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# FOUNDATIONS OF INCLUSIVE KAZAKH RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

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## Abstract

There are a number of either simplistic and stereotypic views about the Islamness doctrinal or theoretical Islam, formed by ‘ijtihads’ (‘Ijtihad’ means independent, based on reasoning, interpretation of the issues were not openly covered in the primary sources of Islam) and Muslimness (embodiment of doctrinal Islam or Islamness in a particular identity) of Kazakhs, historically a major Central Asian Muslim nomadic group. This paper, first, tries to shed light on a fact that Kazakh religious perceptions and identity are in line with core Sunni Islamic doctrinal understandings characterized by spirituality, xenophile and being depoliticized. Second, this paper searches for a nexus between inclusiveness of Kazakh Muslimness and historical and civilizational foundations of Kazakhness. Although the Muslimness of Kazakhs, like all post-Soviet ethnic groups bears heavy stain of Soviet period, the historical and civilizational Islamic heritage of Kazakhs could not be totally erased and transformed by Soviet period. The paper contends that the official policy of Kazakhstan adopted after its independence paves the way of building inclusive national and inclusive religious identities and incrementally promotes adoption of core liberal values, particularly in the field of education and culture. If traditional Kazakh religious identity is revived, the negative scenarios concerning the dominance in future of ethnic-based exclusivist Kazakh nationalism and rise of exclusivist Islamic interpretations among the country’s Muslim community can be successfully neutralized.

*Keywords:* nomadic, civil, Islam, xenophile, identity

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## **1. Introduction**

Islam is experiencing resurgence in Kazakhstan like in all former atheistic post-Soviet societies and the role played by Islam in personal and public life is increasing. Although Islam was subjected to the most harsh persecution, Islamic heritage became a victim of systematic destruction by Soviet regime, Islamness and Muslimness of Kazakhs, like all post-Soviet ethnic groups bear deep stain of decades-long ‘Soviet-designed’ social engineering, aimed at transforming the classic Muslim Central Asian worldview and way of life, Islam could preserve its undeniable place in historical memory, culture and public conscience of Kazakhs like all other Central Asian Muslim societies. The authors use the concept Islamness tentatively as doctrinal (theoretical) Islam, formed by ‘Ijtihads, independent, based on reasoning, interpretations of the issues which were not openly covered in the primary sources of Islam. Islamness is shaped mainly by ‘mazhabs’, the schools explaining and interpreting Islam. Muslimness implies the reflections of doctrinal Islam (Islamness) to everyday life, to be fleshed into a particular identity, customs, traditions, folklore and vocabulary of a Muslim community.

It should be emphasised that the authors believe that any concept such as ‘Kazakh or Malaysian’ Muslimness should not be understood as Kazakh or Malaysian version of Islam, in which religion is subordinated to ethnicity. Muslimness (sometimes overlapping with Islamness) here refers to the dominant interpretations and practices of Islam within particular society or ethnic group.

It is a fact that the Soviet regime was rather successful in creating a new kind of society and new kind of idiosyncrasy in Central Asia. Loss of civilization if not absolutely, at least to significant degree happened in Central Asia during the Soviet times. Soviet legacy in the realm of religion brought about the disappearance of intellectual platforms of Islam, nearly total extinction of local ‘Ulema’ (Muslim scholars trained in classic Islamic educational and spiritual system) and destruction of Sufi institutions (zawiya and tek[k]e), as a whole the destruction of ‘high Islam’ which can be depicted as Islamness and Islamic religiosity with intellectual dimension, premised upon home-grown religious scholars and spiritual leaders – local ‘Ulema’, as well visible in public sphere Islamness and Muslimness featured with viable classic religious (mosques, madrasah) and Sufi institutions. However, despite of ‘broken tradition’ and somehow ‘religious minimalism’ caused by decades-long unprecedentedly systematic anti-religious campaign launched by the Soviet system, Central Asians, including Kazakhs consider themselves no less Muslims, historically bound them to customary Islam, which ties community, custom and tradition to Islam [1]. In the eyes of Central Asian Muslims, Islam can be regarded as “the sole real anchor of stability and source of moral succour in a volatile society that suffers endemically from serious socio-economic hardships...” [2].

All this brought about, on the one hand, enthusiasm of reviving religious life in post-atheistic society inasmuch as religion is indispensable component of human civilization and the freedom and right to confess religion are of fundamental human rights, on the other hand, fears of politicization of religion, rise of militancy and destructive ideologies and groups wrapped up in religious, particularly Islamic slogans. The problems challenging the Muslim community and Kazakhstani society in general, the elites, intellectuals and religious leaders specifically, can be divided into two main categories. The first is the emergence of distorted understandings of Islamic teaching which is conditioned by three main factors such as the enduring negative Soviet legacy; epitomized by the destruction of ‘high Islam’ and phenomenon of ‘broken tradition’; the formation of exclusivist identities and the criminalization syndrome infiltrated to the religious life. The second problem is the politization of religion and spread of radical interpretations, as a result a number of Muslims in post-Soviet countries turned out to be the sympathizers of exclusivist and authoritarian interpretations of Islam focused on the struggle with ‘Crusades’, ‘Zionists’ or other alleged enemies of Islam, not infrequently among Muslims themselves.

Politization of religion and rise of radicalization essentially impoverish the nature of religion and even threaten its survival as spiritual and ethical teaching. Surely, it is a very dangerous point to get to. This shows the urgent need to find solutions within the Islamic doctrine, namely the development of the humanistic and ethical dimensions of Islamic doctrine and generation and adoption of ‘non-contentious’, ‘non-authoritarian’ [3], ‘not-exclusivist’ interpretations of Islam.

This paper claims that traditional/ historical Kazakh Muslimness tended to be inclusive, xenophilic and depoliticized. This paper searches for the foundations of this identity by shedding light on the arguments about inclusive (anti-authoritarian) origins of Kazakh communal identity; inclusiveness of Kazakhness and influence of Sunni tasawwuf (‘Tasawwuf’ can be understood tentatively as spiritual reading and interpretation of Islamic religious sources) on the nature of Kazakhness and prominent Kazakh thinkers and intellectuals.

A significance of the paper lies in the assumption that Kazakh inclusive Muslimness can be seen as antithesis to both radical/authoritarian religious interpretations and ethnic-based exclusivist identity–building. Therefore, if traditional Kazakh religious identity is revived, the negative scenarios aired by some experts about the perspectives of the dominance in future of ethnic-based exclusivist Kazakh nationalism and rise of exclusivist Islamic interpretations among the country’s Muslim community can be successfully neutralized. This methodology can be used as blueprint for other Central Asian countries. On the whole, the paper tries to draw a positive picture of developing multicultural, poly-ethnic and multi-religious pluralist and tolerant society in Kazakhstan experiencing religious, including Islamic awakening.

## **2. Methods**

The sociological research in the field of Religion studies is very promising in the sense that they reveal the religious situation and consciousness of modern society. The sociological dimension of Islamic consciousness for the Kazakhstani society is an urgent task in the case of the on-going religious conversions in the Islamic Ummah. The Institute for Philosophy, Political Science and Religion Studies of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan conducted sociological research on two dimensions in 2014:

- 1) Questionnaire of respondents in the format of an omnibus with a sample of 1,000 people in 14 regions of Kazakhstan, including the cities Astana and Almaty;
- 2) Interview of 60 experts (from groups of imams, teachers of moral education schools, teachers of religion studies of secular universities, staff of the Department of Religious Affairs, law enforcement officers and journalists). The most general results of the research are reflected in the collective monograph 'Values and Ideals of Independent Kazakhstan' [4].

The sociological dimension on the importance of the Hanafi madhhab and its difference from other schools which constitute the Islamic legal doctrine showed that, despite the on-going secular policy in our country, nevertheless, there is a relative increase in the religious content of society (on a quantitative scale). But it does not mean that there is a large-scale growth of religious self-awareness and religious self-identity.

The expert poll showed deep awareness of the conceptual definition 'traditional Islam'. The answers were based on a good knowledge of historical and social cultural causes, the prerequisites for the emergence of traditional Islam. As the answers show, majority of experts consider that the notion of traditional Islam which associated with the notion of tradition, which in fact does not contradict the universal understanding of the traditionality of a particular religion. However, when comparing the answers of the respondents and experts, it is revealed that in the mass consciousness the idea that traditional Islam exists due to the experience of generations. It is revealed the tendency of a tolerant attitude towards the professing of Islam, which is based on the cultural and historical tradition.

## **3. On the Muslim origins of Kazakh religious identity**

To be able to analyse the issue of Kazakh religious identity we should, first of all, answer the question about the historical and civilizational place of Islam in the lives of Kazakhs. Only then we can successfully elaborate the question about the appropriateness of depicting and describing the Islamic perceptions of Kazakhs.

On the whole, Islam has had a profound impact on the culture, historical memories, language, national attire and other components of national identity of Kazakhs. The authors argue that the arguments about Islamization of Kazakhs after Russian annexation of Kazakh lands in 19<sup>th</sup> century should be seen as stereotypic, orientalist and oxymoronic. In general, simplistic and essentialist approaches in different research conducted on Central Asian nomads have often been observable from the Middle Ages to present. The history of Islamization of Kazakhs, more correctly of proto-Kazakh tribes, and in general of Central Asian nomads, can be discussed extensively. However, this paper does not aim to discuss this issue extensively. It touches only few main points.

The authors share the views of past (such as W. Radloff) and present scholars (D. DeWesse, S. Akiner, B. Privratsky, T. Uyama and others) who challenge the view, popularized by uncritical reading of the analyses of some orientalism-minded Kazakh, Russian and Western scholars, implying that Kazakhs were historically 'nominal Muslims' and that Islam 'sat lightly upon' nomads. As it is pointed out, "the belief that Kazakh nomads were Islamicized lightly or late is out-dated, as are all the analyses that stem from the view of Valikhanov and the like, that the Kazakhs received their Islam passively from 'fanatical Tatars and Central Asians'" [5].

W. Radloff writing about the effect of Islam on the Kazakh identity pointed out that "Despite the fact that the Kazakhs were nomads, different from shamanic Altay peoples, the fact that their life is more cultural is solely due to Islam. Their clothes, neatness in their homes, cleanness, perfect family relations, higher morality, of course, are certain results of Islam. Several centuries have passed since the Kazakhs accepted Islam. Just looking at the fact that there are some shamanistic leftovers among the Kazakhs, it would be wrong to assume that they became Muslim only now. The reason that Kazakh's Islam is rather different from others is only because of their different lifestyle." [6]

It is more accurate to argue that Islam has more profound and long history among Central Asian nomads than it used to be acknowledged, in a view of that "within a century of its appearance, the Golden Horde became definitely and consciously an Islamic Empire. Thus, Central Asia was 're-Islamized' from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, in the late Chingisid and early Timurid era." [7] The basic Islamic rituals entered into almost all spheres of the proto-Kazakhs' everyday life, from birth, name-giving, circumcision, marriage and death, all traditions took an Islamic form. As archaeological excavations have testified, the nomads started to bury their dead according to Islamic rituals in the fourteenth century. Many family ceremonies began to be shaped according to Islam [8]. As some scholars admit, "Kazakhs had converted to Islam by the sixteenth century, but the details of their conversion process are unknown" [9].

The fact that Central Asian nomads were not idolatries, for instance Caliph Ali acknowledged that Turkic tribes did not worship idols [10], was probably the most important factor of the massive acceptance of Islam of Central Asian nomads, since the pre-Islamic worldviews of Turkic tribes to a considerable degree overlapped with the Islamic creed.

Particularly prominent mutasawwuf Ahmed Yasawi and his disciples paved the way for opening the indigenous channels of developing Islamic creed and Muslim identity among nomadic Turks. They could connect the Islamic teaching and consciousness of Central Asian nomads. Although some scholars particularly from Turkey after Koprulu tended to situate Yasawi in the tradition of non-Orthodox (non-Sunni Islam), this view has been constantly challenged by a number of scholars. According to this view, contrary to Koprulu's revised thesis (Koprulu initially also described Yasawi as Sunni), neither Yasawi as a heterodox 'baba' alien to Sunni Sufism, akin to Shiism, Batinism, nor was teaching such heretical fitted to the illiterate nomadic Turks on the frontiers of the Islamic world. Instead, both the identity of Yasawi and Yasawi order were fundamentally Sunni orthodox [11]. The fact that, in contrast to the nomadic Turkic tribes of the Middle East, Anatolia and Balkans, no Shia or Alawite groups historically emerged among Kazakhs proves this statement.

In parallel to what was put forward concerning the Muslim thinker of a later generation Shakarim, who was able to develop a unique Islamic thought, despite never educated in a madrasa [12], the fact that a number of Kazakh poets and thinkers like Bukhar Jyrau, Umbetey Jyrau or Dulat [13] living far from major Islamic cities could develop Islamic ideas freely and deeply shows deep seated Muslim roots of Kazakh religious identity.

The misperceptions of Kazakh Muslim identity derived from the following reasons. First of all, the misunderstandings or lack of knowledge about the nature of Kazakh nomadic culture should be highlighted. Generally the researchers have overlooked, first, that Kazakh Muslimness was adjusted very much to the Central Eurasian nomadic lifestyle. Secondly, the Kazakh nomadism was of seasonal nature characterized by migration twice a year from 'zhaylau' (summer place) to 'kystau' (winter place) where nomads lived in built houses but not in tents). Thirdly, under the geographical conditions of Central Eurasia nomads had to live in their 'kystau' migration at least for six months. Hence, the claims that the nomadic lifestyle was unsuitable to perform Islamic rituals and pursue religious and whatever type of education tended to be superficial. As well, many of these researchers have not paid attention to the fact that according to Islam the whole Earth has been made as a mosque, place of worship, even under some extreme conditions prayer (salat) can be performed on the back of the horse, and that according to Hanafi school of Islam, to which historically almost all Kazakhs belonged, to perform the Friday-prayer the congregation of three Muslims is enough.

Some researchers may consider the politically motivated 'fatwas' given against Kazakhs as objective and enough to judge an entire community ignoring historical, ethnographical and linguistic factors. These fatwas were given by some Central Asian scholars under the duress of the ruling Shaybanid dynasty at the particular period and declared Kazakhs 'unbelievers' so as to launch against them a war and capture their property. However, one of the prominent scholars of that period, who was also compelled to give his 'consent', Fazlallah ibn Ruzbihan, admitted that it would be more sacred to fight war against Safavids

than Kazakhs professing the proper Sunni Islamic creed [F. ibn Ruzbihan, *Mihnam-name-yi Buhara*, Vostochnaya Literatura, <http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/rus7/Isfachani/framepred.htm>]. He acknowledged that Kazakhs had been converted to Islam at the same time as the Uzbeks. However, on the other hand claiming that Kazakhs could be attacked because they retained certain local practices, making them ‘apostates’ but not pagans, he found the solace by justifying the problematic fatwa [9, p. 98].

In the research about the religious identity of Kazakhs, Western and Soviet scholars appealed to accounts and surveys from the eighteenth and nineteenth century researchers – travellers to Central Asia. However, these travellers turned out to be handicapped by their misunderstandings of the specific native interpretations of Islam and pre-Islamic beliefs in the region. For them, to be Muslim meant the performance of prayer (salat) five times per day in mosques, attire similar to the Arabic style, etc. Hence, when these researchers did not encounter the generally accepted symbols of Islam or what they knew about Arabic states, or when they encountered native practices and traditions which were not in line with those of ‘standardized’, they usually reached the judgment that the Central Asian nomads were still ‘pagans’ and Muslims in name only [5, p. 7].

The information concerning ‘Islamic missionary’ of Tsarist regime in Kazakh lands has spread among scholars. However, the so-called ‘Islamic missionary’ of ‘official mullahs’ among Kazakhs, undertaken, depending on the circumstances, either with official or semi-official support or tacit approval of the Tsarist regime, was designed to take nomadic way of life under the state control by creating a controllable model of Islamness and Muslimness.

On the whole, nomadic Islamness in Central Asian steppes never embarked on creating the ‘state- shaped Muslimnes’ premised on ‘exclusivist’ and statist interpretations, which from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and particularly from early 19<sup>th</sup> century became desired by Imperial Russia to consolidate its power among Central Asian nomads populating the vast areas from Altay to Volga, and from Siberia to Tashkent and Bukhara. The official policy of Imperial Russia during the reign of Catherine the 2<sup>nd</sup> was not merely to ‘recognize’ Islam. This policy endeavoured to control Islamness and Muslimness of Muslim people, subjects of Russian Empire. Moreover, the imperial power attempted to ‘construct’ a state-loyal version of Islamness and Muslimness among Russian Muslims, initially in Volga-Ural region, which had been colonized centuries earlier. Imperial Russia was scarcely the only empire to use religion to help it rule [14]. Consequently, it was natural that the main rationale behind ‘Toleration of All Faiths Edict’ adopted in 1773 and state support to establish Muslim Ecclesiastical Administration, subsidization of building mosques and other official material and immaterial assistance lent to Russian Muslims could be a goal to develop the policy to control Muslims from within-in and shape the ‘state-centric’ Islamness and Muslimness (in Russian ‘kazennoya religiya’).

The attitude of religious/Muslim oriented Kazakh poets and spiritual leaders to Tsarist policy showed the deep-seated Muslim consciousness of Kazakhs. Some prominent representatives of the ‘Zar Zaman’ (Time of Lament, the period of overt colonization of Kazakh lands by Tsarist regime) such as Shortanbay and Dulat praised Islam, previous Kazakh khans and lamented over the loss of, first of all, shari’a, land, and peaceful nomadic life [12, p. 93]. As it is indicated by Uyama Tomohiko, the Tsarist authorities did not allow Shari’a law to be applied in the Kazakh steppe, in contrast to the Volga-Ural and the sedentary areas of Turkestan [12, p. 95]. This fact also proves that Tsarist regime aimed to shape controllable Islam or at least to cause antipathy to Islam on the side of Kazakhs by employing directly or by allowing tacitly or otherwise the ‘preaching’ in Kazakh steppes of the mullahs professing ‘exclusivist’, deeply scholastic and distant from human’s reason (in Kazakh ‘dumshe molda’ – ‘fake/half-ripe mullah’) interpretations of Islam. It was a main reason why many anti-colonial poets like Abubakir Kerderi or prominent reformist thinkers like Abay Kunanbayuli criticized the mal-practices of such mullahs, ‘ishans’ and ‘sufis’, and the leading Kazakh intellectuals like Chokan Valikhanov developed anti-Islamic discourse in his works. It is noticeable that Abay Kunanbayuli wrote that: “in this land of Dar al-Harb, one has to acquire wealth first and then [to learn] Arabic and Persian ... It is necessary to learn Russian...It is necessary to learn their language, education and science, both to avoid their harms and to share their advantages.” [9, p. 125]

#### **4. Inclusiveness and Kazakhstan’s policy**

As a rule, the official strategy of identity building, official policy towards religion, a model of state-religion relations all these exert considerable effect on shaping Islamness and Muslimness of the people practicing Islam. For example, excessive repression, gross violations of basic human rights by a politically-dominant group/s characterizes many Muslim countries, the factor which is a central in breeding violence and in the emergence of exclusivist religiosity deprived of spirituality. These all impoverishes Islam, even threatens its survival as a religion.

To be able to understand objectively the political and social processes taking place in Central Asia, firstly, we should get rid of indulging into overwhelming generalizations about the states located in the region, since substantial differences in the political regimes, social and economic conditions emerged after 1990 in all post-Soviet Central Asian states.

Specifically, it can be argued that Kazakhstan adopted as a key element of national strategy ‘inclusiveness’ to avoid the fate of Bosnia-Herzegovina of the early 1990s and other countries of the former Eastern Bloc where people of different origin became embroiled into inter-community and intra-community conflicts.



It is a fact, that identity formed either by inclusive religiosity or secular humanness is the best antithesis of religious radicalism and aggressive nationalism and chauvinism. However, after independence some Central Asian countries embarked on the developing the policy of instrumentalising Islam in building exclusivist identities characterized by primacy of titular ethnicity and narrowly perceived 'localized' religiosity. This phenomenon has to be seen as a leading factor impeding creation of viable pluralist societies in Central Asia [15].

However, the political elites of Kazakhstan after independence embarked on ground-breaking reforms in economic and financial and educational sectors, adopted relatively liberal policy in economic and cultural life and a policy of non-interference into religious life. All these formed the foundations of building genuinely diversified society in place of non-diversified, purely modernist, ideationally and culturally post-totalitarian society.

In domestic politics toleration of cultural, linguistic pluralism, and building relatively inclusive national identity, in foreign policy good neighbourhood strategy and 'multi-vector' foreign policy have been conceived as a linchpin of official policy of Kazakhstan. Specifically, in the field of language in place of strict nationalization/Kazakhification, accommodation and toleration of other, primarily Russian language can be observed. While Kazakh language is official, Russian can be used equally and the program of developing three languages (Kazakh, Russian and English) is being promoted.

As a result of reforms, some strong pockets of liberal education already exist in the field of education and sciences in the country. For instance, KIMEP University in Kazakhstan, which is the oldest and largest US-style academic institution in the CIS area, has produced thousands of graduates who are employed in top state organs and private institutions. Recently established Nazarbayev University's curriculum is designed according to the US's and British requirements. A number of young bureaucrats, technocrats and academicians have been educated through 'Bolashak' program in the Western universities according to liberal programs. All these contribute to solidify inclusiveness of Kazakh society.

Although traditional Kazakh Muslimness and perceptions of self and others came under serious challenge during Soviet period and Soviet-engineered identity building is still seriously influencing the public opinion, science-making and official policy in Kazakhstan, on the whole the post-Soviet identity-building in Kazakhstan is more congruent with traditional Kazakh inclusiveness and xenophile.

Inclusiveness of official policy is harshly criticised by some Kazakh nationalist groups claiming that they defend Kazakh language and culture. However, they ironically do not represent as such classic Kazakhness (mind-set and style of reasoning) permeated with traditional Kazakh Muslimness. These groups rather represent modernist Soviet-style primordial perception of national identity.

In essence the inclusiveness and xenophile is a method of turning the threats into opportunities and even strengths, for example, as Abay advised, “It is necessary to learn Russian...It is necessary to learn their language, education and science, both to avoid their harms and to share their advantages.” [12, p. ?]

On the whole, inclusiveness as a core component of Kazakhstan’s domestic and foreign policy strategy adopted at the dawn of independence, more or less being implemented, has paved the way for the revitalization of traditional Kazakh religious identity.

## 5. Conclusions

Although the official policy of Kazakhs government adopted at the dawn of independence has paved the way for the revitalization of traditional Kazakh religious identity, there are still a number of challenges impeding the development of enlightened and ethical dimensions of Islamic way of life, primarily the spread of the groups adhering to the ‘flat’, ‘literalist’, even radical-takfiri methodology of interpreting Islamic sources and the enduring legacy of totalitarian past in political, social-cultural and religious spheres.

Therefore, this paper proposes, first, to continue the policy of establishing sustainable pluralist society and passive secularism which paves the way for development of inclusive religiosity and inclusive religious identity. In other words, Islam as a religious teaching, but not as a phenomenon downgraded to the level of political ideology, can develop authentically only in diversified civil society and only in the form of ‘Civil Islam’. Building inclusive secular and religious identities and openness to the outside world can help neutralize the repercussions of being ‘Post-totalitarian society’ by providing integrated to the outside world, self-sufficient political, economic, social, and intellectual development.

The authors urge about necessity of studying the works of Kazakh poets and thinkers of pre-modern and early modern period as well of the intellectuals of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries through more balanced prism devoid of essentialist and orientalist stereotypes and cliché. The fact that the religious (Islamic) motifs in the works of the poets and thinkers of either early modern or late modern period have been generally overlooked or misunderstood is understandable, since Kazakhstan is a post-totalitarian and post-atheistic country. This seems important also in a view of the fact that the traditional inclusive and xenophilic Kazakh Muslimness on the one hand is misunderstood by the scholars who regard it as less-Islamic and on the other hand is downplayed by the representatives of literalist methodology (side-lining with so-called Salafist approach) who claim about the necessity of reappraisal of traditional Islamness (Sunni-Maturidi, Hanafi) and Muslimness of Kazakhs.

Consequently, to tackle the problem of politization of religion and religious radicalism, the revitalization of inclusive Kazakh Muslimness and resurrection of local ‘High Islam’ by establishing educational and academic venues and development of social justice are necessary. Therefore, the

prioritization of repressive methods only deepens the problem of radicalization. If some countries in the region had not adopted harsh, reminiscent of totalitarian past methods of fighting with radicalism and terrorism, the overall situation in Central Asia, the political and psychological atmosphere would have been much more positive and conducive to develop more human-oriented and pluralistic political systems.

On the whole, if traditional Kazakh Islamness is revived, the negative scenarios aired by some experts regarding the perspectives of the dominance in future of ethnic-based exclusivist Kazakh nationalism and rise of exclusivist Islamic interpretations within the country's Muslim community can be successfully neutralized. Inclusive Islamness can be seen as antithesis to both radical/authoritarian religious interpretations and ethnic-based exclusivist identity-building. Ethnic, religious, cultural and civilizational diversity are *sine quo nun* of development, it is not a tragedy or disaster, or any kind of immediate threat.

We hope that the issues touched in this paper will be elaborated further by scholars and experts who are interested in developing the approaches which are critical of established orthodoxies and try to challenge them by offering more optimistic and exuberant perspectives.

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