

Anti-Muslim Fear Narrative and the Ban on Said Nursi's Works as "Extremist Literature" in Russia

In May 2017, the head of the Turkish Office of Religious Affairs Mehmet Görmez joined the Grand Mufti of Russia Ravil Gainutdin to open a mosque in the Russian city of Kostroma. This was the culmination of the determined efforts of Kostroma's Muslim community since the early 1990s to build a large mosque in their town. The original plan was to name this mosque after the famous Kurdish-origin scholar of Islam from the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, Said Nursi (1878-1960). Nursi was brought to Kostroma as a prisoner of war during World War I and had lived there, in a small mosque, for over a year. As a result, when the Soviet Union disintegrated at the beginning of the 1990s and non-Soviet Muslims began traveling to former Soviet territories in an effort to revitalize Islam, Nursi's followers in Turkey were among the first to come to this northern city. When they arrived, however, they found out that the mosque where Nursi had once stayed was long destroyed.

In 1998, while attending a conference in Turkey, Gainutdin capitalized on the Turkish interest in Kostroma by inviting Nursi's followers to contribute to the construction of a new mosque in this city in commemoration of Nursi's legacy. Thus, Nursi's followers as well as the Turkish state contributed to the construction of the Kostroma mosque over time, and when it was ready for worship, Görmez was invited to the opening ceremonies as the guest of honor. This was symbolically significant for Nursi's followers in Turkey, because while the Turkish official establishment had long maintained a cautious distance from

Nursi and his followers, the country's Office of Religious Affairs had explicitly acknowledged his scholarly worth and begun publishing his works for the first time in 2014, under Görmez's directorship.¹

Yet the mosque in Kostroma was not named after Nursi. Instead, it was named "Kostroma Memorial Mosque," as Gainutdin explained in his official announcement of the event, to commemorate more than a thousand years of Muslim presence in the region, the Muslim soldiers who had fought to defend the Soviet Union in World War II, the Ottoman prisoners of war who had spent time in the city during World War I, and only then, "among them, Said Nursi."² It seems this was a difficult moment for Gainutdin. In 1998, he himself had suggested that the mosque would commemorate Nursi's legacy, and in 2004, he had also praised Nursi's works in an official statement.³ Since then, however, the Russian courts had actually banned Nursi's works and begun prosecuting his followers. As Görmez offered the first Friday sermon at the Kostroma Memorial Mosque and cautiously evoked Nursi's stay in the city during World War I,⁴ Russian courts were trying several individuals for up to ten years of imprisonment for the possession and distribution of the renowned scholar's works, known as the *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, or the *Epistles of Light Collection*.⁵

This article analyses the circumstances that led to the ban of Nursi's works in Russia, enabled the persecution of his followers, and culminated in this ironic moment in Kostroma in 2017. A complete understanding of the matter requires exploring a matrix of developments at multiple scales of analysis, from the local efforts of Kostroma's Muslim community to Russian and Turkish national politics

and ultimately to the global context characterized by the surge of Islamophobia and the securitization of public attention to Islam since 9/11. Following a brief period of religious pluralism in the wake of communism, the ironically named “Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations” in 1997 marked Russia’s reversion to the late-Soviet practice of regulation and containment in managing religious communities. Simultaneously, an anti-Muslim fear narrative surged in the country to the background of the Chechen conflict and the influx of migrant workers from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Immigrant as well as indigenous Muslims offered a convenient contrast to highlight the conservative values of a fast centralizing regime as Vladimir Putin consolidated his power in the early 2000s. Meanwhile, America’s “Global War on Terror” in the aftermath of 9/11 offered the Russian authorities and public a language that, once appropriated, could be deployed to justify anti-Muslim policies and attitudes both at home and before the world. I argue that the ban of Nursi’s works and the irony of Kostroma are the products of this appropriation in post-Soviet Russia, where the practices of Soviet anti-religious policy are still being deployed to manage various religious communities, set their limits, and highlight their otherness.

Said Nursi Arrives in Russia

Nursi was born to a peasant family in the Kurdish regions of the Ottoman Empire in eastern Anatolia. With an extraordinary memory and sharp intellect, he excelled through various disciplines of Islamic studies in the local madrasas of this region and earned fame as a scholar already in his teen years. This fame followed him when he traveled to Istanbul at the end of 1907 and then toured the empire to support its new

constitutional regime following the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. He returned to eastern Anatolia in 1912 to open a madrasa where he would teach Islamic and positive sciences together. However, when the world war started, he organized his students and other volunteers into a regiment and commanded them against the advancing Russian forces. This is when he was captured and taken to Kostroma as a prisoner of war. When the Bolsheviks seized power at the end of 1917, he took advantage of the ensuing chaos and escaped to Istanbul through Eastern Europe. He was welcome as a war hero in the imperial capital and appointed a member of the empire's highest council of Islamic affairs, *Dârü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslâmiye*. Yet Allied forces occupied most Ottoman territories, including Istanbul, at the end of the war. An independence movement emerged in Anatolia, and upon the invitation of its leaders, Nursi moved to Ankara in 1922 to support resistance against occupation. There, however, he noticed the secularist tendencies of the rising new regime's leaders and developed a strong aversion for factional politics. Shortly before the foundation of the Turkish Republic in October 1923, he went back to his native lands in eastern Anatolia with a decision to withdraw from society altogether and settle in a mountain cave. A Kurdish rebellion in the region disrupted this plan though. He had not supported the rebellion, but fearing his local reputation, the Republican authorities exiled him to a distant mountain village called Barla in western Anatolia.

Nursi wrote the bulk of the *Risale-i Nur* in Barla, in the form of short treatises that countered the positivist worldviews of the Republic's ruling elite and of a growing cohort of secularist Muslim intellectuals across the world through a side-by-side reading of the observable universe and the Qur'an. While the content of his work was profound, his

ample usage of representations and parables rendered this content accessible even to the uninitiated peasants around him. As an outcast of the new regime, he was not allowed to publish, but his peasant readers and small townspeople in the vicinity hand-copied his works and distributed them through a slowly growing network of followers, who came to be known as “Nurcus.” Nursi faced two more exiles and several court trials as a result, but eventually, the *Risale-i Nur* was acquitted from all charges. When Turkey adopted a more democratic multiparty regime in the 1950s, Nursi managed to publish his works too.⁶ As one of the most remarkable Islamic scholarly contributions of the twentieth century,⁷ the *Risale-i Nur* became the most widely read and influential work of Islamic scholarship in Turkey since then, preserving religiosity among millions of Turkish citizens and inspiring several religious movements.⁸

Especially from the 1980s on, Nursi’s followers translated his treatises into many languages and traveled to various parts of the world to spread the *Risale-i Nur*. They arrived in Russia in 1990, as the Communist Party lost its grip over society. Soviet authorities in the latter decades of the communist regime had concentrated their efforts in establishing government control over religious practices with a sustained expectation that the complete elimination of religion from social life would take place in time. Especially in Central Asia, as Eren Taşar meticulously documents, they created an “autonomous sphere” for “official Islam” and left practicing Muslims relatively free as long as they remained within the registered institutional settings of this sphere. In doing so, however, they also delegitimized religious practices that remained beyond the confines of official Islam either as “superstitious,” highlighting government prerogative to define the authenticity of religious practice, or “Wahhabi,” implying both religious deviation and

political threat affiliated with Saudi Arabia's the then proselytizing Islamist regime.⁹ The legacy of this categorization in the post-Soviet period was a rhetoric that prioritized registered and official Islam as true to the sources of religion and fit for the national body. In the process of recovering from state atheism, official Islam could even be embraced as a "traditional" characteristic of the emerging nations.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the institutions of official or traditional Islam were not equipped to cope with the sudden increase in the number of believers in the immediate aftermath of the communist regime. As a result, when various Muslim groups from around the world began arriving in the historically Muslim-inhabited regions of the former Soviet Union to "reclaim" their culturally Muslim brethren, it was not difficult for them to find interested audiences. Moreover, Muslim incomers from Turkey enjoyed the advantages of not being tainted with Wahhabi affiliations, sharing the family of Turkic languages with most of the former Soviet Muslims, and the historical legacy of pan-Turkist networks and ideals from the turn of the twentieth century. As a result, they were often welcome by dignitaries of official Islam too.¹¹ This was a relatively short-lived process in Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan, where governments quickly reasserted Soviet patterns of dictatorial control.

In the Russian Federation, the authorities passed a pluralist law in 1990 to introduce religious freedoms and re-legitimize religion after the Soviet experiment with state atheism. Moreover, most of the country's Muslim communities were from minority populations. As a result, even when Moscow began to push for a more centralized approach to religion toward the end of the 1990s,¹² the leaders of official Islam among the federation's various republics were slow to comply. Being able to establish direct

contacts with Muslim representatives from other countries was a dignifying aspect of their newly-earned religious autonomy after all.

Nursi's followers arrived to this relatively welcoming environment among former Soviet Muslims. Thanks to the closeness of the Turkish and Azeri languages, a dedicated cohort of *Risale-i Nur* readers emerged in Azerbaijan first. No less than Mustafa Sungur (1929-2012), arguably the most senior living student of Nursi at the time, oversaw the development of this cohort. Upon his encouragement, the Azerbaijani followers of Nursi began translating his works into Russian and some of them also moved to the Russian Federation along with others from Turkey. In 1997, Sungur himself traveled to Russia, met several of the federation's Muslim dignitaries such as Gainutdin, and presented them with translations of the *Risale-i Nur*. The response he received was highly positive. No less than Tatarstan's charismatic president Mintimer Shaymiyev would kiss the book that Sungur presented to him and touch it on his forehead as a sign of respect.¹³

Nevertheless, the 1997 "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" passed days after Sungur's visit to Russia, signaling the end of religious pluralism and a return to the late-Soviet model of regulation and containment in the country. This law limited legitimate religious activity to the oversight of officially registered organizations and introduced various barriers that rendered registration by religious groups of a non-Russian origin difficult. The return to regulation and containment in religious policy was to a large extent the result of a defensive approach to the challenge that various Christian missionary groups posed to the Orthodox Church's assumed centrality in Russian society. The Church establishment and its allies in the administration would at times turn their attention to Islam as a challenge to this centrality

too, but at least at the beginning, they were mainly concerned with warding off what they perceived as the intrusion of various foreign Christian denominations.¹⁴

The representatives of Russia's official Muslim institutions – *muftiates*, or directorates, at the federal, republic, and district levels – were not interested in countering the influence of religious groups from Turkey in a similarly aggressive fashion at the beginning. In most cases, the religious models that these groups from Turkey advocated did not differ fundamentally from the traditional Islam that the Russian muftiates attempted to revive. The Turkish groups' affiliation with the Hanafi legal school in Islamic jurisprudence and Naqshbandi Sufi origins in several cases offered a convenient alternative to the much dreaded Wahhabi intrusion. Moreover, owing to the aforementioned minority status and predominantly Turkic origins of Russia's Muslim communities, severing ties with Turkey could also be perceived as detrimental to the Russian muftiates' relative autonomy from Moscow. Thus, in 1998, a year after the introduction of the law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations," Gainutdin did not mind calling for Turkish support for the construction of the Kostroma Mosque while attending a conference in Istanbul that a foundation dedicated to supporting research on the *Risale-i Nur* organized.¹⁵

Nevertheless, this tolerant and even cooperative approach to Muslim groups from Turkey did not last through the millennium's first decade. The Russian muftiates grew organizationally over time and became more capable of regulating Muslim practice in their respective jurisdictions. As Roman Silant'ev controversially suggests, they became more jealous of the resources to which this jurisdiction entitled them too.¹⁶ On the other hand, when Russia returned to a highly centralized and illiberal regime under Putin's

administration, the muftiates lost their ability to disregard Moscow's directives and priorities. In the meanwhile, the broader Russian society developed strong anti-Muslim prejudices throughout the 1990s. And after 9/11, the Russian policy and opinion makers predominantly appropriated the fear narrative about Islam that emerged from America's "Global War on Terror."¹⁷ Given the xenophobic environment that this appropriation created, Muslim dignitaries of the Russian Federation had to distance themselves from their Turkish counterparts and keep silent when the Russian courts banned the *Risale-i Nur* in 2007. To understand the nature and implications of this environment, we need to examine the evolution of a global fear narrative about Islam in the aftermath of 9/11, the inclusion of Russia's Muslims in this narrative, and the narrative's appropriation in the Russian Federation to the background of already existing anti-Muslim prejudices.

The Global Fear Narrative

Islamophobia, or "anti-Muslim prejudice," was already a problem in Europe and North America in the 1990s,¹⁸ but the attacks of 9/11 in 2001 exponentially magnified the problem. The US and its allies declared a "Global War on Terror." And the seeming necessities of this global war subjected Muslims collectively to the scrutiny of security agencies as potential threat. As Mahmood Mamdani insightfully captures in the title of a 2004 book, yes, there were "good" Muslims, but given the perceived level of risk from what came to be known as "Islamist terrorism," each Muslim could be treated as a "bad" one until proven "good."¹⁹

Public concern about this perceived threat channeled large sums of funding to the investigation of extremist or terrorist organizations with a claim to Islam and of potential radicalization among various Muslim communities around the world. Scholars,

journalists, and government experts produced copious amounts of research on the subject. In the aggregate, however, such concentrated attention to the threat factor blew actual threats out of proportion and justified the reduction of public concern about Muslims to questions of “radical Islam,” “Islamic extremism,” or “Muslim terror.” Even when only a small and marginal faction in a particular population was radicalized, supported extremism, or participated in terrorist activity, the perception of threat associated with that faction magnified its activities into the one essentially significant consideration about the entire population under scrutiny.²⁰ Observers who studied otherwise meaningful issues concerning that population but did not pay significant attention to the threat factor risked being accused of having missed the perceived elephant in the room and ended up confining their research to the marginalized niche of an underfunded academic interest. Gradually, even the most diligent researchers and officials found themselves trapped in a vicious circle in which threat justified their work and the products of their work both justified and magnified the public’s sense of threat.²¹

The global securitization of public attention to Islam affected global perceptions about Russia’s Muslims too. Scholars observed the country’s traditionally Muslim communities as well as immigrant Muslims from elsewhere to detect, analyze, and avert various forms of threat. The cover of an otherwise conscientious book on the subject titled *Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union* illustrates the reductive consequences of this paranoid search. A photograph ornamenting the book’s cover exposes five unassuming Tajik girls wearing light-colored headscarves as they casually pose to the camera in a madrasah courtyard in Khujand, Tajikistan. The relevant section in the book does not suggest anything radical about them, but the cover design puts them right in the

box of “radical Islam.”²² The seemingly unfounded association of Muslim girls wearing headscarves and radicalism may have been an inadvertent oversight, but what makes such an oversight possible in the first place is the presence of an ill-defined category of “radical Islam” that draws publicity and attention through the magnifying effect of fear.

On the other hand, a *Newsweek* article by Denis Sokolov titled “Russia’s Other Pipeline: Migration and Radicalization in the North Caucasus” and published in 2016 highlights how research spills into a discursive environment characterized by fear. Sokolov is a diligent scholar of the North Caucasus who justifiably boasts having spent “seven years in the field ... researching transformation and migration.” Yet he writes in his Wilson Center-sponsored opinion piece:

The events that drove – and continue to drive – these movements [transformation and migration] are poorly understood. Yet understand them we must if we are to comprehend the larger developments in that part of the world – *including the growing number of fighters from this region prepared to strike within Russia and outside its borders.*²³

The events Sokolov refers to include post-Soviet urbanization, ethnic conflict, state formation, corruption, return to religion, and much more. In his broader work, he examines all of them and provides correctives to critical misunderstandings about the experience of North Caucasian Muslims.²⁴ Yet, what earns him *Newsweek* publicity remains the eventual interpretation of his research to provide insight about “the growing number of fighters from this region [who are] prepared to strike.”

Appropriation of the Fear Narrative in Russia

As elsewhere around the world, the global circulation of a fear narrative about Islam in the aftermath of 9/11 gave Russian authorities and the broader Russian public an opportunity to justify existing Islamophobic policies and attitudes. Muslims had long been an integral part of Russia's social fabric,²⁵ but two visible developments notably spurred anti-Muslim prejudice in the Russian Federation following the disintegration of the Soviet Union: the Chechen bid for independence and the influx of labor migrants from formerly Soviet and culturally Muslim countries. In his memoirs of the two Chechen wars, Khassan Baiev offers a firsthand account of being Chechen in Russia but outside the Caucasus in the 1980s and the early 1990s. His memories bring to life a gloomy picture of ethnic prejudice and discrimination against Muslim nationalities from the Caucasus region even before the First Chechen War in 1994.²⁶ When this war turned into a protracted conflict in the next decade, the involvement in it of transregional militant groups claiming to act in the name of Islam and the consequent terrorist activities organized by Chechen fighters further aggravated such ethnically-defined prejudices.²⁷ Meanwhile, at the turn of the 2000s, millions of Muslim natives of the former Soviet Union's economically dysfunctional "southern republics," such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, began traveling to major Russian cities. Here, they sought livelihood in substandard living and working conditions as illegal but systematically tolerated migrant workers. The cultural difference, poverty, and vulnerability of such a large and visible population of Muslims further contributed to growing anti-Muslim sentiments among the broader Russian public.²⁸

The Russian authorities and public observed the post-9/11 securitization of public attention to Islam in Europe and North America to the background of these existing anti-Muslim sentiments and with a sense of vindication. In the decade following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia reoriented its cultural aspirations toward Western Europe. And although its human rights violations in Chechnya did not trigger an effective response from governments of the former First World, they still stalled Russia's efforts to recast its image as a "Western" country. Consequently, when the US declared a "Global War on Terror" after 9/11, the Russian authorities and media were eager to relate al-Qaeda's attack on the US to the activities of Chechen fighters in Russia and to present Moscow's brutal suppression of Chechen separatism in the early-2000s as contributing to this global war.²⁹

Meanwhile, various factions in the Chechen resistance movement responded to government brutality in Chechnya by spreading their attacks to Russia's cosmopolitan cities. The resulting terror, which could now be presented as an extension of transregional "Islamist terrorism," began blurring the line between widespread prejudice against specific Muslim ethnicities and religiously defined anti-Muslim prejudice in the Russian Federation. Indigenous Muslims of Russia outside the Caucasus region who had better integrated into the Soviet society before its breakup, such as the Volga Tatars and Bashkirs, never experienced the same level of profiling and discrimination that their Caucasian and immigrant coreligionists did. In the aftermath of 9/11, however, the fear narrative about Islam shaped government policies and public opinion about Muslims more broadly and began to hurt all Muslims in the country.³⁰ Conservative representatives of the Orthodox Church and their followers in the broader Orthodox

population began to view Muslim presence in Russia as a demographically growing threat to the integrity of the social fabric of what they perceived to be an Orthodox Christian society.³¹

Given the strategic expediency, pervasiveness, and the power of the fear narrative, even Russia's official Muslim dignitaries had to adopt its language to gain recognition for their concerns on various issues and controversies. A statement by the Chief Mufti of Russia Talgat Tadzhuiddin illustrates this situation well. In November 2016, the Central Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of the Russian Federation (TsDUM-R), which Tadzhuiddin leads, cosponsored an international conference in Ufa on Islam and education. In an interview about this conference, Tadzhuiddin explained that in addition to the question of Islamic education, the participants addressed "the wave of extremism and terrorism that has swept over nearly the entire world of Islam." Then, he called for more government investment in the field of training Muslim religious personnel in Russia as a measure to avoid the "recruitment of Russian [Muslims] as terrorists," which, he implied, is what happens when Russian Muslims learn Islam from sources that are not controlled by the Russian state. The chief mufti wanted Muslim men of religion to be trained in Russian seminaries and to preach and edify Russian Muslims in mosques supervised by Russian government agencies, that is, by his office.

It may be unfair to suggest that Tadzhuiddin remains blind to the possible benefits of providing religious education to Russia's Muslims for non-security related purposes. Nevertheless, at least while justifying government investment in such education, he confined his argument to the necessity of curtailing radicalization. In doing so, he first reduced Islam and Muslims to a potential threat to be restrained, then offered state-

supervised Muslim institutions, such as religious seminaries and mosques, to restrain them. Thus, the TASS caption of the interview would pick the following quote by the chief mufti as the highlight of the interview: “In the war with terrorism, it is important to explain the true nature of Islam and faith.”³²

Another example of the dependence of Russia’s Muslim dignitaries on the fear narrative to steer public opinion and secure official support can be observed in a controversy about the language of mosque sermons in the Russian Republic of Tatarstan. In August 2016, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUMRT) decided to require imams to give sermons exclusively in Tatar in Tatarstan. This appears to have been a nationalist move to encourage Muslim Tatars to learn and use the Tatar language by excluding the Russian language from their religious rituals. When asked about making exceptions for a few designated mosques in the republic to offer Russian-language sermons, the Mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan Kamil Samigullin, who heads DUMRT, categorically rejected the idea and said: “This is the Republic of Tatarstan. If not in Tatar, then in what?”³³

But then, in January 2017, Gabdulla Galiullin, who had served as the first head of DUMRT after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and now serves as a mosque imam, publicly denounced Samigullin’s decision in a Friday sermon. A group of imams from the city of Kazan, he said, had met to discuss “the war against terrorism and extremism in Kazan and in Russia.” Claiming to represent the collective opinion of these imams, he averred that giving sermons both in Tatar and in Russian would make “a huge and significant contribution to the war of Tatarstan’s religious personnel with terrorism and extremism.” In the cities of Tatarstan, he explained, there were many Muslims, such as

the Central Asian immigrants, who spoke Russian but not Tatar. Giving sermons only in the Tatar language would amount to leaving those immigrants to the uncontested influence of extremists, who tried to reach out to their audience with printed and online literature in Russian. “Before us stands a task,” Galiullin declared, evoking the authority of no less than Putin, “on which the President V. V. Putin has said: ‘War on terror is a shared matter.’” Then, Galiullin ended on an intimidating note: “And whoever stands on the way of this war with terrorism and extremism, regardless of whether he is an imam, supervisor over imams, or mufti, will be an accomplice of terrorism and extremism in Russia.”³⁴

This controversy over the language of sermons could be conceived as a disagreement over the nature of Tatar nationalism. Or it can be related to a preexisting personal feud between Galiullin and Samigullin.³⁵ Regardless of the actual motives and agendas that underlined this controversy, however, Galiullin found it expedient to frame his argument in the context of the fear narrative, because this is what works in post-9/11 Russia. The fear narrative’s self-confirming claims about the perils of Islam defines public opinion, silences or veils alternative approaches, resonates among the country’s decision makers, and mobilizes state-controlled resources more reliably than any alternative. It is in the context of this dependence on the fear narrative that we need to understand how the dignitaries of official Islam in Russia withdrew their support for the *Risale-i Nur* as prosecutors built a case against it by 2007.

The Ban

Russia’s gradual return to the regulation and containment model in religious policies after 1997 corresponded to a secularist military intervention in Turkey, known as

the February 28th process. Turkish intelligence services actively persecuted the members of many religious groups in this period and reached out to their counterparts in other countries, including Russia, to do the same.³⁶ This brought Nursi's followers under the radar of Russia's security establishment primarily as part of a concern related to the activities of Turkish Muslim religious networks such as Süleymanlılar³⁷ and especially the followers of the Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941). Most analysts, including some representatives of official Islam, such as Valiulla Yakupov, a prominent critique of foreign influences among Russia's Muslims who was assassinated in 2012, understood that Gülenist and Nurcu were not the same. However, they were often confused to think of the Gülenists as yet another branch of the Nurcu network and representative of the *Risale-i Nur* movement broadly due to their size and visibility.³⁸

That outside observers fell into this confusion is understandable until the 2010s when the Gülenists themselves claimed Nursi's legacy and the broader Nursian community did not definitively disown them.³⁹ However, the movement that Gülen originated needs to be distinguished from the network of readers inspired by Nursi's works. While the Nurcus focus exclusively on reading the *Risale-i Nur* and disseminating Nursi's teachings as expressed therein, Gülen's followers never attributed the same level of authority to the *Risale-i Nur*. Especially as the volume of Gülen's publications and recorded speeches increased over the years, they relegated the *Risale-i Nur* to a secondary position and focused primarily on disseminating Gülen's views through a centrally-regulated network of institutions, such as media organizations or high-quality lay schools that targeted elite and promising students. This departure from the centrality of the *Risale-i Nur* and the promotion of Gülen instead caused much consternation among the

broader Nursian community starting already in the 1970s. However only when Gülen encouraged his followers to publish a linguistically simplified version of the *Risale-i Nur*, senior Nursi who considered attempts to simplify Nursi's language to be tantamount to its distortion jointly, publicly, and definitively disowned Gülen at the beginning of the 2010s.⁴⁰

In the Russian Federation, the Gülenists' institutionalization helped authorities identify them and terminate their activities by denying them visa and confiscating their schools in the early 2000s. Nursi's followers, on the other hand, did not have institutionalized affiliations. While this did not save them from being confused with the Gülenists, it rendered their identification and elimination by the Russian authorities more difficult. Moreover, since the 1990s, many Russian Muslims had also become familiar with Nursi's works and read them as a source of spiritual guidance. As a result, prosecutors had to establish cases against Nursi's readers based on the possession and distribution of his works, which often failed until 2007. Even though the prosecutors treated translations from the *Risale-i Nur* as proscribed literature and harassed their readers with searches, interrogations, and protracted trials, the initial persecution of the Nursi often remained inconclusive.⁴¹

The endorsement that several Russian Muslim dignitaries extended to the *Risale-i Nur*, both publicly and in court-solicited reports, deflected government pressure on its readers in the period before 2007. Among those dignitaries were the imams of several prominent mosques, the heads of the Muslim spiritual boards of a few republics and districts in Russia, prominent Russian Muslim intellectuals, and the rector of the Russian

Islamic University Rāfyq Mōhāmmātshin.⁴² In 2001, for instance, the Chief Mufti Tadzhuddin “confirmed” on behalf of TsDUM-R that:

the works of the well-known scholar of Islam Bediuzzaman Said Nursi ... are exclusively scholarly commentaries on the Qur’an that explain the revelations of the Almighty Creator and rely on modern scientific achievements ... These books are far from religious extremism and fanaticism. They call to faith in One God and to loving Him and His creatures – all people, regardless of nationality, race, or creed. These works and the people who uphold them ... absolutely do not call for violence, national and interreligious strife, or the subversion of the foundations of society and state.⁴³

Similarly, in response to an inquiry by the association that oversaw the construction of the Kostroma mosque, Gainutdin affirmed in 2004 that Nursi’s works were “apolitical.” They aimed at “inspiring spiritual values” through enlightenment and by expounding “the profound meanings of the Holy Qur’an.” Gainutdin also declared that Nursi’s works contained no “elements of extremism” and lent his support to their translation into Russian, provided that the translations were submitted for inspection in advance.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, once the justice system banned Nursi’s works in 2007, the country’s senior Muslim representatives could not endorse them publicly any longer. The legal pretext for this ban was provided by the “Federal Law on Counteracting Extremist (*ekstremistskii*) Activity” that Russian law makers passed in 2002 by borrowing the notion of “extremism” from the post-9/11 American discourse on Islam.⁴⁵ The plight of

Jehovah's Witnesses is probably the best known example of the consequences of this law, as it constituted the basis for the denomination's disbandment by Russia's Supreme Court in July 2017 after years of prosecution.⁴⁶ Yet the majority of legal action pursuant to Russia's 2002 counter-extremism law and various amendments to it have targeted Muslims, starting with the proscription of fifteen Muslim organizations, including al-Qaeda and Taliban but also borderline movements such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Muslim Brothers, as "terrorist" in 2003.⁴⁷

The prosecution of the alleged members of Hizb ut-Tahrir between 2003 and 2006 reveals some of the workings of the fear narrative underneath the overall handling of Islam-related cases by the Russian justice system after the passage of the extremism law in 2002. It also explains why the 2007 ban would render public endorsement of the *Risale-i Nur* by representatives of official Islam nearly impossible. Hizb ut-Tahrir is an international political organization or social movement network that aims to unite all Muslims under a reestablished caliphate and claims to be pursuing its goals through exclusively non-violent means. However, in its decision to ban Hizb ut-Tahrir in 2002, the Russian Supreme Court reasoned that the organization's objective to establish a worldwide caliphal state would require overthrowing the existing international system – and therefore the Russian state – through eventual use of violence.⁴⁸ This obviously meant the criminalization of a group based on what its objectives supposedly entailed rather than what its activities included. After receiving several complaints from individuals jailed by smaller courts because of the Supreme Court decision, Russia's Memorial Human Rights Center decided to challenge it. Since the court's decision was based on an analysis of the literature published by Hizb ut-Tahrir, they contacted Shaykh

Nafigulla Ashirov, the head of the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Asian Russia, to comment on how the average Muslim reader would receive and interpret this literature. Ashirov concluded that nothing in the specific books submitted to him for evaluation would incite Muslim readers to violence or the overthrowing of authorities. But Moscow's public prosecutor countered Memorial's move with a "legal socio-psychological expert analysis" that concluded that Ashirov's report, as published on the Memorial website, might be evaluated as propaganda material to popularize Hizb ut-Tahrir, and hence, he ordered its removal.⁴⁹ Since then, numerous complaints and appeals to Russian courts to revise the ban have been consistently declined on procedural grounds, including the pretext that individuals who were sentenced for being members of Hizb ut-Tahrir were not a party to the case.⁵⁰

The genuineness of Hizb ut-Tahrir's claim to non-violence is an open ended question in scholarship,⁵¹ and weighing in on that debate is both beyond the scope of this article and irrelevant to its premise. The process that resulted in the initial Supreme Court ban and the subsequent imprisonment of several alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir members by smaller courts reflects the distorting effects of the fear narrative regardless. The employment of social scientists to manage religions was a practice that late-Soviet authorities institutionalized.⁵² As Russia returned to the late-Soviet model of containment and regulation in religious policy after 1997, its courts and executive state organs began to rely heavily on lay expertise as the ultimate authority to assess religious groups too. Yet, as Dmitrii Dubrovskii suggests, the heavy reliance of courts especially on philological and psychological expert opinions to evaluate decontextualized literature in criminal trials itself builds prejudice into the Russian justice system.⁵³ The prosecutors

choose the experts, limit the scope of their evaluation with targeted questions, and when religious representatives offer contradicting insight, they can be disregarded easily or even be accused of complicity as in the case of Ashirov.

The systematic prioritization of incriminating expert reports played a crucial role in enabling the 2007 ban on Nursi's works too. The early lay reports on the *Risale-i Nur* actually tended to be positive or inconclusive.⁵⁴ When Tatarstan's public prosecutor in Kazan Kafil' Fakhrazeevich Amirov initiated a case against Nursi's readers in 2005, he failed to establish "direct intent to incite religious hatred" as the 2002 law required, and the case was dismissed in 2006. Yet the Amirov persisted. Amid highly publicized police activity against Nursi's readers that demonstrated the effects of a scare campaign, he moved the case to the Koptevo District Court in Moscow, where many of the Russian translations of Nursi's treatises had been printed. Russia's Ombudsman for Human Rights Vladimir Lukin tried to intervene with an analysis that concluded that Nursi's works did not violate the law. However, the prosecutors were able to produce more consistently negative expert opinions in Moscow. Thanks to these reports, Amirov secured a ban on fourteen treatises of the *Risale-i Nur* as "extremist literature." An appeals court upheld this decision the following year, and since then, other courts extended the ban to the rest of the translations of Nursi's works, reaching about 60 titles by 2015.⁵⁵

An evaluation of the expert reports that constitute the evidential basis for the court cases that began in Kazan and moved to Moscow illustrates the biased nature of the legal reasoning that designated Nursi's writings as "extremist literature." All the problems that Dubrovskii identifies with the use of philological and psychological expert opinions in

criminal cases are identifiable in the way that these reports were obtained and used. The prosecutors framed the experts' analyses with questions that referred to particular laws and required the experts to scan the texts under examination for decontextualized statements or phrases that could be interpreted as violating the cited laws.⁵⁶ Yet, even as the quality and accuracy of such analyses remain tenuous, the academic titles of their authors put authority behind their conclusions. And importantly, once the reports were presented to the courts, judges considered their conclusions in a discursive environment that associated all Islamic religious influences beyond the boundaries of official or traditional Islam with radicalism.⁵⁷

Having originated in Turkey, the *Risale-i Nur* and its readers could not be a part of "traditional Islam" in Russia. However, any informed student of Turkish Islam and the Nurcu movement within it would grant the absurdity of associating the *Risale-i Nur* with extremism. Nursi's followers consider safeguarding public peace and security as well as the avoidance of involvement in politics and government administration among the central tenets of his teachings.⁵⁸ This is why even though secularist Turkish authorities had prosecuted Nursi's works and followers in upwards of a thousand court trials until the 1990s, with the exception of two minor and politically-charged cases, none of these trials had resulted in a noteworthy conviction.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in the context of the appropriation of the post-9/11 fear narrative in Russia, Muslim groups with non-Russian origins such as Nursi's followers were a priori framed as radical or extremist and bore the nearly impossible burden of proving their innocence.

For those familiar with Turkish politics, the activities of Gülen's followers, including the involvement of some among them in an aborted coup in July 2016, may

appear to contradict the above observation about the apolitical and benign nature of the Nursian community. This is why it needs to be highlighted that although the *Risale-i Nur* influenced Gülen, he and his followers parted ways with the broader Nursian community over time, and this departure led to their eventual denunciation by the Nurcu network already in the early 2010s. As a result, the Nursian community attributes many of the initiatives and activities of Gülen's followers, including their involvement in government affairs and the 2016 coup attempt, not to Nursi but to an egregious breach of Nursi's teachings. The Turkish government also acknowledged this distinction between the followers of Gülen and Nursi when the Turkish Office of Religious Affairs printed Nursi's works in 2014 while simultaneously prohibiting Gülen-related publishers from doing so.⁶⁰

Thus, as in several other cases in which the Russian courts have proclaimed certain texts as "extremist literature," such as a popular Qur'an translation by Elmir Kuliyeu or the official international website of Jehovah's Witnesses, the attribution of criminal extremism to Nursi's treatises tests the boundaries of reason and common sense.⁶¹ Beside the above-mentioned structural problems related to the initiation and framing of expert reports by prosecutors, such disconnect with reality often results from the inability of lay court experts to understand the context or even the content of the texts they evaluate.⁶² One of the early expert reports on Nursi's works, a linguistic evaluation commissioned by Tatarstan's Public Prosecutor in 2005, illustrates how experts are selected without regard to even an elementary understanding of the context. Among the tasks of this report's author was a comparative analysis of fifteen of Nursi's treatises and the Qur'an, for which the reporter used a Russian-language translation of the Qur'an. In

other words, a linguist who was unfamiliar with the context of Nursi's works or Islam more broadly and who had to rely on a translation of the Qur'an to access its content was commissioned to assess the compatibility of Nursi's works with the Qur'an. She concluded within one month that Nursi's treatises violated the law, among other reasons, for claiming to expound the meanings of the Qur'an. In the linguistic expert's opinion, Nursi's claim amounted to asking his readers to consult the *Risale-i Nur* instead of the Qur'an in order to attain "'true' faith."⁶³

On the other hand, a psychological evaluation commissioned by the same prosecutor in 2005 demonstrates the consequences of the author's inability to understand the content. The author, an assistant professor of applied psychology with no expertise in Islam, read through twelve treatises and concluded that nine of them violated the law by "deploying" stratagems to "influence personality" and by promoting the notion of an "absolute truth," which, according to the author, reduced individuals' "ability to think critically and perceive reality adequately." She found Nursi faulty for aiming to convince his readers that his "religious doctrine ... [was] not an abstract theory used to provide an interpretation of reality but the reality itself." Such certitude, according to her psychological evaluation, might "cause exclusiveness and intra-group interdependence," build "negative attitudes to all other common social, cultural, and religious norms and perceptions," and lead to "isolation from reality, thereby contributing to the formation of behavioral deviations (deviations from the norm)." In other words, the author took the presence and objectivity of a scientifically accessible reality and certain socially acceptable norms for granted. Then, she argued that because Nursi's "religious doctrine" deviated from that reality and those norms, his claim to "absolute truth" must be false,

pushing his readers into isolation from reality and a pathological mental state. The subjectivity of such arguments aside, the author did not even understand Nursi's narrative, at one point confusing his criticism of positivist naturalism with claims about "the entire material world [being] an illusion" and the non-existence of "all thoughts, desires and actions that are not prescribed by the *Qur'an* and the *Risale-i Nur*."⁶⁴ A position about the illusory nature of the material world has a place in the history of Islamic thought, but the irony here is that Nursi actually refutes that position in his writings.⁶⁵

These two early examples represent the tone of many of the subsequent expert opinions, including the one that led to the eventual ban on Nursi's works in 2007. The authors of this eventual evaluation, four specialists of psychology and linguistics from the Moscow-based Russian Academy of Sciences, call their report a "Scientific Examination." Using the language of the 2002 law, they conclude that the thirteen works they studied foment "religious discord," "negative attitudes toward individuals," and "the senses of superiority and inferiority of citizens based on their religious convictions."⁶⁶

To be clear, the courts received positive evaluations of Nursi's works too, but as a meta-evaluation of twenty-one expert reports from the 2005 Kazan trials demonstrate, such positive assessments were gradually eliminated as prosecutors aggregated them on the way to a verdict. The authors of this meta-evaluation, two Moscow-based academics working in the field of psychology, dismiss the four opinions written by Muslim experts outright as biased and/or one-sided. They deem some of the other positive reports impartial but still dismiss all of them either as one-sided or for reaching positive conclusions by contextualizing the texts. They criticize some of the negative reports too

but either for blatantly partial language or for failing to connect their conclusions to their analyses sufficiently. The opinions that receive the authors' relatively unqualified approval are the ones that reach a negative conclusion with an effort to expose the "hidden messages of the text" and without any attention to context.⁶⁷

Several English-language studies in the past two decades have argued that the Russian traditions of studying the "peoples of the East" have avoided the flaws of Saidian Orientalism. The underlying rationale in highlighting these exceptions to Edward Said's paradigm seems to be an insistence on the self-consciously benign nature of the Russian scholarship on the "peoples of the East" due to Russia's own ambiguous place between Europe and the East.⁶⁸ What this argument misses is that the very secular authority to speak about Islam that tsarist and Soviet scholars have accumulated over a century is what enables lay experts to claim to study and understand Muslims objectively today.⁶⁹ Being further institutionalized in the late-Soviet practice of relying on social scientists to regulate and contain religions, this claim offers immunity from allegations of prejudice to court experts and, by extension, to the courts that rely on their opinions. Yet the experts, who often lack even preliminary knowledge of Islam, write their reports by responding to prosecutorial inquiries that demand them to merely pick sides in the Russianized version of a global anti-Muslim fear narrative where each Muslim is boxed in a "good Muslim, bad Muslim" binary. On this discursive plane, "bad" or its variations such as "radical" and "extremist" stand for "danger." It raises a powerful alert about security threats supposedly coming from Islam and Muslims. And the clamor of that alert silences positive expert evaluations or, importantly, the voices of Muslim representatives.

In the Microcosm of Kostroma

It was the effects of this clamor that made the opening of the Kostroma Memorial Mosque such an awkward moment. The Muslims of Kostroma had approached Gainutdin to build a mosque in their city as early as in 1988⁷⁰ and registered as the “Muslim Religious Association of Kostroma (MRA)” in 1992. In 1995, during the Russian Federation’s initial period of religious pluralism, the Kostroma city administration gave the MRA the deserted clubhouse of a factory to use as a place of worship.⁷¹ The community was not financially strong enough to build a new mosque yet, but this changed with the involvement of Turkish donors after Gainutdin’s call in 1998. In the following year, the famous Turkish architect Necip Dinç designed a mosque project inspired by the Prophetic Mosque in Medina and with various symbolic details reflecting Nursi’s life. While the MRA was originally promised ten thousand square meters of land for this purpose, by the time Dinç drew his blueprints and ordered a model to be built, the allotment was reduced to four thousand square meters. Still, with support from the then mayor of Kostroma Boris Korobov, the MRA began construction in 2003.⁷²

The construction work immediately led to an outcry among conservative Orthodox residents of Kostroma who viewed the looming image of a large Muslim edifice with towering minarets an affront to what they claimed to be an “Orthodox Christian city.” In a petition to the regional authorities, they even suggested that the mosque initiative was “a step toward the aggressive intrusion of Wahhabites from the Caucasus.”⁷³ The MRA took several measures to dodge such negative attention and avert allegations of radicalism due to foreign, that is Turkish, support. Instead of naming the mosque after Nursi, they came up with the name “The Memorial Mosque” to highlight

the centuries-long Muslim presence in the city. They engaged local architects to design a façade that would look more authentic in Russia. They lowered the height of their minarets below the lowest church bell tower in Kostroma. And when asked about finances, they mentioned the Turkish businessmen in the city as just one of the funders among many.⁷⁴

Yet the pressure continued. It was rumored that a massive administrative building erected right in front of the future mosque site was meant to screen it from the main road. When Korobov's successor Viktor Andreevich Shershunov, who was highly supportive of the MRA, died in a traffic accident in 2007, the city administration turned completely against the mosque and stopped construction in 2009. This led to various litigations between the MRA and the city administration. Partly thanks to Gainutdin's personal intervention, the MRA was able to secure a court order and restart construction only in 2013. But the city administration intervened again in 2014 by not extending the construction permit and then repeatedly fining MRA for building without permit. By mid-2015, the MRA had accumulated over a hundred thousand rubles of fines, and moreover, its resources had dwindled as relations between Russia and Turkey soared due to the two countries' opposing positions in the Syrian conflict. The Kostroma authorities avoided open confrontation with the MRA in this period but stalled its work with various procedural obstacles. They even tried to take the mosque site back from the MRA through litigation, but when this failed, they focused on delaying the completion of the construction indefinitely.⁷⁵ Yet, Gainutdin's persistent interventions and another court order in 2015 enabled MRA to finish the mosque in one final push and open it for service by the end of 2016.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, relations between Turkey and Russia improved again as American engagement with Kurdish forces in Northern Syria pressed Turkey to seek new allies despite its ongoing cooperation with the US in the region. It seems that Gainutdin wanted to take advantage of this rapprochement to secure a more legitimate presence for the Kostroma Memorial Mosque by organizing a highly-attended and publicized opening ceremony. Thus, he invited Görmez to Kostroma in May 2017, immediately after Putin and the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met in Sochi to fix their relations and seek ways of cooperation in Syria.⁷⁷

Yet, in this diplomatic maneuver, Gainutdin seems to have disregarded the significance of Nursi for the Turkish side of the Kostroma mosque project. Görmez, on the other hand, would not do the same: He was aware of the support that the Nursian community had given to this project. He personally appreciated Nursi as a scholar of Islam. And the Turkish government wanted to maintain good relations with Nursi as it clamped down on the Gülenists after the 2016 coup attempt. Thus, Görmez carefully evoked Nursi's name in the Friday sermon that he gave in Kostroma, and Gainutdin did the same, albeit in passing, in his official statement about the opening ceremony. Nevertheless, the name of the mosque in Kostroma remained the "Kostroma Memorial Mosque" to the disappointment of the Nursian community,⁷⁸ and the Russian courts continued to sentence Nursi's readers for possessing the banned Russian-language translations of his works.⁷⁹ The post-9/11 global fear narrative about Islam as appropriated in Russia's public discourse and judicial system was by now too entrenched to be overcome by one diplomatic gesture.

Conclusion

The conspicuous eradication of Nursi's legacy from the Kostroma Memorial Mosque reflects the broader transformations concerning Islam and Muslims in Russian politics and society since the 1990s. Religious pluralism characterized Russian politics in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of communism and facilitated the revival of religions, including Islam. Local Muslims in Kostroma conceived the idea of a large congregational mosque and Nursi's followers travelled to the city in search of the legacy of their esteemed teacher in this period. Yet the genuine celebration of pluralism did not last long. Concerns about challenges to the perceived centrality of Orthodoxy in Russian society and the centralization of political power under Putin gradually brought back the late-Soviet model of regulation and containment in managing religions. Homegrown anti-Muslim prejudices and the convenient appropriation of the global post-9/11 fear narrative further aggravated the effects of this more restrictive model on Muslim experiences in Russia.

Such restrictions did not amount to the overt repression and condemnation of religions as was the case in the Soviet Union, but the difference here was in the degree to which the regulation and containment model was implemented, not in the model itself. The Russian Federation accorded a much larger space to religion than the late-Soviet Union, but it still maintained the prerogative to define and regulate the boundaries of that contained space. Moreover, in the case of Islam, it policed those boundaries with augmented severity. This severity was a product of anti-Muslim prejudice and in turn justified it too. Initially, anti-Muslim prejudice evolved locally in the Russian Federation, but the appropriation of the broader post-9/11 fear narrative about Islam aggravated its

consequences. The delays in the construction of the Kostroma Memorial Mosque was one such consequence. And the ban on Nursi's works as well as the persecution of his readers remains to be another.

¹ İhsan Atasoy, *Üstad'ın Manevi Evladı, Fena Fi'n-nur: Mustafa Sungur* (Istanbul: Nesil, 2009), 253; "Said Nursi'yi Misafir Eden Kosturma Camii İbadete Açılıyor," *Risale Haber*, 05 May 2017, accessed online at <http://www.risalehaber.com/said-nursiyi-misafir-eden-kosturma-camii-ibadete-aciliyor-300544h.htm>; and "V Kostrome otkryli stroivshuiusia pochti 13 let mechet'," *7x7*, 6 May 2017, accessed online at <https://7x7-journal.ru/item/94711>.

² "Memorial'naia mechet' v Kostrome," *Musul'mane Rossii*, 5 May 2017, accessed online at <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/event/12309>.

³ Ravil Gainutdin, "Zakliuchenie Sovet muftiev Rossii," No. 12, 20 December 2004.

⁴ "Kostroma Caminin Hutbesindeki Said Nursi Vurgusu," *Risale Haber*, 06 May 2017, accessed online at <http://www.risalehaber.com/kostroma-caminin-hutbesindeki-said-nursi-vurgusu-300606h.htm>.

⁵ Vitalii Ponomarev, "Rossiiskie spetssluzhby protiv "Risale-i Nur": 2001-2012," (Moscow: Pravozashchitnii tsentr "Memorial", 2012, accessed online at <https://memohrc.org/specials/novyy-doklad-pc-memorial-rossiyskie-specsluzhby-protiv-risale-i-nur>) offers a detailed account of this ban and its consequences. Also see, among many reports on the subject by the Norwegian human rights organization *Forum 18*, Geraldine Fagan, "Officials Deny Harassing Muslim Women's Study Group," *Forum 18*, 11 July 2017, at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=992; and Victoria Arnold, "Ten Years' Imprisonment for Religious Meetings?," *Forum 18*, 26 January 2017, at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2250.

⁶ For an accessible biography of Said Nursi in English, see Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005). For an introduction to the *Risale-i Nur*, see Colin Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light* (Berlin: Gerlach, 2013)

⁷ Mustafa Tuna, "At the Vanguard of Contemporary Muslim Thought: Reading Said Nursi into the Islamic Tradition," in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2017 28(3): 311-40.

⁸ See Ali Mermer, "Aspects of Religious Identity: The Nurcu Movement in Turkey Today" (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Durham, 1985); and M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially 151-79.

⁹ Eren Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), especially 298-364. Also see Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev* (London: Hurst & Co., 2000); and Devin Dewese, "Islam and the Legacy of Sovietology: A Review Essay on Yaacov Ro'i's *Islam in the Soviet Union*," in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2002 13(3): 298-330.

¹⁰ Dmitrii Makarov and Rafik Mukhametshin, "Official and Unofficial Islam," in *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Hilary Pilkington and Galina M. Yemelianova (New York:

RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 117-63; and Roland Dannreuther, "Russian Discourses and Approaches to Islam and Islamism," in *Russia and Islam: State, Society and Radicalism*, ed. Roland Dannreuther and Luke March (New York: Routledge, 2010), 9-25.

¹¹ Atasoy, *Mustafa Sungur*, 239-75, especially 247. For examples of earlier pan-Turkist connections, see James H. Meyer, "Turkic Worlds: Community Representation and Collective Identity in the Russian and Ottoman Empires, 1870-1914" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Brown University, 2007).

¹² See Geraldine Fagan, *Believing in Russia: Religious Policy after Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), especially 53-65.

¹³ Atasoy, *Mustafa Sungur*, 243-53.

¹⁴ Fagan, *Believing*, 60-116.

¹⁵ "Kosturma'da Tarihi Gün," *Barla Platformu*, 5 May 2017, accessed online at <https://barlaplatformu.com/2017/05/05/kosturmada-tarihi-gun>.

¹⁶ Roman Silant'ev, *Soviet muftiev Rossii: istoriia odnoi fitny* (Moscow: RISI, 2015)

¹⁷ On the development of anti-Muslim prejudices in the Russian Federation, see Galina M. Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey* (Houndmills; New York: Palgrave, 2002), 137-93; E. C. Il'ina, A. V. Korotayev and D. A. Khalturina eds., *Islamofobiia v Moskve* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ippolitova, 2003); Alexander Verkhovsky, "Russian Approaches to Radicalism and 'Extremism' as Applied to Nationalism and Religion," in *Russia and Islam: State, Society and Radicalism*, ed. Roland Dannreuther and Luke March (New York: Routledge, 2010), 26-43, Fagan, *Believing*, 53-171; and Marlene Laruelle and Natalia Yudina, "Islamophobia in Russia: Trends and Societal Context," in *Religion and Violence in Russia: Context, Manifestations, and Policy*, ed. Olga Oliker (New York: CSIS, 2018), 43-62.

¹⁸ Runnymede Trust, "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All," (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997, at www.runnymedetrust.org/companies/17/74/Islamophobia-A-Challenge-for-Us-All.html).

¹⁹ See Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004); and Andrew Shryock ed. *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 1-25.

²⁰ For an insightful critique of this magnification effect, see Kurzman Charles, *The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²¹ For an open letter against the "dystopic characterizations of Islam" by several scholars working on Central Asia, where similar dynamics are under way, see "Understanding Islamic Radicalization in Central Asia," *The Diplomat*, 20 January 2017, accessed online at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/01/understanding-islamic-radicalization-in-central-asia> on 1 February 2017. For a broader critique of how states tend to perceive reality in reductive ways, see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

²² Galina M. Yemelianova ed. *Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union* (London: Routledge, 2010).

²³ Denis Sokolov, "Russia's Other Pipeline: Migration and Radicalization in the North Caucasus," in *Kennan Cable*, no. 17 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2016). Republished as Denis Sokolov, "Putin's Savage War against

Russia's 'New Muslims'," *Newsweek*, 20 August 2016, accessed online at <http://www.newsweek.com/putin-savage-war-against-russia-new-muslims-490783>.

Emphasis mine.

²⁴ D. V. Sokolov and I. V. Starodubrovskaja, *Istoki konfliktov na Severnom Kavkaze* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom "Delo", 2015), 78-128, provides a more detailed account of Sokolov's research.

²⁵ For a survey of Muslim presence in Russia, see Galina M. Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey* (Houndmills; New York: Palgrave, 2002).

²⁶ Khassan Baiev, *The Oath: A Surgeon under Fire*, ed. Nicholas Daniloff and Ruth Daniloff (New York: Walker & Company, 2003), 1-101.

²⁷ On the Chechen independence movement and its radicalization, see Glen. E. Howard ed. *Volatile Borderland: Russia and the North Caucasus* (Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation, 2011); Sokolov and Starodubrovskaja, *Istoki konfliktov*. For an example of the impact of this radicalization on the perception of Muslims in Russia, see N.A., *Severny'i Kavkaz pod ten'iu Vakhkhabizma: o radikal'nom islame na stranitsakh gazety "Severnyi Kavkaz" 1991-2008*, 2 vols. (Nal'chik: Izdatel'stvo M. i V. Kotliarovykh, 2009).

²⁸ Sergei Abashin, "Migration from Central Asia to Russia in the New Model of World Order," in *Russian Politics and Law*, 2014 52(6): 8-23; Andrew Foxall, *Ethnic Relations in Post-Soviet Russia: Russians and Non-Russian's in the North Caucasus* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Sophie Roche, "The Moscow Cathedral Mosque in the Life of Migrants from Central Asia," accessed online at <https://youtu.be/V3dizJryzyY> (Presentation at George Washington University, 21 February 2017).

²⁹ Field observation in Russia between August 2001 and June 2002; Tuomas Forsberg and Graeme P. Herd, "The EU, Human Rights, and the Russo-Chechen Conflict," in *Political Science Quarterly*, 2005 120(3): 455-78; John Russell, "Terrorists, bandits, spooks and thieves: Russian demonisation of the Chechens before and since 9/11," in *Third World Quarterly*, 2005 26(1): 101-16; and Emma Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

³⁰ Roche, "The Moscow Cathedral Mosque".

³¹ See, for instance, the claims of the Moscow based Archbishop Dmitrii Smirnov on the subject. "U menia ochen' tiazhelaia ruka," *Lenta.ru*, 2 March 2016, accessed at <https://lenta.ru/video/2016/03/02/smironov>; and "Miagkaia islamizatsiia Rossii ili otkuda berutsia 'dukhovnye skrepy,'" *IslamNews*, 8 January 2017, accessed at <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-515908.html>.

³² Interview with Talgat Tadzhuiddin by Avgust Iakovlev, "V bor'be s terrorizmom vazhno ob'iasniat', chto takoe islam i vera," *TASS*, 17 November 2016, accessed online at <http://tass.ru/opinions/interviews/3790158>.

³³ "U nas Respublika Tatarstan. Esli ne na tatarskom, to na kakom," *BiznesOnline*, 11 August 2016, accessed online at <http://m.business-gazeta.ru/article/319489>.

³⁴ "Pervyi muftii Tatarstana otstupil ot natsional-islama DUM RT," *IslamNews*, January 13 2017, accessed online at <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-516455.html>.

³⁵ On this feud, see "Muftii Tatarstana Gusman khazrat Iskhakov ushel v otstavku," *Tatcenter*, 13 January 2011, accessed online at <http://tatcenter.ru/article/95654/>; and "Gabdulla Galiullin: 'Möftigä katı basım bulgan'," *Azatliq Radiosi*, 14 January 2011, accessed online at <http://www.azatliq.org/a/2276037.html>.

³⁶ Field observation in Russia between August 2001 and June 2002.

³⁷ There is little written on this movement. The best general consideration of the subject can be found in M. Ali Kirman, "Türkiye'de Yeni Bir Dinî Cemaat Olarak 'Süleymancılık'" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Ankara University, 2000).

³⁸ See for example, Valiulla M. Iakupov, *Neofitsial'nyi islam ve Tatarstane: dvizheniia, techeniia, sekty* (Kazan: Iman, 2003); and Rais Suleimanov, "Religioznoe vliianie islamskikh stran Vostoka na Musul'man Tatarstana v postsovetskii period," in *Mir Islama*, 2015 (3): 40-56.

³⁹ See Atasoy, *Mustafa Sungur*, 234 and 475.

⁴⁰ See Metin Karabaşoğlu, *Saykal: Risale-i Nur'a Husumetin Kısa Tarihi* (Istanbul: Selis, 2017), especially 19-70; and "Bediüzzaman'ın Talebesinden Gülen'e Son Uyarı," *Sabah*, 17 March 2014; "Risaleme Dokunma," accessed online at <http://www.risalemedokunma.com>. For critical comparisons of Nursi's teachings and the movement that Gülen inspired, see Kâzım Güleçyüz, *Cemaat ve İktidar* (İstanbul: Yeni Asya, 2015), 103-19; and "Said Nursi ve Fethullah Gülen Hareketi Arasındaki 17 Fark," *Risale Ajans*, 30 December 2013, accessed online at <http://www.risaleajans.com/nur-alemi/said-nursi-ve-fethullah-gulen-hareketi-arasindaki--fark>.

⁴¹ Ponomarev, "Rossiiskie spetssluzhby", 15-46.

⁴² See for instance, Tsentral'noe Dokhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Rossii, "Zaiavlenie," No. 595, 9 August 2001; and Gainutdin, "Zakliuchenie". A larger list of statements prepared to protest the ban on Nursi's works in 2007, which includes non-Russian as well as Russian citations, can be found at "My za tsivilizovannyi dialog: Nash otvet na zapret 'Risale-i Nur,'" www.Nurru.com, accessed online at <http://www.nurru.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=130>.

⁴³ "Zaiavlenie," 09 August 2001.

⁴⁴ Gainutdin, "Zakliuchenie".

⁴⁵ See Fagan, *Believing*, 53-171; and Federal Law of the Russian Federation No. 114-FZ, 25 July 2002, "O protivodeistvii ekstremistskoi deiatel'nosti," *Sobranie zakonodatel'stva R.F.*, 2002 (30): 7766-74, as subsequently amended. Available online at <http://ivo.garant.ru/#/document/12127578:0>.

⁴⁶ Victoria Arnold, "Jehovah's Witnesses Now Banned," *Forum 18*, 18 July 2017, at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2297&layout_type=desktop.

⁴⁷ Fagan, *Believing*, 155-58; and Verkhovnyi sud Rossiiskoi federatsii, "Reshenie," 14 February 2003, accessed online at <http://old.memo.ru/hr/jbl/doc/2.htm>. For a comprehensive and authoritative study on Hizb ut-Tahrir, see Reza Pankhurst, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: The Untold History of the Liberation Party* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2016). For a discussion about possibly banning the Muslim Brotherhood in America, see Benjamin Wittes, "Should the Muslim Brotherhood be Designated a Terrorist Organization?," *Lawfare*, 27 January 2017, accessed online at <https://www.lawfareblog.com/should-muslim-brotherhood-be-designated-terrorist-organization>.

⁴⁸ See Verkhovnyi sud, "Reshenie".

⁴⁹ Geraldine Fagan, "Ban on Hizb ut-Tahrir not to Be Challenged," *Forum 18*, 10 April 2006, at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=756.

⁵⁰ Interview with Vitalii Ponomarev by Mustafa Tuna, (2 October 2017).

⁵¹ See Geraldine Fagan and Igor Rotar, "Hizb ut-Tahrir Wants Worldwide Sharia Law," *Forum 18*, 29 October 2003, at

http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=170&layout_type=desktop); Zeyno Baran, "Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency," (Washington, DC: The Nixon Center, 2004), especially 48-66; Geraldine Fagan, "Division over Hizb ut-Tahrir," *Forum 18*, 10 April 2006, at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=755); and Emmanuel Karagiannis, "Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir" (paper presented at the), 103-20.

⁵² Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim*, 300.

⁵³ Dmitrii Dubrovskii, "Prava cheloveka i ugovnoe pravosudie," in *Zhurnal konstitutsionalizma i prav cheloveka*, 2015 3-4(8): 104-18.

⁵⁴ See for instance, Slavianskii pravovoi tsentr, "Religiovedcheskaia ekspertiza," in *Religia i pravo*, 2005 (1), accessed online at <http://www.sclj.ru/analytics/expert/detail.php?ID=1101&print=Y>. Also see Ponomarev, "Rossiiskie spetssluzhby", 15-46.

⁵⁵ Geraldine Fagan, "Said Nursi Ban Brands Moderate Muslims As Extremist," *Forum 18*, 27 June 2007, at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=981); Vladimir Lukin's letter to the Koptevo Court (8 May 2007); and Ponomarev, "Rossiiskie spetssluzhby", especially 47-57, and 87-152. A complete list of banned works by Nursi can be found at http://minjust.ru/ru/extremist-materials?field_extremist_content_value=Нурси.

⁵⁶ For an explicit statement about the appropriateness of this method for criminal evaluation, see the introduction to an expert opinion submitted to the Koptevo District Court that banned Nursi's works in 2007. K. I. Alekseev, M. E. Alekseev, N. D. Pavlov, and E. F. Tarasov, "Zakliuchenie kompleksnoi sotsial'no-psikhologicheskoi i psikholingvisticheskoi ekspertizy po grazhdanskomu delu No: 2-833/06," Moscow, 15 February 2007.

⁵⁷ For an analysis of this overall Islamophobic discourse and the contributions of the "experts of Islam" to it, see Kristina Kovalskaya, "Nationalism and Religion in the Discourse of Russia's 'Critical Experts of Islam'," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2017 28(2): 141-61.

⁵⁸ See for instance Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Şuâlar* (Istanbul: Envâr Neşriyat, 1995), 281-83, and 362.

⁵⁹ For a compilation of some of these court proceedings and the expert opinions submitted to them, see N.A., *Risale-i Nur ve T.C. Mahkemeleri: 785 Beraet Kararı ve Bilirkişi Raporları* (Istanbul: Envâr Neşriyat, 1981); and Gültekin Sarıgül, *12 Eylül'den Sonra T.C. Mahkemeleri ve Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Cihan Yayınları, 1989).

⁶⁰ "İşarat'ül İ'caz Satışa Sunuldu," *Risale Haber*, 12 January 2015, accessed online at <http://www.risalehaber.com/isaratul-icaz-satisa-sunuldu-227295h.htm>.

⁶¹ Victoria Arnold and Geraldine Fagan, "Two 'Extremism' Bans Overturned - but Bans, Fines Continue," *Forum 18*, 27 January 2014, at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1920. The bans on Kuliiev's translation and the Jehovah's Witnesses website were eventually overturned respectively in 2013 and 2014, but the Jehovah's Witnesses was then banned as an organization in 2017.

⁶² Fagan, *Believing*, especially 155-71 offers a good sense of the absurdity that underlines the overall prosecution of religious extremism in Russia.

⁶³ Marina Vladimirovna Vedishenkova, "Zakliuchenie eksperta po ugovnomu delu No: 300079," Kazan, 1 September 2005.

⁶⁴ Alla Vladimirovna Frolova, "Zakliuchenie eksperta po ugovnomu delu No: 300079," Kazan, 1 September 2005.

⁶⁵ See Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Sözler* (Istanbul: Envâr Neşriyat, 1995), 497-99; Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Mektûbat* (Istanbul: Envâr Neşriyat, 1995), 249, and 330-31; and Bediüzzaman Said Nursî, *Lem'alar* (Istanbul: Envâr Neşriyat, 1995), 272-73.

⁶⁶ Alekseev et al., "Zakliuchenie".

⁶⁷ Galina Vladimirovna Ivanchenko, and Dmitrii Alekseevich Leont'ev, "Zakliuchenie metaekspertizy po ekspertnym zakliucheniiam o tekstakh knig Badiuzzamana Saida Nursi," Moscow, 29 December 2005.

⁶⁸ See the debate Nathaniel Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851-1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?," in *Slavic Review*, 2000 59(1): 74-100; Adeeb Khalid, "Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian & Eurasian History*, 2000 1(4): 691-99; and Nathaniel Knight, "On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian & Eurasian History*, 2000 1(4): 701-15. Also see David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Mirza Kazem Bek and the Kazan-School of Russian Oriontology," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 2008 28(3): 443-58; and David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁶⁹ A public debate among five scholars working on Islam in Russian academic institutions illustrates this point well. See "Chetki: Kto ty islamoved?" (Kazan: Universtudencheskii telekanal, 2012), accessed online at <https://tv.kpfu.ru/index.php/teleproekty/arhiv-programm/chyotki/chyotki-kto-ty-islamoved-chast-1.html>.

⁷⁰ "Memorial'naia mechet' v Kostrome".

⁷¹ D. V. Makraov, *Dorogami islama tsentral'noi Rossii* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Mardzhani, 2012), 96-97.

⁷² In a video from 1999, Mustafa Sungur and Necip Dinç discuss the mosque project in a gathering of Nursi's followers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jW5lfrSA4BY>; and "Kostromskaia mechet'," accessed online at <https://golos.io/mapala/@antonkostroma/kostromskaya-mechet>.

⁷³ "Mechet' v Kostrome: byt' ili ne byt'," *Religare*, 10 November 2004, accessed online at http://www.religare.ru/2_11719.html; "Online Discussion Forum on the Kostroma Mosque," 2007, accessed online at <http://skovorodka.org/topic2918-mechet-v-kostrome.html>.

⁷⁴ "Online Discussion Forum"; "V Kostrome vosobnovleno stroitel'stvo mecheti," *Musul'mane Rossii*, April 2013, accessed online at <http://dumrf.ru/common/interview/6703>; "Musul'manam v Kostrome ne dali dostroit' mechet'," 7x7, 06 May 2015, accessed online at <https://www.7x7-journal.com/item/62245>; and "Kostromskaia mechet".

⁷⁵ "Musul'manam v Kostrome ne dali".

⁷⁶ "Otzyv: Sobornaia mechet' (Rossiia, Kostroma) – Velichestvennoe zdanie v samom tsentre patriarkhal'noi Kostromy," *Otzovik*, 29 November 2016, accessed online at http://otzovik.com/review_4138671.html.

⁷⁷ “Putin, Erdogan Hail Return to ‘Normal Partner’ Relations,” *RFE/RL*, 3 May 2017, accessed online at <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-turkey-putin-erdogan-meeting-sochi/28465509.html>.

⁷⁸ See “Keşke Adı Bediüzzaman Camii Olsaydı,” *Yeni Asya*, 18 May 2017, accessed online at http://www.yeniasya.com.tr/gundem/keske-adi-bediuzzaman-camii-olsaydi_432485.

⁷⁹ Victoria Arnold, “Third 2018 Conviction for Muslim Study Meetings,” *Forum 18*, 21 August 2018, accessed online at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2406&layout_type=mobile.