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CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TATARS IN PETROGRAD-LENINGRAD AND FINLAND DURING THE 1920S AND 1930S

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Saint Petersburg served from the end of the nineteenth century as a transit point for Mishär Tatars moving to the Grand Duchy of Finland. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a small community had already formed in Finland, but its members maintained regular contacts with their relatives and connections in the Sergach district (Nizhny Novgorod province), Saint Petersburg and other regions. Contrary to common belief, these ties were not interrupted even after the October Revolution of 1917. Throughout most of the 1920s, Tatars and others crossed the Soviet-Finnish border illegally. Tatars living in independent Finland also sent considerable financial aid to their contacts in Leningrad with the help of couriers.

The nature of the ties between the Tatar emigrants in Finland and the Tatars of Leningrad can be illustrated by the materials of one criminal case. This case was instituted by the Soviet political police against representatives of the Tatar Muslim community in Leningrad in 1931. Only after several arrests and tightening border control was communication between the Tatars in Finland and Leningrad interrupted. I suggest that the Mishär Tatars in Leningrad and Finland constituted a single social and cultural space until the 1930s, when the connections between them were blocked. The ensuing divide had a large impact on the identity of the Tatars living in Finland, who began developing a separate Finnish Tatar identity just a few years after the termination of contacts.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Tatars in Finland is closely connected to the history of the Tatar community in Saint Petersburg. The arrival of Mishär Tatar traders in the late nineteenth century from the Sergach district in Nizhny Novgorod province to the Grand Duchy of Finland was connected with the opening of the railway link between Saint Petersburg and the Finnish town of Riihimäki, located approximately 70 km north of Helsinki (Helsingfors). The capital of the Russian Empire, Saint Petersburg, by virtue of its economic significance and geographical position, served as a transit point for these Tatars, who from the end of the nineteenth century began to explore new markets. In the beginning, their visits could be defined as a primarily seasonal migration. In the summer, the Tatar men engaged in farming in their villages, while in the winter they traded in towns with furs, fur products, textiles, and so forth (Khairetdinov 2015: 181).

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Initially, these Mishär Tatars extended their trade from the capital to the Finnish towns located on the Karelian Isthmus near Saint Petersburg, Terijoki (now Zelenogorsk) and Viipuri (Swedish: Viborg, Russian: Vyborg). However, as competition increased, they began to explore the markets in the internal regions of the Grand Duchy of Finland. After certain commercial successes, several men abandoned farming and switched to regular trade. Settling in the cities of Finland and bringing their families from the home villages, the Tatars retained business and kinship ties in Saint Petersburg and the Sergach district. Often the trade was a family enterprise or based on networks created already in the home region. According to census data for 1910, around 7,300 Tatars lived in Saint Petersburg, comprising about 0.4 percent of the urban population (Chistyakov n.d.).

A significant segment of the Tatars in the city consisted of immigrants from the Nizhny Novgorod province. At the beginning of the twentieth century, whole families lived in Saint Petersburg (Figure 1). The ethnic, cultural, social, economic and geographical proximity of the Tatar communities in Saint Petersburg and Finland shows that they were part of a common Mishär Tatar socio-cultural space, understood in this article as a space-time integrity, the existence and functioning of which is determined by the presence of unifying factors (ethno-religious, cultural, socio-economic, historical-geographical and so forth).

Figure 1 Tatar boy from Saint Petersburg, 1905. Renat Bekkin, private collection.

As Pierre Bourdieu (2007: 18) has noted, the space of relationships is no less real than geographical space. The basis for the Mishär Tatar common space was created in a couple of villages in the Sergach district, the starting point for the emigration. The Tatars in Saint Petersburg and Finland continued to live in a single space of relationships, which was determined by the geographical position of the metropolis near the Finnish border and its importance as the capital of the Russian Empire. The common space also strengthened the economic, matrimonial, cultural and other ties among the Mishär Tatars sharing the same background, values and lifestyle.

TATARS IN FINLAND AND PETROGRAD-LENINGRAD AFTER 1917

The October Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing declaration of independence for Finland in December during the same year changed the fate of the unified Tatar community. Like many residents of the former Russian Empire, the Tatars believed that the rule of the Bolsheviks was a temporary phenomenon. Therefore they had no intention of curtailing their businesses in Russia. A typical example is Zinetullah Imadetdin, better known as Zinetullah Ahsen Böre (1886–1945).[1]

In 1917, Zinetullah Imadetdin was the leader of the Muslim community in Terijoki, where he engaged in trade and kept a shop. At the end of 1917 or the beginning of 1918, Zinetullah transferred the store and other real estate to his brothers Abdulkhaq and Abdullah, who remained in Terijoki while he travelled to Petrograd (renamed from Saint Petersburg during World War I). Here he rented a four-storey shop at Apraksin Dvor, one of the oldest city markets, established in 1754. He also purchased goods for 10,000 gold roubles and invested 75,000 gold roubles in the purchase of a house consisting of 88 rooms (Bekkin & Tagirdzhanova 2016: 458). In August 1918, however, Zinetullah had to leave the house and the shop and hastily flee to Finland.

During the years of revolution and the Civil War, the structure of the population in Petrograd underwent major changes. Famine and the dangers of war provoked many residents to leave the city. A significant part of the Muslim intelligentsia, consisting of military personnel, lawyers, teachers, journalists, doctors and so forth, left not only the city but also the country. As for the peasants, those who had the opportunity moved to Finland or returned to their home villages. Yet in the early 1920s the trend reversed. Compared with the pre-war levels, the numbers of the Tatar community increased fourfold, mainly due to 28,000 peasants fleeing to the city from the famine in the Volga region in 1921–1922 (Tagirdzhanova 2008: 53).

The situation in Finland was also restless in this period and the Finnish Civil War affected the Tatar community in several ways. For example, after General C.G. Mannerheim's troops captured the city of Viipuri on 29 April 1918, residents who did not speak Finnish or Swedish, which included the Tatars, became victims (Westerlund 2013: 43). After the end of the civil wars in Russia and Finland, the migration of Tatars to Finnish cities continued. The presence of the new state border limited mobility but did not eliminate the possibility of travel between Finland and Russia (or Soviet Union, after 1922) for residents in both countries. Tatars moved both legally and illegally, independently or resorting to the help of guides.

Literary sources about this period, primarily memoirs, show many examples of illegal crossings of the Soviet-Finnish border. There were two main possibilities of illegal movement from Petrograd to Finland: by boat or other watercraft through the Gulf of Finland, or on foot through the land

1 The author expresses his gratitude to Mikko Suikkanen for providing an English translation of an extract from the book *Firmat kauppatalo S.I. Ahsen Ve Ahsen O.Y. 1910–1935–1945*, related to the life and work of Zinetullah Imadetdin in Saint Petersburg in the early twentieth century (see Yesilova-Leino/Ahsen Böre).

"corridors" on the Karelian Isthmus. For example, two eminent early twentieth-century Muslim politicians, Mammad Amin Rasulzade (1884–1955) and Sadri Maqsudi (1878–1957), left Petrograd by sea. Rasulzade's biography explains the route. After deciding to emigrate from Soviet Russia, he went to Petrograd. From there he took a boat, illegally crossed the Gulf of Finland and thus arrived in Finland (Balaev 2013: 13). Maqsudi left in a similar way. The escape to Finland by sea is described in more detail in the biography of another Muslim politician, Abdullah Battal-Taymas:

> For the meeting with Finnish boatmen, A. Battal with one child and a middle-aged Mishär Tatar went to Oranienbaum [later Lomonosov, a town near Petrograd]. Here he walked along a forest shore and then waited in an abandoned house until the time of departure came in the evening. On a foggy night between 9–10 pm together with two Finnish oarsmen-smugglers he was rushed into the boat and journeyed across the stormy sea to the Finnish coast, where there was no Bolshevism. On the shore, soldiers detained him and he was sent to quarantine. After some time, he was released. (Birindzhi 2011: 186)

According to the memoirs, one of the organizers of the escape of Rasulzade and Maqsudi was the outstanding Tatar theologian Musa Bigeev (also written Bigiev or Bigi, 1873–1949),[2] who during the Civil War in Russia performed the functions of *imam-khatib* (leader of prayer) at the Petrograd Cathedral Mosque, opened in 1913.[3]

In 1920, Musa Bigeev left the position of *imam-khatib* because he wanted to focus on scientific and social-political activities. As his stand-in, Bigeev suggested Yakub Khalekov, who had recently moved to Petrograd from Vologda, where he had served as *imam* until 1917. Bigeev was not the chairman of the mosque congregational council (the so-called *dvadtsatka*, consisting of twenty members), but nevertheless he took an active part in the affairs of the Muslim community. Although many believers did not share – or, more precisely – understand his reformist views on Islam, Bigeev enjoyed much respect among the Muslims in the city. Bigeev's ties with the Leningrad community were not broken off during 1923–1926, when he was arrested and had to live in Moscow, being forbidden to leave the Soviet capital (Bekkin 2017: 150–153).

The second way of illegally crossing the border between Soviet Russia and Finland – by land – was more common, and it was not as adventurous as might seem the case today. Until the mid-1930s, experienced guides led various kinds of people from both the Finnish and Soviet sides across the border on the Karelian Isthmus. The transits are well-known because of the activities of the White emigration[4] and the operations carried out by the Soviet political police, the United State Political Directorate (*Ob"yedinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie*, OGPU). For instance, Operation "Trust" (*Trest*) was organized and carried out by Soviet counter-espionage agents in 1921–1926. It involved setting up a fictitious anti-Soviet monarchist organization, which aroused the interest and sympathy of the White émigrés in

2 For a biography of Bigeev, see Zaripov & Belyaev (2020), in this volume.

3 About the Cathedral Mosque in Saint Petersburg, see Bekkin & Ståhlberg 2016: 72–75. Borrowed from the Christian lexicon, the term 'Cathedral' was commonly used in the Russian Empire and in the USSR to denote the main mosque in the city.

4 One of the most famous stories is the double border crossing by the V.A. Larionov group, who committed the terrorist attack on the Communist Party Club in Leningrad on 1 June 1927 and managed to return to Finland afterwards. Larionov and his two colleagues in the Russian All-Military Union (*Russkiy obshchevoinskiy soyuz*, ROVS) crossed the Finnish-Soviet border with the help of a guide. Their goal was to commit a terrorist act in one of the Soviet institutions in Leningrad. The guide was supposed to wait for the Larionov group at the appointed place on the evening of the next day, but unable to arrive at the agreed meeting time due to a delay, the group was forced to return on its own. Even in the absence of a guide, one could successfully cross the border (see Larionov 1931: 2–10, 58–63).

Europe. Some noteworthy persons living in exile and officers of Western intelligence services were killed in the course of this operation.[5]

The Tatars used "windows" on the border for other things than emigrating from Soviet Russia. Representatives of the community also plied the border, legally and illegally, as part of the communication lines between the Finnish Tatars and their contacts in Saint Petersburg. With guides often found among smugglers who regularly moved across the border, the Tatars in Finland transferred money, goods and correspondence to their relatives and contacts in the city, which was now called Leningrad.[6] Ismail Salyamov, a member of the Leningrad mosque congregational council, used the services of an antiques dealer, according to a report:

> The accused Salyamov had connections with Tatars living in Finland through a dealer Sheberg, who travelled from Finland to Leningrad in 1923–1931 under the flag of purchasing antiques; Salyamov rendered him full assistance in the purchase of antiquities at low prices from the state funds, where Salyamov worked as an appraiser, for which Sheberg gave him money, various parcels and smuggled things.[7]

Vagap Khayretdinov, who lived in the village of Aktukovo (Tatar: Aqtuq) in the Nizhny Novgorod province, resorted to the service of a Finnish diplomatic courier to receive a coat and 8,000 roubles from his nephew in Finland (Senyutkina & Guseva 2013: 128).

The couriers did not always succeed in reaching their destinations, and as a result the parcels fell into the hands of the OGPU. In order to catch a courier from Finland, in 1925 an ambush was prepared in the apartment of one of the key figures in the Leningrad Muslim community, the actual administrator of the Cathedral Mosque, the chairman of the mosque's congregational council (*dvadtsatka*), Mohammed-Alim Maksutov (1857–*c*.1930).[8] The details of this story are unknown, but it is obvious that there was a provocateur or spy among the Leningrad Tatars. Soon after the incident, Maksutov decided to leave the post of chairman. As Maksutov's son Hafiz subsequently informed the investigating authorities in 1931, his father "utterly disappointed withdrew from the Tatars".[9]

During the 1920s, Finnish couriers also conveyed money, which was used as aid for both individuals and the Muslim community in Leningrad as a whole. As already noted, until the end of the twentieth century, the main part of the Muslim population in Saint Petersburg consisted of Tatars. Their need for sponsorship from abroad became particularly acute in the second half of the 1920s after the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP). Although private trade was officially banned only in 1931, it was already hindered through a combination of administrative and tax measures that the state had created to reduce entrepreneurial activity. As a result, many Tatar entrepreneurs in Leningrad lost their sources of income. Some of them left the country,

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5 In particular, English intelligence officer Sydney Reilly (1873–1925), misled by provocateurs from the OGPU, arrived in the USSR via the Finnish-Soviet border on the Karelian Isthmus. The provocateur A.O. Opperput-Staunitz (1895–1927?) and M.V. Zakharchenko-Schultz (1893–1927) fled the same way, but in the opposite direction to Finland (see Primakov 2014: 110–128).

6 *Sledstvennoe delo № 111999 po obvineniyu natsionalisticheskoy kontrrevolyutsionnoy gruppirovki*, *vozglavlyaemoy mullami Khalikovym Yakubom i Basyrovym Kemalem* [Criminal case No. 111999, charging a national counter-revolutionary group headed by *mullah* Yakub Khalekov and Kemal Basyrov], Archive of UFSB in Saint Petersburg and Leningrad region. P-74704. Vol. 2: 377. This criminal case was instituted against *imams* and members of the "twenty" (congregational council) at the Leningrad Cathedral Mosque in February 1931. Of the 27 arrested, 23 people were sentenced to different terms of imprisonment.

7 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 2: 377.

8 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 2: 287v.

9 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 2: 269v.

among them Ymär Sali (Alautdinov) (1876–1951). Having finally moved to Finland in 1926, he continued to provide financial support to the Muslim community and its leaders, such as Musa Bigeev, Yakub Khalekov and others. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Ymär Sali and his brother, along with Zinetullah Ahsen Böre and the Zhemaletdinov (Cemaletdinov, in Finland: Camaletdin) brothers, were the main sponsors of the Muslim community in Leningrad.[10]

The support provided to the Leningrad Muslim community from Finland, however, was not limited to the sending of funds. In 1923, Musa Bigeev was arrested in Moscow. The Tatars in Finland sent a letter to the Turkish government with a request to intervene. Soon the theologian was released, although he was forbidden to leave Moscow for three years (Bekkin 2017: 152–153).

MUSA BIGEEV'S PLAN OF ESCAPE IN 1930

One of the main sources on the relations of the Tatars in Leningrad and Finland is the criminal case of 1931, which was instituted by the OGPU against the leadership of the Muslim community in Leningrad (Bekkin 2017: 153–156). The immediate reason for this case was Musa Bigeev's escape from the Soviet Union in December 1930.[11] Bigeev left Leningrad on 5 November 1930, and the next day he arrived in Moscow. From there he travelled by train to Central Asia, leaving the USSR via the border with East Turkestan (also called Chinese Turkestan, now the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang).

When it became apparent that Bigeev did not intend to return to the Soviet Union in the near future, the authorities launched repressions against the Muslims in Leningrad.[12] On the night of 15–16 February 1931, almost three and a half months after Bigeev's departure, the leaders of the Muslim community were arrested. The Cathedral Mosque was at the centre of events (Figure 2), and *imam-khatib* Y. Khalekov, *imam* K. Basyrov and a significant part of the members of the *dvadtsatka* council were interrogated. The authorities were interested in all who had been associated in any way with Bigeev or his relatives, friends or colleagues. Two months later, Bigeev's wife and children were arrested.

The investigation papers contain only a fragment of a certain "document", which could be a letter from Bigeev to his wife, written shortly after his arrival in East Turkestan. In this document, Bigeev asked her to share the information how well Muslims lived abroad. There was "... greater justice and tranquillity. Great respect on the part of the state for the people, their morals, religion, life, and a wide freedom. Life with wealth, many mosques and *madrasas* [Islamic religious schools]."[13] Not only are these words remarkable, but at the end of the document Bigeev wrote: "I ran away. I acted in the right way. I could have fled to Finland. But there was another need – to go to Kashgaria [East Turkestan]."[14]

According to the materials of the criminal case in 1931, another plan had existed for Bigeev's escape. The move over the Soviet-Finnish border in summer or autumn 1930 was never carried out. The initiator and organizer of this plan was the Tatar entrepreneur Ymär Sali, who had lived permanently in Finland since 1926. Back in 1929, Musa Bigeev had addressed him in a desperate letter:

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10 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 2: 381.

11 For more information about Bigeev's escape, see Bekkin 2018b.

12 We should not exclude the possibility that upon learning of the arrests, Bigeev decided not to return. Unfortunately, his activities in this period, including the very early stages in 1931–1932, are not well known.

13 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 2: 383.

14 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 2: 383.

Figure 2 The Leningrad Cathedral Mosque, 1931. Renat Bekkin, private collection.

> Over the past two years, my financial situation has deteriorated considerably. In 1929 I was deprived of my rights, and in many ways I am again in a difficult situation. I even looked for some work, but found nothing (Tagirdzhanova 2010: 222).

It is possible that Ymär Sali's offer to bring Bigeev to Finland was a response to this letter. The suggested plan was as follows: Bigeev's sister[15] Mariyam (1863–1947; Figure 3) was supposed to arrive in Leningrad from the village of Aktukovo near Sergach. During the meeting with Bigeev she would discuss how they could cross the border. In Leningrad they had to wait for the arrival of a guide from Finland, whose task was to escort them to the Soviet-Finnish border and ensure safe passage.[16] The escape was to be carried through in the second half of 1930.

This is all we know from the criminal case materials. To implement the plan, Sali needed assistance from the Leningrad Tatars. He sent a letter to three of his fellow villagers from Aktukovo: Yarulla Sadretdinov (b. 1890), Anderzhan Zainetdinov (b. 1882) and Dinmuhammed Ainetdinov (b. 1882), in which he informed that Mariyam would soon arrive in Leningrad for an eye treatment. All three lived in Leningrad in the same apartment at Apraksin Lane 10/12. Sadretdinov and Ainetdinov were engaged in trade and Zainetdinov was an unskilled worker in a galoshes warehouse at the Red Triangle factory. Sali asked them to provide Mariyam with accommodation in their apartment.[17]

15 According to one source, Mariyam was Sali's cousin (*Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 1: 160); according to another, she was his aunt (*Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 1: 161v).
16 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 1: 173v.
17 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 1: 160.

Figure 3 Seucan Alejeff (1947–1928), left, and Mariyam Hakimcan (1863–1947), right. Courtesy of Hind Ali, Tampere.

According to Zainetdinov's testimony, when Mariyam arrived in Leningrad, he noticed that she was in no hurry to go to the doctor and she did not complain about any eye problems.[18] The true purpose of Mariyam's visit soon became clear when Zainetdinov, Sadretdinov and Ainetdinov gathered for a meeting. Well aware of the risks if Bigeev's escape were to be disclosed, they decided to immediately send Mariyam back to the village.[19] Caution did not save Zainetdinov, Sadretdinov and Ainetdinov from a severe sentence, however. The plan had somehow been discovered and each of them was sentenced to ten years in concentration camps.[20] The testimonies are contradictory in the wording of the indictment, in which it is noted that the escape did not take place "only due to the change of the escape plan by Bigeev himself to Kashgaria".[21]

The plan of Bigeev's escape via the Soviet-Finnish border to Finland in 1931 is not the only Finnish trace in this criminal case. The connection between the Muslim community in Leningrad and the Finnish Tatars was extremely troubling to the Soviet investigators, as is evident in the questions asked of different persons involved in the case.[22]

18 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 1: 160.
19 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 1: 173v.
20 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 2: 394.
21 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 2: 381.
22 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 1: 170.

RELATIONS ARE BROKEN

The indictment part of the criminal case concerning Bigeev contains repeated references to Finland and the group of Tatars living there. By fabricating a case about the existence of a counter-revolutionary group within the Muslim community in Leningrad that was closely connected with White Muslim émigrés, the OGPU assigned the character of a political act to the charitable assistance provided by the Finnish Muslim Tatars to their co-religionists in Leningrad. The indictment stated the following:

> The organization of Tatars in Finland, which is under the direct influence and guidance of the Eastern counter-revolutionary national centre represented by Ġayaz Isxaqi,[23] was in close connection with the liquidated group. This connection was expressed in the ideological reactionary junction, the sending of money and mutual information.[24]

In reality there was no nationalist organization which would unite the Tatars of Finland. There was a lack of consensus even among the Tatar traders, who were involved in the criminal case and who sponsored the Leningrad Muslim community. This is indicated among other things in the case materials, where one of the accused, Hasan Sadykov, notes that the Zhemaletdinov (Cemaletdinov) and Alautdinov brothers asked Zinetullah Böre to pay 10,000 Finnish marks in favour of some Tatar organization. Böre refused to do this, for which the mentioned persons boycotted him.[25]

One of the most common accusations among members in the Finnish Tatar community was having links with the Bolsheviks. It was not just a figure of speech or insult, but had political repercussions as well. Some members of the community wrote denunciations to the Finnish secret police, accusing other Tatars of collaborating with the Bolsheviks. One victim of such denunciations was, according to his own words, Zinnetullah Ahsen Böre (Yesilova-Leino/Ahsen Böre: 32). The Tatar community in Finland was split, perhaps not without the interference of the OGPU. Even if there had been a large, unified nationalist organization of Tatars in Finland which had as its goal the struggle against Soviet power, due to the apolitical character of the Tatar community in Leningrad it would hardly had been able to achieve success.

The materials of the criminal case of 1931 show that the main complaint, which the majority of the accused made against the Soviet authorities, was about a ban on entrepreneurial activity originating in the NEP policy. According to the testimony of Kemaletdin Bedretdinov, one of the accused, the *imam* of the Cathedral Mosque Kamaletdin Basyrov had said: "In Finland one lives better; here [in Leningrad] Tatars are oppressed, while there they have freedom… our Tatars are apt to trade, but the Soviet government does not permit that. It is not so in Finland."[26]

The investigating authorities were not interested in the actual state of affairs. Playing the Finnish card, the OGPU pursued several goals at once. First, it was necessary to stop or at least control the channels through which the Muslim community of Leningrad received material assistance. To this end, the authorities had to arrest the key activists who served as liaisons between the Tatars in Finland and Leningrad, and to create an atmosphere of fear and distrust

23 Ġayaz Isxaqi (Ayaz İshaki, 1878–1954), writer, publicist and publisher, was one of the leaders of the Tatar national movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1920, he emigrated from Soviet Russia. In the 1920s and 1930s, Isxaqi carried out active work for the consolidation of the representatives among the Turkic peoples living in exile, trying to create an anti-Bolshevik platform.

24 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 2: 379.

25 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 1: 140.

26 *Sledstvennoe delo №* 111999, vol. 2: 373.

among the Muslims on their side of the border. Secondly, the task was to isolate the Tatars of Leningrad from their co-religionists in Finland, in order to prevent the flow of information from and to Soviet Russia. Blocking information would allow a crackdown on persons disliked by the Bolshevik regime without attracting the attention of the international community.

These goals were largely achieved by the OGPU. The result of the criminal case in 1931 was that 23 people were sentenced to different terms of imprisonment. A separate case was assigned to members of Musa Bigeev's family: his wife Asma, son Ahmed and daughters Mariyam and Hind. The key task, the elimination of the Muslim community and the closing of the Cathedral Mosque in Leningrad, was not completed. The Muslims managed to consolidate, and in a short time Muhammed-Safa Bayazitov (1877–1937) was elected as the new *imam-khatib* (Bekkin 2018a: 86–88). The Cathedral Mosque continued to serve as the centre of religious life for the "Tatar colony", as the Tatar population of the city was then called in official documents. The group numbered about 35,000 people.[27]

In the following year, the OGPU struck at the Muslims again. By the Resolution of the Out Session (*vyezdnaya sessiya*) of the Board of the OGPU, dated 19 June 1932, Bayazitov was sentenced to five years in concentration camps under Articles 58–10, 58–13 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) of 1926. The basis for the accusations against Bayazitov was his activities before 1917. Relying on the allegations of other defendants and witnesses, the investigator noted: "The documents in the case expose him as an *okhrannik*, formerly a protégé to the position of the All-Russian Mufti of Muslims proposed by the secret police, in order to carry out an operation among the Muslims of Russia."[28] *Okhrannik* is a Russian slang word denoting an agent of the secret police in the Russian Empire. Most of the other Leningrad *mullahs*, who also were accused in this case, received a period of three years in concentration camps, among them F. Yunusov, A. Adikayev, B. Rahimov and others.

After the two criminal cases of 1931 and 1932, one could say that the Leningrad Muslim community was beheaded. The city authorities managed to close the Cathedral Mosque only in 1940, when the Muslim population of the city was greatly reduced due to mobilization for the Soviet-Finnish (Winter) War in 1939–1940. At least this was the reason officially given by representatives of the community in Leningrad, when in the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s they petitioned for the opening of the mosque for worship.

The contacts between the Muslims in Leningrad and the Tatars in Finland had almost completely ceased by the mid-1930s. The termination of the relations was achieved through various acts and circumstances. First of all, those who personally knew or had relations with Tatars living in Finland were arrested or expelled. Also, technical measures were taken by the Soviet side to strengthen the border on the Karelian Isthmus. As a result, by the mid-1930s it was almost impossible to cross the border without the OGPU's successor, the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (*Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*, NKVD), knowing about it.

A further important factor was that those Tatars who remained in Leningrad had become afraid of maintaining contact with their connections and relatives in Finland. A letter from

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27 *Delo № 1296-32 g. Po obvineniyu kontrrevolyutsionnoy gruppirovki*, *vozglavlyaemoy mullami Yunusovym F.*, *Adikaevym A.*, *Bayazitovym S.* [Criminal case No. 1296-32g charging the national counter-revolutionary group headed by *mullahs* F. Yunusov, A. Adikaev, S. Bayazitov], Archive of UFSB in Saint Petersburg and Leningrad region. P-86059. Vol. 2: 129. This criminal case was instituted against *imams* and members of the "twenty" council at the Leningrad Cathedral Mosque in May 1932. In total, 27 persons were involved.

28 *Delo №* 1296-32 g, vol. 2: 139.

Finland detected by the NKVD could cost the holders their freedom and even their lives. Neither greater caution nor silence, however, saved them from the Great Purge of 1937–1938. The thirteen volumes of the Leningrad martyrology, which contains the names of the citizens who fell victim to the repressions, contain many Tatar names (Leningradskiy martirolog 1995).

Those Leningrad Tatars who managed to escape arrest but witnessed how their relatives and friends vanished forever fell silent. After the beginning of the Winter War in 1939, any such contacts could be punished according to martial law. This is the main reason why Tatars – not only Leningrad Tatars but also from other regions in the USSR – would try to avoid communication when meeting Tatars from Finland. Such a case is vividly illustrated in a memoir by the son of an eyewitness:

> Terijoki was the first city occupied by the Red Army. The Finns managed to take away the only Jaeger battalion stationed there and evacuate the civilian population. However, several families of Russian émigrés decided to stay. My father, who came to Terijoki a few days after the beginning of the war with his car battalion, was surprised to find an open shop there and even bought a pack of Finnish cigarettes, which he didn't like very much. The owner of the shop turned out to be a Tatar who had been trading in Terijoki since pre-revolutionary times. He spoke Russian perfectly and immediately asked if there were any Tatars among his father's comrades in arms. It turned out that their company's *politruk* [political commissar] was a Tatar – but he was not at all happy about my father's message; he reprimanded him for his political short-sightedness and ordered not to tell anyone that he had communicated with a White emigrant, and to throw away the cigarettes. Apparently, the emigrants who had refused to evacuate deep into Finland strongly regretted their decision afterwards. (Chereyskiy 2012: 197–198)

CONCLUSIONS

Historically, the Mishär Tatars from Nizhny Novgorod province and the Kasimov Tatars, mainly found in the Ryazan and Tambov provinces, made up the main part of the Tatar and Muslim population in the Russian capital Saint Petersburg from the eighteenth until the twentieth century. Many of the Mishär Tatars, who at the beginning of the twentieth century formed the Tatar community in Finland, had lived in Saint Petersburg before moving over the border to the Grand Duchy. They were linked by family, economic and other ties with their fellow ex-villagers, relatives and co-religionists, who continued to live in the city.

The October Revolution and the proclamation of independence of Finland in 1917 did not break the existing ties between the two communities. The Tatars in Finland continued to maintain contacts with Petrograd, later renamed Leningrad. The illegal journey to and from Finland was fraught with serious risk, but it was possible to send correspondence and packages, including money, with smugglers and professional guides crossing the Soviet-Finnish border.

The Soviet authorities became worried about the uncontrolled receipt of money from abroad, because the financial support allowed the Muslim community of Leningrad to fulfil their material obligations to the state and pay taxes. The mosque had also funds for repairs, stripping the authorities of the opportunity to bereave the believers of their Cathedral and liquidate the Muslim community as a legal entity using judicial grounds. This they had been trying to achieve since the 1920s in connection with the strengthening of the atheist policy and intensification of the dictatorship within the Soviet Union. The atheist policy took the form of a mass campaign targeting any religious activity, even among groups of believers loyal to the state.

In this complicated situation, one of the main goals of the OGPU was to sever all ties between the Tatars in Leningrad and the outside world, whence materials and other support

such as information flowed into the city. It was not by chance that practically all persons involved in the criminal case of 1931 were charged with having links to representatives of the foreign Turkic diaspora in Finland, East (Chinese) Turkestan or Turkey. Complex measures were undertaken by the OGPU; among others, these included the arrest of persons who had contact with fellow believers abroad. These measures resulted in a break of the long-term ties between representatives of Muslim congregations and various Turkic peoples within the Soviet Union and outside the country.

In the case of the Tatar community in Finland, the severing of relations was most painful, since the community had been connected with a significant part of the Muslim population in Leningrad. The ties were not only based on common religious, cultural and linguistic characteristics. The people belonged to the same group of Mishär Tatars who had come from a number of villages in the Nizhny Novgorod region, first and foremost Aktukovo, and many were related to each other. They often worked and also migrated within their family and village networks.

For these Mishär Tatars, their migration destinations of Saint Petersburg-Petrograd-Leningrad and Finland constituted a single social and cultural space, even after the establishment of the state border between the Soviet Union and Finland. The existence of border control complicated but did not interrupt the ties established in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Their networks existed as long as the persons who served as links between the two communities were alive. These linking persons can be seen as "guides" within the social or socio-cultural space (see Sorokin 2008: 127–128).

In Soviet Leningrad, these guides were either pushed out of the country, like Musa Bigeev, or arrested and deported, as the participants in the 1931 criminal case. Musa Bigeev never returned to the Soviet Union. After taking refuge abroad in 1930, he lived in a number of countries, such as Afghanistan, British India and Finland, and he passed away in 1949 in Cairo. In Finland, the generation of "guides" was gone by the early 1950s. The chasm in the socio-cultural space had a strong impact on the creation of a separate identity among the Tatars living in Finland. It can be argued that they developed into "Finnish" Tatars only after the 1930s, when communication with the Leningrad Tatars would be broken for half a century.

After 1956, when the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev, introduced a period of de-Stalinization and reforms (1953–1964), foreign tourists, including visitors from Finland, could again visit the Cathedral Mosque, which had recently been returned to the Muslims. Neither private visits nor visits of official delegations, however, could help restore the regular communication between the Finnish Tatars and the Tatars in Leningrad. Any unauthorized contacts with foreign citizens would likely become known to the KGB (*Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti*, Committee for State Security) under the Council of Ministers of the USSR. Even if there were an opportunity to meet a tourist from Finland, hardly any Leningrad Tatar would be ready to engage in such communication. As for imams and members of the *dvadtsatka*, they were obliged to report any contacts with foreigners visiting the mosque and their apartments, both officially and unofficially, to the Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR in Leningrad and the Leningrad region. It goes without saying that in such circumstances, developing long-term contacts between the Tatars in Finland and Leningrad was out of the question.

Over time, a cultural disparity developed between the two Tatar communities. The compulsory transition from Arabic script for the languages of Tatars and other Turkic peoples in the Soviet Union, first into the Latin alphabet in the second half of the 1920s and then into Cyrillic in the late

1930s, marked a break with the old tradition and caused an enormous slice of the cultural heritage to become inaccessible to subsequent generations. The division of the unified socio-cultural space of the Tatars in Finland and Leningrad was not only caused by administrative measures (arrests, tightening of border controls, etc.), but it was also the result of the Soviet planned cultural policy. For instance, a significant part of the cultural and spiritual heritage of Muslim peoples was declared so-called "vestiges of the past" (*perezhitki proshlogo*) and gradually destroyed.

The passing of the last "guides" among the Tatars in Finland and Leningrad coincided with the onset of the Khrushchev political thaw and the establishment of more friendly relations between the USSR and Finland. The younger generations among the Finnish Tatars had by then lost touch – or they had never had any contacts – with their relations or the previous generation's networks in Leningrad. By that point, the children and grandchildren of the emigrants from Aktukovo and other villages near Sergach in the Nizhny Novgorod province had already in many ways become Leningraders or Finns.

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