5. History of Politics and Islam in Central Asia

Central Asian history is important for gaining an understanding of the contemporary religious policies of the independent states. For example, the Uzbek nation-building strategy refers to Timur while the contemporary Muftiates have their origin in the Soviet offices, which in turn are the successors of tsarist institutions. But history is also necessary to help us understand non-state movements. For example, the involvement of Naqshbandiyah tariqa in politics centuries ago, its suppression during tsarist and Soviet times, as well as the mobilization-potential it demonstrated during this period, helps shed light on its current status. This chapter does not seek to give a general overview of the history of the region, but is rather more concerned with the development of contemporary religious self-images and governmental restrictions on Islam. In order to gain an overview of the many different aspects which have played a role in Islam in the past and still have an influence today, I summarize in this chapter the history of the most important empires in the region, as well as internal developments within Islamic thinking and practice. I start with the Islamization of the region.

5.1. Early Empires and Islamization of Central Asia

Islam is one of the main world religions and it is the prevalent religion in Central Asia. It spread from contemporary Saudi Arabia, where Prophet

Muhammad lived in the 7th century, to other regions. Ever since Arab conquerors first incorporated Transoxiana, also called Mawarannahr (the lands between the Amu Darya and the Sir Darya), into the Arab caliphate in the 8th century, different waves of Islamization have spread through Central Asia (Naumkin 2005: 6).

From the 8th century onwards, different Muslims and Muslim groups from Central Asia have shaped the history of the Muslim world, and the region, "could present a unique success story in the Islamic world" (Kaplony 2005). For centuries Bukhara was a centre of Islamic learning: it is the birthplace of one of the most important Sufi orders, the Naqshbandiyah, and famous personalities such as the jurist Abu Mansur Muhammad al-Maturidi, the scientist Abu Nasr al-Muhammad al-Farabi and the rationalist philosopher Abu 'Ali Ibn Sina all originated from this region (Khalid 2007: 25).

Generally speaking, the people living around the oases on the Silk Road were the earliest Central Asian converts to Islam because they were the first to come into contact with merchants advocating the new religion.

"One decisive factor in the Islamization of Central Asia was the bustling caravan transport. The merchants were amongst the first to spread Islamic religion and culture" (Schlageter 2003: 74, translated by the author).

As a result, the first Islamic strongholds in the region were the cities of Bukhara, Samarkand and Kokand (Schlageter 2003: 161). The sedentary people in these cities were Islamized by the Arabs of the Abbasid caliphate in the 8th century. By contrast, the nomads in the region were less accessible for the new religion and so their conversion took a great deal longer, as Khalid explains: "Many nomads entered the orbit of Muslim civilization […] from the tenth century on, but conversion to Islam was a gradual process that lasted into the eighteenth century" (Khalid 2007: 26). Under the Qarakhanid dynasty many nomads of the Kazakh Steppe were Islamized in the second half of the 10th century (Schoeberlein 2009: 99) and from the 10th to the 12th century Tajik merchants brought Islam to the nomads who lived on modern-day Kyrgyz territory (Karagiannis 2010: 33). Yet more important for the conversion of the nomads than the spreading of Islam by commerce, however, were "the efforts of charismatic Sufi *shaykhs*" (Schoeberlein 2009: 103). It was under their influence that the conversion

of Kazakh nomads continued until the eighteenth century (Schoeberlein 2009: 99, 220).

As we can see, the Islamization of the Central Asian peoples depended on their way of life on the one hand. Conversely, their way of life had an influence on how the new religion was practiced. Whereas we can find many impressive Islamic monuments in the traditionally sedentary regions (mainly in Uzbekistan but also in Tajikistan), there are few historical Islamic buildings in the lands of the nomads in mountainous Kyrgyzstan or in the far reaching steppes of Kazakhstan.

Due to such differences, as well as the fact that the nomads were Islamized later than the sedentary populations, it has often been said that the nomadic peoples are less religious than the sedentary ones (Schoeberlein 2009: 103). Thereby the assumption has been that Islam today is rooted to a lesser degree in a society if the society was originally (even hundreds of years ago) coerced to convert; if it was Islamized at a later point in time, or if it tended to abstain from the usage of written sources (all this is said to be the case with the nomadic societies in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – although the latter is not true as we could see in 3.2.1). However, "no consistent relationship can be observed anywhere in the Islamic world between high levels of literacy and devotion to Islam, and […] right from its beginnings in the core of the Arab world, Islam has found strong adherents among nomads" (Schoeberlein 2009: 103). As a consequence, Schoeberlein proposes not to exaggerate the importance of reading the Quran as an indicator of religiosity. In any case, it is true that there still are some differences between the originally nomadic peoples and those who have been sedentary for centuries. This is important to consider if we want to come to a conclusion regarding the contemporary revival of Islam in Central Asia.

In the following sections, I focus on the different Central Asian empires and their impact on Islam; namely whether they a) brought Islam to the region b) fought against it or c) declared it as their state dogma.

5.1.1. 8th Century: Umayyads

The Umayyads (661 – 750), who were Arabs from Mecca, had their centre of power in Damascus and expanded their empire to contemporary parts of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In the late 7th century they controlled Bukhara, Samarkand and the Ferghana Valley under Umar II (Ber-

zin 1996). It was predominantly people living in cities who adopted the new religion in the mid-eighth century. The Arabs' primary interest was not the expansion of Islam, but rather the military and economic advantages they could gain by controlling the Silk Road (Berzin 1996). A mass conversion of non-Muslims would have signified a financial loss for the new rulers because only non-Muslims would have had to pay a poll tax (Enderlein 2005: 61). At any rate, the Arabs were the first who brought Islam to Central Asia and changed the life of the occupied people to a great extent:

"In order to integrate Transoxiana into their domain, it was not unusual for the Arabs to take drastic measures. The land was declared property of God or rather property of God's surrogate on Earth. It was leased and taxed" (Schlageter 2003: 74, translated by the author).

Interestingly, the so called *waqf* religious property remained important until the very beginning of the communist era.[1]

5.1.2. 8th-13th Century: Abbasids

The Umayyad Empire was troubled by internal quarrels and finally destroyed by the Abbasids (749 – 1258). They were supported by Persians from the 9th century on and adopted the Persian style of administration (Blair and Bloom 2005a: 93). The Abbasids legitimized their fight against the Umayyads by labelling the older regime 'unholy' and by tracing their right to rule back to the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad (a relationship that was closer to the Prophet than the Umayyads') (Enderlein 2005: 63; Blair and Bloom 2005a: 91). It is important to note that when Kalif al-Mamun was in power, questions such as human freewill were broadly discussed in Islam.[2] He promoted the rationalistic view on this matter (which

1 For the contemporary role of waqf in the Islamic world see: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:TpBQClBR0hEJ:www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/3546_80031_ILP%25207.doc+&cd=5&hl=de&ct=clnk&gl=ch.

2 "The dispute between the traditionalists and the rationalists took on very harsh forms, sometimes even within the same *madhhab*. Whereas the former made an absolute out of emulating authority (whether books or preceptors), the latter largely relied on methods of reasoning, analogies, and mental conclusions (eve-

was opposed predominantly by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the founder of the Hanbali School of Law), declared it as state dogma and pledged the *ulama* to avow themselves to this interpretation (Blair and Bloom 2005a: 90). The following quote summarizes the Abbasids' theology:

"First, they stressed the absolute unity or oneness (tawḥīd) of God. From this it was logically concluded that the Qurʾān could not be technically considered the word of God (the orthodox view), as God has no separable parts, and so had to be created and was not coeternal with God" (Encylopaedia Britannica c).

This rationalistic religious view was coupled with great military power. With their capital in Baghdad and Samarra, the Abbasids derived their military force from guards from Central Asia, who they could rely on when internal quarrels threatened their power (Blair and Bloom 2005a: 93). The loyal army of the caliphate became known as Mamluks, who were mainly slaves with Turkic roots (Encylopaedia Britannica c).

5.1.3. 9th-10th Century: Samanids

During the rule of the Abbasids, many parts of their empire were controlled by different local dynasties as well as by independent empires which were under the suzerainty of the Abbasids. In this way, Transoxiana was ruled by the Samanids 875 – 999, who established their centre of power in Bukhara (Blair and Bloom 2005a: 93). Islam was their state religion (Naumkin 2005: 6) and they developed a double-identity as campaigners against pagans and Shiites, as well as protectors of Iran against the Turks (Kaplony 2005). Already during their rule, Central Asia became a hub of Muslim sciences and commerce:

rything that became the pivot of *kalam*). In various regions of the Abbasid caliphate, the Hanafites seriously conflicted with the Hanbalites, followers of Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hanbal (780-855), who fully depended on the traditional sources of Islam and literal understanding of texts, admitting *ra'y* only as a last resort, when traditional sources could not give an answer to the question that arose" (Naumkin 2005: 9).

"Under the loosely centralized feudal government of the Sāmānids, Transoxania and Khorāsān prospered, with a notable expansion of industry and commerce, attested by the use of Sāmānid silver coins as currency throughout northern Asia. The main cities of Samarkand and Bukhara became cultural centres. Persian literature flourished in the works of the poets Rūdakī and Ferdowsī, philosophy and history were encouraged, and the foundations of Iranian Islamic culture were laid" (Encylopaedia Britannica d).

Although these philosophers were Persians, the contemporary Turkic Central Asian states refer to them – for example one of the biggest universities in Almaty, Kazakhstan, is named after Ferdowsi. From the Samanid dynasty on, the present-day Uzbek cities remained

"[…] important centers of Islamic learning and culture, as market centers on the Silk Road, and as the core of major world and regional powers from the Samanids to the Chagatayids, Timurids and Shaibanids […]" (Schoeberlein 2009: 99).

As we will see later on, reference to the historical importance of these cities is an important part of contemporary nation-building by the Uzbek government.

5.1.4. 10th-12th Century: Qarakhanids and Seljuks

The Samanid dynasty disintegrated in 999, and the Turk Qarakhanids took over in Transoxiana, but they soon came under the control of the Seljuqs (Encylopaedia Britannica a).

The Seljuqs (Great Seljuq Empire: 1038 – 1157) were Turkic nomads from the Oghuzen confederation of tribes, who were deployed by Central Asian rulers to fight the Arab invaders. Around 960 AD they converted to Islam and secured their own territories. For some time, they controlled one of the most far-reaching Muslim regimes (Hattstein 2005a: 348). Because of their Turkic origin they could not claim a direct relationship to the Prophet Mohammad. Instead, they relied on honorary titles which they received from the caliph in Baghdad to religiously legitimize their rule (Hattstein 2005a: 348). Under the rule of Nizam, the Seljuks promoted the integration of Sufism into the state religion, maintained many excellent madrasas, and established a strong central power (Hattstein 2005a: 350ff).

In addition to honorary titles they also sought to legitimize their rule through an increasing reliance on sharia as a system of positive jurisprudence; through the maintenance of political stability, as well as through their prosperity (Hattstein 2005a: 352).

The relationship between Seljuks and Qarakhanids shifted. Whereas the Seljuqs initially came under the suzerainty of the Qarakhanids, they dominated the latter at the end of the 12th century (Hattstein 2005a: 348; 352). Finally, the Seljuks were defeated by the Chinese Qara-Khitai in 1141 (Hattstein 2005a: 351); the Qarakhanids fell under the domination of the latter, and the regime of the Seljuks disintegrated in 1157 AD (Encylopaedia Britannica a). At the very beginning of the 13th century the Qarakhanids gained their independence again for some years but were finally stamped out by the Shah of Khorezm (Encylopaedia Britannica a).

5.1.5. 11th-13th Century: Khorezm-Shahs

The Khorezm-Shahs (1077–1231) first ruled as vassals of the Seljuks in modern day Central Asia and Iran and (taking advantage of a civil war among the Seljuks) subsequently gained their independence (Encylopaedia Britannica e; Hattstein 2005a: 353). Under their rule, the Central Asian oases flourished, as Hattstein observes:

"Under the rule of Tekish's son Ala ad-Din Muahhad (1200 – 1220) the Empire of Khorezm experienced its greatest triumphs and its most precipitous fall. After 1206 he acquired the entire domain of the Ghurids (1208 he carried Herat), cast off the formal suzerainty of the Qara-Khitai in 1210 and in the aftermath enlarged his regime at the expense of the Qarakhanids and Qara-Khitai. Thereby his domain covered for a short time the largest area in the history of Islamic empires" (Hattstein 2005a: 353, translated by the author).

In spite of this high-time, the empire's decline was invoked after initially good contacts with the Mongols turned sour. In the early 13th century, the Khorezm-Shahs maintained contact with Genghis Khan (1167-1227), the leader of the Mongols. When they imprisoned and slaughtered Mongol merchants and ignored Mongol requests for compensation, this provoked Mongol expansion to the west (Hattstein 2005a: 353).

5.1.6. 13th-14th Century: Mongols

Under the Mongols, Central Asia witnessed very hard times. "Under Genghis Khan's leadership, Mongol forces destroyed numerous cities in Transoxania and Khorasan in an unprecedented display of terror and annihilation" (Encylopaedia Britannica b). This was not only a disaster for the people, but also for Islam (Naumkin 2005: 10):

> "Although the Mongols did not bear any particular antimus against Islam, their actions had a destructive impact on the religious and cultural traditions of Transoxiana. Islam was displaced from its position as the recipient of political protection or patronage, and its moral and ethical imperatives were subordinated to Mongol practices" (Khalid 2007: 26).

The Mongol invasion thus brought an end to centuries of Islamic rule. Ghengis Khan replaced the Islamic sharia with the Mongol *yasa*, a code of law and ethics that probably goes back to the early 13th century (Hattstein and Delius 2005: 613; Khalid 2007: 26). Whereas earlier empires had relied on their link to the Prophet Muhammad, during the next centuries the legitimacy of rule was strengthened if rulers could trace back their ancestry to Genghis Khan (Blair and Bloom 2005b: 388). "Mongol rule thus undid the hegemony of Islam in the political realm" (Khalid 2007: 27).

The situation improved for Islam when the Mongols converted in the 14th century and re-established it as the official religion in Central Asia: Özbek Khan (1313-1341), the Golden Horde's leader, made Islam the religion of state (Schoeberlein 2009: 99; Naumkin 2005: 10). Afterwards, the Mongol Chagatayids and the Il-Khans also converted to Islam (Blair and Bloom 2005b: 388). However, the weakness of these three states allowed Timur to come to power in the 14th century (Cannon 2009: 380).

5.1.7. 14th-15th Century: Timurids

Timur (1336-1405) was a Mongol from the Barlas tribe which used the Turkic language and therefore is sometimes wrongly considered to be a Turkic tribe: the contemporary Uzbek government, for example, publicize Timur as part of their heritage. He served as a vizier for Ghengis Khan's son Chagatai (ruler over the Chagatayids), who became Timur's first victim

(Cannon 2009: 380). Timur took over Samarkand as capital, and the territory under his influence soon became almost as large as the former empire of Ghengis Khan. However, his dynasty could not tightly control it: "A mere hundred years after Timur's first military victories, Timurid power had fragmented into petty states" (Cannon 2009: 380). Timur's fall was therefore almost as precipitous as his rise. This was partly because he concentrated on single cities and regions and did not develop a concept for the administration of the state (Hattstein 2005b: 414).

As far as religion was concerned, he was theoretically as tolerant as his Mongol predecessors, and the formalism of the Muslim schools of law did not dominate. Instead he tried to combine the Mongol yasa with the sharia (Hattstein 2005b: 408). Under his rule, Sufism and local saints cultures flourished (Hattstein 2005b: 408). Sufism became not only an important aspect but even a dominant part of cultural life (Khalid 2007: 10):

> "[…] in that era, it was no longer the *ulama*, as it was before the conquest, but Sufi *shaykhs* and *ishans* who played a paramount role in the religious class. Sufi symbols and rituals […] became the quintessence of popular Islam, joining together diverse ethnic groups of the population" (Naumkin 2005: 10).

This led the root for the contemporary integration of Sufism into folk Islam. In spite of Timur's religious tolerance, even Muslims were among those to fall victim to his extreme cruelty. For example, during the capture of Delhi (1398): "[…] his armies wantonly destroyed the lives and property of many Muslims and Hindus" (Cannon 2009: 380). In fact, Timur was even crueller than the legendary Ghenghis Khan and the mass murder of civilians and the destruction of cultural centres could not be compensated by the cultural extension of Samarkand by deported artists and craftsmen (Hattstein 2005b: 408).

One significant change during the Timurid era was the relocation of the capital, so whereas in the past the Islamic centre had been in Persia it now shifted to Samarkand (Hattstein 2005b: 414). As a consequence, under Timur's rule, the region again became a centre of Islam and especially under Timur's grandson Ulugh Beg (1394-1449), "masterpieces of Muslim architecture – mosques, mausoleums and madrasas, such as the Shah-i Zinda ensemble, the Bibi Khanum mosque, the Gur-e Amir Mausoleum, and the Ulugh Beg madrassa, were built" (Naumkin 2005: 11).

5.1.8. 16th-18th Century: Shaybanids

The Shaybanids were the successors of the Timurids in Central Asia. Their Uzbek empire was named after Muahammad Shaybani Khan (1500 – 1510), the chief of a confederation of Islamized Turko-mongol nomads from the steppes, who established his sovereignty over a part of Ma Wa-ra'al-Nahr (Holzwarth 2005: 431f; Naumkin 2005: 10). In 1507 Shaybani Khan ruled over eastern Khorasan, Transoxania, Khawarszm, Turkistan and the Ferghana Valley (Holzwarth 2005: 432).

The second generation of the Shaybanid Khans in particular maintained a close relationship with the Naqshbandi Sufi order, which was able to transfer its influence from the Timurid era to the Uzbek empire (Holzwarth 2005: 432). The heads of the Sufi orders were descendents of wealthy khodja-families from diverse cities (Holzwarth 2005: 432). Amongst other things, the societal influence of the Sufi orders was one reason why the region did not expand beyond externally demarcated borders (Holzwarth 432). Bukhara was the main capital of the Shaybanids in the 16th century because it had been of great importance for Islam since ancient times and was also the stronghold of the Naqshbandiyah (Holzwarth 2005: 433). During this empire, Bukhara replaced Samarkand as the economic centre and Silk Road junction (Holzwarth 2005: 433).

5.1.9. 18th-19th Century: Khanates and Emirates

Already by the 17th century, the Shaybanid Khanate had been weakened: Balkh was temporarily occupied by the Moghul Empire while Bukhara was attacked by Khiwa (Holzwarth 2005: 434). After a deep political and economic crisis from 1720-1770, the Uzbek empire disintegrated into several principalities (Holzwarth 2005: 434). Three new Uzbek dynasties subsequently emerged in the northern part of the former empire, which were able to re-establish political stability and economy (Holzwarth 2005: 435):

- *Kokand Khanate*: the Uzbek Ming separated from Bukhara and founded their capital in Kokand in 1740, countering the Kyrgyz tribes and the Dsungars there. They maintained good contacts with the Chinese who granted them privileges for their commerce with Kashgar. In addition, the Kokand Khanate which, apart from the Ferghana Valley, also con-

trolled Tashkent, was an important mercantile partner for Russia (Holzwarth 2005: 435).

- *Bukhara Emirate*: the Mangyts regained control of Bukhara in 1750. Unlike their predecessors and neighbours, the Mangyts, "were not recognized as descendants of Genghis Khan and therefore could not bear the title of khans and were called amirs" (Naumkin 2005: 11). They emphasized the religious role of their political rule and tried to lead a disciplined lifestyle as a good example for their citizens. Some regarded themselves as mere followers of the Naqshbandiyah and refused any gaudiness. Again, Russia was an important trading partner for the Bukhara Emirate, which was trying to regain its influence over Kokand and Khiwa (Holzwarth 2005: 435).
- *Khiva Khanate*: Khiva was the capital of Khwarezm. Here the nomadic life was more pronounced than in the other two dominions. Between 1742 and 1770 Turkmens and Uzbeks fought against each other, and finally the ruler (and since 1804 Khan) of the Uzbek Qungrat managed to gain suzerainty over the Turkmens (the latter separating only in 1855 when they became independent as the Tekke-tribes). Khiwa was well known as a centre of the slave trade – the city alone employed around 40,000 slaves (Holzwarth 2005: 435).

In the Khanates of Kokand and Khiva as well as in the Emirate of Bukhara, Hanafi Sunni Islam remained the official religion and throughout the region Sufi shaykhs retained a strong influence on politics (Naumkin 2005: 11). In the late 19th century these last Uzbek empires were incorporated into tsarist Russia and later on became part of the Soviet Union. This meant that hundreds of years of Islam as (quasi) state religion – only interrupted during the rule of Genghis Khan – came to an end.

5.1.10. 16th-20th Century: Russian Tsars

The first Muslim territory to be occupied by the Russians was the land of the Tatars around Kazan in the 16th century. What later became Kazakhstan was gradually incorporated into the Russian regime from the mid-18th century on. The Central Asian regimes also came under Russian control: the Emirate Bukhara in 1868, the Khiva Khanate in 1873, and Kokand Khanate in 1876. This means that the territory of today Kyrgystan, Tajikistan and

Uzbekistan were incorporated into tsarist Russia in the late 19th century (ARDA). This period was accompanied by resistance and strong repression against the local population: "The Kyrgyz staged a major revolt against the Tsarist Empire in 1916 in which almost one-sixth of the Kyrgyz population was killed" (ARDA: KG).

Literature about the tsarist period in Central Asia usually goes into details of the reigns of Peter I (reigned: 1682 – 1725) and Catherine the Great (reigned: 1762 – 1796). Whereas Peter I ruled very cruelly, Catherine the Great's politics were influenced by enlightened absolutism and allowed the Tatar Muslims not only ownership of land but also gave them the right to religious freedom under the 'Toleration of All Faiths' edict in 1773. Catherine the Great evoked the 'Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly' in 1788, headed by a mufti and established in Ufa for administering the affairs of the country's Muslims (Ro'i 2000: 100f). On the one hand, this had advantages for the Muslims who now were officially recognized and whose suppression was stopped (Yemelianova 2010: 19). On the other, the assimilation of Muslims into the state had advantages for the regime, too; for example, Muslim nomads were called upon to settle and were thereby easier to control (Ro'i 2000: 100f).

On the whole, the religious policies of the Russian tsars were ambivalent. Periods of relative religious freedom alternated with periods of forced assimilation and the curtailment of religious rights (Kappeler et al. 1989: 117). Or, as Schoeberlein puts it:

> "The czarist policy toward Islam varied from highly suspicious, considering that fanatical Islam was the cause of uprisings against the czarist authorities, to tolerant and broadly supportive, reflecting the idea that Islam could be a civilizing factor, especially among nomads" (Schoeberlein: 2009. 100).

Compared to what was to come under communism, though, Russian tsars did not interfere too much in the religious life of Central Asians, who were allowed to operate their own religious schools and religious courts (Keller 2001). Tsarist Russia was primarily interested in Turkestan's natural resources (as cotton became increasingly important at the end of 19th century), and in having a buffer area between itself and Great Britain during the 'Great Game' (1835 – 1840) (Keller 2001).

5.2. THE COMMUNIST STATE AND ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

5.2.1. Bolshevik Revolution and the Central Asian Socialist Soviet Republics

After the Revolutions of 1917, the Russians could not keep Central Asia in check. In Uzbekistan in particular, the Bolsheviks faced stiff resistance (ARDA: UZ). An outstanding role for the final communist conquest over Central Asia must be reserved for Frunze's efforts as a military leader of the Bolsheviks. Frunze, who originated from Bishkek (which was named after him from 1926-1991), was one of the most important military figures of the Civil War (Encyclopedia Britannica d). Not only did he lead the Eastern, Southern and Turkestan fronts of the Soviet Army but the Bukharan Emirate was also eliminated under his command (Frunse 1885-1925). Total control over the region was only fully reestablished in 1925 when the contemporary nation-states became terrirtorial and administrative entitites as Socialist Soviet Republics (SSR) (ARDA):

- Uzbekistan in 1924
- Tajikistan in 1929 (from 1925 on Tajikistan had been an Autonomous SSR inside the Uzbek SSR; with its transformation into its own SSR, "present-day Sughd province was transferred from the Uzbek SSR to the newly formed Tajik SSR in 1929" (ARDA: TJ).
- Kazakhstan in 1936
- Kyrgyzstan in 1936

The general effects of communism were felt most strongly by Central Asians through Soviet agricultural policies. During the 1920s and 1930s the collectivisation of agriculture and the forced settlement of nomads brought about a terrible famine which resulted in the death of around 1.5 to two million Kazakhs. Stalin's 'Virgin Lands' campaign in the 1950s and 1960s was another Soviet agricultural project with far-reaching consequences for Kazakhs:

"Soviet citizens were encouraged to help cultivate Kazakhstan's northern pastures. This influx of immigrants (mostly Russians, but also some other deported nationali-

ties) skewed the ethnic mixture and enabled non-Kazakhs to outnumber natives" (ARDA: KZ).

Another well-known disaster in Central Asia, also unleased by Soviet agricultural policies, was the intensive production of cotton and grain. This "led to overuse of agrochemicals and the depletion of water supplies, which have left the land poisoned and the Aral Sea and certain rivers half dry" (ARDA: UZ). These negative developments, however, went hand in hand with the introduction of a modern education and health system and unforeseen infrastructural progress. Clearly the impact of Soviet politics on Central Asian life was immense; I will therefore not go into the general changes they brought about but will instead restrict my analysis to the religious policies under communism.

5.2.2. Religious Policies under Communism

Directly after the revolution in 1917, the Soviet government paid little attention to the role of Islam. The Bolsheviks prioritized dealing with Christianity over Islam because Moscow's main religious problem seemed to be the Russian-orthodox church which tightly identified itself with the tsarist regime and was ingrained in the Russian population (Bräker 1989: 136). In addition, the Bolsheviks seemed to realize that Islam was the most important force shaping Central Asian society and therefore were reluctant to fight it for fear of antagonizing local people, whose main attitude was already anti-Russian. This meant that while all tsarist court systems were abolished by a law passed in 1917, the Muslim courts, which were acknowledged during the tsarist rule, persisted, "because authorities were afraid of adding to the already intense anti-Russian hostility" (Keller 2001: 31f). Furthermore, Moscow was a long way from Turkestan (how Central Asia was called in these times) and in the early years the infrastructure and resources for maintaining strict control over this region and abrogating Islam were not available (Keller 2001). In 1918 all *waqf* property was nationalized and sharia courts prohibited, however, the Soviet state was not yet able to provide education. In 1922 the nationalization was reversed and not only the religious schools but also sharia courts were permitted to operate legally again. Therefore, Central Asians practiced their religion quite freely notwithstanding the anti-religious communist ideology in the 1920s. How-

ever, these relatively tolerant years did not last long, as Schoeberlein highlights:

"[…] after a period of relatively limited interventions in the decade following the Revolution, a very severe campaign was unleashed to suppress Islam. This was aimed primarily at transforming or liquidating those aspects of society in Central Asia and the Caucasus that were perceived as blocking the 'building of socialism', and all those identified as Islamic leaders were classified as the 'class enemy' " (Schoeberlein 2005: 100).

The destruction of Islamic traditions in the name of creating a socialist utopia included closing mosques, madrasas and maktabs. The religious élite was physically liquidated and local traditions concerning marriage, circumcision and burial were prohibited (Schoeberlein 2005: 100). The most severe repression of Central Asian Muslims took place under the anti-religion campaigns launched by Stalin and Khrushchev. Stalin fought against nationalist deviations, which included the practice of religion (Simon 1986: 14). One of the most terrible periods for Central Asians and nomads, who were among the most severely affected, was when Stalin welcomed or even consciously caused a famine to break the political will of non-Russian peoples (Simon 1986: 15) (see the 'Virgin Lands' campaign mentioned above).

During the Stalin and Khruschchev eras the transfer of Islamic knowledge by scholars as well as by representatives of folk Islam was interrupted:

"[…] under Stalin hundreds of people with both local and textual knowledge of Islam – *pirs, shaikhs, ulama*, Islamic intellectuals – were executed in a brutal attempt to break the connections of future generations with their Islamic past" (Vernon 2009: 280).

Islam was successfully suppressed from the public sphere and the physical presence of Islam was reduced by the destruction of mosques and madrasas (Khalid 2007: 2). Furthermore, many holy places were destroyed or converted into anti-religious museums (Bennigsen and Wimbush 1985: 132). People feared to visit the mosques or holy shrines because this could ruin their careers or "draw the unwanted attention of the government" (Vernon 2009: 280). Those who continued to visit the mazars in defiance of such

risks were occasionally detained and as a consequence mazars were gradually abandoned (interview with Baktykan).

Yet the Soviet religious policy was not based on coercion alone (McGlinchey 2006). The very cruel politics alternated with periods of relative respite for Central Asian Muslims.[3] Kappeler (1989) regards this as a continuity of the (alternately tolerant and repressive) religious policies of the tsars (Kappeler et al. 1989: 127). Especially during Second World War, the Soviet regime depended on the mobilization of the Muslim population and therefore made concessions to the practice of religion (Schoeberlein 2009: 100; Bräker 1989: 141). Religious activities and practices were once again permitted and the status of nomads was enhanced (Yemelianova 2010: 23). In this context, additionally to the TsDUM in Ufa, further religious administrations for Muslims were established such as the *Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan* (SADUM).[4] Indeed, the establishment of SADUM in Tashkent in 1943 represented, "a public admission of what had been apparent for several years – that the fight to eradicate Islam was over" (Keller 2001: 245).

The new official Islamic institutions took up some threads of the Jadidis. The Jadidis were Muslim reformers who had been active in Central Asia since the 19th century and argued that modern education would improve the spiritual, economic and physical well-being of Muslims. Efforts were taken "to eradicate practices associated with Islam that were seen as being at odds with successful modernization, such as restrictions on women's roles, payment of bride-price in arranged marriages, and expensive celebrations associated with circumcision, marriage, and other community events" (Schoeberlein 2009: 105). These policies were complemented by solid measures in the social, educational and economic fields to integrate Muslims into the Marxist-Leninist system (Bräker 1989: 142). Although many Jadidis initially welcomed the Bolshevik revolution in the hope of social progress, they too soon became victims of the anti-religious campaigns.

3 At the same time, Muslims in other parts of the Soviet Union (Chechens, Kurds, Bulgarians) suffered collective deportation because they were accused of collaboration with Nazi Germany (Yemelianova 2010: 24).

4 Under communist rule, the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly in Ufa further persisted and was renamed *Central Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Inner Russia and Siberia* (TsDUM) (Ro'i 2000: 101).

5.2.3. Official Islam and Nationalization of Religion

Under Soviet rule "an active atheism was pursued" (Naumkin 2005: 21). The majority of Central Asian mosques were destroyed or closed by the communists. Apart from small village mosques, which were effectively closed (Roy 2000: 152), very few mosques (around 300-400 for the whole Soviet Union) were registered with and declared legal by the Soviet administration (Ro'i 2000: 181). These mosques were allowed to operate but worship was restricted by SADUM which now represented the official Islam and also controlled Muslim education. The texts of the Muslim sermons had to be ratified in advance (Ro'i 2000: 255). Whereas registered mosques and the clergy were controlled by SADUM "at the same time shrine-based religious activities were denied any legal framework. […] [The] Soviets took pains to demonstrate that shrine-based beliefs and practices were actually un-Islam" (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 235) and Sufi brotherhoods were persecuted (Naumkin 2005: 21).

Apart from the monitoring of Islamic content through SADUM, the authorities also specified political issues, such as economic restructuring programs, which had to be included in the sermon (Keller 1988). As the authorities depended on the imams to reach out to people, the official Islamic elite could take advantage of its position as an intermediary (McGlinchey 2006: 129). This gave the Muslim clergy, which could maintain its role after independence, relative autonomy:

> "That the 'Soviet Muslim clergy' was not simply an extension of the Soviet ideological apparatus of KGB is evident in the diverse positions that these figures are now known to have taken in traditionalist versus reformist debates in Soviet times and the more open debates on these issues that are taking place in the post-Soviet period" (Schoeberlein 2009: 105).

Despite the strongly totalitarian religious policies of the communists, in practice the official clergy remained at least to some extent heterogeneous (see also Keller 2001). However, only those imams who cooperated fully with the Soviet authorities could be sure not to be replaced. Sometimes the registered clergy even perverted their faith to the extent that they could justify communist rule as the will of Allah, who sent Marx and Engels to at-

tain socialism, arguing that communism corresponded with a righteous Muslim society (Ro'i 2000: 253f).

From the 1960s on Islam survived officially thanks to the new perception of religion as part of nationality: in the wake of national politics, religion, together with culture and ethnicity, was not only tolerated but even cultivated in a folkloristic way (Khalid 2007: 85ff). I will later on refer to these policies as the 'traditionalisation or nationalization of religion'. During this period even party members could describe themselves as Muslims, which implied that being Muslim was a cultural question and that it was even possible to be an 'atheist Muslim' (Pelkmans 2006). In order to promote the Soviet image in the Muslim world, students of Islamic theology were henceforth sent to friendly Sunni Arab countries for their studies (Roy 2000: 151).[5] As a consequence of these relaxed religious policies, the revival of Islam started in the early 1980s. When the authorities realized this, they launched a "final large scale anti-Islamic campaign", which targeted " 'popular religious practices', Islamic funeral rituals and what was labelled 'nationalist tradition', such as circumcision, marriage ceremonies and the practice of *kalim* (bride price)" (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 237). This phase lasted until the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* which were, after some delay, applied in Central Asia as in the rest of the Soviet Union (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 237):

"At the end of the decade, the restrictions were largely lifted and the public display of Islamic religiosity became increasingly evident" (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 237).

5.2.4. Central Asian Roots of Salafism

The aforementioned contact with Sunni Arab countries (Libya, Syria, Egypt and Jordan), had an impact on the content of official Islam in the USSR:

"[…] young students of religion who were sent there came back deeply influenced by the thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood. These young *ulemas* displayed

5 This opening towards other Muslim regions had the unintended effect that some students were thereby influenced by the thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood (Roy 2000: 151). At any rate, they still collaborated with the authorities and remained loyal to the USSR (Roy 2000: 151).

their political loyalty towards the USSR, but at the same time they were elaborating an uncompromising brand of Islam" (Roy 2000: 151).

They did not agitate against the Soviet rule but instead "played a long-term game of compromise with the authorities and re-Islamization of society" (Roy 2000: 151). Peyrouse explains that these young ulama, influenced by Arab political Islam, laid the foundations of Central Asian Salafism. He asserts that the present day revival of Salafi Islam has its roots in Soviet religious policies, and is primarily an indigenous development: "It was the Russian repression of reformist Islam leaders that led to the rise of fundamentalist Islam in the region during the Soviet period" (Peyrouse 2007: 40). Already at that time, the scripturalist Salafi Islam was contrasted by the government with Central Asian folk Islam (as we will see later on, only the roles ascribed to them by governments changed after independence). Whereas "in pre-Soviet Central Asia, the veneration of saints (*avliyo*) played a prominent role in Islamic piety", this "interrelation between mosque and shrine […] became seriously disturbed" (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 235). Naumkin found out that in the 1980s the Salafis were supported by the communist party committees "in order to use them against the influential and therefore dangerous traditional Islam" and in order to divide the religious class (Naumkin 2005: 52). Sufism (and the Naqshbandiyah specifically) was declared 'parallel Islam' or even 'illegal Islam' because it was less institutionalized than scholarly Islam and therefore less tractable and more feared by the Soviet authorities (Bräker 1989: 134).[6] Sunni and Shiite Islam, on the other hand, were usually summarized as official or institutionalized brands of Islam in Soviet literature (Bräker 1989: 134).

The impact of individuals' trips to Arab countries on the religious development of the region is especially apparent in the influence of the Babakhan family, who led SADUM from 1943-1957. Ishan Babakhan and after him, his son, Ziyauddin Babakhan were supreme muftis (Peyrouse 2007: 42f). Ziyauddin studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo and tried to present himself as a Hanafite, but returning from his first stay in the Middle East,

6 At any rate, there has always been a commingling between the two; "One should not imagine that Sufism in Central Asia is antagonistic with the scholarly Islam of the *ulemas*" (Roy 2000: 148).

he brought with him many Hanbali publications. Furthermore, he opposed local traditions and customs, denouncing them as 'un-Islamic,' although he stemmed from a khoja family himself (Peyrouse 2007: 43).[7] His *fatwas*, for instance, not only pointed out that "circumcision is not obligatory in the Quran," denounced "excessive expenditure occasioned by marriages and the dowry principle", and "criticized the cult of saint worship" (Peyrouse 2007: 43):

"His puritanism led him to regard the Central Asian traditions as superstitious practices contrary to the renewal of Islam. […] His particular fundamentalist orientation, then, favoured a non-Hanafite re-Islamicization of the young Soviet generations. […] Paradoxically, however, the political authorities preferred to support the fundamentalist theologians rather than the conservative elements and the Sufi movements […]" (Peyrouse 2007: 44).

It was during the time of Ziyauddin Babakhan's leadership of SADUM that "the Muslims of Central Asia witnessed the beginnings of a schism between Hanafite conservatives and the newer, much more fundamentalist, informal movements influenced by Hanbalism and Shafiism" (Peyrouse 2007: 45).

When more tolerant religious policies were finally implemented under Gorbachev in late 1988 and early 1989, former mosques reopened and former parallel mullahs could overtly perform their tasks:

"[…] the parallel mullahs left their jobs in the *kolkhoz* (albeit keeping their plots of land), put on turbans and long robes and installed themselves in the *mahalla* mosques which were either reopening or were being built" (Roy 2000: 153).

Already by 1990 1,330 mosques were registered all over the USSR and the "number of madrasa students rose to several hundreds" (Yemelianova 2010: 27). During the last years of the Soviet Union, mullahs could decide more freely what they wanted to preach in their sermons and the former 'official Islam' of the Soviet Union was no longer so strictly defined.

7 For the explanation *khoja* of this term see section 2.4.

5.2.5. Unofficial Islam in the Soviet Union

Although the repressive religious policies of the USSR were very broad, they were not totally successful or effective, as Keller states:

"A good part of the fault lay with the party itself, which too often issued vague, contradictory, and impossible-to-fulfil orders. However, at all levels of the Central Asian governing structure Muslims found ways to ignore orders that they deeply opposed (especially concerning women's status), turn a blind eye as clergy served on collective farms and evaded taxes, and make sure that their children understood the rudiments of religion. Convinced Communists, regardless of ethnic affiliation, were too few in number to stop this tide of evasion" (Keller 2001: xvf).

In short, the means to implement the theoretically totalitarian ideas of the communist party were often lacking. As Roy makes clear, the control of repression was "limited by the structure of the KGB itself: either it was local and complicit in what was going on, or it was town-based and unaware" (Roy 2000: 152). This may explain why Keller (2001) concludes that even under Stalin, the regime was not totalitarian in its practice (even if so theoretically). Further evidence for this is provided by Schoeberlein who writes that, "gathering at unofficial mosques, visitation of officially closed shrines, and the traditional life-cycle rituals although never officially accepted, were still maintained" (Schoeberlein 2009: 100). Shrines " – museumized or not – remained focal points for popular Islam" (Louw 2007: 54). Yet it was in the area of non-institutionalized religious education that Soviet measures of eradication were particularly unsuccessful since such education, "depends more on a personal relationship with a teacher than an attachment to a religious or state institution" (Fathi 2011: 177).

So, despite Stalin's best efforts, an unofficial or 'underground' Islam persisted. Other reasons for the persistence of a parallel Islam include the fact that what was forbidden went underground, or the fact that the official clergy supported and was in contact with its unofficial counterpart:

"This official clergy was never cut off from the parallel clergy. Both came from the same environment: that of the provincial Sufi religious families. The official mullahs always had their initial education at the hands of the parallel mullahs. […] The channels of communication have always been open, not least as a result of family

and local links. The official mullahs who did not become muftis were sent to run the official mosque of their district of origin, where they re-established their old informal contacts with the parallel mullahs. The policy of the official mullahs was not to suppress the parallel clergy but to control it" (Roy 2000: 151).

Official and unofficial clergy often stemmed from the same khoja-families. The popular parallel Islam was represented by *pirs,* who still oversaw the Sufi shrines, and *biotunchis*, women who taught Islam in their private houses. As a consequence of the closure of most mosques during the Soviet period, especially in rural areas, people attended unregistered mosques, which were administered by parallel-mullahs (Schlageter 2003: 173). They met at traditional teahouses (*chaykhana*) or other non-religious public places (Yemelianova 2010: 25). I can conclude, then, that Islam remained important to the Central Asian people throughout the communist decades. (Yemelianova 2010: 25). As Yemelianova makes clear, this was particularly evident during celebrations of the main life-cycle events, such as births, circumcisions, marriages and deaths.