by religious freedom activists as indicating a possible change in the atmosphere, it is clear that Kyrgyzstan's treatment of most religious groups has remained relatively liberal. Indeed, Igor Rotar, correspondent for the religious rights movement Forum 18, found that unregistered religious communities faced no serious problems (Rotar 2004). 'Traditional' religious groups did enjoy a pre-eminence in public life, but this was not accompanied by substantial legal privileges or political influence (Anderson 2003). Whereas the Kyrgyz government has tried to crack down on the (perceived or real) fundamentalist Islamic threat, Protestant missionary groups are given more leeway. It is not entirely clear how this difference in attitude should be accounted for. It may stem from the Western orientation of political leaders, from the ties of Protestant missions to the powerful United States, or from the fact that Protestant missionary activities are often cloaked in development activities and discourse. In any case, on a practical level Christian missionary activity has faced little obstruction from the state.

One church, however, has been seen as particularly threatening – the Pentecostal Church of Jesus Christ (CJC). Its rapid growth, its hierarchical structure, and its emphasis on the gifts of the spirit have all contributed to controversies. Those who are antagonistic accuse the CJC of bribing people to attend church (even though members are required to pay the tithe) or claim that the leaders transform church members into 'zombies' who are no longer able to think for themselves.⁵ Government officials launched efforts to crack down on the CJC by closing several of its churches in 2003 and by filing a massive tax bill that was believed to be aimed at crushing the church.⁶ Despite these pressures (or because they added to the church's heroism), the CJC continued to grow and to expand throughout Kyrgyzstan.

⁵ The titles of the following articles, which appeared in one of the largest Kyrgyz newspapers, speak for themselves: 'Psychological terror or dark totalitarian sect' (*Vechernii Bishkek*, 10 November 2000), 'Spiritual narcotism' (*Vechernii Bishkek*, 19 March 2002).

⁶ Forum 18 News Service, 17 June 2003, 22 August 2003, <http://www.forum18.org>.

The Pentecostal Church of Jesus Christ in Kyrgyzstan

Why do we have success? Why, why, why? Because we do as it is written. The apostles write that in order to be successful you need communication [*obshenie*], prayer [*molitva*], and understanding [*ponimanie*]. We are in constant communication and we constantly pray. It is all very simple.

Thus spoke Vasili Kuzin, senior pastor of the Pentecostal Church of Jesus Christ during what was perhaps the shortest formal interview – 15 minutes – I ever held. He basically repeated his stump speech of church doctrine to explain his church's success. That success was related to the church's messages, organizational structure, and relationship to wider socio-economic changes in Kyrgyzstan.

The CJC is at once the largest, the fastest growing, and the most controversial church in Kyrgyzstan. It was established in 1991 by a small group of Russian Pentecostals who were dissatisfied with the 'legalistic' attitude of the older Pentecostal church, which had been active during the Soviet period. According to Vasili Kuzin, co-founder of the CJC, the church grew rapidly from its very start. In 1994 it had 500 to 600 members, and by 2003 it had reached 10,000 (the number does not include irregular attendants). Moreover, whereas in the first half of the 1990s the church attracted many Christians from other denominations and was almost completely ethnically Russian, in 2004 approximately 4,500 out of 12,000 members were ethnic Kyrgyz.

The church is well embedded in transnational networks. In addition to its 45 daughter churches in Kyrgyzstan, the CJC has seven congregations in Germany, three in the United States, and two in Russia. It has links with international Christian networks such as Calvary International, the Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith, and Derek Prince International. But at the same time, the church is different from many others in the country in that it is not a 'missionary church' but is led by Kyrgyzstan residents. The CJC is, in this sense, similar to other Pentecostal churches, which are characterized by an 'increasingly complex web of transnational networks, where flows of people, money and images circulate with growing speed and intensity, defying all attempts to pin them down to any particular source or destination' (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001: 1). This combination of transnational involvement and local organization allows the church to adjust

flexibly to problems that are important at the local level while also being able to muster international support when necessary.⁷

In 2004 the CJC had 45 officially registered daughter churches in Kyrgyz territory. By and large the 'planting' of these churches followed a characteristic pattern. In the early 1990s the CJC restricted its activities to the capital, Bishkek, and its immediate surroundings. Around 1995 it established daughter churches in provincial towns and some district centres in the north. In the late 1990s the church expanded its activities to the south of the country, into the Fergana valley. This meant a move from a region that had a strong Russian presence and was locally seen as secularized to a region that was seen as more Muslim. These geographical shifts were paralleled by changes in ethnic make-up. Whereas during the early 1990s the CJC attracted most of its members among the Russian minority, later in the decade it was finding increasing success among ethnic Kyrgyz.

The rapid growth of Pentecostal churches worldwide has often been associated with the attractions of the 'gospel of prosperity' (Coleman 2000: 27–40). Similarly, part of the attraction of the CJC is its advancement of a kind of 'spiritual modernity' that offers salvation and also stresses that prosperity, health, and success can be attained by faithful prayer. The importance of these themes was immediately visible to anyone who passed by the main church building in Bishkek. Five-meter-high pink billboards listed – next to an immense map of the country with the caption, 'Pray for Kyrgyzstan' – four main themes: service, family, finances, and healing. Each item was supplemented with biblical texts showing the importance of the category and the way true faith would help one deal with poverty, sickness, and other terrestrial problems. Overcoming the corruptions of the world was a central element in the services of the Church of Jesus Christ and a recurring theme in the book series published by the church, seen in titles such as *Shadows of the Past* and *Breaking the Fetters of Slavery*. It also filled the church's newspaper, *Tvoi Put'* (Your Way), in which church members testified about how their faith and the support of other believers had helped them overcome addictions, diseases, poverty, and other personal problems.

Though the CJC's insistence on abstinence from drugs and its valorization of patriarchal family structures were the same in its churches throughout the country, important variations existed in the perceived causes

⁷ During an interview, Vasili Kuzin summarized his strategy for dealing with government interference: 'Whenever there is such a problem, I have to make phone calls to believers working in international organizations. Then these people make other phone calls, and usually that settles the problem.' Understandably, he did not offer specific details.

of immorality and in opinions about the best methods to deal with them. Whereas the senior pastor in Bishkek regularly invoked the dangers of immorality in the city and talked about the seductions of 'modern' life, the pastor in the much smaller provincial town of Jalal-Abad ascribed everyday problems to 'occult practices' and the 'hollow religiosity' of many Muslims. Moreover, whereas in Bishkek the path to overcoming these problems was imagined through involvement in strict church life, the emphasis in Jalal-Abad was on defeating demonic forces by prayer. In short, although the ideals of a moral life were similar in both churches and were defended as biblical, the causes of immorality were seen as different and thus in need of different methods to be overcome. This was perhaps the most important reason the messages of morality were seen as effective answers to complex socio-economic problems.

Equally important to understanding the attractions of the church was that it offered entrance into a tightly organized community life. In Bishkek the CJC has developed into a full-fledged institution that occupies a huge building (a former theatre) in the centre of town. It has its own television studio and a press that publishes a stream of books and brochures written by Pastor Kuzin. The church has a cafeteria and provides English language, computer, drama, and dance classes to church members. Many members take part in such groups, and all are expected to participate in 'home-church' meetings (*domashniaia tserkov*), which gather at least once a week. These home churches can be perceived as the pillars of church discipline. Each group leader is responsible for making sure that members contribute the tithe, and within these groups members are recruited for participation in one of the ministries or for positions higher up in the church hierarchy. During home church meetings participants discuss their successes in combating addictions and poverty and testify about the ways in which God is changing their lives, thus reinforcing the church's ideology in an intimate setting.

CJC brochures proudly claim that its members are of all ages and national and social backgrounds. Still, the church has made special efforts to reach out to those at the lower end of society. In Bishkek it has organized services in prisons, managed an orphanage, and provided services to the elderly. This is partly reflected in the make-up of the church, and many members told me stories of their problematic pre-conversion life. In Jalal-Abad the church was less involved in outreach activities that specifically focused on the 'powerless', but still the make-up of the congregation showed interesting patterns. The majority of church members there were ethnically Kyrgyz.⁸ Women were by far the majority, making up 75 per cent of church

⁸ In a survey conducted among 121 church members in Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyz made up 73 per cent of the respondents. Uzbeks were the most under-represented ethnic

members. Contrary to the locally common idea that only young people convert, the members of the CJC were almost evenly spread over the age cohorts between 20 and 50, and 12 per cent were older than 50.⁹ Levels of education ranged equally widely. Only a small minority (5 per cent) had not completed basic school education. The majority (63 per cent) had finished high school or a vocational school, and a significant proportion (32 per cent) held a degree from a university or a teaching school.

Data on residence and civil status showed that membership in the CJC in Jalal-Abad was closely related to social cohesion. Of the surveyed members of the church there, 71 per cent were immigrants to the city, the majority having moved there after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Another 13 per cent lived not in the city but in villages in the immediate surroundings. Only 16 per cent had been born in Jalal-Abad itself. In other words, conversion was most likely to occur among rural Kyrgyz who had recently migrated to Jalal-Abad. Immigrants, as newcomers, were likely to be poorly integrated into the social fabric of the city and thus more inclined to join a movement that provided close-knit social ties. Moreover, promises of health and prosperity might have been especially attractive to those who had to establish their own niche in a post-Soviet urban setting. Seen from the reverse perspective, migrants were removed from their original social surroundings and thus felt less pressure to conform to social (and religious) expectations.

Another striking pattern emerges when one looks at the civil status of respondents. The data show a strong over-representation of divorced, widowed, and remarried women. Together they made up more than 50 per cent of all the women who attended the CJC in Jalal-Abad. This pattern was less pronounced among males. Only a small minority of men was divorced, and the categories divorced, widowed, and remarried made up approximately 23 per cent of male church members. The difference can be partly explained by the fact that men tend to remain better integrated in kin networks after a divorce; they often live with their own relatives. Moreover, they have better chances of remarrying than do women. Women are more likely to end up living alone after a divorce, which, in combination with the hardship of

group (3 per cent of church members, versus 30 per cent of the population). Tatars were the best represented group (11 per cent of church members, versus 3 to 4 per cent of the population). This over-representation seems related to the low cohesion of Tatar communities in the region and their ambiguous position between Russians and Central Asians.

⁹ The following cohorts were distinguished: ages 15–19 (14 per cent); 20–29 (30 per cent); 30–39 (22 per cent); 40–49 (22 per cent); and 50+ (12 per cent).

being a single mother, makes them more open to a new community and an alternative ideology.

The observed patterns correspond broadly to observations made about Pentecostal churches elsewhere. Joel Robbins has mentioned that the majority of converts to Pentecostal Christianity ‘have been rural migrants to cities, people at the lower end of the social class scale, or rural stay-at-homes displaced from the centre of their own worlds by social change’ (Robbins 2004: 123, paraphrasing Martin 1990: 190–91). To displaced people, Pentecostal churches, with their high-intensity community life and their emphasis on morality, provide both social security and a purpose in an insecure world.

This generalization was partly confirmed in the stories of converts whom I interviewed. They stressed the friendliness they encountered and the mutual support that believers provided each other. Moreover, the church gave them a sense of moral superiority over the non-believing community. One woman mentioned, ‘There is a big difference in friendship with believers and with non-believers. Non-believing men immediately want to draw you to their beds, and women immediately want to drink alcohol. But with believers, they only encourage you to do the right thing.’ The messages of Pentecostalism challenge the ‘corrupt’ world in which they operate. Thus, in Kyrgyzstan a major part of the attraction of Pentecostalist churches is that they ban alcohol and drug consumption and aim at restoring patriarchal family structures. Moreover, by explaining poverty and illness in terms of a corrupt world under the spell of Satan, they provide concrete answers to problems related to the social and economic dislocations of Soviet and Muslim space.

Conclusion

The market model predicts that pluralistic competition will stimulate religious markets just as it does secular markets, forcing suppliers to efficiently produce a wide range of alternative faiths well adapted to the specific needs of consumers.

Laurence Iannacone,

Rational Choice: Framework for the Scientific Study of Religion

Kyrgyzstan was the Central Asian republic that was fastest and most rigorous in adopting policies that resembled the neoliberal ideal of the free market. Therefore, it is worthwhile to reconsider here the findings of the religious market pundits. Their main assertion is that openness and competitive pressures will lead to overall higher participation in religious life and to religious institutions that better serve ‘consumer’ needs. Although this

statement was originally put in morally neutral terms (Stark 1985), it has since been refined to argue that deregulation is also the best way to *manage* religious markets, because it supposedly leads to the healthiest 'market equilibrium' of religion in society (Poutvaara and Wagener 2004: 5).

The upsurge in the number of religious groups, the greater activities of missionaries, and the higher visibility of religion in the public sphere in Kyrgyzstan might at first glance suggest the validity of the market 'theory'. But such a suggestion would be tautologous, adding nothing to what every casual observer of the religious situation in the former Soviet Union has already noticed. (Similarly, no one needed a theory to explain why post-Soviet economic markets were better stocked than Soviet ones.) By dissecting its terms, however, I have aimed to address several issues concerning the effects of market *policies* and *ideologies* in the religious sphere. The first concerns the way religious groups are differently affected by 'pluralistic competition'. The second concerns who the 'consumers' are and why they became consumers in the first place. This also means asking what the consumers' 'needs' are and how those needs were created. By reflecting on these questions it is possible to provide some indications about why certain religious groups won, why others lost or stagnated, and what the societal effects of this religious activity have been. The tautological models employed by the current rational choice theorists of religion cannot answer such questions adequately.

To understand which groups were in a favourable position in Kyrgyzstan, it is important to point out that religious markets are not self-regulating systems but rather are constructed in transnational space characterized by competing and unequal economic and political forces. The richest groups, those with the most efficient links to wealthy countries, are in a privileged position. Consequently, the nature of new waves of missionaries and the attractions of Evangelical Christianity underline the complex dialectics of the current world order. It may also be that the Western roots of the religious market ideal and of civil society are inherently beneficial to religions that stress the importance of the individual. That is, the emphasis on individual choice that underlies the religious market ideal seems most compatible with religions that promote individual salvation. Neoliberal ideologies and reforms, therefore, have created an environment that is favourable to Protestantism. Moreover, because people do not 'shop' for religions, but rather react to those they encounter, religions that have the most aggressive selling strategies – such as Pentecostalism – seem to do well in situations in which people face numerous problems in everyday life.

Who are the people who enter the 'religious market'? What allows us to speak of a religious market, at least metaphorically? Anthropologists long

ago came to see religion as embedded in social contexts and as constitutive of social networks and cultural practices. But if religions bind individuals to larger networks, then how do people ever come to shift their religious affiliations? This question is particularly pertinent in a country such as Kyrgyzstan, where religious and ethnic affiliations are seen as tightly linked.¹⁰ Part of the answer is that shifts in religious affiliation occur most frequently in societies that experience rapid change, among people who are poorly embedded in social networks. The economic uncertainties produced by the postsocialist 'transition', the disintegration and malfunctioning of state organizations, and the general collapse of the social welfare system in Kyrgyzstan have made religious institutions that provide social services and a vision with which to cope with difficulties more attractive. The embrative structures offered by the Church of Jesus Christ, in combination with visions that promise the delivery of dreams of capitalism and modernity in this life, have made it particularly attractive to the excluded and the dispossessed.

Precisely because religion is a social phenomenon, market models that promote individualistic attitudes are bound to generate repercussions. The new 'religious pluralism' in Kyrgyzstan challenges older conceptions and practices concerning 'tolerance' and 'neighbourliness', as well as ideas about ethnic and national identity. Rather than creating equilibrium, neoliberal policies and visions have far-reaching consequences that are potentially destabilizing. If neoliberal economics has largely failed to shape the direction of the 'transition' in Kyrgyzstan, then we may similarly wonder about the effects of 'religious market' ideologies. Perhaps the religious markets have functioned well in attracting new religious movements, but it remains to be seen how the tensions generated by their confrontation will be managed.

¹⁰ To answer this question requires further analysis of the shifting linkages between religion, ethnicity, and culture during and after the Soviet period. The current 'religious market' provides interesting similarities with and differences from the early Soviet 'ethnic market,' when ethnic labels were promoted and sought for various economic and political reasons. In that period 'religion' seemed the immutable component and was definitely not 'on the market', whereas now it is the ethnic labels that are perceived as fixed and religious affiliation as unstable.

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Chapter 3

Extreme Conversations: Secularism, Religious Pluralism, and the Rhetoric of Islamic Extremism in Southern Kyrgyzstan

Julie McBrien

In 1990 ethnic violence between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the Uzgen and Osh regions of southern Kyrgyzstan resulted in the murders of hundreds of people. Studies indicate that land disputes, uneven distributions of power, and high levels of unemployment were major impetuses in the civil unrest (Tishkov 1995: 134). At the time many predicted further ethnic eruptions in the densely populated Fergana valley. Speculation that violence might resume rose when the Soviet Union dissolved not long after the Osh events. Despite these fears, more than 15 years later the Fergana valley has seen no further ethnic violence. Moreover, whatever tensions may exist between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz there, ethnic relations receive little to no media attention in contemporary Kyrgyzstan. Instead, reports concerning the stability of the region focus on another 'looming threat', Islamic extremism.

In some respects this apprehension is justified. The only other major violence in the region since the Osh events was the killing of several hundred people by security forces in May 2005 in Andijan, Uzbekistan (see Hilgers, this volume). As predicted, Islamic extremism played a role, but not quite in the way imagined. Although reports indicate that the state's murder of citizens was unprovoked, the Uzbek government justified its action as an anti-terrorist measure (Human Rights Watch 2005; International Crisis Group 2005). Its use of this rhetoric demonstrates that perhaps what should be feared in the region is not 'terrorists' but the contemporary discourse on Islamic extremism and the governments that employ it.

Like the Uzbek government, the Kyrgyz state employs the rhetoric of anti-terrorism and Muslim extremism. An intertwining of ideas about modernity, Islam, and the role of religion in society has produced an ideological environment in which the Kyrgyz state, in dialogue with the intelligentsia, the official religious hierarchy, and ultimately the largest part of the population itself, has endorsed a narrow definition of acceptable Islam

throughout the region. This definition is part of the discursive construction of boundaries between what is seen as the good, tolerant Muslim and the religious fanatic. Kyrgyzstan, as an ‘emerging democracy’, must guarantee freedom of religion. At the same time, as a country drawn into the contemporary world-wide ‘war on terror’, it has a vested interest in ensuring that ‘bad’ Islam does not proliferate. Uzbekistan, the United States, and Russia, in their efforts to help Kyrgyzstan reach this end, have attempted to influence Kyrgyzstan’s definition of acceptable Islam and have pushed the Kyrgyz government to take a ‘tougher stance’ on Islamic extremism.

Despite these matters Kyrgyzstan, unlike Uzbekistan, remains one of the most religiously tolerant Central Asian countries, if not *the* most tolerant. The Kyrgyz constitution, like the constitutions of many of the other republics, guarantees religious freedom (see Pelkmans, this volume). Throughout the region, however, such constitutional allowances have not resulted in the kinds of religious freedom that are expected of countries supposedly ‘transitioning to democracy’. Kyrgyzstan has been the exception to this rule in allowing both the ‘traditional religions’ (*traditsionnye religii*) – Islam and Orthodox Christianity – and ‘new’ faiths to exist largely unrestricted. It is difficult to discern the origins of the contemporary religious state of affairs, but they are related to a mixture of factors including a relatively weak state, pressure from the West, and some good intentions. Whatever the sources, the existence of religious pluralism has promoted religious debate.

Within this religious debate one of the strongest voices is that which promotes the negative discourse on Muslim extremism. The opening of the ‘religious marketplace’ in communities in southern Kyrgyzstan has meant that although people there have come into contact with non-Islamic religions, the expansion of multiple interpretations of Islam has affected social life more significantly. Concomitant acts or signs of supposed Islamic extremism have not proliferated. Yet discourse against supposed extremists continues, and local residents experiencing new religious multiplicities utilize the rhetoric of religious extremism (among other things) to deal with their changing environment.

The discourse of religious extremism, while created partly at the global, state, and regional levels, is at the same time defined, interpreted, and reinforced at the local level. In this chapter I analyze the rhetoric of anti-terrorism and Muslim extremism in Central Asia in order to understand its roots and delineate its usage in contemporary Kyrgyzstan. I want to illuminate the linkages between state and local-level discourses on religious extremism and show how these discourses translate into practice at the local level. I argue that the discourse of terrorism is a powerful rhetorical tool

because of its long history of use in the region. Although contemporary global events and political manoeuvrings influence the discursive environment, historical narratives play a leading role in legitimating the rhetoric. Moreover, the expansion of alternative interpretations of Islam and the creation of religious space in local communities has posed a real threat to the former religious status quo, making an anti-religious discourse highly relevant for some portions of the population. I focus on a town in southern Kyrgyzstan located near both Uzgen and Andijan, in order to explore how residents of the community employ (and create) the discourse of Islamic extremism to make sense of the changing religious landscape.

The Roots of the Rhetoric

The atheist policies of the Soviet state, though variant and often contradictory over the duration of Soviet period, succeeded in virtually wiping out public observance of Islamic practices such as mosque attendance, corporate prayer, and veiling in Central Asia. In the early years of the Soviet Union, the government launched harsh campaigns that ‘targeted the pillars of Muslim society . . . the *waqf* system, traditional schools and women’s place in society’ (Keller 1992: 31). Moreover, it unleashed an ideological campaign that painted Islamic religious practices as antiquated and backward – in short, anti-modern. These ideas and policies were similar to those concerning religion throughout the Soviet Union (Keller 1992; Kamp 1998; Northrop 2004).

Yet the Soviet reaction to Islam in Central Asia had ideological underpinnings beyond a general disdain for religion as an opiate of the masses. Central Asian Muslims were the Russians’ eastern ‘other’, a population the Soviet authorities saw as backward and in need of civilizing. The anti-Muslim attitude can be traced back to the Russian Empire specifically and to European imperialist and orientalist attitudes more generally (Geraci 1997). The Muslims of Central Asia were perceived as undeveloped, waiting for help from imperial Russia. At the same time, Islam was seen as a destabilizing force and was assumed to be fanatical at its heart. ‘Russia as progress stood in contrast to Central Asia as fanaticism and barbarity, much of which was seen to reside in Islam. “Fanaticism” came to be the defining characteristic of Central Asians’ (Khalid 1998: 51). Russian fears about political subversion and their ‘abiding prejudice against Muslim religious piety’ (Brower 1997: 119) thus led to two-pronged campaigns against Islam – political (to control a population) and ‘cultural’ (to civilize the fanatic other).

Although large discontinuities existed between imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, the orientalized view of Central Asian Muslims was nearly

identical in the late Russian and early Soviet periods (Northrop 2004). According to Adeeb Khalid (1998), Russia largely attributed Central Asians' fanaticism and barbarity to Islam. In strikingly similar terms, Northrop (2004: 40) noted: 'In the eyes of these early Bolshevik observers, much of the explanation for these problems lay in the paramount importance of religion in Central Asian life. Primitive, "barbaric" practices could thus be ascribed straightforwardly to Islam.'

In the early years atheist campaigns were fairly unsuccessful. The Soviets therefore changed tactics multiple times and tried various means to discredit Islam throughout Central Asia. In the Fergana valley they ultimately squared their attack on notions of everyday life (*byt*) as embodied by women and the home (Northrop 2004). They aimed their efforts at the veiled woman, arguing that her imprisonment in the *paranji* represented the evils of fanatic Islam.¹ Unveiling women was seen as tantamount to their liberation. This emancipation of women was not only a part of the Soviet anti-religious campaign but also a way to create a pseudo-proletariat in an area largely lacking in the class categories needed to implement wider Soviet campaigns (Northrop 2004).

As in other parts of the Muslim world where colonial forces sought control, the foreign focus on women and the veil as symbols of the backwardness of Islam helped to set the terms for the debate between the colonizer and the colonized (Ahmed 1992: 164; Moors 1998: 210). Instead of taking issue with the colonial focus on women and the veil as the appropriate symbol of Islam, Muslims' counter-arguments accepted the veil as *the* issue, and they launched their retaliation by extolling the virtues of the veil. Thus it was as much the colonized as the colonizers who centralized gender and gender seclusion in the debates over Islam. In Central Asia the process took another twist. The Soviets' union-wide endeavour to create and delineate nations coincided with their anti-religious efforts. Thus the centralization of women and veiling in the Soviet 'crusades' had the concurrent result that women, the veil, and domestic life became symbols not only of Islam but of emerging national identities (Northrop 2004).

In additional attempts to pacify Central Asia and eliminate Islam, Soviet leaders aimed their attacks at what they perceived as the public, overtly religious aspects of life – religious authorities, mosques, and Islamic

¹ The *paranji* was a large, shirt-like covering worn by some female inhabitants of the Fergana valley at the end of the Russian imperial period and the beginning of the Soviet Union. The garment was draped over the head and hung loosely over the body. It was open in the front and was either pulled closed by the woman wearing it or was worn with a *chachvan*, a rough horse-hair veil that extended from the top of the *paranji* over the face and down the length of the body.

literature (Keller 1992). Similarly, their ideological campaign denigrated the outward, public forms of religious expression. This campaign resulted from ignorance of Islam on the part of Soviet (and earlier Russian) authorities. 'Assuming that Islam was structured like the Russian Orthodox Church, with a visible, clerical hierarchy,' Soviet leaders thought 'that destroying the hierarchy would destroy the religion' (Keller 1992: 36). Shoshana Keller noted that their focus was largely on the visible, public side of religion – at least the aspect of life that the Soviets considered religious.² Part of the effort to eliminate this 'public side of religion' was an ideological campaign that portrayed its practices as backward, fanatical, and anti-modern. The attacks on public forms of religious expression meant that Central Asian Muslims privileged other forms of Muslim religious life in their daily existence, such as the observance of Muslim holidays, rituals related to the home, and the marking of life-cycle events, which took place largely in the domestic sphere (Privratsky 2001).

In Central Asia, nation-building carried particular importance for the Soviet authorities because it was part of an effort to break up any unity among the Central Asian population founded on Muslim identity. Nation-building turned out to be a very dialectical endeavour as local populations learned to use the developing rhetoric of nationalism to gain power or meet personal ends (Hirsch 1997). Nations and nationalities were actively constructed by delimiting peoples and their corresponding territories. At the same time, a bounded, primordial idea of culture as consisting of a 'bag' of 'things' that belonged to each of the nations was created. Thus each nation ended up with its national musical instrument, dish, dress, heroes, symbols, holidays, and so forth. National identity was also bound up with 'everyday life' (*byt*) and the home.

Despite religious persecution and restrictions on religious identification and practice, Central Asians' identification as Muslims could not be eradicated. Many of the markers of national identity being promoted throughout the Soviet Union also happened to be key elements that Muslims

² What the Soviets deemed 'religious' may not have been understood in the same way by the Central Asians. 'The first [mistake of the Russian Communist officials] was their inability to see that for Muslims the relationships between law, religion, and social mores were much more complex and closely intertwined than they were for Westerners' (Keller 1992: 35). For Central Asians there was no uniquely 'religious' part of their existence that could be excised from the social, economic, or political. Keller and others thus argue that after the Soviets' religious campaign a large degree of Muslim religious life was (unintentionally) allowed to remain, simply because it was unrecognized and therefore not targeted by Soviet anti-religious policies.

saw as inherent to their Muslimness (Shahrani 1984). These elements were all the more important because they were the forms of religious expression left to Central Asians after the anti-religious campaigns of the early Soviet period. Thus, through the concomitant processes of anti-religious campaigns and development of nations, Muslimness in Central Asia became an inherent part of the evolving concept of national identity.

These intertwined processes had effects beyond identification and self-understanding. They also influenced Muslims' notions regarding proper religious observance and appropriate Muslim behaviour. Although veiling had been targeted during the anti-religious campaigns, other 'domestic' elements of Muslim religious life had not been stigmatized as 'bad' or 'evil.'³ It was the more public aspects of Muslim spiritual life, which, according to Soviet logic, were the highly religious side of Islam, that had been divorced from definitions of Muslimness and reinterpreted as bad, extreme, and unmodern. It therefore became acceptable for Muslims to be largely a-religious in public. Because of the ban on public religious observances, people's fear of discussing private religious belief and ritual, and the reorientation of Central Asians' Muslim identity towards a 'domestic' or 'popular' Islam, discussions about and debates over conceptions of Muslimness and Islam were effectively muted in the public sphere. Yet despite the disappearance of wide-scale debate over Islam, a quieted dialogue continued among the official and unofficial *ulama* of the Soviet period.⁴

In the late Soviet period the practice of so-called popular or domestic Islam became stronger and more apparent.⁵ Finally aware of the religious significance of such beliefs and practices, the Soviets attempted to rid the Central Asian populations of these 'vestiges of Islam'.⁶ One means of doing so was to pressure the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Central Asia to

³ The Soviets did become aware of these 'vestiges' of Islam, as they were often termed, in the 1960s and 1970s, and they attempted to 'finish the project' and get rid of them. Their campaigns against shrine veneration were mostly successful, but they had less success against the other practices and beliefs (Poljakov 1992).

⁴ During the Soviet period the official *ulama* were those religious leaders holding positions in the few state-approved mosques and *madrasas* (religious schools), which were under the authority of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Central Asia. Unofficial *ulama* would have been men who taught Islam, possessed religious authority, or both, but who were not a part of this official, state-approved structure.

⁵ The following historical account is a synthesis of works on the Central Asian *ulama* by Babadjanov (2004; Babadzhanov 1999), Babadjanov and Kamilov (2001), Saroyan (1997), and Shahrani (2005).

⁶ For an example of how the Soviet intelligentsia understood these 'vestiges', see Poljakov 1992.

denounce such practices as un-Islamic. The religious leaders of the board and the various religious leaders below them had their own theological reasons for wanting to expunge these practices as well. Thus, in a series of fatwas and religious publications they attempted to dissuade Central Asian Muslims from participating in such practices.

While the Soviet authorities were attempting to rid the area of the vestiges of Islam, the idea of an ‘orthodox’ Islam, free of the aberrations of shrine worship and certain ‘domestic practices’, arose among the religious leadership (Saroyan 1997; Babadjanov 2004:170). This idea sparked debate among the *ulama*, official and otherwise, in which it was argued that at least some of these domestic forms were in fact sanctioned by the Hanafi school. At the same time, theological developments from outside the isolated Central Asian Muslim world began to penetrate the region, and some people adopted Salafi interpretations of Islam. Theologically, the Salafis rejected nearly all the so-called domestic forms of Islam in Central Asia.

Because of the convergence of Soviet aims to eliminate the vestiges of Islamic practices and the Salafis’ and critical Hanafis’ desire to reform Central Asian Islam, Soviet authorities allowed these religious authorities greater freedom to spread their ideas, hoping that their teachings would help curb the religiosity of the masses (Babadzhanov 1999: 3).⁷ As the ideals of the Salafis and critical Hanafis became clearer and their numbers of adherents grew, the Soviets recognized the political threat they posed and discontinued their tacit support.

It was around this time, too – in the 1970s – that those in political and religious power began to use the term *Wahhabi* as a way to label Muslims such as the Salafis and critical Hanafis whom they perceived to have deviant points of view. Actual Wahhabi ideas from Saudi Arabia may have been among the ideas used by these groups, but they most likely had indigenous theological roots as well. Babadjanov and Kamilov (2001) speculated that the term *Wahhabi* was first used by an influential Fergana valley *alim* to label his own students whose theological ideas had veered from his and who had criticized local Islamic practices that the *alim* validated. Whatever the genealogy of the term, it stuck as a pejorative label for Muslims whom state and religious authorities considered deviant or threatening.

⁷ I have chosen the rather awkward designation ‘Salafi and critical Hanafi’ because there were most likely *ulama* with Salafi orientations as well as Hanafi *ulama* involved in criticizing the so-called popular forms of Islam. Of course the Salafis and critical Hanafis differed in their opinions, but from the existing literature it is impossible to know to whom the Soviet authorities allowed more liberties. (They most likely allowed equal liberties to both.) Moreover, who belonged to which category was, and is, debatable (see Shahrani 2005: 9).

Though these early ‘Wahhabis’ found followers, many Central Asians held negative views about them because the Wahhabis directly criticized their main modes of religious expression as un-Islamic. Moreover, the general population viewed the so-called Wahhabis with suspicion because of their emphasis on religious practices that were labelled extreme in the discourse about the ‘evil Muslim’. A large portion of the *ulama*, both official and unofficial, was equally against the ideas of the Wahhabis because they held widely divergent views on the validity and use of the four Islamic legal schools. Moreover, it is plausible that the Soviet regime, in light of its experiences in Afghanistan and its fear of a Muslim population unified under the banner of Islam, employed the term itself and solidified the equation of ‘Wahhabi’ with ‘extremist’. Thus, from many fronts the Salafis and critical Hanafis (whether actual Wahhabis or not) were viewed with suspicion and perceived as a threat, though for different reasons and from different angles. Nevertheless, the common usage of the term *Wahhabi* solidified its place in the Central Asian lexicon.⁸

The Rhetoric Employed

The Soviet authorities and later the governments of the newly independent states were skilful in marrying Central Asian Muslims’ actual discontents regarding the ‘Wahhabis’ – that is, disputes over the orthodoxy or permissibility of daily religiosity – to the broader discourses on religious extremism and ‘bad Islam’ that had developed under tsarist and Soviet rule. Moreover, in the early 1990s mosques in several towns in the Uzbek part of the Fergana valley, and in one case a local government (Namagan), were temporarily taken over by members of allegedly Wahhabi groups.⁹ Later some of the men involved in these incidents participated in efforts to topple

⁸ The local discourse has even reached academic circles. In a 1999 issue of the journal *Central Asia and Caucasus*, of seven articles that discussed the Central Asian situation, four included explicit references to the special usage of the word in Central Asia. For example, Malashenko wrote, ‘Islamism or, to use official Uzbek terminology, Wahhabism’, and Babadzhanov noted that ‘Fergana fundamentalism’ is also ‘known as “Wahhabism”, “political Islam”, etc.’ (Babadzhanov 1999; Malashenko 1999). At the time this explanation was relevant; today the term *Wahhabi*, with all its negative connotations, has become widespread.

⁹ Different groups took over the mosques from the official imams. In one case, that of Namagan, it is clear that men of Salafi orientation were the ones involved. These men, head by Juma Namangani, later formed the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The other groups were different, and it is unclear whether or not they were Salafi or unofficial Hanafi conservatives frustrated with the official Muslim leadership.

the Uzbek regime. The incidents became part of the discourse on extremism, which could now include the menace of political upheaval. The rhetoric also pointed to the growing influence of foreign Muslims, with their literature, financial aid, mosque construction, and scholarship programs, to create greater fear of these ‘Wahhabis’ in the population and to instil the suspicion that extremists wanted to take over the country.

Since 1999, regional and national discourses on extremism have been very clear about who these extremists are. These discourses hold that the Wahhabis are Muslims with extreme views on Islam and a political agenda aimed at overturning national governments and remaking them into Islamic states. The regional (Central Asian) and national rhetoric indicates that these fundamentalists employ the notion of jihad and seek to bring about political and social changes by force. Therefore, the argument asserts, they threaten the well-being of individuals, because they use indiscriminate violence to reach their ends. Moreover, they supposedly threaten the well-being of the free, democratic nation-state. Taking the argument further, the discourse proposes that the threat of the Wahhabis legitimates harsh actions on the part of governments to stop extremists and to ensure peace and security.

Rhetoric employing the terms *Wahhabi* and *extremist* has not discriminated between groups of Muslims with different political agendas or with none at all. For example, the group that would later become the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) challenged local leaders by taking over political control of Namagan, Uzbekistan, in the early 1990s and later seized hostages in Kyrgyzstan as part of an effort to initiate military action against the Uzbek government. The group Hizb ut-Tahrir, however, has espoused peaceful methods for establishing a caliphate and has been found guilty of nothing more than producing and distributing literature and leaflets promoting their cause. Other groups, such as Akromiya, which was so important to the May 2005 events in Uzbekistan, have sought to address the economic deprivation and social instability rampant in the country because of government mishandling (International Crisis Group 2005).

Clearly, it would be difficult to view the IMU, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and Akromiya in a single category. They all have political ideas and agendas, but their ideas, like the means by which they aim to bring them about, are different. Nevertheless, in official rhetoric the groups are presented as different versions of the same thing – a threat to the Central Asian states. For example, even though Hizb ut-Tahrir has perpetrated no act of violence or ‘treason’, its activities have been recast in language that equates their methods with violence, such as the phrase ‘war of leaflets’. A member of Kyrgyzstan’s state committee for religious affairs wrote the following about Hizb ut-Tahrir and its activities:

At first glance there is nothing wrong with them [Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets]: they describe Islamic rites and discuss the Shari'a. The party offers its understanding of what is going on in the world and the region and insists that it avoids violence and the use of arms, does not practice terrorism, has no use for explosives and robberies. It says that it rejects violence, not out of fear of the authorities and their adequate response but because by calling on the Muslims to restore the Islamic state it guides itself by the injunctions of the Apostle [*sic*], which ban violence. Hizb ut-Tahrir started a 'war of leaflets' in response to the wave of repressions in Central Asia and did not miss mentioning any single fact of such repressions against the Muslims. The leaflets call on them to open a jihad against the infidels, not to be afraid of arrests, follow the road of Allah, and win through patience. ... The content of such leaflets is anti-constitutional and anti-state. Hizb ut-Tahrir obviously threatens the country's territorial integrity and security (Kurmanov 2002: 119–26).

Because Hizb ut-Tahrir has never been implicated in anything that could remotely be construed as terrorism, its actions must be reinterpreted rhetorically to fit the model of an extremist organization. That is, it must be presented as threatening the individual and the state. Images such as 'war of leaflets', 'anti-constitutional', and 'anti-state' imply violent tendencies and means. Furthermore, in order to imply that the group is a real threat, in written texts it is often juxtaposed with the IMU. By listing the two together, the authors suggest that the two belong in the same category.

Besides emphasizing the threatening side of extremists, regional and national discourses play upon familiar notions of 'good' and 'bad' Muslims developed during the Soviet period. 'Good' Muslims are portrayed as largely a-religious and as active participants in a society working towards modernity. 'Bad' Muslims are described as fanatical in their religious devotion and backwards in their ideas about society. In her discussion of Uzbekistan, the Tashkent-based political scientist Guli Yuldasheva wrote: 'On the one hand, [Islam] has from the very roots of its foundation the powerful charge of liberal-tolerant ideas of the Sunni Hanafi *madhab* [a legal school], and on the other, it experiences the influence of radical extremist ideas, whose sources can also be traced back to history' (Yuldasheva 2002: 141).

Yuldasheva's remarks indicate that the good Islam practised by the people of Uzbekistan is liberal and tolerant, in essence a form that is compatible with the 'essential' values of modern democratic society. Though the emphasis is now on constructing a democratic society rather than a

Soviet Communist one, the argument is essentially the same as that used during the Soviet period. Thus it plays upon sentiments still held by the majority of adults throughout Central Asia. Further comments reveal Yuldasheva's conviction that not only do the extremists eschew these important values but that they also shrink from society to hide in a backward world. By contrast, she indicates that 'good' Muslims participate in the construction of a thriving, liberal society: 'The Soviet type of modernization created a peculiar secular-minded type of population, a fact which differentiates us greatly from other Muslim states. Even so-called modern "fundamentalists" prefer to give their daughters professional education, opportunity to own a small business and business enterprises, and participate in public life, all of which contradict the demands of a radical type of Islam' (Yuldasheva 2002: 143).

Yuldasheva's comments highlight two important themes. First, she emphasizes that good Muslims take part in constructing a thriving society. In her discussion, society is a liberal, capitalistic one, but it is easy to see how her argument mimics Soviet rhetoric of building a modern, Communist state. Second, she specifically draws on the issue of gender roles, implying that good Muslims give rights and freedom to women, whereas 'bad' Muslims do not. This discourse follows Soviet-era values of gender equality and the communal construction of a good society. Soviet discourse often contrasted these values with those of Muslims, who, it was said, sequestered their women and lived in a backward culture. By the late Soviet period most Central Asian Muslims had come to share these Soviet opinions and had no problem reconciling such values with their understanding of Muslimness. They were the 'good, modern' Muslims. Playing on these ideas, Yuldasheva takes the next step by implying that the 'bad, backward Muslims' are the radical Islamists.

A similar line of argument was followed by the editor of the *Bishkek Observer* when he wrote:

Throughout these years of struggle and survival, Kyrgyz people maintained religious neutrality and tolerance. Perhaps it was their human approach towards life that earned them international acknowledgement and undisputed reputation among the world community. . . . Nearly everyone in Kyrgyzstan is Muslim, but Islam has penetrated relatively lightly on the Kyrgyz people. This is also a reason that more than eighty ethnic nationalities live in Kyrgyzstan enjoying complete religious and cultural freedom (*Bishkek Observer*, editorial, 29 July 2003).

Here the Kyrgyz are praised for their tolerance and religious neutrality. A special point is made, however, that although nearly all Kyrgyz are Muslims,

‘Islam has penetrated relatively lightly.’ This phrase is often used when Kyrgyz contrast themselves with other Muslims, whom they see as being more devout in their religious observances but at the same time too extreme in them. The subtle implication made at the end of the editorial is that had Islam penetrated a little more heavily, the Kyrgyz would have been different kinds of Muslims – less tolerant and less permissive of religious freedom.

Thus the discourse is careful to distinguish between ‘good Muslims’, who practise moderate forms of Islam (references are sometimes made to prayer, but mostly to ethical and moral norms of Islam), and ‘bad extremists’. The discourse gives little indication, however, of how members of extremist groups can be identified. Other than meeting someone who proclaims himself to be affiliated with the IMU or Hizb ut-Tahrir, or witnessing a ‘terrorist’ act such as the distribution of leaflets, the average Kyrgyz citizen is given little to help him or her identify the extremist. The only hint given by the discourse producers is that extremists must be practitioners of the ‘bad’ variant of Islam. This idea draws directly on notions of the Soviet period that stressed that extreme devotion (regular prayer, study of Islam) and the regular performance of or participation in public religious activities such as mosque attendance or veiling were ‘bad’ Islam.

The vagueness of the terms employed in the discourse allows governments to manipulate the categories in order to label nearly any threat to the nation or state as one of religious extremism. The label then justifies any action the government takes to protect itself and its citizen from the ‘evil’ threat. Uzbekistan has justified the arrest, torture, and murder of thousands of alleged Wahhabis and Hizb ut-Tahrir members as combating religious extremism (Human Rights Watch 2004). Kyrgyzstan has taken a more moderate stance towards Islamic groups and individuals espousing political ideals, as well as towards Muslims practicing ‘conservative’ forms of Hanafi Islam but with little or no political agenda.

However, following the kidnapping of foreigners by IMU members in Kyrgyzstan two summers in a row (1999 and 2000) and the attempted assassination of Karimov in 1999 by unknown assailants, Uzbekistan put pressure on the Kyrgyz government to take stronger measures to combat supposed Islamic extremists. The terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001, as well as Russia’s continued entanglement with so-called terrorists in Chechnya, also added new dimensions to the debate. The worldwide rhetoric of terrorism has meshed neatly with existing notions of Islamic extremism and ‘bad’ Muslims in Central Asia. The United States and Russia have pressured Kyrgyzstan to be more aggressive in its actions against terrorism. Moreover, Russia, the United States, and Uzbekistan use

their positions of power to make the suggestions given to Kyrgyzstan less than optional.

The relatively open religious atmosphere in Kyrgyzstan may be a product of democratic reforms, but it is arguably linked equally to the weakness of the Kyrgyz state. Struggling to keep its head above water, especially in light of the March 2005 revolution, the Kyrgyz government's only real means of trying to influence Islamic belief and practice in the country is through limited police action against alleged members of Islamic groups, the partial regulation of religious authority, and the use of discourse. The discourse about 'extremists' and now 'terrorists' has been combined with discussions of 'good' (moderate to secular) Muslims and 'bad' Muslims. The use of this discourse is the state's attempt to protect itself by keeping its population ideologically distanced from suspect groups. Additionally, it is a way to satisfy, though only partly, the demands of Uzbekistan, Russia, and the United States. Of course the rhetoric would be hollow if it were not believed (in whatever way and to whatever extent) by those producing it. Nevertheless, despite belief in an actual threat posed by religious extremists, the discourse serves to reinforce the legitimacy of the government and its actions by painting opposition to it as 'evil'.

The rhetoric is notably vague on exactly who belongs to the extremist groups. This ambiguity allows the category to be applied liberally. It also means that on the local level, residents must find their own ways of identifying who this evil Muslim other really is. Though the state, the media, and the intelligentsia are key players in producing, utilizing, and reinforcing the discourse of Islamic extremism, individuals at the local level create and draw on the discourse as well.

How to Know whether You Are a Terrorist

Bazaar-Korgon is a town of about 30,000 people in the Fergana valley region of southern Kyrgyzstan. It lies approximately 30 kilometres from the Uzbek border and is within a few hours' driving distance of both Uzgen and Andijan. Eighty per cent of its inhabitants are Uzbeks; the other 20 per cent are Kyrgyz. Despite its large population, the town is administratively classified as a village. There are few paved roads in the community, and until 2004 there was no intra-village public transportation. The town has a handful of small businesses, none of which employs more than 30 people, and one with a work force of approximately 100. The vast majority of residents are employed in state-sector jobs (education, health care, government offices), work in the bazaar, or perform agricultural work. Many are unemployed and subsist on meagre state benefits and what they grow on their private plots.

During both the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods the town's broader networks and linkages lay to the south-west, in what is today Uzbekistan. Most families trace their lineage back to towns in the Fergana valley, with Andijan being the most common place of origin. The original Friday mosque in Bazaar-Korgon, built at the beginning of the twentieth century, served as the major mosque for an area that incorporated many villages inside contemporary Uzbekistan. Andijan was a key city for trading and economic activity. Even today, with a much more tightly monitored state boundary, travel back and forth across the border is relatively easy. Trips are made frequently, and nearly every Uzbek family in town has a relative in Uzbekistan.

From the summer of 2003 until the summer of 2004 I conducted anthropological research in Bazaar-Korgon. I already had many contacts there, because I had worked as an English teacher in the community from 1998 to 2000.¹⁰ Midway through my fieldwork in spring 2004, my mother visited me. My former colleagues at the local boarding school were eager to meet her, so I organized a luncheon. Though all conversations with my mother were mediated by translators, she and the teachers seemed to hit it off. At the end of the meal, one of the elder teachers said a customary blessing (*duo*), after which we closed the meal with the gesture of the *omin*.¹¹ My mother performed the gesture as well, but with sideways glances to ensure she was doing it correctly.

As soon as the *omin* was completed, one of the teachers at the back of the room, a man known as a joker, looked at my mother, crossed his arms in a large X, held them in front of his body, and shook his head no. Then, gesturing to the teachers, he said, 'Atheism, we are atheists'. He smiled all the while, and everyone in the room chuckled at him. Because he used the Russian words for *atheism* and *atheists*, which are cognates of the English words, my mother understood what he said. Nevertheless, she missed his meaning. She found nothing extraordinary about a group of Muslims praying after a meal. Indeed, she later commented that it was just an inversion of the practice she had grown up with – praying before a meal. But the declaration of atheism among a group of Muslims who had just prayed did strike her as a bit odd.

¹⁰ I was a US Peace Corps volunteer working in a local school, partnering with local English teachers.

¹¹ The *omin* is a gesture performed after a blessing (*duo*), at the end of a meal, when passing a graveyard, at the beginning of travel, and so forth. The hands are cupped together with palms up and then raised so that the fingers nearly touch the forehead. The hands are separated, and each travels down one side of the face, tracing its outline. The motion is similar to the way a person washes his or her face with water.

Temur, the teacher who made the atheism remark, was a 30-year-old Kyrgyz who was not an atheist. He believed in God, though he explained that he was not very involved in religion. Most of the teachers characterized themselves similarly. Why, then, did Temur make the comment about atheism? He said he did not want my mother to get the wrong idea about who the teachers were. Worried that an American might interpret the blessing as a sign of real piety or even extremism, he employed the word *atheist* basically to let her know that the teachers were 'OK'.

The brief interaction between Temur and my mother speaks of Temur's fears about how participation in religious rituals might be interpreted. His actions were perhaps a bit excessive; no one in town would have seen the traditional blessing as a hint of extremism. Yet his reaction did reflect the common conception of most residents that involvement in religious observances indicated which type of Muslim one was. This observation in and of itself is banal. In academic literature and in everyday life, the performance of religious rituals is usually linked to a person's perceived level of religiosity. What makes the situation of Bazaar-Korgon interesting is that a massive re-examination and re-interpretation of the category 'Muslim' was going on at the time, and it was taking place within a national, regional, and global discourse of Islamic extremism.

Since the late 1980s, religious practice had slowly but steadily been increasing among inhabitants of the town. Most of the growth had been in what Martin van Bruinessen (2004: 5–6) termed 'canonical' forms of Islam. Residents who had come 'closer to Islam' (*dinge jakin*) largely adopted interpretations of Islam that relied on the written word for establishing orthodoxy. They were re-evaluating so-called Muslim traditions, such as wedding ceremonies and the wearing of charms, to determine whether they were proper Muslim practice. Many began regularly praying *namoz*, the prayers said five times daily as a basic obligation of all Muslims, or changing their mode of dress. The end of the Soviet Union allowed those interested in Islam greater access to materials from which they could learn about and explore various interpretations of the religion. By 2004 a wide variety of media made Islamic teachings readily available in town. A significant portion of the material was produced in Uzbekistan, some came from Kyrgyzstan, and a small fraction came from outside the region. Perhaps the most popular media form was the audio cassette. Tape recordings of local and sometimes foreign teachers were passed among families, friends, and neighbours, spreading messages and sparking debate.

As a part of this growing observance of certain practices and alteration of beliefs, old ideas about Islam were being strongly criticized in a relatively open forum. Moreover, questions were being raised regarding what it meant

to be Muslim. The re-examination of existing categories was not an academic exercise but an endeavour and debate that challenged people's self-conceptions and worldviews. The experience of renegotiation was often unsettling and confronting, especially when categories such as 'terrorist' and 'not really a Muslim' were being considered.

The discussions over Muslimness were of course influenced by a host of factors, including people's preconceived notions and their positions in society. These affected the way the discussion played out and what conclusions people came to regarding proper Muslimness. Some of the most influential notions people brought to the debate were those regarding the nature and place of religion in society; appropriate means and levels of religiosity and religious expression; and how (and in what form) Islam specifically fitted into modern nation-states. In each of these arenas the notions of extremism, Wahhabism, and 'bad Islam' figured prominently. Thus an important part of people's attempts at redefining, for themselves and others, what Muslimness and Islam meant was an interaction with the discourse about terrorism. Because the discourse was largely vague concerning exactly who the terrorists were, and because everything seemed up for renegotiation, identifying the terrorists (no one questioned their existence or presence) was left to the individual. Ideas about who actually deserved the appellation 'Wahhabi,' 'terrorist,' 'Hizb ut-Tahrir,' or 'extremist' – in a sense, *who the terrorist was* – changed depending on the viewer.

Among the most common traits that signified to many that a certain person was an extremist were clothing and bodily appearance. Gulmira, a university student who lived in the one set of apartment buildings in town, told me a story about her neighbour, a young woman a few years older than herself. Gulmira did not know her neighbour well but had seen her around a lot. According to Gulmira, she had been an average young woman until she got married.

'Then she became a Wahhabi', she added.

'How do you know she became a Wahhabi?' I asked.

'She covered herself, wore her headscarf like this', Gulmira explained, tracing a line with her fingers, from each of her ears, down her jawbone, to her chin. The movement mimicked the closure of a veil in the style of a *hijab*.¹²

¹² A *hijab* is a head scarf that covers all the hair, is fastened below the chin, and drapes a bit over the shoulders. The word *hijab* is not generally used in the town. Those who wear the *hijab* do use the term but not to refer to the scarf they wear on their heads. Rather the term refers to the long-sleeved, monochromatic, overcoat-like outer garments worn by many Muslim women throughout the world. There is no

‘Are you sure she’s a Wahhabi?’ I continued.

‘Well, no. It might be that her husband is a Wahhabi and that he forced her to dress that way’, she admitted.

Gulmira’s admission of uncertainty hardly indicated a real questioning of her own views. Our discussion revealed that she linked the wearing of a *hijab* with extreme religious views and the practices of ‘Wahhabis.’ For Gulmira, the neighbour’s alteration of dress meant either a change in her beliefs about Islam or that her husband was the one with the extreme views.

Nazgul, a teacher in her fifties and one of the most abrasive characters around, held similar ideas. She often found my questions about religious matters ridiculous. ‘We are atheists. Yes, we are Muslims, but let me explain – we are all Muslim people, Kazaks, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Tajiks, Tartars. ... We were born Muslims. That’s it.’ On another occasion I met Nazgul sitting outside her home with two of her neighbours with whom I was also acquainted. We began talking, and Nazgul, in a slightly less abrasive mood, said, ‘Look, we are atheists, but of course we all believe in God. We always did. I do. Now we are free. We build mosques, people pray, that’s good. But those, those who wear scarves like this and keep their women at home, they are bad. They are Wahhabis.’

In the first instance Nazgul indicated that it was enough to be born a Muslim in order to deserve that title, even if one was an atheist. Her second remark reveals that she also accepted a certain level of religiosity – belief in God, the construction of mosques, and prayer. For her these all fell into the realm of good Muslim behaviour. She drew the line at the issue of gender and dress, much as Gulmira did. She perceived the concealment of women not only as a bad practice but as a clear sign that someone was a Wahhabi, an extremist. The number of women altering their form of dress from the norm in Bazaar-Korgon was greater than the number of men changing theirs. Indeed, the husbands of most of the women I knew who wore the *hijab* looked like ‘average’ men in town. Perhaps that is why men with deviating bodily appearances drew even more attention than women.

I had a discussion with the four children, ages 13 to 20, of a family one afternoon about their lives and the life of their neighbourhood. The children’s parents both regularly prayed *namoz* and fasted during Ramadan. Their mother wished to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, but because the head of the household was out of work, the family could barely get by, let alone finance the hajj. All the children were interested in learning more about Islam, and the older two had been praying off and on for the previous few years.

single word used to describe the *hijab*. Thus, people in town often use motions and the words ‘wears her headscarf like this’ to indicate this form of veiling.

We were discussing their neighbourhood mosque and who in their area attended it. The boys, who did not attend themselves, guessed that somewhere between 10 and 20 men went daily. At least one of the regular attendees, they said, was a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir. He lived around the corner from the family. I asked the boys how they knew the man was a member. Abror began describing the man – his beard, his white, tunic-like shirt. Abror's younger sister chimed in: 'Even their two-and-a-half-year-old daughter wears a head scarf tied under her chin like this!' I pushed them further, asking whether there was any other way they knew. Had the man himself admitted that he was a member? Abror reiterated his comments about the man's clothing. Whether or not there were other untold 'signs' that led Abror and his siblings to their conclusion about their neighbour (or whether they were simply reiterating the opinion of others), their comments show that they were convinced that referencing his bodily appearance and clothing should be enough to substantiate their claims and convince me of his membership in the group.

This common assumption – that certain styles of clothing and bodily appearance indicated membership in certain 'radical' groups – often had a direct effect on the way men and women chose to dress. Delnora and Omad were a young couple who had each had a self-described religious awakening. Both had been praying regularly for nearly two years when I met them. Omad had been learning to recite the Qur'an and was receiving regular religious education at a small study group run by a former imam of the town's central mosque. Delnora had intermittently attended a similar group for women, run by a female religious specialist who lived near her home. Delnora had chosen to wear the *hijab*, although it had been a difficult decision for her to make. She knew that many people might think she was 'not modern', or worse, that she was a 'terrorist'.

In the months leading up to her decision to wear the veil she often expressed her fear of other people's reactions. Indeed, after she began veiling, she did hear snide remarks about her appearance when walking through town, just as she had feared. She worried about people's opinions even more when she thought about returning to work. Delnora had worked as a teacher but had stopped when her first child was born. Now that she wore the *hijab*, she worried that she would be asked to remove it if she returned to the classroom. In the end she decided that if she went back to work she would stand her ground and not be afraid of what others thought. 'I shouldn't fear them. I should fear Allah. That is why I dress like I do', she explained.

Her husband had a different reaction to the issue of bodily appearance. Several months after Delnora changed her style of clothing, Omad con-

templated letting his beard grow in the way recommended in the hadith. He discussed the issue with Delnora and his mother. Delnora supported him but was worried about the reactions of others. His mother asked him not to do it but stopped short of forbidding him. She was afraid that others would think Omad was a Wahhabi. In the end Omad decided that whereas the command to leave one's beard untrimmed was not obligatory, but being obedient to one's parents was, he would not grow his beard out of respect for his mother's wishes.

Because of Delnora's dress and Omad's religious activities (daily mosque attendance, regular prayer, participation in a study group, and being a member of local *davat* efforts, or attempts by groups of men to call others to Islam), the two were often suspected of being extremists by those who did not know them or did not know them well. This was a common pattern – suspicion about religious extremism was nearly always raised against someone largely unknown. This is why religious practices performed or seen in public were particularly drawn on in marking out who was a terrorist. The size of the population of Bazaar-Korgon meant that a certain amount of anonymity allowed such generalizations and stereotypes to arise. The sort of fear of what others might think that Delnora and Omad experienced was strong. Another young woman whose sister, an unmarried woman of 20, was considering wearing the *hijab* expressed this worry. 'Wait a while', she cautioned her sister one day as they discussed the matter. 'Wait at least until you are married. Even then people will think you are a Wahhabi. But it will be worse if you do it now.'¹³

Suspicious that someone was a 'terrorist' were based not only on the person's appearance. Gossip also pointed towards other signs as evidence. Delnora had heard others talking about Omad. Some women had even warned her that he was probably a terrorist. The women's tales had upset her, and she eventually confronted Omad with their words. He was angry and hurt that Delnora had believed the gossip, though he later understood her concern. In retrospect, Delnora said she was ashamed of her suspicions. She said she should have thought things through a bit more. Omad had often discussed with her why he disagreed with the ideas and actions of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Wahhabis, emphasizing the reasons their beliefs were not in line with true Islamic teaching. Furthermore, he was a member of a study group headed by the former imam of the town and had close connections to the current official religious leadership, all of whom adamantly opposed

¹³ Unmarried women in town wear no form of head scarf. Nearly all married women do, unless they are professionals, in which case they wear it only at home. This form of head scarf is tied at the base of the neck and usually reveals a lot of hair at the brow line.

such groups. Nevertheless, the gossip had been so potent, and the rhetoric so well known (and believed) by Delnora, that it had caused her to doubt.

The gossip carried strength in part because the growth of Islam in the community had been so striking. In short, there was something big to gossip about, something quantifiably different from before. During the middle and late Soviet periods, only one official mosque had existed in town. In 2004, 27 mosques were open and running. The twenty-eighth was under construction, and donors were being sought for the twenty-ninth. The mosques were not empty. All but 2 of the 27 were neighbourhood mosques (*mahalla mechet*), designed to hold between 30 and 60 men. Statistics gathered by the head imam of the region indicate that most of these mosques were well used, with an average attendance of about half capacity. The two Friday mosques were even more heavily frequented. Statistics, as well as my own observations, indicate that on any given Friday, 500 to 1,000 men attended afternoon prayers in each mosque. On religious holidays, the largest Friday mosque was completely full, and adjacent vacant lots were used to accommodate the overflow.

Prayers at each of these mosques were led by men sanctioned by the *qazi*, the provincial religious authority, in Jalal-Abad. There were seven *qazi* in the country, one for each province. They were appointed by the muftiate, the highest religious authority of the country. Although religious authority was in some ways indirectly moderated and influenced by the government, it had a significant degree of autonomy. Local communities had an important say in the appointment of imams to neighbourhood mosques. They also had mechanisms by which they could monitor and influence the religious messages being delivered. The level of community involvement in the religious leadership and its messages indicates some community sanction of them. Thus, although religious expansion in the community was threatening to some, it certainly was approved of and initiated by many others in town.

Mosque attendance was the most visible and most easily quantifiable sign of burgeoning religious piety available to residents of the town. Less easy to count, but perhaps even more influential in regard to the spread of ideas, were the small home-based study groups held throughout the town, such as the ones Delnora and Omad attended. There were separate groups for men and women. No records or statistics exist for these groups, but I estimated that at least one group existed within easy walking distance of anyone's home. The groups were important forums for religious teaching and discussion. Moreover, among the 'newly pious', to borrow a term from Robert Hefner (2005: 21), they were often the places where alternative 'canonical' interpretations of Islam were debated. In many cases these groups were run by the imams of the mosques. The best attended groups

were those headed by the imams, the former imams, and the assistant imams of the two Friday mosques in town. This was true of the group attended by Omad.

The growth of mosques and study groups was an important indicator for local residents of the growing interest in and adherence to more canonical forms of Islam. The appearance of *davatchis* – men and women who travelled around Kyrgyzstan delivering religious messages calling others to come ‘closer to Islam’ (*dinge jakin*) – was a new development. Indeed, the term *davatchi* was largely unknown in the community. All most residents knew was that there were men in the community teaching about Islam. One of the first stories I was told when I began my research was about men preaching in front of the bazaar, calling others to come ‘closer to Islam’. For many these changes in religious structure and practice were exciting; for others they were threatening. And perhaps for most, the changes produced mixed feelings. That is why even among those who were active in study groups and for those whose friends, relatives, or acquaintances participated in *davat*, the rhetoric of the Muslim extremist was still part of the interpretive tool kit they used to evaluate and deal with the changing religious environment.

Looking back to Delnora, despite the fact that she had to her own knowledge been labelled a potential religious extremist, she, too, was often involved in the same labelling process. She knew that she was not a terrorist, but she believed there must be terrorists somewhere. She was often busy trying to figure out who they were, how she could identify them, and why they had become terrorists anyway. The task was difficult for her, because she could not rely on most of the identifying factors used in the community to spot a terrorist. She fit the typical description herself, yet she was not an extremist. ‘Where do you think they are? Where do you think they meet?’ she once asked me.

The image of the ‘hidden terrorist’, with its element of secrecy, was another trope people employed when talking about terrorists. One of the claims women had made against Omad had to do with his involvement in a study group. They intimated that the group was in fact a terrorist cell. Kadir, a 50-year-old man, was also sure that any combination of secrecy and religion indicated the involvement of terrorists. He once told me that there were ‘Wahhabis’ and ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir’ living on his street. ‘Down there, at the end of the street, I often see young girls wearing head scarves go secretly to that woman’s house. She teaches them about Islam, but it’s not right. She teaches them bad things.’

I asked him how he knew that the things the woman was teaching were bad. He explained, ‘It’s done in secret, so it must be bad. If they didn’t

have anything to hide, they would do it in the open.' I asked Kadir why he considered the lessons secretive, explaining that any girl could attend if she asked and expressed a real desire to learn. I told him that I myself had simply approached the teachers and had subsequently been invited to join several different study groups. Besides, how should the teacher make it more public? I asked him. Kadir mentioned something about public announcements but halted and had no real response. Clearly the form of the study groups fitted with the contemporary discourse about how extremists met and spread their ideas. It also fitted with ideas from the Soviet period about how the very religious stole away to meet and pray together clandestinely.

In these instances the discourse of terrorism-Wahhabism-extremism was employed in order to assess who belonged to what group. It was a process of distinction-making and identification that was important in the context of the 'peace and stability' of the nation as played upon in state and regional discourses. It was also a process of trying to find 'peace and stability' with oneself and one's own concepts of Muslimness. Finding resolution to these ideas was extremely important in a time when they were highly negotiable. The state's discourse was, in one way, an attempt to control this new discussion. But people in Bazaar-Korgon were concerned with the effects ideas about Islam and Muslimness had on state and society, as well as on themselves as individuals.

Although the contents of the rhetoric about 'the Wahhabi' remained remarkably consistent – it was always about an 'evil' other who had a perverted notion of Islam – who that evil other was and how he or she could be identified changed depending on who was employing the rhetoric. For those who did not veil or were members of a family in which no one veiled, the wearing of *hijab* seemed to be one of the key ways of identifying someone who practised extreme Islam. Again, reiterating previous arguments, this had everything to do with the discourse of the veil as a sign of backwardness, oppression, and 'intolerant' forms of Islam. For others, such as young women who were friends with women who wore the *hijab*, the veil took on alternative meanings simply because they could identify with someone who wore it and who was not an 'extremist'.

Indeed, contact with people involved in typically 'terrorist' endeavours such as veiling or attending home study groups often forced people to question their assumptions about who was and was not a terrorist. The encounter demonstrated that there were pious Muslims who performed the canonical rituals and practices of Islam and who had neither participated in terrorist or other 'evil' endeavours nor had any sort of radical or potentially 'dangerous' political ideas. Gossip, however, counteracted these

interfaces. It worked to deepen or confirm people's suspicions about those they did not know.

Religious Extremism and Secularism in the Modern, Civil World

The rhetoric of terrorism is a salient element in current debates about and construction of a modern, democratic, religiously free Kyrgyzstan. The rhetoric has been used to limit the possible interpretations of Islam legitimately available to citizens to only those that fit with certain notions about moderate Islam as situated in a liberal, secular nation-state presently participating in a global war on terrorism. The rhetoric of terrorism that is employed has its roots in colonial orientalism and secular ideas of modernity as embodied in imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. A peculiar intertwining of processes meant that by the end of the Soviet Union the idea of a Muslim as someone who participated in a series of life-cycle rituals and kept to his or her national Muslim ways but who was largely a-religious, certainly in the public sphere, had gained currency. This notion of Muslimness was contrasted with the notion of 'bad' Muslims, who were presented as extreme in their religious devotion, especially in regard to the observance of particular public rituals. Later the notion of terrorists involved in a political struggle aimed at overturning the government was melded with the idea of the 'bad' Muslim. The state mobilized these discourses of the terrorist-Wahhabi-extremist to promote its own ideas of Islam and the proper role of religion in society. Nevertheless, it was the involvement of locals in accepting, interpreting, and employing the label of Wahhabi or extremist that made the discourse work in Kyrgyzstan.

In his article on political discourse, Peter Mandaville (2005: 321) asserted the need for an anthropological approach 'that is highly sensitive to the interplay of global and local: one that understands the mechanisms through which universal normative discourses are rendered meaningful to the predicaments of a particular social milieu'. Mandaville's argument focused specifically on the political discourse of transnational Islam, but I believe the approach he advocated is equally valid for the discourse about Muslim extremism. In the case of Bazaar-Korgon, the tropes of religious extremism were part of the discourse residents utilized as they dealt with the expansion of Islam, the proliferation of a plurality of religious voices, and the effects these changes had on their community and on themselves. Residents faced new religious structures, new methods of religious education and dissemination of religious knowledge, and an increase in public acts of piety. Moreover, they had to rethink concepts of Muslimness. Old notions of good and bad Islam, reinvigorated and reshaped by the current political environment, became newly deployable in the contemporary situation. For

local residents the discourse was important in making sense of the changing religious landscape in their community. As they used the rhetoric, they moulded the discourse to fit the new situations, making the rhetoric even more relevant.

The rhetoric of religious extremism was one of many discourses drawn upon by residents of Bazaar-Korgon. It was perhaps the most powerful at the time because it was also the official line endorsed by the government, the media, and the intelligentsia. It had been utilized in Uzbekistan to justify barbaric crimes. The argument David Edwards (1989: 655) made in his discussion of the British in India rings true for the Karimov government in Uzbekistan: 'Establishing the enemy as fanatical denies him moral status and affords those whose moral superiority is thus affirmed a free hand in defending their interests.' In Kyrgyzstan the discourse has not been exercised in a similar fashion, but it has nevertheless played a role in limiting the 'religious market' within Islam. Considering that, at least in Central Asia, the most heinous crimes have been committed by secular governments in the name of anti-terrorism and anti-extremism, social scientists might need to rethink who the object of study should include when we examine whether Islam specifically, or religion more generally, is compatible with democracy and a civil society (e.g. Casanova 1994; Hefner 2005).

Although these investigations are interesting and fruitful, one should be careful not to assume that the secular nation-state is neutral and disinterested. It has been argued that secularism and the supposedly impartial public sphere are in fact loaded with ideology and constituted by power (Asad 2003; Salvatore 2004). By examining how religion fits within this context we look only at how a weaker party must accommodate itself to the dominant one, and we fail to analyze the relationship that created this imbalance of power. Talal Asad's assertion that the secular and the religious are mutually constitutive should push us to see how secular nation-states and modern religious movements impinge on one another. A provocative question might be whether or not the secular nation-state is compatible with a tolerant, civil environment full of religious people.

But perhaps this question is less an item for a research agenda than a rhetorical device for social scientists. My question inverts the power relationship, asking secular nation-states to accommodate themselves to religious citizens. If we would look at 'public religions in the modern world' through the eyes of the religious, rather than the secular, we might garner a whole new set of questions. They might enable us to see what else religion is doing in the 'modern world' beyond accommodating itself to secular, liberal nation-states (see Mahmood 2005).

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Chapter 4

The Regulation and Control of Religious Pluralism in Uzbekistan

Irene Hilgers

Anyone who knows that he is an Uzbek knows that he is a Muslim. The main basis for being an Uzbek is to be a Muslim. There is no *O'zbekchilik* without *Musulmonchilik*!

Iskander, age 24, an Uzbek Muslim, Fergana valley

In May 2005 a group of mullahs and imams demonstrated in front of the State Committee of Religious Affairs in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, against recent closures of mosques and arrests of members of the local *ulama*. The government had begun a new wave of clampdowns on Islamic institutions and individual Muslim believers – as well as on proselytizing by non-Muslim religious groups – in reaction to what the official discourse presented as dangerous Islamic extremism and subversive religious movements.¹ The government legitimated its actions and violations of religious rights in terms of events that had taken place earlier that month in Andijan, a city in the Fergana valley on far eastern edge of Uzbekistan.

Twenty-three businessmen from Andijan were on trial there, accused of religious extremism. Local Muslims widely perceived the trial as unjust, and it triggered protests. On 13 May, armed sympathizers broke into the city prison, killed security officials, took hostages, and mobilized people to attend a protest in Andijan's public square. The protest turned into a large, peaceful gathering in which people called for economic and social justice (see Human Rights Watch 2005). In response to the incursion and the gathering, security forces unleashed a military operation in which several hundred people, most of them civilian protestors uninvolved in the armed incursion, were killed.² The crackdown on religious organizations and individual believers following the Andijan events was one example of the

¹ See reports of Forum 18 News Service, Oslo, Norway, <http://www.forum18.org/>.

² The estimated numbers of civilians killed ranged from 500 to more than 1,000.

government's practices in controlling and restricting religious life in the country.

Comparing the situation of religious groups in Uzbekistan today with the role the official governmental discourse grants to religion in the process of nation-building, one can see an emerging discrepancy between an 'ideal' model of a tolerant, multi-confessional Uzbek nation-state and the everyday reality of religious groups and individual believers. In the national independence ideology and in the numerous publications and public speeches of President Islam Karimov, spirituality, religious freedom, and tolerance are presented as important bases for a functioning democracy and civil society. In practice the proclaimed tolerance and religious freedom end where alterations in what is officially defined as 'traditional' Uzbek religious belief and practice begin. Those in political power fear that such alterations will lead to instability and tensions within society or might threaten the authority of the nation-state in the making.

Rather than focus on the state as the main force constraining religious pluralism in Uzbekistan, I look at the question of how its constraints are applied at the executive level. Representatives of religious organizations and individual believers who had experienced constraints on their religious freedom never directly indicated in interviews that 'the state' was an actor. These persons first mentioned the arbitrariness with which local authorities applied laws or made use of their offices, creating fear and insecurity in terms of religious practice. Only secondarily did they refer to the authoritarian regime as providing a basis for a restrictive climate towards religion.³

If local officials, and not 'the state', are perceived as the main actors in restricting religious freedom, then who are these executives? What are their motivations and mutual dependencies? It was a common tool of the Soviet regime to make bureaucrats and local officials instruments in implementing and maintaining control over state policy and ideology. As Sheila Fitzpatrick (1999) described in her book on the Stalinist era, the central government passed secret instructions to local authorities to take measures and implement rules that diverged from official laws and the constitution. In case of objections, the Soviet regime was able to back away from policies it had never publicly endorsed and could accuse local

³ Research for this PhD project was conducted between June 2003 and September 2004 in Tashkent and the Fergana oblast in Uzbekistan. The project was focused on developments in the religious sphere and associated (re)definitions of religious identities among ethnic Uzbeks in the time frame from socialism to Uzbekistan's independence.

authorities of having acted on their own interpretation of the law (Fitzpatrick 1999: 27).

I do not claim that the regulation of religious life by officials in Uzbekistan is carried out in all cases on higher 'secret' orders or that violations of religious rights are subjective acts exercised by local officials. Rather, in this chapter I look at multiple internal and external factors that play a role in a given official's decision-making.

Government officials represent nodal points in a system in which external forces (the orders and interests of the state) are at work, but biographical factors and social and cultural backgrounds and environments also influence people's perceptions of certain issues. The agency of government officials is framed, from one direction, by forces such as the constitution, the law, state ideology, and orders from superiors. From the other direction, agency is shaped by the moral and normative ideas of the society with which the official identifies (in this case, 'Uzbek'). Like the village headman described by Max Gluckman in his contribution to a famous article on British Central Africa, the bureaucrat 'interlocks two distinct systems of social relations . . . and in consequence the sanctions on him in case of misuse of his power are dual: moral sanctions from the side of his social environment and legal sanctions by the political authority' (Gluckman et al. 1949: 93).

Michael Herzfeld (1998: 49), in exploring the symbolic roots of Western bureaucracy, tried to demonstrate this two-way relationship between the manifestation of state power and the numerous levels at which a sense of local community is realized in the actions of an official. Like Herzfeld, I believe the social grounding of bureaucratic practice is crucial and that it is important to 'recognize the role of the ordinary person in taking the grand images presented by the leadership and recasting them in the more familiar terms of local experience, and influencing their public evolution in turn' (Herzfeld 1998: 49).

In looking at the regulation of religious pluralism in Uzbekistan, I take Herzfeld's approach further and include a third force, the religious factor – in addition to state power and social grounding – to explain the central issues involved in framing the agency of executive authorities to regulate and govern religious matters. As I show later, Islam is being instrumentalized in the national politics of Uzbekistan as an important marker in creating and consolidating Uzbek national identity. By being legitimated in the 'national independence ideology' promoted by the government, Islam becomes an important political player, and the religious affiliation of ethnic Uzbeks is 'de-privatized', in the sense that it becomes a public affair rather than an

individual decision.⁴ The ‘grand images’ of the state, such as the notion of Uzbek-Muslim synonymy and ideas about what is to be defined in official government discourse as ‘Uzbek’ religious practice, were derived from underlying cultural values within Uzbek society and represent widely shared notions.

Regarding Uzbek government officials, a majority of whom are Uzbek Muslims, I want to show to what extent their agency is framed and shaped by three factors: the ‘national independence ideology’, cultural categories, and Islam as the designated ‘traditional’ religion of the Uzbeks. I offer two cases as examples. The first illustrates the way the agency of the officially appointed director of the shrine of Bahauddin Naqshbandi is limited as he attempts to modify local religious practices in a direction he perceives as ‘right’ conduct according to the rules of scriptural Islam. Not only does the state’s definition of legitimate Islamic practice restrain his agency, but so does the adherence of Uzbek Muslims to local Islamic practices. The second case, that of an Uzbek Christian community trying to obtain state registration, shows how state ideology, the law, and the norms and values of Uzbek society provide government officials with some leeway to justify ambiguous measures and to ignore the legal rights of applicants, which they do with reference to both public opinion and state ideology.

For a better understanding of the networks and ideologies in which government officials are embedded and that influence the construction of their selfhood, I discuss three main forces – state, society, and ‘traditional’ religions – and their stance towards questions of Uzbek identity. First I give a short historical account of the development of the religious sphere in Uzbekistan.

The Development of Religious Plurality in Uzbekistan

In pre-Islamic times, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Nestorian Christianity, and Buddhism were the main religions in the region, existing in parallel with animism. Later, in the first century CE, the first Jewish communities appeared in Central Asia, and significant numbers of Jews settled in Bukhara and Samarqand. The disunity of political and religious life in the region was a precondition for the Arab invasion and the Islamization of the local population, which began in the seventh century. At first rejected by the local people, Islam became in the eighth century the main religious doctrine in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan and the spiritual-ideological and legislative foundation of the region.

⁴ I use the term *Uzbek* to designate ethnic Uzbeks. It is not to be confused with *Uzbekistani*, an inclusive term denoting people of Uzbek citizenship.

On the initiative of the Russian empress Catherine the Great (r. 1762–96), a wave of settlers from Germany and the Baltic moved into the region of Turkistan. The majority of the settlers were German Lutherans, Mennonites, and Baptists. In the second part of the nineteenth century, Christianity spread in the region, due to the expanding power of the Russian monarchy there. In 1871 the eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Central Asian bishopric were established in Tashkent. Around that time, members of the Baha'i faith, persecuted in Persia, sought refuge in Turkistan and established their first small communities there. The first Armenian Apostolic church was established in 1903.

Tsarist rule in Turkistan interfered little with the religious practices of local Muslims (Bacon 1966: 111), but the religious contest manifested itself in a political power struggle between the Muslim Central Asian khanate and Orthodox tsarist Russia, and religion became important in Central Asian–Russian affairs of state (Allworth 1999: 3). The era of Russian colonialism in Turkistan was characterized by an emerging schism among Muslim intellectuals between traditionalists, who opposed any reforms in the theory or practice of Islam, and the Jadids, or Muslim reformers (Abduvakhitov 1996).

The situation in the religious sphere changed dramatically after the October Revolution in 1918 and the Bolsheviks' rise to power. Anti-religious policies and the propagation of atheism were launched in the mid-1920s, and religious life was increasingly banned from the public sphere (Northrop 2004). Although atheism was the norm, the Soviet government made minor concessions to 'indigenous faiths', which included Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. All other denominations were treated as 'sects' or 'cults', terms with strong negative connotations stressing the cult-like, 'possessed' behaviour of believers and their blind obedience to religious doctrine. In contrast to indigenous faiths, non-indigenous religions were considered alien and were unwelcome in the Soviet Union. Religious leaders and followers of such faiths experienced discrimination and persecution by state authorities (Anderson 2002: 182; Wanner 2003: 284).

Because of anti-religious propaganda and repression by the Soviet regime, some religious groups, such as the Baha'is, completely ceased their corporate religious activities, and their religious knowledge came to be transferred only at the individual level. Other congregations continued practising as underground churches or even openly in their old church buildings, if those were not destroyed or transformed into workshops or storehouses.

The Soviet government's anti-religious policies led to a weakening of the structures of religious institutions but could not erase religious practices

and community life completely. On the contrary, the deportations and labour migrations under Stalin and Khrushchev in the 1950s and 1960s brought increasing religious diversity to the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan. The first adherents of charismatic Protestant movements such as the Full Gospel Church, Pentecostal churches, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses came into the region during those decades (Peyrouse 2004). Religious life and the transmission of knowledge were restricted under Soviet policy largely to the levels of families and religious communities. Especially for members of ethnic minorities, closed religious communities based on ethnicity were vehicles for maintaining knowledge about culture and language, transmitting that knowledge to the next generation, and avoiding the loss of ethnic characteristics (Peyrouse 2004: 173ff.).

The first liberalizations in the sphere of religion were introduced in the Soviet Union by the reforms of *perestroika* in the mid-1980s. The community lives of religious groups were revived, and people could once again enact their beliefs in public. In addition to the internal restructuring of local religious community life, faith communities from abroad began to support their Central Asian co-religionists with financial and material help and sent representatives to the ex-Soviet countries to help establish new congregations. New foreign-based faith communities established centres in the country as well, among them the International Society of Krishna Conscience (ISCKON), the Mormons, and various charismatic and Pentecostal Christians. After Uzbekistan declared independence in 1991, this trend towards diversification in its religious landscape increased rapidly. Soon afterwards, foreign-based religious communities such as the American Baptist and Jewish associations began encouraging their believers in postsocialist countries to migrate to the United States or Israel.⁵

These developments in the religious sector intensified even further with the adoption of Uzbekistan's new law on religion in 1992. Largely modelled on the last version of the Soviet law (Anderson 2002: 184), it guaranteed freedom of religion and the right to establish religious organizations. The newly independent Republic of Uzbekistan defined itself as a secular state with no official state religion, but it retained control over the religious sector. Religious groups and organizations were allowed to operate provided their objectives and doctrines neither ran contrary to the legislation nor threatened security or provoked ethnic, social, or inter-confessional conflicts.⁶ In response to the increasing activities of radical Islamic groups, government authorities undertook a major clampdown on

⁵ Personal communication with Baptists and Jews in Tashkent, Kokand, and Bukhara, 2003.

⁶ Articles 4 and 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, version 1998.

political and ‘unofficial’ Islam, including a wave of mosque closures and arrests of individual believers accused of being ‘Wahhabis’.⁷ In May 1998 the parliament revised the 1992 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, imposing new restrictions on religious groups (see Melvin 2000; Sengupta 2003; Human Rights Watch 2004).

As part of the clampdown, existing state registrations were withdrawn, and all religious groups had to re-register under the Ministry of Justice. To obtain a new registration, a mosque or other religious organization had to file an application with a minimum of 100 signatures from church members with Uzbek citizenship. Further requirements, among others, were verification that the religious leader held a diploma from an official religious institution and that the organization possessed an official building. Signatures were requested from the local *hokimyat* (town hall) and the *mahalla* committee of the neighbourhood where the religious organization was established.⁸ Signatures were also required from various institutions to prove that the group’s building met security and hygiene standards.⁹ Along with the burdensome rules for obtaining state registration, the construction of mosques and teaching of theology now also required official permission. Theology classes could not be taught in primary and secondary schools but were limited to theology colleges. Because of the new registration process, many smaller religious communities had to close their churches and mosques when they could not fulfil the state’s requirements. Some religious communities ceased their activities; others continued to operate illegally, without state registration.

Besides the burdensome process for obtaining state registration, amendments were introduced in the criminal code that restricted religious practices. According to Articles 5 and 7 of the code, missionary activities and proselytizing directed towards members of other faiths were prohibited. Article 14 prohibited the practice of religion and wearing of religious clothes in public, except by officially recognized religious leaders.

The government’s stated reason for increasing its control over and restrictions on religious groups was that these measures were necessary to fight terrorism and radical Islamic movements. But the measures were also

⁷ For a more detailed account of the development of Islamic movements in Uzbekistan, see Rasanayagam, this volume.

⁸ A *mahalla* is an Uzbek neighbourhood, the lowest unit of administration. *Mahalla*-level institutions have been co-opted by the government since independence, not only for information and security purposes but also for ideological transmission (see March 2002: 382; Human Rights Watch 2004).

⁹ Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (Law N 618-1), 1 May 1998.

aimed at limiting the missionary activities of religious groups within the local Uzbek population.¹⁰ When I asked about the reasons for such laws, the chief expert in the Department of Confessions of the State Committee of Religious Affairs explained that the original concern was that religious conversions might lead to tensions within Uzbek society:

So among the ordinary Uzbek people there is absolutely no idea about Christianity. No one knows what a church is like on the street, and if someone says that there are Uzbeks in it, they will ask why. It might bring bad consequences. In order to prevent this, explanatory work is to be implemented. The church itself possesses no bad characteristics – it also calls to the unity with God, makes people believe in religion, leads to goodness. But in some places, some representatives of the local population become members of churches, and instead of helping that church, they render more harm to it. If an Uzbek becomes a member of a church, he will promote it to other Uzbeks with the claim that nothing bad happened to him after his conversion. And an opposite reaction will be caused by the other people: those people will say that this person went astray and is trying to drag others from Islam to his way of belief, and people will say that the church is bad. So the missionary activity is the worst characteristic of such churches. Once you have accepted religion, you should not propagate it to others; it is your personal thing, which should remain with you. [Otherwise] bad events might happen. This is the same with Wahhabism, which is one of the branches of Islam, or the basic religion of Saudi Arabia. It is not bad, but the actions of some of the representatives of this branch led to accusations against the whole religion. ...

After seventy years of atheism, a lot of people suffered from irreligiosity and stood in hesitation, and then the pastors started to come, and no one could distinguish whether these were good religions or not. Those missionaries were using the moment of material and spiritual difficulties [for their own purposes].

The chief expert's concern about foreign-based religious communities that were abusing the current situation of social and economic insecurity represented a broader concern in society about the tensions that might result from a growing number of conversions away from Islam.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of the events and developments leading to the measures taken by the Uzbek government against politically oriented religious activities and individual believers, see Rasanayagam, this volume.

Defining the Uzbek Muslim

Although a secular state, Uzbekistan grants Islam a special role in nation-building. As part of its ideology for legitimating and consolidating the Uzbek nation-state, the government stresses the region's Islamic history and heritage and the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam as the foundation of Uzbek culture and tradition. Islam is framed as an important marker for Uzbek national identity, something that shapes the nation's social organization and gives it a moral and ethical framework.

President Karimov promotes a 'cultural' or 'civil' Islam, emphasizing the tradition of religious tolerance, which is presented as a special characteristic of the local interpretation of Islam (State Committee of Religious Affairs 2004). This view refers back to the region's multi-religious, pre-Soviet past and is legitimated by the writing of a specifically 'national' history, the rehabilitation of Islamic intellectuals and the Islamic tradition, and the elimination of most vestiges of the Russian colonial and Soviet religious eras (see March 2002; Melvin 2000).¹¹ Local practices such as shrine veneration and Sufism are integral parts of the official definition of a nationalized, 'Uzbek' Islam.

In defining and propagating a so-called enlightened and peaceful Islam, the government aims to counter radical Islamist notions and to consolidate a collective national Uzbek identity by emphasizing the common good (State Committee of Religious Affairs 2004). Through public speeches, the state-controlled media, slogans on billboards, the teaching of subjects such as 'spirituality and enlightenment' in schools, and the sending of university professors on agitation tours into villages, the government spreads its view of what constitutes 'an Uzbek' and 'Uzbek Muslimness'. By clearly communicating its concepts of Uzbek tradition, culture, the 'typical Uzbek mentality', and proper 'Uzbek religious practice', the government defines what is acceptable and creates the parameters of legitimate behaviour. Religious behaviour that transgresses this framework is deemed a threat to the stability and democracy of the country and therefore, in Karimov's rhetoric, must be regulated and controlled (see Karimov 1997).

Even without the government's presentation of Islam as an inevitable product of Uzbek history and cultural life, the notion that Islam forms an important part of people's sense of community and culture appears to be deeply internalized. Ethnic Uzbeks and non-Uzbeks alike often told me that 'Uzbeks have to be Muslims' or 'Uzbeks are Muslims'. Among Uzbek

¹¹ March (2002: 379) described this manipulation of Uzbek history to favour the legitimization of the independent Uzbek nation-state as 'Uzbekifying Islamic history and Islamifying Karimovism'.

Muslims, leaving Islam is one of the worst sins an Uzbek can commit – not only in terms of religious doctrine but also as a sin committed against the Uzbek nation, traditions, and culture. Uzbeks who convert to other religions are accused of having betrayed their nation and their ancestors, and their decision often comes with high social costs. The majority of Uzbek converts I met had experienced rejection by their families, friends, and neighbours after confessing their new belief, and many had experienced persecution by the Uzbek National Security Service. Uzbek society exerts tight social control, and individual behaviour perceived as ‘not Uzbek’ is socially penalized.

Such social penalties apply not only to Uzbeks who turn away from Islam but also to those who orient themselves towards scriptural interpretations of Islam. Uzbek Muslims who reject and criticize local Islamic practices and dress codes as being ‘not Islamic’ risk being stigmatized as ‘Wahhabi’ or ‘extremist’ (see Babadzhanov 1999).¹² The term *Wahhabi*, usually understood as referring to a group of orthodox Sunnis that is dominant in Saudi Arabia, was used in the Soviet period as shorthand for Islamic fundamentalism. Its meaning has been broadened in the official usage of the government of independent Uzbekistan to refer to religious expression or behaviour that departs from official government definitions or is perceived by Uzbek Muslims as inappropriate. The label is applied to members of radical Islamic movements and to devoted individual believers, as well as to believers in proselytizing religious movements such as the Full Gospel and the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Traditional versus Non-Traditional Religion

In introducing measures to limit the activities of religious organizations in Uzbekistan, the government was also reacting to pressure from so-called traditional religions. The overwhelming majority of citizens in Uzbekistan, 92.46 per cent, are Muslims. The Russian Orthodox Church, with 4.89 per cent of the citizenry, follows as the second largest faith.¹³ Islam and Russian Orthodoxy claim supremacy on the Uzbekistani religious scene and claim themselves to be the traditional religions in the region. They legitimate this claim in terms of their long-standing roots in the territory and their large

¹² Johan Rasanayagam (this volume) describes in detail how the term *Wahhabi* became, on the one hand, associated with a fear of state sanctions and, on the other, a tool used in personal conflicts in Uzbekistan. See also the chapters by McBrien and Stephan in this volume.

¹³ Statistics on the religious affiliations of the population of Uzbekistan were provided by the Council for Religious Affairs, Tashkent, 2003.

numbers of adherents of specific ethnicity, among whom religious affiliation is automatically passed on to the next generation.

Because of their large numbers of adherents – both active and nominal believers – and their power and authority in the region, Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church are becoming political players in Uzbekistan, calling for the promotion of their interests by the government. In October 1995 the Muslim Spiritual Board of Uzbekistan and the Metropolitan of Tashkent jointly demanded, during a conference, that the government implement measures to constrain and control the activities of religious movements declared illegitimate for not being traditional in the region (see Peyrouse 2004). The initial reason for their demand was the decline in membership the Russian Orthodox Church was experiencing because of the growing numbers of conversions from Orthodoxy to new, ‘non-traditional’ religions, especially to the charismatic branches of Protestantism. The Muslim authorities shared this concern, even though the number of conversions from Islam to other religions was much smaller. Their greater concern was the potential attraction of Muslims to politically motivated Islamic movements such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

Though the main players in pressuring the government for stricter regulation and control were the *ulama* and the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church, other deeply rooted groups in the country claiming to be traditional religions, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the German Lutherans, the Armenian Church, and the Jews, joined in urging the government to take measures against the ‘sects’.¹⁴ At a conference on inter-confessional tolerance organized by the Tashkent Islamic University and the State Committee of Religious Affairs in November 2003, representatives of the ‘traditional’ churches emphasized that they considered it obligatory to respect and tolerate different religious beliefs. They took exception to the missionary activity of other faiths because they saw it as a violation of such respect and tolerance.

In an interview, the head of the seminary of the Russian Orthodox Church in Tashkent vehemently rejected cooperation with the new religious organizations. On the question of the church’s official view towards the so-called non-traditional organizations, he replied that it was ‘sharply negative!’

¹⁴ Non-Muslim and non-‘traditional’, proselytizing religious movements such as the charismatic Protestant denominations, Pentecostals, Hare Krishnas, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Baha’is, as well as certain Islamic movements or associations, are usually labelled ‘sects’ or ‘cults’, following the usage of Soviet anti-religious propaganda (see Peyrouse 2003 on Central Asia; Wanner 2003 on the example of Ukraine).

Most of them psychologically break people, sometimes making zombies out of people. ... [They] take [people] out of the usual way of life. ... Families and the basis of the state are destroyed. ... Quite often money is the aim. ... they are working only for money. Cults have commercial characteristics. There is no any discussion about saving of the soul and about the internal perception of the believers.'

Differentiating between legitimate and illegitimate religions and labelling non-traditional religious organizations 'sects' and 'cults' in a strongly negative sense is common in the rhetoric of representatives of traditional religions in Uzbekistan. Most members of the religious elite subscribe to this view and openly propagate it in their preaching, at conferences, and in the media. The muftiate of Tashkent, together with government institutions, issues spots on state-controlled television in which Muslims are reminded of their duty to attend to the religious education of their children. These spots show pictures of 'Islamic extremists' – sinister-looking people wearing beards who seduce young people with their ideology and money – but they are also directed against the new foreign-based religious organizations.

The traditional religions in Uzbekistan, motivated by the desire to maintain their supremacy and prevent losses of their adherents, have served as potent allies to the government, which is motivated by its own desire to consolidate its legitimacy and keep the influence of international organizations weak. Together they have formulated laws intended to control and restrict the activities of non-traditional religions. Yet when individual believers or religious communities experience limits on their religious freedom, they or their representatives do not accuse the state directly as the agent of the limitation. Instead, they refer to individual bureaucrats who use their executive power to restrict or reshape religious practices or adherents they perceive as 'wrong'.

In my field data, certain patterns appear in narratives about cases in which a violation of religious rights or an intervention in religious practice took place. Mostly, religious communities experiencing constrictions of their religious freedom complained about arbitrariness in the way local authorities treated certain cases. They claimed that the local authorities interpreted laws idiosyncratically or even created new rules, non-existent in the legislation, as obstacles to registering a religious organization. In many cases, local authorities justified their decisions with reference to certain laws, presidential decrees, or amendments in the legislation.

Local and international critics of the 1998 law on religion claim that its definitions of terms are vague and leave considerable leeway for interpretation. When the laws themselves are unclear, administrators have

legal grounds for expressing their personal opinions and stances on certain issues.¹⁵ Moreover, administrators act not on individual interests alone but within a larger socio-economic matrix. They are supposed to represent the state discourse but are entangled as well in social (or, as believers, in religious) norms and values and are supposed to fulfil and represent social obligations and expectations.

In the following sections I present two examples to show how society, government, and traditional religious institutions work together to limit the scope of religious expression and plurality in Uzbekistan. They illustrate how the individual interests of executive authorities and their convictions about right and wrong are entangled with state ideology, loyalty to traditional religions, and the social consensus about morality and culture. All these factors offer leeway for officials to justify and frame their personal convictions about issues of religion and religiosity.

Case 1: The Bahauddin Naqshbandi Shrine

Bukhara's most important shrine, the burial place of the spiritual founder of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi brotherhood and its saint, Bahauddin Naqshbandi (1318–89), is situated a ten-minute drive northeast of the city. Naqshbandi believed that the immediate duty of any believer was to be content with simple living and aspire to inner self-perfection. He was credited with a miraculous power to release people from troubles and unhappiness. During Soviet times the Naqshbandi shrine was placed under the control of the Muslim Spiritual Board in Tashkent. Later, under Khrushchev, it was transformed into an anti-religious museum. Though officially prohibited by the Soviets' anti-religious campaign and characterized by the Muslim Spiritual Board as 'superstition' and as an un-Islamic local practice, out of line with Shari'a, the Naqshbandi mausoleum still attracted large numbers of pilgrims (Benningson and Wimbush 1985: 62; Louw 2004).

In the last years of *perestroika*, and increasingly after independence, the government invested shrines and holy places with new significance. Mausoleums of Sufi sheikhs were reopened and restored, and the number of Muslims visiting them for worship increased (see Kehl-Bodrogi 2005). In 1989 the shrine of Bahauddin Naqshbandi was officially reopened as a mosque, and in 1993 the saint's 675th birthday was celebrated with a huge

¹⁵ This observation was confirmed by personal communications I had in Uzbekistan in 2003–4 with local lawyers, journalists, and specialists from international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Human Rights Watch, and UNESCO that are looking at issues of religious and human rights. See Human Rights Watch 2004.

ceremony that included the participation of the mufti of Tashkent, the Uzbek president, and leading Sufi sheikhs from all over the world (Zarcone 1995: 72; Louw 2004). The government's declaration that Sufism and shrine veneration were integral parts of the local, 'Uzbek' practice of Islam was aimed at supporting local religious practice and countering the notions of 'radical' Islam, which does not recognize shrine veneration or Sufism as Islamic practice at all (see Zarcone 1995; Louw 2004: 98; Kehl-Bodrogi 2005).¹⁶

With the reopening of the Naqshbandi shrine, followed by the 1993 ceremony, changes were implemented in its personnel and facilities that influenced the practice of pilgrimage (*ziyorat*) at the site. In 2002, comprehensive renovations were undertaken on Karimov's personal order. Houses in the surrounding area were removed in order to create a park connecting the Naqshbandi complex with the mausoleum of Naqshbandi's mother. The street in front of the complex was rebuilt, and traffic islands were installed to make cars slow down when passing the holy place, in order to show respect for the saint and those buried in the compound's cemetery. Petty traders who had their stalls next to the complex were removed to the bazaar across the street. The mass kitchens where pilgrims could prepare food, slaughter animals for sacrifice, and have picnics on wooden platforms (*supa*) under shady trees opposite the pond (*hovuz*) were removed. After the remodelling, people were forced to use kitchens on the other side of the road from the complex, close to the bazaar. The executive director explained the removal of the cooking facilities to outside the complex with reference to the local conduct of pilgrimages, which in his opinion was not in accordance with Islamic practice.

The director of the Naqshbandi shrine was appointed to the position in 2003 by the muftiate of Tashkent; his vice-director had begun working at the complex just a month before my visit in August 2004. Both were local Uzbeks in their mid-twenties who had graduated from the Tashkent Islamic University (TIU) in 2003.¹⁷ Appointing young graduates from official state

¹⁶ According to Paweł Jessa in this volume, the same can be observed in Kazakhstan, where shrines and Sufi-tariqas became rehabilitated and instrumentalized in the nation-building process after the country's independence.

¹⁷ The Tashkent Islamic University was established by presidential decree in April 1999. It is a secular university that covers all issues of Islam according to a scientific approach, unlike other institutions of higher Islamic education, which are subordinated to the Muslim Spiritual Board of Uzbekistan and focused on the religious education and training of future imams and mullahs. Depending on personal interests and qualifications, TIU graduates can obtain positions as imams and keepers of holy places, but they also work for government institutions.

(or state-controlled) institutions of higher education such as the TIU and the Al-Bukhari Islamic Institute to central administrative positions has become common policy in Uzbekistan.¹⁸ Its purpose is to ensure that knowledge is imparted about ‘Uzbek’ Islam as defined by the state and to give the state greater administrative control over important holy places, mosques, and Islamic institutions of education. Graduates from officially recognized Islamic institutions are appointed as keepers of holy places and as mullahs and imams in mosques and *madrasas*, usually replacing the ‘unofficial’ mullahs and sheiks who served as keepers before and during the Soviet period. The term *unofficial* labels Islamic specialists who have not graduated from an official institution of Islamic education but instead obtained their knowledge through self-study of the Qur’an or consultation with a mullah (see Rasanayagam, this volume).

The director and vice-director of the Naqshbandi complex considered themselves devout Muslims, following the scriptural interpretation of Islam although acknowledging local Islamic practices as part of Uzbek culture. They had received extensive education in scriptural Islam and were aware of the differences between local practices and scriptural interpretation. Their duties at the mosque and shrine were mainly administrative – for example, they introduced new regulations, handled staff issues, monitored ongoing construction, and organized public events related to the complex. They were also organizing a new research centre on Sufism. Religious issues were the responsibility of the imams and mullahs working at the complex, but the executive director had the authority to exert his influence over religious issues and to implement changes. In doing so, he used the leeway his position offered to try to fulfil what he saw as his personal duty both as director and as a devout Muslim. That duty was to ensure the proper conduct of pilgrimage according to Shari’a, but without violating the unwritten rules of the official discourse, which tolerates local Islamic practice so long as it does not lean in a radical, anti-traditionalist direction.

In local practice, pilgrims to the Naqshbandi shrine must walk three times counter-clockwise around the tomb of the saint. While circling the tomb, they touch the stone with their hands or foreheads, believing that it will absorb their sins, and ask for support. A second station for the pilgrims is the trunk of a mulberry tree in the second courtyard of the complex. According to legend, Bahauddin Naqshbandi thrust his walking stick (*hasso*)

¹⁸ The Al-Bukhari Institute of Islamic Studies in Tashkent is a non-governmental school of higher learning of the Muslim Spiritual Board of Uzbekistan. It was founded in 1969 as a training centre for specialists in Islam and the *ulama* under the Soviet government and continued to operate under the new government of independent Uzbekistan.

into the earth there, and a mulberry tree grew out of it. Eventually the tree died and fell over. Today, pilgrims to the shrine ascribe spiritual powers to the tree trunk, which is also known as the 'wishing tree'. People circle the trunk three times, kissing and touching the wood. They break off little pieces of wood to take home and use to make amulets for protection. They climb underneath the trunk, believing that the spirit of Naqshbandi will help them in cases of hardship or sickness or will fulfil wishes such as the desire for fertility or to pass an exam.

On a directive of the Muslim Spiritual Board of Uzbekistan, signs were installed at holy places concerning the correct procedure for visiting graves. In the summer of 2004 the director decided on his own initiative to give these announcements greater prominence. He erected additional signs next to the tomb of Naqshbandi, the pond, and the tree, informing visitors that

entering the mosque, two units [sing., *rakat*] *namoz* are to be prayed. The Qur'an will be read in honour of his holiness Bahauddin Naqshbandi and to all the deceased *azizlar* [pl., holy people] and *mumin* Muslims.¹⁹

Whatever blessings and wishes one might ask for, they should be asked only from Allah.

The following should receive attention: Circumambulating the tomb, kissing the stones of the tomb, trees, and wood, and lighting candles are contradictory to Shari'a.²⁰

During my visit to the shrine I observed a group of pilgrims enter the yard, walk straight to the tomb, and walk around it counter-clockwise, touching and kissing the stone. After nearly completing the first circuit, the group came to a sudden halt in front of the sign. The pilgrims read the note intently, discussed it briefly, and continued on their way around the tomb. Fewer people touched and kissed the stone than had done so on the first circuit. I saw similar behaviour on the part of many other pilgrims that day. No one seemed to take the pilgrimage rules very seriously.

When I asked the director why he had put up the signs, he explained that his intention was not to prohibit the pilgrimage practices but to help people carry out the pilgrimage in the 'right' way, according to Islamic rules, in order to ensure a prosperous pilgrimage. He emphasized that the measure was primarily for education:

It is only giving advice, helping to prevent the wrong conduct of shrine veneration. Many people have to learn about Islam. During Soviet times they forgot how to conduct a pilgrimage, and because

¹⁹ A *mumin* (Arabic) is one who adheres to Islam and has internalized its teachings.

²⁰ Translated from Uzbek by the author.

of the prohibitions on and repressions of Islam, the proper conduct of many rituals was forgotten. In general, people knew about Islam, but in the course of time they forgot about the details, such as how to conduct a pilgrimage. ... Especially those who were born during the Soviet period have only a superficial knowledge of Islam and do not know how to behave at a holy place. For them we display these rules for information. ... For example, the rituals around the *hasso* that you observe originated from the comprehension of the people and not from the scriptural form of Islam, nor is it a prophetic tradition. In addition, we have to preserve the place, and it is actually a problem that people break off pieces of wood and the tree trunk shrinks.

When I talked to people who conducted pilgrimages at the Naqshbandi shrine, they stressed that they were doing only what they had learned from their parents or grandparents. They perceived this as legitimate traditional practice but were aware of the discrepancies between local and scriptural practices. People emphasized that they did not worship the saint but used his presence to reinforce their requests to Allah. They did not perceive their devotional activities as un-Islamic. How people conduct pilgrimages and what they regard as right and wrong does depend to a certain degree on their understanding of Islam and Islamic practice and on the meaning they attach to 'pilgrimage' (see van Bruinessen 2004). People to whom I spoke at the Naqshbandi shrine emphasized the special protection against the evil eye gained by carrying a piece of the *hasso* in the form of an amulet. For them, this was part of their local Islamic practice and was therefore seen as 'right'.

Circumstances in which the ideas and practices of local Islam are confronted with notions of scripture- and Shari'a-oriented Islam can be observed frequently in Uzbekistan and are widely discussed among Muslims (see Krämer 2002; Fatih 2004; Kehl-Bodrogi 2005). Older people in particular perceive local Islamic practices as 'right' conduct, and like the state authorities they legitimate such practices with reference to the long history of this religious tradition in the region. Now these defenders of 'traditional' Islam find themselves faced with so-called modernists who want to make religious practice conform to scriptural Islam and who deem local Islamic practices partially wrong, un-Islamic, and sometimes even superstitious (see McBrien, this volume; Rasanayagam, this volume). The director of the Naqshbandi complex, though intending only to inform and not to force people to alter their religious practices, provoked a confrontation between the two notions of Islam.

In fulfilling what he perceives to be his duty as a Muslim believer, the director finds his agency in 'correcting' religious practice constrained by the

loyalty he must display to the government that employs him. He feels torn between his duties as an Uzbek citizen and as a Muslim. In his position as director, he must subscribe to the official definition of ‘Uzbek’ Islam, according to which the pilgrims’ religious practices are legitimate. This means that as a Muslim following the scriptural interpretation of Islam, he has to accept certain practices that in his opinion are discordant with scriptural interpretation. He tries to solve this dilemma by using the leeway available to him to implement changes that express his personal opinion without trespassing the boundaries of loyalty.

Case 2: The Registration of a Christian Community

The pastor of an Uzbek Protestant community in Tashkent, an Uzbek in his forties, converted from Islam to Christianity in the early 1990s. Later he attended the seminary of one of the charismatic branches of Protestantism, obtained a diploma as a pastor, and became the leader of the Uzbek group of believers within his church. In 2001 his group branched off the main church community in order to establish a new congregation in another district of Tashkent. The group applied to the Ministry of Justice for state registration, in order to get official status as a legal religious organization. The community met all the basic requirements for eligibility: it had more than 100 adult members of Uzbek citizenship, the pastor had an official diploma, and the community had its own building.

According to the law, an unregistered organization was not allowed to buy real property. To circumvent this restriction, the building had been bought in the name of an Uzbek member of the church who then donated it to the community. The buyer, in arranging the gift of the property, frequently met with hostile reactions from the Uzbek officials with whom he had to consult, who repeatedly asked him why he, an Uzbek and a Muslim (even though he had converted to Christianity some years earlier), wanted to donate a building to a Protestant congregation. He reported that he had to wait longer to get the necessary signatures than a non-Uzbek coming to the town hall (*hokimyat*) with the same request would have had to wait, and he was required to pay higher fees than those set in the rules. Some of the officials told him frankly that the reason for this unequal treatment was his request to donate property to a Christian group, which in their opinion constituted a violation of Uzbek moral values – Uzbeks had to be Muslims.

After lengthy negotiations with various authorities, the community succeeded in registering the building. With an official address, it was now eligible to submit to the district *hokimyat* the documents needed for registering as a religious organization. Although according to the official regulations the district *hokimyat* was the office in charge of registration, in

this case it claimed not to be responsible and referred the group to the city *hokimyat*. That office claimed not to be responsible either and referred the group to the *mahalla*, or neighbourhood, committee as the office in charge. The committee members refused to sign the registration forms because they did not want to be responsible for permitting an Uzbek Protestant community to operate in the neighbourhood. They said they would give their approval only if the community provided signatures from all the households in the *mahalla* agreeing to the establishment of a Christian Uzbek church there.

The pastor stated that the group faced no problems in obtaining these signatures, because ethnic Russians dominated the *mahalla* where the church was to be located. But when he submitted the document, the *mahalla* committee again withheld its approval, this time demanding signatures from the fire brigade, the public health department, and a plumber to verify that the building was in proper condition. Although the signatures of *mahalla* residents were not actually required for registration, this time the authorities were backed by the law concerning the registration of religious organizations.

Again the community faced difficulties, because none of the persons whose signatures it needed wanted to be responsible for assisting the registration of an Uzbek Protestant congregation, fearing conflict with higher authorities. Eventually, however, the pastor succeeded in getting the appropriate officials and a plumber to attest that the building met health and safety requirements. Once again he submitted the requested documents to the *mahalla* committee. This time its executive administrator, an Uzbek Muslim, told him that although he had no personal objection to a new church in the *mahalla*, nor did the Uzbek residents to whom he had spoken, he nevertheless would be unable to put his final signature on the document needed in order to submit the application to the town hall. He said he was afraid of losing his job if he approved the registration, because of the negative attitude of his subordinates in the *hokimyat* towards Uzbek converts. After long negotiations, however, he finally signed the document.

Collecting all the necessary signatures had taken the community more than a year. Handing in the documents at the *hokimyat*, the pastor was informed that according to the law, the documents could not be older than one year, and documents needed to be updated regularly even if a religious organization was registered. It took the community another two months to update its documents and submit the application to the *hokimyat*. In the end, the registration of the community as a religious organization was denied, with the explanation that the rules had been changed and their official building did not comply with the actual legal requirements.

The Uzbek Protestant community owned half of a multi-store building. A Korean Baptist church occupied the other half, but it faced no problems with the authorities over registration.²¹ Its parishioners were predominantly ethnic Koreans and Russians, and its services were conducted in Korean and Russian. The Korean Baptists were required only to assure the officials that they would not offer services in Uzbek, which might get Uzbeks interested in converting to Christianity. The Uzbek Protestant community did not try to obtain state registration again. Its members officially joined the Korean Baptist church, although they kept their sovereignty within the church. In order not to create risks for the church as a whole, the Uzbek parishioners conducted their meetings in Russian.

In the course of the registration process, a member of the National Security Service (NSS) with whom the pastor had to deal proposed to him a possible solution to his problems – namely, that he and his parishioners should convert to Russian Orthodoxy. According to the NSS officer, the Russian Orthodox Church, unlike the charismatic Christian congregations, did not evangelize and was officially recognized as a ‘national’ church.

Nationalizing Religiosity?

In my first example, the director of the Bahauddin Naqshbandi shrine implemented measures designed to alter local pilgrimage practices by educating people about what he perceived as ‘right Islamic practice’. To some extent he had the backing of the government and the Muslim Spiritual Board of Uzbekistan to implement changes, but only within the framework of what a majority of Uzbek Muslims perceived as legitimate local religious practice, a framework supported by state discourse on culture and tradition. The director faced clear limitations on his agency by the official discourse, which claimed local Islamic practices such as shrine veneration to be ‘national Islamic heritage’ – a counter-balance to fundamental notions of Islam espoused by believers aiming to purify Islamic practices (see Karimov 1997; Karomatov 2001). In implementing changes associated with the ‘purification’ of local practices, the director had to be careful not to transgress this frame and become stigmatized as a ‘modernist’ or a ‘Wahhabi’.

²¹ The Korean Baptist churches in Uzbekistan were established on the initiative of South Korean missionaries who came to the country increasingly at the beginning of the 1990s to proselytize the ethnic Koreans living in the region. The Russian Koreans, who were deported to Soviet Central Asia in 1937, under the Stalin regime, in the majority conceive of themselves as atheists or refer to Buddhism as the religion of their ancestors.

In the example of the Uzbek Christian group trying to obtain registration, the government officials in charge chose to penalize behaviour that established a religious alternative to the 'traditional' faith, Islam. They believed they were serving Uzbek society by preventing the fragmentation of religious affiliation. They justified their actions, on the one hand, through their personal conviction of Uzbek-Muslim unity as an intrinsic part of 'Uzbek' traditions and culture and, on the other, by referring to the government discourse and the nationalization of Islam and by supporting the concept of traditional religions as promoted by the clergy and *ulama*.

In both examples the local authorities were serving the national image and sought to control and regulate the collective imagination (Herzfeld 1998: 98). For the post-Soviet context, Neil Melvin has identified political and cultural elites as key actors in 'developing nationalistic forms of politics' (Melvin 1995: 2). With its post-Soviet ideology aimed at consolidating a national identity and 'nationalizing' Islam (March 2002; Peyrouse 2004: 662), and under pressure from the 'national' religions, the government of Uzbekistan strives to regulate and limit religious pluralism and to maintain a certain homogeneity, at least in order to implement its own interests and avoid instability and internal conflicts. Accordingly, it permits religious pluralism only in limited and controlled ways: religious communities are allowed to register if they fulfil certain legal criteria, but they are limited as soon as they are suspected of violating unwritten rules such as the ethnic-religious correlation.

The freedom of conscience and right to choose a religion that is granted to Uzbek citizens by law is undermined by the state's ideology, by the official position of the 'traditional' religions, by social control within Uzbek society, and by the way in which the law is applied. For ethnic Uzbeks, religious affiliation becomes a political issue, in that it is instrumentalized for maintaining power relations between the state, the established religious institutions, and society. The interests of these three players are embodied in the actor of the government official, who in his or her position as an executive link between the macro and micro levels can control certain developments within the religious sphere, implement changes, and punish behaviour perceived as not 'right'.

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Chapter 5

‘I Am Not a Wahhabi’: State Power and Muslim Orthodoxy in Uzbekistan

Johan Rasanayagam

Since the end of state socialism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, the reform agendas of postsocialist governments have been directed towards political and economic liberalization. In varying degrees this has generally translated into the introduction of democratic political systems and free market economies. In contrast, the government in Uzbekistan has become more autocratic since independence was declared in 1991, with political power firmly concentrated in the hands of President Islam Karimov. In this authoritarian setting a ‘religious marketplace’ has little space to develop. Freedom of belief is laid out in the constitution,¹ but in practice the central government restricts the formation of new religious groups. The regime attempts to functionalize Islam, the dominant religion in Uzbekistan, as a support for its legitimating ideology (see Hilgers, this volume). It promotes Islam as a component of local culture and a source of Uzbek spiritual values but acts aggressively to exclude any independent interpretation that it considers a threat to its authority.

In what sense, then, can we talk about ‘civility’ in relation to religion in Uzbekistan? If civility is to be measured in terms of tolerance towards other groups, then what kind of freedom can state-controlled religious structures have in Uzbekistan to be tolerant (or intolerant)? Can we even talk about Islam as a ‘dominant church’ that can be assessed according to the extent to which it promotes tolerance towards competing religious groups (Hann 2000, 2006)? Unlike Christianity, Islam has no institutional church structure. In Uzbekistan there is instead a quasi-state structure that registers mosques, appoints imams, and promotes its own version of Islamic orthodoxy. The ‘clergy’ in this structure exercise certain forms of both state

¹ Article 31 states: ‘Freedom of conscience is guaranteed to all. Everyone shall have the right to profess or not to profess any religion. Any compulsory imposition of religion shall be impermissible.’

and religious authority but cannot be said to represent the community of believers in the same way Christian churches do. Independent of this 'official' structure is an array of diverse beliefs, practices, and locally embedded institutions. Together with official structures they make up the totality of the practice of Islam in Uzbekistan.

If we are to examine Islamic practice in terms of civility and tolerance, we should not limit the discussion to a judgement about whether a particular Islamic movement or theological school is more or less able to accommodate a plurality of religious viewpoints. This too easily leads to an oversimplified dichotomy between 'extremist' and 'moderate' Muslims. Not only does this fail to do justice to the complexity and subtlety of religious practice, but it also adopts as analytical categories labels that are themselves internal to local discourses and that are strategically employed and manipulated (Rasanayagam, *Forthcoming*).²

Just as important to the issue of civility are the conditions of possibility within which actors are able impose their particular version of Islam and suppress that of others (Asad 1986). A number of other contributors to this volume (Hilgers, Kehl-Bodrogi, McBrien, Stephan) discuss conflicts over the interpretation of what constitutes 'genuine' Islam in Central Asia, many of which take place between those who advocate a universalist and scriptural interpretation and those who follow locally embedded Muslim practices.³ Throughout the region government authorities have applied the label 'Wahhabi' to Islamic practices of which they are suspicious, and this label has been adopted within local debates and struggles to define 'real' Islam (see particularly McBrien, this volume). While conflict within the diversity of the practice of Islam exists in all Muslim societies, civility (or incivility) is marked not by the existence in itself of conflicting beliefs but rather by the terms in which the conflicts between the beliefs are expressed.

In this chapter I explore the effects of central government interventions in struggles to define Muslim orthodoxy in Uzbekistan and the way these interventions shape the conditions of possibility within which

² An example of the complexity of religious practice is found in Stephan's chapter in this volume. She presents the case of a 'neo-fundamentalist' young Muslim in Tajikistan who criticizes much of the religious practice of other Muslims in his community as un-Islamic tradition but who nevertheless distances himself from 'radical' or 'extremist' Islamic movements.

³ The subdiscipline of the anthropology of Muslim societies has generated an extensive literature dealing with the competition between what might be glossed as 'modernist' or 'reformist' groups and 'traditionalists' (Lambek 1990; Bowen 1993, 1997; Horvatic 1994).

Muslims are able to express their faith. Yet the conditions of possibility are not shaped simply by the direct actions of central government. In practice the coercive capacities of the state – the army, police, courts, prisons, and so on – are mobilized within the personal projects of actors who may have no official positions in state structures. Thus the regime's intolerance of religious diversity becomes a mode of interaction that is generalized throughout society.

An important factor that shapes the way in which these capacities can be mobilized by non-state actors is the atmosphere of everyday vulnerability engendered by the central government, which I explore in the next section. Michel Foucault's conception of power is useful here. Power is not an 'object' in itself, located within certain institutions or offices and simply imposed from above. Rather, power is always a relation between partners and is dispersed throughout the whole of society through these relations (Foucault 1990, 1994). The atmosphere of everyday vulnerability disperses the coercive capacities of the state throughout society, allowing actors to bring them to bear in local conflicts over religious belief and practice. This profoundly affects the civility of interaction within the religious sphere. Whereas in many Muslim societies the holders of a particular view of what constitutes 'genuine' Islam are unable to stifle opposing voices, in Uzbekistan those who can be presented as in opposition to government-approved practice are subject to severe sanctions. In this environment diverse interpretations of Islam do exist, but public debate is more muted than in neighbouring countries, and those who hold 'suspicious' beliefs are less free to advocate them openly.

Everyday Vulnerability

Between July 2003 and April 2004 I carried out two periods of field research totalling six months in the city of Samarkand. I conducted a further four months of research, from May through August 2004, in a village near the city of Andijan in the Fergana valley. Soon after my arrival in Samarkand I was told a story about the tomb of Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari (810–70), located not far from the city. Imam al-Bukhari was the compiler of the most authoritative collections of Hadith and as such is an immensely important figure in the history of Islam. In the late 1960s his tomb was in a state of disrepair and was being used as a warehouse for a collective farm. The farm chairman, a devout Muslim, wanted to preserve it and made renovations, ostensibly improving it as a warehouse. An enemy of his informed the district authorities, accusing him of being a supporter of religion, and as a result he was dismissed from the Communist Party and his job.

Not long after this incident, however, President Suharto of Indonesia made a state visit to the USSR and requested that a visit to the tomb be included on his itinerary. The Moscow authorities asked the Party secretary in Samarkand where it was, but he did not know. I was told that he was dismissed for his unforgivable ignorance of such an important Muslim site in his territory. The local state authorities eventually found it, recalled the farm chairman, and congratulated him on his foresight in attempting to restore the tomb. They cleaned it up as much as they could in the short time available and laid a road to it. Suharto is supposed to have been taken there at night in order to hide the real state of disrepair. Gradually over the years the shrine was restored, and a mosque was built there. After independence it was built up as a mausoleum and mosque complex on a grand scale, complete with a sacred spring and a *madrasa*, or religious school.

I cannot be sure of the accuracy of all the details of this story; different versions of it were related to me during my stay in Samarkand. Nevertheless, it is illustrative of a feature of Soviet governance that carries over into present-day independent Uzbekistan: a clear distinction did not always exist between what was officially sanctioned and what was punishable. Suharto's visit coincided with a shift in Soviet foreign policy in which an attempt was made to court Muslim states in the developing world by portraying the Soviet Union as a country with a sizable Muslim population whose religious freedoms were protected. Up until this time the official attitude towards Islam had been either active repression or discouragement, and the Party officials involved in this affair were taken by surprise by the sudden change. Moreover, the ambiguity over what was sanctioned and what was punishable was instrumentalized in personal rivalries. It did not actually matter much that the collective farm chairman had ordered restoration work on the tomb. It was not unknown for local Party members to participate in Muslim religious gatherings such as funerals, and it would have been unusual for them not to have arranged for their sons to be circumcised. What was significant was that the chairman's rival was able to use his breach of official policy in local politics.

Incidents of this sort have a systemic significance that extends beyond the rivalries and conflicts of the particular parties involved. They point to an important means by which Soviet state officials exercised control over both citizens and their political rivals. Anti-corruption charges and campaigns provide other examples of such means. William Clark (1993) argued that Soviet leaders had ambiguous feelings about corruption. They recognized that certain types of corruption were necessary for the workings of the economy and that it was pervasive at all levels of government, including among the ruling elites. At the same time, the pervasiveness of corruption

made it an attractive weapon to use against political rivals, because anyone was vulnerable to investigation. Yuri Andropov used corruption investigations to weaken Brezhnev’s power in his later years. When someone was convicted of corruption, the actual charge was less important than the fact that the higher officials who had formerly provided protection were no longer able to do so (Clark 1993: 145–82).

Perpetual vulnerability to prosecution was not confined to Party elites but was a feature of people’s everyday lives. In the sphere of the economy, a number of studies have shown that the official economy could not have operated without unofficial economic transactions, and vice versa (Verdery 1991; Kotkin 1995; Humphrey 1998; Lampland 2002). The resulting ambiguity between what was officially condoned and what was punishable, in an economy in which transgressions were a part of everyday existence, placed people in a vulnerable situation relative to state authorities. Alena Ledeneva (1998: 77) used the term *suspended punishment* to describe the resulting uncertainty, which created a feeling that a person’s very existence was unauthorized or illegal.

Nancy Lubin (1984) described a similar situation for Soviet Uzbekistan. Because participation in the illegal second economy was pervasive, ‘everyone [was] under an economic pistol’ (Lubin 1984: 226–27). She argued that this discouraged people from engaging in political opposition to the regime, because the authorities could use one’s illegal economic activities as a pretext for arrest and conviction for other reasons. The regime made a bargain with the populace whereby it tolerated a degree of corruption and private accumulation of wealth in exchange for political compliance.⁴

As the Imam al-Bukhari incident illustrates, the condition of everyday vulnerability was not simply a tool that the central government used to enforce its will. Through this condition of vulnerability the coercive capacities of the state were distributed throughout society and were operationalized within relations of power. They became one more resource that people attempted to enlist in their personal rivalries and conflicts. In present-day Uzbekistan, where an authoritarian regime is intent on stamping out any hint of Islamic expression outside authorized limits, and where formal adherence to the law is less important than demonstrating loyalty to the government or at least avoiding the appearance of opposition, the mode

⁴ James Millar (1988) described the contract between state and citizen in the Brezhnev era as a ‘Little Deal’, by which a wide variety of petty private economic activities, many of which were illegal, were tolerated while overt political dissent was prosecuted.

of governance based on a condition of everyday vulnerability is extended to the religious sphere.

A Brief Historical Sketch

Following the repressive policies of the early Stalinist period, state policy towards Islam became more accommodating during the Second World War, when the central government needed popular support for the war effort.⁵ The Muslim Religious Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan was established along with two other regional Muslim boards (a central Muslim regulatory body set up by Catherine the Great in 1788 was already in existence) (Ro'i 2000: 100ff.). These boards administered the registration of mosques and the training and registration of imams and decided on matters of religious dogma within their jurisdictions. They were formally independent, self-governing organizations, as were the mosques themselves, but they were supportive of government policies.⁶

The Mir-Arab *madrasa* in Bukhara was reopened and the Ismail al-Bukhari Institute was built in Tashkent in 1971. The opening of the latter institute coincided with the change in foreign policy orientation mentioned earlier. Towards this end, a façade of acceptance of Islam was presented, and a limited number of students were allowed to study in Islamic educational institutions in Egypt and other Arab countries. A small number of religious publications was permitted, and delegations were sent to international Muslim conferences. The Soviet approach to Islam evolved into one of allowing it to wither away through the process of socialist modernization rather than one of active suppression (Rorlich 1991; Akiner 1996).

The liberalizing reforms instituted during Gorbachev's era of *perestroika* had a significant effect on Islam in the Soviet Union. Obstacles to the building of mosques were removed, and their number increased rapidly.⁷ Because of the resulting shortage of imams, many unregistered

⁵ Shirin Akiner (1996) and Aleksei Malashenko (1994b) have provided overviews of the relationship between Islam and the state in Central Asia in historical perspective. See McBrien, this volume, for an account of tsarist and early Soviet policies towards Islam in Central Asia.

⁶ Mark Saroyan (1997a, 1997b) has described the structure and workings of these Muslim boards in detail. He has argued that official imams both supported and subverted state ideology. Their representation of Islam as prescribing many of the values of Soviet socialism and of Muslims as active builders of Soviet socialist society demonstrated their loyalty to the regime but at the same time challenged the view that religion was a hindrance to progress. See also Rorlich 1991.

⁷ Malashenko (1994a: 111) estimated that 3,000 mosques were built or restored in Uzbekistan during the *perestroika* period, up to January 1992.

mullahs who had been active unofficially in local communities were registered by the Muslim boards and integrated into the official structures. These structures fragmented, to a certain extent, along ethno-national lines. A local religious board was set up in Kazakhstan in 1990, although it was not recognized by the Tashkent board, and more Islamic middle and high schools were opened so that the other Muslim boards would not have to rely on *madrasas* in Uzbekistan for the training of their imams (Saroyan 1997c).

Contacts with Muslims from outside the Soviet Union expanded. The number of students going abroad for religious education increased, as did participation in the hajj to Mecca. Financial resources flowed in from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey for the purpose of building mosques, and a number of foreign Muslim missionaries entered the country. At the end of the 1980s Qur’anic clubs and study groups were organized by lay Muslims that promoted what might be called modernist reformist interpretations of Islam, and in 1990 the Islamic Revival Party, the first Muslim political party in the Soviet Union, was founded in Astrakhan. This party, intended to form a united Muslim opposition to Soviet rule, was not very influential in Uzbekistan (Malashenko 1994a; Akiner 1996; Saroyan 1997c).

The most informative accounts of the Islamic groups that became active in Uzbekistan, particularly in the Fergana valley, in the late Soviet period and the early years of independence have been provided by Bakhtiyar Babadjanov and Muzaffar Kamilov (Babadzhanov 1999; Babadjanov and Kamilov 2001; Babadjanov 2004). As early as the 1960s and 1970s the students who had attended Islamic educational institutions outside the Soviet Union and Muslim foreign students in the republic began to introduce reformist ideas. Critical of the blind following of tradition and the interpretations of medieval Islamic scholars, they advocated that Muslims form a personal relationship to God and Islam through the exercise of *ijtihad* (Arabic, individual interpretation of the Qur’an and Hadith) within the bounds of *ijmā’* (Arabic, theological consensus). They criticized many local practices (*urf-odat*), such as the visitation of shrines and the excessive mourning ceremonies following funerals, as un-Islamic innovations.

Babadjanov described what he called a ‘great schism’ between these reformists and imams who followed a ‘traditional’ Hanafi form of Islam. The latter, though also opposed to many forms of *urf-odat*, were at the same time prepared for accommodation with it in a regulated form. ‘Traditionalists’ labelled the reformers ‘Wahhabis’, after the eighteenth-century reformist movement on the Arabian Peninsula. But rather than being an accurate description of the reformers’ political roots or affiliations, the label was used by traditionalists as a means to delegitimize the claims of their

opponents. The reformists themselves preferred the name ‘Mujaddidiya’, or movement of renewal.

Initially followers of reformist Islam were not well organized, but they became much more active after *perestroika*. Groups that appeared at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s included Ahl-i Hadith, which believed that the sunna (model practice of the Prophet Muhammad) should be the normative basis for Muslim life; Ahl-i Qur’an, which recognized the Qur’an as the only authoritative source of religious truth; and Khalifatchilar, which advocated the revival of the caliphate in order to create the proper conditions for a rebirth of true Islam (Babadjanov and Kamilov 2001: 205). In 1991 a group called Adolat (justice) was formed in the city of Namangan with the proclaimed aims of maintaining public order, combating corruption, and promoting social justice. It was formed largely in response to deteriorating standards of living. Its volunteer neighbourhood groups policed bazaar traders to prevent them from increasing their prices and maintained order in their *mahalla* (neighbourhood residential district). This group worked with local imams, holding meetings in mosques, and demanded that the president establish a public centre for studying the Qur’an in the former Communist Party building in Namangan (Malashenko 1994b: 133ff.).

The response of the government of Islam Karimov was to ban these groups and arrest anyone suspected of involvement in any independent Islamic organization. In 1992 it banned the Islamic Revival Party in Uzbekistan and ordered the arrests of the leaders of Adolat. In an attempt to bring religion more firmly under central control, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers’ Committee on Religious Affairs were given responsibility for monitoring Islam and defining what was acceptable practice. The former retains the role of the Muslim Board of the Soviet era, that of registering mosques and *madrasas*, appointing imams, and deciding the content of Friday sermons (see Hilgers, this volume, for a more detailed account of state regulation of religious groups). Muslim religious groups independent of state control are not tolerated, and those who are suspected of overstepping these limits are defined by state authorities as ‘extremist’, regardless of their actual ideological or spiritual orientation. People who have been labelled in this way range from Muslims who merely pray regularly and strictly observe the tenets of Islam to those who actually advocate the establishment of an Islamic state and Shari’a law.⁸ People who

⁸ During my second period of field research in 2003–4 I learned that one of the students I had taught at the Foreign Languages Institute in Andijan 5 years earlier had been imprisoned for 11 years for involvement in religious extremist groups. His classmates insisted that he was merely a devout Muslim with no political involvement.

openly proselytize on behalf of Islam, encouraging others to observe the Islamic duties of prayer, abstinence from alcohol, and so on, have also been labelled Wahhabis by law enforcement agencies, whether or not they have any links to political or militant Islamic movements (Human Rights Watch 2004: 20ff.).

After several police officers were murdered and a local government official beheaded in Namangan in 1997, arrests of suspected Islamists increased. In 1998, passage of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations made the possession of extremist religious literature, membership in extremist organizations, and proselytizing punishable by long prison sentences. Measures against independent Islamic activity reached a peak in the aftermath of the bombings in Tashkent in 1999, attributed to Islamic groups, after which thousands of suspected ‘extremists’ were arrested.

Muslim Practice in the Soviet Period

In Soviet Uzbekistan the small number of highly educated ‘official *ulama*’, trained in local and foreign religious institutes, preached from the pulpits of the registered mosques a Hanafi version of Islam, often condemning as *bid’a* (wrong or harmful innovation) local practices such as shrine visitation and the use of healing amulets (Saroyan 1997a: 49).⁹ The Muslim Board’s control over the registration of mosques and the appointment of imams, combined with state-enforced restrictions on independently organized religious activities, guaranteed its monopoly over publicly defined orthodoxy. At the same time, the mass of the population was in effect prevented from attending mosques or engaging actively in Islam, which deprived the official *ulama* of its audience. When I asked during field research about religious practice during the Soviet period, most people said they had not attended a mosque. People in positions of authority, such as government officials and teachers, as well as the young, would have risked their jobs if they had done so. Those who did pray at a mosque or at home were almost exclusively older people. The men who prayed while still young tended to be the sons of mullahs or imams, and even they prayed mostly at home rather than in the mosque.¹⁰ Thus the orthodoxy that was being

⁹ *Ulama* are Islamic scholars. By ‘official *ulama*’ I mean the officially appointed imams and religious functionaries within the quasi-state religious administrative hierarchy.

¹⁰ I follow local usage in applying the term *imam* to the person appointed by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan to head a mosque (the ‘imam khatib’), and *mullah* to refer to the unofficial male religious practitioner appointed by the leader of the

preached in the mosques could not extend much beyond the official *ulama* themselves, leaving the mass of the population untouched.

This is not to say that people who did not attend mosques expressed no religiosity whatsoever. Circumcision of boys was universally practiced, the *janoza* (prayers said at funerals) were performed, and marriage ceremonies commonly included the *nikoh* (Muslim marriage ceremony). But these rituals were sometimes observed in order to fulfil family and community obligations rather than to express genuine religious commitment. A former lecturer in atheism and philosophy who described himself as having been a committed Communist in the Soviet period said that he had arranged for his sons to be circumcised in a clinic far from his home so that people would not notice: ‘On the one hand there was the idea of Communism, and on the other our parents. We had to listen to Communist ideology and do the rituals according to Islam.’¹¹

Active engagement in Islamic practices such as praying and fasting was often correlated with age. In Pakhtabad village, my field site near Andijan, people usually began fulfilling these religious obligations after the age of 40.¹² Some men said they had started to pray when their father died and they became the oldest male in their household.¹³ In Samarkand the head of a *mahalla* committee told me how his father, a committed Communist, had become more religious in his old age:

My father was the head of a big department in the Party ObKom [provincial branch of the Communist Party]. He was the head of the oblast [provincial] department of transport, construction, and a few other departments. He was a Party member, a fervent Communist, an atheist. But despite this, a year or two after he became a pensioner he first of all started to visit the *choikhona* [teahouse], then started going to *khatmi qur’ons* [prayer ceremonies for the dead] with the old people. Gradually he started going to the mosque on occasion.

mahalla (neighbourhood unit), or recognized as such by the community, who officiates at local religious ceremonies. Whereas imams are now generally educated at least to *madrasa* level, mullahs do not necessarily have any formal religious education.

¹¹ Many Communist officials retained a religious commitment. Although religious practice was discouraged, many senior government and Party officials in Central Asia engaged in Islam and even tacitly supported religious activities throughout the period of Soviet rule.

¹² The name of the village has been changed for this chapter.

¹³ Bruce Privratsky (2001: 83ff.) wrote that people in the city of Turkistan, Kazakhstan, delayed the regular practice of Islamic obligations such as praying and fasting until old age. Sergei Poliakov (1992: 58) and Sergei Abashin (1997: 456) have made similar observations for Soviet Central Asia.

He didn't pray, but went and talked to people there. If he had lived a little longer he would probably have started praying as well. People who weren't fervent Communists, who were just workers like [my wife's] father – he was a driver – when they become pensioners, some of them start praying. That's natural.

In Pakhtabad Islam was intimately tied to local community organization even in the Soviet period. Each *mahalla* was centred on a mosque, even if it had been closed, destroyed, or used for some other purpose, and usually one of the neighbourhood's residents acted as mullah. The main mosque in the village had been converted into a warehouse by the collective farm chairman in order to save it from destruction. Until 1988, when it was reopened, some people prayed in the house of the unofficial mullah. In another *mahalla* a family had given a section of land at the end of their household plot so that a mosque could be built disguised as a shed. Older men prayed discretely at such unofficial mosques, coming for the early morning and evening prayers.¹⁴

Although people were unable to pray openly, the *mahalla* mullahs cannot be described as having operated completely clandestinely or 'underground'. Often they obtained permission from the officially registered mosque to conduct funeral ceremonies, and some described themselves as having been subordinate to the official imam. The present imam for the main village mosque said he had not been bothered by the Soviet authorities during his long years as a mullah, because he had been a worker in the collective farm.

In addition to formal prayer and life-cycle celebrations, other religious gatherings were commonly organized. Older men would attend the *khatmi qur'on*, a ceremony at which the Qur'an was recited or *zikr* was chanted (repetition of the declaration of belief, 'There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet') in order to transfer merit to the deceased relatives of those attending and also to the organizer of the event. In Samarkand people recalled that in the late Soviet period these ceremonies were held openly, with many guests in attendance, even if the fiction had to be maintained to any officials who inquired that it was a birthday party or some other secular gathering. People recalled the authorities seriously clamping down on religious activity only during a brief period from 1983 to 1985.

Women held their own gatherings. These included the *bibiseshamba*, held to invoke divine aid in overcoming a problem or to give thanks for some success, and the *mavlud* ceremonies in honour of the Prophet

¹⁴ Poliakov (1992) described the operation of unofficial mullahs and mosques in the 1980s in Central Asia.

Muhammad. What distinguished the conduct of these rituals in the Soviet period was that they were organized on a small scale, discretely, in comparison with the open way in which they have been held since. In Pakhtabad there are now *mavlud* circles in which the women of a *mahalla* take turns hosting gatherings, whereas previously these were irregularly held events and only a small number of women were invited.

Healers who worked with spirits or by using the power of the Qur'an were active in the Soviet period, and some people visited the tombs of Muslim 'saints'.¹⁵ A Russian language teacher in one of the schools in Pakhtabad described how his mother and grandmother had served as representatives of a female descendant of the Prophet whom people referred to locally as *posha* or *sayid*. This woman was considered a *pir*, a blessed and honoured person (*tabarruk*). The man's grandmother had been 'given the hand' (*kol bergan*) by the *pir*, which meant that she acted as an intermediary between the *pir* and those seeking her blessings.¹⁶ People would bring offerings of food and money to the teacher's grandmother, who would then pass them on to the *pir*. When his grandmother died, this duty passed to his mother. However, she soon asked the *pir* for permission to give it up because it was making her ill, and afterwards she quickly recovered. The teacher interpreted his mother's illness as evidence of the power of the *pir*, and it contributed to his developing a belief in God, the Qur'an, and the Prophet.

During the Soviet period Muslim practice was diverse and 'de-centred'. There was no single authoritative voice that could reach a significant proportion of the population to create a hegemonic version of Islamic belief and practice. The Soviet state effectively prevented such definitions from being promoted or enforced. Until the *perestroika* reforms, education in the core Islamic texts was largely confined to the few who studied in the two official institutions in Uzbekistan or who were sent abroad. For the majority of the population, those who received knowledge of

¹⁵ Gleb Snesev (1992) and Vladimir Basilov (2003) have documented different forms of healing practices in Central Asia in the Soviet period. Saints were people considered to have been particularly close to God, such as prominent members of Sufi orders and figures from Islamic history such as Imam al-Bukhari.

¹⁶ When I asked this man why people did not go to the *pir* directly, he replied: 'The *hokim* [governor] has his own deputies, and the *pir* has as well and takes things through them. It's difficult to get a *dua* [blessing] from a *pir*. They only give it to people they like.' His grandmother first caught the *pir*'s attention when she was serving guests at a ceremony that the *pir* attended.

Islam did so through the informal teaching of *mahalla* mullahs or *otinchas* (female religious specialists).¹⁷

Most people developed their sense of Muslim selfhood through engagement in life-cycle rituals that created and confirmed them as members of their community; through their obligation to fulfil the duties of prayer, fasting, and participation in communal religious gatherings when they reached a certain age or position within the life cycle of their household; through engagement in what might be called transactional relationships with the divine through propitiatory ceremonies;¹⁸ or through their own encounters with divine power, as in the course of illness and healing experiences and dreams. These diverse modes of religiosity were embedded in distinct patterns of interaction between human, spirit, and divine agents and were founded on differing concepts of what constituted religious knowledge. Each existed alongside the others, and people engaged in one or more of them or avoided all but the most essential ceremonies such as circumcision of their sons.

Avoiding Becoming a ‘Wahhabi’ in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

Since independence Islam has been embraced by the Karimov regime as part of the recovery of national culture. It is an element within the regime’s legitimating discourses and the new national ideology promoted to replace the Marxist-Leninism of the Soviet Union. At the same time religious expression continues to be controlled through the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan. The central government itself now attempts to define Muslim orthodoxy and promotes Hanafi Islam as the only permissible version, although local practices such as shrine visitation and healing with spirits are tolerated because they are not perceived as posing political threats to the regime.

At the popular level, the revival of interest in and practice of Islam that began during *perestroika* increased further after independence. Mosque attendance went up dramatically, and people openly organized the religious gatherings they had held more discreetly in earlier years. A lecturer at Samarkand State University recalled that students asked for and received a prayer room in the university building and even remembered hearing the call

¹⁷ Babadjanov has given an account of Mahammadjan Hindustani, who established an informal school for the study of Islam in the Khrushchev era (Babadjanov and Kamilov 2001). Stéphane Dudoignon (2004) and Habiba Fathi (1997) have described the teaching activities of *otinchas*.

¹⁸ Bowen describes such transactional communication with spiritual entities in Indonesia (Bowen 1993: 229f.).

to prayer over the intercom system in some government departments. In 1996 a group of lecturers at another institute of higher education in the city, along with their friends and relatives, financed the building of a mosque near their institute and helped with the construction work. A vice-rector who had made the hajj to Mecca contributed the bulk of the money for the project. The group registered it with the Muslim Board as a Friday mosque, and it was attended mainly by staff and students of the institute.

As government policies towards Islam became more repressive, however, this trend reversed. The prayer room in the university was withdrawn, and by the time I began my first period of field research in Uzbekistan in 2000, broadcasting the call to prayer by loudspeaker had been banned.¹⁹ After the Tashkent bombings in early 1999 the vice-rector who had donated money to the building of the mosque was demoted to ordinary lecturer. The rector told him that the money should have been spent on improving facilities at the institute rather than on a mosque.²⁰ Just as the officials involved in the Imam al-Bukhari incident I recounted earlier were taken by surprise by changes in government policy, so too were many people in the early years of independence.

The imam at the mosque built by the institute lecturers told me that in 1996 it had been full of teachers and students, but this had changed after 1999:

Then the state imposed restrictions on religion. The teachers were afraid to come, and they told the students not to come either. They told them that if they went they couldn't study at the institute. They were afraid that one of them might become a Wahhabi. But we don't teach anything bad in the mosque. The state monitors us. There's nothing happening here that shouldn't happen. After that fewer people came to the mosque. People who had strong faith remained; the rest with weak faith left. Again they started doing the things they did in the age of ignorance [*johil davr*], drinking vodka, taking bribes. ... But when you die you will be asked if you prayed, if you knew God, if you fasted. The world of material concerns [*mol dunyo*] will pass. It is temporary.

On the occasions when I attended prayers at this mosque, there were usually around 40 people of varying ages at Friday noon prayers and only a handful of older men at noon prayers on other days. Although other mosques in the

¹⁹ This ban was imposed in early 1998 following the incidents I referred to earlier, in which several policemen were killed in Namangan. At the time of my second period of field research, in 2003–4, the call to prayer was once more being broadcast over loudspeakers, even at the unregistered *mahalla* mosques in Pakhtabad.

²⁰ I was told this by a lecturer at that institute.

city were better attended, imams generally commented that their congregations had dropped markedly after the 1999 bombings.

During my fieldwork in the spring of 2004 there were further bombings and attacks on the police, which the government attributed to Islamic extremists. Shortly after the first incident agents from security services visited the mosque in the *mahalla* in which I was living. They arrived at the time of the evening prayers and noted down the names and addresses of all those present.²¹ One of my friends was a devout Muslim, a young man who prayed at that mosque daily and was learning Arabic from the imam. He told me that he was avoiding the mosques for a while and also the main streets, because of the heavy police presence. He habitually wore a black felt cap, a style often favoured by devout Muslims over the Uzbek-style *doppa*, and he felt that he would be a target for their attention. Indeed, a few days later I was walking with him in a neighbouring *mahalla* when we were stopped by the *oqsoqol* (chairman of the *mahalla* committee), who advised him not to wear his cap because people would think he was a Wahhabi. He continued to wear it, however.

An atmosphere of fear, generated by the regime’s targeting of anyone perceived to have strongly held beliefs, surrounded anything to do with Islam. At the same time, a great many people continued to engage actively in Islam, praying regularly at mosques, holding funeral ceremonies and *mavlud* gatherings in honour of the Prophet, and visiting the shrines of Muslim saints. Moreover, I came across a number of young men like the one just mentioned who were studying Islam from *mahalla* mullahs or imams or from the numerous government-approved publications and recordings of sermons that were freely available. Particularly in Pakhtabad many young men were becoming *qoris* (reciters of the Qur’an), and they were much in demand at religious gatherings. State measures to control Muslim expression had not so much reduced religious practice in a crude way but rather altered the way it was expressed. In the atmosphere of fear and vulnerability at the time, the label ‘Wahhabi’ had come to represent any religious expression of which people were unsure, which did not fit the category of the clearly ‘acceptable’ or the ‘harmless’, and which might make those associated with it targets for the state security services. Fear of falling into the category ‘Wahhabi’ affected the way people chose to express their spirituality, and it could also be instrumentalized within personal rivalries.

An account of the building of another mosque illustrates some of these points. This one was in Pakhtabad, near Andijan. It was situated next to the existing main village mosque but had been planned on a grander scale. It

²¹ By visiting during the evening prayers they ensured that they would encounter only the most devout members of the congregation.

remained unfinished and unused, however, and people sometimes referred to it as the 'Wahhabi' mosque. Building had begun in 1992 with money that apparently came from Saudi Arabia or Kuwait (although people I asked were unsure). It was organized by a group of seven villagers, most of them well educated, who might be described as 'modernists'. The chief organizer of the mosque project was an engineer, and another prominent member was a Russian language teacher known for speaking a number of languages, including Arabic, and being knowledgeable about Islam. They believed people should study Islam directly from the Qur'an and Hadith and were critical of many village practices. They argued, for example, that the series of ceremonies that take place on the Thursdays and on the twentieth and fortieth days after a person dies were un-Islamic and that only one short funeral ceremony should be held. They argued about this with other villagers, including the imam of the main mosque, who was the leader of the 'traditionalist' camp. The building of the new mosque seems to have brought these rivalries to a head.

In 1995 this group was denounced as Wahhabi, and building on the new mosque came to a halt. The reason for the denunciation was that members of the group prayed at a particular mosque in Andijan attended by people who shared their approach to Islam. But government authorities identified the Andijan mosque as being controlled by Islamic extremists and closed it down. The traditionalist camp in the village used this as an opportunity to isolate the modernist group. The Russian teacher fled to Russia, fearing that he would be arrested. Although the others remained in the village and were left alone by the state authorities, the imam and his group organized a social boycott of the modernists that lasted until a year or so before my field research in 2003. They were not invited to village events such as marriage and circumcision feasts, and people were encouraged to avoid any events they held.

A factor that might have contributed to the identification of this group as Wahhabi is that around the time work started on the new mosque, a meeting was held at the main mosque with the aim of organizing the village into a new form of governing structure called an *amirlik* (emirate). Each *mahalla* in the village was to have a *yasaul* (judge), whose job it would be to maintain order and ensure moral behaviour, with a *yasaul boshi* (head judge) for the whole village. These *yasauls* were envisaged as part of a hierarchical structure that would integrate the village into the wider polity ruled by an *amir*. This attempt, however, came to nothing. The police arrived the next day and in cooperation with the imam of the main mosque prevented it from going any further.

I was unable to find out who instigated this meeting, which was still a politically sensitive topic, and I was unwilling to attract the attention of the security services to myself or those with whom I was associated by openly investigating the incident.²² Villagers with whom I did manage to talk about the incident claimed that the meeting had been organized by people from outside the village.²³ Probably few of the modernist group in the village were suspected by the law enforcement agencies of having anything to do with Islamic political movements, for none was ever arrested. However, the imam and the other traditionalists were able to use the prevailing atmosphere of vigilance against the threat of Islamic extremism, fostered by the central government, to discredit and isolate the modernists.

The label ‘Wahhabi’ is often applied to people and groups who in no way promote a reformist message of Islamic ‘purity’. Indeed, it can be used to direct the attention of law enforcement bodies to any religious activities that are unfamiliar. In Samarkand I came across what might loosely be called a ‘New Age’ group led by a charismatic healer whom I will refer to as ‘the Teacher’. He claimed to have been taken to the sixth level of heaven a number of times and to have come in direct contact with divine energy. He denied that his teachings constituted a religion at all but called his group a ‘school of life’. Religion, he said, instilled only fear, but in fact God is pure energy and love, and a part of this energy is inside each person. His philosophy seemed to draw on elements of Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. A large part of his practical message involved healing both

²² Unfortunately, I was able to obtain knowledge of this conflict only at second hand. Although many of the people involved were still in the village – including the imam, whom I met on a number of occasions – I was unable to talk about the issue. If I had openly asked people about issues related to political aspects of Islam, I would have put my research and the safety of the people who were helping me in danger. During my time in Samarkand I learned that I had been investigated by the security services because I had been observed attending mosques and talking to people. I found out about this because a friend from my local mosque had been told by the imam that he had been questioned about me and that I should keep a low profile. I believe the reason I was not prevented from continuing my research was that I was careful never to talk to anyone directly about politically sensitive issues unless I knew them very well, so the imams questioned by the security officers would have reported that I was merely interested in the ‘harmless’ topic of the role of religion in Uzbek culture. The circumspection I was forced to observe concerning sensitive issues no doubt affected my research. On the other hand, if I had directly broached such subjects I would not have been trusted.

²³ This incident occurred around the time of the events in Namangan surrounding the Adolat movement and the subsequent government clampdown on the group. It is possible that the meeting was organized by Adolat or a similar group.

physical and psychological pain and suffering and opening up the way to success in life.

The Teacher described how in 2001 he had given courses on his philosophy in the Centre for Spirituality and Enlightenment (*ma'naviyat va ma'rifat*) in the local government for six months. Students had paid 19,000 sum (about \$20) for the course, although the Teacher claimed that the director of the centre pocketed all of this and he himself received nothing. The head imam for the province of Samarkand objected to his teaching and informed the authorities in Tashkent that he was teaching Wahhabism. This imam must have known that the courses were not concerned with Islam, much less Wahhabism, but he used the accusation to launch an investigation. The teacher told the investigators that he spoke no Arabic and did not even perform the *namoz* (Muslim prayers), and the Wahhabism charge was dropped. He was charged with teaching without a licence, however, and fined the equivalent of around \$300. The courses were stopped. At the time I met him he was still not officially registered as a religious organization, although he continued to operate from his home.

People were careful to avoid anything that might lead to their being labelled Wahhabi. An English teacher in Pakhtabad with whose family I stayed while in the village told me that the head of the department of education for Andijan province had not long before been demoted to director of a district department because some of the teachers in his province had been arrested on charges of religious extremism. This director had warned the English teacher to be careful, because the security services would investigate him on the slightest pretext. He said this because the teacher was becoming known locally for his foreign contacts, beginning with me during my research in the village in 2000. Since then he had won a scholarship to study in the United States for a month and had been visited in the village by Americans connected with this programme and others. While in the United States the teacher stayed with a Christian family and was impressed with their hospitality and the fact that, contrary to his expectations, they did not drink alcohol. He read parts of the Bible during his stay but did not bring back a copy because he thought it would be dangerous to have that kind of religious literature in his house.²⁴

An Uzbek student who was attending the meetings of a Protestant Christian group in Samarkand told me his father was worried that the Bible

²⁴ Even though the Bible is approved by the government and so is not considered extremist literature, I was aware of one case in Samarkand in which a member of the Baptist Church was arrested for possessing a Bible at home. The pastor announced this during a Sunday service, saying that this was illegal and that when the case came to trial the man would be freed.

he brought home to his village might be Wahhabi literature. The student showed it to an *eshon* who was visiting,²⁵ who recognized it as the Bible and reassured the young man’s father that it was from God and there was no harm in reading it. However, after the bombings and attacks on police in the spring of 2004, his father forbade him to visit the group. (See Hilgers, this volume, for more on how Christian groups can become labelled ‘Wahhabi’.)

A village outreach worker for a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Samarkand that offered help to victims of domestic violence described how she initially encountered hostility from district government officials and *mahalla* leaders, who accused her organization of creating Wahhabis. This was because the group offered seminars to local women informing them of their rights under the law and raising awareness of the issue of domestic violence. She and her organization were accepted only after they demonstrated that they were able to offer concrete benefits to the community and forward the interests of local government officials. They offered medical and psychological help to victims, but the decisive factor was that they were able to mobilize aid from a foreign organization to build a school in cooperation with the local *mahalla* committees and the district government. This allowed the officials to claim credit for fulfilling directives from the central government to provide schools in their area.

These cases illustrate the ambiguity and flexibility of the label ‘Wahhabi’. Apart from one’s actually engaging in politically oriented religious activities, no fixed markers exist that would identify a person as being a Wahhabi. Human Rights Watch has reported that law enforcement agencies treat young men with beards as suspicious (Human Rights Watch 2004), but a number of young men in Pakhtabad had long ‘Islamic-style’ beards and were in fact devout Muslims, something of which everyone was aware. They were not arrested or harassed by the militia. Rather, what is ‘Wahhabi’ is contextually determined.

Bearded young men in Pakhtabad village who were established *qoris* (reciters of the Qur’an) were safe from the Wahhabi label because this was a conventional role and a clearly non-political mode of Muslim expression rooted in village practice. The same was true of officially appointed imams. When conducting my research I found that officially appointed imams were among the most open and easily approachable Muslims, whereas ‘ordinary’

²⁵ *Eshon* is an honorific title that in Uzbekistan is used to refer to descendants of the Prophet Muhammad or descendants of prominent leaders in Sufi orders. Often the title is purely nominal, in that it applies to members of certain ancestry irrespective of an individual *eshon*’s actual belief or religious knowledge. However, if the *eshon* is recognized as having deep knowledge of Islam and lives as a devout Muslim, he is often regarded as having privileged access to God’s grace.

mosque attendees tended to be reluctant to talk to me. When I administered a questionnaire on religiosity, it was not difficult to persuade these imams to complete it, and I was even able to gain the support of the head imam in the city for distributing it. However, it was very difficult to persuade others to fill it in unless I knew them personally or approached them through someone they knew well.²⁶

An official imam in Samarkand said that when he graduated from the *madrasa* he had not wanted to work as an imam because he felt he would be more effective in spreading Islam as a teacher of Arabic:

When I finished, I didn't want to work in religion at first. This was because I thought that if I was a teacher of the Arabic language in a *maktab* or a *litsei* [forms of secondary school], then during the classes I could bring the boys to Islam. If you sit in a mosque and do *ma'ruzas* [sermons], few young people come, only two or three. I wanted to teach young people the way, to teach them the difference between *halol* and *harom* [the religiously allowable and the forbidden], because the youth are our future. So I worked in an academic *litsei* for three years, from 1997 to 2000. I taught Arabic and also added the Hadith and the *adab akhloq* [morality] of our religion in the course of the lessons. Then in 1999 there were explosions in Tashkent. After that, the government stopped all Arabic lessons in *maktabs* and *litseis*. ... They said it was extremist Islamic groups. Our government didn't want people going over to extremist groups through the language. Some of the Arabic teachers were from that branch [*oqim*]. Because of them, they closed us all down. But these extremist groups, these attacks, are not Islamic. People don't have the right to do them. There's a Hadith, the prophet was asked who was a Muslim. He replied that a Muslim is he who in his speech and actions does not cause harm [*ozor*]. But how many people were killed in the bombings? This is forbidden in Islam. So I was made unemployed. I had two specializations in my diploma, Arabic teacher and *imom khatib* [official imam in charge of a mosque]. I had to change over to my second profession.

Qoris in Pakhtabad and officially appointed imams are able to express their Muslim beliefs in ways that in other institutional and social contexts would render them vulnerable to being labelled Wahhabis. But because of the ambiguity about what constitutes 'extremist' Islam, and because of the arbitrary criteria law enforcement agencies apply in targeting individuals as extremists, people can never be sure that they might not be made vulnerable

²⁶ This was a written questionnaire that was filled in by the respondents themselves.

to the charge if they step outside the boundaries of clearly authorized religious practice.

This is not to say that people are merely passive victims of the arbitrary actions of state officials. The cases I have presented show that many young men continue to actively engage with scripturalist Islam and find relatively ‘safe’ positions from which to express their religiosity and promote their own interpretations of Islam. The founder of the New Age movement I mentioned earlier continued to operate from his home and countered potential opposition from neighbours in his *mahalla* partly by taking full part in community life and contributing to *mahalla* projects. During the *navruz* (New Year) celebrations, for example, he prepared large quantities of the traditional dish *halisa* (a paste made from boiled meat and wheat) and distributed it to residents. The women’s NGO worker managed to overcome the initial opposition of local government and *mahalla* officials by supporting their agendas. People actively seek out means through which they can forward their own projects while avoiding being labelled Wahhabis.

Conclusion

If we want to study religious tolerance or civility, we should focus our attention not only upon religious groups themselves and the degree to which they are willing to accommodate difference but also upon the encompassing conditions of possibility within which individuals are able to express their faith and relate to that of others. In most societies debate or conflict exists within and between religious communities. Civility, however, is perhaps indexed not by the fact of conflict itself but by the way the conflict is expressed.

The way in which Muslims in Uzbekistan have been able to express their religious faith has been shaped in two important ways. First, state policy in both the Soviet and independence periods has had a direct influence by making certain forms of expression permissible and others not. The anti-religious policies of the Soviet state were part of an attempt to create new socialist subjectivities. Rather than eliminating commitment to Islam in Uzbekistan, however, they in effect prevented the hegemony of a single orthodoxy by inhibiting the engagement of the mass of the population in worship at mosques, the only sites where such orthodoxy was being promoted. As a result, religious expression became decentred. The particular form of Muslim expression that is based on engagement with the central scriptures of the Qur’an and Hadith became the province of a small, mainly state-regulated elite. The majority of the population expressed their Muslim faith through life-cycle and other rituals that reproduced their community

and their membership within it, as well as through transactional relations with spiritual agents.

Despite the fact that the post-independence government has embraced Islam within its state-building discourses, and most people seem genuinely to feel that religious freedoms have increased, the government's attempts to exclude certain forms of Islamic expression have had an effect similar to that of the Soviet state. Although scripturalist interpretations of Islam have become more popular since independence (Rasanayagam 2006), active and open proselytizing of forms of Islam other than the Hanafi version sanctioned by the government through the Muslim Board, and proselytizing by people other than representatives of the official structures, has been stifled. This has muted open and sustained confrontation between followers of scripturalist interpretations of Islam and practitioners of what they consider to be un-Islamic traditions (such as the visitation of shrines and healing with the aid of spirits) outside the restricted sphere of the mosque.

Second, civility in the religious sphere is constituted to a significant degree by the manner in which relations between individuals and groups are conducted and the extent to which individuals are able to affect the religious expression of others. Religious disputes are acted out within relations of power. Following Foucault, I do not see power as simply the exercise of coercive force by one party upon the other but as a relationship within which all parties draw upon diverse persuasive and coercive resources in advancing their positions. The coercive capacities of the state are significant in these relations, but the central government does not simply impose them upon its citizens. In Uzbekistan the condition of everyday vulnerability in effect distributes them throughout society, and this has a profound influence on the manner in which disputes in the religious sphere are conducted. It allows parties in local rivalries to use the Wahhabi label to discredit their opponents (whatever their actual beliefs or practices might be), to portray them as threats to the regime, and so to bring them to the attention of law enforcement bodies. Thus, the regime's mode of interaction in the religious sphere, its narrow interpretation of what is acceptable Islam and what is not, and its willingness to suppress any expression it deems a threat are to an extent generalized throughout society.

At the same time, because conflicts occur within particular social relations and involve particular groups and individuals, there are often no clear and consistent boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable religious expression. Between the clearly prohibited involvement in militant Islamic political movements and the permissible participation in 'traditional' Muslim practices such as life-cycle rituals and pilgrimages to the shrines of Muslim saints (some of which have become national monuments), a vast

field of action lies open to interpretation and negotiation. Thus the *madrasa* graduate who was unable to preach Islam as a teacher of Arabic was able to do so as an officially appointed imam. This flexibility provides a degree of freedom to individuals who can place themselves in relatively ‘safe’ locations within the official religious establishment, who are integrated into a social context within which their religious expression is recognized as acceptable, or who manage to develop relations of trust with people in key institutional positions.

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Chapter 6

Islam Contested: Nation, Religion, and Tradition in Post-Soviet Turkmenistan

Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi

Seventy years of Soviet dominance in Central Asia led to the destruction of Islamic institutions and the isolation of the region from the wider Islamic world. As a consequence, Islam in the Soviet Union became highly ‘localized and rendered synonymous with tradition’ (Khalid 2003: 577). The opening to the outside world that began gradually with glasnost and *perestroika* allowed the Muslims of the Soviet Union to re-establish external links. This process accelerated after the Soviet republics of Central Asia gained independence in 1991, when they saw an influx of foreign ideologies of Islam, mainly ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘reformist’ in orientation. Under the influence of these ideologies, indigenous Muslims, including parts of the religious hierarchy, began to find fault with local Islam and to call for the purging of what they regarded as alien to the prophetic tradition. But the ideal of global Islam, which regards as authentic only what is laid down in the Qur’an and the Hadith, comes into conflict with nation-building policies that evoke local religious traditions as indispensable parts of national identity.

Given the worldwide growth of radical Islamic movements, the role of Islam in the political development of Central Asia has attracted much international attention. Indeed, studies of Islam in Central Asia have been dominated by political scientists, who focus on political Islam and state policies towards it. Little is known, however, about the effects of divergent discourses on people’s everyday religious lives and orientations. This applies with particular force to Turkmenistan, the most repressive state in the region, where outsiders have little opportunity to make contact with local residents.¹

¹ After an assassination attempt on President Niyazov in 2002, Turkmenistan tightened its visa regulations, and for Westerners, entering the country became increasingly difficult.

Thus there is very little anthropological literature on post-Soviet Turkmenistan.²

This chapter is based largely on secondary materials, supplemented by observations I made during two short visits to Turkmenistan in 2004 and 2006. I went there first during a stay in Uzbekistan, where I carried out fieldwork on shrine pilgrimages, after my efforts to get official research permission for Turkmenistan proved hopeless. The occasion for the second visit was a conference in Ashgabat dedicated to the literary heritage of the medieval Turkmen poet Garajaoglan. Although my visits were short (four weeks altogether), they enabled me to gain some insights into religious discourses and conflicts then playing out at the micro level. In what follows, I first sketch the historical background, recent processes of nation-building, and the legal and institutional framework that regulates Islam in contemporary Turkmenistan. Then I present some case studies, the data for which were derived from participant observation at holy sites and family gatherings and from discussions in different parts of the country during my stay there.

Islam among the Turkmen: Historical Background

The Islamization of the Turkmen took place between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Sufi dervishes played a crucial role in the gradual process of conversion, allowing the new faith to be reconciled with indigenous religious beliefs and practices.³ Ancestor worship, predominant in pre-Islamic Turkmen traditions, persisted, albeit endowed with new spiritual meanings. Muslim holy men (*öwliýä*) who opened the region to Islam were often ascribed the status of communal ancestors by the Turkmen, who thus connected the conversion process to the origin of the community itself (see DeWeese 1994; Tyson 1997). The burial sites of such ‘ancestor Islami-cizers’ (Tyson 1997: 16) were turned into shrines, and pilgrimages (*zyýarat*) to them continue to be of great importance to many Turkmen.

For centuries the religious life of the Turkmen has been shaped by individual *ishans*, local Sufis believed to possess miraculous power, rather than by well-educated experts in the faith, and by local customs rather than by the prescriptions of Shari’a. A further characteristic of Islam in Turkmenistan is the existence of numerous ‘holy lineages’ (sing., *öwlat*) that

² The only anthropological works known to me are Tyson’s research on shrine pilgrimage (1997) and Blackwell’s study of women’s folk songs in Turkmenistan (2001).

³ For the Islamic conversion of Inner Asia and a discussion of indigenous, pre-Islamic religious concepts in the region, see DeWeese 1994: 17–67.

trace their genealogy back to one of the first four caliphs of Islam. Believing in the sacred origins of these lineages and their members' inherited spiritual powers, the Turkmen paid great reverence to the *öwlat*s who lived in their midst and who performed religious and social services for them. Those services included the provision not only of blessings, spiritual guidance, and healing but also of mediation in cases of inter-tribal and intra-tribal conflicts. Because of Soviet ideological dominance, the *öwlat*s lost some of their former authority, but they continue to enjoy a good reputation, especially in the countryside.⁴

Despite the Turkmen's early Islamization, tribal customary law (*däp*, *adat*) retained its validity among them and existed alongside (and often in contradiction to) Islamic religious law, the Shari'a. As the nineteenth-century Hungarian scholar Armin Vámbéry (2003 [1864]: 194) noted, 'among the Turkomans the "Deb" [*däp*] is obeyed; everything is practiced or abominated according to its injunctions. . . . It is remarkable how little the "Deb" has suffered in its struggle of eight centuries with Mahommedanism. Many usages, which are prohibited to the Islamite, and which the Mollahs make the object of violent attack, exist in all their ancient originality'.

Vámbéry was far from alone in describing Islam as having only minimal influence on the Turkmen. Because of the predominance of non-Qur'anic beliefs and practices among them and their relatively low level of canonical observance, the Turkmen, like the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, continue to be portrayed as 'nominal' or 'superficial' Muslims by foreign observers as well as by Muslim purists in their midst. Such notions, characteristic of Soviet and Western observers of Central Asia alike, fail to take into account the Turkmen's strong attachment to Islam and its crucial role in the formation of their collective identity. As Devin DeWeese (2002: 309) put it in his critique of what he called 'Sovietological Islamology', 'to restrict what is "Islamic" to the Qur'an and a limited body of Hadith may be the business of contemporary Muslim fundamentalists and the medieval jurists they cite, but it was never the business of the majority of self-defined Muslims over the centuries . . . and it is certainly not the business of scholars who would analyse and interpret Muslim religious life historically or at present'.

⁴ The most profound study of the institution of the *öwlat* among the Turkmen is that of Demidov (1976). See also Tyson 1997.

‘People, Motherland, Great Turkmenbashy’: Nation-Building in Turkmenistan

Independence brought no profound changes in the overall political system in Turkmenistan. The former Communist elites ‘remained firmly in control with virtually no challenge to [their] authority’ (Akbarzadeh 1999: 271), and Soviet-style one-party rule continued to determine the country’s political structure. In the first presidential elections after independence, held in June 1992, Saparmurat Niyazov, the former first secretary of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan and the only candidate, was elected with 99.5 per cent of the votes. In the absence of any organized political opposition, and supported by a constitution conferring almost absolute authority on the president, Niyazov succeeded in establishing the most autocratic regime among all successor states of the Soviet Union in Central Asia.⁵ In 1999 the People’s Council (Halk Maslahaty), headed by Niyazov himself, made him president for life.

In Turkmenistan, as in other new states in Central Asia, a top-down nation-building policy was set in motion following independence. Nowhere else in the region, however, has this process been as strongly identified with the person of the president as in Turkmenistan. Niyazov, later awarded the official title ‘Turkmenbashy [head of the Turkmen] the Great’, presents ‘loyalty to his person as integral to national identity’ (Akbarzadeh 1999: 274). In the official national discourse, Turkmenbashy and Turkmenistan have become as inseparable as patriotism and love for the president – a notion expressed in the slogan *Halk, Vatan, Beýik Türkmenbaşy!* (People, Motherland, Great Turkmenbashy!) and in the oath of loyalty (*kasem*) that is sworn daily at schools and at larger public events: ‘Turkmenistan, my beloved motherland, my beloved homeland! You are always with me in my thoughts and in my heart. For the slightest evil against you, let my hand be lost! For the slightest slander about you, let my tongue be lost! At the moment of my betrayal to my motherland, to her sacred banner, to Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashy, let my breath stop!’ (Turkmenbashy 2003).⁶

⁵ The only opposition party, the weak Unity Popular Movement (Agzybirlik Halk Hereketi), had already been eliminated in 1990, only a year after its founding. A social movement that formed in the last two years of the Soviet Union, it consisted of native intellectuals concerned mainly with health issues and ‘broader nationalist cultural demands pertaining to the legal status of the Turkmen language and religion’ (Akbarzadeh 1999: 271).

⁶ The opening session of the conference I attended in May 2006 began with the singing of the national anthem and concluded with the collective recitation of the oath of loyalty.

The Turkmen are said to possess one of the best-defined tribal structures in Central Asia (Tyson 1997: 16). Despite the tribes' claim to have originated from a single mythical ancestor, Oghuz Khan, relations among the tribes (sing., *taýpa*) prior to their incorporation into the Soviet Union were based on rivalry and frequent hostility.⁷ Although Soviet nationality policy contributed to the gradual emergence of national identity, kinship and tribal affiliations continued to be prime bases for group solidarity and loyalty among the Turkmen.⁸ On the eve of independence, experienced observers could thus attest that Turkmenistan resembled 'a tribal confederation rather than a modern nation' (Benningson and Wimbush 1985: 97).⁹

Niyazov justifies the enormous concentration of power in his hands by reference to the segmented character of Turkmen society. The nation, he claims, is in need of a single, powerful leader who carries it 'from trouble to happiness, from slavery to independence, from dividedness to unity' (Arıcı 1997: 142). The ongoing strength of tribal and clan affiliations appears to be seen as a serious obstacle for the success of nation-building and a latent challenge to the president's authority. Thus Niyazov calls on the Turkmen 'to give up the idea of tribe', because it 'causes the integrity of the nation to degenerate' (Turkmenbashi 2003: 147–48). But although discussing the existence of the various *taýpas* in public is discouraged, Niyazov nonetheless has taken pains to ensure the loyalty of clan elders (sing., *ýaşulu*) by including traditional institutions – albeit symbolically – in the political decision-making process. Among those institutions are the People's Assembly (Halk Maslahaty) and the Council of Elders, 'a body invented by Niyazov that harks back to the nomadic roots of the Turkmen people. It institutionalized the tradition of respect for authority and elders' (Al-Bassam 1997: 397).¹⁰

Many students of ethnicity point to the crucial role the past plays in the formulation and maintenance of collective identities. Ethnic or national groups usually base their consciousness of unity and singularity on events in a commonly shared past (see Assmann 1999: 132–33; Giesen 1999: 25–54). Such events are not necessarily merely imagined, in the sense that they lack

⁷ For a list of the major tribes and their subdivisions, see Abazov 2005: 152–53.

⁸ As Adrienne L. Edgar (2001) has shown, Soviet 'tribal policy' contributed to the persistence of traditional solidarity networks based on patrilineal descent and *taýpa* affiliation.

⁹ See also Freitag-Wirminhaus (1998: 158), who claimed that in independent Turkmenistan, solidarity and loyalty to the tribe continued to outweigh loyalties to 'the territorial community and . . . to the Turkmen nation'.

¹⁰ In pre-Soviet times the *maslahat* consisted of the headmen of the larger kin groups and represented 'the condensed public opinion' (Geiss 1999: 349).

any objective plausibility. But ‘histories and historical images are often mobilised for the strategic stabilisation of collective identities, and projected back to times immemorial: histories are turned into *historical myths*’ (Bader 1995: 133).¹¹

Turkmenistan’s current policy illustrates the strategic use of the past for the affirmation of national identity and unity. The (re)writing of history set in motion soon after independence constitutes one of the main pillars of nation-building. It focuses on three main issues: ‘changing the Soviet paradigm, emphasizing unique Turkmen national history rather than shared Turkic history and maintaining national solidarity by uniting the history of tribes and regions’ (Kuru 2002: 76). Niyazov’s book *Ruhnama* (The book of spirit), first published in 2001, serves as the most important means of disseminating the new official historiography. This book – described as presenting ‘the totality of the Turkmen mind, customs and traditions, intentions, doings and ideals’ (Turkmenbashy 2003: 23) – is the only available history textbook in the country. In order to maximize its effect, Niyazov has made it the core subject of education at school and university. To make space for the new curriculum subject called ‘*Ruhnama* studies’, other subjects, including foreign languages, chemistry, biology, and world history, have been dropped or cut back. As a condition of their employment, all public employees are tested on their knowledge of *Ruhnama*, as are university applicants.

Niyazov ascribes to the Turkmen a five-thousand-year-old tradition of statehood, disregarding any historical evidence to the contrary.¹² This legacy, he claims, has fallen into oblivion because of tribal rivalries and hostility. To re-establish themselves as a powerful nation, the leader argues, the Turkmen must, under his guidance, rediscover their past glory – hence the official discourse of ‘national revival’. Accordingly, Niyazov describes the aim of *Ruhnama* as being ‘to open the dwindling spring of national pride by clearing it of grass and stones and letting it flow again’ (Turkmenbashy 2003: 63).

The personality cult established by Niyazov does not allow for the cult of a single historical hero comparable to that of Timur in neighbouring Uzbekistan. Although both legendary and historical figures of the past are assigned important roles in the national pantheon, none of them is allowed to serve as a benchmark of Turkmen history. All heroes of the past must remain in the shadow of today’s Great Leader (*Beýik Serdar*), a notion manifested

¹¹ Translated from German by the author.

¹² ‘Scientific proof’ for the great antiquity of the Turkmen as a nation is provided by native archaeologists and historians working in academic institutions under the direct control of the president.

most impressively in the Monument of Independence in the capital, Ashgabad, where a gilded statue of the president dominates other historical figures in the centre of a marble fountain.

Abroad, Niyazov is often criticized for his extreme personality cult and for suppressing political opposition and violating human rights. At the same time, observers attest that Turkmenistan, which has witnessed no violent ethnic or religious conflict, has the greatest political stability of any country in present-day Central Asia. The president has even been said to enjoy the support of large parts of the population, especially in the countryside (Arici 1997; Freitag-Wirringhaus 1998; Dudarev 2001;). Rainer Freitag-Wirringhaus (1998: 195) claimed that Niyazov's popularity had its roots in the fact that his regime was consistent with the cultural orientation of the people, since he had 'managed to create an image of himself as supporter of the traditional values of Turkmen society and its political culture'. Bülent Arıcı (1997: 144) argued that it was 'this kind of negotiation with local culture and civil society which [gave] the political centre in Turkmenistan enormous power and leverage relative to other Central Asian countries'. Yet so long as we lack reliable information about how people actually experience the effects of this political system, assertions about the popularity of the regime cannot be verified.

State Policy towards Religion

According to its constitution, Turkmenistan is a 'democratic secular state operating under the rule of law'. In *Ruhnama*, Niyazov reproduces the paragraph that regulates the relationship between state and religion under the heading, 'My opinion concerning the foundation of independent and permanently neutral Turkmenistan':

The state guarantees the freedom of belief and worship for all religions and their equality before the law. Religious organizations are separate from the state and are not permitted to interfere with state affairs. The state educational system is separated from religious organizations and is of a secular nature. Everybody has the right to define his attitude towards religion, to profess any religion or not to profess any, either individually or jointly with others, to disseminate and publicize his beliefs concerning religion, and to participate in the practice of religious cults, rituals, and rites (Turkmenbashy 2003: 251).

In practice the state severely restricts religious activities in order to forestall the rise of independent religious organizations that could be an alternative focus of authority. Thus, as Shahram Akbarzadeh (1999: 285) notes, the 'break with the Soviet precedent is not as complete as the current regime

would like its citizens to believe'. The main government body for the control of religion is the 'Council for Religious Affairs [CRA] attached to the Office of the President'. To ensure loyalty, the president personally appoints the members of the directory board of the CRA, which consists of two Muslim religious leaders, the head of the Orthodox Church, and one government representative.

At the same time, the regime has taken pains to avoid giving the impression of anti-religious bias. In order to co-opt the Muslims who make up more than 90 percent of the population, it has incorporated Islam into the policy of nation-building. Islam is now identified as a cornerstone of national identity, and the state makes wide use of religious symbols and practices. In *Ruhnama* the president refers frequently to Islam, stressing its deep effect on 'the spirit of the Turkmen people' (Turkmenbashy 2003: 106), and his public speeches abound with religious expressions. During his official visit to Saudi Arabia in 1992, Niyazov made the hajj to Mecca, an event that received much publicity in the Turkmen media. He surrounds himself with mullahs at public appearances and has generously financed the construction of mosques, the number of which increased from 4 in the Soviet era to approximately 400 by the end of the 1990s. The Saparmurat Haji Mosque in Niyazov's home village, inaugurated with great pomp in October 2004, can accommodate 10,000 people and is officially claimed to be the largest mosque in Central Asia. With the construction of huge and lavishly decorated mosques, however, Niyazov aims at his own glorification rather than at the religious needs of the people, for only a minority of Turkmen observe the canonical prayers regularly and visit mosques in order to participate in religious services.

In many cases the construction of mosques has been supported by foreign countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Turkey.¹³ Up to the end of the 1990s Turkmenistan had no serious objections to the efforts of foreign Muslim countries and organizations to spread their understanding of Islam among the locals. Niyazov was apparently confident that fundamentalism 'would find no fertile soil in Turkmenistan' (Safronov 2000: 83). Shortly after independence, in order to provide the new mosques with religious personnel and to raise the educational standard of the imams, the regime welcomed activists from the Near East and Turkey with open arms. In addition, hundreds of young men were sent to institutions of higher Islamic education in Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. To support Islamic learning at home, a theological faculty was established at the university in Ashgabat, and three *madrasas* were opened in the countryside. The Qur'an

¹³ Turkey financed the largest and most ostentatious new mosque in Ashgabat.

was translated into the Turkmen language, imams were allowed to give lessons in religion in the mosques, and all kinds of religious literature became widely accessible.

Startled by developments in neighbouring Tajikistan and the rise of militant Islamic movements in other parts of the region, the state shifted its policy towards Islamic groups and institutions and became increasingly repressive beginning in the late 1990s. Since 1997 many mosques lacking official approval have been demolished or closed down. In 2001 all the newly established *madrasas* were abolished. At this writing, the theological faculty at the University in Ashgabat is the only institution providing Islamic education in the whole country, admitting no more than 15 to 20 students each year. About 300 Muslims from foreign countries were expelled from Turkmenistan, and it is no longer possible for future imams to study abroad (Burke 2005).

Interpretations of Islam that differ from that of the president are strongly discouraged. Indeed, religious pluralism appears as threatening as tribalism to the president's vision of a unified nation. Thus Niyazov 'has divided the religious spectrum into two distinct units: a Turkmen is supposed to be a Muslim while a European [is] an Orthodox [Christian]' (Peyrouse 2004: 49). In order to prevent further religious diversification, no Muslim is permitted to convert a Russian or European to Islam, and no Christian is allowed to proselytize among Muslims.¹⁴ The new religious law introduced in 1995 required existing religious communities to be validated by 500 signatures in order to obtain compulsory registration. Although the change had almost no effect on the Russian Orthodox Church, to which the vast majority of the country's non-Muslims belong, it succeeded in restraining the activities of small religious groups, mainly charismatic Protestant churches, that had moved into Turkmenistan after independence. In addition to Protestants, the Baha'i and Hare Krishna movements had succeeded in establishing several communities. Because most of the new groups failed to meet the legal conditions, they had either to close or to continue operating illegally. The latter can be punished by 2 to 13 months' wages, two years in a labour camp, or one year in prison. According to human rights activists' reports, pressure on unregistered religious groups increased sharply after 1999.¹⁵

¹⁴ For a similar policy in neighbouring Uzbekistan, see Hilgers, this volume.

¹⁵ For regular reports on violations of religious freedom in Turkmenistan, see Forum 18 News Service (www.forum18.org).

‘Turkmen Islam’ and the ‘Sacred *Ruhnama*’

Turkmenistan’s policy toward religion(s) does not differ basically from that of other Central Asian states. As Hilgers and Rasanayagam show elsewhere in this volume, Uzbekistan, too, exercises strict control over religious groups while seeking to exploit ‘the legitimizing potential of Islam’ (Akbarzadeh 2001: 462) in nation-building. What makes the case of Turkmenistan singular is the effort to create a religiously collared national ideology centred so specifically on the person of the president. In his attempt to mark off the Turkmen from other Islamic nations, Niyazov has sanctified indigenous religious customs and beliefs as the pillar of Turkmenness (*Türkmençilik*): ‘One of the factors that differentiates the Turkmen [nation] from other nations is our approach towards religion. . . . [The nation] has accepted Islam with its own interpretation. It managed to synthesize pre-Islamic beliefs and traditions with Islamic ones without deviating from the essence of Islamic principles. This strengthened the life of the nation because in this way the Turkmen nation was able to protect its own foundations’ (Turkmenbashy 2003: 173).

On the whole, Islam does not figure prominently in *Ruhnama*, which ascribes far more importance to what are regarded as national beliefs and customs. In spite of the book’s extended coverage of Turkmen history, it completely neglects the process of Islamic conversion. Rather, it claims for the Turkmen a tradition of monotheism that pre-dates not only Islam but also all other world religions: ‘O brother, for fifty centuries the Turkmen have been living . . . with the belief of Allah’, we learn on page 197. The conversion to a ‘monotheistic religion’ (the nature of which is not further described) by the mythical ancestor Oghuz Khan five thousand years earlier is evoked as the turning point in Turkmen history (p. 157). To the list of prophets acknowledged by the Qur’an, Niyazov adds Oghuz (Oguz) Khan, the ‘forefather of the Turkmen people’, as well as various historical figures of Turkmen origin: ‘In the history of the Turkmen, many men have been believed to be like prophets and described as godly, holy. We have never tried to force other people to believe that these are men who have prophecy, but we do believe that those were not ordinary people but worked saintly miracles [*karamat*], and we do not let others abuse our beliefs, either’ (pp. 42–43).

Here, as throughout *Ruhnama*, indigenous religious traditions are clearly incorporated, an attitude also manifested in the acknowledgement of saint veneration and shrine pilgrimage ‘as an expression of patriotism and an integral part of being a Turkmen’ (Tyson 1997: 16). The preference for ‘Turkmen Islam’, however, serves also to smooth the way for a more serious departure from Islamic orthodoxy. Thus, even if Niyazov stresses that the

Qur'an 'cannot be replaced or compared to any other book' (Turkmenbashy 2003: 21), he presents *Ruhnama* in a manner suggesting that it resembles the Qur'an and other holy books of mankind. He implies that with *Ruhnama* he has written another, final holy book, claiming that 'there were a number of words, special words, but not a whole word. *Ruhnama* should fill this gap' (p. 23). His account of how he was inspired to write the book is reminiscent of the Islamic narrative concerning the beginning of the revelation given to the Prophet Mohammed. According to the tradition, while Mohammed was engaged in devotional exercises in the cave of Hira near Mecca, the Angel Gabriel appeared to him and ordered him three times to 'read' until he finally accepted the call. In *Ruhnama*, the spirits of ancestors and epic heroes command Niyazov to write:

The soul of Oghuz Khan said: 'Write! The place where your nation came into existence will be the route; the place which your nation favours will be the territory; the wishes of your nation will be realized.' The soul of Gorkut ata said: 'Write! The things that the nation favours, and the things that are written on the fate, mind, and heart of the nation are sacred.' The soul of Gorogly said: '. . . Saparmurat, show the way of the golden life to the Turkmen nation' (p. 144).

Niyazov urges his people to see *Ruhnama*, in which he also prescribes the basics of moral and social behaviour, as a guidebook for their lives. The people should follow the shining examples of the president's deeds, feelings, and sayings, to which of course the book makes frequent reference. Here again are close parallels to the sunna of the Prophet Mohammed. Thus it come as no surprise that Niyazov has repeatedly been called 'prophet' by his followers and that *Ruhnama* is described in official and semi-official publications as 'sacred' (*mukaddes*): 'The Sacred *Ruhnama* enlightens the way for all of us, it is our candlestick [*şamçyragymyzdyr*]. . . . Each of its words is a miracle' (*Diýar – Türkmen Iliniň Žurnaly*, October 2002: 27). All mosques have to display a copy of it alongside the Qur'an, and imams are required to recite from it in Friday sermons.

The official Islamic establishment of the country approves of all state policies. Akbarzadeh (1999: 284–85) writes of the 'open nationalist postures of the Turkmen clergy', which may be explained in terms of sincerely held national commitments but also in terms of 'concern over possible official reprisals in case of deviation from state-sponsored proclamations'. Protests against presidential decisions regarding religion are rare, and critics risk harassment if not arrest. When Hojaahmet *ahun*, the translator of the Qur'an into Turkmen, openly criticized the use of the word *prophet* for the

president, his house and mosque were razed to the ground.¹⁶ The only comparable case known to me involved a young Saudi-trained imam who refused to lay out copies of *Ruhnama* in his mosque and to recite from it in his sermon. I was told that the authorities tried at first to convince him of his errors, but after weeks of futile negotiations he was replaced by an imam loyal to the president.¹⁷

The lack of open critique does not mean that alternative visions of Islam are non-existent. Considerations of political opportunism aside, large parts of the religious establishment appear to prefer an interpretation of Islam that embraces local customs and ‘does not impose a minute surveillance over the way of life or require everyday conduct to accord strictly to religious duties’ (Babadjanov 2004: 53). Others, however, hold the view that local Islam is incorrect and should be purged of unlawful innovations (*bid’a*) and alien religious traditions. The upholders of a puritanically minded, narrowly scripture-oriented Islam – usually labelled ‘Wahhabis’ in Turkmenistan as elsewhere in Central Asia (see McBrien, this volume; Rasanayagam, this volume) – are especially critical of shrine veneration and local traditions connected to death and marriage. The regime apparently leaves such Muslim purists in peace so long as they do not interfere in politics. According to my observation, they are not prevented from spreading their understanding of the faith at least in their immediate surroundings. In what follows, I discuss conflicts that can arise when differing views of what is religiously correct or acceptable collide.

‘Turkmen Islam’ versus ‘True Islam’

Atamyrat was a state employee in his late fifties in the northern provincial capital of Daşoguz when I visited him in 2004, thanks to an introduction from my host on the Uzbek side of the border (my field site in Khorezm was only a few kilometres from Atamyrat’s home). A Communist Party member during the Soviet era, Atamyrat turned to Islam some six years after independence. At the time we met, he observed the canonical Islamic rules conscientiously, including abstinence from alcohol. Because work conditions did not allow for religious observances on the job, he made up for missed prayers at home in the evening. Atamyrat’s ‘internal conversion’ had been sparked by a man with a profound background in Islamic sciences, who had studied at one of the main religious centres in a neighbouring country. Atamyrat described him as a ‘traditionalist’ (using the homonymic Russian

¹⁶ *Ahun* is the title for a religiously well-educated person.

¹⁷ Because this man disappeared from public shortly afterwards, my acquaintances supposed him to have been imprisoned.

word) with an inclination towards Sufism. A traditionalist, he explained, was someone who tolerated local religious customs, whereas a Wahhabi fought against them and accepted only what was written in the Qur'an. I soon discovered that Atamyrat himself belonged to the category he called traditionalist.

When I asked about saintly shrines, the topic I was investigating in Uzbekistan, Atamyrat advised me that saint veneration and shrine pilgrimage belonged to the sphere of 'Turkmen Islam'. 'Instead of taking refuge in Allah alone, as our religion demands, our people prefer to ask the saints for help. It is not correct, but it is our tradition.' To see how 'Turkmen Islam' worked, he invited me to join him the next day on a visit to relatives who lived in the vicinity of a popular shrine. After work we left for his native village, arriving there in the late evening. We spent the night in the house of his paternal cousin Yusup, a man in his late forties and head of a household consisting of his aged mother, his wife, three unmarried children, and a married son with wife and child.

On the way to the village Atamyrat talked openly about the religious orientation of his relatives, whom he described as Wahhabis. Wahabbism, he said, had a rather long tradition in the family. Two of Atamyrat's paternal uncles, one of them Yusup's father, had subscribed to it in the 1970s under the influence of religious books imported unofficially from abroad.¹⁸ Both uncles had served as mullahs in their communities and had brought up their children in strict accordance with Islamic law, prohibiting them from such amusements as watching television and dancing in the village culture house. Talking about his austere childhood, Yusup – who was watching an American action film on Russian TV when we arrived – assured me that he was far more liberal than his father and uncle, because he did not condemn cinema or television. But he also said that he was uncompromising concerning alcohol, music, dancing, and all kinds of un-Islamic religious traditions widely practiced by his countrymen. After independence Yusup had joined an Islamic movement called 'Right Way' (Doghru Yol), which still had a considerable number of supporters in the village, including most of his own lineage. They even established a separate mosque in the village for the exclusive use of the movement.

During the evening meal it became clear that Atamyrat's visit to his home village had an ulterior motive. He was expected to mediate in a conflict that threatened to divide the patrilineage. Its cause was the marriage of the son of one of Yusup's brothers, planned for two weeks later. While

¹⁸ On the dispersal of religious literature from foreign Muslim countries in Central Asia and the subsequent emergence of a 'new generation of Muslims', see Babadjanov 2004.

Yusup and his uncle – the latter characterized by Atamyrat as an even ‘more fanatical Wahhabi’ – pleaded for a Muslim-type marriage ceremony (*musul-manskii toý*), the father of the would-be bridegroom had decided in favour of a traditional Turkmen wedding combined with elements of Soviet-style marriage ceremonies, referred to as *komsomolskii toý*.

A traditional wedding in Turkmenistan usually begins with the ritual of ‘purchasing the bride’ by the groom’s relatives, who then take her to the paternal home of her future husband. When the groom’s party arrives at the bride’s house, it is denied entry until it has paid a sum of money. ‘At some weddings there is a fight between the two families at this time as the groom’s party tries to force an entrance. Although the fight is done in fun, on some occasions people end up with bloody noses and broken teeth’ (Blackwell 2001: 71). The next stage is a Soviet innovation: after the bride’s family has surrendered her, bride and bridegroom visit one or two important memorials in the town or the village, where photographs are taken and often a bottle of champagne emptied.

The *nika*, the Islamic marriage ceremony, is conducted by a mullah in the groom’s house in the presence of the young couple and some relatives. This is a short ceremony consisting of Qur’anic prayers, advice from the mullah concerning how to live as a good Muslim, and the drinking of sugared water as a symbol of future happiness. The climax of the wedding is the entertainment of a great number of guests (I was told that 400 to 500 was the norm) either at home or in a restaurant. Such entertainments are accompanied by music and dance and include the munificent provision of food and alcoholic drinks (one-fourth litre of vodka is calculated per male guest). The wedding is completed with the traditional ritual of *guşak açmak*, the unwrapping of the groom’s belt by the bride. It was described as follows by Carole Blackwell (2001: 75):

Still veiled and wearing the ceremonial coat on her head, the bride sat in a corner with her head bowed. . . . The bridegroom, accompanied by his friends, came and sat cross-legged in front his bride and asked her to take off his silk cummerbund. Since the cummerbund was very long and went around his waist several times, it was quite difficult to find the end. . . . Once the cummerbund was finally unraveled, the groom began to swat his friends with it to show them he was ready to be alone with his wife.¹⁹

A Muslim wedding, in contrast, lacks the traditional rituals of bride capture and *guşak açmak* as well as the more recent custom of visiting monuments.

¹⁹ A similar ritual, called *takatasha*, also forms a part of traditional wedding ceremonies in the province of Khorezm in Uzbekistan, where I carried out field research.

It consists rather of an elaborated *nika* ceremony conducted by one or more mullahs who deliver sermons about the principles of Islam, not only to the bride and bridegroom but to all the invited guests. To include such religious instruction at a wedding ceremony is a recent development, as it is in Kyrgyzstan (see McBrien, this volume). During the entertainment of guests that follows the *nika* and concludes in the afternoon, neither music nor alcohol is allowed, and gender segregation is enforced.

When Yusup's brother decided to celebrate a *komsomolskii toý* for his son, Yusup and numerous other relatives refused to support him financially or to take part in the ceremony. Such a failure to support relatives in life-cycle events is regarded as a severe violation of the principle of lineage solidarity and can lead to a split in the kinship group. In order to prevent an escalation of the conflict, the lineage elders had decided to ask Atamyrat to intervene, his qualifications being his profound religious knowledge and his proper personal practice of Islam. In addition, his good education and relatively senior position in the province administration gave him uncontested prestige in the family, a position acknowledged even by those 'Wahhabis' who otherwise criticized him for being too tolerant of un-Islamic traditions.

The issue was discussed the next day during an improvised family assembly in the house of the would-be bridegroom's father. This man, too, was a follower of Right Way and proudly showed me pictures of a son studying Islamic theology in Egypt and of a daughter married to an imam in Saudi Arabia. He defended his decision in front of his critics with the argument that he needed to consider the career of the son, a police constable, who was obliged to invite his colleagues to the wedding. 'If we do not celebrate a *toý* with vodka and music', he explained, 'we would do him a disservice.' For a state employee, to be considered a Wahhabi would result in disagreeable consequences. Yusup's party, however, rejected this argument, stressing that God's law had to be placed over that of man.

Finally Atamyrat submitted a compromise proposal. He suggested that the wedding ceremony be separated into two parts, a Muslim wedding in the morning and a *komsomolskii* one in the evening. Those relatives opposed to music, alcohol, and the mingling of the sexes could leave before the second part started, and they could contribute to the wedding costs without any moral issues arising. Yusup and some others of those present argued against this proposal on the grounds that even if they did not take part in the entertainment following the *nika*, they would commit a sin (*günä*) by contributing money for the wedding, because it could be used for forbidden (*haram*) actions such as buying alcohol and paying the musicians. We left the village after three days without the opposing parties having reached a

solution. I was told some time later that after a second intervention by Atamyrat, in order to maintain good relations among all the families involved, his compromise suggestion had been accepted.

Like many other Muslims all over the world, the Turkmen show great concern for their deceased relatives, which they express in commemoration rituals (*sadaka*) held on the third, seventh, and fortieth days after death and on the first anniversary of the death. In addition, a commemoration ritual called *uly* (great) *sadaka* is held every year in memory of all deceased members of the family. For a *sadaka*, which is ideally organized with the material and moral contribution of all relatives, one or more sheep are slaughtered and their meat, along with other food, is served to the guests paying visits of condolence. A mullah is invited in order to recite the Qur'an for the soul of the deceased. Remembering one's forebears in this way is held to ease their entrance into paradise and to make them happy in the after-life. I was repeatedly told the following story:

One day a man came before God and saw a great number of souls [*ruhlar*] sitting in a good mood [*keýpli*] in beautiful palaces while others were shuffling along sadly. When he asked God the reason for their differing moods and states he got the answer, 'Those whom you see sitting in the palaces are remembered by their relatives, who recite for them the Qur'an. The others, however, have been forgotten'.

Because commemoration rituals are at the very core of the traditional religious life of the Turkmen, they are targets for particularly vehement attacks by puritanical 'reformists'. Referring to the Islamic rule according to which the mourning period should not extend beyond three days following death, reformists take pains to convince their neighbours to abandon the unlawful practice of *sadaka*. In discussions about 'proper' Islam that I witnessed, reform-minded Muslims argued especially against the notion that the living could have any influence over what happened to the soul in the afterlife. They stressed that according to Islam every man and woman would be judged by his or her deeds and that no one was able to influence God's decisions.

Discussing the issue with another family whose guest I was for a few days, I was told of a conflict similar to that in Atamyrat's family. This extended family was scattered across the country, and some relatives lived in Russia. Because of this they had for several years been unable to carry out *sadaka* in the proper way. One day my host's sister called him from Russia and suggested that all relatives come together in the town where their dead were buried to carry out an *uly sadaka* for all of them. Although two 'Wahhabis' – one of whom lived in the town where the ritual was planned –

objected to the plan on Islamic grounds, the family nonetheless gathered on the appointed day. My host continued:

We spent a whole day trying to convince our uncle to allow the ritual to be carried out at his place. Although he agreed that praying for the souls of the deceased was an Islamic duty, he opposed the slaughtering of several sheep and the invitation of a great number of people, arguing that these were unlawful at such an occasion. I appealed to his sense of hospitality. I said, 'Look, so many guests have arrived. They came to carry out *sadaka* in memory of all of our forebears. It would be a shame [*mashara*] to let them return without carrying out what they came for.' Finally we agreed on a compromise. He agreed to take part in the *sadaka* on condition that half the meat of the sheep slaughtered was distributed as alms among the poor.

Shrines and shrine pilgrimages (*zyyarat*), officially acclaimed as integral parts of national culture and identity, are also contested. Although the official religious hierarchy approves of shrine visitations, in private conversations the spread of counter-propaganda can be felt. When Atamyrat asked his cousin Yusup to give us a ride to a famous shrine some 30 kilometres from his village, he refused, saying that saint veneration was no less sinful than drinking alcohol. Atamyrat's reasoning that my interest was purely scientific had little effect; Yusup was determined to prevent me from dealing with 'superstitions'.

His negative stance caused the women of the family to intervene. Notwithstanding her own dismissive attitude towards shrine veneration, Yusup's mother berated him for his violation of the law of hospitality. Finally Yusup agreed to take us along in his car. Although he even accompanied us inside the shrine, his entire manner expressed deprecation. Whereas Atamyrat did not hesitate to raise his hands in prayer when the shrine keeper blessed the pilgrims, Yusup stood ostentatiously aside, refusing even to return the greetings usually exchanged at a holy site. Later Atamyrat told me that only my presence had held him back from abusing the pilgrims because of their un-Islamic behaviour: 'Usually he misses no opportunity to preach to people Islam as he understands it'.

The shrine itself had been renovated in the first years of independence. In order to meet pilgrims' needs, the local administration had erected a simple building in its immediate vicinity. This building held facilities for the slaughter of sacrificial animals, the meat of which could be prepared in a large kitchen equipped with all necessary utensils. The refectory was large enough to be used by some hundred pilgrims simultaneously. But although

our visit fell on a Friday, the number of pilgrims that day was not large: during one hour I estimated about 50 visitors, mainly women.

Interest in shrine pilgrimage was said to have peaked dramatically during the first years of independence but to have declined more recently. Increased knowledge of what was regarded as proper Islamic practice may have been partly responsible for this development. The guardian of a saintly shrine complained about a recent drop in the number of visitors and made the Wahhabists responsible. He presented himself as a member of one of the *öwlat* groups and a direct descendant of the saint himself:

The shrine was bulldozed by the Soviets when I was a child. After independence I got permission to rebuild it. I erected the shrine you see now with the help of the people in the vicinity. In the first years, a lot of pilgrims came to pay their respects to our saint. But since the Wahhabi disaster [*bela*] far fewer people come to ask the saint for help. Many stopped coming because they became Wahhabis themselves or because they do not want to expose themselves to criticism and insults. They should live their Islam as they like, but why do they interfere with ours?

Conclusion

The nation-state project envisaged by President Niyazov after independence could not rely on past political entities as a point of reference. In consequence, as in many other new states, “the element of modernist invention was necessarily great” (Hann 1997: 126). With his book *Ruhnama*, Niyazov attempted to provide the Turkmen with a five-thousand-year history and a memory of great empires they had erected. Because the universalistic claims of Islam could undermine the attempt to create for the Turkmen a unique place among the nations, Niyazov stressed ‘Turkmen Islam’ as a unique religion that distinguished his people from the rest of the Islamic world. *Ruhnama* is repeatedly called “sacred” (*mukaddes*) in the nationalist discourse. In it the nation, its values, and even its president became sanctified. This phenomenon resembles in many ways the notion of civil religion, understood as ‘the religious or quasi-religious regard for certain civic values and traditions found recurrently in the history of the political state’ (Nisbet 1987: 524).

Tolerance, a key element of civil religion, is not to be found at the level of the present Turkmen state. It is well developed, however, in traditional Turkmen religiosity. This type of religion is tolerant in that it is not constrained into a set of dogmas and laws, and its adherents do not attempt to impose their beliefs and practices on others. Normative ideals of tolerance are not verbalized, but they are manifested in times of crises when

people are confronted with or threatened by the religious intolerance of others. The guardian of the shrine just quoted represents this type of tolerance, whereas Yusup's fundamentalist attitude represents intolerance. Atamyrat, the other protagonist in the preceding story, represents a relatively secular type of religiosity, in the sense that he regards religion merely as a matter of private conscience. Although he shares his cousin's views about the non-Islamic nature of certain religious practices, he rejects imposing these views on others who think and behave differently. Thus, as in every other society, religious life in Turkmenistan has both tolerant and intolerant sides to it. The state's policy, however, may be strengthening a more intolerant form of Islam, which people have begun to view as a solution to the everyday misery brought upon them by independence.

Because the official ideology evokes 'Turkmen Islam' as the cornerstone of national identity, adherence to universalistic Islamic values implies opposition to the state and its president. In the case I described, discussions between upholders of 'genuine' Islam (Yusup and his supporters) and Atamyrat, who displayed a more tolerant attitude towards traditions, found parallels in discussions about the president and his policy. The parties' positions were determined largely by their respective experiences of post-Soviet reality. As a state employee in a fairly influential position, Atamyrat had a safe, if moderate, monthly income and could rely on an extended social network that enabled him to cope with everyday difficulties. The 'Wahhabis' among his kin, on the other hand, belonged to the 'losers' of postsocialist transformation. Yusup, for example, had lost his job as a factory worker soon after independence, and a shop he opened later also failed. His wife, a former nurse, became unemployed when the president abolished all nursing positions at state hospitals, replacing the nurses with less educated paramedics.

For Yusup and the other opponents of the *komsomolskii* wedding, Islam offered an ideological means of expressing their dissatisfaction with the prevailing political and economic situation. Thus, during the quarrels over the wedding arrangements, the 'Wahhabis' of the family complained not only about what they called the 'abuse of Islam' by the president but also about political independence, which had brought impoverishment for the majority. Atamyrat, for his part, tended to draw a positive image of the regime, reminding his kin of the severe suppression of religion by the Soviets. Although he admitted that Niyazov's policy was far from ideal, he argued for submission to the president's will, reciting a Hadith according to which a Muslim has first to obey Allah and after him the ruler (*padişah*). 'It is the ruler, he said, 'who will recommend his people to Allah at the Day of Judgement'.

Although the 'Wahhabis' denied the authenticity of this Hadith, stressing that every Muslim was personally responsible for himself in front of God, in the family conflict over the wedding they accepted Atamyrat's suggested compromise. The crucial motivation underlying this decision was probably consideration for the unwritten law of lineage solidarity. Because the 'Wahhabis' were among the economically weakest members of the kinship group, they could not afford to violate the law of reciprocity by refusing moral and – however modest – financial support for their relative's wedding. As one of them reportedly argued, 'at present it is more important than ever to stick together, because you can never know when you will need the support of your relatives'.

It seems, then, that Islam, with its inherent ideal of social justice, appealed especially to the segment of the community that had experienced the greatest losses in the course of post-independence transformations. This group was the most heavily dependent on kinship solidarity, traditionally manifested in and reinforced by wedding ceremonies and commemoration rituals. It can be concluded that although prevailing political and economic conditions in Turkmenistan are conducive to the acceptance of strict Islamic ideals, at the same time those conditions strengthen traditional forms of social organization and thereby mitigate the consequences of that acceptance in practice. The question of how far these observations are valid throughout Turkmenistan can be answered only in the light of further, more intensive field studies.

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Chapter 7

‘You Come to Us Like a Black Cloud’: Universal versus Local Islam in Tajikistan

Manja Stephan

Fifteen years after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the political authorities in Tajikistan, like those elsewhere in the region, are preoccupied with consolidating the new nation-state. Terms such as *democratization*, *opening to a free market economy*, and *secularization* dominate the political agenda. Liberalization in the sphere of religion has led to a growing diversity of religious identities.¹ Christian churches have become much more visible, and several groups and missionary sects are attracting increasing numbers of Muslim converts (Arabov 2003: 59–62). This facet of post-Soviet reality ruptures traditional ethno-religious boundaries and subjects the peaceful co-existence of Islam and Christianity to a hard test, as violent attacks on several churches in Dushanbe in 2000 showed (US Department of State 2001: 3; Dudoignon 2004: 143; Peyrouse 2004: 48).

At the same time, conditions have been conducive to a broader diversity of religious expression and interpretation within the local Islamic tradition. After the disintegration of the USSR, Tajikistan could no longer be viewed as an ‘oasis of calmness’ (Mullojonov 2001: 221). A window was opened to the wider Islamic world, from which Central Asia had been cut off for more than 70 years. New forms of religious knowledge were ‘imported’ by various media, by teachers and missionaries from Islamic countries, and by Tajiks who used their newly won freedom to travel to Islamic countries in order to study Islam. Confronted with different practices and interpretations of Islam abroad, many experienced an intensification of their faith. Back home such persons spread their new understandings within their local Muslim communities. This inevitably led to confrontations between uni-

¹ Article 26 of the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan and Paragraph 3 of the Law on Religion and Religious Institutions of 1998 proclaim the right to and the free choice of religion and the right to practice that religion alone and in association with others.

versalist or scriptural interpretations of Islam and the local Islamic tradition (see Hilgers, this volume; McBrien, this volume).

The dynamics unleashed by the proclamation of religious freedom have been contradicted, however, by the ambivalent attitude of the Tajik government towards religion, particularly Islam. The authorities promote the ideal of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians (Peyrouse 2004: 48), but more on the basis of historical traditions than of the new post-Soviet religious pluralism. Although as a general trend the various Christian churches are tolerated, Islamic organizations have increasingly experienced limitations and several waves of mosque closures, particularly in the northern part of the country (Human Rights Watch 2003: 2; Forum 18 News Service 2006: 1). The political authorities treat Islam merely as a 'security issue' (Epkenhans 2006: 9), and Wahhabism and Islamic movements such as Hizb ut-Tahrir are viewed with great suspicion.²

Even though Tajikistan, in comparison with neighbouring Uzbekistan (see Hilgers, this volume; Rasanayagam, this volume), follows a more lenient policy towards religious communities, the country has increasingly drawn criticism from the international community. The presumed threat of fundamentalism and the emergence of innumerable unregistered mosques in the course of the Islamic boom have spurred the government to a drastic interpretation of the existing Law on Religion and Religious Institutions in recent years, in order to tighten the registration of mosques and religious organizations in general (Forum 18 News Service 2003: 1, 2; Human Rights Watch 2003: 2).³

Under these circumstances it seems that the limits of civility in the sense of acceptance and tolerance of other religious groups are to be found in particular within the dominant Muslim tradition. In this chapter I explore changing Islamic identities against the background of the liberalization of religion, on the one hand, and the alleged threat of Wahhabism and Islamic

² The term *Wahhabism* originated with an eighteenth-century Muslim movement on the Arabian peninsula that was based on the doctrine of the reformer Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Later the term acquired a negative connotation because members of the movement were designated 'extremists'. The negative sense of the term has been applied by political authorities in Central Asia, during both Soviet and post-Soviet times, to stigmatize practices and interpretations of Islam that do not fit with officially promoted ideas of Islam (see also McBrien, this volume).

³ The situation was aggravated in northern Tajikistan in particular in 2002, when President Rahmonov announced that several prisoners at the American base on Guantánamo bay had been identified as Tajiks from the Isfara district (Forum 18 News Service 2003: 1, 2).

radicalism, on the other. I am particularly interested in the way young Tajiks express their subjective Muslim identity and their understanding of Islam.⁴

Islam in Post-Soviet Tajikistan

As in the other Central Asian republics, the great majority of the Tajik population – more than 90 per cent – declares itself Muslim. Most are Sunnis of the Hanafi school. Unlike the religious map of the neighbouring Muslim countries, the Tajikistan map includes a large group of Ismailis, a branch of Shi’ite Islam, concentrated in the mountainous Badakhshan region in eastern Tajikistan as well as in certain districts of the southern Khatlon region and in Dushanbe (US Department of State 2005: 1).

According to the constitution, and particularly according to the Law on Religion and Religious Institutions, passed in 1998, Tajikistan is a secular (*dunyovy*) state. Its secular character is manifested in the disestablishment of the church and the non-intervention of religious organizations in state affairs, in the perception of religion as a private concern, in the independent right to choose any religion or atheism, and in the separation of the education system from religion (Akhmedov 2005: 96).

Although the great majority of Tajiks are Muslims, recent governments have followed the political course of the former Soviet regime. President Rahmonov’s idea of secularism could be viewed as anti-religious (certainly as anti-extremist) rather than as non-religious (US Department of State 2001: 2, 2005: 2). Islam is excluded from the officially promoted concept of the Tajik nation. Instead, modern Tajik historiography underlines the crucial role of the Samanid empire in the formation of the Tajik nation. The Samanids, an Iranian dynasty that ruled the heartland of Transoxania in the tenth century (see Frye 1997), were indeed selected carefully by the government in order to underline the Iranian-Persian origin of the Tajik people and to distinguish them culturally and linguistically from the Turkish peoples of neighbouring countries. The public presentation of the Samanids as an autochthonous and anti-Islamic ruling dynasty is part of the political authorities’ attempt to reinvent a long tradition of secular Tajik statehood (*davlatdorii tojikon*) (Asadullajew 1998: 28; Rahmonov 1999).

⁴ This question is embedded in the broader context of my PhD project about religious and moral education in present-day Tajikistan. The topic formed part of a larger research project, ‘Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States’, undertaken between 2002 and 2006 at the Ruhr University of Bochum. The data presented here are based on ten months of fieldwork I conducted between 2002 and 2004 in the capital, Dushanbe, as well as in the rural areas of Kofarnihon and Hisar.

Even if the government insists on the idea of secularism, a certain degree of 'Islamisation of politics' (Epkenhans 2006: 10) has nonetheless taken place. The recognition of two Islamic holy days, Id Al-Fitr and Idi Qurbon, as state holidays is a concession to the Muslim background of the majority of the population. Together with Iranian cultural heritage, the religious spirituality and the ethics of Islam are recognized by Rahmonov as the major foundations of Tajik cultural identity (Akhmedov 2005: 97). The separation of religion from the educational system prohibits religious instruction at state schools, yet the government demands that the registered (Islamic) religious organizations help the state in the humanistic and moral education of society. In order to fight 'ignorance, corruption and amorality', representatives of 'official' Islam are asked to include this kind of education in their Friday sermons (*khutba*) and to make it known through radio and television (Akhmedov 2005: 98).

Islam in Tajikistan has strong regional identities and differences. The country's independence, proclaimed in September 1991, promoted a general turn to Islam in all spheres of society, reflecting people's wishes to be rid of the Communist ideology of the Soviet regime. Islam was available as an alternative model of cultural identity, representing non-Soviet and non-Russian cultural values (Tajbakhsh 1998: 174). In general, religion in Soviet times had been 'domesticated' – sequestered in private life (Dragazde 1993). Now it was possible to return it to the public sphere. In Tajikistan dozens of mosques were reopened, even in the more secularized towns. In rural areas, new mosques with brightly coloured walls and gleaming roofs visible from afar showed the vitality of Islam. Built mainly with the financial support of wealthy businessmen, their spacious rooms often attracted townspeople as well as local villagers. In 2004, 231 Friday mosques (*masjidi jum'a*) and 3,082 smaller mosques (*masjid*) were registered with the Department for Religious Affairs (*kumitai diny*), the central governmental body dealing with religious issues (Rahimov 2006: 1).

Increasing interest in Islam led to both a demand for institutional religious education and a blossoming of home teaching. The latter was an old tradition in Central Asia that had helped to preserve the Islamic identity of the Tajik population in the Soviet era. The religious instruction of the masses was also promoted in bookshops and bazaars attached to local mosques. People could now readily find popular Muslim textbooks republished in Tajik – books that had traditionally played a significant role in the cultural memory of Muslims in the region, such as *Chahor Kitob* (see Shahrani 1991) – as well as Islamic literature from Turkey, Russia, Iran, and

elsewhere.⁵ Audio- and videotapes constituted a special form of ‘religious entertainment’ that, packaged as a mix of religious instruction and popular entertainment, carried the words of famous local preachers into Muslim homes.

The new mosques have served as places of innovation, even in matters of gender. Some offer an opportunity for women to participate in public religious life. In the Kofarnihon district east of Dushanbe, for example, a new mosque with white walls dominates the suburb. It offers a special room in which women can perform prayers and listen to Friday sermons over loudspeakers. This mosque appeals to women from the capital, who go there together with female neighbours or relatives or accompanied by their husbands. Their practice is consistent with a general trend that attaches high priority to women’s access to Islamic knowledge. Most urban centres now offer special training for women. In Dushanbe, both the new Islamic university, Imom Termizi, established in 1997 by the Council of Ulama (*shūrai ulamo*), an official body regulating religious life in the country, and the Iranian culture centre have opened courses in which females of all ages learn the Arabic alphabet and recite the Qur’an.

Parallel to the visible revival of public religious life, the ‘Islamic boom’ has promoted a diversity of ideas about Islam in Tajikistan. Tajikistan is the only country in Central Asia that has legalized an Islamic political party. The Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston (Party of Islamic Renewal of Tajikistan, IRPT), a regional branch of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), was established in 1990 and emerged as a crucial political player soon after independence (though as part of the opposition, it was little involved in the struggles for power that resulted in a brutal civil war between 1992 and 1997).

Moreover, representatives of a reforming movement in Islam that arose in the early 1970s began to criticize popular practices such as the veneration of saints and funeral ceremonies accompanied by lengthy meals and the distribution of money to those present. This criticism soon led to conflict with traditional clerics (Rahnamo 2004: 5; see also Jessa, this volume). The reformers, who later designated themselves *javon mulloyon* (young mullahs; Dudoignon 2004: 142), also attacked the representatives of ‘official’ Islam because of their conformity and loyalty to the government (Mullojonov 2001: 227). The political authorities labelled Islamic reformers generically as ‘Wahhabis’ and identified them as a movement alien to traditional Islam (Rahnamo 2004: 5).

⁵ Generally featuring a better quality of printing, these imported books are beyond the means of the majority of Tajiks.

In the villages of Tajikistan, Islam is highly visible and strongly influences the inhabitants' everyday lives. By contrast, Western and Russian patterns of customs and dress still dominate public life in the bigger cities (Epkenhans 2006: 1). Yet in the last decade the Soviet image of the city as a 'bulwark of secularism' has begun to crumble. Partly owing to large numbers of migrants who fled to the towns because of economic distress, Islam is reassuming its prominence in urban areas. Young people with rural backgrounds fill the mosques of the once secular cities, and the spread of traditional dress codes and family models has been rapid (ICG 2003b: 20). This 're-Islamization' of towns is accompanied by a general re-traditionalization of social life, affecting in particular the family domain and the social role of women, because men use Islam to legitimate their patriarchal power (Tajbakhsh 1998: 177–78; ICG 2003a: 19). Customary forms of Islamic family law never disappeared completely, and in recent years they have become stronger than secular law. Marriage, for example, is officially regulated by civil law, yet marriages of minors as well as polygyny are increasingly a social reality (Tajbakhsh 1998: 180; Usmonov 2002: 61).

The trend towards re-traditionalizing Tajik family life is consistent with the promotion of the 'national idea' (*ghoyai milly*) by Tajik political authorities. Government officials are struggling to consolidate a cultural identity after the civil war, and that identity is based on the idealization of values associated with rural life and the glorification of the past (Tajbakhsh 1998: 167–68). At the same time, the return to eastern models of society is a negative reaction on the part of nationalist and Islamic movements to the discredited Communist ideology. For both positive and negative reasons, therefore, the new cultural elites of Tajikistan are promoting models of the 'Eastern family' (*oilai sharqy*) and 'Eastern morality' (*odobi sharqy*) and stressing the role of Islam as the spiritual and ethical fundament of Tajik society.⁶

The civil war interrupted the Islamic boom and had serious consequences for religious tolerance in Tajikistan. Not only did the official political line towards Islam harden, but also the Muslim population became more politicized. This led to a segregation of Islam along ethnic lines – that is, the designation of 'ethnic mosques' for use by either Uzbeks or Tajiks

⁶ The appeal to return to models of 'eastern morality' comes in particular from new ethical books directed mainly at the younger generation. One example is *Oila Odobi* (Uzbek, Family ethics), by the Uzbek author and poet Sulaimon Ermatov, published in 2003. I learned during a talk with a representative of the Ministry of Education in Dushanbe in April 2004 that the ministry planned to translate the book into Tajik and include it in the curriculum of ethics courses in state schools.

only.⁷ The war also severely affected women’s roles in public life. Women in modern dress and lacking a headscarf (*rumol*) experienced harassment and cruel sanctions, even in more secularized areas such as the capital (Tajbakhsh 1998: 175). These images of Islam during the civil war left a ‘negative psychological effect’ (Rahnamo 2004: 5) and caused some to turn away from Islam.⁸

In addition, the difficult economic situation and the need to work hard throughout the day were cited by some as a reason for failing to observe daily prayers. This applied particularly to young male breadwinners. For example, in Dushanbe a young male student at the Pedagogical Institute told me he had had to break off his private religious training by a mullah in order to help his father, who was a fabric seller at the bazaar. The young man travelled to China twice a month to buy fabrics for his father. Part of the money they made from this business was being saved for his wedding, which his parents planned for the near future.

Young people’s attitudes towards Islam are also shaped by the inability of many mullahs to meet the ‘modern spiritual requirements of young people, who view everything in a modern way’ (Rahnamo 2004: 8). This is true of both mullahs who have received formal Islamic training and represent ‘official’ Islam and those who were trained through self-study or private teaching outside of official structures and who form the ‘unofficial’ Islam.⁹ Traditional teaching methods do not stimulate interest in Islam. Generally the institutional weakness of Islam in Tajikistan is marked by a shortage of educated mullahs and Islamic scholars (*ulamo*) who could oppose the messages of Hizb ut-Tahrir and of proselytizing Christian groups (Dudoignon 2004: 142). For Dudoignon this ‘social and intellectual lacuna ... seems to be specific for Tajikistan, a country which, during the Soviet period, did not enjoy an important access to Islamic higher educational institutions, then located in Uzbekistan’ (Dudoignon 2004: 142).

A New Islamic Elite

With independence, Tajiks were suddenly in a position to visit other countries of the Islamic world. Mecca, of course, is the prime destination,

⁷ The ethnic mosques disappeared soon after the civil war and were never mentioned again.

⁸ In Dushanbe I met several middle-aged Tajik men who explained: ‘We can’t forget what our people did with their own Tajik fellow Muslims. Therefore I lost my interest in religion [*Dilam az din khumuk shud*].’

⁹ A careful categorization of Islamic authorities in Tajikistan is given by Epkenhans (2006: 11–14).

but besides hajjis, another group of Muslim travellers consists of young men who go abroad for Islamic education, mostly to Pakistan, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. It has been estimated that between 1,500 (ICG 2003a: 18) and 3,000 (Olimova 2005: 247) men have studied abroad in this way since 1991. Little is known about their social backgrounds, but some are the children of Tajiks who lived in exile in Afghanistan during the civil war (ICG 2003a: 18). According to my data, many young men are supported by their immediate families or more distant relatives for this purpose. They include the offspring of representatives of the official Islamic clergy.¹⁰

The increasing interest in private education abroad is also an indication of the poor quality of the institutional Islamic education available in Tajikistan. This is a result of the insufficient knowledge of teaching personnel, traditional teaching methods, a shortage of teaching materials, and curriculums that are often reduced to memorizing the Qur'an and Hadith (ICG 2003a: 17–18; Olimova 2005: 243–51).¹¹ To address this deficiency the government has begun sending students from the Islamic University in Dushanbe abroad, in order to train the future official religious elites of the country.

Meanwhile, the first Islamic students have already returned from their places of study. Back at home they are confronted with the government's increasingly ambivalent attitude towards foreign graduates and with suspicion on the part of elements of the local Muslim communities. The government ignores the fact that these students are better educated than the majority of local mullahs and treats them as potentially dangerous influences on society and religious harmony. Foreign graduates are associated with the diffuse phenomenon of Wahhabism. President Rahmonov argued: 'If each graduate of these theological schools preaches Wahhabism, it will lead to a religious split and differences and may prepare the ground for destabilization of the situation of the republic.'¹² Consequently, the same government that sent these young men abroad ends up denying them access to positions as imams and isolates them from the official system (ICG 2003a: 18; Epkenhans 2006: 13–14). Both students sent abroad by the government and

¹⁰ To give an example, the imam of a Friday mosque in the centre of Dushanbe told me in 2004 that he had recently sent his 12-year-old son to Libya in order to give him an education in the Islamic way.

¹¹ The situation of the Islamic education system in Tajikistan was summed up beautifully by a Tajik scholar who, astonished at the aim of my field survey, exclaimed: 'What Islamic education in Tajikistan do you mean? Every Tajik who is able leaves home to study in Islamic countries!'

¹² Speech by President Rahmonov in Isfara, 10 July 2002, quoted from ICG 2003a: 18.

those who have studied abroad privately are also rejected by the majority of local mullahs and imams, from both ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ Islam. They see in them a threat to their religious authority, because returnees often publicly criticize the corruption of local mullahs and their tolerance of alcohol consumption (Epkenhans 2006: 14).

On the other hand, through home teaching and missionary activities the returned students can disseminate their knowledge of Islam. Their better education helps them to convey an attractive message to young Tajiks who are thirsty for knowledge of their religion (ICG 2003b: 21). As reported in other studies of foreign graduates (ICG 2003a, 2003b; Epkenhans 2006), this new Islamic elite embodies a genuinely revolutionary potential. Dissatisfied because of their exclusion from official structures, they turn to radicalism and resistance, particularly ‘if they unite with the increasing number of young Tajiks with very limited economic and social perspective who are already turning their backs on the government-promoted view of Tajikistan’s national identity and are searching for new meanings of life’ (Epkenhans 2006: 14).

But what understandings of Islam and Muslimness do these young men acquire, and how do they relate ‘their Islam’ to the cultural customs and ritual practices that form the local Islamic tradition in Tajikistan? To answer these questions I turn to the account of a young man who experienced a religious awakening abroad and returned to his birthplace in Dushanbe with a completely new understanding of Islam – and as an Ismaili now converted to Sunni Islam. Of course such autobiographical narratives must be understood not as historical facts but as ‘constructions which justify the present’ (Schiffauer 2000: 237). My analysis focuses on the way in which this ‘convert’ portrayed himself as a Muslim and positioned himself within his family, his neighbourhood, and the wider Muslim community of Dushanbe.

When I met him in 2004, Anushehr was a 32-year-old living with his wife and two daughters in the central district of Dushanbe.¹³ His black beard and the traditional long Tajik coat (*chapon*) that he wore every time he left the house marked him as one of those young men who have become conspicuous on the streets of Dushanbe in recent years because of their religious expression.

¹³ Anushehr (whose name I have changed) became a major interview partner in Dushanbe after I met him in 2004 during my search for a research assistant in the field. I visited him and his family frequently. We also conducted four more structured interviews in March, April, and May 2004. Interviews were mainly in English; the Tajik terms included in the text are a result of Anushehr’s switching from English to Tajik in the course of our talks.

Anushehr had grown up in a Russian-speaking environment in a well-educated Ismaili family in Dushanbe.¹⁴ Because of the strongly secularized background of his family – typical for minority groups in the former Soviet Union such as the Ismailis in Tajikistan – Anushehr's idea of Islam was dominated by his grandfather's affiliation with the Communist Party, the negative attitudes of his father and other relatives, and the general lack of knowledge in his family about Islam. Because his father had worked in the diplomatic service during the Soviet era, Anushehr had spent a large part of his childhood and youth in Arabic-speaking countries (Libya, Syria, Egypt), and his Arabic was better than his Tajik.

His religious metamorphosis took place in Egypt when he decided, at the age of 18, to complete his secondary education at an Islamic educational institution there. A Sunni teacher from Kuwait instructed him in the tenets of Islam and the religious legacy of the Prophet.¹⁵ Anushehr experienced a religious awakening and turned away from his family's negativity about religion and towards orthodox and scriptural Islam. 'I hated Islam before', he said. 'One day, when I saw a film about Islam on TV, my aunt said to me, "Islam is a bad religion." ... That's why I hated all the Islamic people of Tajikistan – when I saw them with beards and so on. But later, when I understood what this religion really meant, I changed my mind.'

Anushehr converted from Ismaili to Sunni Islam and returned to Dushanbe in 2002. From that moment onward his desire to spread his new understanding of Islam to local Ismaili and Sunni Muslims created conflicts with his parents, relatives, and neighbours and with the believers who visited local places of public worship. In moments of inner conflict he still vacillated between local traditions, his cultural roots, and his new idea of Islam, which alienated him from most of his compatriots. He suffered moments of crisis when he felt 'alien' and dislocated in Dushanbe, as when others at the mosque suspected him of being a Wahhabi or a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, or when local imams denied his like-minded friends access to their mosques. He also experienced positive moments that confirmed him in his new religious convictions, as when people on the street or in the mosque asked him for religious advice or when people thanked him for broadening their religious horizons after intensive discussions.

¹⁴ Anushehr's father was an Ismaili from Tajik Badakhshan. His mother was a Sunni Tajik from the Gharm region with Ismaili family roots.

¹⁵ When Anushehr's parents had to leave Egypt, they put him in the care of a Kuwaiti sheikh who had been recommended to them by a Tajik compatriot because he helped Muslims from the former Soviet Union, in particular, in their Islamic education.

The return to Dushanbe posed financial problems for Anushehr and his wife, mainly because of Anushehr’s unemployment. He attributed his lack of success in finding a job in Dushanbe to the hesitancy of local people to employ him, and he was thinking of moving to Dubai in order to find work. ‘I tried to find a job here in Dushanbe’, he explained. ‘But I had too many problems with local people. ... They are afraid that I could cause a lot of trouble, because of my religion. You know, it is because of my beard. ... They think I am a Wahhabi or from Hizb ut-Tahrir.’

His wife, on the other hand, explained his unemployment in terms of his unwillingness to work, something rooted in the economic background of his parents and the way they had brought him up: ‘Because they gave him everything he wanted, always and ever, you know.’ Anushehr prohibited his wife from taking a job, so the young family had to rely on the help of his relatives. His parents put their modern flat in the centre of Dushanbe at the couple’s disposal, and his younger brother, who worked for the Aga Khan Development Network in Dushanbe, gave him regular financial support.¹⁶

Anushehr denied that the Islamic students who returned to Dushanbe met regularly; he said they feared that the government might suspect them of extremism. Nevertheless, he moved within a network of young men whom he described as like-minded friends. They were foreign graduates as well as a young man from Anushehr’s neighbourhood, a Sunni Tajik from a trader family in Dushanbe, whom he convinced of his ideas about Islam and whom he labelled *shogirdam*, ‘my pupil’. Together they joined the Friday prayers in the local mosque, visited newly built mosques in the rural surroundings of Dushanbe, exchanged new Islamic literature, and talked about their experiences with the local Muslim community.

Afraid of losing touch with the wider Islamic world, Anushehr watched Islamic programs on Arab satellite TV channels at home and used Muslim chat rooms at the innumerable internet cafes that had opened in Dushanbe in recent years. He continued his Islamic study by reading books about Islam in Russian and Arabic that were brought to him by his friends from Dubai, Egypt, Russia, and elsewhere or that he bought from the bookshop in front of the central mosque in Dushanbe.

In the several interviews I had with Anushehr, he expressed an understanding of Muslimness that was centred on absolute submission to the authoritative deeds and dictums of the Prophet Muhammad. Besides the

¹⁶ The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) links a number of development agencies, institutions, and programs that focus on health, education, culture, and the promotion of economic development. Founded and guided by the religious leader of the Ismaili community, the Aga Khan, the AKDN works mainly in the poorest areas of Asia and Africa.

Qur'an, the sunna was the major normative frame that served him as a moral guide in all spheres of life. His commitment to the fundamental texts of Islam was part of his vision to live the purity of early Islam as it existed before it was transformed by human constructs:

Religion [*din*] means, don't do new things. In life you can do [new things], but not in religion. If our religion says pray two times, you can't pray four times, you know? Don't use your brain first. Brain, you know, *aql*, is very important, but not in our religion.¹⁷ Because ... maybe we'll make mistakes. ... The first is what religion says, and after that you can use *aql*. But people here, they use their brains. They think, oh, I pray three–four times. No! People shouldn't do anything that doesn't come from the time of the Prophet! Because you will spread many elements from tradition. For instance, here, when they celebrate weddings, I saw people dancing around the fire. This is not Islam, you know!

Anushehr's religious attitudes reveal a fundamentalism that is expressed in his rejection of the local Islam tradition, which he referred to as *mazhab*.¹⁸ For him, *mazhab* embodied a 'weak Islam' (*Islomi sust*), diluted over time by cultural practices and local customs that were not in accordance with the sunna, as well as by atheistic practices such as celebrating birthdays and abolishing gender-segregated education that had penetrated Tajik society during Soviet times. The dilution of Islam was caused by the ignorance and lack of religious knowledge of the Muslims who followed local versions of Islam:

Mazhab is a way of Islam that developed in times of ignorance, when nobody knew how to pray in the right way. But today we have a universal Islam with free access to every form of knowledge for everybody. But Muslims here know nothing about their religion. They listen to the imams in the mosque, who use weak Hadith instead of reading books about Islam.¹⁹

His rejection of local Islamic traditions included a negative attitude towards local Islamic literature. For him, Tajik literature about Islam was insufficient and not worth reading. 'I don't read Tajik books about Islam because they are full of mistakes and weak Hadith', he said.

¹⁷ The original meaning of the Tajik term *aql*, used by Anushehr for 'brain', is 'reason'.

¹⁸ In its classical Islamic meaning the Arabic form *madhhab* refers to the four schools of law in orthodox Islam. In a broader sense the term means persuasion or a broader way of thinking.

¹⁹ For 'weak', Anushehr used the Arabic form *da'if*.

Anushehr attempted to keep the negative influences of local Islamic tradition at bay, and to a certain degree his efforts affected the life of his family. He forbade his wife to continue her studies at the medical university after their marriage and confined her to the domestic realm. When she left the house she was covered with a long grey veil (*hijab*). Even when Anushehr explained her covering with words such as ‘She protects her beauty’ and ‘She shows that she has modesty [*bosharmgin*]’, the *hijab* was more an expression of her distance from the local Muslim environment. In addition, their three-year-old daughter was not allowed to play with boys in the neighbourhood. Anushehr planned to engage a private teacher for his daughters, so they would never need to go to a public school and come into contact with the polluting beliefs of the local society:

For my daughters it is better to know nothing than to learn about Tajik Islam. ... I don’t want to see them going to school here. Because I educate them in an Islamic way. If they would go to school here, they would see girls and boys sitting side by side, speaking with each other and so on, you know. They would be confronted with the wrong Islam. It would confuse them totally.

His fundamentalist views were also evident in the way he was educating his daughters. In essence he aimed to teach them to accept God as the absolute and only moral authority, determining the earthly life of every Muslim. This doctrine frees the individual from submission to any cultural code or normative rules governing the social lives of local Muslims. For example, the rule of respecting parents and elders is transmitted to Tajik children as a basic social norm to be internalized. In the sphere of family, one should become an obedient child, and in the secular sphere of the school, one must be an obedient pupil. In the religious sphere of the mosque, one should be a docile Muslim. But Anushehr was critical of unquestioning submission to social norms, which have their roots in the fallibility of human nature. He insisted on questioning even parental authority and encouraged every human being instead to establish an individual relationship with God, one that was free of the strong ties of the family and all the distortions of cultural customs. These opinions brought him into conflict with his own parents, as when he declined to take cigarettes to his father and when he asked his mother to stop joining unofficial women’s religious gatherings.²⁰

Anushehr’s religious identification was simultaneously a moral statement. He was an archetypal universalist Muslim who identified not with his nation or culture but with what Olivier Roy called an imagined ‘universal

²⁰ According to Anushehr’s account, his mother, when she visits her relatives in Dushanbe, often joins women’s gatherings in the neighbourhood, which are held regularly in honour of the holy *bibi seshanbe*.

umma' (Roy 2003). 'Even if my parents made a mistake', he said, 'I would have to follow their words. Because I have to respect them before God. But if I respect God first, then I cannot hide before him, and that's why I can contradict them. I can say [to my parents], "Look at me, your words are not right, they are not right before God."'"

At the same time, the universal character of Anushehr's idea of Islam became evident in his attempts to distance himself from the radical Hizb ut-Tahrir movement, which he did on the basis of its partly 'wrong' understanding of Islam: 'And also the Islam of Hizb ut-Tahrir people includes wrong things. They don't believe in *azobi qabr*.²¹ ... Because of these differences we can't belong to them.'²² As a mediator of 'true' Islam he is convinced that he can protect young people from radicalism, which for him is rooted in a lack of knowledge about Islam: 'We don't do anything [if we go to the mosque]; we only speak with people. But the problem here is Hizb ut-Tahrir. I wish that the government could understand us in our idea of Islam. They could use us to fight against them. I believe if we spread our thoughts to Muslims here, Hizb ut-Tahrir will disappear.'

In Anushehr's narrative the prayer (*namoz*) and its ritual performance occupy a central position. The urge to pray marked the beginning of his religious metamorphosis and led to his emotional involvement in Islam: 'It started with a feeling. ... I said to myself, if you will be a Muslim you must pray.' The decision to pray signified the end of what he described as an inner 'fight' between his 'devilish desire to play with girls and live a sinful life in Dushanbe' and a moral voice that admonished him to live as a Muslim in accordance with the prophetic order. It also symbolized his religious emancipation from his parents, who had tried to restrain him from what they considered excessive demonstrations of faith. They were fearful that he would become 'a mullah or one of those Islamic people they hate'. Anushehr's strong view that praying five times daily was crucial to being a good Muslim led his parents to stop sending him money.

Praying publicly in the local mosque visibly distinguished Anushehr from the mainstream Muslim community in Dushanbe. He claimed to perform the *namoz* in the 'pure' way practised by the Prophet Muhammad, and he condemned the ritual performance of local Muslims as an expression of 'weak Islam' (*Islomi sust*) or *mazhab*:

²¹ The Tajik term *azobi qabr*, literally 'agony of the grave', refers to the torments of hell that, according to Islamic eschatology, believers who live sinful lives must suffer after death.

²² Anushehr sometimes used the first person plural to refer to himself as part of a group of young Tajik men who shared the same idea of Islam.

My Islam is other than their understanding of Islam. ... Because first of all, they [local people] pray differently than we do. ... In Egypt I learned to pray in the way ... the Prophet prayed. When I returned to Dushanbe I tried to pray like people here. But after some time I stopped ... because I understood that their way is only *mazhab*. But I want to pray like our Prophet did.

A characteristic feature of autobiographical narratives is the effort people invest in creating consistency and plausibility in their self-portraits (Schiffauer 2000: 234). In order to look behind this constructed coherence it is necessary to focus on inconsistencies and breaks in the narrative text. A tension exists throughout Anushehr's account between his wish to distinguish himself in his religious expression from the local Muslim community and his complaints about not being accepted by his fellow Muslims. He emphasized that the mosque, along with the neighbourhood and the street, was the central institution where he could make contact with other Muslims and express his religious convictions. His feelings of being misunderstood and excluded often manifested themselves in complaints about negative experiences he had at local mosques. These culminated when he described himself as the enemy of both Sunni Muslims and Ismailis:

Now I think I'm an enemy of all, of all Sunni Muslims in Dushanbe, ... and even of Ismaili people. ... When I am there [in Badakhshan] they know how I pray and they say, 'No, you are like an enemy.' And even here [in Dushanbe], when I go to the mosque and pray not like them, they say, 'You are an enemy. You come to us like a black cloud.' ... All the people here in our mosque, they look like the soldiers of an army. And the only one who is different is you. You are like a black cloud under white ones.

At the same time, by referring to the negative reactions of both Ismaili and Sunni Muslims towards his religious expression, Anushehr stressed his position as an outsider in his Muslim environment and his status as a 'special kind of Muslim'. Talking about his conversion from Ismaili to Sunni Islam, he said:

When I talk with [Sunni] people they usually reply and say that I am not right. But if I tell them I am Badakhshany, they change their mind. Maybe they think I am wrong, but at the end they love me. ... Even when I was in Egypt, people there treated me as their diamond, because I am a Shi'ite Muslim who turned to Sunni Islam and who will spread their Islam.

His experiences give him a sense of superiority over other Tajik Muslims, who in his eyes were still languishing in a state of religious ignorance (*jaholat*) as a result of the Soviet regime. He stressed the need to be sepa-

rated from home in order to reach a stage of 'religious enlightenment': 'Tajik Muslims were cut off more than seventy years from the Islamic world and true Islam. But if they go to Mecca [for the hajj] they will understand that we are right [in our idea of Islam].'

These feelings of superiority were accompanied by the wish to serve as a model for Muslims in Tajikistan, in order to spread 'true' Islam. As he narrated his self-portrait, Anushehr showed moments of willingness to make sacrifices. He interpreted his problems at home and other people's negative reactions to his missionary activities as the necessary suffering that followed from his model status: 'I feel alien here and I think constantly about going back to Egypt, where I feel at home. But our Prophet said about people like me, "You will be like a stranger in your society." ... Because you don't do things [that] other people do.'

Conclusion: A New Islamic Elitism

Anushehr's travel experiences were important for his self-definition and his awakening as an 'universalist' Muslim whose purely religious identification centred not on family or communal tradition but on individualism, thus freeing him from any national affiliation. He interpreted the journey to Egypt as *hijra* (hegira), in the sense of a physical and mental movement away from unbelief and ignorance (Masud 1990: 29). His sojourn abroad had invested the term *home* with new meaning for him (Eickelman and Piscatori 1990: xiii): home was now Egypt, full of people who shared his religious attitudes, whereas Dushanbe was a place of backwardness and ignorance to which he returned in order to spread the 'true' Islam.

Anushehr distanced himself from his Muslim environment in Dushanbe in much the same way that Jenny B. White (2002) described for certain women in Turkey. Their 'Islamic elitism' manifested itself in their insistence on a practice that they regarded as superior because it was 'conscious', unlike the 'unconscious adherence to tradition' of the masses, and in their attempt 'to distance themselves from certain shared behaviors and values by attributing them to the ... "Other" Muslims' (White 2002: 213). Thus Anushehr moved within a selected Islamic environment made up mainly of young Muslims whom he knew from his neighbourhood or from local mosques, who shared his attitudes and knowledge and sometimes similar travel experiences. They formed a group of 'equals' who went together to Friday prayers, visited each other at home, and participated in the life-cycle celebrations of family members, provided these were held in accordance with the sunna. Even if none of his friends had converted in the way he had, Anushehr expressed a sense of belonging to a special Muslim

network when he spoke in the first person plural – ‘We are right’, ‘Our Islam is different from their Islam’, and so on.

The new Islamist elitism was evident in the moral superiority these young men felt towards the Muslims around them. They considered the majority of Tajik Muslims to be ignoring the *rohi rost*, the ‘right path’, because they lived in sin or taught their children a ‘weak’ Islam characterized by superstitions, local customs surviving from Zoroastrian times, such as fire rituals at wedding ceremonies, and atheistic practices such as birthday celebrations.

It was this moral superiority that persuaded Anushehr at times to present himself as a young revolutionary. When he went to the mosque with his companions to perform prayers in a different way, when he criticized the moral behaviour of his father, or when he publicly accused local people of being ‘bad Muslims’ because they consumed alcohol and cigarettes, he showed that he was seeking confrontation with the local community. Both his offensive behaviour in public and his direct critique of authority symbolized a break with social codes. Such behaviour constitutes an example of what Werner Schiffauer called the ‘inconsiderate acts of young revolutionaries ... who believe themselves to be in possession of the truth, and who see in rules of politeness an obligation to be insincere. For them, it is a question of denouncing the wrong at any time and at all costs’ (Schiffauer 2000: 281, translated from German by the author).

According to Schiffauer (2000: 290–91), the revolutionary potential is directed first against the father, but in a wider sense against the older generation in general. Thanks to their linguistic and technological skills, Anushehr and other young Tajik Muslims could use the mass media to gain access to Islamic knowledge and theological discourses. Their Islamic education relied heavily on self-instruction and rendered traditional ways of transmitting Islamic knowledge superfluous. They viewed their parents as backward Soviet Muslims whose religious identity was founded on a limited knowledge of a corpus of tradition (*mazhab*) rather than on the major sources of scriptural Islam. In their eyes the Tajik Islamic tradition was pitifully weak in comparison with universal Islam, which opened doors to every important form of religious knowledge (Eickelman and Anderson 1999). The conflict between the generations over religious authority was also a confrontation between global and local Islam.

Anushehr’s religious self-confidence, which stemmed from his consumption of the new mass media and foreign publications, let him reject local forms of Islamic knowledge. Instead of reading Tajik books about Islam, he preferred books in Russian and Arabic. This educational elitism was made possible by his parents, who provided him with the necessary

financial resources. The financial support Anushehr received from his close relatives sheltered him – unlike many local people around him – from the realities of the post-Soviet transformation. As Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi (this volume) shows for Turkmenistan, the economic situation in post-Soviet time limits the realization of Islamic ideals by local people and forces them to hold onto kinship solidarity, which is reinforced in traditional social practices such as wedding ceremonies and commemoration rituals and which contradicts their understanding of ‘purified Islam’. At the same time, one might suppose that Anushehr created his ‘educational elitism’ in order to disguise his lack of knowledge of Tajik, which prevented him from reading local Islamic literature.

Young Tajik Muslims like Anushehr also reject well-established cultural symbols of the local Muslim community and its national identity. For example, Anushehr did not wear the *toqy*, the traditional male headgear and major symbol of Tajik identity, and he preferred to speak Russian rather than Tajik when talking with compatriots. He refused to join communal social events such as wedding ceremonies and circumcisions if they were not in accordance with the sunna. In both his physical appearance and his behaviour Anushehr defied the established structures and categories of Tajik religious expression and positioned himself outside them. His public behaviour stands in sharp contrast to what Johan Rasanayagam (this volume) describes for Uzbekistan, where local people with different religious views and perhaps distinctive appearances attempt nonetheless to persuade the mainstream that they are ‘harmless’ and ‘acceptable’ by joining in the life of the community. Anushehr accepted the label ‘Wahhabi’ as an accurate designation of his mission to confront his fellow Muslims and bring local people around to what he understood as the ‘only right’ Islam.

Anushehr’s refusal of local Islamic traditions reveals the characteristic reaction of neo-Salafis or neo-fundamentalists to the flexibility of the Sunni Hanafi school in dealing with local traditions. At the same time, his strong insistence on Mohammedanic and scriptural Islam was typical of members of minority groups in the former Soviet Union who have embraced Islam. Strongly marginalized minorities such as the Ismailis became targets for secularization during Soviet times. With poor knowledge of Islam and little emotional attachment to the local traditions of the Sunni Muslim majority, they are more attracted to neo-fundamentalist or neo-Salafi ideas than are Tajik Muslims who are fully integrated into local traditions.²³

²³ I base this inference primarily on the results of the workshop ‘Religion and Religiosity’ held by the project group ‘Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States’. Chaired by Stefan Reichmuth and Raoul Motika, it was held on 24 November 2003 at the Ruhr University of Bochum.

But Anushehr’s positioning himself outside of local Islamic tradition cannot be explained solely in terms of his fundamentalist views of Islam. His insistence on speaking Russian and his refusal to wear the *toqy* were expressions of an alienation from the local Sunni Muslim tradition that derived partly from his family’s Ismaili background and from his long separation from home. The latter cut him off from the experiences of the Soviet regime, which were shared by the majority of local Muslims. Those experiences shaped the Muslim identity of his compatriots and explain why few of them were willing to accept a ‘Russian-speaking Wahhabi’.

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Chapter 8

Religious Renewal in Kazakhstan: Redefining 'Unofficial Islam'

Paweł Jessa

The postsocialist situation in Kazakhstan has been characterized by some researchers in terms of 'Islamic rebirth' or 'Islamic revival' (Ro'i 2000: 144; Sagdeev 2000: 10–11; Tazmini 2001: 67–68). The nomenclature is justified in the obvious sense that Islam has become more visible in some of its traditional frames and social roles. Nevertheless, it is equally evident that the actual functioning of Muslim communities is in many ways radically different from that of the past and constitutes a new stage in the Islamization of Kazakhstan. Whereas Marxist-Leninist ideology was consistently opposed to religion, Islam has now been accorded a new place in society as an element of 'national heritage'.

The new stage of Islamization has been manifested, in part, among the official Islamic *ulama*. Kazakhstan's first autonomous muftiate, established in 1990, was charged with developing the country's 'spiritual infrastructure'. At the same time, parallel initiatives promoting 're-Islamization' and 'popular Islam' have also had a marked effect on large segments of the population. Although these initiatives are 'unofficial' in the sense that they proceed outside the structures of the muftiate, some of them have been embraced by the secular authorities.

In this chapter I explore these complex developments, beginning with a general outline of the position of religion in postsocialist Kazakhstan. I show that, on the whole, a 'liberal' climate has prevailed to date, though certain forces are at work that could easily threaten the current balance. I then turn to definitional problems concerning the concepts of traditionalism and fundamentalism and offer illustrations with reference to legacies of Sufism and the syncretic movement known as *Aq jol*, which has enjoyed

great popularity in recent years. For the latter I rely primarily on my own recent fieldwork.¹

Islam in Independent Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's declaration of political sovereignty in 1991 was anticipated in the religious sphere by the establishment of the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Kazakhstan (MSDK) in 1990. The creation of an autonomous muftiate however, could not change Kazakhstan's historical position as a country remote from the traditional centres of Islam, peripheral even to the great regional centres of Central Asia. This very provincialism rendered the country attractive both to various Islamic groups and to missionaries of other denominations. It is estimated that between 300,000 and 500,000 Muslims in Kazakhstan have converted to other faiths.² The combination of Soviet secularization and postsocialist policies guaranteeing religious freedom has generated a kind of religious pluralism that approximates Peter Berger's 'religious market' (Berger 1997: 196).

The demographic structure of Kazakhstan has changed markedly since independence. High population growth, the immigration of Kazakhs from abroad (mainly from China and Mongolia), and the emigration of non-Kazakhs (mostly Russians and Germans) raised the proportion of ethnic Kazakhs to more than 50 per cent of the population by 1997 (Olcott 2003: 334). Changes in the religious domain were even more dramatic. In January 1989 a total of 661 religious communities, representing 30 confessions, was registered in the republic. By 2003 some 5,000 communities affiliated with 62 confessions were recognized. The number of registered Islamic communities rose from 46 in 1989 to 1,652 in 2003, and the number of mosques, from 63 to 1,711.³ During the 1990s a number of new Islamic educational institutions were founded. In particular, the Islamic Institute was set up to accommodate graduates of Islamic institutes in Egypt and Pakistan after their return to Kazakhstan.

Of course statistics concerning the number of new mosques may not be an adequate index of increasing religiosity. Indeed, research has revealed

¹ Twelve months of fieldwork in 2003–4 were supported by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. As in my previous master's research, I concentrated my fieldwork in rural southern Kazakhstan but also included lengthy stays in Almaty and shorter stays in neighbouring parts of Uzbekistan. The main language used in this research was Russian.

² Interview with Kayrat Nazarbayev, leader of Aq Orda, <http://www.islam.ru/pressclub/gost/nazarbaev>.

³ Ivanov and Trofimov 2003: 4–5. These figures do not include unregistered communities.

that the number of people who consider themselves believers and obey religious observances has increased significantly since the early 1990s. The most conspicuous changes are in the character of life-cycle rituals – funerals, marriages, circumcisions. Changes are least marked where individual religious obligations are concerned. According to the results of one survey (Zhusupov 2001: 114), only 5 per cent of male respondents visited the mosque more than once a week.⁴

Some believers feel strongly that representatives of official Islam should concentrate less on the material infrastructure and more on improving the standards of religious education. As one reader of the Russian-language newspaper *Karavan* put the point in a letter to the editor in 1997: ‘In order to save the faith of the ancestors and to prevent national tradition from sinking into oblivion, spiritual leaders from Kazakhstan ought to speak a simple and understandable language and monitor the dissemination of appropriate literature, rather than reap profits from the development of new mosques’ (quoted in Zieliński 2001: 76).

For their part, the representatives of the muftiate with whom I spoke stressed that the persistence of popular practices and rituals not sanctioned by the Islamic canon posed a formidable challenge. They appeared to endorse the familiar dichotomy between scriptural Islam and practices such as the cult of ancestors and healing by spirits, commonly glossed as ‘popular Islam’. Bruce Privratsky (2001) has criticized this categorization and argued that we should pay more attention to distinctions Kazakhs themselves draw between forms of religious observances. He finds that Kazakhs are attracted to what they take to be a theologically pure Islam (sometimes labelled *taza jol*, the clean or pure way), but at the same time they continue to define ‘Muslimness’ in terms of familiar everyday religious practices that are highly syncretic. Many Kazakhs do not fulfil the duties associated with scriptural Islam (*taza jol*), preferring to expand their participation in the sphere connected with the values represented by the ‘little tradition’. As Mark Saroyan has shown (1997a: 116–21), the rituals of this sphere also penetrate the ‘official’ space of the mosque, making it difficult to uphold a strict dichotomy.

Visiting the central mosque in Almaty on a Friday afternoon, one observes a constant flow of people entering and leaving the building. This is the time of Friday prayer (*ġom’e namāz*), obligatory for every Muslim. Surprisingly, however, most believers do not enter the main chamber of the mosque but rather proceed to a smaller room designated the Qur’an Studies

⁴ This research was conducted among Kazakh-speaking inhabitants of Alma-Ata and southern Kazakhstan in 1996 by the Kazakh Institute for Socio-Economic Information and Prognosis.

Chamber (*Qur'an oqū*). In the centre of this room a mullah recites the Qur'an for about ten minutes once a sufficiently large crowd has gathered. After a short prayer (*du'a*), the believers make a donation and leave the room to allow a new group to enter. It is believed that making this voluntary donation (usually of money) after the Qur'an reading entitles one to articulate a request to Allah. This practice has little in common with orthodox *namāz* rituals and the Friday prayer as celebrated elsewhere in the Islamic world; it is prevalent in Almaty because few local Muslims can read Arabic, and the majority must rely on a mullah or *šayh* to read the Qur'an on their behalf. The practice may be viewed as a transplantation to the central mosque of the rural tradition of shrine-visiting. Under socialism, ritual visits to local shrines (*mazars*) were the most popular way to meet personal religious needs.⁵ There, a *shiraqshi* (shrine guardian) would recite the Qur'an, but as an integral part of ritual devoted ultimately to the spirits of ancestors (*arūaq*).⁶

Many urban Kazakhs are still more at home in Russian than in Kazakh, but the MSDK carries out all its activities in the Kazakh language. This creates advantageous conditions for other Islamic groups, as I show later, but any other policy would be inconsistent with the state's desire to promote Kazakh.

Although the government has highlighted the moral potential of religion as well as its role in promoting community integration, it has precluded the establishment of a religious political party. According to the constitution, in Kazakhstan religion is strictly separated from the state. President Nazarbayev has argued that all forms of religion should enjoy 'reasonable conditions for free development' (quoted in Zieliński 2001: 73). At the beginning of the 1990s some leaders of Alash, a pan-Turkic party, proclaimed Islam to be the only force capable of uniting the Kazakh nation. When they called for religious reform in accordance with the spirit of the Qur'an, registration of the new party was obstructed. It collapsed in 1993.

In spite of these apparently clear principles, in young post-Soviet republics the impossible often becomes possible, especially when the president's nephew is involved. Kayrat Nazarbayev, at 35 the country's

⁵ A *mazar* is usually the tomb of a Muslim saint.

⁶ It is widely believed in Central Asia that the spirits of the ancestors visit their descendants' houses during the night from Thursday to Friday. There they 'feed' themselves, first with the words of the Qur'an recited especially for them after the evening meal is finished and then with the smell of fried fat and oil. Thursdays and Fridays are considered to be favourable days for visiting sacred *mazars* or the tombs of dead relatives, because the soul of the ancestor is believed to be located near the tomb on those days (see Basilov 1970: 135–36).

youngest major-general, was able in April 2005 to register a group known as the 'Republican Movement of Aq Orda'. Aq Orda ('the white cell') was not yet a political party, but it intended to acquire that status in the near future.⁷ It was established in the course of a 'patriotic-spiritual meeting' held under the slogan 'Love my Country – in an orthodox way' (*Lyubov k Rodine – ot pravednosti*), attended by the chief muftī of Kazakhstan, Absattar-kazhi Derbisaliev. The party's ideology was clear from Kayrat Nazarbayev's speech on that occasion: 'We do not need any new national ideology – we have got Islam' (Kalizhanov). The founder also proclaimed that although political parties based on religion were forbidden under the constitution, Kazakh Muslims were nonetheless obliged to make choices that reflected their religion. Christians and Jews were to be viewed not as enemies but rather as 'younger brothers'. However, Kazakhstan needed no further denominations; those three were enough.⁸

Should this recent development be seen as a threat to religious pluralism in Kazakhstan? According to Derbisaliev,

great anxiety is caused by the situation in which Kazakhstan has become a location for the existence and practices of non-traditional denominations and totalitarian sects. The secular character of the state, i.e. the separation of religion from the state, does not obviate the need for a meticulous, thorough state policy towards religion. A prerequisite for this policy is appropriate corrections to the law regulating religion and religious organizations. The adoption of just and respectful attitudes towards all confessions and denominations functioning in the territory of the republic should not hinder the state from continuing to support the traditional religions of Kazakh society (quoted in Zhusupov 2001: 110–11).⁹

Kayrat Nazarbayev's dream is the utopia of a Greater Turkistan: 'one country for all Turkistan, on the basis of which we would help and support our brothers elsewhere – Tatars, Ingushi and Chechens' (Kalizhanov). His ideas draw some of their inspiration from the Jadid reformers of the nineteenth century (see Lazzreini 1992: 151–66). It remains to be seen

⁷ Interview with Kayrat Nazarbayev, leader of Aq Orda, <http://www.islam.ru/pressclub/gost/nazarbaev>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Russian Orthodox Church is generally an ally of the mufti in such appeals to maintain the status quo. In 1996, during the second session of the Kazakh National Assembly, Archbishop Aleksiej called on President Nazarbayev to amend a law passed in 1992, titled 'On the freedom of confessions and religious relationships', in order to limit the expansion of new denominations and defend the mainstream religions of the republic. See Zieliński 2001: 79.

whether pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic ideas can be brought together in the postsocialist era as they were in the past. Meanwhile it is pertinent to note that the ideal of a worldwide Muslim caliphate is on the agenda of Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (the Islamic Liberation Party), an organization with a significant presence in Kazakhstan (Zhusupov 2001: 122–26; Savin 2003).

Current Kazakh legislation regulating the founding of religious organizations and their activities is certainly liberal. Its implementation, however, is decisively shaped by President Nazarbayev himself, who arranges regular meetings with representatives of many denominations. During a meeting called the Convention of Worldwide and Traditional Religions' Leaders in September 2003 he announced the construction of a 'Palace of Nations' in Astana.¹⁰ This edifice, approaching completion in mid-2006, was by then designated the 'Temple of Peace and Harmony'. It was to house a mosque, an Orthodox church, a synagogue, and a Buddhist temple in a single complex.

An international ecumenical conference titled 'Through tolerance – to spiritual unity', held in October 2005, provided another opportunity to assert liberal ideals. Representatives of religious communities addressed a suggestion to Nazarbayev that he establish 18 October as a 'Day of Spiritual Harmony' (Kononovich). For the president this conference was also an opportunity to appeal to the assembled religious leaders to join him in combating terrorism and extremism. Following a recent cooling of relations between Washington and Tashkent, Kazakhstan had emerged as a new key ally for the United States in Central Asia. On 13 October 2005, in the course of an official visit, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice applauded Kazakhstan's 'steadfast commitment to the continuing war against violent Islamic extremism here in Central Asia'.¹¹

The idea that Kazakhstan should play the role of guardian of regional security, opposing Islamic extremism, takes us back to the point about the country's remoteness and the widely held view that Islam has never penetrated the Kazakh spirit (Sultangalieva 1999). While this circumstance may make the country more attractive to Protestant missionaries, it can also be evoked to downplay the threat of infiltration from fundamentalist Islam. President Nazarbayev himself likes to argue that the traditional spiritual values of the Kazakhs are a syncretic product of various cultures and traditions and that the seeds some foreigners are trying to sow will therefore find no fertile ground among local Muslims. In his view, 'the historical

¹⁰ The speech Nazarbayev made during the convention can be found at <http://www.religare.ru/document6519.htm>.

¹¹ 'Rice Urges Kazakhstan to Lead Central Asia on Democratization', <http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/Archive/2005/Oct/14-730752.html>.

šarī'a [Shari'a] was unable to supplant consciousness of *adat* norms, which formulate more ancient systems of social rules and customary law, leaving no space for religious radicalism' (quoted in Sultangalieva 1999: 35). Of course those who openly embrace the continuing force of pre-Muslim beliefs and rituals are criticized by other Muslims who deplore such legacies. This is a continuing tension that illustrates the heterogeneity of contemporary Islam in Kazakhstan.

This heterogeneity does not mean, however, that religious life has experienced a democratization comparable to that which has taken place in politics, economics, and popular culture. Not everyone is satisfied with the present situation. Some argue that autonomous processes of development within Islam are inhibited, and that this itself is conducive to religious extremism. The leader of the Association of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (AMK) has called for

the consolidation of various Muslim trends in order to solve current problems of spiritual, economic and political life. ... The present Kazakh *umma* lies between two ideological extremes: radical Islam and official dogmatic Islam. The great majority of Muslims do not accept either of the extremes. On the other hand, there are good reasons for establishing a new, Kazakh model of Islam, and this is the goal of our organization. ... Most importantly, our model is based on tolerance, devoid of force of any kind. We advocate a dialogue not only with different confessions but also with representatives of the various trends existing within Islam (Sultanov).¹²

This new organization has already begun a dialogue with Hizb ut-Tahrir and other parties concerning social problems such as drugs and corruption. The AMK has issued a fatwa condemning those points in the programme of Hizb ut-Tahrir that countenance violence, but it has also signalled its disapproval of the repressive and illegal measures of the state security services towards members of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Fetva Soyuzu Musulman Kazakhstanu). Another recent development is the establishment of a 'Muslim Committee of Human Rights in Central Asia' within the AMK.

It can be seen that 'official' Islam as constituted by the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Kazakhstan now has several rivals. When it advocates that Muslim clergy work closely with the state to ensure that

¹² The AMK uses only Russian (*Союз Мусульман Казахстана*) and English (Association of the Muslims of Kazakhstan) for its name, not Kazakh. The party was officially registered in April 2005 and sees itself explicitly as 'Muslim democratic'. According to theist leaders, Kazakhstan suffers from a shortage of 'Muslim non-governmental organizations'.

Islamic ethical principles pervade culture, the economy, and politics, the AMK strikes a significant chord in postsocialist society (Sultanov). We appear to be witnessing the emergence of new forms of socially engaged religion, of religious actors in an autonomous civil society. The muftī has attempted to counter these developments by denouncing the AMK to the public prosecutor, but he has been unable to defuse its momentum.¹³ This democratizing trend within Islam has been applauded by the United States, even though the superpower remains officially committed to supporting President Nazarbayev and the MSDK as the ultimate guarantors of democracy and modernization in Kazakhstan and the whole of Central Asia (Murzabulatov).

Sufi Revitalization: Between Traditionalism and Fundamentalism

Tremendous confusion exists in the scholarly literature over terms such as *traditionalism* and *fundamentalism*. Whereas some scholars characterize 'Islamic fundamentalism' as the resurgence of tradition (Sultanov 1999), others see these two concepts as contradictory (Stepanyanits 1982; Yarlykapov 2000). Certainly both terms are commonly employed in ideological and polemical debates. In Kazakhstan notions of tradition are deployed by various Islamic groups, each determined to promote its own version of Islamic orthodoxy. As for fundamentalism, three elements seem central to most definitions: the notion of a return to the wellspring of Islam, the explicit politicizing of religion, and a deep suspicion of Western civilization (Tibi 1997; Kepel 2003). The need to 'purify' Islam of heresies has been addressed periodically by activists (*salafiyya*) since the first centuries of the caliphate. The consolidation of four legal schools in the tenth and eleventh centuries facilitated Islam's adaptation to local traditions. Believers were able to retain the distinctive features of ethno-confessional communities, and this inevitably compromised strict adherence to the doctrines of the worldwide *umma*. This tension persisted in more clandestine forms under socialism. In the late Soviet era, Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush (1985, drawing on the work of Klimovich) took up the distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' Islam in Central Asia in order to cast the latter in an oppositional role to the regime.

Bennigsen and Wimbush's approach has been criticized in the post-Soviet years (Akiner 1996; Saroyan 1997b). The designation 'unofficial Islam' has shifted meaning and is now deployed primarily to attack critics of

¹³ The mufti also condemned an open letter to the president signed by M. Talibekov on behalf of the Muslim Committee of Human Rights in Central Asia, on the grounds that no such organization had been legally registered.

Central Asian regimes, who are variously described as ‘fundamentalists’, ‘extremists’, and ‘Wahhabis’ (Malashenko 1999). Meanwhile it would seem that the ‘parallel Islam’ represented by Sufi orders, which are led by unregistered, charismatic figures and grounded in practices outside the mosque, is no longer a force of opposition but has been appropriated by post-Soviet governments as ‘local Muslim tradition’.

Indeed, the Sufi orders are nowadays the most significant component of Kazakhstan’s ‘national heritage’. In the Soviet era they were banned. The long-serving muftī Ziyovuddin Babakhan issued a fatwa in 1952 that denounced Sufism, along with ‘*ishanism*’ and ‘*muridism*’, on the grounds that none of these ritualized forms had existed in the age of the Prophet (Babadzhanov 2001: 173).¹⁴ He urged Muslims to adhere strictly to the Qur’an and the sunna: everything else was unwarranted innovation and an error. Traditional pilgrimages (*ziyārāt*) and pilgrims’ practices of preparing meals at tombs, lighting candles, lamenting, and seeking the intercession of saints were all pronounced inconsistent with Shari’a (Babadzhanov 2003b: 70). Visiting the graves of dead relatives was allowed, but meals and animal sacrifices were prohibited. This fatwa had the effect of reinforcing the atheistic policy of the Soviet establishment, which characterized *ziyārāt* and all associated practices as ‘relics of the past’, ‘illegal gatherings of believers’, ‘wasteful expenditures of financial resources’, and so forth.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ziyovuddin-khon Babakhanov (1908–82; mufti 1952–82) was the son of the previous mufti, Ishan-khan Baba-khan Ibn Abd al-Madzhid-khan (his father, Abd al-Madzhid-khan Ibn Yunus-khan, was descended from the family of Syram Qoja, genealogically connected with the Sufi mystic Qoja Ahmet Yasawi). After the October Revolution, Ishan-khan Baba-khan remained neutral and supported those muftī who decided to adapt to the new situation and advocated trying to restrain the Muslim community (*umma*) from ‘non-Shari’a’ behaviour. In 1943, with the establishment of the muftiate for Central Asia and Kazakhstan, he began the ‘Babakhan dynasty’, members of which served in the office of mufti. Z. Babakhanov was succeeded in 1982 by his son Shamsuddin-khon Babakhanov, who was dismissed in 1989 (Babadzhanov 2003a: 12–14).

¹⁵ Babakhanov’s theological justification could be drawn only from the *shafi*, *hanabali*, or Salafi school, because the local Hanafi school had long accepted the compatibility of *ziyārāt* with Shari’a. The issue was further complicated by the fact that in this period the organs of ‘official Islam’ obtained most of their funds from donations offered in the major pilgrimage centres. A few years later, in 1957, the Religious Cults Council began to condemn mass pilgrimages as ‘dangerous signs of religious renewal’, with the result that all major centres were closed (see Babadzhanov 2003b: 70). On another interpretation, the theological views of the mufti were shaped during his training in Saudi Arabia (1947–48); Babakhanov was

In pre-Soviet Central Asia the cult of saints (*awliyā*) – dead and alive – was an important feature of Islamic devotional practices. As in many other Islamic societies, the mosque and the *mazar* (shrine) were considered to be complementary. Under Soviet rule this link was broken (Ro'i 2000: 364). Most *mazars* were demolished or closed, although some were converted into museums for scientific atheism. Clerical decisions (fatwas), however, did not change the attitudes of local Muslims, and shrine pilgrimages continued. The local clerical establishment condemned some holy places but protected others and in this way helped to preserve its own authority in the Muslim community.

Since independence the government has promoted a dual vision of Kazakh Muslim identity that explicitly incorporates the native 'little tradition', inherited from ancestors who placed their own stamp upon the 'great tradition' of Islam. According to this dualist model, the flexible and tolerant Muslim values propagated on the Kazakh steppe are superior to those of the strident fundamentalism to be observed in other Muslim countries (Privratsky 2001: 9). President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan has justified his own version of 'traditional Islam' in a similar way (see Hilgers, this volume). President Nazarbayev has highlighted the role of the teachings of the Sufi mystic Qoja Ahmet Yasawi in shaping Kazakh Islam.¹⁶ The president and his wife (through the Bobek Foundation, which she heads) have contributed to the restoration of numerous shrines (e.g. Domalaq-ana and Suiinbay-ata). It is thus clear that Sufism in the postsocialist context is no longer an oppositional phenomenon, nor can it be confined to the category 'folk Islam'.¹⁷ Leading members of Sufi orders, who led secretive lives as 'unofficial clergy' in the late Soviet period, now hold positions in the muftiate and are employed as imams in local mosques.

Appropriating the traditions of the Yasawiyya order as a key component of Kazakh Islam requires mythologizing the person of Qoja Ahmet Yasawi. Although his ethnicity and native language are unknown, he is now proclaimed to be a Kazakh saint and is viewed as such by local Muslims, few of whom have any knowledge of his specific contributions to Sufism. For the majority Yasawi is simply the most important Kazakh saint, and his tomb in Turkistan is the destination of the largest pilgrimages. In Kazakh

presented by certain circles as 'the first official Wahhabi' of Central Asia (see Babadzhanov 2001: 180).

¹⁶ See the president's speech in a film titled *Newsreel of the Lost World*, produced by Kazakhstan Television in 2004.

¹⁷ Indeed, the dichotomy between 'official' and 'folk' has never been of much help in understanding Sufism. For contrasting approaches to this broader question, see Waardenburg 1979 and Cornell 1998.

intellectual circles the Yasawiyya tradition is presented as the ‘Kazakh version of Sufism’.¹⁸ Its revitalization began in the late 1990s with the widespread reactivation of Sufi ritual practices. It has been a significant factor in the consolidation of a new Kazakh ethnic unity – that is, a new sense of ‘we’ based on a return to an imagined wellspring, the religion of the ancestors.

By contrast, new Muslim ‘missionaries’, mostly from the Arab world and Pakistan, are not greeted enthusiastically by local theologians. The ‘foreigners’ are seen as intolerant, not only towards other confessions but also towards ‘inconsistent’ practices within local Islam. For their part, many ordinary Muslims with whom I conducted interviews charge the emissaries they call *salafiyya* with apostasy and insist that the ‘true’ Islam is the one that has been preserved in Central Asia. The most common complaints are, ‘They do not read the Qur’an for the souls of dead Muslims, so how can they dare to call themselves Muslims? How can one refuse a prayer to one’s own mother?’ The situation ‘on the ground’ is that the legacies of highly ritualized practices, never completely repressed under socialism, continue to provide more decisive criteria for what it means to be a Muslim than do the notions of any theologians.

Traditions Regained

The Kazakhstani state under President Nazarbayev continues to separate the sphere of religion from the sphere of politics, at least for the time being. The state is legally secular; smaller religious communities are tolerated on the basis of a general pluralism; and the rights of non-believers are also respected. This raises the question of how the new Kazakh religious identity is to be reconciled with the civic ideals of a republic that is officially poly-ethnic as well as poly-religious. One example suggesting that compromises can be found is provided by a new Islamic religious movement known as *Aq jol* (the pure – literally, white – way), which seeks explicitly to unite Muslims with the representatives of other confessions, especially the Russian Orthodox Church.

The establishment of *Aq jol* was part of a broader outpouring of charismatic fervour in the mid-1990s by people calling for a ‘spiritual purification’ of Kazakh society. Two ‘saints’ were especially popular. Sari Aūliye (the yellow saint) and Aq Aūliye (the white saint) became famous through their spiritual healing séances, often performed for several thousand spectators (Privratsky 2001: 182–83). These ‘living saints’ had, in their own

¹⁸ On the historical role of the Yasawiyya order in Islamizing Turkic nomads, see DeWeese 2003: 35–38.

words, been invested with a gift, a spiritual force (*qasiyet*), by the spirits. Their task was first and foremost to bring about the spiritual revival of the inhabitants of Kazakhstan by initiating a return to Islam.

Aq jol was established in 1997 around the person of Bayjanova Zeyniykamal Karjinbaevna, a healer from Kaskelen, near Almaty, under circumstances that exemplify the pattern of new religious movements in independent Kazakhstan. Much of its ritual is concentrated on the spirits of Kazakh ancestors. The highest priority is attached to 'spiritual purification and education'. Leaders and ordinary members alike proclaim the existence of only one God and believe it is a mistake to categorize people on the basis of their *jüz*, tribal, ethnic, or religious affiliation.¹⁹ The essence of *Aq jol* teaching is to have faith in God and to remain 'pure', which among other things means abstaining from alcohol and drugs. Beneath this doctrinal vacuity, the cult of saints plays an important role in the movement: local *awliyā* represent a syncretic agglomeration of ideas concerning holiness based on the Qur'an but also on later Sufi elaborations.

In 1998 the movement fissioned into three independent groups, which have since remained in a state of 'cold war'. Each faction claims that it alone is legitimate and 'supported by the spirits of the ancestors'. The factions have engaged in bitter quarrels and recriminations over alleged financial misdemeanours, the use of black magic, the maintenance of contacts with genies, and the treatment of leaders as if they already were saints.

The religious life of *Aq jol* members is concentrated mainly in small cells known as *ordas*.²⁰ The everyday life of an *orda* revolves around its healing séances. These often attract large numbers of spectators, non-members seeking solutions to health and other personal problems. The weekly *shiraq* ('the candles') ritual, usually celebrated on Thursday, involves lighting candles to invoke ancestral spirits. Members see this as the continuation of a deep-rooted Central Asian tradition, preserved even under socialism through a complex of domestic rituals including the consumption of special meals and reading of the Qur'an on behalf of the ancestors.

The final part of the *shiraq* ritual is introduced by a blessing (*bata*) given by the spirits of ancestors and Muslim saints. A designated person, believed to have been 'chosen by the spirits', stands in front of the audience awaiting the sign from the spirits. When a spirit has 'appeared', a medium delivers a blessing for all those gathered. The spirit then draws attention to

¹⁹ The term *jüz* means 'a hundred'; it refers here to the supra-tribal political-structural group in Kazakhstan, of which there are three: senior, middle, and junior.

²⁰ *Orda* is a Kazakh word meaning 'the centre, the fireplace, the rich yurt'. In the nomenclature of *Aq jol*, the term means the smallest unit of the group. The section of *Aq jol* led by Aq ana also uses the term *ata üy* ('the house of the ancestors').

individual persons present, mentioning facts from both the past and the future in a way that conveys moral or spiritual support. The spirit declares the approximate dates of the 'trials' that the person is going to face and offers the reassurance that they will be overcome. This support is tied to criticism of improper lifestyles, especially alcohol addiction. Muslims are reminded that they are required to pray five times daily and are threatened with serious consequences in the case of failure.

Aq jol healers spread their message discreetly. They are not initially perceived by their clients as members of a religious movement but rather as people 'chosen by the spirits', like any other healer. The teachings of *Aq jol* are introduced only gradually. Many patients maintain long-term contacts with the group and eventually join its ranks. Whereas people's contacts with a typical *baqsı* or *emshi* ('healer') are usually restricted to a single session of diagnosis and therapy and often include some predictions of future events, *Aq jol* healers aim beyond immediate solutions to their clients' health problems. They address deeply rooted problems in their personal lives by building an atmosphere of family warmth within the group. This provides members with new friends who function as a support group in the protracted analysis of each member's difficulties. In addition to these weekly *shiraq* ceremonies, organized pilgrimages to local shrines are crucial in strengthening the sense of belonging to a community.

Patients who attend an *Aq jol* group for the first time are treated in healing séances, which begin with a prompt diagnosis. The protective spirits of the healers usually describe the cause of the illness as the consequence of an evil spell, the interference of evil spirits, or the fact that the patient is a 'spiritual' person, which makes him or her more sensitive to surrounding reality (he or she is said to attract all the 'dirt' of other people and to 'accumulate' it). Subsequently, in the *bata* given by the spirits, the diagnosis is confirmed and the person is advised to go on a pilgrimage, often to Turkistan in the south of the country, in order to obtain 'spiritual purification'.

These pilgrimages, such as the one from Almaty to Turkistan in which I participated, can be analysed in terms of the classical theory of *rites de passage*, as developed by Arnold Van Gennep (1960) and adapted by Victor Turner (1969: 167–96). The first stage, that of separation, begins with preparation for the pilgrimage. Each participant is obliged to undergo a triple purification ritual in the *orda* and from this moment on to maintain a constant state of ritual purity. Any violation would result in exclusion from the pilgrimage, because the spirits would be angered. At this stage the subject is not isolated from everyday life but must embrace a spiritual purity

by avoiding sinful thoughts and conflictual situations and by abstaining from alcohol and sexual relations.

On the appointed day the pilgrims gather at the meeting place and board coaches. At this point they enter sacred space, leaving their everyday, secular lives behind. This is the phase of liminality, during which the subject is introduced to the duties and rights of the new social status. The coaches are clearly marked as sacred spaces when each of them is visited by an *Aq jol* leader before departure. He informs each pilgrim individually about the *arūaq* who will become his or her protecting spirit. The spirit's protection is not restricted to the time of the pilgrimage but extends to the whole of the person's life.

Pilgrims are obliged to prepare a sacrificial meal (*qudayı tamaq*) for their protecting spirits. On each night of the five-day pilgrimage the group makes an offering of a ram (all costs are shared), which is subsequently cooked and eaten. The pilgrims who 'prepare the table' on a particular day and who are responsible for making the offering are considered to be 'hosting' the spirits. Ritual bread (*qudayı nan*), tea, and sweets are also served. Active participation by the other pilgrims in preparing the *qudayı tamaq* is voluntary. However, everyone is expected to contribute actively in the course of the pilgrimage to 'convincing' the spirits of the pilgrims' sincerity and respect. Although the pilgrims represent a wide spectrum of Kazakh society, differences in social status are suppressed for the duration of *ziyārāt*. The hierarchy of mundane society is replaced by egalitarian relations (see Turner 1969: 96, 177). Ritual power is transferred to the *aqqu*, who not only leads the pilgrimage but also verbalizes the words of the spirits.

Each night, as well as in each sacred place the pilgrims visit, a blessing from the *arūaq* is obtained. In its *bata* the spirit will sometimes inform a pilgrim that he or she has been 'chosen by the spirits'. The majority of the 'chosen ones' have not previously been aware of the 'gift' they possessed. Through their blessings the spirits explain that they are responsible for spreading a variety of misfortunes, including illness, in order to lead the 'chosen one' to the right path, forcing him or her to recognize the cause of the problems. This moment is regarded as a landmark in the person's life, something decisive for his or her future. The spirits inform the chosen person that the 'gift' should be accepted. Subsequently he or she will undergo the 'opening' (*ashu*) ritual, which terminates the suffering. If the person accepts the gift, then on returning from the pilgrimage he or she will begin the 'preparation stage' in an *orda* (usually, but not necessarily, the *orda* known already). Should the person refuse, he or she will continue to suffer the trials sent by the *arūaq*.

The end of the pilgrimage is marked by the final blessing from Aisha bibi ana, the protecting spirit of the *Aq jol*, which communicates the acceptance of the pilgrimage by the spirits. Having returned home, some of the participants prepare a last sacrificial supper (*qudayı tamaq*), inviting their fellow pilgrims to eat with them. The *qudayı tamaq* is the culmination of the rite of passage, reincorporating the pilgrims into society. This reincorporation does not apply to those who have discovered a 'gift' inside themselves, who will remain in the liminal stage. However, all pilgrims are regarded as having experienced spiritual purification through their journey. In the case of the 'chosen' people, the purification enables them to begin preparations for the 'opening' ceremony. The rest of the pilgrims concentrate on retaining as much as possible of their newly accomplished spiritual purity through active participation in the life of *Aq jol*.

The pilgrimage is a 'one-way ticket'. *Aq jol*'s activists emphasize that pilgrims must change their lifestyle afterwards, or the *arūaq* may punish them. It is forbidden to drink alcohol for nine years after the *ziyārāt*. During that period they will be tested by the spirits in numerous ways. After nine years, those who pass the tests can expect the reward of 'happiness', a notion that is not clearly defined. It might refer to spiritual enlightenment; at a more prosaic level it might mean a happy family life without earthly worries or financial problems. Only by remaining within *Aq jol*, following its rules of conduct, and subjecting oneself to the will of the spirits can one achieve this state.

Experience of the sacred during a pilgrimage to Turkistan enables pilgrims to achieve a greater understanding of future contacts with the spirits. Moreover, this experience legitimates and establishes those 'chosen by the spirits' in their new roles as healers within the framework of *Aq jol*. The spirits inform the person of the proper time for the ritual of 'the opening of the heart', which is organized once a month. This ceremony, too, is divided into three stages. The actual 'opening' takes place when the chosen person mediates the spirits' words for the first time. The subsequent stages are connected with mastering the techniques for transferring *bata*. Having successfully completed all the stages, the new healer begins practising within an existing *orda*. Subsequently, having developed his or her healing skills and successfully gone through tests and trials imposed by the spirits, the healer might receive permission from the *arūaq* to initiate his or her own *orda*.

In comparison with products of 'official Islam' as represented by the MSDK, *Aq jol* has been doing well in recent years on Kazakhstan's 'religious market'. It targets its appeal to those searching for a direct means of experiencing the sacred. The 'new quality of Islam' to which it aspires is

to be established on the basis of tradition, enriched by new ritual practices derived from pre-Islamic customs. Its Muslim character does not preclude the integration of members of different denominations. The structures of *Aq jol* include Russian-speaking *ordas* with non-Muslim leaders. This is possible because the spirits of the Kazakh ancestors are not Islamic purists; they are prepared to accept that Christians can be offered the same 'gift'. The acceptance of a gift does not necessarily trigger conversion to Islam, although the spirits may suggest it. Nevertheless, there is a strict language imperative for ethnic Kazakhs: regardless of their ability to speak the mother tongue, it is not possible to give *bata* in any language but Kazakh. This can be interpreted as a rule to strengthen the native language, which remains weak in much of northern and central Kazakhstan. In Almaty many Kazakhs are unable to speak the language of their ancestors, and Russian-speaking *ordas* are popular – but the culminating *bata* must be uttered in Kazakh.

The 'Russian' *orda* that I studied most carefully was in every respect eclectic, starting with the decoration of the room in which Tatyana, the healer, met her patients. The walls were decorated with posters of Christ, Sai Baba, and pilgrims in Mecca (see also Penkala-Gawęcka 2001: 170–71). Discussions in the group drew on Soviet parapsychology and New Age theology. In the 1980s bio-energy healers, known as 'extra-sensories', were especially popular in Kazakhstan, and their techniques have been imitated by some *Aq jol* healers. While some of the alternative medical notions originate in Moscow, the main sources of inspiration for para-religious groups such as *Aq jol* are in the West.²¹ Two *Aq jol* leaders, Ermek and Aq ana, have been honoured with certificates for 'Best Healer of the Third Millennium', issued by the 'Russian International Register of Complementary Medicine' in Moscow.²² Such titles enhance healers' reputations and provide additional legitimation for their practices. The 'Russian' *ordas* remain faithful to *Aq jol* at the ceremonial level (they practice *bata* and *shiraq*), but their discourses are also replete with references to karmic debt, energy channels, and karmic ties.

The activities of *Aq jol* may be categorized as 'tradition regained' (Penkala-Gawęcka 2001: 182–83), in the sense that ritual practices have been reconstructed from surviving elements and reintegrated into religious life in Kazakhstan in new, original forms. Although *Aq jol* is a structured organization, its practices are legitimated at the level of the *orda* by the spirits of the ancestors, the demiurges of the group. Some of those who remain sceptical concerning spirits may be impressed instead by the pseudo-scientific certificates of the healers. Yet at another level *Aq jol* generates

²¹ See http://scien.open.by/page1_eng.html.

²² See <http://www.eniom.ru/articles/frame1.htm>.

deep religious commitments. One interlocutor asked me, 'Why does Kazakhstan suffers less interior disorder than the neighbouring republics?' Immediately he gave his own answer: 'Because of Allah, to whom all the members and sympathizers of *Aq jol* pray every day.'

Kazakhstan's political and religious transformation has resulted in a general turn towards the values of tradition, in which the great ancestors are called upon to legitimate the claims and power of new, modern authorities. The sacralization of deceased leaders of the Communist Party is consistent with this trend. Former secretary-general Dinmuhamed Ahmedovich Kunaev (1912–92) is nowadays widely seen as the father of the nation, able to defend Kazakh culture and protect Kazakh citizens' interests during the harsh years of Soviet rule. In popular literature (e.g. Ramadan brochures in 2003) he is referred to as a saint. A mosque devoted to him is currently being erected in Sozaq, and his tomb in Almaty attracts many pilgrims. One of my *Aq jol* informants explained that she had gone on a *ziyārāt* to the tomb with her little son in order to obtain Kunaev's blessing. She believed that through the intercession of the new saint, her son would grow up to be a man of power like Kunaev, who was for so long the most important person in the republic. In this way the 'specification' of this new saint has been clearly established: whereas others may be more appropriate for healing or fertility or marital crises, Kunaev is the saint to whom you turn if you crave power and influence.

The three factions of *Aq jol* have become complex 'corporations'. Individual members have special functions (as shamans, psychic healers, blessing givers, etc.), but the group collectively performs integrative functions through its *shiraq* rituals and by organizing pilgrimages to saints' shrines. The charismatic leaders emphasize the Muslim character of the movement, yet they remain open to other denominations (especially Orthodox Christians) as well as to non-Kazakhs. The rituals are a synthesis of Islamic and non-Islamic regional customs. Members usually possess no more than superficial knowledge of Islamic doctrines, regardless of whether or not they are nominally Muslim. Inside the group they undergo a 'Muslim education course' based on the interpretations of *Aq jol* leaders, who refer extensively to local tradition and to the 'instructions' issued by the ancestors. As a result, the gap between their own religious faith and both the official Islam of the state and the worldwide teachings of the *umma* becomes even wider.

Of course *Aq jol* should not be confused with the revival of Sufi traditions as represented by the Yasawiyya order, which has played such an important role in the re-Islamization of Kazakhstan. In 1992–93 *šayh* Ismatulla-kari returned from Afghanistan (where his father had fled in the

1930s) to establish a *madrasa* in Almaty. Whereas *Aq jol* aims at establishing a new religious formula incorporating pre-Islamic traditions, Ismatulla-kari concentrates on revitalizing 'Kazakh Sufi tradition', which is placed firmly within a Muslim context. Ironically, his group (*jama'rat*) is widely perceived to be a sect performing non-Islamic, shamanic rituals. As Privratsky pointed out following his research in Turkistan, local people no longer have any collective memory of the Sufi orders (Privratsky 2001: 104). Their main public rituals were banned in 1930. As a result, their contemporary revival is associated not with Islam but with ecstatic performances of Kazakh *baqsı*, shamans who merely imitate Islamic forms and discourses in their rituals.

Despite this perception the number of *jama'rats* has grown rapidly. Their media presence, notably through the performances of a vocal group called Iyassauī, has attracted many new members and sympathizers, especially among the young. Some are people who have serious problems with drugs or alcohol, whereas others seek the possibility of realizing their spiritual needs. A third group consists of businessmen and intellectuals, some of whom are able to provide generous financial support to their *jama'rat*. Ismatulla requires his new recruits to begin with a fast lasting forty days, during which the neophyte is completely isolated from the outside world and has contact only with the teacher. Following this 'purification procedure', most members return to their homes and resume more or less normal lives, though they retain ties to their *jama'rat* and participate in its rituals. Others give up their civil careers, learn Arabic, and eventually acquire the status of 'teacher' in their own new *jama'rat*.

One factor behind the popularity of the Yasawiyya in the 1990s was the immigration of large numbers of ethnic Kazakhs from China and Mongolia. These immigrants faced numerous problems in adapting to a Kazakhstan that appeared to be highly Russified and secularized. Thanks in part to Ismatulla, they came to be perceived as the bearers of the 'true Kazakh' culture, with privileged access to 'true Kazakh Islam' and the Yasawiyya order. 'I have travelled round the world. Kazakhs, brothers and sisters, do not search for religion, spiritualization abroad. All knowledge, everything of value, is here in your country, this rich country. You need only to study the way of Qoja Ahmet Yasawi, Abaj, and Shakyrym [two famous poets]', urged Ismatulla (quoted in Atygataj 2002: 3). Unlike the leaders of *Aq jol*, he could see nothing of value in pre-Islamic customs: 'Religion had to be learned from Arabs, because there was nothing in Kazakhstan, no religion, no spirituality' (Atygataj 2002: 3).

Ismatulla had initially to cope with the obstacles put in his way by the MSDK, which accused him of supporting the Afghan Taliban and wanting to

train Islamic fundamentalists in his *madrasa*. In fact he had been the spiritual teacher of an army officer in Afghanistan, but he had no links at all to the Taliban. Nonetheless his *madrasa* was closed and Ismatulla was temporarily deported from Kazakhstan. Even this did not hinder the expansion of his *jama'rat*. After three years he returned to the country and acquired Kazakhstani citizenship. At the time of writing, *šayh* Ismatulla's relations with the secular authorities were again warm, and his praise for the accomplishments of President Nazarbayev was reciprocated in the form of unofficial encouragement of new *jama'rat* sections throughout the country.

Conclusion

Since Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, its religious situation has been transformed. A new stage of Islamization has begun in which various trends are competing for dominance. Local Muslims, few of whom had any detailed knowledge of Islam previously, are now able to choose from a wide range of offerings on the 'religious market'. The Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Kazakhstan has been forced onto the defensive and has had to witness the expansion not only of various non-Muslim confessions but also of new, 'heretical' strands within Islam. So far the new republic has maintained its multi-ethnic and multi-religious character, in accordance with international norms for the protection of religious human rights. The charismatic leaders of *Aq jol* are treated as charlatans by the 'official' clergy, yet they enjoy great popularity among the population. Many nominal Muslims discover the teachings of Islam for the first time in *Aq jol* groups, but they do so in a highly syncretic form.

Whereas *Aq jol* has been attractive to people in all age groups who have had to cope with misfortunes, the revitalization of Sufi rituals has appealed particularly to the younger generation. Imported literature on Islamic mysticism has contributed significantly to the spread of Sufi ideology and practices, but the support of President Nazarbayev has been even more important. According to the head of state, all Kazakhs should study the heritage of Qoja Ahmet Yasawi, 'on the teachings of whom the whole of Kazakh Islam has been based'.

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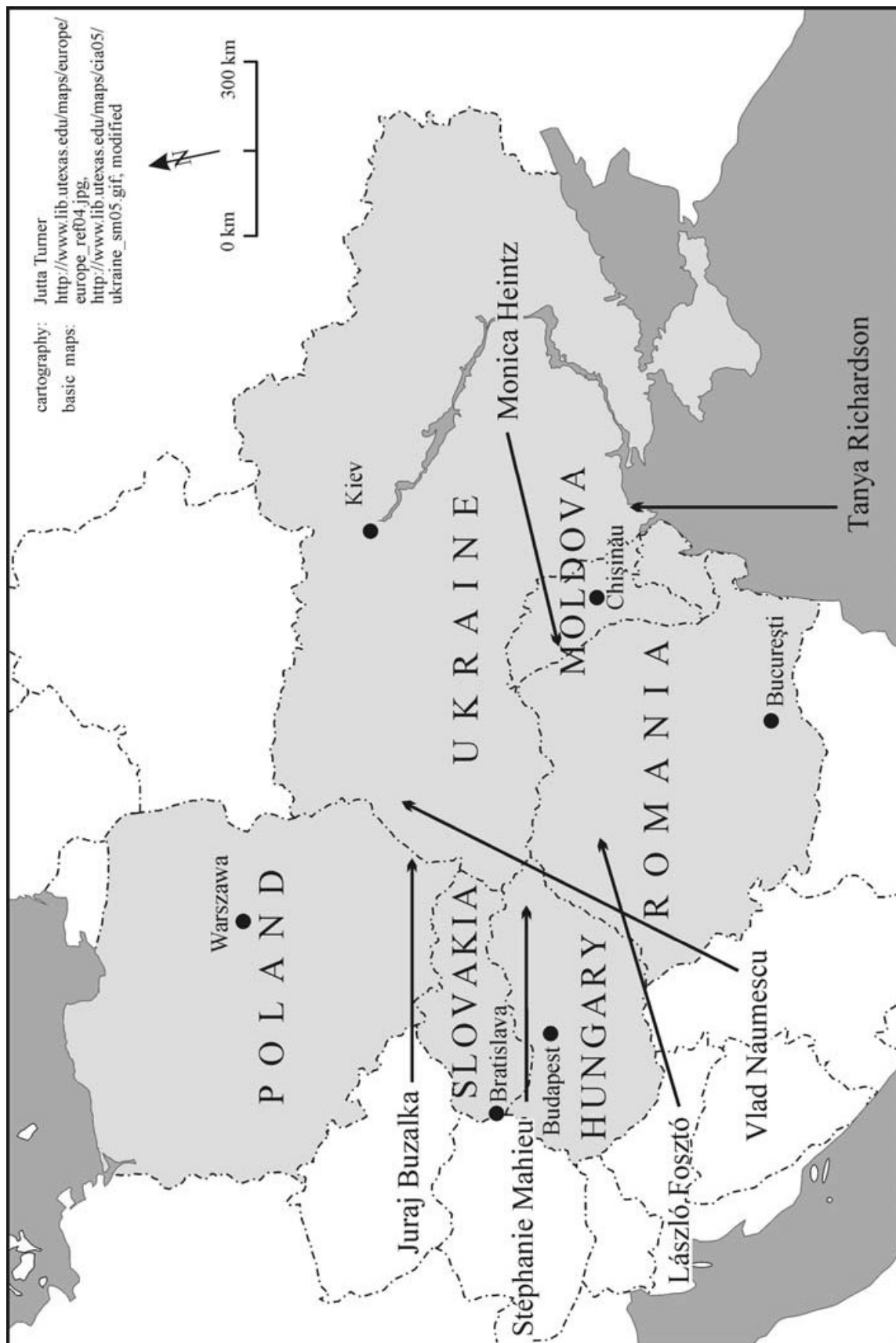
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PART TWO

EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE



Fieldsites of the researchers of the East-Central Europe Group

Chapter 9

Tolerance, Conformity, and Moral Relativism: Cases from Moldova

Monica Heintz

Morality and tolerance have not always gone hand in hand among Christians, despite Jesus's original call to tolerate and forgive Mary Magdalene's sins. In eighteenth-century Puritan Massachusetts, a scarlet letter stigmatized the sinner who took love to be more valuable than eternal sorrow.¹ God's moral beings could be merciless. Today the idea that morality is not counter to tolerance but should include its exercise wins the strength of law in Western societies.

In this chapter I examine the question of whether any similar change has taken place in postsocialist eastern Europe. I first address the theoretical question of the conciliation between tolerance and morality and read it through the lens of conformity. Then I use two case studies drawn from ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in 2003 and 2004 in the Republic of Moldova to argue that tolerance is possible when the moral law is violated but the violation is not perceived as threatening to the community. In the current context of social instability in the Republic of Moldova, 'civic' norms, in the sense of conformity to the majority, are more important than moral norms.

My first case is one of religious intolerance by the state towards a new religious group. This repressed group invoked the universality of human rights by appealing to the international organization that enforces them in Europe – the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) – and won its case. The material on which I rely comes from public sources: textbooks, official reports, scientific literature, and newspaper articles. The second case is one of tolerance towards deviant behaviour at the level of a rural community, the

¹ Hawthorne wrote his chef d'oeuvre *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) in the nineteenth century.

village of Satul Vechi in the north of the republic, on the frontier with Ukraine.² It was my field site for six months.

The two cases enable a consideration of Moldovans' attitudes towards fellow citizens who hold different beliefs. Through them I consider questions such as, What is the position of the new Moldovan state, independent since 1991, towards religious pluralism? What is the appeal of international laws regulating human rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of conscience? Are new religious groups tolerated, and if so, what determines the lack of violence towards them? And how do communities incorporate individual deviant behaviour?

Moral Relativism and the Foundations of Tolerance

In recent years the idea that people should be tolerant has been increasingly accepted in some circles and has found its way into numerous international laws and acts (e.g. UNESCO's 1995 'Declaration of Principles on Tolerance').³ *Tolerance* is a term applied to the collective and individual practice of not persecuting those who believe or behave in ways of which one does not approve. Tolerance implies both the ability to punish and the conscious decision not to do so. Intolerance, its opposite, presupposes the same judgement and disagreement with the other's beliefs but entails persecuting the other, violently or otherwise. Tolerance has come to denote the practical rationale behind permitting uncommon social practices and diversity, behaviour that departs from conformity within society. The old paradox of tolerance, which is that tolerance demands intolerance towards the intolerant, is encountered at the level of international policy, which demands the punishment of intolerant behaviour towards (mainly) minority groups, all in the name of tolerance. Moral relativism is commonly said to provide the philosophical justification for the practise of tolerance, though some philosophers try to demonstrate that this move from theory to practice on the part of decision-makers is abusive (Gowans 2004).

Anthropologists were fascinated with the diversity of cultures they studied empirically. In particular, Franz Boas and his students – Ruth

² Satul Vechi is not the real name of the village but is a typical village name meaning 'old village' in Romanian.

³ According to UNESCO's declaration: 'Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. ... Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.'

Benedict, Melville J. Herskovits, and Margaret Mead – explicitly articulated influential forms of moral relativism in the twentieth century. In 1947, on the occasion of the United Nations debate about universal human rights, the American Anthropological Association issued a statement declaring that moral values were relative to cultures and there was no way to show that the values of one culture were better than those of another. Anthropologists, however, have never been unanimous in taking a relativist position (Gellner 1970; Sperber 1982). In recent years, human rights advocacy on the part of some anthropologists has mitigated the relativist orientation of the discipline.

But the work of anthropologists stimulated the philosophical current of meta-ethical moral relativism, which stipulates that ‘the truth or falsity of moral judgements, or their justification, is not absolute or universal, but is relative to the traditions, convictions, or practices of a group of persons’ (Gowans 2004).⁴ This position would leave advocates of the implementation of universal human rights, of religious pluralism, and of norms of tolerance without their bread and butter. If a culture does not hold among its values that of religious pluralism or of tolerance towards minority groups, should anthropologists cast negative judgements on that culture by using universal (in fact, Western) concepts? The cultural relativism that most anthropologists adopt when encountering different religious beliefs in the field often moves into universalistic moral judgements when it comes to practices such as genital excision, murder, and the production of suffering. However significant this dilemma is for the practice of anthropology, I do not deal with it here; I have done so elsewhere (Heintz 1997). Instead, I restrict my discussion to the ambiguous link between morality and tolerance.

The original definition of morality as a code of conduct put forward by a society and used as a guide to behaviour by the members of that society might have suited small-scale, homogeneous societies. Large-scale societies that have experienced the influence of different codes of conduct coming from outside cannot share the same homogeneity of values (Gert 2004: 1). Coherent groups emerge within them that hold different norms, different religious beliefs, different practices, and even the right to the recognition of their difference. Today they can appeal to the Western concepts of pluralism, tolerance, and moral relativism to support their nascent or established ‘deviant’ behaviour and obtain protection against local punishment, as my first case study shows. Nevertheless, their deviance from the norm is judged by the majority as immoral and potentially harmful. The majority (or simply

⁴ An important early bridge from anthropology to philosophy was established by Edward Westermarck (1906–8, 1932), a social scientist who wrote anthropological and philosophical works defending forms of empirical as well as meta-ethical moral relativism.

other groups holding different values) will be torn between their own values, which they hold to be the ‘right’ values, and the imperative not to exercise violence towards those who do not share them.⁵

What is important in one group’s encounter with another that espouses different moral or religious values is that those others depart from conformity to ‘normal’ practices. Conformity is the act of maintaining a certain degree of similarity in practices to the other members of one’s social group, to those in power, or to the general status quo.⁶ Nonconformity and deviance are seen as actions against the majority, who conform to the norms. Deviants show their lack of solidarity or sympathy and even their hostility towards others. If we were to follow a Durkheimian path, we would say that those who hold different beliefs violate the sacredness of the community, which is supposed to share beliefs in common. The problem raised by holders of a different set of religious beliefs is not that their beliefs necessarily attract disapproval but that by holding them, they draw a line between themselves and others. According to Durkheim (2003 [1912]), what is sacred is not the religious belief per se but the sharing of it within the community.

Durkheim’s seminal work was nourished with examples from the communities of Australian Aborigines. Should the application of his theory be restricted to homogeneous, small-scale societies? In what follows, I analyse some cases from Moldova from the angle of conformity and show that there, too, the exercise of tolerance or intolerance depends on the evaluation of an action as civil or uncivil – as harmless or harmful to the maintenance of community – and not on a moral judgement about the content of beliefs.

The Case of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia versus Moldova

The eastern Orthodox churches, or Orthodox churches, are a communion of nationally based, autocephalous churches sharing the same credo. They were born from the Great Schism of 1054, which durably separated Christianity into a western Christianity – the Catholic Church, led from Rome – and an

⁵ A moral relativist position might help them tolerate the other’s behaviour and conform to the adage ‘understanding is half forgiving’. Here we can see how moral relativism is more problematic than (plain) relativism. Whereas a relativist position implies only understanding the other, a moral relativist position may also lead to forgiving the other.

⁶ Conformity in practice does not imply conformity in values; the individual can conform publicly but hold his or her values in private (compliance).

eastern Christianity – the Orthodox Church, led from Constantinople (of course other oriental Christian churches had fissioned much earlier). The Russian Orthodox Church became independent of Constantinople in 1448 and established an autocephalous patriarchate in 1589. The Romanian Orthodox Church became autonomous in 1885 and was promoted to the rank of patriarchate in 1925. During the period 1918–44, when the territory of Moldova was part of Romania, its main religious institution was the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, under the jurisdiction of the Romanian Orthodox patriarchate. After 1944, when the territory of today's Moldova was incorporated into the USSR, Stalin suppressed the existing Metropolitan Church and created a new church, the Metropolitan Church of Moldova, under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church.⁷

Immediately after Moldova gained its independence from the USSR in 1991, a group of priests from the Metropolitan Church of Moldova, headed by the archbishop of Balti, declared their schism from the Russian Orthodox Church and demanded the reactivation of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia as part of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Romanian patriarchate, based in Bucharest, agreed to take the new-old church under its canonical care and gave it the status of a metropolitan church for Romanians situated outside state borders.⁸ Although a 'Law on Religious Freedom' (*Legea despre Culte*, nr 979-XII), guaranteeing the free exercise of one's religious beliefs, was passed on 24 March 1992, the Moldovan state repeatedly rejected the juridical registration of the new religious institution until 2002, when the European Court for Human Rights pressed the republic to register the church. As a member of the Council of Europe, Moldova had to respect the ECHR decision (ECHR 2001). In recent years the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia has grown and won parishes from its direct competitor, the Metropolitan Church of Moldova, with consequences yet to be seen.

What was so intolerable to the Moldovan state authorities – three presidents and ten governments between 1991 and 2002 – that they refused to register the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia while allowing the registration of many other Christian and non-Christian denominations? What threats did this religious group pose, and what was its influence in the public sphere that prompted the political forces in power to systematically

⁷ National metropolitanates under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church were created in nearly all the republics of the USSR.

⁸ The Romanian Orthodox Church has two other metropolitanates and smaller entities abroad, to cater for the spiritual needs of the Romanian diaspora. From the point of view of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the request of the Bessarabian metropolitanate was canonically valid and unproblematical.

persecute the group with beatings, threats, and even occasional murders? To understand this conflict between church and state it is necessary first to examine its historical context – the origins of the Republic of Moldova and its relation to neighbouring Romania. After doing so, I analyse the conflict in the light of the Moldovan government's attempts to maintain statehood.

From the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, the zone of Romanian ethno-linguistic settlement was politically divided into three kingdoms: Moldova (Moldavia), Walachia, and Transylvania. The three kingdoms were under the influence of three empires: the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Transylvania and, from the eighteenth century, the northern parts of Moldova), the Ottoman Empire (Walachia and Moldova), and the Russian Empire (from 1812 the eastern part of the kingdom of Moldova, which Russians called Bessarabia). In the nineteenth century two of the kingdoms, Moldova – without Bessarabia – and Walachia, took advantage of favourable geopolitical circumstances to unite under the name Romania. In 1918, after the First World War, Transylvania and Bessarabia, too, were united with Romania.

The German-Russian non-aggression pact of 1939 allowed the Soviet Union to claim Bessarabia. In June 1940, after an ultimatum, the Romanian army and administration withdrew from Bessarabia, and the Soviet army took over. The 'annexation' or 'liberation' of Bessarabia – depending on whose point of view is expressed – was accompanied by massive movements of people. The Romanian elites (teachers, priests, administrators) sought refuge in Romania; those who did not manage to flee were subject to deportation to Siberia (Bulat 2000; Fruntasu 2003). A year later, in 1941, Romania joined the German forces, now in conflict with the USSR, with the aim of recovering Bessarabia. From 1941 to 1944 the region had a joint German-Romanian administration.

In March 1944, Soviet troops crossed the Dniestr and incorporated the Bessarabian region and northern Bukovina into the USSR. Parts of the territory (northern Bukovina and southern Bessarabia) were incorporated into Ukraine, and the remaining, central part was consolidated as a new republic, the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). The frontier between the Socialist Republic of Romania and the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was reinforced, and the history of the two countries was rewritten from a Soviet perspective.

To justify the new borders, Stalin created a new nation, the Moldovans, an action necessary in order to respect the USSR policy of incorporating only nation-states into the USSR (Eyal and Smith 1998). Moldovans were conceived of as a separate ethnic group from Romanians and were held to speak a different language, Moldovan, which was now

written in Cyrillic to differentiate it from Romanian. The story of the birth of the 'Moldovan' language has been amply documented by Western social scientists (Eyal and Smith 1998; King 2000; Hegarty 2001).

Throughout the socialist period the republics of Moldova and Romania had few contacts, and circulation of information concerning their common past was prohibited in both states. Despite this policy, at the end of the 1980s a new generation of Moldovan intellectuals began claiming linguistic and national (Romanian) rights. In a few years, facilitated by *perestroika* and the general 1989 movements in eastern Europe, Moldovans obtained from the USSR recognition of the Romanian language as the unique official language of the republic, written in Latin script (31 August 1989), of the ethnonym 'Romanians', of the Romanian national anthem, and of their political rights (Cojocaru 2001). At the time, the republic featured a mixed ethnic population, including 64.5 per cent Moldovans (Romanians), 13.8 per cent Ukrainians, 13 per cent Russians, and 3.5 per cent Gagauz and other groups. Two years later, on 27 August 1991, the republic declared its independence from the Soviet Union under the name 'Republic of Moldova'. Romania was the first state to recognize Moldova's independence, an act often invoked by Romanian politicians in order to defend themselves from accusations of expansionism made by Moldovan officials.

After 1994, Moldovan officials whittled away the 'Romanian' national rights gained in 1989, out of their desire (notwithstanding that most of them were Romanian) to base the legitimacy of their new state on the uniqueness of their nation. Thus the name of the official language, 'Romanian' in 1989, was changed again to 'Moldovan' in 1994. The anthem 'Wake Up, Romanians' (Romania's anthem) was changed to 'Our Language', with lyrics written by Alexe Mateevici, a Romanian born in Bessarabian territory. The government threatened periodically to change the history textbooks from covering the 'history of the Romanians' (taught in 2004 in the majority of Romanian-speaking schools) to covering the 'history of Moldova'. Massive social protests in 1995, 2002, and 2003 dissuaded the government from implementing the new textbooks.⁹

In short, the Stalinist doctrine of the difference between the two ethnic groups (*narody*) was reinforced during the period 1994–2005. Moldovan officials refused to consider the Republic of Moldova a 'Romanian state within different state borders', the formulation used by Romanian officials to deal with their eastern neighbour. In addition to defining Moldovan identity through a specific content (language, ethnicity, history), Moldovan officials tried to define the nation's identity through opposition and conducted a

⁹ A full account of the debate can be found in Ihrig, Forthcoming.

strong anti-Romanian campaign from 1998 to 2005 (Heintz 2005). This attitude changed dramatically in January 2005 following the visit of the newly elected president of Romania, Traian Basescu, to the Republic of Moldova.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the government's refusal to grant status to the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia in the years up to 2002 should be read within the general framework of the fight against 'Romanian imperialism' – to use the words of the Moldovan president, Vladimir Voronin.

The schism of the priests who demanded reactivation of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia took place shortly after Moldova gained its independence in 1991. What differentiated this metropolitan church abroad – that is, outside Romanian borders – from the metropolitan church inside Romania was its relative autonomy, which gave it the right to retain the old Julian calendar (all religious events except Easter are celebrated 13 days after they are celebrated in Romania) and the right to administer itself internally.

The government of the Republic of Moldova, to which the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia handed its first application for registration in September 1992, refused to register the church, even though the legislation regarding religious freedom in Moldova could be considered generous. After independence, Moldova adhered quickly to international documents stipulating freedom of conscience: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Convention for Children's Rights (1989), and the International Treaty on Civil and Political Rights of 1966. Its Law on Religious Freedom rejected the limitations imposed by Soviet legislation regarding religious organizations and proclaimed freedom of conscience and religion, the right to practise one's own religion individually or collectively, and freedom of religious teaching and religious rituals. The Moldovan government includes a Religious Affairs Department whose task is to register all religious groups and their affiliated organizations. The 1994 constitution confirmed the freedom of religion and further validated the Law on Religious Freedom of 1992. Following this law, the Republic of Moldova legally recognized 19 churches and a dozen Christian missions between

¹⁰ There are several explanations for this 180-degree turn. Some political commentators in Moldova invoked the Communist government's fear of an 'Orange Revolution' before the February 2005 elections. Other political commentators in Romania referred to the personal merit of the Romanian president, who knew how to avoid the sensitive national question and to address the more burning topic of bilateral economic exchange. Notably, Romania offered its support in solving the energy crisis that had affected Moldova since the worsening of its relations with Trans-Dniestria and Russia.

1993 and 1997.¹¹ The only church that all successive governments refused to recognize was the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia.

The Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia applied to the Moldovan government for legal recognition as a local, autonomous church eight times between 1992 and 2000 but received no reply (ECHR 2001). It appealed several times to various national courts, under different heads, sometimes even winning the case, but the government invariably appealed the decision, asserting that the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia was a schismatic church and its existence had to be decided within the Metropolitan Church of Moldova and not by the state. Thus the church had to wait for the canonical negotiations in progress between the Romanian and Russian patriarchates, a type of negotiation that could last for decades or even centuries.

Having exhausted all possibilities for a national resolution of the problem, the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia lodged a complaint at the European Court of Human Rights in January 1999, which was adjudicated in December 2001. The decision of the ECHR was that the Moldovan government had violated articles 9 (stipulating freedom of religion) and 13 (stipulating the provision of domestic legal structures able to solve the problem) of the European Convention for Human Rights. The court ordered the government to register the church immediately and pay the church's ECHR trial expenses. Despite this decision, a month of street demonstrations in March 2002 was necessary before the government was willing to implement it. Registration of the church took place in July 2002, ten years after the first application had been made.

The reasons invoked by the Moldovan government for not recognizing this church were related to the reasons for the freezing of relations between Moldova and Romania during the same period. A 1994 memorandum from the Moldovan Religious Affairs Department (quoted in ECHR 2001) claimed that 'for nearly two years an ecclesiastical group known under the name of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia has been operating illegally in Moldovan territory. No positive result has been obtained in spite of our sustained efforts to put a stop to its activity'. The writers added that 'the activity of this group is causing religious and socio-political tension in Moldova and will have unforeseeable repercussions.' One of the department's main objections was to the name 'Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia'. The department argued that there was no territorial unit called

¹¹ Among these churches were the Pentecostal Church, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mosaic cult, the Metropolitan Church of Moldova, the Old Believers, and the Baha'is. The only qualification in considering the Law on Religious Freedom a tolerant law might be its prohibition of active proselytizing, which leaves officials free to accuse and ban a cult on those grounds.

Bessarabia within the Republic of Moldova, and creating a group with such a name would be an 'anti-State act – a negation of the sovereign and independent State which the Republic of Moldova constitutes'.

The memorandum pointed to the peaceful relation that should exist between an Orthodox church and the state and argued indirectly that the only Orthodox church that could claim such a relation with the Moldovan state was the Metropolitan Church of Moldova. 'All Orthodox parishes in Moldovan territory have been registered as constituent parts of the Orthodox Church of Moldova', and 'if nothing is done to put a stop to the activity of the so-called Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, the result will be destabilization not just of the Orthodox Church but of the whole of Moldovan society'. The privileged relationship between the Metropolitan Church of Moldova and the Moldovan state, which appears in no legal act but has existed *de facto* since Moldova's independence, is here clearly emphasized. It is in this light that one must understand the concluding sentence of the 1994 memorandum: 'Recognition of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and ratification of its articles of association by the Government would automatically entail the disappearance of the Metropolitan Church of Moldova'.

Faced with two metropolitan churches, one established by Romania in 1925 and discontinued during the Soviet period, the other established by the USSR in 1947, the post-Soviet independent state chose one church to support, the simultaneous existence of the two being seen as impossible. This reasoning had a basis: both churches claimed to be the heir to the majority church that had existed in Moldovan territory. Locating this continuity with the Russian Orthodox Church or with the Romanian Orthodox Church made a huge difference politically and historically. Indeed, while the government was delaying the registration of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia (its 'resurrection', in the terms of church supporters), it also tried to legitimate the existence of the Metropolitan Church of Moldova. It did so by recognizing that church, in an act dated September 2001, as the official inheritor of the pre-1944 Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia. Following the registration of the new-old Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia in 2002, this act was declared void in a court case in February 2004.

At stake in this inheritance is not the disputed property of the church, which consists of some parish houses and confessional schools but no churches (according to Orthodox canon law, churches belong to the community and may change hands only if the community decides on it). Nor are differences in religious beliefs at stake: there are none. What is at stake is the symbolic significance of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia's affiliation with the Romanian Orthodox Church and whether history is to be

read in the framework of Romanian national history. What the officials expressed in their memorandum regarding the ‘disappearance of the Metropolitan Church of Moldova’ was their fear of the disappearance of Moldova as an independent state. All post-1991 governments feared such a disappearance, because the Republic of Moldova could draw on no historical tradition to legitimate its existence as a state.¹²

It is on the same symbolic grounds that prohibition of the regional term *Bessarabia* in official discourse should be read. The term evokes a pre-1944 Romanian past, a past when the state of Moldova did not exist. Following the model of the Orthodox union between church and state, it was feared that the expansion of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, part of the Romanian Orthodox Church, would bring in the long run a national and territorial expansion of Romania into Bessarabia, and thus the loss of Moldova’s independence and indeed statehood. But the ‘Romanian nationalists’ of the late 1980s had become pragmatic politicians by the mid-1990s. Under the pressure of Gagauz and Trans-Dniestrian separatism (which led to the war of 1992), of the claims of ethnic minorities, and of Moldova’s economic dependence on the Russian Federation, they renounced their first program of unification with Romania and moved into the ‘independentist’ and later ‘Moldovenist’ direction.

The story of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia is an interesting case of intolerance and incivility on the part of the state towards a religious denomination perceived as symbolically threatening to statehood. The conflict between the church and the Republic of Moldova was linked not to religious matters but to nationalism and statehood. Both parties to the conflict understood this, despite the church’s lawyers’ play on religious freedom during the ECHR trial. Obviously, a nationalist discourse would not have won the sympathy of the ECHR. The Moldovan government’s defeat may have been due in part to the xenophobic discourse of its lawyer (see ECHR 2001). The Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia refrained from any indulgence in nationalism, and its priests stayed outside the political domain, even fearing being associated with it. Moldovan officials nonetheless considered the church’s mere existence harmful for the existence of the state and were apprehensive of the sympathy it enjoyed in some local communities and its offer of an alternative identification as ‘Romanian’. At the local level, the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia was often disapproved of not because of the expressed ethnicity of its members but because any

¹² Bessarabia existed as an independent state for only four months, December 1917 through March 1918. Otherwise, it has been only a region within another state – the Moldovan kingdom (to 1812), the Russian Empire (1812–1917), the Romanian kingdom (1918–44), and the USSR (1944–91).

discussion of ‘Romanians’ versus ‘Moldovans’ was considered liable to divide the community and threaten its social existence.¹³

Tolerance towards Idiosyncratic Deviant Behaviour

Satul Vechi is a community of 2,990 persons situated in the northern part of the republic, seven kilometres from a middle-range agro-industrial town. The village, mentioned in a document dating from 1509, has its own museum and a historical monograph dedicated to it (unpublished to date); belonging to Satul Vechi triggers pride. The population of the village is overwhelmingly Romanian-speaking and 99 per cent Orthodox. The remaining 1 per cent consists of three related families who have recently converted to a new Protestant movement. The villagers have regular access to two Orthodox churches: the village church and the church of a monastery three kilometres distant. They also have the possibility of attending one of the three churches in the larger town, to which they are linked by frequent though irregular means of public transportation. All churches in the *raion* (district) belong to the Metropolitan Church of Moldova.

The civility and tolerance manifested in the community can be analysed with regard to a key case of ‘problematic’ behaviour linked to the sphere of the religious. I start with the recent history of local religious institutions, gathered as oral histories from villagers, and then look at villagers’ positions towards some key ‘deviants’ on the basis of a survey I conducted in summer 2004 in 75 households.

Like most other villages in Moldova, Satul Vechi had its own church, situated in the centre of the village. This building survived the Second World War and functioned until 1959, when it was closed by the Soviet authorities – 1959 was a year of radicalization of Soviet policy against religion throughout the Soviet Union (Anderson 1994). Khrushchev believed in the future of Communism and thought that rooting out the vestiges of religion would speed the way to it. Religious groups of all denominations suffered persecution, and more than one-third of all registered places of worship were

¹³ The existence of different public spheres in Moldova reduced the impact of the existence of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia. However, as access to information grows, the danger of divisions in the community also grows, as indicated by the increasing number of churches that are built or pass from the Metropolitan Church of Moldova to the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia (Dungaciu 2005). The Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia has 160 parishes, and the Metropolitan Church of Moldova, 1,143 (personal communications from the two metropolitan churches’ secretaries, September 2004). The number of churches registered with the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia grew from zero to 160 between July 2002 and September 2004.

closed down between 1959 and 1964. The Orthodox Church lost nearly 6,000 churches all over the USSR.

According to Satul Vechi villagers, who seemed unaware of the larger phenomenon, their church was closed by the authorities and the priest was obliged to leave (he was not originally from the village) because people had too little faith to defend it. In other villages, people took their pitchforks and sticks and defended the church. In Satul Vechi, the church was left to fall into ruin. Some people attended the major celebrations such as Easter in the neighbouring town or in the neighbouring Ukrainian village (it was relatively easy to cross the frontier during Soviet times), where a church remained open. This triggered conflicts with the village Party secretary, events mentioned by many of the villagers who experienced them.

Marriages and baptisms were celebrated in other villages where churches still existed. At funerals, priests from neighbouring villages were brought to the cemetery, and young children were christened by priests at home. As for events such as the *hram*, a celebration tied to the local church and one of the three main religious celebrations of the Orthodox year in rural areas (together with Easter and Christmas), villagers celebrated it at home by laying their tables for potential visitors.¹⁴ This became such a tradition that even today, when a church exists in the village, many people do not link their celebration of this occasion to the church. 'We respect the religious celebrations; visitors could always pop in, and we must be ready for them with a laid table' was the way one middle-aged woman affirmed her religiosity.

In 1990, soon after the national movement, a 21-year-old Romanian-speaking monk came to the village and began rebuilding the church. Villagers contributed funds and labour, and the church was ready to be used a few years later. At that time the young monk was arguably the most popular figure in the village; he knew and had links with all the families and enjoyed their unconditional support. At a time in which everything around them was being dismantled, the making of the church was the most important constructive process around which the community gathered. The monk enjoyed a reputation for efficiency and was considered a good *gospodar*, meaning a hardworking man and a good manager – a very positive appreciation in Romanian.¹⁵ A constant refrain was, 'The monk is

¹⁴ The *hram* is the celebration of the name of the church, an important celebration among Romanian-speaking people. I described the *hram* and its accompanying 'laying-down of the tables' in Heintz 2004.

¹⁵ Accounts of the organization of cooking for the construction workers on the church building site give a measure of his efficiency. He grouped families by two or three and made each group responsible for one day's cooking. The priest picked up

such a good working man – he did everything here. He made the church in the village and the monastery by himself. He always listens to people and helps them.’

The monk was also the first priest of the village church, until he moved away in 1997 to rebuild a monastery outside the village in a wild place where there was an old, small altar. Documents attested to the existence of a monastery there in the seventeenth century, but it had disappeared by the nineteenth century. In 1997 the monk began officiating in the open air, and photographs show large crowds attending the services. The church of the monastery was officially blessed in the presence of Vladimir, the metropolitan of Moldova, in 2002, but the construction project was still under way in 2004.

Except for the young monk, who was now abbot of the monastery, no other monks lived there – just occasional visiting monks, an old woman in the kitchen, and many construction workers. In the first years of the construction of the monastery church, the villagers helped by feeding these workers, but they were not solicited to contribute funds. The church painters were brought from neighbouring Ukraine, as were most of the construction workers. To secure the necessary funds, the monk travelled widely in Ukraine in a huge truck, buying and selling whatever he could, as well as transporting construction materials. His driving the truck at 100 kilometres an hour on the narrow main street of Satul Vechi, used mostly by pedestrians, was a source of pride for the locals, despite its danger to children and old people. As one woman explained, watching his truck pass: ‘He is always busy and has to hurry somewhere.’ Only on Sundays could he be found at the monastery.

After the monk’s departure for the monastery, four priests served consecutively in the village from 1997 to 2004, but none enjoyed the community’s esteem. The first one left after a year on his own decision; the second was thrown out of the village because of his frequent sexual affairs and was said to have returned to his job as a barman. The third did not stay long, and the fourth, who was there during my fieldwork – though settled with his three children and ‘young modest wife’, who enjoyed the sympathy of the villagers – was not held in high esteem either. His rivalry with the monk was well known, and his adulterous relationship with the wife of a policeman who had temporarily migrated for work in Russia was an object of gossip. Church attendance in 2003–4 was low and restricted to old people who could not walk to the monastery. In the early 1990s, when the monk was still officiating in the village, the church was said to have been full,

the food in the morning and delivered pots and crockery to the group in the evening. The sequence began at one end of the village and ended at the other.

especially at Easter and *hram*. A decade later the monastery was better attended than the village church, but most of those attending came from towns in Moldova and neighbouring Ukraine, not from Satul Vechi. 'People in the village don't have that much faith', I was often told.

The enthusiasm for religion in Satul Vechi in the early 1990s was surely determined by both the effervescence of the young monk and people's recovery of their right to manifest their faith in public after years of repression. This enthusiasm followed the same curve as interest in the banned and recovered national identity: by the late 1990s it had begun to fade. Faced with unemployment, poverty, and the more recent problem of migration, which disintegrated families, most villagers confessed they would give priority to material interests over spiritual matters. Their disengagement from spiritual life was accelerated by their disenchantment with church leaders, in the same way their growing lack of interest in the national movement was accelerated by disenchantment with their national leaders.¹⁶ The two phenomena were linked in the accounts of certain educated villagers.¹⁷

Despite the villagers' esteem for the young monk, he was also in a way a 'deviant', a violator of accepted norms. One of the secrets of the village, which I was allowed to hear only after several months of fieldwork but which, as then became obvious from multiple sources of information, was known by every adult villager, was that the monk had two children. Whereas Orthodox priests are allowed to marry and actually are required to do so before they can receive the charge of a parish, Orthodox monks definitely are not. This fact was well acknowledged by most villagers. In all accounts of the love affair between the monk and a married woman from the village, whose marriage was effectively broken up by the relationship, it was whispered that he had sinned. But most women from whom I heard the gossip were also convinced that 'for him it is easy, he just raises his hands towards God, and he is forgiven'. The frequency of this phrase in their accounts suggests that this was the official community discourse for

¹⁶ People grew tired of political life in general, as was shown by radical absenteeism at local elections in Chisinau, Moldova's capital. In 2005, Chisinau's inhabitants were called to the polls four times in order to elect a mayor, but each time only 22–25 per cent of the voters showed up. In accordance with legislation stipulating that at least one-third of the voters must vote, the elections were declared invalid.

¹⁷ This was so because the antithesis of Soviet identity was that of being Orthodox Romanian. Romanians in Romania were viewed by the Romanian-speaking population in Moldova as deeply religious, and no claim to Romanianness could go unaccompanied by the claim to be a believer.

explaining people's tolerance of the monk. God has forgiven him, so why should we judge?

If some men displayed their disagreement with the appreciation the monk still enjoyed in the village by mentioning his sin, others tried to prevent their wives from telling me the story and called it 'lies' or 'women's gossip'. Most women had an 'understanding' attitude towards the monk's sin, describing his affair as 'love', the couple as 'handsome', and him as 'tortured' and 'repentant': he had left the woman and returned to his duties after a while. Obviously, his repentance was not very quick and was less than certain. Two children, born some years apart, testified to the duration of the affair.

Given the mixed attitudes of the villagers, can the fact that they still accepted the monk in their community, helping him and valuing his activities, be considered 'tolerance'? The exercise of tolerance implies three phases: disagreement with the other's beliefs or behaviour, display of this disagreement – privately if not publicly – and the decision not to punish the deviance. In this case the first condition, disagreement with the monk's behaviour, was met – it was manifested in villagers' desire to keep his sinning secret, far from the ears of strangers. Other occurrences of disagreement with adulterous behaviour indicated the existence of a certain moral standard in the community that came mostly from the villagers' Christian faith. Monks and priests were certainly expected to conform to this religious moral standard, even though their potential for bypassing moral norms was well captured in the popular saying, 'Do what the priest says, not what he does'.

Yet villagers did tolerate the man as priest in the community, and this situation seemed unlikely to change in the future solely on the basis of the memory of his sin. His affair had taken place more than five years before my fieldwork, and since then the monk had managed to render the villagers grateful to him by building the monastery, a source of local pride.¹⁸ Although the villagers voiced their disagreement with his behaviour privately, they did not publicly display it – on the contrary. The most interesting aspect of this story is that when church officials heard about the sinning monk and wanted to take his parish away, the villagers hired several buses and went to Chisinau to protest the decision. 'The whole community' (in the accounts of most villagers) went to defend him and to claim him back as

¹⁸ Villagers considered the monastery and its surrounding dependences extremely beautiful, and the priest received all the credit for having built it. The monastery, which bears the name of the village, is now a tourist attraction. The monk himself told me that he built the monastery alone and that he did it for the village, and not in order to become an abbot.

their priest, refusing any replacement. Their effort succeeded, and this was how the monk was allowed to continue preaching in the community, under the condition that he abandon his lover.

One way in which the monk's behaviour was rationalized was by dissociating this particular instance of sinning from his overall behaviour and considering it exceptional. It was not in his nature to sin – he was not an immoral person – but this sin 'happened'. Sins that 'happen' to take place meet with mechanisms of forgiveness in Christianity if the sinner repents. Forgiving, however, is not forgetting, as the many stories of past moral deviance that were recounted spontaneously to me showed.

Why did villagers (positively) tolerate the monk?¹⁹ Their account of the end of the love affair may place us on the right track. The monk took his lover to Chisinau, away from the village, and left her and her children there, after endowing her with a flat and everything necessary for a living. This was regarded as a token of responsibility and seriousness and was highly appreciated by the villagers. It should not be forgotten that the monk was not from the village (he was a 'stranger' in this respect), whereas his lover was deeply embedded in its social structure. Even if the woman never returned to the village, only sending her children to their grandparents during vacations, her family still lived there. Thus villagers could identify with the woman's family and judge that they had received reparation through the financial support of their 'daughter'. One of the greatest worries for a family is how to provide for its daughters (many daughters are forced into labour migration and often prostitution to make a living). The monk fulfilled his civic duty in this respect by providing for his lover financially and taking this burden from her parents – an enviable situation after all.

Thus the monk was guilty of a moral fault but not of a civic one. If his morality as a monk, whose life was dedicated to God, was not judged negatively but respected, it was because his civic contribution to the community, which we might term his civility, counterbalanced it successfully. Indeed, his civility counterbalanced his moral failing so successfully that he retained his pre-eminent place in the community. His position was positively tolerated by most villagers and negatively tolerated by just a small minority of people who, unimpressed with his performance for the sake of the community, continued to apply moral judgements to his behaviour.²⁰

¹⁹ I use Hayden's (2002) distinction between positive and negative tolerance.

²⁰ From a sample of 75 households included in a survey, only 4 families expressed their disdain towards the monk, those being educated people or people who had run into direct problems with him. They also admitted being in minority in the village and because of that had renounced manifesting their disagreement publicly.

In support of the assertion that civic performance was more important in the eyes of the villagers than moral performance, people's acceptance of the monk's deviance can be compared with their fragile tolerance of the behaviour of the priest who held office in the village in 2003–4. This married priest had an adulterous affair with a married woman. The affair was well known by villagers; I heard it from several sources while I conducted the household survey. Roughly two-thirds of the villagers questioned manifested their disapproval of his adulterous behaviour, talking about it as a 'sexual' and not a 'love' affair. This disapproval was followed by their noting that the priest did not do much for the community. In reality the priest had repainted the church and was very concerned that this contribution be acknowledged by the villagers.

Putting together the moral and civic judgements in villagers' characterizations of the priest shows that mechanisms were at work that balanced deviance in one domain, the moral, by invoking good performance in the other domain, the civic. These mechanisms, however, did not help the village priest. Although he had sinned as much as the monk, he was not forgiven and supported in the same way, because his work for the community was comparatively little. At the time of my fieldwork, his presence in the village and his exercise of functions were tolerated. The three phases of tolerance were met: his moral 'model' was disagreed with, the disagreement was publicly manifested, but he was not punished. The villagers' behaviour can be referred to as an exercise in 'negative tolerance' (Hayden 2002), but one in which the balance was fragile and depended on the priest's ability to continually provide for the community.

A last comparative example is that of tolerance for the three families in Satul Vechi who had converted to a new religious movement. My household survey showed that only 4 per cent of the persons interviewed felt respectful towards the holders of other beliefs (interestingly, these were women active in the church choir and thus among the most fervent Orthodox Christians). Some 30 per cent were indifferent, and the remaining 65 per cent declared themselves 'against' other religious movements. Nevertheless, the three families lived in peace in the village. Villagers singled them out, disapproved of their conversion in private but not publicly, and continued to engage in commercial relations with them. The first family to convert had nine children and 100 goats and sold goat cheese to the whole village. They were considered hard working and clean and were respected by others, although they were also considered 'strange'. That one of the children had been born physically disabled, after the family's conversion, was taken as a sign of God's punishment for 'abandoning God'. Yet no one publicly expressed disdain for the faith of the believers or attempted to persecute

them. They continued to be part of the community and to be included in local economic exchanges.

Conclusion

From my case of state intolerance towards ‘difference’ in the Republic of Moldova and a cluster of cases of local tolerance, I conclude that in both instances what was more important than differences of content were the capacities of the deviants to remain in conformity with the community. More than an understanding and acceptance of moral relativism, it was conformity that formed the basis of tolerant behaviour.

In the case of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia versus the state of Moldova, it was a lack of conformity that made the state intolerant, not the content of the new religious movement’s beliefs, which were thoroughly Orthodox. The existence of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia divided society and threatened to promote greater division in the long run, leading, it was feared, to a disintegration of the national community called the Republic of Moldova. In the village I studied, the moral deviance of the priests and the conversion of three families to neo-Protestantism were less threatening for the community, so long as a certain appearance of conformity was respected. Deviance remained a private matter, even if publicly known, so long as it triggered no negative consequences for the community. In the context of instability in Moldova in the early years of the twenty-first century, what was punishable was what contributed to further instability, not what was morally wrong. Strict moral standards were perhaps a luxury for the years to come.

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Chapter 10

Living Cosmopolitanism? ‘Tolerance’, Religion, and Local Identity in Odessa

Tanya Richardson

Odessa is a tolerant city. The city is international, a port. People of many nationalities and religions live here. Lots of people are involved in trade. Some people sell, others buy. Everyone’s happy. People live quite well. There are no conflicts here.

Retired army officer, summer 2005

Odessa is full of myths, including the myth of tolerance. You can find both confirmation and refutation of this myth in real life.

Employee at the Museum of the
History of Jews in Odessa, summer 2005

Tolerant was an adjective Odessans often used, alongside *international*, *multi-ethnic*, and *multi-confessional*, to describe their city when I conducted fieldwork there in 2001–2. When I returned in July 2005, seven months after Ukraine’s Orange Revolution, Odessans either underscored the calm that prevailed in the city relative to other places in Ukraine or expressed shock at the passions aroused and the potential for conflict that had surfaced during those events. In both cases Odessans attributed the absence of open conflict in their city to its long-standing ‘traditions of toleration’ in everyday life.

The concept of toleration has been discussed most extensively by political philosophers of liberalism, for whom it is ‘most exalted’ (Mendus 1989: 3). Although liberalism addresses the toleration of sexual, racial, and religious differences, ‘the story of toleration is predominantly the story of the battle against religious intolerance and persecution’ in western Europe (Mendus 1989: 6). Indeed, as Monica Heintz discussed in the previous chapter, liberal notions of tolerance have been enshrined in a range of international acts and laws. Yet although tolerance is often seen as a characteristic of cosmopolitan places, the two going hand in hand, the nature

of toleration in these contexts has not been subject to the same rigorous commentary it has received in the political philosophy of liberalism.

I situate this chapter between the approaches taken by the anthropologists Robert Hayden (2002) and Pamela Ballinger (2004) to the study of tolerance and coexistence in multi-ethnic and multi-confessional contexts. Hayden drew on the distinction between Lockean negative and Milleian positive toleration in liberal political philosophy to interrogate assumptions that the sharing of religious sites in the Balkans and India reflected the existence of tolerance as a positive moral attitude. He concluded that groups were involved in 'competitive sharing', which was based on negative toleration or strategies of practical accommodation. Ballinger, on the other hand, focused on Istrian regionalist discourses rather than on particular practices to illustrate how 'hybridity', 'cosmopolitanism', and 'multiculturalism' operated largely within the framework of nationalism rather than transcending its exclusionary cultural logic.

Although the subject of this chapter is tolerance, as it was for Hayden, I do not categorize practices in terms of positive and negative toleration. Categorizing practices in such a way obscures the nuances in motivation and belief among the participants and thus the possibility that multiple forms might be at work in a given context. I therefore examine the evocation of tolerance in local discourse in a way similar to that in which Ballinger treated 'hybridity' in Istria, in conjunction with situations of interaction, coexistence, and conflict.

Drawing on conversations and interviews conducted during fieldwork in 2001–2 and July 2005, I suggest that the trope of tolerance is part of an Odessan discourse of distinctiveness that draws on literary and historical images from the city's past as a cosmopolitan port in the Russian Empire. It is linked neither to concepts such as individual rights nor to the operation of 'civil society' in liberal philosophy but rather to everyday interactions conceived of as existing outside the political realm. I probe whether the existence of a trope of tolerance in local discourse has had any influence in muting conflicts during critical events, using the 2004 presidential election campaign as an example. I also explore the contradictions in individuals' evocation of 'tolerance', their experiences of intermarriage, and the crossing of ethno-religious boundaries. Finally, this material serves as a springboard for reflecting on the usefulness of analytical concepts such as 'toleration' and 'civility' in analysing the negotiation of religious and ethnic differences in everyday life in Odessa. Although this volume as a whole is focused mainly on differences within or between 'religions', in the Odessan context ethnicity and religion intersect in complicated ways that make it important to address both together in discussing toleration and civility.

Religion and Politics in Contemporary Ukraine

Ukraine's contemporary religious landscape has been shaped to a large degree by the absence of any protracted period of independent statehood before 1991.¹ As a consequence of the country's geographical location, complicated ethnic, linguistic, and regional divisions intersect with those of religion. Three Orthodox churches operate in the country. The largest is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), with 10,566 registered communities. It is followed by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), with 3,484 registered communities, and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), with 1,172. Of these three, the first is the only canonically recognized church. Furthermore, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), the Roman Catholic Church, and various Protestant churches also have significant presences, with 3,386, 870, and 4,870 communities, respectively. Other significant religious groups include Jews (251 communities) and Muslims (457 communities).²

There is a strong regional element to the distribution of religious communities in Ukraine (see Krindatch 2003 for a detailed discussion). The Greek Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church are found predominantly in western Ukraine. Western Ukraine also has the highest concentration of religious communities, which is partly explained by the fact that it came under Soviet rule only after the Second World War, whereas the rest of the country had been part of the Soviet Union since the early 1920s. Regionally, Crimea has the largest concentration of Muslims – mainly Crimean Tatars, nearly 300,000 of whom returned from deportation in Central Asia after 1989. Muslim communities are also found in larger cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odessa, where they are composed of refugees

¹ Although various autonomous and semi-autonomous political formations existed in Ukrainian territories, prior to independence in 1991 Ukraine never had extended periods of statehood, with the exception of the medieval kingdom of Kyivan Rus', a state from which both Russia and Ukraine claim descent in their respective historiographies. From the late eighteenth century until the end of World War I, Ukrainian lands were divided between the Austro-Hungarian Empire (and within the empire were parts of different provinces) and the Russian Empire. In the aftermath of World War I and the October Revolution, despite a protracted campaign to establish an independent state, Ukrainian territories became parts of the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. After World War II, eastern and western Ukrainian lands were reunited in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and in 1954 Khrushchev incorporated Crimea into the republic.

² Information as of January 1, 2005. Religious Information Service of Ukraine, <http://www.risu.org.ua/eng/resources/statistics/org2005>.

from Afghanistan, residents from Central Asian republics and the North Caucasus, and students from Africa and the Middle East. Roughly speaking, the UOC-MP predominates in the east and south, while the UOC-KP is the dominant Orthodox church in the west, and the two vie for dominance in the central oblasts. However, the dominance of a certain church in an area is the result of the 'ethnic and confessional features of particular *oblasti* and even *raiony*' (Mitrokhin 2001: 174).

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a law on 'The Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations' in 1991. This law, together with the constitution (adopted in 1996), essentially follows the separation model of church and state relations rather than a partnership model or a protectionist model (Razumkov Centre 2004). A strong relationship between one church and the state has not emerged in Ukraine as it has in Russia and Serbia, for two main reasons: two major religious communities – Greek Catholics and Orthodox – claim to be the 'national church', and after 1991, the Orthodox Church in Ukraine fragmented and splintered into three.

Although the law spells out a separation between church and state, government officials have been drawn to intervene in church affairs (Plokhyy 2002: 305). The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations requires all religious organizations of more than ten persons who have reached 18 years of age to register their articles and statutes as local or national organizations in order to obtain the status of a 'judicial (legal) entity'. This status is necessary to own property and carry out many economic activities, such as publishing religious materials and opening bank accounts. Using various indicators, observers usually rate Ukraine as having a high level of religious pluralism and toleration relative to other countries in the former Soviet Union (Razumkov Centre 2004; Wanner 2004; see Naumescu, this volume, for a critical discussion of these issues).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, newly revived churches formed from the splintering of the Russian Orthodox Church jockeyed for positions of dominance. Until 1989, the Russian Orthodox Church was the only eastern Christian institution with legally recognized congregations in Ukraine. In that year the Greek Catholic Church was legalized and revived across western Ukraine after a meeting between Gorbachev and Pope Jean Paul II. It had been liquidated in 1946–48 after western Ukrainian lands were annexed by the Soviet Union. The church leaders had been arrested or had emigrated, and many parishes were placed under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. The church survived in exile and underground in the Soviet Union. In 1990 the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church was also revived in western Ukraine.

In 1992, Patriarch Filaret (Denysenko) was removed from his position as head of the Kyiv metropolitanate, partly through manipulations from Moscow. A few months later, with the support of the government, he was able to form the UOC-KP. This new church enjoyed support from the government during the administration of President Leonid Kravchuk (1991–94) via the Committee for Religious Affairs (an institution that had operated prior to 1991), which took steps to defend it against other Orthodox competitors and other denominations. This move towards creating a national church resembled the paths followed in other states such as Russia and Serbia.³ The Greek Catholic Church also vied for this role but was marginalized by the Kravchuk administration (Plokhly 2002). At the peak of the inter-church confrontation, more than 1,000 Ukrainian parishes were internally splintered as followers of the UGCC, the UOC-MP, the UOC-KP, and the UAOC were involved in open and frequently violent conflicts (Krindatch 2003: 69).

The election of Leonid Kuchma as president in 1994 altered the dynamics of church-state relations. One of his first steps was to liquidate the Committee for Religious Affairs and form in its place the Ministry for Nationalities, Migration, and Cults. His government threw its support behind the UOC-MP, which was the extension of his platform on nationality, culture, language, and geopolitical orientation. Relations with the UOC-KP worsened and came to a head in July 1995 with a clash between the two Orthodox churches over control of the church of St. Sophia in Kyiv, when the UOC-KP tried to bury its patriarch on the church's grounds.⁴ In the immediate aftermath, the government increased its pressure on the UOC-KP. A kind of compromise was reached, however, allowing for the adoption of the constitution in 1996, after which the government eased its pressure on

³ As in other successor states of the Soviet Union, Ukraine's government embarked on a nation-building program referred to as 'Ukrainization'. Debates about nation-building at the elite level have centred on whether Ukraine ought to be a 'national' state (the state of the Ukrainian people) or a multi-ethnic one (a 'political nation', in local parlance, or a state of the people of Ukraine) (Plokhly 2003: 166). Many scholars have delineated the contradictory attitudes held by Ukrainians towards this project. They have demonstrated that ethnicity, language, and region influence these attitudes but do not align in ways that have polarized the country to the point of open conflict (see, for example, Arel and Khmelko 2005).

⁴ The church of St. Sophia is important for proponents of both Russian and Ukrainian nationalism. For the UOC-MP, it is one of the major symbols of 'Holy Rus' and the idea of the unity of the three East Slavic peoples (Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarussians). For the UOC-KP, taking possession of the church meant victory for the Ukrainian claim to the spiritual heritage of Kyivan Rus'. It has remained state property and operates as a museum.

the UOC-KP, and Patriarch Filaret withdrew the demand for the establishment of a state-sponsored Orthodox church. This resulted in a shift from a government policy of confrontation with the churches to one of dialogue. The Committee on Religious Affairs was later revived to mediate these discussions.⁵

During the late 1990s, competition for prominence continued as Patriarch Filaret and the government took various steps towards creating a single Orthodox church. The government pursued two options. The first was the granting of autocephaly by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to the UOC-MP and the subordination of the other two churches to it; the second was unification of all three Orthodox churches on an equal basis and recognition of the united church by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, in spite of protests by the UOC-MP. In August 2000 a request to the ROC for autocephaly was refused. Since then the second strategy has predominated, although nothing definitive has been achieved (Krindatch 2003: 66).

Ethnicity and Religion in Odessa

Odessa, a city of a million inhabitants located in southern Ukraine, was founded with the expansion of the Russian Empire into the region in the late eighteenth century. The city developed at an unprecedented rate as a port and centre of trade. By the mid-nineteenth century it had become the third most prominent city in the empire, after Moscow and Petersburg. Since the city's establishment, Odessa and its environs have had a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional population. According to the 1897 census, the city was home to persons who spoke some 55 languages and came from more than 30 countries, including most European and some Near Eastern nations, the United States, China, and Japan (Herlihy 1986: 242–43). Slavic-speaking people, predominantly Russians, accounted for approximately 60 per cent of the population at that time, and Jews (identified on the basis of religion) constituted 32.5 per cent – up from 14 per cent in 1858. Yet whereas prior to the October Revolution, synagogues and Orthodox churches existed in

⁵ In a further development, following his election as president, Viktor Yushchenko abolished the State Committee on Religious Affairs in February 2005. Until then it had had headquarters in Kyiv and maintained branch offices in every regional capital, as well as in the cities of Kyiv and Sevastopol. In the summer of 2005, the Committee on Religious Affairs and the Committee on Nationalities and Migration were reformed into a single department on religion and nationalities within the Ministry of Justice.

nearly equal numbers, there are now three synagogues and more than 30 Orthodox churches.

According to official data from 2005, 62 per cent of Odessa's population is made up of ethnic Ukrainians, 29 per cent of Russians, and 4 per cent of persons belonging to other nationalities. Among these other nationalities, the largest groups are Bulgarians (13,331) and Jews (12,380).⁶ Leaders of various ethnic communities provide figures that are often double the official numbers. Although these groups may have an interest in inflating their numbers, their claims are plausible, because for a variety of reasons, many individuals have historically claimed to be Russian or Ukrainian to minimize discrimination.

In the Soviet period the number of registered and unregistered religious communities fluctuated in line with state policy. In the 1980s there were three Orthodox churches and one monastery in Odessa. An Old Believers church, which remained open throughout the Soviet period, continued to operate, as did a small Catholic church near the city centre. Despite the campaign against religion in the 1930s and the persecution of religious leaders, a number of synagogues remained open. By the late Soviet period, only one synagogue remained, in the district of Peresyp. Baptist and Pentecostal communities operated at times underground and at times officially.⁷

In contemporary Odessa 'you have everything', explained Eduard Martiniuk, a religious studies scholar.⁸ The religious landscape in the city, however, is dominated by the UOC-MP, which has more than 50 communities and 30 churches and monasteries. Odessa is the centre of the Odessa-Balti Eparchy of the UOC-KP, which has two churches in the city,

⁶ See <http://www.misto.odessa.ua/index.php?u=gorod/stat> (accessed 25 April 2005).

⁷ The oldest continually existing Baptist community dates from 1942. During the Soviet period, two additional communities formed out of this one. One of these splinter communities registered and shared a prayer house with the Pentecostals. The Peresyp community registered in the early 1960s in order to avoid arrests but then went underground after activists continued to be arrested. On several occasions the authorities bulldozed its prayer house.

⁸ In the Odessa oblast there are 607 registered Orthodox communities, of which 495 are UOC-MP, 78 are UOC-KP, 4 are UAOC, 13 are Old Believers, and 17 are 'others' (which include the Russian Orthodox Church abroad, the Armenian Apostolic Church). There are 10 Greek Catholic, 17 Roman Catholic, 365 Protestant, and 38 'other' communities. According to recent sociological surveys, 48 per cent of respondents in the Odessa oblast were affiliated with a religious organization, in contrast to more than 80 per cent in the western oblasts and 20 per cent in the eastern ones. See <http://www.risu.org.ua/eng/resources/statistics/reg2004> (accessed 12 May 2005); Razumkov Centre 2004: 26–27.

and the Odessa-Simferopol Eparchy of the Roman Catholic Church, which has a cathedral and two churches.⁹ The bishop of the Odessa-Crimea Greek Catholic Exarchate is located in Odessa but at this writing has been unable to secure land or premises and therefore uses the Roman Catholic Cathedral for conducting services. The bishop for Ukraine's Lutheran Church is also based in Odessa. There are two communities of the Russian Orthodox Church (outside Russia, which has its metropolitan in New York), one of which is prepared to join the Moscow Patriarchate and one of which is not. The Baptists and Pentecostals have the largest number of communities among the Protestant churches.

There are three synagogues in Odessa. The two most prominent congregations represent different movements within Orthodox Judaism – Chabad, one direction of Hasidism, and the Lithuanian Orthodox movement. Each runs a yeshiva, heders, day-care centres, schools, and a newspaper. A Jewish University, licensed and affiliated with the National University, has also opened at the synagogue of the Lithuanian Orthodox community. The third, a reform congregation, is much smaller than the others.

Odessa also has two Muslim communities. One is based in the Arab Cultural Centre, founded by the Syrian-Ukrainian citizen and philanthropist Adnan Kivan. It is housed in a newly constructed building in the centre of the city and has a mosque but no minaret. The other community has premises in what was formerly a Polish school and is attended by Muslims from different countries in the former Soviet Union (Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan) and the Middle East (Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon). According to Imam Sheikh Usam, a Lebanese married to a Kyivan, there are some 40,000 Muslims in Odessa – a mix of Ukrainian citizens, permanent residents, students, and businessmen.

In a representative survey conducted by sociologists from the Odessa National University in 2003, of the 51 per cent of respondents who identified themselves as believers, 46 per cent were Orthodox Christians belonging to the UOC-MP and the UOC-KP. The number of believers identifying themselves as Orthodox had risen to 46 per cent from 28 per cent in 1995, whereas the proportion who considered themselves adherents of Greek Catholicism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Judaism, or other, non-traditional religions (each at 1 per cent of the sample) had remained unchanged during the period studied (Pankov, Forthcoming).¹⁰

⁹ The Catholic community in Odessa has historically been Polish and German, but nowadays services are offered in Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian.

¹⁰ Sociologists agree that at the beginning of the 1990s, a religious revival took place in the form of a sudden increase in the number and variety of religious organizations. Since 1995, the dynamics have slowed in Odessa. According to the

Commenting on inter-faith relations in Odessa, one journalist noted that ‘on one side you have the UOC-MP, on the other you have all the rest.’ Given its preponderance in numbers and its close alliance with local authorities while Ruslan Bodelan was mayor (from 1994 until the spring of 2005), the UOC-MP is structurally in a completely different position from the other communities.¹¹ Two spiritual councils have formed: the Spiritual Council of Christian Confessions and Missions and the Spiritual Council of Christians.¹² Representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate take part in neither.

2003 survey, 51 per cent of respondents considered themselves believers, 32 per cent could not answer, and 17 per cent considered themselves to be non-believers. In 1995, 51 per cent considered themselves believers while 19 per cent had difficulty deciding and 28 per cent considered themselves non-believers. At the same time, although the number of communities has increased, local sociologists argue that religion and religious values are marginal in public consciousness. This leads them to assert that it is no longer accurate, as it was at the beginning of the 1990s, to speak of a religious revival in Ukraine (Pankov, *Forthcoming*).

¹¹ In the spring of 2005, Eduard Gurvits, Odessa’s mayor from 1994 to 1998, launched a court case to annul the results of the mayoral elections in 2002 because of fraud. Elected to parliament in 2002 as part of Yushchenko’s ‘Our Ukraine’, he was reinstated as mayor in the spring of 2005 through a controversial and somewhat dubious court decision. Given the affiliation of the Kyiv Patriarchate with Our Ukraine, questions were raised about how this might change the balance of power among the Orthodox churches in Odessa. However, Gurvits’s decision to continue funding the foundation established by Bodelan for the renovation of the city’s main Preobrazhenskiy Church was taken as a sign of his reluctance to challenge the status quo. With the reorganization of the department on religion, the situation in the summer of 2005 was quiet but in flux, as was illustrated by the contradictory statements of different religious communities on the new situation. The pastor of the Evangelical Word of Life Church felt relations had improved and was optimistic, given that one of his church members was working as an advisor to Gurvits and that his former math teacher was one of Gurvits’s deputies. On the other hand, the press attaché of the Catholic Church complained that the bishop had been unable to meet the mayor, that two of the church’s property issues were stalled, and that communication on these issues had become no more transparent.

¹² The latter was formed originally in 1997–98 at the initiative of a young pastor of the Evangelical Word of Life Church. It brought together many of the Protestant churches, including the Baptists and Pentecostals. It was reactivated in 2000–2001 when the Spiritual Council of Christian Confessions and Missions was formed at the initiative of the Catholic bishop, bringing together the bishops of the Greek Catholic Eparchy, the Odessa-Balta Eparchy, the Lutheran Church in Ukraine, the Presbyterians, and the Armenian Church, among others. At this writing, the two councils are negotiating a union. The councils are not formally registered as non-governmental organizations, although each has a protocol and has informed the city and oblast departments of religious affairs of its existence and activities.

These councils were activated in 2003 to counter proposed changes to the law on the freedom of conscience proposed by the Cabinet of Ministers. The two councils joined and bombarded deputies and the Cabinet of Ministers with letters opposing the changes.

Since then the two councils have organized festivals of Christian music, held joint Easter services and processions, and begun negotiating the creation of a single council. They lobby the local administration on property and land issues and support each other's claims and demands. They also issued joint statements calling for fair elections and the maintenance of peace during the presidential elections in the fall of 2004. Although occasionally the councils invite the rabbis to take part, they do not aim at a broader inter-faith role. As one priest explained, 'We have enough difficulty negotiating between Christian confessions.' Jewish and Muslim communities therefore negotiate independently with the authorities.

The Trope of Tolerance in Odessa

'Tolerance' is a trope in Odessan discourse, which is informed by what literary scholars call the 'Odessan Myth.' The Odessan Myth refers to the development – primarily, though not exclusively, in Russian-language texts – of images and ideas about Odessa's distinctiveness from other cities of the Russian Empire. This 'Odessa text' – part historical, part mythical, part literary – can be traced to early portrayals of the city as a special place, dominated by trade and populated by people from different countries, that seemingly sprang up from nowhere in the wild steppe (Naidorf 2001: 329; Stanton 2004: 41; Gubar and Herlihy 2005: 5). An early image emerges in the writings of Chizhov, a naval cadet and friend of Alexander Pushkin's, who wrote the following in the early 1820s (quoted in Gubar and Herlihy 2005: 3):

Imagine that everyone gathers here [in the garden] to enjoy the cool evening and aromatic fragrance of flowers. The tall Turk offers you a tasty Asian drink, while a pretty Italian woman sitting under the dense shade of an elm brought over from the shores of the Volga proffers ice cream in a cut-glass tumbler. ... a fellow citizen of the great Washington walks alongside the bearded inhabitants of Cairo and Alexandria; the ancient descendants of the Normans from the steep cliffs of Norway, the splendid Spaniard ..., the residents of Albion, Provence, and Sicily gather it seems in order to represent here an abridgement of the universe. It can be said that nowhere in Russia is there another place where you might find such a spectacle.

In the 1920s this 'Odessa text' was further elaborated by a group of Odessan writers – including Isaak Babel, Yurii Olesha, Valentin Kataev, Ilia Ilf, and

Evgenii Petrov – labelled the ‘southwest’ or ‘Odessan’ school by Viktor Shklovsky (Stanton 2003:117; Karakina 2004). Their writing continued themes of sun, sea, trade, and different nationalities while placing new emphasis on the presence of Jews, criminals, and the seamy underside of city life (Stanton 2004: 49–50). Although much of Odessa’s history was off limits in the Soviet period, given the city’s association with capitalism, trade, and bourgeois culture, its distinctiveness was permitted within certain bounds: ‘Multi-national Odessa was a miniature of a new historical community – the Soviet people. ... it was the place for people of different nationalities and professions from across the Soviet [Union] to meet and rest by the shores of the Black Sea’ (Gubar and Herlihy 2005: 7). Odessan discourse has, therefore, absorbed some of the tropes and tenets of Soviet internationalism.

‘The Odessan Myth’ is not merely an academic term for a literary phenomenon. Odessans of different ethnic and social backgrounds draw on its tropes when enthusiastically describing the uniqueness of their city and its residents. People insist that Odessa’s uniqueness emerged not only from the specifics of its physical geography, its role as a port city, and the prominence of trade but also from the mixing of people of different nationalities and diverse livelihoods – trade, culture, and criminality. This mixing is viewed as the source of the beauty of the city’s women, the toleration among its citizens, its tasty cuisine, and its dialect, which mixes Russian with Yiddish, Ukrainian, and other European languages. While mixing is stressed, Odessans also cite the important role Jews played in the city and the strong influence of Yiddish culture on the development of what is felt to be distinctively Odessan. Finally, it is not uncommon for residents to answer ‘Odessan’ if asked their nationality as a way of side-stepping issues of ethnic categorization.

Gevork Panossian, an Armenian who came to live with his uncle and finish high school after the Armenian earthquake of 1989, offered a particularly lucid account of Odessan distinctiveness. He underscored Odessans’ pragmatism, their apolitical behaviour, and their interest in making money. He also noted the secular character of the city – residents’ casual, non-dogmatic stance towards religious practice – and people’s desire to avoid conflict. He had studied history at the Odessa State University and had worked in trade, in the local administration, and as a driver:

Here nationalism isn’t popular. Business is more important. Odessa is a trading city, a working city, and people are used to making money and doing business. Odessans think that under any regime, if you can do business and make money, then you will live well. If you can’t, then no matter what kind of regime you have, things will be

bad. For Odessans the most important thing is not slogans but money, because at the end of the day, Odessans are neither naïve nor *ideini* [swayed by ideals]. They think: ‘We’ll fight together, but what we win will be enjoyed only by one person.’ Here no one wants to fight against anyone. Everyone wants to do their business and support their family.

The uniqueness of Odessa, its forms of sociality, and its ‘tolerance’ were often explicitly linked to its experience of people of different religious and ethnic backgrounds trading at the markets and living together in communal courtyards in the old part of the city. Panossian explained this in a way that echoed many other Odessans’ accounts:

Why do they say that an Odessan is a different type of person? Because as a child he got used to living in a multi-ethnic courtyard. He could be a Jew, but his neighbour might be Bulgarian or Moldovan, and he grew up with them. He doesn’t feel a difference. He’s not raised in the spirit of his own nation. ... Maybe it is there a bit. But there is a high degree of assimilation. Assimilation occurs, and in Odessa there are many people who say they don’t know who they are ethnically [*po natsionalnosti*], because they have had Jews, Poles, Greeks, and Armenians in their families over the course of two hundred years.

Life in courtyards is often presented in idealized terms evoking social solidarity, kinship ties, and ethnic tolerance. Viktor Portnikov, an elderly Jewish Odessan, recalled the courtyard he had grown up in before the outbreak of the Second World War:

Russian, Ukrainian, and Jewish families lived in my courtyard. Before the war all the kids would play together. My family spoke Russian, but some of the other Jewish families spoke in Yiddish. It was like a commune. Doors were always open, and we didn’t think about entering our neighbour’s home to borrow something. My father worked as a tailor. One neighbour and his son worked in the NKVD. Another neighbour collected scrap metal and made hair clips.

Mikhail Kordonsky, a youth worker, web-site designer, and journalist in his forties, presented a description of Odessan social relations in an article entitled ‘A Person of the Odessan Nationality’, about a photographer friend’s exhibition (Kordonsky 2004). It encapsulates the different aspects of Odessan sociality but also shows how they extend beyond the courtyards in old Odessa:

I am writing this article in an apartment from the Khrushchev era, built in 1961. Behind the wall of my monitor is the apartment of a

Greek, Toli, and his wife, Lena, a Bulgarian. The next apartment belongs to my best childhood friend, Shuni. In his family everyone spoke only Ukrainian, moreover not *surzhik* [a mix of Ukrainian and Russian] or western Ukrainian [*po zapadenskym*] but the literary Poltava dialect. His mother, Halyna Fedotovna, who is already old, may God grant her many years, is to this day one of the best translators and literary editors of Slavic languages in Odessa. In that apartment you could get hold of special Ukrainian ‘nationalist’ *samizdat*. ... When we went to visit them we spoke in Russian and they spoke to us in Ukrainian. In the courtyard everyone spoke in Russian ... Odessan Russian! Behind another wall lived a settled Gypsy, Misha. Above me lived a Ukrainian, Vasia, and his wife, Rosa. In this apartment of 60 flats, settled by the workers of a shoe factory, lived Russians, Armenians, Moldovans, Arnauts [Albanians], or were they Gagauzy? ... that’s not because I forgot – I just never asked. We always lived in Odessa this way. We ate the cuisine of all these people on their name days and during their funerals. From childhood we knew several words in many languages ... you can guess which ones. The few believers in those atheistic times attended various churches (synagogues, party committees, model homes). Vitia, the son of Lena and Toli, married the daughter of Vasia and Rosa. They have two daughters and one grandson, Slava, who doesn’t know that according to Judaism he is a Jew and therefore according to Israeli law has the right to emigrate. He doesn’t need this and is not interested in it. Yet, perhaps. For the time being, they haven’t taken away his native language – which is not *greco-bulgarian-khokholyiddish* ... there is no such thing; there is only Odessan.

Echoes of Soviet internationalism reverberate throughout this passage. Although Soviet internationalism envisioned the formation of *Homo sovieticus* through the merging of peoples, the Soviet Union created an administrative structure and policies that generated distinct nationalities in a nested hierarchy with Russians at the top and the Russian language as the language of ‘inter-national’ communication (Slezkine 1994: 416). The trend towards assimilation in pre-revolutionary Odessa continued in the Soviet period. Odessan discourse therefore contains the same paradox as Soviet internationalism: on the one hand it validates mixing and assimilation, and on the other it asserts the existence of discrete nationalities. Mikhail Kordonsky is Jewish and, like many other Soviet Jews, encountered difficulties entering an institution of higher education. Yet he is adamantly against ‘democracy’ and ‘liberalism’, which he associates with economic

and social dislocation. His case highlights the way Odessans' sense of what secures toleration is not conceived of as connected with the principles of liberal political philosophy.

These ideas of a tolerant, multi-ethnic, multi-religious Odessa are forgetful of ethno-religious and racial violence – namely, pogroms in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and genocide during the German-Romanian occupation. Moreover, although local discourse posits an unchanging Odessan spirit or ethos, historical events in fact radically changed the cosmopolitan character and ethno-religious composition of the city. The First World War, the subsequent revolutions, and the establishment of the Soviet state drastically diminished Odessa's economic importance and links with the world. The anti-religious campaigns of the 1930s transformed the religious landscape of Odessa in human and architectural terms as leaders were repressed and religious sites destroyed. The Second World War annihilated the Jewish population that remained in occupied Odessa, and under subsequent Soviet policies, Germans, Greeks, and Tatars were deported for collaboration with the Nazis.

Despite this, many Odessans emphatically assert that Odessa is a multi-ethnic city and that the city's residents are tolerant of ethnic and religious differences. Although prior to the October Revolution, inhabitants of courtyards would have negotiated their religious differences, the accounts by Portnikov and Kordonsky refer to the situation under socialism, in which religion was 'domesticated', many people engaged in no religious practice, and differences were muted by the homogenizing policies of the Soviet Union. If the sense of tolerance that Kordonsky described was shaped in the Soviet period, when religious practices and beliefs were hidden, then what happened when religion came to occupy a more central place in certain people's lives and when religious institutions became more significant in public life? Did this change challenge practices of toleration in new ways? Did a local discourse in which 'tolerance' was a central trope influence these interactions?

Interpreting Odessan 'Tolerance': Liberalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Political Sphere in Ukraine

The concern with toleration emerged in western Europe out of the wars of religion in the sixteenth century and the recognition that a stable constitutional order could not rest on shared faith. Liberalism, with its emphasis on freedom of individual conscience and commitment to autonomy – based on a particular conception of the person – is considered an extension of this (Kymlicka 1995: 155). In liberal thought, 'the problem of toleration

arises in circumstances of diversity ... and is required where the nature of the diversity is such as to give rise to disapproval, dislike, or disgust' (Mendus 1989: 8). According to this definition, indifference is not toleration. Yet Walzer includes indifference in his fivefold categorization of stances of toleration: resignation (acceptance of difference for the sake of peace); benign indifference ('it takes all kinds to make a world'); moral stoicism (a principled recognition that others have rights even if they exercise them in unattractive ways); openness to others (curiosity, respect); and enthusiastic endorsement (Walzer 1997: 10–11). The Ottoman Empire is often highlighted as a system of religious toleration in contrast to that of liberalism, in that religious communities were allowed to practise their religion as well as a degree of self-government. However, as liberal theorists are quick to point out, it was neither democratic nor liberal, in that restrictions were placed on individual freedom of conscience, and membership was not voluntary.

Tolerance is also evoked in discussions of cosmopolitanism. Western genealogies of cosmopolitanism highlight the eighteenth-century rationalism of Kant, medieval Christendom, the Roman Empire, and the city-states of ancient Greece, where people of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds lived together, albeit in circumstances in which they did not engage in forms of self-rule. In the 1990s cosmopolitanism received renewed attention from scholars as a means of analysing global economic restructuring, new transnational communications media, new flows of migrants, and the proliferation of civil wars, which 'challenged liberalism's established understanding of the issues of political membership and sovereignty' (Calhoun 2001: 21). It has been revived as a way of 'thinking and feeling beyond the nation' to develop ways of transcending the interests and intolerance that have produced wars and conflicts (Cheah and Robbins 1998). The cosmopolitan attitude has been described as 'a state of mind, exhibited in a rejection of xenophobia, a commitment to toleration, and a concern for the fate of humans in distant lands' (Kymlicka 2001: 220). It has also been defined as 'belonging to all parts of the world; not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants' (Calhoun 2001: 5) and as 'an aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrast rather than uniformity' (Hannerz 1990: 239). Other scholars, however, propose that we move away from universalist cosmopolitanisms and Western genealogies to examine 'how people have thought and acted beyond the local' in different times and places (Pollock et al. 2002: 10).

The particularities of Odessa's local discourse – its trope of tolerance and relationship to the political sphere – can be interpreted using different facets of the growing literature on cosmopolitanism. For Martha Nussbaum

(1996), the ethical obligations of individuals, whose highest and strongest obligation is owed to humanity as a whole, are the foundations of cosmopolitanism. For her, world citizenship is always superior to more local ties. In a somewhat different vein, David Held (1995) stresses multiple and overlapping allegiances of different scales. Held's work, rooted in democratic theory, emphasizes rights rather than individual ethics and advances cosmopolitanism as a means of achieving more democratic governance. Both approaches, however, are elitist, universalist, and individualist and describe the 'class consciousness of frequent travellers' (Calhoun 2003).

Whereas Nussbaum and Held are concerned with reconceptualizing the norms of a cosmopolitan political sphere, anthropologists are critical of attempts to fix a cosmopolitan political practice. They call for attention to the multiple, hybrid ways of being 'abroad at home and home abroad' and for a refusal to draw a distinction between the vernacular and the cosmopolitan (Pollock et al. 2002: 11–13). In the context of Stalinism in the Soviet Union, Caroline Humphrey (2004) pursued such an agenda in tracing how the Soviet state's attempts to repress certain kinds of cosmopolitan practices nevertheless produced cosmopolitanisms in the everyday lives of its citizens. In contrast to Nussbaum and Held, these scholars refuse the notion that cosmopolitanism is somehow above or outside the particularities of culture.

This review of different features of cosmopolitanism and approaches to studying it can help in situating and interpreting Odessans' claims that the city and its residents are 'tolerant'. The Odessan Myth, which is embedded in a local discourse of distinctiveness, was born in and describes an imperial trading city populated by people from different lands. Local discourse posits Odessans' openness to others and to the world, the mixing of peoples in the city, and the stark separation of politics and everyday life, as in other cosmopolitan imperial cities. Like the discourse of scholars who would see nationalism and cosmopolitanism as opposites, this local discourse constructs Odessans and Odessa as worldly and international, in contrast to the parochial, exclusivist notions of nationalism associated most strongly with the western Ukrainian city L'viv, but also with Kyiv, and the policies that emanate from the national government. Further, local discourse seems to suggest both a pragmatic tolerance of ethnic and religious differences ('live and let live') and a more positive tolerance (embracing difference and producing something unique as a result of intermixing).

Yet 'toleration' in local discourse is related to tropes of internationalism and cosmopolitanism and has a complicated relationship to historical, sociological, and political realities. Indeed, this discourse

circulates literary and historical images of the city's past and is therefore based to a large extent on the historical memory of cosmopolitanism in the city. Although the Odessan Myth may have emerged during the early-nineteenth-century heyday of Russian imperialism, a time when local (but unelected) administrators had considerable autonomy from the centre, Odessa was subject to the policies of the Soviet Union for seven decades and is now part of a Ukrainian nation-state. As a result, it is ethnically more homogeneous and not nearly as important a trade hub as it was in the pre-revolutionary period.

Scholars have taken up the study of cosmopolitanism in their search for ways to think beyond the logic of popular sovereignty and the nation-state model, which they hold responsible for the violence witnessed in the twentieth century. The local discourse on Odessa's distinctiveness, in which ideas of toleration are embedded, does not articulate a model of polity or politics. Indeed, this discourse conveys a sense in which Odessan life and the relationships that make toleration possible exist outside the realm of politics ('Odessans are apolitical'; 'Odessans keep a psychological distance from power') and in which the city floats free of any political moorings. That Odessans feel this is an important fact does not mean they are immune to being swept up in or affected by political events. The issue then arises of how to conceive of 'the political' and 'public life' in Odessa (and Ukraine more generally) and how everyday social practices withstand larger political and social crises.

The regime that formed in Ukraine during the 1990s has been characterized as neo-patrimonial, an outgrowth and modification of the operation of the economy and power in the late socialist period (Zimmer 2006). This characterization refers to the private appropriation of the governmental sphere by those in power, something that proceeds through the blurring of public and private realms and through patron-client relations. Although formal institutions of political democracy exist, they are subordinated to the patrimonial machinery. The blurring of public and private realms, pervasive 'corruption', and the use of blackmail techniques to control people inside and outside the state apparatus in Leonid Kuchma's Ukraine (Darden 2001) raise questions about the efficacy of institutions and relationships called 'civil society', which are predicated on a liberal distinction between public and private spheres.

Many scholars have picked apart the concept of civil society. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999: 6) called it a 'Big Idea' that was 'intrinsically protean', an 'immanent construct whose manifest materiality exists only to the extent that it is named, objectified and sought after', and 'a tool of the social imagination'. Yet civil society is entwined in liberal

thought with the cultivation of ‘civility’ (Rouner 2000: 4). Civility in turn has been defined as ‘a quality of respect, care and concern among fellow citizens – a kind of solidarity – a willingness to put the common good above private interest’, and is said to be ‘interdependent with the state, serving to cultivate respect, regard and participation in the institutions of the state’ (Straus 2000: 231).

On the one hand, the operation of power in Ukraine up until the Orange Revolution (and to some extent after it) undermined the social conditions for the creation of institutions and practices labelled ‘civil society’. On the other hand, discursively Odessans conceive of everyday life as separate from politics and state institutions, such that any conflict is understood as being externally stimulated and foreign to the natural order of things in Odessa. Yet clearly Odessa does not exist ‘outside’ politics. The operation of state power locally, together with the discursive and practical particularities of public-private distinctions, has a bearing on prospects for the practices of toleration – peaceful coexistence. I turn now to some particular events in Odessa before and during the presidential election, events that politicized many Odessans and generated a great degree of animosity towards particular religious and ethnic groups.

The Limits of Toleration

Odessans became aware of the limits of toleration during the 2004 presidential election, when, to quote a professor from the clinical psychiatry department at the Odessa National University, ‘tolerance ended for a while’. Many Odessans referred to the tension among the branches of Christian Orthodoxy or between the UOC-MP and various Protestant confessions. One event that was often discussed was the visit of Patriarch Filaret, of the UOC-KP, to Odessa in May 2004, as the presidential election campaign was getting under way, to consecrate a church. Metropolitan Agafangel, of the Odessa eparchy of the Moscow Patriarchate, was well known for his opposition not only to the split between the churches but also to the idea of autocephaly in general – that is, separation from the Russian Orthodox Church (Sysyn 2005: 8–19). During Filaret’s visit, a demonstration attended by several hundred people took place outside the UOC-KP church. It was organized, at least in part, by a local radical non-governmental organization (NGO), United Fatherland (Edinoie otchestvo), affiliated with the UOC-MP. Agafangel appealed to the mayor and the head of the oblast administration not to let Filaret come to the city. His letter included remarks such as, ‘The visit will be explosive and is a provocation’, and suggested that it could result in ‘open conflict in the streets’, the responsibility for which would lie with the organizers and those who ‘permitted’ the visit. He also reminded the

mayor of the links Filaret had with Our Ukraine, the main opposition bloc at the time, which ‘intends to destabilise the situation and create a Georgian scenario’ (Shchotkina 2004).

Kateryna Shchotkina, a Kyiv journalist, remarked on the small size of the demonstration that took place in Odessa and downplayed its significance. But other Odessan journalists and sociologists were disturbed by the event and considered the size and ferocity of the believers who attended unlike anything they had seen in the city before. Olga Feldman, a correspondent for a national news agency whose family has lived in Odessa for generations, commented:

When Filaret came, it was the only time when I saw how some believers insulted other believers. The fanatics of the Moscow Patriarchate didn’t allow them to pass and yelled insults at the supporters of the Kyiv Patriarchate who were attending their own service. I had never seen that before. I don’t see much of this type of thing in everyday life, and so that’s why I can say that this action was created and stirred up.¹³

Feldman also described a press conference she attended during the parliamentary elections in 2002, conducted jointly by the leader of the United Fatherland NGO and Metropolitan Agafangel:

When I read the press release my eyes nearly popped out of my head because there were direct political statements. If this were a party I would have understood. There were calls to vote for a particular candidate and party and critical statements about others. I asked: ‘Perhaps I didn’t understand, but it seems you are calling us to vote for a particular candidate. As far as I remember the church is separate from the state here. Explain please.’ Agafangel smiled sweetly and said: ‘You read the press release too quickly. If you look more closely, the church is not calling for people to vote for a particular candidate.’ I looked more closely, and it was a joint text where Agafangel’s commentary was mixed with the NGO’s calls to vote for a candidate. It was so cynical.

This case illustrates some of the intricacies existing in the relations among church, ‘civil society’, and local authorities in Odessa. In these examples, United Fatherland, an institution of civil society, played a distinctly ‘uncivil’ role in creating conflict with another church. At the same time, the church

¹³ At least one Orthodox priest attempted to distance himself from the activities of this group and indicated that the metropolitan was doing the same. If previously this NGO served as a convenient front, now the organization is a scapegoat for unpleasant incidents that occurred.

that lies behind and tacitly supports this NGO enjoys a privileged position in the city through support from the local authorities.

Odessans also described how inter-faith conflict nearly came to a head during the presidential election campaign in fall 2004. The professor from the clinical psychiatry department explained: 'The Moscow Patriarchate took an active political position [regarding the election]. A no less active position was taken by the Kyiv Patriarchate, directly in opposition to the Moscow Patriarchate. We saw demonstrations, shrieks.' Vitaliy Kuranin, an employee of the Museum of the History of Odessan Jews, noted that 'there was a lot of aggression. When there are such shake-ups in society, everything that's going on comes to the surface and you see all the rotten things that exist in society and people.'

Other stories were told of firms, families, and friendships that were split down the middle during the election as people supported opposing candidates. Aleksandra, whose law firm nearly broke up, narrowly escaped physical aggression on the part of two women from her walking club after she made a comment in defence of Viktor Yushchenko. Olga Feldman said, 'This fall and winter, I was appalled at how some politicians quite consciously tried to stir up inter-ethnic conflict. It was connected with elections. Being Jewish, I listened with horror. ... There is a saying, "Slavs reconcile with each other best during a Jewish pogrom."' The logic, as she expressed it, was as follows:

They are for Ukraine. They are Galicians. For them, Ukrainians are those who speak Ukrainian. We don't speak Ukrainian. To them we are not Ukrainians. They'll come here and cut our throats. ... We won't allow them to beat us up. It was awful. Leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate uttered these phrases during a holy procession. They handed out leaflets saying, 'Orthodoxy is in danger'. Other leaflets were put in post boxes calling for real Ukrainians to kick the pigs out of this city. These were false, black PR. ... The traditions of tolerance in everyday life saved us from a conflict because everything was done to ignite it.¹⁴

I was not present during the election to witness the tension and moments of potential conflict, but several people offered examples from their experiences to illustrate how local 'traditions of tolerance' might have eased the tension. The head of the Odessa Oblast Roma Congress, Serhii Yermoshkin, described the following:

I was standing at Kulikova Field. There were a mix of Yushchenko and Yanukovich supporters there. Two people – a supporter of each

¹⁴ The Jewish museum made a display of the range of anti-Semitic leaflets distributed in Odessa during 2004–5.

candidate – got in an argument, and it looked like it was going to come to blows. A couple of people stepped in and said, ‘Guys, are you really going to fight about those idiots in Kyiv? Do you really think those guys in Kyiv care about you and your problems?’ and managed to diffuse the crisis.

In another case, Katerina Svirina explained that some of her colleagues and the director of the Jewish organization where she worked supported Yanukovich, whereas she and others supported Yushchenko. In the interest of getting along and not ‘putting their boss in a bad mood’, Svirina and her colleagues did not speak about politics at work. The fact that support for the candidates did not fall neatly along ethnic or linguistic lines in the city no doubt played a role in preventing the eruption of conflict. But small actions in everyday life likely contributed as well.

The conceptual and practical limits of Odessan toleration can also be seen in the experiences of assimilation, mixing, and crossing of ethno-religious boundaries. The Odessan Myth posits an Odessan as a unique type of person with mixed ancestry. Yet people retain a sense of the existence of discrete nationalities, partly the consequence of Soviet nationalities policy. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of these ‘nationalities’ have been reviving, cultivating distinct communities, and asserting new social boundaries and criteria for membership. Concomitantly, although Odessans may proclaim that their city is ‘international and tolerant’, swastikas have been painted on walls throughout the city, city authorities have not always labelled incidents of anti-Semitic violence or vandalism as such (only as acts of hooliganism), Jewish organizations do not put signs on their buildings, and refugees and visible minorities experience racism and sometimes violence.

Vitaliy Kuranin’s experiences provide insights into the contradictions inherent in the Odessan Myth and the legacy of assimilation. Kuranin, a recent university graduate, is of mixed Ukrainian and Russian ancestry, has a degree in history, and works at the Museum of the History of Odessan Jews. For many years he has participated in activities and groups run by different Jewish organizations in the city. He reflected on issues of identity and toleration in Odessa in light of his own experiences. Like many other Odessans, he viewed the high rate of mixed marriages and assimilation in Odessa since the pre-revolutionary period as an indicator of the high level of toleration in the city. He described his personal experiences:

When I was entering university in Odessa I had a problem which I have to this day. There was a form to fill out. We had to write our surname, etc., and then the fifth point – nationality. I had a dilemma then. I couldn’t list myself as Russian or Ukrainian. I lived that myth

which is very strong in Odessa that I am Odessan. ... I told the girl who was taking the documents. I didn't just say I was Odessan, but I argued it. ... She told me to speak to the secretary. I took the document and went to see him. He was a smart guy, listened, and said, 'Write what you want.' I refused to write anything, and then he said I had to write something. I turned around and wrote 'Jew'. So with that nationality I entered the university. Throughout my studies I was perceived as a Jew because I often wrote and spoke about this topic. ... So I heard how people said behind my back, '*Zhid*, why don't you leave for your Israel?' I found it both sad and funny.

Although Kuranin read assimilation as a sign of toleration, in analytical terms 'toleration' – which exists when there is dislike or disapproval – is distinct from assimilation, a process facilitated by intermarriage that occurs when the perception of difference becomes muted, often through more or less coercive state policies. Kuranin's experience also demonstrates how the Soviet state's nationality categories trumped the local sense of being Odessan. Even though 'nationality' is no longer inscribed on passports, the legacy of Soviet policies lives on in the way in which people speak of having a 'nationality'. Although individuals might assert that 'we're all Odessan, we're all mixed', the spectre of discrete ethnic groups remains, with anti-Semitism alongside it. Later in our conversation, Kuranin remarked:

Before, I lived the myth that I am Odessan. But then I understood that it was artificial. It's a wall behind which people hide, to pretend that they have no nationality. It reminds me of a tree without roots, culture, knowledge, traditions ... it has no prospects. But then I read this slogan on Deribasovskaia Street: 'An Odessan – it's not your place of birth but a condition of the soul!' To this day people of all the different confessions and nationalities in Ukraine live here and have a place in this city. ... It's not important which country they're from.

Kuranin's comments illustrate the continued persuasiveness of the Odessan Myth. While on the one hand he was sceptical of the myth's celebration of mixing, on the other he was drawn to its capacity to advocate the peaceful coexistence of discrete and different groups.

In the post-Soviet period, new social boundaries have been forming as particular ethno-religious communities revive their communal life, creating difficulties for people with 'mixed' ancestry. Kuranin explained that a Jewish youth organization had become concerned about non-Jews who were participating in its activities. This affected his friend, whose father was Jewish and whose mother was Russian. His friend formally converted to Judaism. Kuranin commented:

This is a person who has a Jewish surname, looks Jewish, and feels Jewish. But for the synagogue he is not a Jew but a goy. This was a big problem because he really wanted to be a part of the Jewish people. He was always Jewish but he didn't fit within the frames set out. Now he's a full-fledged member of this community. I think he understands well what mixed marriages are and how the children of these mixed marriages can end up being excluded.

The story of Kuranin's friend illustrates another dimension of the limits of the Odessan Myth and the processes of mixing and assimilation that it legitimates. Whereas in the Soviet period assimilation may have been 'normal' and even desirable, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the revival of Jewish communal life, mixed ancestry has become problematic for some individuals in a way it was not in Soviet times.

A final twist in the issue of toleration in Odessa illustrates deep-rooted ideologies about the 'proper' correspondence between religion and nationality. Pavel is Jewish and comes from a family in which religious practice has not been observed for generations. At the height of Brezhnev's rule, Pavel converted to Orthodox Christianity, which he explains now was partly an act of opposition to Soviet Communism and atheism. Although still deeply religious, he remains on the sidelines of any religious community:

Several times, people have explained to me from different sides that a Jew in [Christian] Orthodoxy is not a good thing either for Jews or for Orthodoxy. ... I taught religious studies in school for some time. It was just before Christmas and so I was teaching the children Ukrainian carols. And after that I was walking along the street and I ran into one of my acquaintances. He told me I was a Mason who was breaking up the Orthodox Church from inside on the order of the KGB. I sent him away using words that I don't usually use, even though he is of the same belief, though a radical.

Then later I went to visit a friend, who gave me a full-page article in a Ukrainian newspaper where I was accused of being anti-Ukrainian, of Russifying Ukraine in my work as a doctor, a public figure, and journalist. ... It was a moment of truth. I had just taught kids Ukrainian carols. And it turned out that I am an enemy of Christianity and an enemy of Ukraine. Since then, I've kept a low profile. I am on the periphery. I think this has something to say about toleration, don't you think?

Pavel's experiences illustrate that although the tropes of tolerance in the Odessan Myth may hold sway in mainly secular contexts for certain people, such as Vitaliy Kuranin, in other cases disturbing ideologies dominate that

are associated with Russian Orthodoxy and Ukrainian nationalism, for which Jews are a 'dangerous other'.

Conclusion

I have argued that the trope of tolerance is part of a 'cosmopolitan' discourse on local identity in Odessa. This discourse circulates images about cosmopolitanism in Odessa in pre-revolutionary Russia as well as tropes of Soviet internationalism. In analytical terms, there may be elements of toleration in the practices of Odessa's residents. Yet when Odessans call their city tolerant, they actually are often referring to social situations such as intermarriage and cohabitation in courtyards during the Soviet period, when toleration was not an issue because difference had been muted through assimilation. With the re-emergence of sharper ethnic and religious differences in the post-Soviet context, Odessans confront the tensions and contradictions that such distinctions produce. Elections revealed that city residents were susceptible to the tensions generated by political conflict, just like residents of any other place in Ukraine. They also revealed the uncivil role that civil-society organizations and religious institutions may play. Tensions peaked, relationships were transformed, and the potential for conflict was reached. I cannot confirm whether local traditions of tolerance prevented conflict, as Odessans assert. It is possible, however, that everyday actions on the part of Odessans – what might be labelled 'civility' – played a role in easing tensions.

In combining an analysis of the trope of tolerance with instances of interaction and conflict from everyday life, I have tried to illustrate that it is an oversimplification to characterize practices of sharing and coexistence in terms of categories from Western political philosophy as examples of exclusively 'positive' or 'negative' toleration. Rather, the Odessan case illustrates not only that in a given situation, different forms of what can analytically be called toleration are at work, but also that local ideas about tolerance are an important dimension to consider when examining such dynamics.

Like Ballinger in the case of Istria, I have subjected Odessans' claims that their city is internationalist, tolerant, and multi-cultural to scrutiny in order to illustrate the contradictions and tensions those claims conceal. The complex involvement of religious organizations in 'civil society' and electoral politics undermined everyday practices of civility in Odessa and, for some, the salience of the trope of tolerance. But whereas Ballinger attributed the cultural logic of nationalism to Istrian regionalism, I hesitate to do so completely in the Odessan case. First, I am discussing a city identity that, despite the invocation of 'nationality', does not draw on the standard

repertoire of nationalist images in the way that Istrian regionalist discourses do. Second, intermarriage and mixing seem to occupy a more central place in Odessan discourses than they do in Istrianism, in which ‘coexistence’ – implying separate groups – is emphasized.

Although Odessan discourse neither offers an accurate representation of Odessan realities nor displaces other exclusivist ideologies, it nevertheless has some effects, as Vitaliy Kuranin’s experiences of negotiating his mixed background indicate. Moreover, Kuranin uses the historical experiences of Odessa for pedagogical purposes in ways that echo Nussbaum’s emphasis on the human being in the abstract and her calls to transcend and mute ethnic or religious categories that divide people. As he draws on examples of city residents’ exemplary behaviour to cultivate a similar ethical stance in contemporary Odessa, Kuranin can be considered to cultivate a kind of civility. In doing so, he illustrates the cosmopolitan possibilities of Odessan discourse and suggests that it is more than just a mirror image of nationalist cultural logic. I quote him in closing:

In Odessa there’s fertile ground for toleration. There have been many bad moments like pogroms, but there are many things that show – I don’t want to say toleration, because this is often exploited – humanity [*chelovichnosti*], some kind of normal humanity. There were legions of the Jewish Self-Defence League that did not have only Jews in them. They also had Georgians and Christian women from the Red Cross. There were workers, Russians, Ukrainians who patrolled the streets where Jews lived and where Jews had stalls at the market. The metropolitan of the Odessa region appealed to Odessans not to be tempted to provoke a pogrom. This is more valuable ... – people for whom a person is valuable as a person and not for what his or her nationality is.

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Chapter 11

Religious Pluralism and the Imagined Orthodoxy of Western Ukraine

Vlad Naumescu

The postsocialist transformations of eastern Europe brought with them a repositioning of religion in the public sphere and in relation to the state. Historical ties between traditional churches and national states that had developed during nineteenth-century nation-building and that survived the socialist period are being challenged in the contemporary religious environment. New religious groups, foreign missionaries, and novel religious practices inspired by global religions have entered the postsocialist space, acting in response to the ‘spiritual void’ left by the failed socialist ideology. Their mission of ‘spiritual renewal’ has confronted the reviving traditional churches, which persist in claiming a privileged role in the emerging democracies.¹

Most postsocialist states aspire now to Western liberal models that dictate a separation between religion and state and ask governments to protect the freedom of religion. This right is expressed by the individual possibility to choose one’s religion and the guarantee of equal rights of worship and public expression for any religious group. Those states that tried to secure religious freedom were subject to a tension between the desire to grant this right and the desire to favour certain religious identities that were part of a larger national identity (Hann 2000; Plokhly 2002). Most states did in the end offer special status to the dominant church, giving it rights denied to others in the name of a historical relationship. These churches, confirmed as ‘national churches’, could then dictate tolerance or, rather, intolerance

¹ Unlike Russia, Ukraine did not differentiate between ‘traditional churches’ and ‘new religious groups’ to favour the former over the latter. I use the term *traditional* for churches that had a historical presence in Ukraine, primarily the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches.

towards other religious groups, replacing pluralism with religious monopoly.²

In the larger postsocialist context, Ukraine makes an interesting case for its smooth achievement of a religiously pluralist society. Two factors converged in creating the premises for religious diversity: an unregulated religious sphere and the absence of a single church corresponding to national ideals.

Ukraine's becoming 'a model of religious pluralism among formerly socialist societies' (Wanner 2004: 736) has provoked many discussions and attracted different models of interpretation. In this chapter I present some of those models and argue that the Ukrainian case does not represent the model of religious pluralism as it is generally understood. To support this argument I describe a case of religious diversity on the ground and discuss the implications it has in the way people practise their faith and relate to various religious groups around them. People in Ukraine have weak commitments towards churches as institutions, even though levels of religious practice and manifest religiosity are high. People transcend recently erected confessional boundaries within the previously homogeneous Orthodox Christianity, transporting their practices and expectations to different churches as different places of prayer. This leads to the acceptance and coexistence of religious groups imagined to be Orthodox or very close to the 'imagined Orthodoxy'.

The visible basis of this imagined community comes from the tradition of practice and knowledge that churches share. The imaginary becomes possible because of a separation of religious belief from political allegiances – what Charles Taylor (2002: 96) called the post-Durkheimian dispensation, a third ideal type in the evolution of religion in society. Taylor understood the social imaginary as an 'ensemble of imaginings that enable our practices by making sense of them' (2004: 165). The social imaginary is a result of human imagination and relates to the ways in which people construct images of the world in which they live. It includes the ways in which people imagine their existence in relation to those around them, as well as their awareness of the world in terms of what they expect and what is expected from them – the normative aspects of social life. Hence the moral social order is a constituent of the social imaginary, and civility is an early expression of it (Taylor 2004: 37). It is the imaginary that enables people to interact with one another, shaping their views of themselves and of others and being transformed by their experience and reflection of the world.

² For articles comparing Russia and Ukraine as opposing examples of the development of the religious sphere in relation to the state, see Tataryn 2001, Plokhyy 2002, and Krindatch 2003.

Ukrainian religious pluralism can thus be seen as a form of social imaginary in which people grasp themselves and 'religious others' as existing and acting simultaneously in a space of common display.

The Evolution of Ukrainian Religious Pluralism

In the postsocialist context, religious pluralism is usually seen as an existing or desirable characteristic of the religious sphere. The notion carries a certain ambiguity: it can refer to either the recognition of the variety of religious groups coexisting in a certain place or to an ideological position associated with a liberal view of religious diversity (Hamnett 1990: 7). In the postsocialist case, 'pluralism' emerges as a direct consequence of the state's ideological failure and the introduction of liberal policies correlated with the lack of religious monopoly. Its meaning switches easily between 'circumstantial plurality' (Borowik 2002) and 'expected pluralism' (Barker 1997; Casanova 1998; Wanner 2004). The first meaning applies when a large number of religious groups are active in one place, whereas the second presupposes a certain ideology underlying the observed diversity.

The complexity of Ukrainian pluralism in the context of postsocialist religious 'revival' arises from the emergence of a large number of new religious groups and the revival of traditional churches and divisions within Ukrainian Orthodoxy.³ The phenomenon of Ukraine's 'fragmented Orthodoxy' has been investigated thoroughly in both political and historical terms. Historical explanations present Ukrainian territory, especially the western region, formerly part of Galicia, as a space of continuous ambiguity and interaction between different cultures and religious traditions. Investigated in historical terms, the religious question reveals the continuity of identity-related dilemmas: 'What makes this historical comparison interesting today is the permanence of the plurality in the formation of Ukrainian identity and the reactualization of the problem of searching for the Ukrainian identity between Occident and Orient' (Boyko 2004: 66).

In her discussion of a 'religion of the margins', Natalka Boyko reinforces an image of Ukrainian Christianity, also proposed by other authors (Bociurkiw 1995; Wilson 2000), as a middle-of-the-road

³ Statistics on the number of religious organizations registered in Ukraine in 2005 can be obtained at <http://www.risu.org.ua/eng/resources/statistics>. There were 28,481 religious communities registered in January of that year. For comprehensive articles on the Ukrainian religious situation, analyzing statistical data from 2001, see Krindatch 2003 and Razumkov Centre 2004.

construction 'between Orthodoxy and Catholicism'.⁴ Galicia has always been a place of religious plurality in which confessional borders were extremely flexible, especially those between Orthodox and Greek Catholics.⁵ Ukrainian Greek Catholics illustrate well the ambiguity of the peripheries: for more than 400 years they were subject to incessant fluctuations and internal transformations.⁶ While church institutions followed political variations, people created a broader, all-inclusive sphere of practices and beliefs that could accommodate the frequent changes. This resulted in a high degree of confessional mobility by both elites and local communities, which facilitated an easier identification with Orthodoxy for many Greek Catholics when unification was imposed in 1946 (Yurash 2005: 191).⁷

The historical coexistence of faiths was destroyed, and they were forced into uniformity, during the incorporation of western Ukraine into the Soviet Union. After 1948 the Soviet state, by having most religious groups banned and their members repressed, made possible the monopoly of Ukrainian Orthodoxy. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church depended on the Moscow Patriarchate, but the relationship between them was unbalanced: the strength of Russian Orthodoxy in Soviet times came from Ukraine, where there were more Orthodox parishes and monasteries than in Russia (Keleher 1993; Krindatch 2003).

The domestication (Dragadze 1993) of religious practices and the survival of basic religious structures allowed for a continuity of religious practice alternative to state-promoted atheism and tolerated Orthodoxy.⁸ The

⁴ Boyko (2004) introduced the concept of margins (*'une religion des confines'*) to build a historical model explaining the floating religious identities in past and present Ukraine. Wanner (1998) portrayed Ukraine as a 'borderland' in the introduction to her book on the making of the modern Ukrainian nation.

⁵ The plurality was once even greater than it is today, because of the significant absence of Judaism at present.

⁶ The three unions with Rome and frequent reforms of Ukrainian Orthodoxy illustrate the historical argument of the continuous move between the two poles, Latin and Byzantine (Wilson 2000: 239). Greek Catholics, or 'Uniates', appeared as a result of such a union in 1596 in which the Orthodox Church recognized the pope as its head and entered the Catholic Church, keeping its eastern tradition.

⁷ According to Yurash (2005: 190), one of the current myths regarding Ukrainian Greek Catholics is that 'Galicia has a unique role as the historical stronghold of Uniatism and in its very nature is exclusively Catholic and anti-Orthodox'. This phenomenon of confessional mobility undermines the idea of a historically exclusively Catholic Galicia.

⁸ Among the survivals of basic religious structures, the case of the 'underground Greek Catholic Church' received a lot of attention in Soviet and post-Soviet studies of religion (Ramet 1989, 1990; Hosking 1991; Bociurkiw 1993; Keleher 1993).

persistence of a Ukrainian religious tradition and of local networks within the larger Orthodox Church played an important role in the revival of Ukrainian churches in the late 1980s (Boyko and Rousselet 2004a; Shlikhta 2004; Yurash 2005). Among the first public demands heard during the glasnost period was one for freedom of religious practice. Religious and civic activists advocated for the opening of churches. Some fought for the legalization of the Greek Catholic Church, and others initiated the formation of an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, separate from Moscow. The strong nationalist, anti-Russian movement in fact led to the creation of two Ukrainian Orthodox churches independent of Moscow. Their collaboration and their relationships with the Ukrainian state appeared to be about to lead to the formation of a national church in 1992.⁹ But further attempts to unite the two churches were unsuccessful, and a third church soon emerged. The political and religious dividedness of Ukraine contributed to the separation of the three Ukrainian Orthodox churches (see Richardson, this volume).¹⁰

The Orthodox churches disputed the legacy of Orthodoxy in Ukraine among themselves and against the re-legalized Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). The 'reviving' UGCC had its foundation in underground structures, and it grew with substantial help from the Ukrainian diaspora and the conversion of Orthodox priests and parishes. It began to develop mostly in western Ukraine, alongside the emerging national movement, and became the major church of that region.

The formation of the Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches involved much politics and many confrontations. A sensitive aspect was that these churches had to share the same resources: church buildings, parish communities, priests, and monasteries belonging to the Orthodox Church of Soviet times. Having to divide a common inheritance, each church tried to differentiate itself from the others by claiming that it represented the independent Ukrainian church associated to the newly independent Ukrainian state. 'We want our church Ukrainian' was the slogan with which

⁹ The first Ukrainian president, Leonid Kravchuk, insisted on the idea of plurality (see Wilson 2000: 234) and at the same time encouraged the formation of a United Ukrainian Orthodox Church that would support the state. Church leaders saw this as the best occasion for the creation of an autocephalous Ukrainian patriarchate, as in other Orthodox countries, with the status of national church. Later, President Leonid Kuchma completely changed state policy towards religion and chose to support the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (Plokyh 2002: 306).

¹⁰ The story of the Orthodox splits and the early revival of Ukrainian churches was told at length in the postsocialist literature on Ukraine (Sysyn 1993; Bociurkiw 1995; Markus 1995; D'Anieri, Kravchuk, and Kuzio 1999; Wilson 2000; Fagan and Shchipkov 2001; Plokyh 2002; Krindatch 2003).

believers and priests belonging to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church justified their choice.

No church, however, secured the state's permanent support in this process. In spite of the existence of a governmental body dealing with religious issues, key matters such as registration of parishes and distribution of land and property remained under the control of local authorities.¹¹ Thus the development of local religious groups depended on the ethnic and religious characteristics of the respective administrative region (Mitrokhin 2001; Yurash 2005). Most religious groups were able to build successful local structures benefiting from good relations with state authorities. In western Ukraine, Greek Catholics, fully supported by local administrations, secured a large majority of parishes and church buildings, becoming the main actor in the religious sphere.¹²

While the Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches were competing to obtain a privileged position and national recognition, a large variety of new religious groups appeared all over Ukraine, gathering significant numbers of believers (Wanner 2004). The religious boom resulting from the revival and growth of religious organizations and the increase in religious diversity caused specialists to consider Ukraine 'one of the most active and competitive "religious marketplaces" in Eurasia' (Wanner 2004: 736). Among the Ukrainian cities, L'viv, the capital of western Ukraine, came to be seen as the perfect example of the competitive and diverse religious market (Casanova 1998: 95). It constitutes the subject of the following case study.

¹¹ The governmental body that deals with religious issues is the State Committee on Religious Affairs (Derzhkomreligij; see Richardson, this volume). A corresponding council, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, was created by religious institutions that claimed national representation. It is composed of leaders of the main religious groups on a voluntary basis.

¹² The distribution of religious affiliation by territory is discussed in Markus 1995 and Razumkov Centre 2004. According to government data, 56 per cent of all religious organizations in L'viv oblast are Greek Catholic (L'viv Regional State Administration website, accessed 12 October 2005), followed by the UOC-KP, with 15 per cent, and the UAOC, with 13 per cent. The National Committee on Religious Matters of Ukraine counted the following religious communities functioning in L'viv oblast by 1 January 2004: 1,507 Greek Catholic, 842 Orthodox (61 Moscow Patriarchate, 413 Kyiv Patriarchate, 366 Autocephalous), 140 Roman Catholic, 269 Protestant, and 27 others. Source: www.risu.org.ua/eng/resources/statistics/reg2004/, accessed 12 October 2005.

Religious Pluralism from Below: The Case of Sykhiv

Sykhivski *massif* is a large district south-east of the centre of L'viv.¹³ It offers a typical example of Soviet architecture mixed with remains of villages that nearly disappeared under the expanding town during the 1970s. This area, one of the last in the city to be developed by the Soviets, became heavily industrialized in the 1960s and was turned into a 'dormitory' (*spalnyi micro-raion*) to accommodate the new working class originating mostly in surrounding villages. In the central square, Soviet city planners designed spaces for modern institutions embodying the new order – Party headquarters, kindergartens, a hospital, and a park – but owing to the demise of the socialist system, they remained only on paper. Instead, since 1991 church buildings have arisen around the square, occupying those empty spaces step by step.

When I started my work in Sykhiv in late 2003, this central area accommodated five church buildings belonging to the UGCC, the UOC-MP, the UOC-KP, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and a congregation of Pentecostals. Apart from them, dispersed in the nearby neighbourhood were several unfinished churches and chapels: one Roman Catholic, another UAOC, and a few more Greek Catholic. On the periphery of the new district, among the remains of the former village Staryi Sykhiv, two more churches remained, a former Polish church (*kosciol*) and a small Ukrainian wooden church (*tserkva*).¹⁴

The district has as much spatial unity and coherence as the postsocialist setting allows it, as well as a certain local identity, the Sykhivian. More important than the spatial proximity of local churches is that residents bring them together in a coherent story about the making of their inter-confessional district (*mijconfesiinii raion*). It is the experience of walking by these churches daily that reminds Sykhivians of the current religious plurality, which started almost from zero in 1991. As Yury Hrynchyshyn, a Sykhivian and a former member of the local council, explained to me:

In respect to the confessional situation here, if you compare it to 1990 ... I always refer back to that moment of change [*perehodu*] ... it grew a lot, confessions multiplied in Sykhiv, but I see that all

¹³ The material used in this analysis comes from fieldwork undertaken in Sykhiv *massif* (district) in 2003–4. Additional information was gathered from archives (Institute for Church History, L'viv state archive, parish registers).

¹⁴ Sykhivski district covers a larger territory, but I limited my research to the area perceived locally as 'Sykhiv', which is concentrated around the central square, Cervona Kalyna, and Staryi Sykhiv, the former village.

[churches] end up here in the centre. ... Maybe you were there already or you will go and see that next to the church of the Nativity of the Mother of God, a Greek Catholic church, there is a Baptist church in the forest. The building that in the beginning we thought would be the administration, Cervona Kalyna 86 A, [belongs to] Jehovah's Witnesses now. Opposite it is a temporary small church – the Kyiv Patriarchate. Right next to it is a small construction – the Moscow Church. ... There is a split between them, a legal case [proceeds]. ... They fight mainly because of the location.

An investigation into Sykhiv's recent past illustrates the origins and evolution of the current religious pluralism. Religious life during the Soviet regime took place in the former Roman Catholic church in the village, at the margins of the newly built area. The parish community was of mixed backgrounds; many church-goers were Ukrainians resettled from different parts of Poland in 1946. This church was once the only one open in the entire *raion*, so unless people went to villages around L'viv, they had to go there for religious services. The church had to switch from Greek Catholic to Orthodox in 1948, but the shift was remembered as smooth, and nothing visible changed in the religious practices of the parish.¹⁵ Sofia Ventyk, an older resident of the village, remembered: 'It was done in silence, and the priest didn't explain anything. Only the cantor told me, "We became Orthodox!" And I ask, "How?" He says, "Look, everything is done in the Orthodox [way]." I couldn't ask during the liturgy how, who, and where. ... And people didn't learn about it. Afterwards they understood that it is Orthodoxy.'¹⁶

Asked about the implications of shifting confessions at that time, Hanna, a member of the church council of the current UOC-KP parish in Sykhiv, gave an explanation that was shared by most of the former parish members. She had been resettled from Poland after the Second World War, like many other Ukrainians in the region, and had lived in Sykhiv ever since. She was baptized Greek Catholic in Poland but in Ukraine had to change churches three times, in 1946, 1991, and 1993 – though she did not see these changes as conversions or as having to break with the religious tradition in which she was raised.

¹⁵ The Church of St. Mykhail had been Roman Catholic and belonged to the Polish community in the village, but after the resettlements of the Second World War, Greek Catholics took it over for a short period. When banished, they had to leave it to the Orthodox Church, which administered it until 1991.

¹⁶ Interview P-1-1-436.5 with Sofia Ventyk, oral history archive fund of the Institute of Church History, L'viv. The archive comprises a large collection of materials on the underground Greek Catholic Church (1946–89).

I don't know who thinks about a church that it is Catholic or Orthodox. ... Look, you enter a church and kneel to pray to God, so how do you pray? 'My Father, Greek Catholic', or you say, 'My Father, Orthodox', or you say, 'Our Father'? The prayer cannot be changed, and the word 'Orthodox', even the pope came here and said, 'And all you Orthodox Christians'. It is right to believe in Christ's faith ... but if you are going to subordinate [*pidchyniatysia*] yourself to the pope, or to Kyiv, or Moscow, that is [one's] own business, who wants to [subordinate oneself to] whom. ... But nobody says a different prayer, credo, Our Father, Mother of God – [nobody] has the right to change them. Then [in 1946], there was only the Orthodox Church.

The first new churches in Sykhiv appeared through the splitting of the Orthodox parish, a process that was taking place all over western Ukraine. In L'viv in 1989–90, great public pressure existed to turn from Orthodoxy to Greek Catholicism. Lay activists and underground priests asked people to return to the church that had traditionally defended Ukrainian ideals in western Ukraine and accused the Orthodox of being 'Russians' and thus anti-Ukrainian. Defections of priests and entire parishes led to the takeover of church buildings by Greek Catholics, often represented by the very same community that had just changed its name from Orthodox to Greek Catholic.

Following the campaigning of activists from Sykhiv, and backed by the general wave of religious enthusiasm, the two Orthodox priests of the small parish in Staryi Sykhiv were thrown out of the church. Their refusal to change confession or to leave the church led to an ad hoc local 'referendum' that approved the transformation of the church into a Greek Catholic one. Only 12 parishioners followed the expelled priests, first to one priest's house behind the church and later to the central square of Sykhiv. An older couple from the parish, Oleh and Olea, emotionally attached to the older Orthodox priest, followed him and left the church. Before the war Olea had lived in Poland, but she had an Orthodox background. She was resettled in L'viv, where she met her husband, a Greek Catholic Sykhivian. Like many other residents, she heard nothing about underground Greek Catholics before 1989 and was surprised to learn that some were her own neighbours.¹⁷

¹⁷ Opinions varied about how secret the activity of the underground priests was. The neighbours of the most active monks living in Sykhiv found out only in 1989 that they were Greek Catholic priests, whereas other residents knew and organized clandestine services together.

People were inciting [each other]: ‘Orthodoxy is from Moscow!’ ... They called us *Moskalii*;¹⁸ they shouted at us. ... We were going to church and they shouted at my husband; they didn’t shout at me as I’m just his wife, but he is from here, they all knew him: ‘To whom did you go? What are you doing?’ But we didn’t reply to all the terrible words they told us; I can’t say those words. ... We were *Moskalii* and they were Ukrainians! People were showing us the finger: ‘Look at them, Communists [*komuniaky*]!’

In 1991 the group started to build a small church in Sykhiv’s square. When the church was almost erected, a second split in the community took place – this was in 1993, the year when the third Orthodox church, the UOC-KP, appeared. This time the people who had stayed with the older priest claimed their Ukrainianness by following the UOC-KP, which they perceived as the Ukrainian church. Thus they succeeded in taking possession of the church against some of their own fellow parishioners, now ‘Russians’, who chose to remain attached to the Moscow Patriarchate with the younger priest. Olea, talking about the second split, revealed the group’s hope of having a national church alongside the independent Ukrainian state. Their religious choice followed national ideals of the time: ‘We were saying like this: Rome is not our father, Moscow is not our mother. We are already worthy of our own [church]. We were crying that we must have our own. I say even now that we must have our own church, Ukrainian.’

The priest who stayed with the Moscow Patriarchate, forced to leave the church, moved only ten metres away to erect an improvised shelter for Sunday celebrations. His community, numbering a few more than 50 people in 2003, could not register as a parish or own the plot it now used. The local administration, consistent in its anti-Russian attitude, refused to allow the group to build a church on the grounds that a second Russian church in L’viv was unnecessary.¹⁹ The same land was claimed by the other priest, of the Kyiv Patriarchate, for building a bigger church than the existing chapel. Both Orthodox communities remained strong in their positions, each preventing the other from starting construction. Although neither of the two groups had visible signs indicating its confessional affiliation, the common view was

¹⁸ *Moskalii* is a pejorative term used in western Ukraine for Russians or anyone considered to have a connection to Russia.

¹⁹ The case achieved international recognition because of the Moscow Patriarchate’s complaints regarding freedom of religion in Ukraine. There was already a church in the centre of L’viv that gathered the Russian community and was known as ‘the Russian church’ or ‘the church on Korolenka [street]’.

that only the larger chapel was Ukrainian Orthodox. People pointed to the improvised chapel next door as 'the church of Russians [*tserkva Ruskiv*]'.²⁰

The expanding Greek Catholic community made its first step into the central square in Sykhiv in 1990, on the advice of the underground priest who was leading the group. The congregation blessed a cross in the memory of Ukrainian martyrs and continued to pray daily next to the cross. Thus they appropriated, first symbolically and then materially, the land for a new church. As the Greek Catholic priests remembered in 2004, they experienced a wave of gratitude and generosity, and 'authorities were more open', at the beginning of the 1990s. No one opposed their project, and they received substantial support for the construction of a church building.²¹

Due to the affluence of Sykhiv residents and their support for the new church, the parish priest began to make plans to erect one of the largest churches in L'viv. The actual construction began only in 1995, soon after a new, young priest came to the parish.²² This new Church of the Nativity of the Most Blessed Mother of God (*Rizdva Presviatoi Bohoroditse*) became the neighbourhood project that attracted the most local residents. Some dedicated their time as workers or helpers, and many donated money or offered other assistance. Personal connections with people working in the factories around Sykhiv yielded a great deal of material and technical support for the construction (as was also the case with the nearby Kyiv Patriarchate chapel, which was built entirely with donated materials).

The efficient management of the parish, combined with intense religious activity in the community, attracts the largest group of churchgoers in Sykhiv.²³ Employees of the district administration are also members of this parish, and although official support is less visible than in the early

²⁰ It was so called because the church belonged to the Moscow Patriarchate and the common language among parish members was Russian, alongside Ukrainian. The liturgical language was Church Slavonic, unlike in all other churches, where Ukrainian was used. Parishioners were mostly Ukrainians, some from eastern Ukraine.

²¹ Local authorities supported Greek Catholics all over western Ukraine by offering them church buildings, land for construction, and financial support.

²² In the initial stage, an older priest, Father Boyko, led the parish and raised a hangar-chapel near the cross. But he was unable to start the big project of the new church, and soon he was replaced by Father Orest Fredina, one of the most charismatic priests in L'viv, who in 2004 still ran the parish, together with six other priests.

²³ According to the parish's own statistics, about 3,000 people attended Sunday mass and more than 10,000 attended Easter celebrations in 2004. The church also hosts 13 religious organizations, a choir, a parish journal, and a printing house. Seven priests work in the parish.

1990s, the church's activities exceed those of any other church in town – in Sykhiv, Greek Catholics are involved in schools, kindergartens, and hospitals. Most residents perceive the Nativity church as 'the church in Sykhiv', and its priests and parishioners act accordingly. In preparation for the ritual known as the Jordan blessing on 19 January, the church priests seek out parishioners in the district, knocking on all doors to enter and bless houses. They invite people to church while gathering statistics regarding local residents' religious affiliation. They also offer religious activities and community services to all age groups without ethnic or confessional differentiation.

Mykola, an older deacon in this church, who had also served in the Orthodox church in Staryi Sykhiv, said that many people came to the Greek Catholic church to deal with personal problems and, being accepted at once, remained there: 'There are still some Russians who go there to him [the priest affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate]. But most [people] come to us. Look, we just had a service and an entire Russian family came to the liturgy, their girl died. They came, spoke Russian, and that was it, we don't have the right to tell them anything. Even if you speak Russian, you came to pray to God.'

The 'Nativity church' gained such recognition not only because it was the largest church in the district but also because it was the centre of other significant events. In 2001 Pope John Paul II, during his visit to Ukraine, had a meeting with the Catholic youths of L'viv. The meeting took place in the square in front of the Nativity church, which played a large role in the organizing. People came from all over Ukraine, Poland, and Belarus, but Sykhivians were there in the front row. Many parish members took part in the organizing, and all those who wanted to participate and 'see the pope' had to register on lists kept by the parish priests.²⁴ This visit played an important role at many levels, both religious and political, but for the church in Sykhiv it became a significant symbol. 'The church where the pope came' (*tserkva de Papa buv*) remained a marker of the church and increased Greek Catholics' authority in the district as representatives of local religious tradition. Father Ruslan, a priest in the Nativity church, admitted the benefits brought by the pope's visit: 'Those people who generally consider themselves "against confessional differentiations" [*pozakonfesiynymy*], they come here anyway, because the church is bigger; the pope was here, and after all, the advertisement works.'

²⁴ The church still uses these lists for fundraising purposes and other church-related activities. I was permitted to use them to make up the Greek Catholic sample in my survey.

This event also brought together religious groups that had previously ignored each other, such as the Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics in Sykhiv. The pope, aware of the implications of his visit to a place with a tradition of religious pluralism, showed consideration for both religious traditions and equally addressed Orthodox and Catholics, Ukrainians, Poles, and Russians.

Only four years before the pope's visit, in 1997, Roman Catholics had moved into Sykhiv, to a house containing a small chapel and a flat for the Polish priest. As was the case everywhere in western Ukraine, a strong Roman Catholic presence had once existed in Staryi Sykhiv, a half-Polish village. The Poles had left after the war, and the church building (the 'referendum' church described earlier) was taken over by Greek Catholics. The new Roman Catholic community attracted the few mixed families living in Sykhiv, mostly Ukrainians with Polish origins.²⁵

Natalia's case is revealing of the way family relations develop around religious choices in a mixed confessional environment. In 2004 she was an 18-year-old parish member of the new Roman Catholic community. Her mother was from a Polish family in Ukraine, and her father was Ukrainian Orthodox from eastern Ukraine. She was baptized Orthodox, but before 1989 she went with her father to the Orthodox church and with her mother secretly to the Catholic cathedral. When the new Roman Catholic parish was established in Sykhiv, Natalia began to go to church regularly. She said she liked the priest and the kind of community that grew out of his parish activity, in comparison with the Orthodox one with which she was already familiar. She learned Polish and became involved in the community, working with children, organizing pilgrimages, and helping with pastoral activities.

Her parents had little contact with the church and believed she was too much involved in church life. Natalia thought her father behaved as he did because 'he doesn't know what he is' – he had no clear religious identity. When she and her mother went to the Roman Catholic chapel in Sykhiv, he went to the Greek Catholic church. The entire family attended an Orthodox church affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate whenever they were in the father's parents' village of Hmel'nitskyi, because there was no other church around. During religious festivals (*sviata*) in L'viv, the entire family went to

²⁵ In western Ukraine, Roman Catholics recovered only 10 per cent of their churches after 1990. Most of the church buildings were given to Greek Catholics by local authorities, who argued that Polish communities were either very small or non-existent. The Roman Catholic Church chose to build new churches rather than ask for the old ones back, to avoid possible conflicts over property. The Roman Catholic parish in Sykhiv counts about 300 parishioners.

both the Catholic and Orthodox churches.²⁶ Natalia's parents had not had a religious marriage, because her father did not want to upset his parents by getting married in the Catholic church [*v kosteli*], and her mother did not want to marry in an Orthodox church [*v tserkve*]. This created problems for them in attending Roman Catholic services.

This story shows that 'Greek Catholic' and 'Orthodox' are not the only transcendable confessional identities. These two are grounded in the same tradition, so people easily find similarities between them; more surprising is the substitutability of the Roman Catholic tradition. Potential family conflicts deriving from different affiliations are overcome by attending multiple churches and falling back on common practices. The permeability of confessional boundaries favours the frequenting of more than one church and the mixing of religious practices among Sykhivian Roman Catholics, although to a lesser degree than among the Orthodox and Greek Catholics. In spite of different religious traditions, there is a basic common ground among these confessional groups, due to both historical and recent circumstances. During Soviet times, some Greek Catholics in Sykhiv went to Roman Catholic churches, considering their Catholic identity more important than the eastern tradition they held in common with Orthodox Christians. This choice on the part of western Ukrainians was also political, determined by pervasive anti-Soviet attitudes. Some underground Greek Catholic priests were adopted by Roman Catholic communities and continued to profess as priests under this disguise. These connections strengthened the links between the two communities and influenced Greek Catholics' religious practices.

The possibility of transcending confessional boundaries is more problematic in the case of the last two religious groups that are part of the local plurality. Pentecostals came to the district in 1992 and rented the cinema hall in the central square for their Sunday services. After a year they began to build their church behind the Greek Catholic one, close to the forest.²⁷ As in the case of the Church of the Nativity, the building in 2004 looked monumental, and its unfinished construction exceeded the possibilities of the local community. It included the parish church and a

²⁶ Though she knows the difference between Greek Catholics and Orthodox Christians, Natalia often talks about *pravoslavnyi*, referring to Greek Catholics, and says about the Orthodox Kyiv Patriarchate and Moscow Patriarchate that they are 'of different faith' (*insha vyra*).

²⁷ Initially the Pentecostal community wanted the land next to the Nativity church, but because of pressure from the Greek Catholic parish, which did not want another church close by, it could not obtain approval from the local authorities. The plot was later occupied by a shopping mall.

theological seminary for future Protestant pastors.²⁸ Not far from it, in a large building close to the square, were the Jehovah's Witnesses, the latest newcomers to Sykhiv, who arrived in 2000. Their organization replicated the standard Jehovah's Witnesses structures, and all members from Sykhiv met in separate groups according to geographical divisions. The Jehovah's Witnesses' preaching covered the entire district. This was therefore the only religious organization that frequently met other religious groups and challenged people's religious identities.²⁹

The religious groups I have described had the ability to develop their communities and create their own spaces in the district. Sharing buildings and land was a source of conflict between Greek Catholics and Orthodox Christians and later between Orthodox Christians of different affiliations. In the early 1990s, conflicts over church buildings took place frequently all over western Ukraine, but Sykhiv remained relatively peaceful. This was the general impression of many residents, priests, and pastors, in spite of the small Orthodox conflict. The two Orthodox priests could not come to terms with each other, and their communities remained separate, even though their churches stood only ten metres apart. Residents quickly 'absorbed' the vibrant religious activity, and new groups were easily accommodated into the district. Priests often emphasized the 'religious thirst' of the district as the reason for such intense activity. Under-urbanization (Szelenyi 1981) resulting from Soviet industrialization policies made Sykhiv a district of rural migrants who retained strong links to their villages around L'viv. Their urban religious practices were similar to their rural practices, sustaining traditional forms of devotion that had evolved around the family and important holy days. Most religious leaders understood and conformed to this type of religiosity.

The most notable religious events in the district revolved around the Nativity church, the largest religious enterprise in the area, but all the other religious groups were able to pursue their activities as well. Since 1990, Greek Catholics have tended to influence the religious dynamics of Sykhiv,

²⁸ This is a traditional Pentecostal church with home prayer groups and little public preaching in nearby villages. The community has between 500 and 700 members whose ritual practice is very moderate, with few charismatic influences.

²⁹ The centre of Jehovah's Witness activity in Ukraine is at the outskirts of L'viv, and their activity has been well-established in the city since the early 1990s. Like the Pentecostals and Greek Catholics, this organization, too, had underground structures and was heavily persecuted by the Soviet regime. The community in Sykhiv has over 1,000 members from the district.

including the establishment of other religious groups.³⁰ Upon the pope's visit in 2001, their influence could still be felt in the religious life of the quarter. This time it had to do with the presence of 'the Russian church' – the Moscow Patriarchate chapel in Sykhiv – and the anti-Russian feelings of the local authorities. The head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Cardinal Lubomyr Husar, intervened on behalf of the Moscow Patriarchate community to obtain a plot on which the UOC-MP could build a church. According to Yury Hrynychshyn, Greek Catholics played a pivotal role in this affair:

The request came before the pope's visit. ... I was the head of the municipal committee for religious issues. ... [They asked] that we distribute them a location for construction. ... So we all said as one, 'We don't want to! There is a church on Korolenka street, it's enough, there's no need for another one.' Then Husar addressed [the committee,] asking us to give them a place for reconciliation purposes, for good relations. So they started to think about it, where they could give them something ... maybe they even gave them something in writing.

The smaller religious communities in Sykhiv developed as offshoots of larger communities. When the Roman Catholic parish was founded, announcements were made at the other two Catholic churches in L'viv, to encourage Sykhivians to attend the new chapel. When the Pentecostal church opened in their neighbourhood, Pentecostals, too, moved from other churches in L'viv closer to home. Unlike the Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches in Sykhiv, these communities cultivated stronger ties between parish members, putting more pressure on newcomers to integrate and stay.

This account of Sykhiv's recent history shows how religious pluralism started in a former village church on the periphery of a Soviet district that had been emptied of religious life. Plurality began with the successive splitting of a parish church, and within a few years the 'revival' of religious activity completely reshaped the public sphere. In 'making churches', people did more than recycle Soviet spaces and symbols into religious ones (Luehrmann 2005); they created new ones.

Religious life in Sykhiv illustrates the flexibility of boundaries and people's loose commitments to religious institutions, particularly with respect to the traditional churches – Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Roman Catholic. Confessional affiliation appears to be weak, which is one of the main factors leading to religious pluralism. People who follow such

³⁰ Even in this powerful position, Greek Catholics did not become intolerant towards other religious groups or obstruct their founding and activities in Sykhiv, as was the case in other postsocialist countries.

undifferentiated religious practices can be referred to as 'free-floating believers', a category also underlined by several sociological studies.³¹ The phenomenon exists throughout eastern and central Ukraine but also appears in western Ukraine, a region with higher involvement in religious issues. In the west it seems to have historical roots that are visible in confessional instability and the continuous ambiguity of religious borders. Non-institutionalized religious practices were reinforced by the domestication of religion during Soviet times ('home belief') and by the general mistrust of any institution characteristic of the late socialist period.

My own survey showed that intense non-institutional religiosity was characteristic of Sykhiv as well.³² Individual devotion was frequent (47–68 per cent of respondents claimed it), and most church-related religious activity took place in the family around religious festivals. Family members were major sources of religious education and support, according to 65 per cent of respondents, whereas churches were seen as unsuccessful in their attempts to provide religious education for adults and young people. The only successful church-based education was the Sunday schools for children that the Greek Catholic, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic communities provided.

People tended to rely on individual devotions in their daily lives. Most respondents stated that individual prayer was the most helpful form of religious support (92 per cent practised it, and 68 per cent practised it daily), followed by the reading of spiritual literature (70 per cent). Over 60 per cent of Sykhivians performed basic 'domestic' religious rituals, including the use of holy water (drinking and sprinkling it), candles, and icons and the baking of Easter bread. Although their religiosity was highly individualized, most respondents (85 per cent) declared that churches significantly influenced their religious lives. More than half of those interviewed (55 per cent) went

³¹ Boyko and Rousselet (2004: 39–50) labelled believers without institutional affiliation as having 'individual belief'; Casanova (1998: 95) talked about the 'unchurched'; and Borowik (2002: 503) wrote of the 'Orthodox with undefined affiliation'.

³² The survey data represent preliminary results of a micro-survey focused exclusively on religious life in Sykhiv that I organized with the help of the Department of Sociology of L'viv National University. A representative sample of 312 respondents included a street subsample of 120 persons, who declared themselves religious or not religious, churchgoers or non-practising believers. Another 180 respondents included representatives of all the religious communities in Sykhiv according to their approximate size. Viktor Susak and his students, along with Natalia Vashrova, were extremely helpful in the survey.

to a church service weekly (45 per cent with family) – usually to Sunday mass – and 97 per cent of respondents had attended a church at least once.

The meaning of *church* for Sykhivians, however, was that of ‘a place of prayer’ (80 per cent), rather than that of ‘hierarchy’ (11 per cent) or ‘national institution’ (21 per cent). This confirms the existence of a non-institutionalized group of practising believers who see the church as a locus of spirituality rather than representative of an institution. Such a belief also makes it easier for churchgoers to remain attached to one ‘place of prayer’ when the institution to which it belongs changes. It allows them to shift between churches if external conditions impose a change. Aspects such as proximity, comfort, and social networks had less influence on people’s choices of church (fewer than 30 per cent).

Respondents preferred to stick to one church (80 per cent) that seemed to best fit their beliefs (60 per cent). The sense of ‘a church that fits one’s beliefs’ was based not on confessional differences but on the shared tradition of religious practice of Orthodox and Greek Catholics. Common answers usually concluding conversations on this subject were, ‘Each church teaches “good”; there is no difference [between them]’ and ‘We do not make a difference; Orthodox and Greek Catholic are “our churches” [*nashyi tserkve*]’.

Collective expectations about what one ought to find in a church and get from the priest were sometimes strong enough to impose on churches and priests the community’s habits. This was usually effected through a negotiation between the priest and the community, represented by some of the more knowledgeable parishioners. Such a process – though ultimately unsuccessful on the part of the parishioners – took place in the Nativity church when the new generation of priests came in 1995 and parishioners asked them to continue devotions from the Latin tradition. The priests refused, insisting on following the main line promoted by the church after the 1990s, that of Byzantinization. It happened more successfully in the Roman Catholic parish, where the Polish priest had to give up some classical Catholic rituals and make way for rituals requested by his parishioners.³³ He found it difficult to introduce new rituals that were not part of the local tradition, and he had to celebrate rituals and holy days that were important for his community but were rarely celebrated in the Latin tradition of his church. Thus, even in the case of traditional churches, Sykhiv residents

³³ Parishioners asked for services that existed in the Latin tradition but were more important in the Orthodox Church, such as the blessing of water. The Roman Catholic priest renounced the Marian prayers and rogation days that were practised in the Polish Roman Catholic Church.

shaped the lives of the newly built religious communities according to local cultural practices derived from a distinct religious tradition.³⁴

Following this idea, one can understand how the fact that a church changed jurisdiction several times in the recent past failed to affect the religious practice of the respective community. Rituals tended to remain the same, or if they changed, they did so in a comprehensible manner. The same priest usually continued to celebrate mass in the parish, making the change even less dramatic. It is not surprising, then, that the majority of respondents in the Sykhiv survey (86 per cent) considered that they had not changed their confession or church since 1990. Although there was only one Orthodox church in Sykhiv before 1989 but at least six different religious groups in 2004, the number of 'converts' was extremely small. This result confirms that Sykhivians followed the splitting and making of churches without considering a real change to have taken place in their religious practice.³⁵

Many respondents opted for the making of a national church, declaring that they wished churches would unite to become one (*odyniaetsia*). This choice, however, was not oriented towards a particular confession, Orthodox or Greek Catholic, as one might have expected. A large majority (70 per cent) considered that confessional identity was not necessarily related to national identity, affirming that being Ukrainian did not depend on being Orthodox or Greek Catholic.³⁶ Because confessional identities were weak, people tended to choose identities that encompassed religious differences: being Christian or Ukrainian was more important than being Catholic or Orthodox.³⁷

Sykhiv residents indicated different levels of acceptance of the religious groups present in the district.³⁸ The category 'Greek Catholic' won the greatest favour; 55 per cent of respondents expressed a positive attitude

³⁴ Wanner (2004) acknowledged the same process in the case of Evangelical communities in Ukraine.

³⁵ During the interviews, no one in the Orthodox and Catholic communities referred to his or her turn from one church to the other as 'conversion'. This is certainly the opposite of the case with new Protestant movements (Wanner 2003: 276).

³⁶ What mattered, according to the survey, was language, or 'speaking Ukrainian' (75 per cent), and patriotic feelings, or 'feeling Ukrainian' (77 per cent).

³⁷ 'Ukrainian' (16 per cent) and 'Christian' (27 per cent) were the most important identities among a total of 32 choices given in the questionnaire, including religious, ethnic, moral, gender, and age markers. In comparison, 'Greek Catholic' was chosen by 4.5 per cent, even though the sample counted 60 per cent self-identified Greek Catholics.

³⁸ The following results were obtained from a scale of social distance introduced in the questionnaire.

towards the Greek Catholic Church.³⁹ The large number of Greek Catholic residents and the presence of the Nativity church, a symbol of the district, accounted for such favourable reception. Attitudes towards other traditional churches, such as the UAOC, the UOC-KP, and the Roman Catholic Church, were neutral (50 per cent), whereas Pentecostals and members of the UOC-MP were seen with some suspicion (28 per cent and 21 per cent of respondents, respectively, expressed a negative attitude towards them). The survey also included a broad category of 'sects' (*secty*). This category, usually identified with Jehovah's Witnesses, was strongly rejected by almost half of the respondents (49 per cent), who considered it 'bad for Ukraine' (*pohanyi*) or untrue (*ne spravdlyvii*), in the sense that sects were not 'true churches' as culturally accepted in western Ukraine.

These results are better understood when one takes into consideration the distance of each religious group from the local religious tradition and the cultural understanding of 'church' and its role. The limits of the collective representation of what religion is about seem clearly manifested when it comes to Jehovah's Witnesses. Hanna, a woman who had been forced to change churches three times (all of them belonging to the same eastern Christian tradition), illustrates that there is a point where the imagined religious community stops, by leaving Jehovah's Witnesses outside it:

But I came here [to the Greek Catholic church] ... and I didn't hear anything: that the prayer was different, that the preaching was different, that they read a different Gospel. ... And it seems to me that the Orthodox faith was from the beginning ... because already in 1988 we celebrated 1,000 years of Orthodox faith, and Catholics 450 years since the Union. So there was one, and then [the other]. ... It was not our fault, [but of] those patriarchs, they thought of their own and divided ... and since then they separated. ... But the faith should be one, this is how I think. One God, we cannot divide [*dilyty*] him. Look, you walk and meet Jehovah's Witnesses on the road ... there was also an acquaintance of mine [who had become a Jehovah's Witness] and I told her, 'Christ is risen!' And she laughed at me. ... You know how much it hurt me, and I thought, 'Woman, you even went [to church] up to now ... and to me it doesn't make a difference to which church you go, to the *kosciol*, or to the Autocephalous, or the Orthodox, or to the Catholic, but you go to pray to God ... and all [of them] say, Christ is risen! And you don't

³⁹ This result was directly influenced by the proportion of Greek Catholics in the survey sample (60 per cent). Their over-representation reflected the massive presence of Greek Catholics in Sykhiv and in L'viv oblast (56 per cent of the population).

[say it]! And I think about her: How is it possible that she lost her way completely?

Religious Pluralism in Interpretative Models

The plurality of religious groups in Ukraine has been often portrayed in terms of a 'religious marketplace' (Casanova 1998; Wanner 2003). This concept has become common in postsocialist studies of religion, but like 'pluralism' it carries a certain ambiguity. It ranges from being a metaphor for religious diversity to being a sociological model of analysis and an ideological concept closely related to liberal models of pluralism (see Pelkmans, this volume). The sociological reading follows the idea that the existence of unregulated religious economies determines competition among religious groups, which produces higher levels of religious commitment (Finke and Stark 1998).⁴⁰ The degree of competition is determined by the number of religious organizations and the level of state regulation. In Ukraine there is separation between state and religion, which the state tries to maintain because of complicated religious divisions. The legal status quo since 1991 also reflects the fact that churches are afraid of changes that might affect the fragile balance they have reached.

The supply-side model, as the marketplace model is also known, has recently been amended for postsocialist countries. Apparently, in those cases competition does not explain higher levels of religiosity (Bruce 1999; Froese 2004). Instead, the reasons for intense religiosity are the religious monopolies established after 1989 – religious groups that dominate a religious market through a combination of state support and state regulation of minority religious groups (Froese 2004: 61). The market-like model works only in a society in which people do not have strong institutional commitments and where ethno-religious identities are not strong either (Bruce 1999: 274).

The case of Sykhiv reveals an absence of strong religious commitments, at least in institutional terms, but also a high level of religiosity. The permeability of borders and the ambiguity of confessional identities contradict the idea of an increased institutional commitment determined by religious competition. Indeed, even competition on the ground can be questioned. Religious elites with different political visions seem to compete, but this has little effect on individuals, who continue to carry their religious practices and beliefs from one church to another.

⁴⁰ Finke and Stark (1996) developed this analytical model on the basis of rational choice theory to explain high church attendance in American cities and later tested it for various other places around the world.

It is also evident that the religious sphere in Ukraine is far from a monopoly. The idea that Ukrainian identity overlaps that of Orthodoxy or Greek Catholicism seems questionable in the light of present data. Believers keep their political commitments separate from their religious beliefs.⁴¹ The state also stays out of the religious sphere, and sociologists agree in affirming the secularization of the Ukrainian state (Mitrokhin 2001; Boyko 2004; Yelensky 2005).

José Casanova (1998) took both secularization and the market idea further and proposed a denominational model for understanding the Ukrainian religious situation, which he considered similar to the American case. The idea that animates this view, when applied to Ukraine, is that the absence of a national church and the emergence of a plurality of religious groups – including the divided Orthodoxy – created the premises for a complete separation of religion from the state. Thus religious life could ‘be routinized into the normal institutional competition between religious firms competing on a more or less free and open religious market’ (Casanova 1998: 97).

The denominational model denotes a society that, like the United States, is founded on civic principles that incorporate religious values (Taylor 2002). Charles Taylor believes that in the American case there is no need for one religion to be exclusively linked with the nation because the nation was built as a religious project.⁴² In this context, churches became denominations because they no longer aimed to encompass all the members of the society, as ‘national churches’ do. To lose the ambition of becoming a national church is to be transformed into an ‘affinity group’ (Taylor 2002: 73), accepting that other churches share the same space and that none includes ‘all believers’. The particularity of denomination-based pluralism is that it encompasses all religious groups without discriminating between them.

Similar circumstances can be found in Ukraine, where the religious field is so fragmented that no one church includes ‘all believers’. Since Ukrainian independence, no religious group has managed to form a close relationship with the state and thus to become a national church. The reason is that no religious institution became strong enough to dominate on a national level and thus to be a partner of the state in its nation-building. The

⁴¹ This conclusion is also supported by the analysis of voting behaviour produced by the Razumkov Centre (2004).

⁴² Taylor draws on the concept of American ‘civil religion’ as developed by Robert Bellah (1980). For Bellah, ‘civil religion’ represented a set of cultural symbols, beliefs, and practices that drew connections between a nation and some conceptions of the sacred.

four eastern Christian churches, however, still aspire to become national, and their visions incorporate the 'imagined community' of the nation. To the extent to which they do not plan to remain denominations, other religious groups previously not considered 'traditional churches' may increase their influence beyond that of a denominational group.⁴³ Thus, instead of remaining 'affinity groups', several religious organizations are attempting to incorporate, at least nominally, larger numbers of people, to speak in the name of 'Ukrainians', and to pursue the vision of becoming a national church.

In Ukraine, considering the association between the national movement and religious revival in the early 1990s, two churches had the chance to become national: the UAOC and the UGCC. After the socialist regime collapsed, they became the privileged carriers of moral values because of the potential for religious expression to channel and evoke collective experiences of repression and revival.⁴⁴ But the UAOC was not convincing enough – most of its representatives were either too close to the institutions of repression (as former Soviet Orthodox priests) or too far from the common experience (coming from the American diaspora). Instead, it was Greek Catholics who had 'the experience of martyrdom' and the incipient structures of the underground church. They easily mobilized people in western Ukraine around 'church and nation', being the perfect carriers for both symbols. Yet this remained a regional episode that went unrecognized in the rest of the country, where Greek Catholics were almost non-existent.⁴⁵ Thus the Ukrainian national project remained in the end separate from the religious one.

In western Ukraine the failure of this project is not fully accepted, and religious pluralism there has a different meaning for some people. One of the most active laypersons in the UGCC, Myroslav Marynovych, talked about those who see pluralism as an anomaly of religious and social life: 'The

⁴³ Ploky (2002) and Wanner (2004) each talk about the Pentecostals' growing role in Ukrainian politics. Wanner also claims that as Protestant 'sects' gain greater acceptance, their status will shift to that of 'church'.

⁴⁴ This was the case in other countries such as Poland and Romania, where 'the sense of national domination and oppression, the sense of virtue in suffering and struggle, is deeply interwoven with religious belief and allegiance' (Taylor 2002: 78). The sense of belonging to a group was fused with that of belonging to a confession, and religious expression could channel and express for a while the moral and political experience of suffering and repression around certain moral principles.

⁴⁵ The church tries to escape its regional limitations and is spreading rapidly throughout central and eastern Ukraine, establishing new parishes and building churches.

plurality of Ukrainian churches with Byzantine roots is seen by Ukrainian society not as confessional pluralism, which would eventually have to be tolerated, but as a schism, a temporary violation of the norm, which needs to be corrected. ... Many, especially among nationalists, see the fragmentation of Ukraine's religious life not only as emblematic of broader societal fragmentation but as the cause of it.'

This vision recognizes only 'traditional churches', particularly the Orthodox and Greek Catholic ones, as legitimate Ukrainian churches. Members of these churches often describe the present situation using words such as 'suffering' and 'division'. Thus, local understandings of pluralism remain rooted in the idea of a fragmented Ukrainian church that might one day become a single church (*odyniaetsia*). This view is exclusive and ignores other religious groups such as charismatic Protestants or Jehovah's Witnesses that are nonetheless part of the religious sphere. Indeed, other observers of Ukrainian religious life have noted the discrepancy between 'plurality' and 'pluralism' and suggest that diversity in Ukraine has come about only as a circumstantial equilibrium that is not yet indicative of an overall atmosphere of religious tolerance.⁴⁶

Although the imagined unity seems to create the premises for tolerance, the possibility that one day a unified eastern Christian church might emerge undermines this very pluralism. Orthodox Christianity would then be the norm, and other religious groups would be marginalized or excluded. The imagined Orthodoxy is reflected today in the idea of creating a unique Ukrainian Patriarchate, successor to the Kievan Rus Church.⁴⁷ It is implicit in people's hope for a national church and for Orthodox unity, and it is explicitly pursued by the religious elites of all the eastern churches.⁴⁸ The political project of creating a Ukrainian patriarchate echoes the imagined

⁴⁶ 'It is necessary to admit that this diversity is neither religious pluralism nor a non-aggression pact between "great religious powers" but a quite fragile balance based on equal possibilities of all parties. "Pluralism", as it is put by George Weigel, "doesn't simply happen. Genuine pluralism is built out of a plurality when differences are debated rather than ignored, and a unity begins to be discerned"' (Yelensky 2005: 170 n. 25).

⁴⁷ The period from the Christianization of the Kievan Rus state in 988 until its fall in the twelfth century is considered one of the greatest moments of eastern Slavic Orthodoxy, represented by the Kievan metropolitanate (Schmemmann 1977: 295). Eastern Slavic Orthodox churches see themselves as successors of the Kievan Rus Church.

⁴⁸ The problem of the Greek Catholic patriarchate in the Ukrainian religious context is discussed in Plokhyy 1995; Fagan and Shchipkov 2001; Boyko and Rousselet 2004.

unity of western Ukrainian believers, but it would erode the foundations of the religious market identified by Casanova.

Conclusion

When describing contemporary Ukrainian society, policy makers, religious leaders, and social scientists hasten to associate it with the idea of religious pluralism. The ascribed pluralism is based on the ‘observed diversity’ of the religious field, a diversity that has been facilitated by Ukraine’s permissive legal framework and the absence of a religious monopoly. Advocates of modernity interpret this pluralism as a normal sign of democratic exercise in which the secular state guarantees freedom of religion and equal rights for all religious groups. Sociologists view it in terms of market-like competition, considering the Ukrainian case similar to the American denominational model. Nation-building in Ukraine has moved on from being linked with a particular confession. Ukrainian religious organizations, however, still pursue the idea of appropriating a privileged position in relation to the state, envisioning their position as national churches.

The case of Sykhiv shows how pluralism developed locally, shaped by the relationship between the majority religious group and state authorities, and how it functions at the moment. The everyday experience of religious diversity is connected to less institutionalized forms of religious practice that, instead of consolidating confessional boundaries, cross them. People relate to the common basis of practice and belief by employing a shared representation of an imagined Orthodoxy that encompasses confessional differences. Thus they are able to transport their practices and beliefs between different churches and accept the existing plurality.

But Sykhiv also illustrates the limits of acceptance, since the Jehovah’s Witnesses are very much on the margins of the local social imaginary. Religious pluralism functions in Sykhiv today on the basis of an imagined Orthodoxy and an awareness of existing differences. It is a form of the social imaginary rather than a deliberate practice of tolerating diversity.

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Chapter 12

Mono-Ethnic Churches, the ‘Undertaker Parish’, and Rural Civility in Postsocialist Romania

László Fosztó

Ethnographers often focus on groups or sub-groups that are seen as insignificant by a great majority of the people in the states where the ethnographers work. Yet attention accorded to these groups may reveal something about the general political and social climate of the respective society. The people with whom I am concerned, Roma who convert to Pentecostalism, sit at the crossroads of two social categories that have been at best ignored and more often despised in Romanian society. To assert that one is a ‘Gypsy’ or a ‘born-again’ (Rou: *pocăit*) is to be burdened with stigma.¹

Though stigmatized, excluded from many domains of everyday life, and confronted with the hostility of official institutions, a growing number of citizens of postsocialist Romania make no attempt to conceal their ‘marginalized’ ethnic identities as Roma (Țigan) or their evangelical religious identities as Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, and so forth. Among the evangelical churches, the Pentecostals have recorded the most dynamic growth.² This is due not only to more relaxed popular attitudes

¹ I use (Rou) for Romanian, (Rom) for Romani, and (Hun) for Hungarian terms throughout this chapter.

² In the 2002 census, 324,462 persons, or 1.5 per cent of the total population, declared themselves to belong to the Pentecostal Church. In comparison with their number in 1992 (220,824), Pentecostals registered 50 per cent growth during the first postsocialist decade (see also <http://www.oci.ro/recensament/CENSUS.htm>). The proportion of Pentecostals among the Roma is higher. According to the 2002 census, 6.5 per cent of the 535,140 self-declared Roma, or Țigani, belonged to the Pentecostal Church. Today Pentecostals, as the fourth largest church in Romania, outnumber some of the historical churches. They are behind only the Orthodox Church (86 per cent of the total population), the Roman Catholic Church (4.7 per cent of the total, of whom 57 per cent are Hungarians), and the Reformed (Calvinist) Church (3.2 per cent of the total population, of whom 95 per cent are Hungarian).

towards the census, in comparison with the socialist years. In addition, people now actively adopt these categories as markers of their social identity, no longer afraid to declare their belonging. Fifteen years after the fall of state socialism, which imposed uniformity in the public sphere and promoted the ideology, if not the practice, of egalitarianism, extant and emerging pluralisms seem increasingly to surface and to be acknowledged. Along with growing public awareness of 'cultural' differences, socio-economic inequalities have been apparent in the postsocialist years, although they have attracted much less public attention.

In this chapter I discuss some social aspects of religious institutions and popular religious practices during Romania's dual transition to a market economy and a democratic political system. My main argument is that the historically rooted mono-ethnic churches reproduce monopolistic ethno-religious structures, and these structures dominate the public sphere of post-socialist Romania. But although divisions are strict on the surface, and higher levels of church hierarchies seem to be marked by ethno-religious exclusivity, crossing the boundaries between churches and ethnic groups is not uncommon at the 'bottom', or local, level.

Anthropological case studies can show the extent of the symbolic power that lies in the hands of local religious specialists. Looking at religious services from the 'demand' side, my ethnography reveals some of the economic and social aspects of religious practices. It also demonstrates how ideological divisions are refracted through local socio-economic conditions. Local clergymen are aware of these conditions, and my evidence suggests that they can use their resources in a positive manner to maintain civility in local communities.

In Romania, being a member of one of the historical churches is perceived as an almost exclusive ethnic marker. The Roma are the only significant exception. Unlike other ethnic groups, they do not cluster in a denomination that they dominate. My historical overview suggests that anti-pluralist ideologies, both before the Second World War and during socialism, prevented the expression of Roma ethnicity in the public sphere. Most members of this widely distributed minority remained economically marginal and maintained affiliations with one or other of the churches of their non-Roma neighbours. The transition to a market economy and privatization consolidated the position of the historical churches but also opened niches for new religious movements, especially neo-Protestant denominations. Among the Roma, conversion to Pentecostalism provides an idiom for collective expression of identity under postsocialist conditions, but the transformations accompanying the rise of Roma Pentecostalism need to be evaluated over a longer time span.

In the first part of this chapter I address the ways in which the Romanian state and religious institutions have dealt with problems of religious and ethnic pluralism at the level of legislation and public discourse during the twentieth century. I then turn to postsocialist developments and analyse ethnographic material relating to funeral practices among the Roma in a religiously plural and multi-ethnic setting. The case studies are based on my fieldwork among the Roma in the Cluj area of Transylvania.³

An Historical Overview

During the late nineteenth century the dream of the 1848 revolutionaries in Moldova and Walachia was achieved, and the two Romanian principalities were unified. In 1866 Romania promulgated a constitution, but it was not until March 1881 that the first Romanian king was crowned and Romania become an independent kingdom.⁴ By that time some major social and economic measures had already been taken to transform the polity: the abolition of Roma slavery (1855–56), the sequestration of estates belonging to the Orthodox monasteries (1863), and the passage of an agrarian reform (1863). Almost all social strata welcomed the confiscation of the monasteries' property, but the nobles (boyars) opposed the land reform and did little to alleviate social inequalities.⁵ By the end of the century the condition of the peasants had worsened. Because the constitution allowed the naturalization only of 'foreigners belonging to the Christian faith', large numbers of Jewish immigrants arriving from Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century were denied civil rights and public employment (Jelavich and Jelavich 1977: 178–79).

Following the First World War, Transylvania also became part of Romania, and problems related to regional differences and ethnic and religious diversity increased substantially. In 1930, non-Romanian speakers made up 28 per cent of the total population and 48 per cent of the Transylvanian population. They formed the majority in Bukovina (56.5 per cent; Livezeanu 1995: 10). Religious diversity was even greater. The process of state-building reinforced the hegemony of the 'national churches', which

³ I carried out fieldwork between June 2003 and September 2004. I spent the first months in a city neighbourhood, improving my Romani and visiting both Roma and non-Roma Pentecostal assemblies. I then moved to live with a Roma family in a nearby village, from which I visited the city occasionally.

⁴ The 1866 constitution was based on the Belgian constitution of 1831 (Jelavich and Jelavich 1977: 122).

⁵ Monasteries controlled approximately 25 per cent of the country's total acreage. The abbots attempted to claim that they were not subject to state jurisdiction but were subordinated to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople.

were given priority over the ‘minority denominations’. ‘Sects’, or ‘new religions’, were banned in a general attempt to control the public sphere.

The distinction between these three categories of religious organizations – national churches (Orthodox and Greek Catholic), historical minority denominations (Rou: *culte minoritare*), and sects – had strong ethno-national overtones. Although the two major national churches were composed mostly of ethnic Romanians, the minority denominations were each dominated by a single minority group. Sects were looked upon as dangerous movements subverting established religious and ethnic structures.⁶

In 1928 a liberal government adopted a general law to regulate the religious sphere. The main proponent and designer of the Law on Denominations (Rou: *Regimul Cultelor*) was the historian Alexandru Lapedatu, minister for religious denominations and the arts. Judging from his contributions to the debate over the law, he found himself in a difficult position when he proposed regulating all the minority confessions on equal footing. The Romanian Orthodox Church had already been granted the status of ‘dominant church in the state’ in 1925. Lapedatu had a hard time explaining how the new law would serve the interests of the state. After 15 legislative sessions it still had not been adopted, and sceptics were asking whether it was needed at all. Lapedatu argued:

In the law project there are some matters that might seem curious to us, those who lived in the Old Kingdom. Nevertheless these matters need to be regulated. There is the question of conversion from one denomination to another [*chestiunea trecerii dela un cult la altul*] and the problem of the religious affiliation of children. These problems did not exist in the Old Kingdom because cases of passing from one denomination to another were very rare and because the religion of children was regulated by civil law. Nobody bothered with the problem of conversion because we were living in the tradition of a single religion in the state, the Orthodox religion. We have now in our state seven or eight recognized historical denominations. The regulation of these matters is necessary (Lapedatu 1928: 22).

One matter for which the minister responsible for religious matters felt he had found a good solution was the ‘issue of the sects and their propaganda’

⁶ The basic opposition behind these distinctions persists to the present. The minority denominations and national churches were merged as ‘traditional’ or ‘historical’ churches, while the ‘new religions’, or sects, form the other pole. Even though these labels have been abandoned as legal categories, they are influential in practice and shape cooperation between denominations (see Muntean 2005: 92–94).

(Rou: *chestiunea sectelor și propagandei lor*). The limitation of 'sectarian activities' seemed to be a terrain on which the national and minority churches could be in full agreement with each other. The law finally adopted in 1928 aimed to ban the 'sects'.⁷

Other policies affecting minorities in this period, such as regulations on language use, seem to have been even less liberal. Members of ethnic minorities unable to speak Romanian properly lost their positions to Romanians. Career opportunities for members of minorities were still open, however, in the churches in which they were dominant. In this way churches became reservoirs of ethnic politics – and not only for Hungarians, Germans, Jews, and Muslims. The emerging organizations of the Roma also had strong connections to the Orthodox and Catholic churches in this period. But the religious and ethnic activism of Roma within the churches of the majority was looked upon with misgiving along the Orthodox–Greek Catholic divide, owing to suspicions of proselytizing on the part of some Roma leaders.⁸ Ilona Klímová-Alexander (2005: 176) observed: 'However, it could have been the other way around. The [Roma] leaders could have used the support and resources of the Church to further their own mobilization goals. Religious conversion of Roma might have been just the necessary means to achieve this support.'

The use of religious arguments for political ends was not confined to minorities. Secular democratic values were shared by only a minority of the Romanian political and cultural elites, who were divided between 'traditionalists' and 'Westernizers'. Traditionalists viewed religion as a key element of the Romanian 'national character' and opposed modernization on the grounds that Romania should stay a peasant and Orthodox Christian nation. Westernizers largely ignored religion and stressed the importance of industrialization and democratic development.⁹ By the 1930s the

⁷ Not all received the same treatment. Baptists, who had been recognized in Transylvania by the Hungarian state since 1905, 'inherited' this status in the successor state (Lapedatu 1928: 38–39). Adventists and Evangelical Christians were registered as 'religious associations', but others, including Pentecostals, Nazarenes, and Bible Students, were 'strictly prohibited' (Rou: *interzise cu desăvârșire*) (Cuctuc 2001: 18).

⁸ Calnic I, Popp Șerboianu, was an Orthodox priest of Roma origin who allegedly converted to Catholicism and intended to convert all Roma to Greek Catholicism (Klímová-Alexander 2005: 201). For details concerning the mutual accusations of Roma leaders and complaints related to 'missionary certificates', see Nastasă and Varga 2001 (documents 54 and 56, pp. 151–54).

⁹ For a discussion of the debates, see Hitchins 1995.

traditionalists had the upper hand; many joined rightist groups such as the Legion of Archangel Michael.¹⁰

After the Second World War the Communist Party became the dominant political force, and by the end of 1947 a new pro-Soviet government had been formed. In April 1948 Romania was declared a people's republic, and in August new laws for education and religion were adopted. The new law on denominations outlawed the Greek Catholic Church but recognized the previously banned sects. All religious organizations were directly subordinated to the state, and repressive administrative measures were applied when the government needed to control them. In the first decade of the people's republic, imprisonment and deportation to forced work camps were common ways to punish anti-regime activities. Members of the Greek Catholic clergy and faithful, people who were reluctant to 'return' to the Romanian Orthodox Church, 'sectarians' – mostly but not exclusively Jehovah's Witnesses – and those caught in 'subversive activities' such as proselytizing in the villages were among those deported (Vasile 2003: 212–60).

The socialist state also created a new niche for institution-building, which enabled the Pentecostals to reorganize and institutionalize their movement. They published an official, state-supported bulletin from 1953 onwards, replacing earlier illegal and irregular publications.¹¹ In September 1954 the group moved its central administrative office from Arad in Transylvania to Bucharest. Being close to the administrative centre of the regime proved a mixed blessing: by the late 1950s the church leadership was purged of those disloyal to the regime. Other neo-Protestant movements underwent similar processes (Sandru 1994: 16).

In the 1960s Romania progressively distanced itself from the Soviet Union. In 1965 Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power and initiated a modest liberalization of the public sphere. His maverick stance, notably his refusal

¹⁰ The legion was one of the most prolific eastern European fascist movements of autochthonous origin. Its military organization, the Iron Guard, became infamous through its anti-minority actions and political assassinations in the 1930s (see Volovici 1991: chapter 2; Ioanid 2004).

¹¹ Since 1929, Romanian Pentecostals had irregularly published *The Word of Truth* (Rou: *Cuvîntul Adevărului*). An official monthly bulletin was published from 1953 to 1989. The January 1990 issue of the bulletin was published under the title *The Word of Truth (New Series)*. The editorial promised a return to 'words that could not be published previously'. The editorialist also apologized for some of the words that they had published, such as the 'forced telegrams' of congratulations to the supreme leader, 'which probably, as we console ourselves, were not read by anybody' (Roske 1990: 1).

to participate in the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, eventually allowed him to build an 'anti-Soviet Stalinism' with Western financial assistance (Câmpeanu 2002: 251). Public discourse was increasingly dominated by nationalism, and the position of ethnic minorities became precarious.¹²

Ethnic groups reacted differently to the repression. Katherine Verdery (1985: 80) highlighted the contrast between Germans and Hungarians, and the case of the Roma was different again. They were denied official recognition and had no representation in the public sphere (Beck 1984). Not even their folklore performances were tolerated.¹³

During the period 1968–88 the number of converts to neo-Protestant confessions increased considerably. A table in the archive of the secret service shows that Pentecostalism became the major movement of Romanian neo-Protestantism during this period (Neagoe and Pleșa 2003: 64). By 1988 the number of the Pentecostal assemblies had increased to 793, and their membership had reached 155,470.¹⁴ This expansion during the most repressive period of the Ceaușescu era, when all religious groups were subject to the strictest controls (see Sandru 1994 for the Pentecostals), is remarkable. It can to some extent be explained in terms of the social disruption caused by migration and displacement, important factors in the rise of Pentecostal movements in many parts of the world (Robbins 2004: 123–27). It can also be seen as part of a worldwide Pentecostal revival.¹⁵ In addition, whereas historical churches in Romania were openly critical of the regime's policies, the Pentecostals preferred to avoid confrontation. Although the Inspectorate for Denominations limited all churches to one Sunday service, Pentecostals privately organized clandestine gatherings in which they sang, prayed, and studied the Bible (Vlase 2002: 146–47). They

¹² As Katherine Verdery argued, 'the Party was *forced* onto the terrain of national values (not unwillingly) under pressure from others, especially intellectuals, whom it could fully engage in no other manner' (Verdery 1991: 122, italics in original).

¹³ Elsewhere in the region, folklore was instrumentalized as a means of Roma ethnic expression. A letter sent to Radio Free Europe in 1982 by a Romani woman provides a rare indication of how this discrimination was perceived. Among other problems, she complained about the 'pseudo-ignorance' shown towards Roma – 'pseudo' because the denial to Roma of a separate ethnic identity did not prevent the police from maintaining special records and statistics for 'Gypsy criminals' (Cosmin 1983: 34).

¹⁴ Across all the neo-Protestant denominations, membership grew by an average of almost 90 per cent; the number of Pentecostals grew by 139 per cent.

¹⁵ In 1970 there were approximately 74 million Pentecostals worldwide, accounting for 6 per cent of Christendom. By 1997 the number of Pentecostals had reached 497 million, about 27 per cent of all Christians (Anderson 1999: 19).

constructed prayer houses ‘in private’ in order to avoid administrative obstacles (later the ‘owner’ would donate the building to the assembly; see Vlasé 2002: 143).

Postsocialist Developments

In 1991 Romania adopted a new constitution that proclaimed the separation of state and church, guaranteed full freedom and equality to all religious denominations, and stipulated that a special law would address the problem of denominations. The proposed new law, however, was not adopted, and an amended version of the old law of 1948 remains in force. After years of debate, the draft law is still contested by the smaller denominations, who fear that the distinction between ‘churches’ and ‘religious associations’ (denominations with fewer than 300 members) will prevent many new assemblies from being recognized as churches, thereby making them vulnerable to state interference.¹⁶ The Greek Catholics, a ‘historical church’ re-emerging from illegality, also boycotted the ratification procedure, making their consent to the draft conditional on the restitution of property confiscated by the state (Rou: *naționalizare*) during the early socialist period (Corley 2005).

The restitution of confiscated properties was a dominant issue after the fall of state socialism. Many church buildings had been appropriated by public institutions. In such cases the church had to bargain and litigate with the local administration to regain access, even after legal title was restored. De facto restitution was often delayed by lawsuits or opposition from current possessors. In many cases the process was hindered by the perception that minority churches were putting forward ethnic demands that were unfair to the Romanian majority; such perceptions were fuelled by the xenophobic arguments of some local politicians.¹⁷

Despite the aggressive tone of the debates, religiously motivated violence has been rare in postsocialist Romania, and none of the conflicts

¹⁶ Only a religion recognized as a ‘church’ or ‘denomination’ has the right to provide religious education in schools, and only its priests or pastors receive salaries from the state.

¹⁷ For example, the former Reformed High School in Cluj (Hun: Református Kollégium) was returned to the Reformed Church by government decree in 1999. The bishop agreed to take possession of some of the classrooms for a Hungarian school, while allowing a Romanian secondary school to function in the rest of the building. The mayor of Cluj, well known for his anti-Hungarian rhetoric, initiated a series of counter-lawsuits and issued inflammatory denunciations of Hungarian politicians (Transindex 2002).

has had an ethnic component.¹⁸ Some of the most publicized disputes hinged on the unwillingness of the dominant Romanian Orthodox Church to hand over buildings to the Greek Catholics. In some cases, legal decisions ordering restitution could not be enforced because of physical resistance by the local Orthodox priest and parishioners. In the case of the Schimbarea la Față Cathedral of Cluj, Greek Catholics retook their property by force (Mahieu 2004: 10–12).

Conflicts also arose between rural Orthodox clergy and members of 'sects'.¹⁹ The mass media labelled one such case, in late November 2001, 'the jihad of Niculitel'. The account of one of the victims was widely circulated (Omuț 2001). He belonged to a group representing the Romanian Evangelical Alliance, which had rented the village House of Culture in order to screen a religious film.²⁰ The mayor had agreed to rent the room, but the local Orthodox priest prevented the distribution of posters and had the church bells tolled as if for a calamity. Representatives of the alliance were threatened by a group of locals and left the village without being able to advertise the event.

The following day a representative of the alliance returned, accompanied by reporters from the regional media, and the priest was invited to the mayor's office to be interviewed. He and his brother, also an Orthodox priest, attended the meeting with the mayor but refused to grant an interview. When the reporters wanted to interview villagers, the priest brothers appeared on the scene, along with a third colleague, and prevented the interviews. The bells were tolled again, and a large number of locals gathered. The reporters were closed in the churchyard. When the representative of the alliance took refuge in his car, he was surrounded by a rowdy group, beaten by one of the priests, and then taken to the mayor's office. At this point a crowd gathered in front of the office, and the police

¹⁸ On the other hand, religion played no role in conflicts that were perceived as ethnically motivated. The violence between Romanians and Hungarians that erupted in Târgu Mures in March 1990 was connected to debates over secular institutions, notably the local Hungarian school. The most common cause of conflict between members of local majorities (both Romanians and Hungarians) and Roma in the early 1990s was theft (Fosztó and Anăstăsoaie 2001: 358–59).

¹⁹ Instances of such conflicts were rare in Transylvania. For a list of conflicts involving Pentecostals, see Rusu and Tarnovschi, pp. 30–32. Some cases are also discussed on web forums; see BaptistNET.ro 2004.

²⁰ The Romanian Evangelical Alliance is an inter-confessional organization formed by three denominations – Baptist, Evangelical Christian (Brethren), and Pentecostal – and the 'Lord's Army', a religious movement within the Romanian Orthodox Church.

arrived. The victim was escorted to the county police station, where he filed a complaint. The village mayor resigned the same day.

This event might be taken as an illustration of the intolerance of some local priests and their parishioners. It also exemplifies the way a conflict may be worsened by confrontation and the way the local majority supports 'its' priest. Attempts to 'go public' by enlisting media support are likely to fuel the antagonism. The majority church is unlikely to punish a priest for zeal against 'sectarians and Satanists'. For these reasons, Gabriel Andreescu, a leading Romanian human rights expert, has argued that the Romanian Orthodox Church and its priests are prone to extreme-right ideologies. Among senior clergy, the patriarch and the bishop of Cluj were involved in their youth in the anti-Semitic actions of the Legion of Archangel Michael (Andreescu 2003: 42). Other analysts have remarked on the popularity of nationalist and 'fundamentalist' ideologies and attitudes among members of the Association of Orthodox Christian Students of Romania (ASCOR). ASCOR maintains good relations with the New Right Christian Forum (Rou: Forumul Creștin 'Noua Dreapta'), which openly promotes the cult of the 'martyrs' and endorses the values of the Legion of Archangel Michael (Mănăstire 2003).²¹

In stark contrast to the examples I have presented so far, local communities provide many instances of everyday civility and tolerance. Anthropologists who have studied rural Orthodox Christianity in Romania have remarked on the permissive attitudes of the low clergy towards practices of popular religiosity, something quite different from the dogmatism one finds farther up the church hierarchy (Mihailescu 2000). In the following section I show that everyday forms of tolerance and civility can also be found in other (non-Orthodox) denominations – and where their limits lie. First, however, it is important to note the limitations of the metaphor of the 'religious market' in the Romanian case (see also Pelkmans, this volume).

Churches are far from competing freely for adherents in Romania, and religious choices are rarely individual. They are mostly made within a community broader than a person's close kin-group – typically a neighbourhood or a village that subjects its members to various forms of social control. Although recent legislation has promoted greater freedom for religious denominations and granted equal status to them all, the traditional ethno-religious monopolies have not been eroded. It would be misleading to focus exclusively on the relationship between Orthodox Christianity and Romanian national identity. All the 'historic' churches in Romania,

²¹ The website of the New Right Christian Forum (<http://www.nouadreapta.org>) offers many illustrations of the symbolism of this movement.

especially the so-called Hungarian churches, are tied to ethno-national ideologies and identity projects. Belonging to one of the 'Hungarian' denominations is often linked directly to Magyar-Székely ethnicity, just as belonging to the Orthodox Church is equated with being an ethnic Romanian. The Romanian religious sphere, far from resembling a 'free market', consists of monopolistic structures with secular political alliances.

Religious denominations that emphasize the importance of individual conversion, characteristically the neo-Protestants, pursue a different strategy. They do not depend exclusively on members' having been born into an ethno-national group and baptized by their parents. They also recruit 'born-again' adults. Although families of course remain important, ethno-national boundaries are more easily transcended in these denominations. Their emphasis on individual salvation, on the one hand, and on the local assembly, on the other, relegates ethno-national identities to a marginal role. My cases demonstrate that there is some space 'in-between' the segments of the religious field, which marginalized groups such as the Roma can exploit (cf. Gmelch 1986). Given their history, it is not surprising that they show little interest in the ethno-nationalist arguments. Some of them might well be seen as victims of the emerging 'real' economic market. This leads me to ask how the more-or-less agreed-upon 'horizontal' boundaries on the ethnic and religious surface of the postsocialist public sphere correspond to the 'vertically' layered social reality – the increasing socio-economic differentiation – and how new forms of solidarity reaching beyond ethno-religious labels can perhaps be achieved in everyday life.

Religiosity, Life-Cycle Rituals, and Roma Funerals

If the religious services accompanying life-cycle rituals were used as the sole index of religiosity, the region I worked in would be regarded as highly religious.²² This was particularly true for funerals. I rarely heard of a priest-free funeral during the postsocialist years. Even during socialism, village burials seldom took place without the assistance of local pastors or priests. This is in sharp contrast to the Bulgarian village studied by Deema Kaneff

²² In 2000 a representative survey showed that 92–94 per cent of the population of Transylvania considered it important to participate in religious baptisms, weddings, and funerals. This was much higher than figures obtained using the same survey for the population of Hungary, where 27 per cent of those aged 18–40 and 21 per cent of all adults considered baptism unimportant. In addition, 29 per cent of the total adult population (35 per cent of those aged 18–40) considered religious weddings unimportant, and 17 per cent of all adults declared that they would not hold a religious funeral (Tomka 2000).

(2002), where priest-led funerals ceased in the 1970s, and even in the postsocialist years the attendance of a priest was rarely requested.

Although the importance of religious services at life-cycle events is an indicator of the close connection between public religious practice and family life, life-cycle ceremonies should not be equated with religiosity. To illustrate, I quote an anecdote I was told during my Cluj fieldwork:

In a town situated in east Transylvania, in the middle of a region inhabited largely by Hungarians [Székelys], a Unitarian pastor decided to put an announcement next to the entrance of his office: 'This parish is not a funeral director!' [Hun: *temetkezési vállalkozás*]. Because some of his parishioners were surprised at the strange inscription, he explained that the warning was for those who came to his office only to ask for burial services. Because he was not asking for the unpaid yearly contribution [to the church] retroactively, [such people] were quite numerous. And they were not exclusively Unitarians.

Unitarians are a strong denomination in that region, and Székelys are well known for their sense of humour. The story might have been a joke, but the problem was real, as some Unitarians confirmed to me. It is not enough to state that an important connection exists between religiosity and participation in religious ceremonies connected to life-cycle rituals; this connection has to be analysed more carefully in order to show the role of religiosity in the lives of the people under scrutiny.

Refusal of religious burial can be used to punish those who have not satisfied their obligations to the assembly. Traditional churches have also used it against 'sectarians' and their families, even denying them burial places in cemeteries, although liberal theologians have refused to countenance such measures (Fekete 1993: 135–39). A certain coercive potential resides in refusing burial, and it lies mostly in the hands of the local priest or pastor and the church council. How they use this symbolic power is an indicator of local conceptions concerning civility and tolerance. The cases I present here demonstrate traditional possibilities for dialogue across ethnic and confessional boundaries.

The timing of funerals, unlike baptisms, can never be planned, and Roma families rarely accumulate the resources needed for burials. Therefore, in addition to psychological distress, the family faces a sudden financial burden. There is an important difference between the peasants Gabriela Kiliánová (2003) described in Slovakia, who saved money for their own burials as they got older, and the Roma I worked with, some of whom occasionally joked about what their adult children would do with their dead body if they were unable to raise the money to bury them properly. During

my fieldwork I discovered that Roma attributed to Orthodox priests in Cluj a function similar to that of the Unitarian pastor in the story just quoted. Apparently the priests provided funeral services for anyone in immediate need, without asking too many questions. Some of the Roma I came to know used them to give their relatives the last sacrament, even if the person dying had not been baptized Orthodox.

I recorded the life story of an elderly Romni. She had had a harsh life because of her husband and eventually got a divorce in the mid-1980s. The former husband died in an asylum years afterwards, and she felt compelled to organize his burial. The street-cleaning company she worked for offered her a coffin free of charge. A car was also provided to take the coffin to the asylum. But she had difficulty arranging a religious funeral. She visited several Orthodox parishes:

I could not find him a priest! The priest from Horea Street did not want to come; I couldn't find a priest anywhere. The priest from Someșeni [a suburb, a former village] did not want to come. It was snowy and cold, it was so cold. ... Then I went to the priest on the Petru Groza [street] and talked to the priest, who knew him [the late husband]. This priest took his oath twenty times, that he will not drink anymore. 'Father, you know me, you also knew my man. You know my hardships. I beg you very much, I will pay'. 'Lady, I will go, but you should pay for a taxi. You should take me there in a taxi and bring me back from the cemetery'.

I went and talked to a taxi driver. The morgue took him [the deceased] directly to the cemetery [on the margins of the city]. I went together with the priest by taxi. The priest said three-four words before they put him in the grave, then he returned with the taxi. So we buried him. I went home and made a big pot of meal [Hun: *juhtokány*] to be the *pomana* [funeral meal]. I did not do anything else, and I did not give away anything anymore – that was it. I buried him not because I was regretting him ... but I did not want the girls to tell me when we have a quarrel, 'Mother, shut up, you let Father be burnt!'

Some conditions have changed since late socialism. Only a minority of the Roma I met in Cluj were employed, mostly for the street-cleaning company. Other circumstances remain similar. Roma still prefer burial and regard cremation as horrifying (bodies are taken to the crematorium unless claimed for burial). Both religious funerals and the *pomana* are observed. Orthodox priests are seen as the least demanding and 'the cheapest'. Cities offer more scope for individual choice of a priest (even across denominations), and social control tends to be looser in urban neighbourhoods. City dwellers

perceive burial as a private problem, and surviving family members can seldom rely on support beyond their close kin. The increasing 'privatization' of burials in the city is an example of the 'ritual decline' observable elsewhere in eastern Europe (see Creed 2002 for Bulgaria).

Gerald Creed (2002: 65) also noted the potential for Protestant converts to redirect their behaviour towards more ascetic practices. Neo-Protestant rituals produce the social networks that people need, but without the costs of traditional celebrations, which they can no longer afford because of economic crisis. This observation seems valid for the Roma I worked with; conversion to Pentecostalism or some other neo-Protestant denomination offered the convert an alternative network.²³ Although people had various motives for converting, the local assemblies were always seen as important support groups, and not only for spiritual matters. Among other forms of mutual support, converts were guaranteed a proper burial without having to depend on relatives, for the congregation took care of its dead.

Individual requests to priests or pastors of a dominant church may transgress denominational boundaries without leading to conversion. Conversion involves collective engagement in faith and ritual practice in order to maintain the social network of the assembly. Whereas in the previous examples, pastors or priests of a dominant church dealt with individual cases irrespective of religious and ethnic boundaries, an assembly of converts publicly challenges the established divisions. Although this might provoke greater opposition in rural contexts (the conflicts between local clergy and 'sectarians' described earlier all took place in rural settlements), villages have their own traditions of civility (see Buzalka, this volume, on 'agrarian tolerance').

During my fieldwork in a village in the Cluj area, I witnessed two burials among the Roma and heard accounts of several others. In all cases but one the religious service was performed by the local Reformed pastor. Sometimes this meant that the relatives, if they had left the congregation and neglected their duties for a long time, had to pay up to five years' contribution to the church retroactively in order to have a religious funeral. This payment to the parish was considered important by the local community, but at the same time the community supported the families through donations during the ritual. The involvement of the community,

²³ Some Roma who have more resources organize expensive burials. The regional press reported that at the burial of a respected and well-off *gabor* Rom in Cluj, the religious service was performed by a Catholic priest, and the eulogy, in his home, by a Jehovah's Witness pastor. The funeral feast was generous but without alcohol consumption, because most of the *gabors* were Adventists (Corăbian 2003).

beyond the limits of the family and ethnic group, was characteristic of the village in which I worked and of the region as a whole.

I describe two burials, neither of which I observed personally but about which I was able to gather detailed information. The first was a 'normal' burial in the late 1990s in which everything proceeded as expected, except that the pastor demanded more piety than was the custom. The second is the case of a Rom buried in the early 1990s 'without even a bell toll' (Hun: *harangszó*). Both cases provoked discussion about the nature of a proper burial. In this account I rely on my observations about the general scenario of funerals, but important comments and descriptions are drawn from recorded narratives about the two cases. I was told that the funeral of Kata followed the normal scenario. It was a 'beautiful' burial, some said to me.

Kata's Funeral

Kata, a Roma woman, was about to die after long suffering. She was in her early sixties, and her husband would survive her. The family gathered (three adult children, her sister-in-law, and her other relatives) and began to discuss how the pastor should be addressed and asked for help. Because most of the local Hungarians knew Kata well and appreciated her character, one of the neighbours offered to go with her husband to talk to the Reformed pastor. The pastor knew the husband and agreed to come and perform the religious service. That evening he came with several non-Roma women, and they sang religious songs and prayed. Kata died that night. Members of the family agreed that although unconscious, she seemed visibly relieved after the service. The next morning the husband went to the pastor again to report her death. The pastor said he would celebrate the funeral service on the condition that the husband would stop the Roma men from playing cards during the wake, as was the norm. 'The funeral will be either with me or with the cards!' the pastor said, as the husband recalled his words to me.

Kata had no debt to the church, because she regularly helped clean the church building and the parish garden, and this work was counted as a contribution. The family's financial burden, however, was not insignificant. The main expenses for a funeral are usually the coffin, the wooden plank (Hun: *padmaly*) that is placed over the coffin to prevent earth from falling directly on it, the drinks consumed during the three-day wake, and the food for the celebration that follows the burial. Personal wreaths and flowers for each family member should be ordered from the city. The grave in the village cemetery is usually dug by the male members of the community without expecting payment, but they need to be supplied with bottles of liquor. A small sum of money should be given to the person who tolls the

bell. The pastor also should be offered some money. The money is usually put together by the immediate family, but all the villagers offer some contribution towards the expenditures. A trustworthy Rom, a friend or a relative, is asked to gather the cash, and as people come to express condolences to the family, they give the money to him.

In the general burial scenario, the body is prepared by female neighbours and friends and put on display in the open coffin in the middle of the main room. During the night of the wake, the body ideally should not be left alone in the room. The women and some of the men usually take turns sitting next to the deceased, chatting in a soft voice or recalling events from the deceased's life. Musicians may appear unbidden and play slow music as a sign of mourning. It is normal for the men to gather in a room next to the wake and play cards. In this case Kata's husband asked his *kirve* (Rom: godparent of one's child; Hun: *koma*) to stay at the gate and tell the Roma not to start playing cards, because he himself was ashamed to do so. 'I could not talk like this to the people', he said. The *kirve* offered bottled drinks to the men and asked them to respect the pastor's wish. Some recalled that this was the first wake ever without card playing.

On the third day the church bell is tolled in the early afternoon, and the community gathers at the house of the mourning family, who are dressed in their best dresses and suits, gathered around the body. When the bell is tolled for the second time, the pastor is expected to come. Upon his arrival the coffin is brought to the middle of the yard, where he delivers a sermon, prays, and sings hymns with the help of the cantor. After the service the coffin is closed, the relatives take emotional farewell of the body, and the coffin is carried to the cemetery. Everyone follows in a long procession, the bell tolling continuously as they proceed along the village streets. Musicians again play slow songs. Men take it in turns to carry the coffin on wooden poles to the grave, where they place the poles across the grave and rest the coffin on them. A second prayer and more hymns are performed by the pastor. Then the coffin is lowered into the grave. The wooden plank is placed above the coffin, and it is covered with earth. The fresh mound is covered with wreaths and flowers.

The pastor leaves, musicians begin to play again, and bottled drinks are distributed among the mourners. I was told that in former times an elder Rom performed a second eulogy before inviting all the people to take part in the feast. This meal is served at the house of the deceased's family or in the House of Culture. Drinks are offered again, and everyone can eat and drink, but not to the point of inebriation, which would be disrespectful to the dead and the family. The feast usually concludes before evening, and the people depart.

This case shows that the role of the pastor is well embedded in the ritual, but he is not its organizer. He is expected to perform his part in the ritual and then leave the Roma to continue in their way.²⁴ The most important organizers are usually from among the community, generally led by a respected and trustworthy Rom who, along with the male relatives, organizes the work of preparing the grave and the tables for the feast and distributing bottled drinks. If the organizer is good, everything will be prepared in time, people will be satisfied, and no one will become drunk.

During the wake, things might get a bit out of control – some of the card players can lose money, become angry, and curse – but that is not considered disrespectful to the dead. Nowadays the card players are likely to go to a neighbouring house, where they are supplied with drinks from the wake. The pastor's repeated efforts to stop the card playing altogether have had little success. Indeed, Kata's husband, who stopped the playing under the threat of a pastor-free burial, told me that his last wish would be that his son should bring all the heavy card players to his wake. 'Because I loved the card playing, but I was the first to stop the cards, I want to be buried with the cards', he explained to me, half-seriously.

In addition to card playing during the wake, the burials of Roma in the village differed in some other aspects from the burials of Hungarians, although the pastor did not see these differences as significant. Nor were Roma beliefs and fears of much interest to the local clergy.²⁵ Roma musicians rarely played any role in Hungarian funerals. Emotions were expressed more openly during Roma funerals, and Roma stayed longer at the cemetery after the departure of the pastor and continued the funeral in their way (playing music, sharing drinks, etc.). Personal objects and coins were placed in the coffin, or money was put into the hands of the deceased. Kata had 'the price of a piglet' placed in her hand because her daughter had promised to buy her one before her death. In a general way the 'normal funeral' is the recognized way for both Roma and Hungarian members of the

²⁴ Michael Stewart (1997: 219) argued that the *vla*x-Roma he worked with 'handed over' most of the work during funerals to the priest and his assistants, and they were seen as polluted. In the case of Kata's funeral there was no such belief, but the pastor was seen as an outsider who performed 'his work' (Rom: *lesri butji*) and was not otherwise involved in the lives of the mourners.

²⁵ Lay eulogies given at the grave by elder Rom were formerly part of Roma burials in this village. The practice was widespread in Transylvanian Hungarian and Roma communities but was forbidden by some Reformed pastors on religious grounds (Nagy 1992; Keszeg 2002). In this village I heard of no attempts by pastors to suppress this custom. During one burial, I witnessed a lay eulogy recited during the funeral meal.

community to be buried, and normality includes the participation of the local pastor. In the village, no one would call an Orthodox priest from the neighbouring Romanian village to the funeral of a relative, and everyone can be buried in the same cemetery. Even emigrants are 'brought home' and buried in the village.

Albi's Funeral

Albi, a Rom who was born in the village, moved to the city in the 1970s when he was in his early thirties. He worked first in the construction industry and later for the street-cleaning company. In the mid-1980s he started attending a Pentecostal assembly and eventually was baptized, together with his wife. The company gave Albi a flat, and the couple led a decent life in a neighbourhood of the city.

Trouble began for Albi after his wife died. He married another Romni, but his two adult children were dissatisfied with his new spouse. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis and separated from his second wife for a while. Under pressure from his sister, who said it was better to have somebody to take care of him, he 'took back' his wife, but his children were even more dissatisfied and now were angry at his sister, too. Because of his illness he had to quit his job and received a small pension. This took place in the last days of the socialist regime.

In the first postsocialist years Albi was still living in the city, but he soon recognized that he was unable to maintain his flat because of rising maintenance costs. He sold it and bought a house in the village, where he was expected to pay only for electricity. He died in the village after a few years. His burial was organized by his children; his siblings did not contribute much because they were not on good terms with the children. The son invited neither the Reformed pastor nor the members of the Pentecostal assembly in the city, from which Albi had effectively dropped out. Albi's body was prepared according to custom, but his son, insisting that the deceased was a convert, did not organize a wake with drinks. Some women came and stayed overnight, but most men preferred to pay just a short visit to express their condolences and give the usual money. After the second day, Albi's brother tried to convince the son to go to the Reformed pastor and ask for a service. When the son disagreed, the brother did not pursue the matter.

On the day of the burial there was no bell toll, but people nonetheless started to gather for the funeral. The local Pentecostal preacher called an ordained pastor from the neighbouring village to celebrate a service, but as the pastor approached in the company of some female converts, Albi's brother, who was still angry at the son for not calling the Reformed pastor, drove them away, saying that the pastor had been a thief in his youth. The

Pentecostals left, and only a Hungarian Reformed woman, a neighbour of Albi's, said a prayer over the body in the yard of the house. The coffin was brought to the cemetery and buried without further ceremony. Some commented that the grave was too shallow; others remarked that the wooden plank was missing. The feast afterwards was modest and without alcohol. Albi's son and brother still avoid talking to each other, and the burial is remembered as the one that took place without a bell toll.

This case can be interpreted as evidence of some degree of tolerance, because Albi was not denied a burial place in the cemetery. His grave was prepared, as is usual, among the graves of his dead relatives. Yet the divisions within the mourning family indicate different ideas about proper burial. Albi's son insisted on giving him the burial of a convert because he wanted to respect the deceased's faith, but also in order to save money. Most local converts considered the dead man to have 'fallen'. The son saved money on his own father's burial, which drew the anger of his uncle. Albi's brother was not alone in commenting on the son's avarice.

The Reformed pastor stayed out of the picture. He was not invited, and he probably also wanted to demonstrate that if someone converted, then he or she should bear the consequences. But the son was criticized for not even trying to talk to the pastor, who, according to local opinion, would have been open to reintegrating the dead under the usual conditions: the family would merely have had to pay a couple of years' retrospective contributions. Criticism of the son attributed his reluctance to talk to the pastor to his avarice. The neighbouring Hungarian woman who volunteered to pray and sing over the body was performing what she considered necessary to avoid a 'take him and carry him away' burial (Hun: *vegyétek és vigyétek*), as the locals call such short, unacceptable funeral services.

The two funerals I have described can also be contrasted in terms of their social consequences. Kata's relatives managed to unite in their effort to provide a proper funeral, which later was remembered as beautiful and continued to enhance the family's prestige. After Albi's burial, pre-existing conflicts among family members deepened. In such processes, the community plays a role: people can take sides and echo others' opinions. In this case the son carried the blame for failing to arrange a proper burial. Although there are several ways of organizing a burial, a proper ceremony is expected to be connected with some religious institution. In the light of this example, it is evident that the local Reformed pastor was the most important religious authority in the village. Local Pentecostals dealing with an ambiguous situation (Albi's affiliation was contested) accepted that the unconverted brother of the deceased had the right to refuse their services. In the memory of the local community, the burial without a pastor remained a

failure. Either Albi should have been reintegrated into the local parish or the incipient local Pentecostal assembly should have been allowed to play a role.

Conclusion

During the twentieth century, successive states and religious institutions in Romania have dealt with religious and ethnic pluralism at the level of legislation and public discourse. 'Minority denominations' were legalized following the unification with Transylvania, but 'sects' were prohibited. After the Second World War, when Romania became a secular people's republic, freedom of religion was proclaimed, but one of the national churches was abolished: the Greek Catholics were forced to 'return' to Orthodoxy. New denominations, previously banned as sects, were legalized, and properties of the 'historical churches' were confiscated. Denominations were subordinated to the state and controlled, if not persecuted, by the authorities. After the end of socialism, religious freedom was again proclaimed. Greek Catholics re-emerged and, along with the other historical churches, reclaimed their nationalized properties. Although the new law for denominations has still not been passed, steps have been taken to promote greater freedom and equality for all denominations.

At the level of discourse, however, distinctions persist between the historical churches and the 'new denominations'. The historical churches are widely considered to be more legitimate because of their affiliations with majority and minority ethno-national groups. Beyond the formal proclamation of equality, churches still attempt to monopolize the loyalty of a segment of the population through exclusive ethno-religious ideologies. The metaphor of the 'religious marketplace' thus has its limitations. However, I have shown in the latter part of the chapter that crossing denominational boundaries is not uncommon at the grassroots level.

The case of the Roma of the Cluj area provides a good illustration of the interplay between ideological expectations and local socio-economic conditions. In this religiously plural and multi-ethnic region, possible religious choices are multiple, in both the city and the surrounding rural area. Religious funerals among the Roma show that inviting a priest or pastor from another denomination to celebrate a funeral service is not uncommon in the urban context, where burials are more likely to be seen as private affairs. Although this indicates a degree of tolerance on the part of the clergy, the family must bear all the costs of the burial; the neighbourhood is not involved. In villages, on the other hand, religious funerals contribute to the maintenance of local communities through expressions of rural civility. The local community actively supports the grieving family. My conclusions, based on evidence from Protestant denominations, supports Vintila

Mihailescu's (2000) observation concerning Romanian Orthodox Christians, namely, that there is more tolerance at lower levels of the hierarchy.

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Chapter 13

Agrarian Tolerance versus Artificial Tolerance: The Reconciliation of Nations in South-East Poland

Juraj Buzalka

No matter which country we live in, no matter which language we speak, all of us can speak to God ‘Our Father’ and to Mother of God ‘Our Mother’. Christ offered himself and brings the gift of internal peace to all of us.

From the homily of one of Przemyśl’s Roman Catholic bishops

In this chapter I hope to demonstrate that although religion is one of the primary sources of division between Roman Catholic Poles and Greek Catholic Ukrainians in Przemyśl, south-east Poland, it also creates the basis for a new public sphere that emphasizes tolerance. I show that apart from various religion-assisted symbolic practices, the reconciliation of the two nations is actually achieved through rituals supervised by a church or at least including church participation in some form. I investigate the reasons attempts at reconciliation between Poles and Ukrainians outside the religious domain seldom succeed in Przemyśl, and the reasons the state, local politicians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and ‘liberal’ intellectuals who wish to promote reconciliation all seek alliances with religious specialists and institutions of the Catholic Church. Finally I ask, if religion has this capacity to reconcile nations, what kind of tolerance results?

I draw on two bodies of literature. The first deals with political ritual and its role in facilitating and reflecting political change (Kertzer 1988; Kelly and Kaplan 1990; Boissevain 1992). The second concerns the anthropology of reconciliation (Borneman 1997; Hamber and Wilson 2003; Wilson 2003). Although the latter body of work deals predominantly with situations following ethnic wars or the fall of authoritarian political regimes, I believe it can also be of help in examining situations of national division such as that in south-east Poland, where collective memories of violence that took place around the time of the Second World War emerged with great vitality in the 1990s. Before moving to the analysis of Catholic tolerance, I

present an historical introduction and describe one reconciliation ritual – the common singing of carols – and how it developed from a village activity into a regional event of political significance.

Nation and Religion in Poland

As the motto *Polonia semper fidelis* (Poland always faithful) reveals, the Roman Catholic Church and the Polish nation-state have historically been indistinguishable from each other. The nation-religion linkage was greatly strengthened during the religious wars of the seventeenth century, when Poland was perceived as ‘the Antemurales of Christianity-Catholicism in the war against Muslims, against schism and heresy’ (Litak 1994: 28). As a result of the Counter-Reformation, the Orthodox bishops of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth accepted the Union of Brest (1596). By formally acknowledging the pope as their head, they secured the right to continue to practise their eastern rite. The union was finally accepted by the Orthodox eparchy of Przemyśl in 1692. The ‘Uniate’ church was later given the name Greek Catholic, and it is today officially called the Ukrainian Catholic Church of Byzantine Rite in Poland.

Unlike in the Prussian and Russian parts of partitioned Poland (1772–1919), in the parts under Austrian rule – under which south-east Poland fell – the Roman and Greek Catholic churches enjoyed substantial independence. As elsewhere in eastern Europe, nation-building there, on ‘Christianity’s internal frontier’ (Hann 1988), began under agrarian conditions, and nations have been nurtured under the strong influence of church employees. In nationally awakening Galicia in the nineteenth century, the Habsburg rulers attempted to counterbalance the strong position of the Roman Catholic Church, the stronghold of the Polish national idea, by supporting the Greek Catholic Church, the cradle of Ukrainian national revival.¹ Often using Catholicism as a Polonizing force, after 1919 the independent Polish state provided an example of what Roger Brubaker (1996) called nationalizing states: state-based, nation-promoting, post-independence nationalisms. Although the war between the new Polish state and the Ukrainian People’s Republic in 1918–19 had fewer ‘ethnic’ consequences than the one that followed, the national-religious camps, in which Greek Catholic clergymen and village teachers remained the strongest ‘Ukrainianizers’ among the peasant masses, were already clearly defined.

¹ For greater historical detail about south-east Poland, see Hann 1988 and Nagengast 1991. For social-historical accounts of national awakening, see Himka 1988; Worobec 1989; Stauter-Halsted 2001; Hann and Magocsi 2005.

During and after the Second World War the Jews – since the Middle Ages the third largest religious community in Poland – vanished in the concentration camps, and the actions of the paramilitary Ukrainian Insurgent Army against Poles, as well as the actions of Polish troops against Ukrainian civilians, climaxed in the so-called repatriation of inhabitants. On the basis of an international agreement between Poland and the Soviet Union in 1944, Ukrainians from Poland and Poles from Soviet Ukraine were often forcibly ‘repatriated’ to ‘their’ respective state. There remained, however, some 150,000 Greek Catholic Ukrainians, mostly in the villages of what became, after the war, south-east Poland. During ‘Action Vistula’ (*Akcja Wisła*) in 1947, they were relocated to the north and west of the Polish People’s Republic, to the areas that Poland acquired from Germany after the war in exchange for losses in the east, where the new Polish-Soviet border was established on the so-called Curzon line, a few kilometres east of Przemyśl.²

Although it was not formally made illegal, the Greek Catholic Church ceased to exist *de facto* after the Second World War, not least because it was perceived as the stronghold of Ukrainian nationalism. The church’s property was appropriated and its leading representatives brutally eliminated. It nevertheless survived as a clandestine church of the Roman Catholic Church. The approximately 2,000 identity-conscious Ukrainians living in Przemyśl at this writing are for the most part returnees and descendants of the last wave of population dispersal, who have been migrating back to their native region since the late 1950s, partly because they see Przemyśl as the cradle of their national community and the ancient seat of their bishops. As a consequence of the public revival of the Greek Catholic Church at the beginning of 1990s, Przemyśl became known in Poland and abroad as an example of ‘uncivil society’ (Hann 1997). Incivility was epitomized by nationalist tensions over church property and particularly by religious-national conflicts over the Carmelite church, before 1947 the Greek Catholic cathedral.

From the perspective of the 1990s, the Roman Catholic Church in Poland won the competition for legitimacy over the nation against the Communist state and strongly influenced the establishment of a new political order. The Polish state has substantially consolidated itself since the turbulent early 1990s, and its relations with the Catholic Church have become consolidated as well. A concordat with the Holy See was signed in 1993. Accepted by an overwhelming majority in parliament, it was quickly signed by the president in 1998 (Eberts 1998: 832). As a consequence, the

² The Curzon line, the demarcation line between Poland and the Soviet Union named after the then British foreign minister, was proposed during the Russo-Polish War of 1919–20 but became (with a few alterations) the Soviet-Polish border only after the Second World War. For a detailed account of Action Vistula, see Misilo 1993.

Roman Catholic Church has not only secured its position and autonomy in Poland but also influenced many policies of the state. The exclusive role played by Catholicism in Poland is illustrated by the *Invocatio Dei* in the preamble of the new Polish constitution of 1997 (Eberts 1998; Hann 2000; Zubrzycki 2001).

Andrzej Korbonski (2000) described several other areas, apart from the constitution and the concordat, in which the Roman Catholic Church has influenced state policies. These include especially the institutionalization of religious education in public schools (religion was taught outside of or unofficially in the schools during socialism) and the passage of an anti-abortion law only slightly less restrictive than that of Ireland. The vague defence of Christian values regulating radio and television was also secured by law, and the church managed to establish influential media channels. Among them, the nationalist and xenophobic Radio Maryja, transmitted from the city of Toruń and headed by the Redemptorist monk Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, is the best known. It attracts some 5 million listeners (17 per cent of Polish citizens) and ranks fifth in the national ratings. It has also received a license for a television channel, TV Trwam (Korbonski 2000: 131; Luxmoore 2001: 322). Independent of the church and aiming to inform people about the activities of the Polish church, a Catholic Information Agency was established in 1993.

After the fall of Communism, proselytizing groups such as the Hare Krishnas and Jehovah's Witnesses entered the Polish religious 'market'. These 'new religious movements' have acquired substantially more adherents in Poland than in other eastern European countries (Froese and Pfaff 2001: 490). The Polish constitution of 1997 respects religious freedom – churches and other religious organizations are guaranteed equal rights, and the state is to remain impartial in matters of personal conviction. Chapter 2, article 53, of the constitution says that freedom of faith and religion shall be ensured to everyone in Poland. The major document institutionalizing the relationship between the state and the dominant Roman Catholic Church – the concordat – is based on the principle of respect for the autonomy of each in its own sphere, as well as on the principle of cooperation for the good of the individual and the common good. The Polish parliament also passed laws securing its relations with other churches and religious communities, thereby creating privileges for some denominations.³ These agreements, however, do not threaten the dominant position of the Roman Catholic Church.

³ These other state-recognized denominations are the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church; the Evangelic-Reformist Church in Poland; the Evangelic-Augsburg Church in Poland; the Evangelic-Methodist Church in Poland; the Old-Catholic Church of the Mariavites in Poland; the Catholic Church of the Mariavites

The Roman Catholic Church as an institution supported Poland's entry into the European Union, as did an overwhelming majority of its clergy (Korbonski 2000: 141). A very active, tolerant, and open Catholicism – a stream that Norman Davies (2005: 162) traced back to the Catholic intellectuals who positioned themselves politically between the socialists and the nationalists (Pilsudski and Dmowski) in inter-war Poland and who represented the strongest and most independent element of the Polish intelligentsia during Communism – also plays an important role in nurturing a particular form of 'civil religion' (Hann 2006, and this volume) in Poland today. Nevertheless, unlike during the Communist years, and despite the fact that more than 95 percent of Polish citizens (34 million) have been baptized Catholic and one-third of them attend church regularly (Luxmoore 2001: 315), public support for the Roman Catholic Church has been waning since 1989 (Korbonski 2000).

In south-east Poland this decline has been less dramatic. The former Austrian part of contemporary Poland shows the highest right-wing (or anti-Communist) factor scores (Zarycki and Nowak 2000: 349). The south-eastern dioceses of Przemyśl and Tarnów are also known as the most religious parts of the country. According to Communist secret police archives, this region demanded 'particularly hard work, especially because of the traditional bonds that locals had to the Catholic faith, which had strong support in well-organized Church structures' (Arcybiskup 1997: 3). The Roman Catholic archbishop of Przemyśl at the time, Ignacy Tokarczuk, was considered a 'decidedly dangerous enemy of the People's Republic of Poland' (Arcybiskup 1997: 4). He was often identified as the second most prominent enemy of Communism after Cardinal Wyszyński, the Polish primate. Under the leadership of Bishop Tokarczuk, 430 new churches and chapels were built in Przemyśl diocese between 1966 and 1993 (Arcybiskup 1997: 5). In 2004, the ratio of priests to believers in south-eastern Poland was twice as high as that in the north-western dioceses, and church attendance was one of the highest in the country.⁴

in Poland; the eastern Old-Rites Church in Poland; the Islamic Religious Union in Poland; the Karaim Religious Union in Poland; the Polish-Catholic Church in Poland; the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Poland; the Baptist Christian Church in Poland; the Union of Jewish Confessional Communities in Poland; and the Pentecostal Church in Poland. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_denominations_in_Poland#A_list_of_churches_according_to_special_legislation (accessed February 2006).

⁴ I compared the south-eastern dioceses (Przemyśl, Rzesów, and Tarnów) with those in the north-west (Szczecin, Koszalin, and Zielona Góra) using statistics from

The clergy strongly influences Poland's collective memory; its members supervise almost all public rituals and safeguard what is perceived as tradition. Life-cycle rituals are generally held in churches.⁵ Furthermore, apart from the state and the municipality, most investment is made by ecclesiastical institutions. The Roman Catholic Church has enlarged old sanctuaries, monasteries, and houses of charity since 1989 and built many new ones. In Przemyśl, professionals such as cathedral librarians, restoration artists, musicians, and teachers benefit from the city's dense ecclesiastical structures. Apart from parish and cathedral priests, several male and female orders have their monasteries in Przemyśl. The clergy are the best educated and most numerous element of the city's intelligentsia, and new generations of clerics are educated at Przemyśl seminary. There are state-sponsored Catholic schools in the city, and all state schools, at both primary and secondary levels, offer religious classes that are widely taught by clergy. Children who do not enrol in them are viewed with suspicion.

Among believers dispersed across the country, the Greek Catholic Church worked as a more or less tolerated clandestine organization of the Roman Catholic Church after 1946. This was possible only thanks to the exceptionally strong position the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed in Poland. Despite this hospitality, Roman Catholic believers and employees showed significant hostility when the Greek Catholic Church relaunched its official structures after socialism. Przemyśl became the main battlefield for these religious-national tensions.

Religious Reconciliation

Although many clergymen of both Catholic rites continue to foster nationally based intolerance, in an increasing number of situations representatives of both sides have directly or indirectly facilitated reconciliation between Poles and Ukrainians. In addition, many local NGOs working on reconciliation have religious backgrounds or at least are run by religiously committed persons. In order to gain more substantial political legitimacy, they usually ask clergy for at least symbolic supervision or assistance. To give one example among many, the planting of a 'Media Forest' (*Las medialny*), an initiative of a regional NGO intended to

<http://www.stat.gov.pl/serwis/polska/2004/dzial4/obrazy4/rys30.htm> (accessed November 2004).

⁵ According to statistics from the Civil Office in Przemyśl, around two-thirds of all marriages conducted in the city between 1999 and 2004 were held in churches. According to cemetery statistics, 600 funerals were held in Przemyśl Main Cemetery in 2003, of which 596 were Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic.

symbolize Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation, took place in October 2004 near Bircza, a town where battles between the Polish Army and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army had been particularly fierce after the Second World War. The little trees of reconciliation were sown on the site of the former village of Łomna, which had ceased to exist after the expulsion of Ukrainians. Along with journalists from L'viv and Przemyśl and state and local officials, priests representing both Catholic rites took part in the ceremony. Another example is the annual Polish-Ukrainian Prize for reconciliation (Nagroda Pojednania), initiated by the Greek Catholic Sisters Servants of the Holiest Virgin Mary (Siostry Służebnice Najświętszej Maryji Panny). Under their auspices a committee chooses the prize-winners – one Pole and one Ukrainian – every year.⁶

It is now common for the annual rituals of one church to be attended by representatives of the other, examples being the Greek Catholics' Jordan ceremony and Roman Catholics' Corpus Christi.⁷ Although taking part in joint celebrations is less usual among ordinary believers than it was before the Second World War, when it was widely practised – particularly in religiously mixed families – members of the Polish 'liberal' intelligentsia like to take part in Greek Catholic celebrations, as do many local politicians. In villages where large numbers of eastern and western Christians have lived next to each other continuously (Kalników, Chotyniec, Komańcza), such sharing was practised even during the socialist years. It can be seen as a form of the enduring agrarian tolerance that László Foszto (this volume) refers to as 'rural civility'. Common celebrations are nowadays becoming increasingly popular elsewhere. In comparison with the situation observed by Hann in the mid-1990s (Hann 1998a), even in urban areas – particularly Przemyśl, where tensions resulting from the politicizing of the violent past

⁶ In 2003 the prize was awarded to the Polish journalist Paweł Smoleński and the Ukrainian historian Borys Woźnicki. The year before the winners were the well-known Polish dissident and politician Jacek Kuroń and the Ukrainian writer Mykoła Riabczuk, as well as the Polish-Ukrainian battalion in Kosovo.

⁷ The Jordan ceremony is a festival of eastern-rite churches (Orthodox and Greek Catholic) that takes place annually on 19 January, Epiphany. Commemorating the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan, it involves a procession and the blessing of water, usually the local creek or river. In the vernacular tradition the festival is also called the blessing of water (*ukr vodosvyaschenya*). Corpus Christi, or the Ceremony of the Most Blessed Sacrament (Boże Ciało, or Uroczystość Przenajświętszego Sakramentu, or Święto Ciała i Krwi Pańskiej), is a festival of the western Christian church that honours the presence of the body of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. The ritual is observed in May or June on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday and literally brings God into the community when the Holy Eucharist is carried through the public places.

were formerly most visible – the public sphere has become much more peaceful.

Bearing in mind the exclusive role of Catholicism in local politics in south-east Poland and taking into account the omnipresent ritual and symbolic dimension of politics (Kertzer 1988), I argue that political changes in both directions – towards promoting animosity and towards facilitating peaceful co-existence – are mediated predominantly through rituals in which religious specialists play the main role. Ritual can be characterized as ‘rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling they hold to be of special significance’ (Lukes 1975: 291). David Kertzer saw ritual as having four political ends: organizational integration, legitimation, construction of solidarity, and inculcation of political beliefs (Kertzer 1991: 87). He also observed that ritual channels emotions, guides cognition, organizes social groups, and, by providing a sense of continuity, links the past with the present and the present with the future (Kertzer 1988: 9–10). What is important to remember is that rituals change in form, meaning, and social effects, and people are not just simple followers of symbols in ritual but also active creators. This is part of what makes ritual a powerful tool for political action (Kertzer 1988: 12).

Among the rituals that promote animosity in south-east Poland are those commemorating war heroism and war suffering, such as the annual march of Ukrainians to the war cemetery in Pikulice, near Przemyśl, and various commemorations organized by the local Polish combatant associations. In both Polish and Ukrainian rituals in which one nation’s heroes are the other’s enemies, Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic clergymen play crucial roles (Buzalka, *Forthcoming* offers detailed descriptions).

The other kind of ritual I have in mind, which priests also supervise, is that through which two religious-national groups share ‘tolerant’ connections evoked by the interpretation of common tradition, the majority’s acknowledgement of the minority’s existence, and – presumably among at least some people – the religious experience of forgiveness and togetherness. The last experience, especially, can be achieved most effectively through religious practice, supervised by religious specialists and explained through religious narratives. Therefore, although rituals are historical events and can evoke tradition and continuity, they can also lead to change. The ritual site is where ‘new history’ is ‘being made’ (Kelly and Kaplan 1990: 141) and where political change can be studied. Among the rituals of tolerance performed in south-east Poland, the activities of the Roman Catholic parish priest in Krasieczyn, a village near Przemyśl famous for its Renaissance

castle, are the best known. And of those, the common singing of carols by Roman and Greek Catholics each year after New Year's Eve takes special place.

Regardless of political regime, the priests of the Roman Catholic parish houses (*plebania*) in south-east Poland have always played eminent roles in the social lives of villages. The Krasieczyn parish priest at the time of this writing is no exception. As an article in the regional weekly illustrates, the presbytery has been a politically important place, especially in politically turbulent times:

It was the year 1989. The entire country was boiling. The old order was falling down, and the morning star of freedom was approaching the most remote parts of Poland. Everywhere citizen's committees were formed. In Krasieczyn the most important place, where a great deal was always happening, was the parish house [*plebania*]. There one used to meet the opposition politicians, the parliamentarians, the Solidarity activists, and all these who wanted to take part in the building of the new (*Życie podkarpackie*, 3 March 2004, p. 19).

The Krasieczyn parish priest, Father Bartmiński, is known for his interest in political affairs. In the dichotomy employed by some political sociologists, who divide the Polish Catholic Church into 'open' and 'closed' factions (Michlic 2004), he belongs to the 'open' and tolerant one, especially in his attitudes towards Jewish heritage and the Ukrainian minority. On 11 November 2003, for example, the day of parish patron St. Martin, he organized a common Greek and Roman Catholic service during which a plate was installed commemorating the Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation ceremony that had taken place the previous summer in Pawliwka, Volhynia, Ukraine.⁸ A quotation from the pope on the plate read, 'It is time to tear away from the past'.⁹ As the priest underlined several times, the Holy Father asked both Christian nations to look deeply into their consciences and to find reconciliation.¹⁰

Although Krasieczyn, a predominantly Roman Catholic parish, encompassed no villages that experienced serious ethnic violence during or

⁸ The ceremony in Pawliwka, attended by the presidents of Poland and Ukraine, commemorated the victims of the ethnic war that took place during the Second World War.

⁹ The plate also displayed the following text: 'On the sixtieth anniversary of incidents in Volhynia: in order to pay honour to the fallen ones, to eschew hatred, to commemorate reconciliation. Pawliwka 11.07.2003, Krasieczyn 11.11.2003' ('Czas już oderwać się od bolesnej przeszłości. W 60-lecie wydarzeń wołyńskich, by uczcić Ofiary, przestrzec przed nienawiścią, upamiętnić pojednanie').

¹⁰ For another of Bartmiński's activity of this kind, see Hann 1998b.

after the Second World War, the inhabitants were nonetheless substantially affected by Action Vistula, in which Greek Catholic Ukrainians were relocated to north-west Poland. The Greek Catholic parish *tserkev* (church) of the nearby village of Sliwnica was destroyed during the war.¹¹ Until they were expelled in 1947, the Greek Catholics were allowed to practise their religion in the chapel of Krasieczyn castle, owned by the well-known Sapieha noble family. The other nearby *tserkevs* were in Mielnów and Cholowice. The former was given to the Roman Catholic Church, and the latter fell into ruin.

The Cholowice *tserkev*'s rebirth from the ruins, initiated by Father Bartmiński, climaxed with a religious ceremony on 30 May 2004. The church was restored in an 'Eastern' style – sanctuaries of this sort, with pure Byzantine features, were rare in the border region between the two Christian traditions before the Second World War – and was dedicated to the Holy Spirit. The parish priest emphasized that it was dedicated also to Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation. The event was attended not just by people from the village, which consisted of some 10 or 15 families; most of the 200 or so Roman and Greek Catholics in attendance came from Krasieczyn and Przemyśl.

From the beginning of the ceremony, the tolerant traditions of the district were emphasized and the unity of Christians under the Holy Spirit evoked. A priest who was a guest of Father Bartmiński's delivered the sermon, saying, 'In one spirit we were baptized, and there must be no division between us.' Prayers were said for the unity of Christians, and former inhabitants of the village and their descendants, now living in Ukraine, were invited to visit. The past was taken to be uniformly tolerant – no difference was made between the inter-war Polish republic and the medieval Rzeczpospolita, the Polish republic of the nobility.

At the end of the mass, Poles and Ukrainians shook hands, and the local priest said a greeting in Polish, Ukrainian, and German, emphasizing that these three languages were equal and commonly used in the area before the Second World War. He particularly expressed his gratitude to the Greek Catholics who attended the ceremony and thereby reminded the Polish majority of this lost pre-war harmony. Stressing their eastern-rite Catholicism, he expressed the wish that there might be 'one common fatherland where there are no divisions. We all come from one God. Shalom!' After thus evoking the third, Jewish, part of the pluralist tradition, the priest concluded by expressing the hope that it would become normal to hear Ukrainian and German on the streets again.

¹¹ Eastern-rite Christians use the term *tserkev* instead of 'church' for their building.

Afterwards Father Bartmiński invited everyone to tour the ‘post-*tserkev* church’ (*kościół pocierkewny*).¹² Inside, the professional painter who had conserved the church – herself a Roman Catholic with eastern Christian roots – interpreted the work. She explained that the church was painted in a pure Byzantine style, recognizable from the composition of the icons of the apostles and the Mother of God. Empty places on the walls would later hold portraits of former Przemyśl bishops of both rites, complementing the Byzantine church art. As the painter explained, this dichotomy was necessary in order to show the ‘two cultures’ that had lived next to each other for centuries.

The event continued with a picnic. Eating sausages and drinking beer and coffee, people sang Polish and Ukrainian folksongs, walked around, and talked. A discussion arose among the painter, a teacher at the Przemyśl Ukrainian School, and other participants about an exceptional musical talent of Ukrainian nationality. The painter said, ‘The Ukrainian nation is gifted with musicality. It is visible in the culture of the Greek Catholic Church, where the singing needs no support from the organ. People learn singing from childhood listening to the *tserkev* choir.’ It was clear from the discussion that eastern-rite Catholics were perceived as more spiritual, more emotional, and more musical than western-rite Catholics. This opinion, which also appeared in connection with the singing of carols in Krasieczyn, is commonly held by the local intelligentsia, both Polish and Ukrainian in origin.

The Singing of Carols

In religiously mixed areas of south-east Poland, it was a widespread practice before the Second World War for believers of both Catholic rites to celebrate Christmas and other important festivals together. Because of the difference in calendars – Roman Catholic Gregorian and eastern Julian, respectively – the observances seldom clashed, and neighbours used to invite one another to their homes as well as to the church or *tserkev*. This was almost unavoidable in religiously mixed families, but even among one-rite families it was common to join with neighbours of another rite to sing carols (*wspólne kołędowanie*). Before the Second World War, people moved freely from carols in Polish to carols in the local dialect of Ukrainian. Paradoxically, such switching was also observed after Action Vistula when people in some villages around Przemyśl, after singing Polish carols at the

¹² *Kościół pocierkewny*, an expression used widely by Greek Catholics in south-east Poland, denotes a church that served as a *tserkev* before 1947. This reminds Greek Catholics of their historical continuity in the area.

Christmas vigil (*wigilia Bożego narodzenia*), continued singing ‘Ukrainian’ ones (Bartmiński 1990). This might have resulted from the fact that not all Greek Catholics were repatriated – those living in mixed families stayed – but some Roman Catholics also continued to practise the local tradition.

Because of the way the Polish state constructed the Ukrainian enemy after the Second World War, this kind of activity tended to be risky and was possible only in face-to-face local settings. Nevertheless, this kind of ‘agrarian tolerance’ survived in Krasieczyn.¹³ Certain active parishioners organized the village’s social life, including harvest festivals and the singing of carols. Their role in keeping old traditions alive was enhanced after the arrival of Father Bartmiński in the 1970s, a relatively liberal period. The new parish priest himself organized carol singing at the presbytery.

The event described in what follows took place on 11 January 2004, soon after Christmas according to the Julian calendar, in the Royal hall of Krasieczyn castle. For the first time it was co-organized by the local branch of the Kraków-based foundation *Mosty na Wschód* (Bridges to the East), which was intellectually backed by the well-known Christian association ZNAK and financed by the US General Consulate. The several hundred Catholics of both rites who attended, most of them from Przemyśl, included ordinary parishioners as well as journalists, politicians, intellectuals, and priests.

After a short welcome from Father Bartmiński, an NGO activist took the floor. He said, ‘Living on the Polish-Ukrainian borderland, we would like to take advantage of our common roots, to identify with these roots, and take inspiration from the common Polish-Ukrainian heritage.’ He welcomed high-ranking clergymen of both Catholic rites, the representatives of self-government from the region – ‘the lords of the land’ (*gospodarzy tej ziemi*), as he called them – and stressed the need to spread the activities of ‘multi-culturalism’ away from centres such as Kraków. He introduced his foundation’s new program, ‘Bridges of Tolerance’, launching its activities in Krasieczyn castle.

Another NGO activist expressed his gratitude to Father Bartmiński, who, among the speaker’s friends in Kraków, was a ‘very much honoured person’. To strong applause, the floor was then given to the priest himself. Mentioning Cardinal Sapieha, who had been born in the castle and who ‘enriched the multi-cultural environment of Kraków’, he underlined the ‘multi-cultural values’ of Przemyśl and south-eastern Poland. He observed

¹³ I noticed a similar practice of carol singing as a form of agrarian tolerance surviving from the pre-socialist years in the village of Hrebenne, near Lubaczów, about 100 kilometres north of Przemyśl, and was told it had been practised in some form in a few villages in south-east Poland (Kalników, Komancza) that were repatriated only partially or not at all after the Second World War.

that close to the city were Slovakia, the Czech lands, Ukraine, and Byelorussia, that Przemyśl has two archbishops and two cathedral churches, and that a strong Jewish heritage was visible in the streets. Moreover, some Muslims had recently moved into the region, not to mention those in the cemeteries, such as the Ottoman Turks buried in Krasieczyn. All this demonstrated the multi-culturalism (*wielokulturowość*) of the region. In Father Bartmiński's words: 'Is any other city in Poland so drenched in multi-cultural traditions? This land is linked to many nations, and we must emphasize this tradition. As the Holy Father said, let's leave the accounting of history to the historians and try to build a common future.'

After this introduction, he asked the Greek Catholic metropolitan and the Roman Catholic auxiliary bishop to say a few words. The Greek Catholic archbishop began with the story of the Russian poet Yevtushenko, who, while in Paris, wanted to connect that city metaphorically with Moscow. As the archbishop put it, 2,000 years ago Christ had connected earth and heaven, as well as people among themselves: 'Christ always connects and never divides. He always shows the way of unity and brotherhood. It happened that in this place there also appeared bridges – bridges to the east. These took inspiration from a great humanist tradition, but they were also based on faith and forgiveness, on the teaching of the church.' The archbishop compared state borders to those dividing people's hearts, which are even more difficult to cross: 'I wish for all of us that this border in our hearts would not exist. As Christ brings peace to all people of good will, I wish for good will among us and for peace among nations in the entire world. I wish this to all of us. Christ was born!'

Similarly, the Roman Catholic bishop noted that Christ had been born a man in order to show solidarity with sinful humans. In the bishop's eyes, the Holy Father also spoke of this type of solidarity, which meant 'everybody with everybody and everybody for everybody'. He expressed the wish to experience solidarity while sharing *prosfora* and Christmas wafers, the eastern and western symbols of the Eucharist, respectively. For him, this was similar to the sharing of hearts, something that could be achieved only through pure human love. It was not only solidarity of man with man, he said, but the solidarity of God with man that was symbolized in the sharing. Bringing in the importance of a peaceful home and a morally healthy family, he emphasized the significance of Christmas – a time when people discover the secrets of faith in God and brotherhood among themselves. Because the bishop was celebrating the twentieth anniversary of his installation, the parish priest asked the choirs and the people in the auditorium to sing the Polish greeting song 'Sto lat' and the Ukrainian 'Mnohaja lita'.

The emotional atmosphere went further. On stage, the choirs began to sing Christmas songs, Ukrainian ones alternating with Polish ones, while the *prosfora* and wafers were distributed. Some people shook hands and cried. The floor was then taken by a village mayor. He expressed the wish that, thanks to activities like the common singing of carols in Krasieczyn, 'Przemysł land' (*Ziemia przemiska*) would no longer be seen as a place where national tensions prevailed. 'I would like to show everybody that we know how to live together and cooperate, no matter what rite or nationality we belong to. Apart from health, peace, and wisdom, I wish to everyone brotherly love, openness to every man. I wish for cordiality to take root in our hearts.'

Afterwards, a letter of greeting from the mayor of Przemyśl was read, and then an opera singer, with guitar and sombrero, entered the scene. He commented on the presence of Jesus in people's hearts, which brings internal peace of soul and also appears in the external peace of people's everyday relationships. He wished the true Christian faith to everyone and then sang carols from around the world, some of them in Spanish and some in Italian. People sang with him, especially on the Polish songs, clapped their hands, and enjoyed the performance.

The program continued with a programme by some young schoolchildren, and the Greek Catholic parish priest from Przemyśl offered final thanks to the organizers. He invited everyone to the annual Greek Catholic ceremony in Przemyśl, where Roman and Greek Catholic archbishops would together 'bless the river that becomes Jordan'. The crowd sang the well-known German Christmas song 'Silent Night' in Polish. The ritual ended with a common blessing by the bishops, and everyone was invited to another hall where refreshments and Christmas folk dishes were served. The clergymen, order sisters, and other VIPs were invited to a separate hall, where they were served dinner.

The Themes of the Ritual

Although several Greek Catholics noted that the celebration was held predominantly in Polish and that even their archbishop blessed them in the Latin style, the participants appreciated the public form of the event. Several hundred people were present, and some political and media representatives from the region showed interest in the activities of the Krasieczyn priest. Some Roman Catholic participants stressed the opportunity to learn more about the practices of their fellow Catholics. A young Greek Catholic girl said the common singing of carols helped to make the churches more open to each other. As some Greek Catholic participants observed later, the sharing

of wafers and *prosfora* made for a warm atmosphere, bolstered by the miraculous air of Christmas.

All this evoked strong positive emotions. Bishops kissed each other and people cried. To those present, the common celebration of Christmas exemplified the teachings of Christ, whose activities were universal, overcoming divides based on nationality or confession. This essentially Christian tradition, based on solidarity among people and between people and God, implied redemption, which could be achieved through what Pope John Paul II described as a 'tearing away from the past'.

Coming from Kraków intellectual circles to visit the periphery, the NGO specialists claimed that the common Christmas celebration was a way to transcend the intolerance of south-east Poland. A new regional narrative based on the local 'multi-cultural' past was evoked. As one Przemyśl participant commented, the priest from the beginning 'supported people in becoming "themselves", in singing "their songs" [*po naszymu*] as they used to be sung before the war. He wanted to build on local traditions. People used to come to the veranda of the parish house and sing for him because he liked it. He opened the locality, built regional identity'. Two sorts of multi-cultural narratives were mixed together. The first came from urban intellectuals, while the second was genuinely concerned with uncovering the 'local' past. Despite the expressed unity of the celebration, the two did not really gel. The presence of the bishops of two rites and the politically correct alternating of Ukrainian and Polish performers underlined the 'managed' character of the whole event.

What I think we see here is the demise of the local tradition of agrarian tolerance in favour of an elite-controlled reconciliation of national collectives that I call 'artificial tolerance'. Whereas agrarian tolerance is rooted in everyday sharing among peasants, artificial tolerance is an intellectual construction, the work of the teachers and priests who were the main agents of the nineteenth-century national 'awakening' and the related ideologies of exclusivity. The initiative of holding a joint Christmas celebration with carolling, which originated in the parish, has moved to the castle and is now co-organized by the municipality and the regional NGO. In 2004 the entire event was legitimated by the presence of the bishops of both rites.. Some locals discussed the role of these postsocialist power holders and saw them as exploiting the hard work of the local priest. I heard the local NGO activists complain about the lack of resources for their community work, which to them contrasted sharply with the resources available to the 'cosmopolitan' intellectuals from Kraków. These people also expressed nostalgia for times when the ritual had been much more local. One of the Przemyśl activists said:

Once it was more spontaneous, organized next to the parish house and in front of the church. Then he [the priest] decided to enlarge the activity, he asked the cathedral office for approval – both Roman and Greek Catholic – they sent their choirs. ... Sometime in 1990–1991 it happened that Poles began to sing only Polish carols, and Ukrainians, only Ukrainian ones. They alternated one after the other, and the spontaneity was lost. The teachers teach pupils only Polish carols; Ukrainians come with only the Ukrainian ones. ... There are ‘we’ and ‘them’; before it was just ‘we’. There is no longer that continuity of the local language, the mixture, the local blend.

This speaker agreed that particularly during the nationalist tensions in Przemyśl in the 1990s, the Krasieczyn singing played an important educational role: ‘The Poles came and saw that the Ukrainians were similar.’ From the mid-1990s, however, the Przemyśl bishops began attending the event, and ‘it became the Przemyśl event, not the local one. The castle wants to run its business; politicians and “Bridges to the East” want the same. It is an activity [*impreza*] of the Przemyśl intelligentsia. Although the local schools prepare their program, they are just participants. ... Fewer and fewer local people come; there are no grandmothers [*babcze*] who remember how it was before the war.’

Even the Jordan ceremony in Przemyśl, which every year gains greater attention from politicians and the media, is perceived by some local Greek Catholics with suspicion. One Greek Catholic said, ‘Jordan is changing into a media event. The photographers and TV teams do not allow concentration on the internal aspects of the festival; they prefer the external, visual side and the fact that in a few moments the entirety of Poland will see us. I must confess, the last time I left the Jordan ceremony in Przemyśl.’ As this man saw it, this new kind of tolerance was a fragile product that would last only so long as there existed pressure from above. ‘It is an artificial tolerance [*sztuczna tolerancja*]’, he said.

Although the Christmas event was initially a local activity of the parish priest and villagers, the priestly and lay intelligentsia has now become engaged in the event, with the approval of the same priest and his bishop. Because local politicians and journalists were present, the common singing of carols became a prestigious event for the local elites. A cultural activist of the Ukrainian minority, herself a teacher and singer in the Greek Catholic choir, directly stressed the importance ‘of showing that Ukrainians are a highly cultured minority and their strong culture should be shown to Poles.’ As she put it, ‘everything must return to normality’ – presumably meaning as it was before the war. She said:

We should invite more high-ranking Ukrainian artists; we in Przemyśl have a lot to show to Poles. ... I fought in a war-like activity for Ukrainian culture in Przemyśl, [a culture] that in fact did not exist in Poland. It was necessary to build it and emphasize it all the time because it was somehow nameless, because there was no Ukrainian statehood. It was very difficult, but that culture survived in people, and it exists.

Unlike agrarian tolerance, this new ‘multi-culturalism’ was invented by middle-class intellectuals. It is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century project of modern nation-building undertaken by the rural intelligentsia. Today such people speak in the names of their national collectives. They purify and essentialize their folk traditions, making them ‘appropriately’ high, according to middle-class tastes, and often ignore local voices. Although the 2004 Christmas event in Krasieczyn was perceived as multi-cultural, in fact it acted to strengthen the national cultures. The state-supported education system, represented during this and similar rituals by the contributions of local schools, only supports the bounding of imagined national collectives that are supposed to be undergoing reconciliation. On various public occasions, for example, students from the Shashkevych School in Przemyśl sang folksongs and performed dances from areas hundreds of kilometres away, presenting them as purely Ukrainian and therefore local.¹⁴

Two workable models of relatively tolerant societies have appeared historically – cosmopolitan cities and rural empires. In the 1970s, Renée Hirschon (Forthcoming) studied Greek refugees from Turkey who, after several decades on mainland Greece, remembered their harmonious co-existence with Turks on the basis of lived contacts with them, thus opposing the official, elite-driven national history of ethnic hatred. In Krasieczyn, as in a few other places in rural south-eastern Poland, a similar surviving tradition of agrarian tolerance kept the communal singing of carols alive. In the Krasieczyn case, however, the local activity patiently supported by the resident priest has been overwhelmed by the growing political significance of the event for the entire region. It is widely publicized in the media and valued by ‘liberal’ intellectuals as an example of multi-culturalism. The ‘cosmopolitan’ priest himself seems not to object to these perceptions and even assists in promoting this artificial tolerance.

¹⁴ The Ukrainian-language school in Przemyśl, named after the Ukrainian national ‘awakener’ in Galicia, Markiian Shashkevych (1811–43), was re-established in 1991.

What Kind of Tolerance?

In order to understand these ritual changes, it is necessary to analyse the contents of the tolerance narrative that underpins them. John Borneman (1997, 1999) has argued that reconciliation is embedded in culture and in social networks rather than in state institutions. It is about the restoration of social relationships and the application of everyday notions of justice, rather than about rational bureaucratic and legal procedures. Studying post-conflict societies across the globe, Hamber and Wilson (2003) described the sorts of reconciliations initiated by many post-authoritarian religious and political elites as taking the form of social rehabilitation and public or societal healing. They are a kind of therapy for a sick and divided society – the restoration of the national psyche.

Signs of this kind of reconciliation can be found in Przemyśl. The discourse of reconciliation there not only aggregates individual and family memories into the memories of nations but also foregrounds the religious language of forgiveness. Therefore, although rituals such as the common singing of carols open the public space to a once-proscribed religious-national collective and bring political change, they also favour forgetting and national healing (Hamber and Wilson 2003). They use the Christian vocabulary of redemption and evoke the idealist tradition of a lost peaceful world. They narrate an impersonal tolerance and ignore religion's own history in the conflict (see van der Veer 2002).

Local intellectuals who are engaged in the telling of 'macro' history widely agree that forgetting and generational change automatically bring tolerance. Seen from the perspective of the 'sudden' emergence of 50-year-old memories of ethnic war in the early 1990s, this is a simplistic hope. The notion of artificial tolerance expresses the feeling shared by many ordinary locals that reconciliation is being actively promoted on the surface while religious-national tensions continue to thrive underneath. This certainly does not mean that every attempt to promote tolerance 'from above' is necessarily superficial – the participation of high-ranking clergymen of both rites in each other's ceremonies in Przemyśl has been a precondition for calming conflicts since the early 1990s. Sometimes, however, artificial tolerance serves to support and reinforce the dominant worldview and to indicate particular relationships of power while concealing the true character of majority-minority relations.

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Chapter 14

Charity in the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church: An Alternative Model of Civility?

Stéphanie Mahieu

In Hungary, as in other postsocialist countries, the years of ‘transition’ brought a deep crisis in the welfare system. Non-profit organizations (NPOs) became important actors in welfare provision.¹ Many have explicit religious affiliations and rely on pre-existing religious structures (Széman 1999: 13). Yet the precise manner of their interaction with churches and with the state is complex. Through their charitable activities, religious NPOs aim to promote a specific set of values. In this chapter I focus on charities linked to a minority church, the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church (HGCC).² Following Zsolt Enyedi (2003), I argue that the Hungarian state has endorsed a politics of ‘active neutrality’. In practice this means that the state provides religions and associated NPOs with a great deal of support, but it supports some religious groups more actively than others.

I begin with a general overview of the religious landscape and the religious voluntary sector in Hungary in the twentieth century and outline the constitutional framework for religious freedom and tax measures bearing upon religious and non-profit organizations (so-called ‘percentage philanthropy’). Then, drawing on ethnographic research I conducted in 2004 and 2005, I turn to a description of three faith-based charitable programs

¹ I follow Salamon’s definition of the non-profit sector as ‘a collection of entities that are organizations; private as opposed to governmental; non-profit distributing; self-governing; voluntary; and of public benefit’ (Salamon 1999: 10). I use the terms *voluntary sector* and *charitable sector* as synonyms.

² The Greek Catholic Church belongs to Rome but follows the Byzantine rite. The existence of a Hungarian Greek Catholic Church is the result of a tumultuous history and repeated redrawings of frontiers in the region. Hungarian Greek Catholics are for the most part of Rusyn and Romanian origin, but they have been almost totally Magyarized. The Union of Uzhhorod (1646) established a Rusyn Greek Catholic Church in Subcarpathia (Mayer 1997; Molnár 1997). At present this church has one eparchy (in Hajdúdorog) and one exarchate (in Miskolc).

managed by the HGCC: the Szent Cirill és Method foundation in Győr, the Karitász community in Ózd, and the Paraklisz community, a detoxification centre, in Rakaca.³ The first two charities provide ‘traditional’ social welfare locally, the first outside the traditional territory of the HGCC and the second in one of Hungary’s poorest towns. The third operates in a small village, where its goal is to heal drug addicts coming from large cities. My hypothesis is that besides implementing the Christian duty of charity to the needy, the founding of Greek Catholic charities has two motivations: to gain greater internal independence from the church’s highly centralized structure and to gain greater visibility within Hungarian society generally.

A vast literature addresses the topic of Christian faith-based organizations, especially in the United States (Anheier and Salamon 1999; Cnaan 2002). Rebecca Allahyari (2000) contrasted two feeding programs for the homeless, one organized by a Catholic Worker-inspired organization and the other by the Salvation Army, a conservative evangelical Protestant organization. Following Michael Katz (1986), she argued that Protestants and Catholics in the United States brought different formulations of charity into play in the politics of welfare. European models of charity seem different yet from those found in North America. In western Europe, although charitable associations have long played crucial roles, their power has generally been balanced by that of the state (Wright 2002). Several comparative studies of the role of religion in providing welfare in western Europe have been undertaken in recent years (Fix and Fix 2002; University of Uppsala 2002).

In postsocialist countries, too, religious non-profit organizations are playing an increasing role. In Hungary, NPOs have become ‘key actors – especially at the local level – on the various fields of public service provision as of health care, education and social services’ (Jenei et al. 2005: 75). Some areas (e.g. north-east Hungary) and some segments of the population (e.g. elderly people and Roma) have suffered much more than others as a result of postsocialist dislocation. Religious NPOs of diverse affiliations have concentrated their efforts on such priority groups and regions.

³ In 2004 I carried out research mostly in the Nyíregyháza area. In 2005 I also visited Győr, Ózd, and Szolnok. Although the total fieldwork for this project covered only two months, I was already familiar with many details of Greek Catholic care as a result of previous fieldwork in Romania (Mahieu 2003). I would like to thank Kristóf Buza, Péter Csigó, Anita Halász, Zsolt Horváth, Bertalan Pusztai, and Irén Szabo for their support during my field trips, and all the Greek Catholic priests and believers who helped me in the course of this project.

Religion and Civil Society in Hungary

According to the 2001 census, 55 per cent of Hungary's citizens are Roman Catholic, 15 per cent are members of the Reformed (Calvinist) Church, 3 per cent are members of the Lutheran Church, 3 per cent are Greek Catholics, and less than 1 per cent are Jewish. However, surveys indicate that fewer than 20 per cent of believers are regular churchgoers (Kamarás 2001). Ten per cent declined to answer the optional question concerning religious affiliation, and about 15 per cent declared no religious affiliation. Other denominations include Orthodox churches, other Protestant churches (Baptist, Adventist), and new religious movements (Jehovah's Witnesses, Krishna Consciousness).

Religious tolerance in Hungary has a long history. The Hungarian state was founded in the tenth century when Stephen I integrated the country into the western Christian sphere of influence. He was crowned the first king of Hungary on Christmas Day in 1001. However, a significant Byzantine influence persisted in the Carpathian basin until at least the twelfth century, a fact frequently emphasized by Greek Catholics wishing to stress the rootedness of their church (see also Pusztai 2005).

In the course of the Reformation, large numbers of people converted to Lutheranism and Calvinism. Some of their descendants eventually returned to the Catholic Church, but many Magyars remained Calvinists. The greatest concentration is to be found in the eastern part of Hungary, around Debrecen, the 'Calvinist Rome'. In 1541 the fall of Buda castle marked the beginning of 150 years of Turkish occupation and repression of the Christian churches. But conversion to Islam was rare, and after the Habsburgs pushed back the Turks, the Roman Catholic Church reasserted its dominant position, which it has sustained to the present day.

Before the onset of socialism, Hungary developed a rich tradition of religious and non-religious volunteering, mostly based on local solidarity. 'Voluntary associations were more important in the fields of culture and politics than in providing welfare services, where the state was an important actor in pre-socialist decades' (Kuti 1993: 4). Yet because Hungary at this time was still a predominantly rural society, 'people in need received informal assistance from neighbours and family members, pre-empting the need for charitable association. Consequently, charities represented only 6 per cent of all voluntary associations and provided services primarily to the poor in urban areas' (Kuti 1993: 4). Church organizations such as the Catholic Agricultural Youth Societies were the most numerous form of civil

association. In this sense, pre-socialist civil society was suffused with religion.⁴

The socialist period brought repression, but the various churches were not all affected uniformly. The Roman Catholic Church, the largest and most powerful church in Hungary, was the main target of repression. Its lay organizations were disbanded in 1946, religious schools were abolished in 1948, and most Catholic religious orders (59 out of 63) were dissolved. The welfare previously provided by Caritas, the principal Catholic charity, was taken over by the state (Haney 1999). In 1950, religious orders and congregations were suppressed, and 10,000 monks and nuns were interned. Cardinal József Mindszenty, archbishop of Esztergom, prince-primate of Hungary, was arrested in 1948. Mindszenty symbolized national resistance to Sovietization and Russification, not only for Roman Catholics but for all Christian churches (László 1989: 290). He was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1949.⁵

By contrast, Protestant churches (Calvinist, Lutheran, and Unitarian), the small Greek Orthodox Church, and the Jewish community all reached accommodations with the government in the late 1940s and were even allocated financial support. Except during the 1956 uprising, the Protestant churches were not sources of organized dissent. As for the Greek Catholic Church, which in all neighbouring states was effectively eliminated, following the Soviet example, its path in Hungary was highly distinctive. The Greek Catholic Szent Atanáz Theological Institute and Seminary was founded in 1950 in Nyíregyháza, at exactly the same time the Roman Catholic Church was experiencing harsh repression. It seems that this took place as the result of a local initiative and was not actively supported by the state (Pregun 2000: 9). Nevertheless, one might wonder why the HGCC enjoyed substantially more freedom than other denominations during the 1950s. The most likely explanation lies in the church's small size and relative poverty. North-eastern Hungary, where most Greek Catholics have lived historically, has long been the country's poorest area.

The 1960s brought a gradual rapprochement between the state and the Holy See, and the organizational structures of all major churches were stabilized.⁶ Each denomination was allowed to maintain modest publishing organs (newspapers, books, and standard devotional literature), and religious

⁴ Civil society consists of 'social organizations occupying the space between the household and the state that enable people to co-ordinate their management of resources and activities' (Layton 2004: 1).

⁵ During the uprising of 1956 he took up residence at the US embassy in Budapest, staying there until September 1971. He died in Vienna in 1975.

⁶ See [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+hu0077\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+hu0077)).

services were broadcast over radio. The issue of religious freedom did not play a major political role inside Hungary after 1956, although it remained important for the Hungarian minorities in neighbouring states, especially in Romania, where religion (Roman Catholic and Calvinist) was the strongest bulwark against assimilation. János Kádár's regime addressed this issue in 1986–87, when a petition was sent to the Helsinki Conference on behalf of the churches of Hungary, protesting the denial of religious human rights to Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries (Lazló 1989: 297). This step symbolized the increasing public role of churches in the last decades of socialism, which facilitated the emergence of a relatively strong religious non-profit sector after 1990.

Churches and New Civil Society Actors after Socialism

Article 60 of the Hungarian constitution (1990, with subsequent amendments) guarantees freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, and there is no official state religion.⁷ The Law on Freedom of Conscience, also dating to 1990, regulates the activities of religious communities, defines the benefits for which they are eligible, and establishes registration criteria. All groups must submit a statement to a local court declaring that they have at least 100 followers. As of 2005 the courts had registered more than 136 religions (*vallások*).

The prevailing spirit of the early 1990s was that of a 'secular, but pro-religious liberalism' (Enyedi 2003: 161). In later decisions, however, the Constitutional Court 'endorsed the idea of active neutrality: the state has the duty to provide the churches with the means that are necessary for their operation. ... In other words, freedom of religion presupposes an active, positive attitude on behalf of the state' (Enyedi 2003: 161). In 2001 the four historical religions – the Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran churches and Judaism – reached an agreement with the government for the financial support of clergy in settlements with populations of less than 5,000. In 2002, a similar agreement was concluded with six other churches. As part of the Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church also receives such support. According to Enyedi, the agreement between the historical religions and the state, and the collusion between political parties (especially right-oriented ones) and certain churches (especially the Roman Catholic Church), qualifies the religious freedom enjoyed by 'newcomers', that is, new religious movements. The privileging of established churches has been

⁷ For an English version of the Hungarian constitution, see <http://www.unesco.org/most/rr3hung.htm>.

controversial ever since financial support for churches was introduced in 1996.

The 1996 law enabled churches and NPOs to receive funds through taxation. Taxpayers are permitted to transfer 1 per cent of their personal income tax each year to the religion of their choice, and an additional 1 per cent to the charity of their choice.⁸ This system was inspired by the 0.8 per cent model introduced in Italy in 1990 to generate funding for the Catholic Church, which was later adapted in Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. This form of indirect public funding was initially intended as a mechanism to support the revival of churches, but it was later considered an appropriate way to promote civil society in general (Karajkov 2005: 2).

On the whole, statistics on revenue obtained by religious groups in this way confirm the rankings shown in the general census, although the law appears to benefit new religious groups (charismatic churches, Jehovah's Witnesses, Krishna Consciousness, Scientology) more than it does the traditional churches (Scanda 1999). In the second half of 2002, the parliament repealed a law that looked likely to modify the way in which the state allocated public funds to registered religions. The repealed law (passed by Viktor Orbán's right-of-centre government before the April 2002 general elections but never implemented) would have permitted the government to distribute funds to religious groups according to the 2001 census data rather than the voluntary 1 per cent tax contributions. Use of the census data would have benefited the historic religions and shifted funds away from smaller, newly established religions. The repeal of the law left the 1 per cent method of funding for religious groups unchanged.

How does the '1 per cent + 1 per cent' law work for religious groups and associated NPOs in practice? The Greek Catholic Church provides a good example, even though in this case taxpayers are unable to transfer money directly. Although the HGCC is, like the other Greek Catholic churches, a *sui juris* (self-governing) church, unlike its sister churches it does not have the status of a metropolitan church and is under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Revenue collected according to the first 1 per cent rule goes to the Roman Catholic Church and is distributed by the Episcopal Council according to the number of believers in each diocese. The HGCC has only one eparchy (in Hajdúdorog), and therefore all moneys are sent

⁸ See <http://www.nonprofit.hu>. According to this website, 'to be eligible to receive 1 per cent transfers, organizations must have been registered for more than three years (public foundations need to be registered for only one year), carry out "public benefit" activities (cultural, educational, environmental protection, charitable and social welfare activities, etc.), be non-political, and have no outstanding payments liable to the state'.

there. Many of my informants stressed that the result has been to strengthen the institutional structures of the HGCC and build new facilities. A. F., a Greek Catholic priest, said:

I have to say that, even though our situation was rather better in 1990 than in Romania or in the Ukraine, we were lacking institutional structures and buildings. We had no schools or other facilities, and the bishop said that this was the priority. And now there is the beautiful seminary in Nyíregyháza, the school in Hajdúdorog. ... But we receive very little money for our social activities from the church, and we still have to pay our employees. We can do it only through the help of our foundation.

Charity is not high on the agenda of the HGCC as an institution, but many priests express the necessity they feel at the local level to provide welfare to those in need. This is what leads many of them to create private foundations, in order to benefit directly from the second 1 per cent rule. M. S., another Greek Catholic priest, told me:

The reason we created this foundation was partly to get economic independence, and the other reason is that there are domains where the church as an institution cannot help. Quite a number of families were moving here from the north-east, as I did myself, and these rootless families, without any social network, they had economic problems and they turned to the church, but the church couldn't help them, the parish simply could not help them, because if they would put the sums necessary for these families and students into their budget, then the bishop would simply refuse to accept that budget.

That's where the foundation comes in.

Creating a foundation is therefore a way to gain autonomy from the religious institution and to be able to support not only one's parishioners but also the needy in general, regardless of their religious affiliation.⁹ At present it seems that moneys received under the second 1 per cent system represent only a small part of the charities' budgets – between 5 and 10 per cent. The rest is provided by private donations, transnational religious networks, and, since 2003, grants provided by the National Civil Fund (Nemzeti Civil Alapprogram).¹⁰ In the Greek Catholic case, the '1 per cent + 1 per cent' law increased the dependence of the HGCC on the Roman Catholic Church and on a centralized structure, yet the second 1 per cent played a small role in

⁹ In addition to the local needy, many of the foundations I know also provide material support to the Hungarian-speaking Greek Catholic communities in Slovakia, Romania, and, above all, Subcarpathian Ukraine.

¹⁰ Created in 2003, this fund 'aims to strengthen the operation of civil society organizations and develop the third sector through grant support'. www.nca.hu.

creating greater autonomy for local parishes through their foundations. In the remainder of this chapter I describe three Greek Catholic charities that illustrate contrasting ways of providing welfare.

Greek Catholic Charities: Material or Spiritual Support to the Needy?

What matters first is that we help the poor. And then comes the fact that this is organized by the Greek Catholic Church. What matters is not who belongs to which church, but that we are doing good things, which are necessary in today's society.

A Greek Catholic priest, director of a charity, Szolnok

My three cases vary in their geographical locations (two are situated in the historical territory of the Greek Catholic Church in north-eastern Hungary; one is in western Hungary), in their main activities (two are non-residential providers of 'classical' social services to the local needy; the other is a residential detoxification centre where people are brought from the city), and in their institutional affiliations (two are private foundations; one is part of the Caritas network). In addition, the cities of Győr and Ózd, where two of the foundations are located, could hardly be more different economically. The former is among Hungary's wealthiest cities, and the latter is located in the country's poorest area.¹¹ What the foundations have in common is that each was created through the energy of a single priest who combined charity management with his normal pastoral work, and each works in cooperation with local government agencies. I focus on the perspective of the welfare providers rather than that of the people who receive assistance, because Greek Catholic priests were the main focus of my enquiries.

The Saint Cyril and Methodius Foundation is located in Győr, outside the historical territory of the Greek Catholic Church. Győr is a city of 130,000 inhabitants located about halfway between Budapest and Vienna in one of the country's wealthiest regions. A Greek Catholic parish was created there in 1991, following a suggestion by the Roman Catholic bishop of Győr. When A. F., the priest, and his family arrived from Nyíregyháza to take up his new position, they knew no one, and the parish had to be built up from scratch. The HGCC has since taken over a former Serbian Orthodox church, after an agreement with the Serbian bishopric of Szentendre. There are officially 500 Greek Catholics in Győr, but A. F. says he knows only 120

¹¹ Strong regional differentiation has followed the end of socialism. Previously it was socialist policy to prevent such differences from emerging.

to 130 of them. He founded the Szent Cirill és Method Alapítvány in 1992 with a broad agenda in educational and cultural as well as social fields. Gradually it has restricted its activities to the last field. The foundation occupies several buildings next to the church, on the outskirts of the city in a neighbourhood where many Roma live. Even though the name of the foundation makes explicit reference to eastern Christianity, it has no formal link to the HGCC. As A. F. explained:

The foundation is not a religious foundation. It is a private [*magán*] one. However, it is true that it helps the church and that it was created by Greek Catholics. It supported the renovation of the church, for instance, but still it is a private foundation. But for many people, it is hard to distinguish between the private and the religious, because I am the director of the foundation and a Greek Catholic priest at the same time.

The foundation has four main programs. It provides temporary accommodation for children and families in need. It provides non-residential rehabilitation and psycho-social help to addicts, in collaboration with the psychiatric department of a hospital in the city. It supports education concerning drug abuse in schools in Győr and Mosonmagyaróvár, a neighbouring city. And it has a training program, run in partnership with the county's employment agency, to help unemployed people re-enter the job market. The foundation does not explicitly promote Greek Catholic spiritual values, but it is concerned to transmit values such as empathy and love. When I asked A. F., 'Do you promote Greek Catholic spirituality in the foundation?' he answered:

No, not explicitly. Here in Hungary, social legislation defines, for every specific situation, what kind of service we have to give. Our mission is therefore written down, the scope of our activities as well, everything is defined. The other reason is that this is not a religious foundation; it doesn't depend on the diocese, and therefore everyone is welcome, not only Greek Catholics, but everybody. As for spirituality, what we try to do is to show more humanity, more understanding, more empathy toward those who come, and not to treat people harshly or meanly, like in some public institutions.

Despite this downplaying of spirituality, the activities of the foundation have made the Greek Catholic community more visible at the local level and have strengthened the parish:

In Szabolcs county [the Nyíregyháza area, in north-eastern Hungary] we are a minority, but up there it is a strong minority. But here, in Győr, we are a tiny group, only 500 people in a city of 130,000! But in our church there is a real commitment, mainly from the priests, to

keep in touch with people who settle far away from our traditional territory. For instance, I go to Szombathely, to Pannonhalma, to say the mass. This is one thing, the spiritual commitment. The other thing is that the Greek Catholics are very active in social work. This is expanding, and more and more people know about us. The appreciation, the recognition we get is growing. We not only have a parish life, such as liturgy, burials, catechism, but we also do a great deal in the public sphere. People talk about us on the radio, the TV, in newspapers, thanks to our social role.

My informants often stressed that maintaining contact with Greek Catholics, especially young migrants to Budapest and other cities in the west or south, was the absolute priority in the present situation. Although building new churches is always an important element, many underlined that attempts to create new parishes had succeeded only in places where charitable foundations were active. The Greek Catholic priest M. S. said:

It is interesting to follow the logic behind it, when a priest goes to a new place where there is a Greek Catholic population. He may have about thirty persons around him, close to him, but it would be a very slow development if he had to build up a community solely on the basis of these thirty persons. That's why, for instance in Szolnok, they decided to launch the *hajléktalan étkeztetés* [soup kitchen]. The seed of those thirty persons grew into a very good, strong assembly in the course of the project, and additionally they stepped out of their anonymity. The whole city started to recognize them; they now have wide visibility.

The case of Győr illustrates the fact that, although the HGCC did not have to set up an entirely new institutional structure as it did in Romania and Ukraine, it was nevertheless confronted with novel challenges (Soltész 2002). The risk is that people who migrate from the north-east will attend the Roman Catholic church or cease going to any church if there is no Greek Catholic facility available. But creating a dynamic parish is no easy task, and this is where the existence of an active charitable foundation helps to cement a feeling of belonging.

Ózd is a town of 45,000 situated in a crisis zone of north-eastern Hungary, a few kilometres from the Slovakian border. It used to have large steel and iron works as well as lignite mines, all of which closed in the early 1990s. The unemployment rate is about 25 per cent of the active population (World Bank 2001). Roma make up some 20 per cent of the inhabitants, and their living conditions are especially precarious.¹² The town combines all the

¹² There is one official Roma Greek Catholic parish in Hodász, which operates a 'community house' providing various forms of help.

social and economic problems of postsocialist Hungary, and the local authorities have sought to address them by developing close contacts with civil organizations, including both religious and non-religious NPOs (Széman 1999:8).¹³ Among the former, the Karitás Greek Catholic centre is one of the most active. The parish was founded in 1943 and currently has 350 active members.

In 1991 a new priest, L. K., was appointed, and in 1993 he set up a foundation to create a community centre that could receive money from persons wishing to donate to an NPO rather than directly to a church (mostly foreign donors in Italy, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands) (Széman 1999: 14). Construction of the neo-Byzantine church and the community centre building was completed in 1996. Helping at the centre are 120 volunteers, almost all of them Greek Catholics. The main activities are a club for elderly persons, home nursing, food distribution, summer camps, and visiting the sick in hospitals. In addition, in 1999 the foundation won an important grant from the National Employment Fund, and it now manages a retirement house, the Szent Anna Szeretettotthon, in Susa, a neighbouring settlement, that hosts 49 people, with 8 permanent employees.

Even though the activities of this Karitás centre seem to have stabilized, the Greek Catholic priest who directs it is afraid that the official discourse of the government concerning improvements in the Hungarian economy will give the false idea that all regions are equally doing well:

We had to close our Karitás shop because we didn't receive any goods anymore; they [the donors] said that they would send them to Albania or Russia, because Hungary is now part of the EU. They [the government] want Hungary to be perceived positively, and so they say that we have no problems, so that the EU doesn't look at us as the poor neighbours. But the truth is that there still are many poor people and shantytowns here in Ózd.

L. K. emphasized how difficult it was to keep working and retain public attention after almost 15 years of activity, in a town where the economic situation was not expected to improve:

All the skilled people left the city as soon as they could. It is hard to find a job here. Anyone who had some money or relatives in other parts of the country went away. And those who stay here are struggling to survive. And one of the Dutch people who helped us, when he came back after a few years, asked me: 'What? You are still here? I thought that you would be gone after two years!' But I told

¹³ The most active, besides the Greek Catholic community centre, are the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical community, and the foundations linked to them (Széman 1999:11).

him that in the church it doesn't go like that, you don't make off when the boat is sinking.

The Karitász centre has been cooperating with the local authorities and expanding its activities, but according to its founder, if government and international donors scale back their support, the future is bleak.

Like his counterpart in Győr, L. K. insisted more on the Catholic universal ethic of love and compassion (see Allahyari 2000: 31) than on any specific Greek Catholic or eastern Christian values. He stressed that many volunteers were poor themselves ('Poor people, not the rich, are the first to help') and that if they did not have money, at least they had ideas ('Love is inventive'). However, as a priest, he considered that the Greek Catholic Church would benefit from rediscovering its eastern roots. This concern about the eastern specificity of the Greek Catholic Church was shared by many priests and believers I met. Although the official social doctrine of the Greek Catholic churches conforms to general Catholic doctrine (Krawchuk 1989), some activists of the HGCC have begun to explore innovative combinations of Catholic social ethics and eastern mysticism.

One such initiative is the Paraklisz detoxification centre in Rakaca, a remote village in the Zemplén area.¹⁴ It is led by a Romanian-born Greek Catholic priest, B. D. As of late 2005 this centre had only three residents, but when the renovation of a house donated by a villager was completed, it was to house as many as 12 patients from cities such as Debrecen, Miskolc, and Budapest. Agreements between the centre and the social service departments in those cities had already been signed. Addicts stay for periods of up to two years. One of the three initial residents has decided, after two years, to buy a house and settle in the village. A young Greek Catholic couple takes care of the finances; they live in Rakacaszend, a neighbouring village, where they teach at the Roma Greek Catholic primary school. L., the 'handyman', lives with the residents and is in charge of everyday organization. The project has two parts: a purely medical one – detoxification from hard drugs, under medical supervision – and an experimental one based on vocational training. The Paraklisz community aims for financial autonomy. It has a foundation, the Paraklisz Drogellenes Alapítvány, to which people can make donations through the 1 per cent law, and a core of devoted volunteers, who have applied for several international grants.

According to B. D., what makes this project special is that 'it is based on the liturgical order [of the Greek Catholic Church]'. Spirituality is represented in the huge Byzantine fresco on the building's walls. B. D. favours a return to 'true' eastern spirituality, where art, and especially icons,

¹⁴ In the eastern tradition, a *paraklisi* is a small chapel or a liturgy dedicated to a specific saint.

plays a crucial role.¹⁵ The thirst for eastern spirituality seems to be the driving force behind the Paraklisz project. For its director, the experience of true eastern spirituality is a collective one, inspired by the eastern mystical monastic tradition: 'We need a real monastic community. Without a monastic life, there is no chance of any renewal within the HGCC. If you want to live the eastern liturgy, you need a community with whom you can live this liturgy. It is not enough to maintain the traditional eastern liturgical order; the priest can't decide alone, he needs a community.' His idea is to insert the Paraklisz centre into the 'normal' course of village life. The centre is located opposite the presbytery, in the very centre of the village.

Myriad faith-based detoxification centres are run within the 'traditional' Christian churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant, but above all within the new Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. According to Catherine Wanner (2005: 3), Pentecostal churches such as the one she studied in Ukraine 'search for potential converts among the addicted by promising to counteract the satanic demons that plague them with the positive power of the Word, which will liberate and save them'. Almost all the volunteers working in the rehabilitation centre she described were former drug or alcohol addicts who were 'saved' by their conversion. For them, 'addiction is a spiritual problem with physical manifestations that mandates a spiritual solution' (Wanner 2005: 5). The Paraklisz community appears to share this view when its activists stress the spiritual dimension of the rehabilitation program, but there are in fact notable differences. Paraklisz makes no attempt to generate a 'snowball effect' by recruiting former addicts to heal and convert others. The project seems closer to familiar Catholic conceptions of charity as a social duty to the poor and the sick than to charismatic fervour. No moral judgements are made, and no references to satanic demons.

The Paraklisz centre puts greater emphasis on spirituality than do the traditional rehabilitation centres organized by the Roman Catholic Church but less on moral aspects than centres managed by Pentecostal churches. Its reference point is eastern spirituality as a way to heal and fulfil the HGCC's charitable duties. This seems to be a recent conception. Indeed, charity as an institutional activity was much less developed in eastern Christian churches

¹⁵ The decree of the Second Vatican Council, 'The Eastern Catholic Churches', and more recently, in 1993, the 'Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches' explicitly encourage the Greek Catholic churches to 'rediscover their authentic traditions'. There are two main trends within the HGCC: one advocates a return to the church's 'true' tradition – that is, a re-orientalization of the church – and the other advocates the status quo, a combination of Latin and eastern elements. Among my informants, the 'oriental' trend was over-represented.

than in the Protestant and Catholic worlds. Saulean and Epure (1999) argued that in the Romanian case this could be explained by geo-political factors and by considerations of general historical development, notably the late onset of industrialization and individualization.

But we need to take seriously the argument that the eastern churches have never promoted charity as a means of salvation in the way found in other traditions. ‘With a highly ritualized canon and more interest in exploring the mystery of divine revelation than in the well-being of its followers, the orthodox religion was conducted by a clergy with little social standing, preaching a partial asceticism, and preserving traditional values’ (Saulean and Epure 1998: 4). The Orthodox theologian Robert Taft (1999) also argued that the modest role played by the Orthodox churches in developing charitable activities had theological foundations:

The Oriental style of Church policy is less interested in the fruits of human organization, of law, order and uniformity. Tending to emphasize the mystery of the church rather than its earthly form, the Oriental is less concerned with the disciplinary and administrative aspects of its life. He sees the church not so much as a visible society headed by Christ, than as His theophany, a coming of the eternal into time, an unfolding of the divine life through the deifying transformation of humanity in the worship and sacraments of Christ (Taft 1999: 32).

The decline in state provision of welfare following the collapse of socialism therefore presented a great challenge in countries with eastern Christian traditions. Only in the most recent years have significant forms of a structured eastern Christian non-profit sector developed (Anastassiadis 2004; Caldwell 2005). But even though mystical, oriental monasticism was clearly a model for the Paraklisz centre, B. D. considered his role as creator of the community secondary to his prime role as a priest. Creating the centre was the fulfilment of a long-held idea, but he was unsure whether he could combine it with his pastoral duties: ‘For years I have been wondering whether or not I could commit myself to helping young drug addicts and nevertheless remain faithful to my vocation for the priesthood, because I don’t want this project to be prejudicial to my duty to the faithful. Fortunately, G. and his wife help me apply to international donors; their help is the only way I can remain faithful to my vocation.’

This concern over combining pastoral duties and the efficient administration of charitable activities was shared by all the priests and foundation managers I met during my fieldwork. Indeed, ‘management of the tasks undertaken in recent years requires full professionalism and full-time activity, which could be to the detriment of [one’s] vocation as a

minister' (Széman 1999: 15). The three charities I have described are the results of individual initiatives, not necessarily supported by the HGCC as an institution. What the three have in common is that they all work in direct co-operation with local and national governmental actors, particularly hospitals, employment agencies, and schools.

Conclusion

Postsocialist Hungary guarantees religious freedom, and there is no collusion between the state and any particular religion. New religious movements, however, are less actively supported than are the historically established churches. In particular, the four historical religions – Roman Catholicism, Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Judaism – benefit from a privileged situation of 'active neutrality' (Enyedi 2003). As part of the Catholic Church, the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church enjoys the same privileges, but it nonetheless faces specific development problems. For historical reasons it has a centralized structure based on a single eparchy. Even though its situation under socialism was much more favourable than that of neighbouring Greek Catholic churches, it had to rebuild infrastructure (churches, schools, and seminaries) and has not so far prioritized its charitable organizations. Greek Catholic charities have mostly been initiated by individuals. The '1 per cent + 1 per cent' system and other funding channels for charitable foundations have enabled some Greek Catholic priests to gain a measure of autonomy from their hierarchy. Their religious NPOs bring them into direct contact with governmental structures, increase the visibility of the HGCC, and promote a specific set of values, including love and empathy, through which social and spiritual commitments are entwined.

The role played by the HGCC in the postsocialist Hungarian public sphere is more significant than one might expect from a small, regional church. This can be attributed to the high value attached to eastern morality and spirituality in a society where the dominant Roman Catholic Church is perceived as highly secularized and where Orthodox churches are small and ethnically based. In this respect the HGCC is in a very favourable situation in comparison with the Greek Catholic churches of Romania and Ukraine, which have to define themselves in a predominantly Orthodox environment, and also with those in Poland, where the Roman Catholic Church dominates and Greek Catholics are an ethnic minority.

If civility is defined as 'the act of showing regard for others', then this Hungarian case illustrates how, in certain situations, cooperation at the local level between governmental agencies and religious charities can strengthen this capacity. The increasing number of religious charities in Hungary, of which the Greek Catholic examples are a small fraction, shows that

neoliberal ideology is by no means hegemonic in the social and economic transformations of postsocialism.

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