



# The Concept of Traditional Islam in Modern Islamic Discourse in Russia

*Edited by*  
Renat Bekkin



THE CONCEPT OF TRADITIONAL ISLAM IN  
MODERN ISLAMIC DISCOURSE IN RUSSIA

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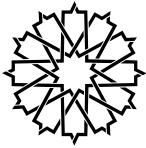
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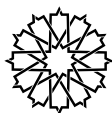


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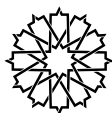
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## Introduction

In recent years, the concept of traditional Islam has attracted attention of researchers both in Russia and beyond. Individual and collective articles, including conference proceedings were published on this topic. A serious drawback of some of the works is excessive politicization of discourse, as well as that authors seem to have only superficial acquaintance with sources both in the languages of the so-called Muslim peoples of Russia and in Russian. The first problem is inherent mainly in the works of Russian authors, the second one in publications by authors from the West.

Nevertheless, even those works that do not fully meet the scholarly criteria are important as they indicate public interest in such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon as traditional Islam which has become an important element, without which it is difficult to imagine the portrait of Islam in modern Russia.

A few years ago, I came up with an idea to put together a book that would examine both the theoretical aspects of traditional Islam and individual cases from different regions of Russia with a significant Muslim population. Eventually, with the assistance from the Center for Advanced Studies in Sarajevo, an edited volume “The Concept of Traditional Islam in Modern Islamic Discourse in Russia” was prepared.

In the contemporary humanities and social sciences, both general readers and the professional public are as accepting of the edited volume as a genre of academic writing as they are of books written by a single author.

An obvious advantage of this genre is that it brings together multiple researchers each with their own profound and specialist knowledge of different aspects of the topic. Books of this kind have a drawback, however, which can prove challenging and even impossible for editors to overcome –





excessive heterogeneity in the methods and approaches used by the authors of the collective work. The editor's task is greatly simplified if all or at least most of the authors come from the same academic tradition. Things stand quite differently when dealing with the collective creativity of authors brought up in different academic cultures or with different educational backgrounds. This is the case with the monograph presently before you.

To begin with, many of the authors are representatives of the Soviet and Russian schools of historical and Oriental studies. While historians and Orientalists in the West have had a significant impact on their research from sociologists and other social scientists for more than a decade, this is not the case for Russian religious studies scholars (except some staff at certain research centres in Moscow and St. Petersburg). I am not inclined to give this circumstance either a positive or a negative evaluation but do consider it my duty to note it for the reader.

Another important point to note is that the authors of some of the articles are involved in the subject matter discussed in the book in various ways. Some are both students and subjects of the discourses in question at the same time, which is to say they are both professional researchers of and active participants in Islamic discourse in Russia. For example, Damir Shagaviev is one of the most original Islamic theologians in modern Russia. His text takes the form of an academic article, but at the same time contains elements of theological analysis. These significant differences between the authors are not, in my opinion, a disadvantage. In fact, they have turned out to be a significant advantage for this book.

Structurally, the book has two parts: a theoretical part ("Traditional Islam: the concept and its interpretations") and a practical one ("Traditional Islam in the Russian regions and Crimea").

In the first part, the authors have attempted to consider the phenomenon of traditional Islam and analyse sources that flesh out the concept. The monograph opens with the article by Kazan-based religious scholars Leila Almazova and Azat Akhunov "In Search of Traditional Islam in Tatarstan: Between National Project and Universalist Theories". While its title may suggest this article belongs to the second part of the book, it contains a comprehensive analysis of the concept of traditional Islam, which is why it has been placed in the theoretical section. In investigating the question of the origins of the concept of traditional Islam, the authors turn to the history of theological thought in the Volga-Ural region. They consider the etymology of the Arabic word *taqlid* in the context of Tatar theological discourse in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early



20<sup>th</sup> centuries, concluding that traditional Islam and similar concepts were unfamiliar to Muslim theologians in pre-revolutionary Russia.

It is a merit of their article that the authors use not only Russian-language sources, but also texts and oral sources in Tatar, which are inaccessible to the reader outside the Republic of Tatarstan. The article also contains a detailed historiographical essay on the works written on the subject of traditional Islam. Almazova and Akhunov trace the evolution of the concept over recent decades. As the authors observe, there are multiple understandings and interpretations of traditional Islam in Tatarstan that differ significantly from the instrumentalised concept of traditional Islam that appeared in the second decade of the 21st century.

No analysis of the discourse on traditional Islam in modern Russia can afford to ignore the discussion prompted by adoption of the so-called 'Grozny Fatwa'. The article by Islamic theologian from Kazan Damir Shagaviev "The Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah and the Grozny fatwa" gives a detailed analysis of the conference in Grozny and the processes of doing theology and making law. The conference was on the topic of "Who are 'Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-jama'ah'?" and was held in August 2016 in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. It caused considerable controversy among the Muslims of Russia. Coverage in federal and (not only Islamic) regional media offered highly various interpretations of the conference's final document (*the Final Declaration*, which was dubbed the 'Grozny Fatwa').

In his article, Shagaviev points out the differences between the two versions of the Final Declaration, one of which is in Arabic and the other in Russian, as well as between them and a text in Russian later reproduced by much of the media as the Grozny Fatwa (this document's full name is "*On the Essential Features that Distinguish True from Delusive Islam*"). This article thus considers the problem from at least two perspectives. On the one hand, the author analyses the content of the *fatwa*. On the other, his interest focuses on the reaction to it from Muslim theologians, public figures and journalists, both in the Arab world and in Russia.

All the articles in the book include some consideration of the traditional Islam concept as an artificial construct promoted by the state to designate their preferred model of state-confessional relations, in which religious organisations and individual believers demonstrate their loyalty to the political regime. Organisations and believers who criticize the state's domestic and foreign policy can then be attributed by the authorities and the muftiates to the representatives of 'non-traditional Islam'.



The article by Moscow-based religious scholar Sofya Ragozina “Official Discourse on Islam and Islamic Discourse in Contemporary Russia: Stereotypes and Intertextuality” focuses on all-Russian aspects of the problem and includes a look at the official discourse on Islam, by which the author understands “the discourse transmitted by various government institutions and statesmen”. Ragozina considers Islamic official discourse to be part of this discourse, as it “includes statements by Russia’s muftiates, the largest religious organisations representing the country’s Muslim community”. “The rhetoric of the leaders of Russia’s muftiates”, Ragozina writes, “is characterized by a high level of intertextuality that indicates close semantic connections with governmental discourse (not just about Islam). Their rhetoric abounds in conceptual metaphors indicating loyalty to the ruling elite. Official Islamic discourse also offers us a better understanding of the use of the ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ Islam dichotomy in Russia.”

Competition between the muftiates means that simply declaring that one belongs amongst the followers of traditional Islam no longer provides sufficient competitive advantage in the struggle to obtain resources from the state. In the article “The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam”, Stockholm-based religious scholar Renat Bekkin argues that this has caused Islamic religious leaders to search for an ideology that is attractive both to the state and a significant portion of believers. One such ideology is the so-called ‘Renovationism’ propagated by a number of religious figures who have held or continue to occupy senior posts at the Russian muftiates. “The renovationists’ administrative status as officials in Muslim religious organisations”, Bekkin writes, “influences how their opinion pieces become part of official discourse”. The author also notes that “Judging on the basis of the available data, the renovationist movement in modern Russian Islam does not seem to have been instigated by the government, but the renovationists may over time become useful to government officials with responsibility for the formation and adoption of official religious policy in the Russian Federation.”

Renat Bekkin has a second article in this monograph, “The Faizrakhmanists of the Volga Region as a Religious Community Opposing Traditional Islam”. It deals with another aspect of the discourse on traditional Islam. He formulates his research question at the beginning as: to what extent can the traditional Islam construct be applied to the study of new religious movements and groups in modern Islam?

Faizrakhman Sattarov was a well-educated Muslim religious figure in the USSR who, excluded from work as an official imam in the 1980s and



1990s, created his own religious group. Its members refer to themselves as Mu'mins (from the Arabic "true believers"), amongst other terms. In the scholarly literature, this group is better known as the Faizrakhmanists. In the view of the official Muslim organisations and, especially, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan, where the group's centre of activity is located, the group is a sect. In the classification of Muslims given by Faizrakhman Sattarov himself, the category of *madhabists* or *mushriks* stands out (followers of traditional Islam, who equate their leaders and the scholars of their madhab with Allah). Traditional Islam is thus considered by the Faizrakhmanists to be the ideology of the official clergy. According to Bekkin, the dichotomy of 'traditional vs. non-traditional Islam' developed as a modification in post-Soviet Russia of the 'official vs. unofficial Islam' dichotomy that had existed in the USSR.

At the end of his article, Bekkin concludes that, as a religious group, the Faizrakhmanists offer a good illustration of how the artificial construct of traditional Islam not only makes it difficult to understand the nature of the new religious movements and trends in Islam but creates additional difficulties for their classification.

The second part of the book presents the situation in the various Russian regions with large compact Muslim populations.

The article by Kazan religious scholar Reseda Safiullina-Ibragimova "Sufism in Tatarstan: revival of a tradition, export or expansion?" continues the theme raised in Shagaviev's. While Shagaviev discusses the role and place of Sufi heritage in modern Russia in theological and legal discourse, Safiullina-Ibragimova analyses the religious practices of various Sufi *tariqas* in Tatarstan. The author's main research question is about the place Sufism occupies in Islamic discourse in modern Tatarstan. Deploying a wide range of sources in Russian, Tatar and other languages, Safiullina-Ibragimova analyses the significance of the rich Sufi heritage as a tool for preserving the national, ethnic and religious identity of the Tatars living in the Volga-Ural region. The author's conclusions suggest Sufism plays a marginal role in the region and cannot serve as a basis for formation of a concept of traditional Islam. Offering a critical interpretation of what she calls the 'bureaucratic' concept of traditional Islam, the author points out that the members of the Sufi *tariqas* in the Volga region do not themselves seek to take advantage of favourable conditions or seize dominant positions in the system of official Islamic organisations. Thus, even though the mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic



of Tatarstan Kamil Samigullin is a representative of the Sufi *İsmailağa jama'ah*, he does not advertise his adherence to Sufism.

The theme of *tasawwuf* is covered in other articles in the second part of the monograph. The article "Traditional Islam in the Discourse of Religious Associations, Ethnic Organisations and Government Structures in Bashkortostan" by ethnographer from Ufa, Zilya Khabibullina, looks at the non-Sufi *Haqqaniyya tariqa*. The author analyses the role of Sufi *tariqas* in the formation of Bashkir identity in modern Bashkortostan. According to Khabibullina, one of the most effective tools for the formation of this identity is the *Haqqaniyya tariqa's* vigorous activity to create "new places of worship, accompanied by sacralisation and mythmaking". She says that studying practices related to pilgrimage and the creation and functioning of holy places will help to understand the phenomenon of traditional Islam in Bashkortostan better, "There has been practically no public discussion in the press on the issue of traditional Islam that covers current problems or attempt to discover the truth whether in the spiritual administrations or the unofficial Islamic movements. It is more evident in the ethnographic material. The question of traditional Islam has a very prominent place in the attitudes of the Muslim ummah of Bashkortostan to local holy places and related rites."

The topic of artificially formed traditions, touched upon in Khabibullina's article, receives theoretical treatment in the article by Moscow historian and ethnographer Vladimir Bobrovnikov "Inventing a New Legal Tradition: the Discourse of 'Traditional Islam' in Post-Communist Dagestan". Using the Republic of Dagestan as an example, Bobrovnikov examines the origins of the traditional Islam concept through various lenses, the legal, the historical, and the ethnographic.

On the one hand, the author sees traditional Islam's roots as lying in the political activity of the Muftiate of the Republic of Dagestan in the 1990s, insofar as "It seems that the federal and the local authorities accepted the idea of an Islamic threat to Russia from those parts of the 'non-traditional' congregations, under the influence of the legalised Muslim clergy in the North Caucasus and Moscow, who had been trying to incite the government to violence against their own political and ideological adversaries in post-Soviet Muslim society."

On the other hand, the researcher traces back the origins of the ideological construct of traditional Islam to the Soviet past. The state's desire to put the so-called "useful" customs of the highlanders of the Caucasus at the service of Soviet power laid, Bobrovnikov argues, the foundations of



traditional Islam. In his view, Soviet ethnographers played a special role in this process, as "... the dominant approach of Soviet ethnography was primordialist, stipulating that there were no societies without traditions. The latter were considered the basis on which national law and culture were built. The main goal of ethnographic investigation was to investigate "people's traditions", even where there were none! Insofar as Muslim highlanders did not accept different aspects of officious Soviet culture and lifestyle, it was explained as evidence of the resilience of local pre-Soviet traditions. Ethnographers were expected to assist the "revival" of the "good" traditions of post-war Dagestani (and North Caucasus) *kolkhoz* villages, which were to be local in form but socialist in content."

According to Bobrovnikov, the influence of ethnography, or rather, of individual ethnographers on the formation of ideas about tradition and traditionalism continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as "It is worth noting that Presidents Yeltsin and Putin and other members of the government and top state officials of the 1990s and early 2000s referred to professional ethnographers... Due to their influence, positivist ethnographical clichés (albeit stripped of their Marxist form) were introduced into post-Communist legislation. This in turn led to the creation of legal nonsenses like the discourse of traditional Islam analysed in this paper. It is no coincidence that the key term is 'traditions'".

At the end of the article, the author concludes that "In the Russian North Caucasus, homogeneous traditional Islam is a fictional construct. Both the 'traditionalists' and their Salafi opponents are divided into a large number of competing religious factions of varying religious and political orientations." Bobrovnikov consequently sees a serious danger in confusing the notions of 'traditional' and 'legal' (*zakonnyi*) in relation to Islam.

Unfortunately, the tendency to equate the concepts of 'traditional' and 'legal' has developed in other regions, particularly Crimea. This issue is the subject of the article "Traditional Islam in Crimean Tatar discourse and politics" by Elmira Muratova, a religious scholar from Crimea.

I decided to include an article on Crimea in a collection devoted to traditional Islam in modern Russia, because Russian laws and the confessional policy pursued by Moscow are being implemented there. Accordingly, the concept of traditional Islam has been utilized in modern Crimea to combat the uncontrolled religious activity of Muslims there.

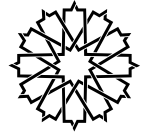
At the same time, as noted by Muratova, even after its introduction into official Islamic discourse, the concept of traditional Islam did not become



part of the official doctrine of the two muftiates operating in Crimea, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (DUMK) and the Spiritual Centre of Muslims of Crimea (DTsMK). These structures interpret the content of the notion of traditional Islam differently, however, “despite a certain similarity in their discourses of traditional Islam and their appeals to traditions and the legacy of ancestors, there remain several substantial differences between the supporters of DUMK and DTsMK. The first is the significant influence of Sufism on DTsMK ideology, which explains its emphasis on the revival of Sufi practices, once quite widespread in Crimea. A return to such practices, which were no longer popular with Crimean Tatars by the end of the 20th century, seems like an attempt to artificially re-traditionalise and archaicise religious life. Compared to such attempts, DUMK looks like an organisation propagating a more ‘modern’ project of Islam, designed to combine Crimean Tatar religiosity with their secular lifestyle.”

This example of the two Crimean muftiates thus illustrates the tendency highlighted in Renat Bekkin’s article “The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam” for modernist and traditionalist concepts, accompanied by declarations of loyalty to the political regime in Russia, to act as instruments in the struggle for leadership among Muslim religious organisations.

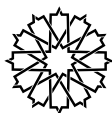
*Renat Bekkin*



**Traditional Islam:  
The Concept and Its Interpretations**







# In Search of ‘Traditional Islam’ in Tatarstan: Between National Project and Universalist Theories

*Leila Almazova and Azat Akhunov*

## ABSTRACT

After the communist ideology collapsed at the end of the last century, it began to be replaced gradually in most countries of the former Socialist Bloc by Islamic values. In response, secular communities have developed the concept of ‘traditional’ (good) Islam. The authorities of Russia and Tatarstan have kept up with this global trend. Official religious structures have historically taken the form of spiritual administrations of Muslims (muftiates) in the Russian Federation. They are trying to flesh out the idea of traditional Islam at the behest of state authorities by suggesting domestic ‘Islamic traditions’ for each region to be preserved and others to be dispensed with. This article traces the evolution of how the phenomenon of traditional Islam has been interpreted from the 1990s to 2018 in the Republic of Tatarstan, using a wide range of sources in Tatar and Russian, including personal interviews by the authors with leaders of the Tatar Muslim community, as well as field research in the districts and cities of the Republic.

Key words: post-Soviet Islam, Islam in Tatarstan, traditional Islam.



## INTRODUCTION

Chronologically our research covers the 1990–2018 period. Over these nearly 30 years the Republic of Tatarstan has made a major leap from second-degree ('decorative') autonomous republic to a leading and economically developed donor region within the Russian Federation.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR) had no independent Islamic administrative institutions, so its 230 congregations (communities) were directly subordinate to the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia (DUMES)<sup>1</sup> headquartered in Ufa.<sup>2</sup> It was only in 1991 that the head of DUMES mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin agreed to create 5 *muhtasibats*<sup>3</sup> in Tatarstan, with one of them becoming the main one. The motivation was to preserve a single DUMES structure against the backdrop of the 'parade of sovereignties', just then beginning in the USSR. These measures did not prevent the emergence of regional spiritual administrations (muftiates) independent of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia and the European Countries of CIS.

By the end of the 1990s there were two official religious structures in Tatarstan claiming leadership in this sphere: the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUM RT), founded in 1992 and chaired by Gabdulla Galiullin, and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Tatarstan (DUM T), led by Farid Salman since 1997.

The 'Unifying' congress of 1998 played an important role in the post-Soviet history of the Republic of Tatarstan. It made it possible for the

- 1 Historically DUMES traces its origin from the Ufa Spiritual Assembly of the Mohammedan Law, founded by Catherine the Great in 1788. When founded, its main functions were: to facilitate state control over the appointment of religious leaders in Islamic communities and their continuing use as promoters of tsarist policies; centralising decision-making in the construction and maintenance of mosques and arbitration in solving legal issues in matrimony, inheritance, and property disputes. Over the history of its existence, the organisation has had a number of different names. From 1846 to 1917 it was called the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly (OMDS). In 1920 former OMDS changed its name to the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Inner Russia and Siberia. In 1948 it was renamed the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia (DUMES). And in 1992 yet another new name was adopted, the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia and the European Countries of the CIS (TsDUM).
- 2 "Muftiy Talgat Tadzhuiddin sobral v Ufe rasshirennyi plenum DUMES" ["Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin gathered in Ufa enlarged Plenum of DUMES"] *Izvestiya Tatarstana* [Tatarstan News], 28 August 1992.
- 3 A *muhtasibat* is a regional branch of a regional or federal spiritual administration of Muslims (muftiate), which, as a rule, unites several mosques and other Islamic religious organisations within a territorial unit. DUM RT has 48 district *muhtasibats*. <http://dumrt.ru/ru/about-us/obschaya-informatsiya/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



Muslim community of the Republic to overcome its internal differences and facilitated the creation of a single Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan.<sup>4</sup>

In 1985 there were 18 functioning mosques in Tatarstan. By 1998 there were 998, and by 2019 as many as 1531.<sup>5</sup> There was no access to religious education during the Soviet era, but there are now 690 training courses at mosques, nine madrasahs, two Islamic higher educational institutions. In 2017 the Bolgar Islamic Academy, which now lays claim to be the leading Islamic educational centre of Russia, was opened. There are currently some 12,500 people studying at various levels in Islamic educational institutions.<sup>6</sup>

While statistical data gives quite a clear picture of the quantitative growth of religious institutions, these figures do not tell us much about real processes in Tatarstan's Muslim community. What are the ideas and religious trends that dominate Tatarstan's Islamic community? Who do Muslims choose to follow? What are their preferences and what do they reject?

In post-Soviet Tatarstan there is an ongoing process of developing the idea of the so-called 'Tatar Islam', and Tatar intellectuals have not yet arrived at a single view or understanding of what this Islam should be. The reason for this divide, in our opinion, is that the Tatars still lack a universally respected spiritual leader who could put forward a concept that would help to bridge basic differences and satisfy all groups, parties and movements.

One thing modern Tatar society lacks, for objective historical reasons, is an institute of elders ('*aqsaqals'*). This is due to the fact that, after decades of Soviet rule, Islam had virtually disappeared from social life in the Volga Region and had only been preserved in customs and traditions that were Islamic in essence and content but referred to as Tatar or Bashkir.<sup>7</sup>

People from the middle generation, most of whom are profoundly atheistic and Soviet-minded, had lost touch with Islam, while the young

4 Akhunov A., "Russia-Middle East: The Influence of the Arab Factor on the Formation of Muslim Education System in the Republic of Tatarstan in 1990–2000", *Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis*, Special Issue, (2014), p. 135-36.

5 "Duhovnoye upravleniye musul'man Respubliki Tatarstan. Obshchaya informatsiya" [Spiritual administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan. General information"]. <http://dumrt.ru/ru/about-us/obshchaya-informatsiya/> accessed 25 September 2019.

6 "Duhovnoye upravleniye musul'man Respubliki Tatarstan. Obshchaya informatsiya".

7 Akhunov A., "Gosudarstvo i islam: osobennosti sosushchestvovaniya v postsovetskom Tatarstane" ["State and Islam: features of coexistence in post-Soviet Tatarstan"], *Religii i radikalizm v postsekulyarnom mire* [Religion and Radicalism in Post-Secular World] E. Filippova; Zh. Radvani (eds.) (Moscow, 2017), p. 69-70.



had only started to show interest to Islam. There were no longer any religious authority figures to take the lead in the Muslim community. Elderly Tatars, who just yesterday had been communists and Komsomol members, were not able to pick up the baton, due to their religious illiteracy. Young imams, who had received their education abroad, entered the arena later, from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, but received little support from common Muslims due to their youth. It is important to note, however, that the average age of devout Muslims in Tatarstan has become much lower. Most of the congregation is now aged between 20–50 years. The senior generation, given its atheistic worldview, is largely absent.<sup>8</sup> Young imams educated abroad are often less respectful of Tatar ethnic traditions in the religious sphere. Conflict between them and older believers on how to perform certain religious rites is not rare.<sup>9</sup>

It is also noteworthy that the mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan elected in 2013 was a 28-year old, Kamil Samigullin. He received a solid religious education in Turkey and is the only mufti in Russia to be a *hafiz* of the Qur'an (i.e. to have memorised the complete text).<sup>10</sup> Nominating so young an imam (who also happens to be from the neighbouring Republic of Mari El) to such an important position is indicative of a certain breach in generational continuity in the Muslim community of Tatarstan.

One of the aims of this article is to consider the question of the role of local Tatar tradition and of the very concept of 'tradition' within the context of the formation of Islam's developmental trajectory in the region. This is done in terms of Talal Asad's concept of 'discursive tradition'. Asad says that tradition consists of discourses aimed at:

... instructing practitioners regarding the correct form and purposes of a given practice that, precisely because it has been established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to a past (when the practice was instituted and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and a future (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified

8 Akhunov A., "Gosudarstvo i islam: osobennosti sosushchestvovaniya v postsovetском Tatarstane", p. 226.

9 According to a staff member of the youth department of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Marat Adzitarov, "one of our old men got so angry that he even broke his neighbour's finger for wiggling his finger during prayer" (Authors' fieldwork materials. Interview with M. Adzitarov. July, 2011). Hanafi Muslims do not repeatedly raise their index finger when reciting the testimony (*Tashahhud*) during prayer. During our field research in 2017 elderly imams also complained about confrontation by the young.

10 Samigullin K.I., *Islam v Tatarstane: Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar' [Islam in Tatarstan: An Encyclopedic Dictionary]* (Moscow: Medina, 2017), p. 201.



or abandoned), through a present (how it is linked to other practices, institutions and social conditions).<sup>11</sup>

The 'correct form' of Islam is also understood in the terms expressed in the following quote, that "Orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship – a relationship of power."<sup>12</sup>

It is absolutely true that the notion of tradition is used as a marker of identity and shared memory rather than there being a clearly defined understanding of the tradition's content. Maurice Halbwachs, who developed the concept of collective memory, believed that each group forms the corpus of what they will remember and what they think is best forgotten.<sup>13</sup>

We also think that the word 'tradition' tends to be used as a weapon in the state authorities' discourse with a view to memory and identity construction by associating a certain tradition with certain groups and individuals.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, virtually every Muslim public figure appeals to the term in one way or another, though each understands it in their own way.

What exactly the religious authorities of Tatarstan understand by 'Islamic tradition' and how this concept is used by various actors will be the subject of this article. Our sources include works by such authors as Jalil Fazlyev, Ramil Adygamov, Mahmut Sharafutdinov, Valiulla Yakupov, Kamil Samigullin, Rustam Nurgaleev, Rustam Batrov (Batyra), Fawziya Bayramova, Rashat Safin, and Fatih Sibgatullin. We also use field research materials, namely a survey of 20 imams from 20 localities in seven districts (out of a total of 45), conducted between May and August 2017.

## THE TERMS TRADITIONAL ISLAM AND 'ISLAMIC TRADITIONS' IN HISTORICAL RETROSPECT

In his article "Anglo-American traditional Islam and Its Discourse of Orthodoxy"<sup>15</sup> Danish scholar Kasper Mathiesen of the University of Copenhagen notes that the very phrase traditional Islam is a completely Western

11 Asad T., *The idea of an anthropology of Islam* (Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1986), p. 14.

12 Asad T., *The idea of an anthropology of Islam*, p. 15.

13 Halbwachs M., *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p. 254.

14 Hearon H., "Uses of the 'Technical' Language of Tradition for Constructing Memory and Identity in Early Christian Communities", *Journal of Early Christian History*, 1:2 (2011), p. 55-70.

15 Mathiesen K. "Anglo-American traditional Islam and Its Discourse of Orthodoxy", *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 13 (2013), p. 191-219.



construct. Internet word search for '*al-Islam at-taqliidi*' as a reference to some group in Islam yields no results. The notion of '*taqlid*' as 'tradition in Islam' has a set of completely different meanings from the Russian word '*traditsiya*' ('tradition'), which is often applied to Islam these days. Which is exactly why the term is not usually translated in academic papers on Islam. As a legal term, the word '*taqlid*' initially meant uneducated Muslims (*muqallids*) following the opinion of competent scholars (*mujtahids*). Over the course of time, not only the uneducated masses but scholars – the '*ulama*' – had to follow '*taqlid*', because conforming to the legal schools – *madhabs* – became mandatory in Islam.<sup>16</sup>

Criticisms of *taqlid* in Tatar theological literature become very pronounced with the appearance of two figures, Abu Nasr Qursawi<sup>17</sup> and an admirer of his work Shihabuddin Marjani.<sup>18</sup> Their work was later continued by Ziyaeddin Kamali<sup>19</sup> and Musa Bigiev,<sup>20</sup> and supported by the more moderate thinker, Rizaeddin Fakhretdin. Musa Bigiev considered *taqlid* a major reason of the Muslim community's decline: "We cannot remain in the dark of feeble imitation (*taqlid*) if we want our religion to be free of harmful misbeliefs. Using our Shariah, we must only rely and count on what is good for us and what is supported by evidence, and not just follow

16 Calder N., "Taklid", *Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition*, p. Bearman et al. (eds.), [http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_7343](http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7343). accessed 25 September 2019.

17 See, Abu-Nasr Qursawi, "Nastavleniye lyudey na put' istiny" [People's Guidance on the Path of Truth], *Izbrannye proizvedeniya* [Selected Works] (Kazan: Tatarskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 2005), p. 136-144. Qursawi (1776–1812) was a Tatar theologian, thinker and educator. Born in the village of Verkhnyaya Korsa of the Kazan Governorate, he received his religious education in Bukhara, later returning to his homeland and becoming engaged in research work and teaching. He died in Istanbul while on Hajj. He wrote over 10 works in Arabic, advocating for a revival of *ijtihad*, which, according to him, was a duty of every educated Muslim.

18 See, Ilyas T., "Koran i Sunna. Idzhtihad i taklid", *Sbornik statey. posvyashchennyi 100-letiyu Sh. Mardzhani*. [Qur'an and Sunnah. Ijtihad and Taqlid] (Kazan: Tatarskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 2015), p. 202-206. Marjani (1818–1889) was a theologian, historian and educator and author of over 30 volumes of fundamental works on various problems of Islamic theology and the history of the Tatar people. He adhered to the ideas of 'opening the gate of *ijtihad*' for every Muslim and the renovation of Islam (*tajdid*).

19 See, Ziyaeddin Kamali, *Dini tadbirler* [Religious Establishments] (Ufa: Tipografiya bratyev Karimovykh, 1913), p. 16. Kamali (1873–1942) was a reformer of education, expert on Islam, theologian, and Muslim religious and public figure, as well as a leader of the Jadid movement in Russia. In his theological and philosophical works, he offered reformist interpretations of the core principles of Islam.

20 See, Bigiev M., *Vozzvaniye k musul'manskim natsiyam* [Appeal to the Muslim Nations], in Bigiev M., *Izbrannye Trudy* [Selected Works]. Vol. 2. (Kazan: Tatarskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 2006), p. 86. Bigiev (1873–1949) was a Tatar theologian and publicist, as well as a leader of the progressive movement (Jadidism) among Russian Muslims in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



statements made by some of our prominent scholars, with all due respect to them.”<sup>21</sup>

The opposite camp, supporters of *taqlid* in the region, was led by the *Din va magishat* (*Religion and life*) magazine.<sup>22</sup> Applying the classification offered by William Shepard,<sup>23</sup> we find that these early 20<sup>th</sup> century Tatar adherents of *taqlid* (Tatar traditionalists) were adaptationist traditionalists. They were ready to relinquish certain rights and privileges (e.g. managing the community or Shariah trial proceedings) to the Imperial authorities rather than let their opponents – progressive Muslims – change the medieval foundations of their communities. According to studies conducted by Tatar historian R.G. Mukhametshin, their main reason for preserving ‘tradition’ was a need to conserve the Muslim religious identity of Tatars under threat of Christianisation, which they considered a risk of reformed ‘Jadidist’ education:

In our opinion, there are no grounds today for a decisively negative assessment of the old-method school. Islam was the ideological content of Tatar social life, which is why it was primarily focused on the Islamic form of public education. Given Tsarism’s colonial anti-Muslim policy, the main goal of Tatars was simply to survive, to preserve themselves as a nation and to prove their historical strength. This is why the old-method school played a very important role in the consolidation of the Tatar people as a single entity. Despite the inevitable losses in the contents of the learning process, it is historically justified to consider the school progressive.<sup>24</sup>

Going back to the two terms used in modern Tatar Islamic discourse for the Muslim tradition – traditional Islam and ‘Islamic traditions’ – one should point out that its historical counterpart, *taqlid*, was perceived differently by different segments of Tatar society: some considered it a clearly harmful phenomenon that caused a ‘sleep of reason’ for Muslims and led to them lagging

21 Bigiev M., *Istoriya Korana i ego svodov*. [The History of the Qur’an and its Consolidated Texts] (Moscow: Medina, 2016), p. 23.

22 *Din va magishat* (Religion and life) magazine was published from 1906 to 1918 in Orenburg. It was basically a platform for the most conservative part of the Tatar Muslim community. Studies about the magazine: Mukhametshin R.G., *Problemy tatarskogo traditsionalizma na stranitsah zhurnala ‘Din va magishat’:1906–1918*. [The Issue of Tatar Traditionalism on the Pages of the Journal ‘Religion and Life’ (1906–1918)] Dissertatsiya na soiskaniye stepeni kandidata istoricheskikh nauk. 2004 g. [Dissertation in Historical Sciences, 2004]; *Din va magishat zhurnalnyn bibliografik kursatkech* (Kazan: Iman, 2004); Rustem Mukhametshin. *Tatarskiy traditsionalizm: osobennosti i formy proyavleniya* (Kazan: Meddok, 2005).

23 Shepard W., “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 19, No 3. (Aug 1987), p. 318.

24 Mukhametshin R.G., *Problemy tatarskogo traditsionalizma na stranitsah zhurnala “Din va magishat” (1906–1918). Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskaniye uchenoy stepeni kandidata istoricheskikh nauk* (Kazan, 2004), p. 15.





behind progressive nations,<sup>25</sup> while others saw *taqlid* as a way of preserving religious and ethnic identity.<sup>26</sup> In Islamic law (*fiqh*), *taqlid* still means to follow religious authority figures of the past, and an absolute majority of legal experts accept the justification for its presence in Muslim practice.<sup>27</sup>

## HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE OF THE TRADITIONAL ISLAM PROBLEM

One of the first Western scholars to provide a definition for the notions of ‘traditionalism’ and ‘neo-traditionalism’ in Islam was William Shepard, whose article “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology” dates from 1987. Some points in his definition of traditionalism have been mentioned above with reference to Tatar traditionalism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He distinguishes between two types of ideological systems: ‘traditionalism’ for the period of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and ‘neo-traditionalism’ for the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>28</sup> Describing the term ‘neo-traditionalism’ (we will later call modern traditionalism ‘traditionalism’ rather than ‘neo-traditionalism’ for the sake of convenience), he writes:

[...the] neo-traditionalist may see positive value in local traditions *qua* local traditions, over against Western ways and also over against the more unitary Islamic model advocated by the radical Islamists. He is more likely than the other types to recognize that certain local customs are both non-Islamic in origin and non-‘modern’, and yet still value them [...].

The neo-traditionalist is likely to value the depth and complexity of the past Islamic tradition as represented by the learning of the ulama and the wisdom of the Sufi sheikhs more than the more modern types.<sup>29</sup>

Similar characterisations can be seen in works of recent years. A review of works on Islamic traditionalism by contemporary authors shows that the

25 “Our religion and faith were built upon knowledge and wisdom, but our religion today reposes on a foundation that consists of blindly following tradition (*taqlid*) and ignorance” (Kamali Z., *Falsafa Islamiya*, 2 juz. (Ufa, 1911), p. 6).

26 Mukhametshin R.G., “Dzhadidizm i Kadimizm” [Jadidism and Qadimism], <https://islam-today.ru/blogi/rafik-muhametsin/kadimizm-i-dzadidizm/>,

27 Chapter “Taklid est neobhodimost” [Taqlid is a Necessity], in Muhammad Yusuf Khattar, *Aktual'nye voprosy islamskogo veroucheniya, prava i etiki* [Topical Issues of Islamic Creed, Law and Ethics] (Kazan: Bolgar Islamic Academy, 2018), p. 462-466.

28 When he published his article in 1987, his analysis naturally did not yet deal with the features of Islamic discourse in post-Soviet space.

29 Shepard W., “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology”, p. 320.



search for a definition of the phenomenon of traditional Islam appears primarily in Western communities, where people are concerned with developing mechanisms of co-existence for Islamic communities that are suitable for secular societies. For instance, an article by Kasper Mathiesen explores the phenomenon of traditional Islam in the Western English-language community. Reviewing the legacy of two Islamic leaders (Nuh Ha Mim Keller<sup>30</sup> and Abdul Hakim Murad<sup>31</sup>), he writes:

Traditional Islamic discourse has its scholarly Islamic roots in a pervasively normative scholarly marriage that dates back to the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries, in a holistic Islamic vision that intermarries sober Sufism, Sunni theological discourse as instigated by al-Aš'arī and al-Māturīdī and by then well consolidated legal schools. The subsequently dominant Sunni Islamic paradigm that began taking form amongst the immediate predecessors of al-Ġazālī, al-Qušayrī (d. 1072) and al-Hujwīrī's (d. 1077) middle-ground Sufism that built scholarly bridges between Sufism and the leading legal-theological currents: Aš'arism/Šāfi'iyya in the case of al-Qušayrī and Māturīdism/ Hanafiyya in the case of al-Hujwīrī.<sup>32</sup>

So, traditionalism is understood in this context in line with what is happening in Russia. At least Mathiesen's conclusion almost completely replicates the so-called "Grozny fatwa":<sup>33</sup>

Based on the decisions of this conference regarding the distinguishing features of Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah compared to the misguided people, we hereby give the following Fatwa to the Muslims of Russia: the indispensable distinguishing features of Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah are three interconnected foundations: Iman, Islam and Ihsan, which is why, in terms of Iman, Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah are Ash'aris and Maturidis, in terms of obedience to Allah they are followers of one of the four madhabs: the Hanafi, the

30 Nuh Ha Mim Keller was born in America in 1954, studied at the University of Chicago and the University of California in Los Angeles, and then in Syria and Jordan. Since 1995 he has been a *sheikh* of the Shadhiliyya *tariqa* and currently lives in Amman, Jordan.

31 Timothy Kohn Winter, also known as Abdul Hakim Murad, was born in 1960. He studied at Pembroke College, Cambridge, then at Al-Azhar, Egypt, and with individual scholars in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. He is now Dean of the Cambridge Muslim College.

32 Mathiesen K., "Anglo-American traditional Islam and Its Discourse of Orthodoxy", p. 191-219.

33 On 26-27 August, 2016, the conference "Followers of the Sunnah: who are they?" was held in Grozny, with 100 theologians from 30 countries invited. The conference became famous because of a fatwa adopted at it that categorised Muslims based on their attitude to various Islamic movements. The Muslim Brotherhood, the Wahhabis, Salafis, Madkhalis and certain others were named among 'the misguided'. A certain number of delegates, in particular Ali al-Jifri, general director of the *Tabah Foundation* (in the United Arab Emirates) and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar Ahmed Mohamed al-Tayeb, who were invited to the conference, subsequently disassociated themselves from the fatwa, however. The mufti of DUM RF Ravil Gaynutdin has also voiced criticisms of the Grozny *fatwa*.



Maliki, the Shafi'i and the Hanbali, and in terms of Ihsan they are Sunni Muslims, which means those who follow the path of moral self-improvement shown by great teachers such as the Sufi imams Abu-l-Qasim al-Junayd ibn Muhammad al-Baghdadi, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani, Muhammad Khawaji Baha' al-Din Naqshband and other righteous mentors.<sup>34</sup>

The differences lie only in the selection of Sufi authority figures, which is determined by the regional peculiarities of Russian Sufism, as represented by the most widespread Naqshbandi and Shadhili *tariqas* in Dagestan<sup>35</sup> and the Naqshbandi and Qadiri *tariqas* in Ingushetia<sup>36</sup> and Chechnya.<sup>37</sup>

The notion of traditional Islam is often interpreted by invoking various forms of 'popular' Islam rather than through the succession line of religious leaders.

For example, in her article "Recalling the 'Islam of the Parents' Liberal and Secular Muslims Redefining the Contours of Religious Authenticity", Nadia Fadil examines the attitude of contemporary liberal and secularised Muslim young people to Islamic traditions popular with the first generations of immigrants from the Maghreb to Belgium, for whom "parents not only represent the 'good Muslims' (i.e. non-fundamentalist, non-orthodox), but also embodied an Islam expressed in its simplest, and purest, form."<sup>38</sup> Such an approach to Islam as a set of rituals, conceptions and habits popular with the older generation and considered 'correct' Islam compared to the fundamentalist ideas of modern Islamist movements<sup>39</sup> has a certain similarity with the processes in the Islamic and quasi-Islamic<sup>40</sup> community of Tatarstan, elaborated on below.

34 Ikramuddin Khan, "V Groznom oglasyat fetvu. opravdyvayushchuyu zachistku islamskoy ummy Rossii" [The Coming in of Grozny city's Fetwa Which Justifies Russian Islamic Ummah's Sweep], <https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=30124/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

35 Shikhaliyev Sh., "Sufiyskiye viridy Nakshbandiya i Shaziliya v Dagestane" [Sufi Virids Naqshbandiyya and Shadhiliyya in Dagestan], *Vestnik Evrazii* [Bulletin of Eurasia], 3:37 (2007), p.135-160.

36 Albogachiyeva M., *Islam v Ingushetii: etnografiya i istoriko-kul'turnye aspekty* [Islam in Ingushetiya: Ethnographical, Historical and Cultural Aspects], St. Petersburg: Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of RAS, 2017, p. 64.

37 Dimayeva F., *Islam v sovremennoy Chechenskoy Respublike*, [Islam in Modern Chechen Republic] (Moscow: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of RAS, 2002), p. 14.

38 Fadil N., "Recalling the 'Islam of the parents' liberal and secular Muslims redefining the contours of religious authenticity", *Identities*, 24:1 (2017), p. 95.

39 Fadil N., "Recalling the 'Islam of the parents' liberal and secular Muslims redefining the contours of religious authenticity", p. 95.

40 The term 'quasi-Islamic community' is used in this context as a name for the category of ethnic Muslims. In turn, the term 'ethnic Muslims' is understood here as referring to representatives of peoples that have traditionally practiced Islam over a long period of history. Ethnic Muslims include both 'practising Muslims' and those who do not practice any Islamic rituals or practice only some (on holidays or family events such as name-givings, marriages/*nikah*, funerals/*janazah*, etc.).



Nor have modern Western researchers overlooked the problem of traditional Islam in Tatarstan. In recent years at least<sup>41</sup> five works have appeared that treat the idea to one degree or another.

Allen Frank was the first to address the issue, in his work presenting translations of writings by Tatar authors, Jalil Fazlyev, Valiulla Yakupov, Gabdelkhaq Samatov, etc., published in 2008. The specific nature of his publication did not allow for in-depth study of traditionalism as a concept, but in his 15-page introduction he does nonetheless identify five attributes of Tatar traditionalism: 1) declared affiliation with the Hanafi school of jurisprudence (*madhab*), which has dominated the Volga-Ural region since the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE; 2) appeal to the ethnic heritage of Islam among the Tatars, as the single largest Muslim ethnic group in Russia, as a 'national value'; 3) institutional and historical continuity with the many officially-recognized muftiates in Moscow, Ufa, and Kazan; 4) opposition to reformist Islamic currents originating within the former Soviet Union or entering Russia from abroad since the fall of the Soviet Union; and 5) open allegiance to the Russian nation state, proclaiming the historical and current role of Tatar Muslims within the Russian national enterprise.<sup>42</sup>

Later in his introduction the author presents a sub-section "The Paradox of Tatar Hanafi Traditionalism." Frank considers the main paradox to be the fact that Tatar traditionalism, grounded in the Tatar theological legacy, is bound to include contrary trends, including both Islamic reformism<sup>43</sup> (which argued against following *madhabs* or popular traditions) and the Islamic traditional legacy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which took the form of conservative orthodoxy, as expressed by following the Hanafi *madhab*, traditional Islamic education (Qadimism), and popular religiously embellished traditions.

To support his argument, Frank appeals to a 2004 work by Valiulla Yakupov entitled *Hanafitskiy mazhab, ego znachenkiye i aktual'nost'* [*The Hanafi madhab, its meaning and relevance*]: "As we can see, for serious

41 There are other works whose authors touch, to one degree or another, upon the problems of traditional Islam (for instance, the works of Agnes Kefeli). Due to the non-historiographical nature of this paper, the authors do not address the entire range of existing references to this term.

42 Frank A., *Tatar Islamic Texts* (Hyattsville: Dunwoody Press, 2008), p. III.

43 In this case Frank uses the term 'Jadidism' (Ibid., p. XIII). The authors of this article have some reservations about Frank's interpretation of this notion, which we understand as reform in the educational sphere, given that Jadid religious views could be very different, ranging from Ahmad-Hadi Maqsudi's religious traditionalism (Maqsudi was the author of textbooks for Jadidist *madrasahs*) to Ziyaeddin Kamali's pro-reform stance (Kamali was director of the 'Galiya' *madrasah* in Ufa). Frank is, however, here simply following Valiulla Yakupov's understanding of Jadidism as a widespread social movement in Tatar society that includes reforms in the spheres of education, religion, political views, culture, etc.



researchers it is no secret that there is a direct ideological connection between Islamic terrorists and reformers (Jadidists) who cover up for them and who, for all intents and purposes, act as their intellectual disguise.”<sup>44</sup> When republishing this work in a collection called *K prorocheskomu islamu* [Toward prophetic Islam] (2006), Yakupov changed the phrasing, so that instead of saying ‘dzhadidisty’ (‘Jadidists’) he used the word ‘lzhe-dzhadidisty’ (‘false-Jadidists’).<sup>45</sup> Yakupov thus reconsidered his views and ceased to claim that there was any ideological connection between Islamic terrorism and the Jadidists. At the same time, one should note that Frank was undoubtedly right in saying that contradictions have existed between different Islamic trends in the past and that anyone serious about formulating a concept of Tatar tradition must explain which tradition it applies to.

One should point out here that the five attributes Frank mentions as characteristic traits of Tatar traditionalism are supported by studies and that detailed consideration is consequently required of these ideas about the paradoxes of Tatar traditionalism that arise due to the opposition between modern Hanafi tradition and Jadidism, both with regard to understanding the term ‘Jadidism’ itself and to the Tatar authors’ interpretation of it. In any case, the decade that has passed since his work was written has produced new pieces and interpretations, discussed below.

A second and more substantial work on the topic is Matthew Derek’s dissertation *Placing Faith in Tatarstan, Russia: Islam and the Negotiation of Homeland*, defended in 2012. While acknowledging the depth of his study and the author’s substantial evidential basis for his conclusions, we have nonetheless to note that, despite the term traditional Islam appearing on almost every page, its contents are nowhere examined in any detail. Only a few specific features are given, such as “adhering to the Hanafi *madhab*,” “traditional Islam’s friendliness to Orthodox Christianity,” and “opposing the ‘alien’ fundamentalist Islam, represented by Wahhabism/Salafi movement.”<sup>46</sup>

In general, it is a drawback of works by Western researchers (notwithstanding their undeniable achievements, like being able to look at the situation from the outside and come to reasonable conclusions on the

44 Yakupov V., *Hanafitskiy mazhab, ego znachenije i aktual'nost'* [Hanafi Madhab, its Significance and Relevance] (Kazan: Iman, 2004), p. 4.

45 Yakupov V., *K prorocheskomu islamu* [Towards Prophetic Islam] (Kazan: Iman, 2006), p. 150.

46 Derrick M., *Placing Faith in Tatarstan, Russia: Islam and the Negotiation of Homeland*. (Dissertation presented to the Department of Geography and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 2012), p. 20.



basis of a relatively small volume of sources) that they tend to review a narrow range of key authors (e.g. in Derek's case, there are references to V. Yakupov, F. Bayramova, D. Iskhakov, R. Hakimov, who certainly do not exhaust the spectrum of opinion, while Tatar-language sources are not represented at all) and lack knowledge of the situation outside major cities, like Kazan, Almetyevsk or Naberezhnye Chelny, and especially of conditions in small towns or villages. Derek's work has, nonetheless, helped the authors of this paper gain useful insights into important aspects of the problem.

Next is the work co-authored by Michael Kemper and Alfrid Bustanov and published first in 2013 and later in an extended version in 2017 in "Vostok" / "Oriens" journal – *Yazyk 'traditsionnogo islama' v tekstah Valiully Yakupova* [*The language of traditional Islam in Valiulla Yakupov's works*]. It is based on a wide range of sources chosen from the works of this public figure. The authors examine his view of the traditional Islam problem, noting such features as his loyalty to the state, the long-standing alliance between Islam and Orthodox Christianity, resort to Volga Bulgars as the starting point for Islamic traditions in the region, blending the traditions of Qadimism and Jadidism into a single non-contradictory whole,<sup>47</sup> and support for Naqshbandi Sufism, with its traditions of quiet *dhikr*.<sup>48</sup> In other work, the authors both state that the very notion of traditional Islam is an umbrella term whose unifying feature is loyalty to the Kremlin and its apolitical nature. At the same time, Kemper and Bustanov note that each region builds up its own line of understanding of what is traditional. For Tatarstan they point out the paradigm shift from apologia for Jadidism in the early 1990s to apologia for Qadimism in the 2000s, as the local variant of traditional Islam.<sup>49</sup>

One of the most recent works to look at the phenomenon of traditional Islam is an article by Matteo Benussi *Sovereign Islam and Tatar Aqīdah: Normative Religious Narratives and Grassroots Criticism Amongst Tatarstan's Muslims*.<sup>50</sup> It is an interesting anthropological study, but the author's

47 This suggests a comparison with Eastern Peripatetics, who combined the ideas of Plato and Aristotle in their works.

48 Kemper M., Bustanov A., *Yazyk 'traditsionnogo islama' v tekstah Valiully Yakupova* [Traditional Islam Vocabulary in the Texts by Valiulla Yakupov], *Vostok/Oriens*, 3 (2017), p. 123-139.

49 Bustanov A., Kemper M., "Russia's Islam and Orthodoxy beyond the Institutions: Languages of Conversion, Competition and Convergence", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 28:2 (2017), p. 134.

50 Benussi M., "'Sovereign' Islam and Tatar 'Aqīdah': normative religious narratives and grassroots criticism amongst Tatarstan's Muslims", *Contemporary Islam*. Published online 24 September, 2018, <https://static-content.springer.com/pdf/art%3A10.1007%2Fs11562-018-0428-8.pdf?token=1555051487977--85c5a4a789a451e8ed4caa800d674ba5af-5756ca40557ae4d5a0a8983a74e8438fdd452ec0d9a5b51f54ee3ed965624c0ac-82694978113ce6b3999ed78c60c35>, accessed 25 September 2019.



analysis of the term traditional Islam adds little new to what has already been established. One can sum up his main idea as saying that traditional Islam is the Islam included in the Russian political project. It has to be patriotic and peaceful and integrated into vertical power structures. It resonates with the attitudes of the secular majority. Sometimes it includes traditional ritual Islam. His speculations on what traditional Islam is tend, however, to be drawn less from its ideologists (although there are quotes, respondents are not named) than from its opponents, whom Benussi refers to as representatives of the 'halal movement'. Firstly, judging the nature of a phenomenon on the basis of what its adversaries think about it is a dead-end. Secondly, there is no 'halal movement' in Tatarstan, even if Benussi provides it a Tatar name, the '*halal harakate*': "As the term 'halal movement' suggests, participants in this ethical trend [...] share a profound concern with ritual accuracy, doctrinal correctness, and spiritual purity."<sup>51</sup>

A poll of very different categories of Muslims, including representatives of fundamentalism in Tatar Islam, showed that none of them had heard of this movement. The halal standardisation committee Benussi may be referring to is subordinate to DUM RT and its status prevents it from adopting ideological policies.

Given this, the examination of the term traditional Islam in Benussi's work gives rise to certain methodological doubts but could have been of interest for how 'traditionalists' are seen by their opponents had the latter been defined categorically.

The final work for us to consider was published in 2019. It is an article by Lili Di Puppò and Jesko Schmoller called *Here or Elsewhere: Sufism and Traditional Islam in Russia's Volga-Ural Region*.<sup>52</sup> Analysing the correlation between the terms traditional Islam and 'Sufism', the authors conclude that both notions are rather ambivalent and can take on contradictory meanings. For instance, Sufism can historically be traced back to the local phenomenon of pre-revolutionary '*ishanism*' and as such demonstrates commitment to domestic traditions. On the other hand, because the succession line of Sufi sheikhs was broken in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan during the Soviet period, contemporary murids are apprentices of Dagestani, Turkish, Tajik, or other regional sheikhs of *Tasawwuf*. It is

51 Benussi M., "'Sovereign' Islam and Tatar 'Aqīdah': normative religious narratives and grassroots criticism amongst Tatarstan's Muslims".

52 Di Puppò L., Schmoller J., "Here or elsewhere: Sufism and traditional Islam in Russia's Volga-Ural region", *Contemporary Islam*, January, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-018-00434-3>, accessed 25 September 2019.



therefore difficult to say how traditional Sufism actually is under really existing local conditions. Or indeed how traditional the notion of traditional Islam itself is in the Volga-Urals region, given that the Grozny fatwa<sup>53</sup> interprets it as including the notion of *ihsan* (which in Russian case means the adherence to moderate or sober Sufi brotherhoods).

The two young authors have invested an enormous amount of effort in analysing their many sources and interviewing Muslims and scholars in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. The short duration of their fieldwork in the region has, however, definitely left its mark on their results.

In analysing statements on Sufism made by respondents, the authors present a mosaic of opinions – from the idea that the land of Bashkortostan is filled with *barakah* to the belief that Sufism should be rejected because of the practice of the apprentice's unquestioning obedience to the teacher. The reader will likely not understand the cause of this polyphony. In our opinion, the problem is that the authors did not take their respondents' background sufficiently into account – the text of the article refers to them simply as 'Tatar Muslim representative' or 'Tatar Muslim official'. Had the authors had a better idea of which schools in Islam their interviewees belonged to, they could have categorized the opinions they collected with greater certainty. There might have been a category of those unambivalently against Sufism (usually representatives of Salafi circles), a category of those who accept intellectual Sufism in its moderate form (generally representatives of the muftiate), and a category of devout supporters of Sufism, but usually only in the forms or *tariqas* they adhere to.

The authors also often rely on their predecessors' views – particularly those of Benussi, with his non-existent 'halal movement', and Frank, who, in talking of Jadidism, "describes Jadid reform among Tatars as religious, social and political and directed at the promotion of ethnic (Tatar) nationalism and a European educational model that the Jadids saw as beneficial for Muslim communities."<sup>54</sup> As noted above in our review of Frank's work, the term 'Jadidism' is only applicable to educational reform and its adherents often held widely diverse opinions on religious problems. For example, Ziyaeddin Kamali completely denied the importance of Sufism, considering it an 'innovation' – *bid'ah*.<sup>55</sup> Musa Bigiev defended

53 Which the Tatarstan muftiate agrees with, given that Kamil Samigullin, like many other religious figures, put his signature to it.

54 Frank A.J., *Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia: Sufism, education, and paradox of Islamic prestige* (Leiden and Boston: Brill. 2012), p. 163.

55 Ziyaeddin Kamali. *Dini tadbirler* [Religious Establishments]. (Ufa: Tipografiya brat'yev Kari-mov'yh, 1913), p. 60-65.





Sufism, emphasising its importance for the development of Islamic civilisation.<sup>56</sup> One should note that the Tatar religious reformers of the early 20th century, whom the authors count among the Jadid movement, did not share a unanimous attitude to Sufism.

To sum up, this review of these works on traditional Islam in Tatarstan has made clear that their drawbacks are often due to their authors' lack of knowledge of local realities and insufficient use of sources from regional religious figures and ordinary Muslims, and especially of Tatar-language sources (there is not a single link to Tatar sources in the works of Derek, Benussi, or Di Puppò and Schmoller), which often leads to unfounded generalisation.

The works by Kemper and Bustanov are an exception because they display a fortunate combination of a well-developed methodology (Kemper) and a substantial review of sources provided by Bustanov. Their work only deals with a single figure from Tatar traditionalism, however, Valiulla Yakupov. In this regard, this article is an attempt to examine opinions on traditional Islam using a broader range of sources both Tatar and Russian.

## TRADITIONAL ISLAM FROM A 'TRADITIONAL' IMAM: JALIL FAZLYEV

Jalil Fazlyev is one of the veterans of post-Soviet Islam in Tatarstan. He was born in 1956 in the village of Burbash in the Baltasinsky district of Soviet Tataria. In 1979, he graduated from the Kazan Agricultural Institute as an economist, later working on a collective farm and in the Baltasinsky district civil service. In 1990, he became imam of Burbash's mosque and since 2006 has been Chief qadi of the Republic of Tatarstan.<sup>57</sup> He became well-known in the 1990s, when he started teaching the basics of Islam in his home village and later rolled out the experience to all of

56 "Sufi *khanqas* at that time were either schools or religious-political communities that disseminated Islam around the world. Despite the fact that *tariqas* differed from each other in the conditions of the surrounding environment and the region they were located in, they still had the same aims. *Tariqas* were either schools of the Sunnah or educational centres that taught Islamic philosophy and thought. A lot of theologians, for example most Malikis and Hanbalis, were raised in Sufi *khanqas*. The greatest wise men of Islam were fostered by *tariqas*." Bigiev, M. "Malenkiye mysli o bol'shom" [Poor Thought on Big Matters], in Bigiev M., *Izbrannye proizvedeniya* [Selected Works]. (Kazan: Tatarskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 2014), p. 262.

57 "Jalil hazrat Fazlyev – glavniy kazyi Respubliki Tatarstan" ["Jalil *hadhrat* Fazlyev – chief qadi of the Republic of Tatarstan"], in "Istoriya/Kto est kto", *Islam-today.ru*, 02.12.2013, <https://islam-today.ru/istoria/kto-est-kto/dzalil-hazrat-fazlyev-glavnyj-kazyj-respubliki-tatarstan/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



Baltasinsky district. In 1998, there were 140 children in Burbash performing prayers five times a day, 70 of whom could read the Qur'an.<sup>58</sup>

From the point of view of the Tatarstan authorities, Jalil Fazlyev is an ideal archetype of a modern mullah, which is why he was repeatedly offered the leadership of the Muslim ummah of Tatarstan.<sup>59</sup> He embodies the stereotypical image of the 'traditional' Tatar imam, an image inspired by Tatar theatre and literature. This image comprises a clear ethnotype of the Kazan Tatar: educated, lively and vivid Tatar speech, flexibility, readiness to accept compromises, patchy but sufficient knowledge of Arabic and Islam, etc. This is why he is one of the leading and in-demand newsmakers and generates steady interest from the public and the media in Tatarstan. Jalil Fazlyev suits the authorities even in his readiness to give an Islamic justification for important secular holidays and patriotic events of a clearly Christian background, which have recently become sacral on a nationwide scale. For instance, the Immortal Regiment parade, which resembles the religious procession and has people marching in columns with large framed pictures of their WWII veteran ancestors, is not in Fazlyev's opinion *haram* (forbidden) for Muslims, because they do not worship these pictures but merely carry them.<sup>60</sup> The celebration of Victory Day (May 9<sup>th</sup>) is also, in his opinion, approved by Islam, because, so Fazlyev says, a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad says that "where danger for the country exists, Muslims must protect their country, even if the ruler is an infidel."<sup>61</sup>

Fazlyev is also famous as organiser and promoter of the 'Islamic Sabantuy', originally an ancient pagan 'holiday of the plough' which Fazlyev seeks to legitimise with reference to certain deeds of Prophet Muhammad. This situation is reminiscent of the struggle between *Futuwwa* and *Muruwwa* in the early Arab Caliphate, where, instead of the traditional and ancestral 'chivalric code of honour' – *Muruwwa* – Arabs were offered *Futuwwa* – the same code of honour but based on descriptions of the deeds of the Prophet and his Companions.<sup>62</sup>

58 Rahimova V, "Baltach gorurlygy bulgan zamandash" ["The contemporary who became the pride of Baltach"], *Iman [Faith]*, 9 (1998).

59 In personal conversations with one of the authors of this article, A. Akhunov, Jalil Fazlyev mentioned offers he said he refused, because of his inability to speak Arabic and insufficient knowledge of the Islamic sciences.

60 "Ulemsez polk'ka kushylasyzmy?" ["Will you join the Immortal regiment?"], *Watanym Tatarstan [Our Homeland Tatarstan]*, 62, (5 May, 2018), <http://vatantat.ru/index.php?pg=866/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

61 Rashit Minhaj, "Berbashlar bashlap yeri" ["Berbashlar – are the initiators"], *Watanym Tatarstan [Our Homeland Tatarstan]*, 51-52 (24920-24921) (March 25, 2005).

62 Fazlyev Jalil, *Rebenok musul'manina. O vospitanii [On Fostering Muslim Kid]* (Kazan: Iman, 2012/1433), p. 27. Separate issue of *Musul'manskiy mir [Muslim World]*, 3 March/Rabi' al-Awwal, 2012/1433.



In general, Jalil Fazlyev adheres to an 'ethnographic' version of traditional Islam. He rarely diverges from his chosen course or goes back on his words. His position can be expressed in the words of a famous Tatar theologian of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Shihabuddin Marjani, which he has turned into his motto: "Three things preserve religion, even if they are not connected with religion: ethnic language, ethnic clothes, and ethnic customs".<sup>63</sup>

The following quote expresses Fazlyev's view of traditional Islam in more expanded form:

If we do not preserve our ethnic peculiarities, ethnic customs, how shall we recognise each other? If nations were not needed, Allah would not have created them and would not have explained their importance with certain ayahs. Undervaluing national and ethnic identity, ethnic culture and customs leads to contradicting the words of Allah. Like notes that add up to form a single melody, different peoples who live in peace and respect each other create harmony.<sup>64</sup>

A matter of much dispute and discussion is the problem of commemoration ceremonies for the deceased on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> days after death and the first anniversary. It is a sort of marker, a test to show who is who. As noted above, the secular authorities are lobbying for precisely this conservative variant of traditional Islam – an Islam that takes popular customs and traditions into account, which they therefore consider the most suitable and 'safest' form of the religion for the Tatar Ummah. Public figures in Tatarstan are divided into two camps on this issue. The younger generation of imams, particularly those who received their Islamic education in Arab countries, reject this tradition as a relic of the past and as out of character with the classical dogmas of Islam. The second group consists of village imams and mullahs of the older generations, who argue for this variant of Islam, taking the *a priori* stance that the authorities know best how 'Tatar Islam' should develop.<sup>65</sup>

63 Fazlyev Jalil, *Rebenok musul'manina. O vospitanii*, p. 26.

64 Fazlyev Jalil, *Rebenok musul'manina. O vospitanii*, p. 25.

65 As an example of the position of the secular authorities, we can quote a speech by first President of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev at the IVth Congress of Muslims of Tatarstan (February of 2010), "I think we still undervalue the role of ethnic and historical consciousness in understanding our religious traditions. I see that in the example of the disputes about Bolgar and the interpretation of some rituals. What's wrong with Tatars having religious ceremonies on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> day or a year after a close relative's death? These customs not only do not contradict Islam but are actually quite an effective form of preserving and reproducing Islamic traditions, albeit in a very simple form. And they help a lot of people – our children and grandchildren, old and young – to get their introduction to Islam. They hear recital of the Qur'an, the sermon of the mullah, ask questions." Cited after Yakupov V., *Ziyarat (poseshcheniye) Syatogo Bulgara* (Kazan: Iman, 1431/2010), p. 3-4.



In this regard, many Tatar imams take their cue from the words of Jalil Fazlyev, as Chief qadi of Tatarstan, sincerely believing he cannot be mistaken because of his officially recognised status, which, or so they think, gives him the right to speak on behalf of all the Muslims of the Republic:

There are certain acts that are not described in the Qur'an or the *hadiths*: almsgiving at funerals, gatherings on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> days and one year after the death of a person. Of course, neither the Qur'an nor the *hadiths* say anything about this. Before the adoption of Islam, there was a popular tradition of sacrificing a four-legged animal beside the grave of the deceased and then eating the animal's meat. Similarly there were gatherings for collective meals on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> days and one year after the death of a person. Imam Abu Hanifa said, 'If you cannot eradicate the local customs of a nation that has converted to Islam, do not provoke that nation's wrath but bring them closer to the religion.' So, having consulted with each other, our imams replaced almsgiving at the grave of the deceased with funereal almsgiving (*ghur sadaqasy*), and the commemorative meal at the grave was replaced by a commemorative meal at home with the recitation of the Qur'an and dedicating the rewards to the deceased.<sup>66</sup>

Generally speaking, the subject of remembering the deceased is the keynote of a lot of pieces by imams subject to the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of RT. For instance, Mahmud Sharafutdin, imam of the Shamil Mosque of Kazan, wrote in his book *Markhumnar bakhchasy* [*Gardens of the dead*]:

These *majlises*<sup>67</sup> preserved our people's faith during the era of godlessness and atheism; what is more, they helped to pass on religious knowledge. As a result, for 70-80 years of godlessness, knowledge of the existence of Allah, His truthfulness, and the purity of our religion was passed on to our people... And nowadays these *majlises* serve as a means to create strong ties between spiritual leaders and society, the people. ... when people go to these gatherings, they receive food for the soul and find answers to their questions. Under conditions when [after Communism] people have forgotten about going to the mosque, people go to these *majlises* instead, and there, after hearing a sermon or recital of the Qur'an for the first time, they enter upon the righteous path.<sup>68</sup>

For his part, the ex-deputy of the mufti of DUM RT Ramil Adygamov, in the section "Provody usopshih" ["Parting with the deceased"] in his book *Osnovy propovedi i obyazannosti imama* [*The basics of preaching and the*

66 Fazlyev J., *Osnovy islamskoy kultury: uchebnoye posobiye* [Foundations of Islamic culture: study guide] (Kazan: Iman, 2009), p. 127-128.

67 Mejlis, majlis (Arab. – majlis, 'gathering', 'meeting') is any meeting or gathering. The Volga Tatars usually understand the term as referring to gatherings to commemorate the deceased, recite the Qur'an, etc. Instead of 'majlis', the Tatar 'ash' ('Islamic meal') is often used.

68 Mahmud Sharafutdin, *Markhumnar bakhchasy* [*Gardens of the Deceased*] (Kazan: Mechet' Shamil', 2008), p. 98-100.



*duties of the Imam*], simply describes the order in which the ‘majlises of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> days and one year’ are supposed to be held.<sup>69</sup>

Nor should we forget that the tradition of commemorating the departed is a substantial source of revenue both for the mosque and for the practicing imam personally. For example, an imam interviewed in the village of Shali in the Pestrechinsky district of Tatarstan, has introduced a new practice – instead of distributing the *sadaqa*<sup>70</sup> among the guests, he collects it into a separate bag and then spends it on maintenance of the mosque.<sup>71</sup>

The muftiate is also known to have taken steps to limit the rights of unregistered imams<sup>72</sup> to perform commemoration rituals for the deceased. The main motive of the ban is concern that imams not registered with the muftiate may not adopt the Spiritual Administration’s official policy, which may give rise to deviation and loose interpretation of Shari’ah issues. Such competition can also be explained on financial grounds, as, just like in the Soviet era, if imams visit believers at home on behalf of a certain mosque, they are obliged to hand over any donations to that mosque. One should, however, point out that while Orthodox Christian cathedrals clearly define the cost of rituals like baptism, the wedding ceremony, and funeral services, mosques do not set prices for their rites.

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69 “In the Volga-Urals region these majlises are usually held in the deceased person’s home or the home of his/her relatives. Sometimes they may be held in cafes or restaurants... The imam arrives at the majlis, greets everyone present, recites the du’a... After that he delivers a sermon, which is usually about the frailty of our world and the temporary stay of human beings in it. Also at the sermon the imam may explain basic notions of Islam for those present.” Adygamov R., *Osnovy propovedi i obyazannosti imama [Basics of Homiletics and Duties of the Mosque Preachers]* (Kazan: Izdatel’stvo Kazanskogo universiteta, 2014), p. 104.

70 A monetary donation to the imam or the mosque.

71 Authors’ fieldwork materials, June 2017, village of Shali, Pestrechinsky district, the Republic of Tatarstan.

72 In private conversation (with the ethnographer R.K. Urazmanova), the late Valiulla Yakupov used to call them ‘paramedic mullahs’, i.e. ‘amateur mullahs’, with no religious education, having studied the basics of Islam on their own. For the most part, they perform ‘paramedical’ or ‘assistive’ functions like bathing the bodies of the deceased and helping to organise the funerary ritual. It is rare for them to participate in organising rituals of *nikah* or Islamic marriage, for which Tatar families prefer to invite young imams. To some degree, they act as competitors of the official clergy, because they attract some of their income in the form of donations and gifts. Urazmanova R.K., “Transformatsiya musulmanskih obryadov v bytu tatar (k voprosu etnicheskoy samoindentifikatsii)”, *Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii ‘Obshchestvenno-politicheskaya zhizn’ Tatarstana v usloviyakh sotsiokulturnogo i konfessional’nogo plyuralizma’* [Proceedings of Scientific and Practical Conference ‘Socio-Political Life of Tatarstan in Socio-Cultural and Confessional Plurality’] (Kazan: Iman, 2006), p. 45.



## VALIUULLA YAKUPOV AND HIS VISION OF TRADITIONAL ISLAM

As mentioned above, the interpretation of traditional Islam by Valiulla Yakupov (1963–2012) is explored in considerable detail by M. Kemper and A. Bustanov,<sup>73</sup> which is why we will not dwell upon the particulars of his views in this article. We cannot forego all discussion of Yakupov's beliefs here, however, since he defined the image of Islam in Tatarstan for over 20 years. One could say he shaped the image as chief editor of the Iman publishing house, which published 402 editions in Russian<sup>74</sup> and 627 editions in Tatar between 1991 and 2011 on a wide range of Islam-related topics.<sup>75</sup>

Yakupov was born in the village of Dmitrievka of the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1987, he graduated from the Kazan Chemical-Technological Institute. As a student, he already stood out as a charismatic public figure. As secretary of the Institute's Komsomol organisation, he began conducting ethnic and religious events. In 1990, he was elected chairman of the "Iman" Youth Centre of Islamic Culture. In subsequent years, right up to his tragic death in 2012, he held important positions in the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan, from first deputy mufti to chief of the Department of education. In his early career he defined the policy and ideology of DUM RT, later coming out strongly against the Salafi movement, often using the term 'Wahhabi holdings incorporated' (to point to the link between the local secular power and the Wahhabis), for which he was criticised by the Muslim community of the Republic of Tatarstan.<sup>76</sup>

He published a number of articles explaining the notion of traditional Islam in one way or another. Key among them were a brochure published in 2004 called *Hanafitskiy mazhab, ego znachenkiye i aktual'nost'* [*The*

73 Kemper M., Bustanov A., "Yazyk 'traditsionnogo islama' v tekstah Valiully Yakupova" [Traditional Islam Vocabulary in the Texts by Valiulla Yakupov], p.123-139.

74 *Katalog knig, vypushchennykh izdatelstvom 'IMAN'. Spisok knig, izdannyh na russkom yazyke* [Catalogue of books published by 'Iman' Publishing House]. <http://textarchive.ru/c-2145652.html/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

75 *'Iman' nashriyaty kitapлары katalogy* [Catalogue of Books Published by 'Iman' Publishing House] (Kazan: Iman, 2011).

76 *Valiulla khazrat Yakupov turynda istaleklar (1963–2012)* [Memories of Valiulla Yakupov] (Kazan: Tatarstan Meselmannaryny Diniya Nazarate, 2013). Criticism of Yakupov peaked in 2008, when he offered to burn 'extremist' books. See e.g. "Muhtasiby i imamy Tatarstana trebuyut otstavki V. Yakupova, predlozhivshogo szhigat' knigi po islamu", *Tatarmoscow.ru*, 14.04.2008, [http://tatarmoscow.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2167&Itemid=99999999/](http://tatarmoscow.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2167&Itemid=99999999/), accessed 25 September 2019.



*Hanafi madhab, its meaning and relevance*],<sup>77</sup> and pieces written at various times and then collected in the 2006 book *K prorocheskomu islamu [Toward prophetic Islam]*<sup>78</sup>, namely “The role of Traditional Islam in the Religious revival”, “Ethnic customs, traditions and Hadiths”, “Rituals for commemorating the deceased”, “On visiting Bolgar and Bilyar”, “Understanding the term ‘bid’a’”, “The dichotomy of ‘adat- bid’a’”, and an article from a 2011 book *Islam segodnya [Islam today]* “The role of Traditional Islam in countering the dissemination of extremism”.

According to Yakupov, the main traits of ‘Tatar Islam’ are preservation of the Tatar language as the language of sermon<sup>79</sup> and the popularity of *du’a*, personal appeals to the Lord, because Tatars cannot be satisfied with a merely mechanical approach to performing ritual. In his opinion, individual perception of the Divine with the heart is particularly important,<sup>80</sup> as is the preservation of the nation inside a single madhab culture, because it makes

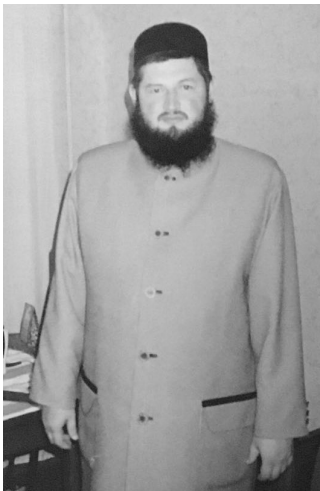


Photo 1. Valiulla Yakupov, 1997 (Kazan, the Republic of Tatarstan). Courtesy of D.A. Shagaviev.

the grandeur of Islamic prayer, its dignified sublimity and its acceptance by God much higher and more effective.<sup>81</sup> Valiulla Yakupov also defends the Shariah right to visit Bolgar to commemorate the Volga Bulgars’ conversion to Islam, citing as an argument the fact that Muslims celebrate the holiday of Ashura to commemorate the liberation of the Jewish people from Egyptian rule.<sup>82</sup> Regarding the majlises on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> days after a death, he says these rituals gained a foothold during pre-Soviet times as a form of philanthropy and mutual assistance amongst Tatars under conditions of economic oppression by colonial (Russian) powers.<sup>83</sup>

It needs to be said that, in addition to explaining what traditional Islam is in his understanding (Tatar as the language of sermons, Qur’an majlises, all

77 Yakupov, V. *Hanafitskiy mazhab, ego znachenije i aktual'nost'* [Hanafi Madhab, its Importance and Relevance] (Kazan: Iman, 2004).

78 Yakupov V., *K prorocheskomu islamu* [Towards Prophetic Islam] (Kazan: Iman, 2006).

79 Yakupov V., *Anti-Islam* [Anti-Islam] (Kazan: Iman, 2006), p. 31.

80 Yakupov V., *K prorocheskomu islamu*, p. 77.

81 Yakupov V., *Anti-Islam* [Anti-Islam], p. 30.

82 Yakupov V., *Anti-Islam*, p. 33.

83 Yakupov V., *Obyazannosti imama* [Duties of the Imam] (Kazan, 2012) Manuscript.



kinds of *du'a*, visiting Bolgar), Yakupov quite often uses the term traditional Islam in the context of polemic:

President V.V. Putin has himself confirmed that traditional Islam exists and is in essence a peaceful and kind religion. What kind of Islam is it? It is clear that we are talking about a *madhabic* Islam, and for Tatarstan it is the Islam of Abu Hanifa. And it is this Islam that radicals and extremists have declared war on... It is very dangerous for Tatarstan that a lot of high-ranking officials and secular scholars, who have set the task of reforming Islam, now wage war against the *madhab*.<sup>84</sup>

According to Valiulla Yakupov, traditional Islam of the start of the second millennium has two main enemies – Wahhabism and reform (alongside Jadidism). The cleric's written works often contain criticisms of both movements. His book *Tatarstanda rasmi bulmagan islam [Unofficial Islam in Tatarstan]*,<sup>85</sup> which criticises several such movements, starting with Wahhabism and ending with Jadidism, Euro-Islam and Neopaganism, has become something of a classic. By the start of the second decade, the impulse given by the 'mirasists',<sup>86</sup> who equated religious reform with Jadidism,<sup>87</sup> ceased to be relevant (although Yakupov's work still contained occasional attacks on reformers, it was more by force of habit than for any strategic reason – authors' note), but his anti-Wahhabist rhetoric remained intact and even enhanced: "The official clergy in the inner part of Russia today"<sup>88</sup> is not only ready to com-

84 Yakupov V., *Obyazannosti imama*, p. 6.

85 Yakupov V., *Tatarstanda rasmi bulmagan islam [Non-Official Islam in Tatarstan]* (Kazan: Iman, 2003).

86 Mirasism, as interpreted by A. Bustanov and M. Kemper, is an intellectual movement of Tatar scholars who became concerned during the period from the 1950s to the 1980s with the written Tatar legacy of the pre-Soviet period, including Arabic-script manuscripts and archival materials. See Bustanov A., Kemper M., "Mirasizm v tatarskoy srede: transformatsiya islamskogo naslediya v tatarskoye prosvetitel'stvo" [Tatar Mirasism: Transformation of Islamic Heritage into Tatar Enlightenment], *Ars Islamica. V chest' Stanislava Mikhaylovicha Prozorova [Ars Islamica. In the Honor of Stanislav Mihaylovich Prozorov]*, Mikhail Piotrovsky & Alikber Alikberov (eds.) (Moscow: Nauka-Vostochnaya literatura, 2016), p. 246-279.

87 Any such comparison between reformation and Jadidism is, according to the authors, completely unjustified, because the phenomenon of Jadidism relates to the reform of school education among the Muslims of the Russian Empire, while religious reformation is a completely different phenomenon that has to do with revising well-established religious norms and which required new interpretations that are in accordance with the sources of Islam, on the one hand, in the context of the modern problems of the Muslim society, on the other hand.

88 Applying the Christian term 'clergy' to Islam is typical of Yakupov. Kemper and Bustanov write, "It is interesting that Yakupov does not borrow and adapt Christian terms mechanically but does it knowingly and deliberately. With regard to the use of the words 'church' and 'clergy' in the context of Islam he notes: 'when speaking Russian we have to use a number of terms that, when applied to Islam, have nuanced meanings and should not be understood in the Orthodox Christian sense.'" (Kemper M., Bustanov A., "Yazyk 'traditsionnogo islama' v tekstah Valiully Yakupova" [Traditional Islam Vocabulary in the Texts by Valiulla Yakupov], p. 136.





pete with ‘Salafi’ extremism but is already successfully fighting it. Beyond the state factor, however, this struggle will inevitably influence traditionalism itself, damaging its tolerant nature.”<sup>89</sup>

Valiulla Yakupov criticized repeated raising of the index finger prayer by some Muslims, the loud enunciation of Amen during collective prayer after reciting “Al-Fatiha”, all of which, in his opinion, spoils the ‘elegance’ of the traditional Tatar way of prayer. He also critically analyses the fundamentalists’ beliefs that Allah is physically located in the sky and the phrase ‘Allah *istawa*’,<sup>90</sup> which, as Yakupov suggests, should be interpreted as ‘Allah is above the throne’. In conclusion, he writes that

Another danger of Wahhabism as an ideology for Tatars is that it imposes what are exclusively Arab problems on our youth, making it seem that we too are responsible for these problems. Together with them, we see the propaganda of tribalism, clanship, mythical Arab supremacy, and the Arabo-centricity of the Islamic world. Whereas the values that have always been typical for Tatars are traditional Qur’anic values, which in the Renaissance era began to be interpreted as European values.<sup>91</sup>

## TRADITIONAL ISLAM IN THE EVOLUTION OF MUFTI KAMIL SAMIGULLIN’S VIEWS

Kamil Samigullin is the youngest mufti in Russia. He was born in 1985 in Mari El, a Finno-Ugric republic adjacent to Tatarstan, where traditional pagan customs are still quite strong. He received his religious education in Kazan, Makhachkala and Istanbul. He studied in Turkey from 2003 to 2007 at a *madrasah* affiliated to the İsmailağa mosque and received an *ijazah*<sup>92</sup> from its leader, sheikh Mahmut al-Ofi. The İsmailağa brotherhood

89 Yakupov V., *Islam segodnya*, p. 23.

90 The word ‘*istawa*’ has been a subject of dispute between supporters of various interpretations. It is usually translated into Russian as ‘*utverdilsya*’ [‘established himself’] or ‘*voznessya*’ [‘ascended’]. Representatives of Kalam believed this term belonged to the category of ‘*mutashabihat*’, i.e. unclear places in the Qur’an, which have to be interpreted allegorically, while the adherents of literal interpretation of the Qur’an think it should not be interpreted but understood literally.

91 Yakupov V., *Anti-Islam*, p. 28.

92 *Ijazah* (Arab.) is literally permission, which can be either written or spoken. It is the right to pass on a certain quantity of religious knowledge.



is one of the branches of the Sufi Naqshbandiyya brotherhood.<sup>93</sup> In 2013,<sup>94</sup> at the age of 28, Kamil Samigullin was elected mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan. In 2017 he was re-elected for a new term on an uncontested basis. He had no rivals.

The mufti's attitude to the problem of traditional Islam has repeatedly changed. It seems to have depended on the context of the current situation. Samigullin took the position of mufti in 2013, when discussion of the problem of the religious and the ethnic had been firmly established in Tatar social discourse. The position of the official secular authorities was very clearly formulated, and they interpreted this issue unambiguously – Tatarstan Muslims should stick to their roots. These roots are the Hanafi *madhab* and the Maturidi *aqidah*. Nor should Tatars forget their folk customs or traditions, which are already integrated into 'Tatar Islam'.<sup>95</sup>

This is why, in his first full interview after election as mufti, Kamil Samigullin tried to distance himself from his Sufi background:

I have even been called a fan of the Hanafi *madhab*. And no one has ever heard from me that I belong to a *tariqa*. And you will not find a single person that I have drafted into any *tariqa*. [...] We have to call all believers of Tatarstan to the Hanafi *madhab*, the right *aqidah*, and appeal to them to be pious and God-conscious. But we can't force anyone to become an ascetic. And we shouldn't advocate it.<sup>96</sup>

Analysis of Kamil Samigullin's speeches and articles published in the official newspaper of the DUM RT, *Ummah*, between 2013 and 2014 shows that at that point the mufti still had not worked out his own understanding of the term traditional Islam and was offering quite diverse interpretations. For example, in May of 2013 he made the claim that "Tatars have always constructed their ethnic identity on the foundation of historical and religious unity":<sup>97</sup>

93 The official website of the İsmailağa Mosque, <https://www.ismailaga.org.tr/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

94 The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan has been chaired by four muftis since its foundation (1992): Gabdulla Galiullin (1992–1998), Gusman Iskhakov (1998–2011), Ildus Fayzov (2011–2013) and Kamil Samigullin (2013 – present).

95 E.g. the speech quoted above, made by the first President of Tatarstan, M.Sh. Shaimiev at the IV Congress of Muslims of Tatarstan (February of 2010).

96 Kamil Samigullin, "Islam prevratili v pole, na kotorom kazhdyyi hochet popinat myach" ["Islam has turned into a field where everyone wants to kick the ball"], *Business Online* (11.04.2013), <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/78356/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

97 "Velikoe sobraniye" ["The great Assembly"], *Ummah*, 100 (May 24, 2013).



What makes a nation is not only its shared historical fate but also its shared beliefs and the shared nation-wide idea. This idea is an annual return to our roots, our historical roots in Great Bolgar. This idea unites us and gives us strength, it inspires and develops us. If Tatars lose their history, it will be possible to call them an inferior nation, one without any prospects for self-preservation.<sup>98</sup>

This article in *Ummah* discusses the so-called ‘minor pilgrimage’ to a historical place sacred to all Tatars – the town of Bolgar, the ancient capital of Volga Bulgaria, located some 200 km from Kazan. It is the supposed place where Tatars’ ancestors officially converted to Islam in 922. Tatars travelled there with religious and sacral intent even during the Soviet era, when such initiatives were punishable. Usually, groups of people would travel to Bolgar to perform a prayer at the ruins of the congregational mosque, walk around the only surviving column of the mosque (somewhat similarly to the ritual of *tawaf*, or walking around the Kaaba in Mecca), commemorate ancestors, and make sacrificial offerings with small cattle and poultry. In 1989, this essentially folk custom was validated by the mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia (DUMES) Talgat Tadzhuiddin under the name of *ziyarat as-salihin* (visiting the righteous, the pious). Since then, Bolgar is visited yearly, usually by over 40 thousand people during an event called *Izge Bolgar jyeny* (The Gathering in Holy Bolgar), which is officially held in spring or summer.

In his early speeches Kamil Samigullin thus alternated in his interpretation of traditional Islam between a focus on its religious (the Hanafi tradition) and its ethnic (folk customs) content. At first stressing that Tatars need to adhere to the Hanafi *madhab*, which is traditional for them, he very soon started to speak, clearly under the influence of the general trend established at that time, about ‘historical-religious’ unity.

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98 “Velikoe sobraniye”, *Ummah*, 100 (May 24, 2013).



Photo 2. Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin delivering khutba during Izge Bolgar iyeny, July 2018 (Bolgar, the Republic of Tatarstan). Photo by T. A. Rakhmatullin

In 2014, however, he went back to the religious interpretation, which is more congenial to him. Answering a journalist's question about his understanding of traditional Islam, the mufti replied:

Different people have different understandings of these words. The correct translation of word 'Sunnah' from Arabic is as 'tradition'. The Islamic tradition includes followers of four *madhabs* in the sphere of Islamic jurisprudence and ritual practices and, as regards beliefs, the followers of Maturidi or Ash'ari. We, Tatars, have never turned away from our *madhab*.<sup>99</sup>

In 2016, three years after his first entry into office, the mufti of Tatarstan began expressing in public speeches an independent opinion of current events, making open reference to his past and his Sufi experience:

The entire Tatar theology is connected with peaceful Sufi traditions. I think that Sufism is the real alternative for young people, because the traditions of Sufism call for religious tolerance, humility and respect for each other, which is one of the main elements of human morality and a necessary source of spiritual discipline and virtue.<sup>100</sup>

99 "Kamil khazrat Samigullin: "Pravilno ponimat' islam i byt' bogoboyaznennymi – eto luchsh-eye dlya tatarskoy natsii", ["The best for Tatar nation – is to understand Islam correctly and to be God-fearing"], *Ummah*, 133 (February 2014).

100 "Muftiy Tatarstana v Obshchestvennoy palate RF obsuzhdayet rol' i znacheniye sufizma" ["Mufti of Tatarstan discusses the role and importance of Sufism in the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation"], *Official website of DUM RT* (28 April, 2016), [http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news\\_13441](http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news_13441), accessed 25 September 2019.



In an interview in October 2018, mufti Kamil Samigullin again connected the religious with the ethnic, trying to explain his understanding of ‘Tatar Islam’. According to him, Tatars have their peculiarities and customs, but they do not separate them from the rest of the Islamic Ummah:

Our Islam has its own distinct identity in the Islamic world. Our specific features are expressed in Tatar Islam, but these differences, conditioned by the cultural traditions, do not make our Islam a standalone religion. Tatars are still an integral part of the Islamic world.<sup>101</sup>

As a result, we can see that over the past several years the religious leader of the Tatarstan Muslims’ understanding of traditional Islam has evolved. Putting forward various concepts, such as ‘historical memory’, ‘ethnic identity’, ‘Sunni Islam’, and ‘Sufism’, he has recently been leaning more toward purely religious explanations,<sup>102</sup> but has still not made a final choice in favour of any particular concept. This is all due to the fact that, in contrast to the Islamic republics of the Russian Caucasus, where there is a clear understanding of the religious tradition within Sufism, the concept of traditional Islam has not yet been worked out in Tatar society. Sufism has played an important role in the life of Tatars, but not to the same degree as in the Caucasus, and almost faded away during the Soviet era. In Tatarstan, Islam was preserved thanks to a number of quasi-Islamic rituals connected with the life cycle. These customs were considered so sacred that neither communists nor atheists have been able to do without them.

Under conditions where the religious leaders of Tatarstan are unable to make up their minds on the concept of traditional Islam, the secular authorities insist on the idea of ritual (‘ethnographic’) Tatar Islam, which they consider a cure-all or ‘vaccine’ against ‘destructive’ foreign influence. That is what makes it easy to understand mufti Kamil Samigullin’ unclear position, as he is obliged to listen to the opinion of the authorities, on the one hand, while, on the other, he cannot, as a well-educated and devout believer, reduce everything to folk customs. The vagueness in characterising Sufism is also quite understandable. If the mufti openly declared the Spiritual Administration’s policy of reviving Sufi institutes in the Republic, he would set himself at serious odds with quite a substantial group of Muslims who do not accept the concept of *Tasawwuf* for ideological reasons.

101 “Kamil khazrat Samigullin: ‘Tatary – narod, vozvelichennyi islamom!’” [“Tatars are the nation glorified by Islam!”], *Business Online*, (23 October, 2018), <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/399910>, accessed 25 September 2019.

102 E.g., in a recent interview with one of the authors of this article, he clearly said that “tradition is Sunni Islam” (Interview with K. Samigullin. 06.06.2018 – with Renat Bekkin).



## TRADITIONAL ISLAM DOES NOT CONTRADICT THE HANAFI MADHAB (THE POINT OF VIEW OF ISLAMIC LE- GAL EXPERT RUSTAM NURGALEEV)

In November 2017, there was a roundtable at the Kazan Federal University on traditional Islam.<sup>103</sup> The main speaker at the event was Rustam Nurgaleev, one of the promising young Islamic religious figures of Tatarstan.

Rustam Nurgaleev was born in 1981 in the town of Megion in the Tyumen oblast'. Tatar is not his first language. He graduated from al-Azhar University in Egypt, majoring in Islamic Law (2008), and then studied at the Higher Education Institute affiliated to the Ministry of awqaf of the Arab Republic of Egypt (2010). He also has a secular law degree. Nurgaleev is currently vice-rector for Education at the Kazan Islamic University, deputy chairman of the Council of 'ulama' of DUM RT and counsellor of the Chief qadi of the Republic of Tatarstan.

Speaking at the roundtable, he cited several tenets of Hanafi *fiqh*, which, according to him, justify certain views of traditional Islam and even legitimise them:

- 1) Regarding whether a given practice is justified, Hanafi *fiqh* prefers to rely on the tradition ('*adat*') widespread in a locality as the source of law, rather than a single *hadith* of the *ahad* type (a *hadith* narrated by a single person);
- 2) In analysing whether the use of local tradition ('*adat*') is lawful, Muslims need to adhere to the method of *al-maslaha al-mursala* (the public good or commitment to benefit);
- 3) Muslims should follow the *hadith* "My nation will not unite on misguidance, so if you see them differing, follow the great majority"<sup>104</sup>;
- 4) A core principle Muslims should follow is that of safety (*amn*).

In Nurgaleev's interpretation, Muslims can make decisions on many questions regarding life in secular society on the basis of these principles. For instance, the 'pagan' custom of celebrating New Year is met with reproach by some religious leaders: according to more orthodox Muslims, the holiday is not just of non-Islamic origin, but also brings material losses to Muslims and

103 A full recording of this roundtable is available on YouTube: "Traditsionnyi islam. Publichnaya diskussiya s uchastiyem Orkhana Dzhemalya" [Traditional Islam. Public Discussion with Participation of Orkhan Dzhemal], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzL1lw7DJVY> accessed 25 September 2019.

104 Ibn Majah, *Sunan, Bab Aswad A'zam, Hadith 3950*. [http://islamweb.net/newlibrary/display\\_book.php?flag=1&bk\\_no=54&ID=7249](http://islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?flag=1&bk_no=54&ID=7249) accessed 25 September 2019.



pushes them to commit *haram* – to take alcohol, which is forbidden in Islam.<sup>105</sup>

Nurgaleev's judgement relies on the fact that it is a very widespread tradition that nobody really traces back to its pagan past. As for consuming or not consuming alcohol – that is a personal decision for every Muslim connected with such notions as *akhlaq* and *adab* (morality and good manners). According to Nurgaleev, a true Muslim will never drink alcohol, at New Year or any other event. Besides, he thinks the tradition is beneficial, as it gives Muslims (and non-Muslims) several days off to spend with their families, meet relatives, visit their parents, etc.

As to commemorating the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> days and one year after death, he offers an example from his own experience: in Dagestan the custom was banned by the local muftiate as a harmful ritual, because their tradition required relatives of the deceased to spend unreasonable amounts of money to hold such majlises. In our region, however, Nurgaleev claims, no such practice of spending large amounts of money on mortuary majlises exists, which is why this practice remains useful and important and does not contravene Islam.

Several participants at the roundtable asked Nurgaleev 'tough' questions: whether it is right and normal for Russian law enforcement agencies to tell Muslims what to do or what is right and wrong in Islam; or for Muslims to follow the norms of a non-Muslim state (the wording was quite forceful – 'a *kufr* state'). Here too Nurgaleev appealed to the Islamic norm of 'safety' – '*amn*' – as guiding principle. He explained using an example from his own life, namely from when he travelled to war-torn Damascus: "A Syrian told me – Yes, we know that Bashar al-Assad's hands are covered with blood, but that doesn't mean we have to wash his hands by committing even bigger outrages."<sup>106</sup>

In Rustam Nurgaleev's answers, the notion of traditional Islam thus forms an entire conceptual framework that is well-grounded from a legal point of view. Based on this framework, Nurgaleev offers answers not only to questions on customs (like having gatherings on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> days and one year after a death, visiting Bolgar, etc.) but also to the much

105 "Otnosheniye islama k Novomu Godu", <http://islamdag.ru/analitika/9095/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

106 The actual wording was less than civil ('washing his hands with urine'), so the authors toned it down a little, at least in the main text of the article. "Traditsionnyi islam. Publichnaya diskussiya s uchastiyem Orkhana Dzhemalya" [Traditional Islam. Public Discussion with Participation of Orkhan Dzhemal], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzL1l-w7DJVY>, accessed 25 September 2019.



wider range of problems that arise in polemic with orthodox-minded<sup>107</sup> opponents from the so-called Salafi camp.<sup>108</sup>

## RUSTAM BATROV'S THEORY OF TRADITIONAL ISLAM

Rustam Gayazovich Batrov was born in 1978 in Gorky (now Nizhniy Novgorod), graduated from the Moscow Islamic College, served as imam in Yaroslavl and was at the same time editor-in-chief of the *Minaret* magazine. Since 2007 he has occupied various positions in Kazan – from vice-rector for Education of the Russian Islamic University (since 2009 – the Russian Islamic Institute) to deputy mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan. In 2017, Batrov left DUM RT and became a journalist. He currently has, under the pen name Rustam Batyr, a column on Islam in a popular Tatarstan e-newspaper, *Business Online*,<sup>109</sup> which specialises in covering events that prompt significant public reaction.

Batrov is the author of several books, including *Vmesto reformy* [*Instead of reform*], where he offers not a reform of Islam but a proper reading of Islam's main sources – the Qur'an and the Sunnah, as well as Abu Hanifa's works. Batrov has also published work on Abu Hanifa, in which he pays attention to the wide diversity of interpretations of Islamic law, as well as to the absence of dogmatism in the *faqih's* decisions.<sup>110</sup>

Batrov was a student of professor Tawfiq Ibrahim, well-known for his liberal religious views and author of an extensive work on the biography of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>111</sup> and a theological treatise called *Koranicheskiy gumanizm* [*Qur'anic humanism*].<sup>112</sup>

107 The term 'orthodoxy' as used in this article has two meanings, a) as a religious attitude aimed at establishing and disseminating the traditional meanings inherent to religion, in the Muslim view, and b) as 'faithfulness to a creed' stated by a given group, depending on how capable they are of asserting their orthodoxy in society (Talal Asad). In this context the word 'orthodoxy' is used in its first meaning.

108 The term *al-salaf al-salih* ('pious predecessors') and the word 'Salafi', derived from it, are arbitrary. The Salafi movement has no single leader, single doctrine or centre. The word 'Salafi' is usually used to refer to the followers of the Saudi version of Islam, who reject the Kalam schools (Ash'ari and the Maturidi schools) and oppose any manifestations of Sufism and local forms of Islam.

109 Rustam Batyr, personal web-page: <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/user/3026/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

110 Batyr R., *Abu Hanifa: zhizn' i naslediyе* [Abu Hanifa; Life and Heritage] (Nizhniy Novgorod: Medina, 2007); Batyr R., *Abu Khanifa* (Kazan: Khuzur, 2016).

111 Ibrahim T., Efremova N., *Zhizn' proroka Mukhammada* [The Life of the Prophet Muhammad], Vol. 1-2. (Moscow: Lodomir, 2009).

112 Ibrahim T., *Koranicheskiy gumanizm. Tolerantno-plyuralisticheskiy ustanovki* [Qur'anic humanism. Non-judgmental and pluralist attitudes] (Moscow: Medina, 2015). For more details on the views of T. Ibrahim and his followers, see the article by R.I. Bekkin "The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam" in this edited volume.





In 2016, Batrov presented the manuscript of a theological work, *Traditsionnyi islam Rossii. Kontseptual'nye osnovaniya* [*Traditional Islam of Russia. Conceptual foundations*], for consideration by the Department of Islamic Studies of the Kazan Federal University. Even though it repeats to some degree earlier works by the author published in online media, this work nonetheless sums up his theological research since 2007, the year *Vmesto reformy* [Instead of reform] was published.<sup>113</sup>

It would not be appropriate to conduct a full-fledged analysis of Batrov's work in this paper, so we will limit ourselves to outlining his general approach, which is that there is only one God but Islam is many-sided (n.b. there is also only one Islam but it is many-sided in Batrov's interpretation), and that is its main advantage.

On the one hand, he is repeating an idea typical of the discourse on traditional Islam:

According to the orthodox understanding, traditional Islam therefore comprises the three sciences of the *Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*. The *Ahl as-Sunnah wa-l- Jama'ah* are believers who represent the religion in its three foundations: *Iman, Islam* and *Ihsan*.<sup>114</sup>

He adds a clarification:

[...] regional forms of Islam are the inevitable result of the unfolding of God's Truth in time and space. While preserving its underlying unity, Islam never was and never will be homogeneous. It is embodied in a variety of forms: the Arabian, Turkish, Iranian, Tatar, etc., forms of Islam.<sup>115</sup>

'Tatar Islam' has its own specific features, which are manifest in such diverse historical phenomena as the institute of muftiates, the Kazan publication of the Qur'an, the Jadidism-Qadimism dichotomy, the role of female mentors – *abystays*, the Tatar variant of Islamic fine arts with its tradition of *shamails* – both printed ones and ones painted on glass.

All these phenomena, each in its own way, constitute the Islamic tradition in this region, which enriches the legacy of the ummah.

Modern manifestations, such as 'Qur'an *majlises*, rituals of shaking hands after the collective prayer, commemorative *jiyens* in Bolgar' should also be considered elements of Islam's many-sidedness.<sup>116</sup>

113 For a brief analysis of this work see Almazova L., "Sovremennye tendentsii razvitiya musul'manskoy mysli", *Istoriya musul'manskoy mysli v Volgo-Ural'skom regione* [Modern Tendencies in Muslim Thought. The History of Muslim Thought in Volga-Ural Region], L. Almazova, G. Idiyatullina, A. Khayrutdinov (eds.) (Kazan: Izdatel'sto Kazanskogo universiteta, 2015), p. 345-370. See, also Rustam Batyr, *Vmesto reformy* [Instead of reform]. (Nizhny Novgorod: Medina, 2007).

114 Batyr R., *Traditsionnyi islam Rossii: kontseptual'nye osnovaniya* [Traditional Islam in Russia: Conceptual Grounds]. Kazan, 2016. (In manuscript).

115 Batyr R., *Traditsionnyi islam Rossii: kontseptual'nye osnovaniya*.

116 Batyr R., *Traditsionnyi islam Rossii: kontseptual'nye osnovaniya*.



It should also be noted that the author does not reduce the term traditional Islam to notions of 'patriotic Islam'<sup>117</sup> or 'Russian Islam', as he considers it a much wider idea – religion in its local manifestation depends on the conditions of its existence, but when such conditions change, the religion itself changes as well:

Mixing politics with religion means not understanding the true nature of religion and doing it a grave disservice by placing it on a very unstable foundation. The starting point of Islam should not be the historical nationhood of a certain country, however important it might be for us today, but it should only be the timeless Revelation of God.<sup>118</sup>

Batrov's appraisal of the role of traditionalist believers in modern society is also of interest here:

The role of believers – traditionalists – in our society is, in fact, that they restore the social balance, align the asymmetry in the public conscience which appeared during the period of aggressive atheism. They are certainly not retrograde; they do not want to turn back time and make everyone go back to riding sleighs and horses instead of driving cars, which their opponents often accuse them of because they draw their image of a believer using the propaganda patterns of atheism rather than real-life examples. They simply want our people to have hope for the future, which may not come if we do not preserve in our national consciousness and our existence those elements we still have left after the ruthless cultural sterilisation that happened in the name of constructing a Soviet people.<sup>119</sup>

Beyond Batrov's concept of traditional Islam, we should also mention that his publications generally receive very various assessment from his fellow believers – from the harshest possible criticism to approval and gratitude. In particular, the leader of the *Shura*<sup>120</sup> of the Muslims of

117 "Traditsionnyi islam kak garant vospitaniya patriotizma" [Traditional Islam as Guarantor of Fostering Patriotism], <http://azan-syzran.ru/tradicionnyj-islam-kak-garant-vospitaniya-patriotizma/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

118 Batyr R., *Traditsionnyi islam Rossii: kontseptual'niye osnovaniya* [Traditional Islam in Russia: Conceptual Grounds]. Kazan, 2016. (In manuscript).

119 Batyr R., *Traditsionnyi islam Rossii: kontseptual'niye osnovaniya*.

120 The *Shura* of Bashkortostan Muslims is an Islamic organisation in the Republic of Bashkortostan, whose leader Ishmurad Khaybullin professes a rather orthodox version of Islam, argues against the *madhabs* and Sufism, as well as against interpreting the attributes of Allah and for understanding them literally. He is the author of a 500-page textbook on Arabic Grammar. Ishmurad Khaybullin. *Grammatika arabskogo yazyka. Kratkoye izlozheniye* [Arab Language Grammar. Short Description] (Ufa: Salam, 2010). Timur Rahmatullin notes that the *Shura* has been repeatedly criticised for its Salafi views, see "Musul'manskiye molodezhnye dvizheniya Bashkirii: ot chinovnichih proyektov do salafitskoy initsiativy" [Muslim Youth Movements in Bashkortostan: from Chauvinistic Projects to Salafi Initiatives], [http://www.info-islam.ru/publ/stati/aktualno/musulmanskie\\_molodezhnye\\_dvizheniya\\_bashkirii\\_ot\\_chinovnichikh\\_proektov\\_do\\_salafitskoj\\_initsiativy/49-1-0-42443/](http://www.info-islam.ru/publ/stati/aktualno/musulmanskie_molodezhnye_dvizheniya_bashkirii_ot_chinovnichikh_proektov_do_salafitskoj_initsiativy/49-1-0-42443/), accessed 25 September 2019.



Bashkortostan, Ishmurad Khaybullin,<sup>121</sup> has suggested Muslims should declare a 'general boycott' of Batrov.<sup>122</sup>

Those who opposed him and others holding similar views, like T. Ibrahim and A. Sadriev, include 73 Muslim public figures, among them the journalist Orkhan Dzhemal, the muftis Muqaddas Bibarsov, Nafigulla Ashirov, and Nurmuhamet Nigmatullin, and others, who cosigned a collective open letter to Ravil Gaynutdin, the chairman of DUM RF, that reads:

The home-grown ideas expressed by 'Qur'anite preachers'<sup>123</sup> as renewed religious norms and rules according to their understanding of the Qur'an may serve to disrupt the foundations of traditional Islam, which is based on works and studies recognised throughout the Islamic world and by the great imams of our Ummah. This activity, which aims to 'modernise' Islam and its religious norms in favour of modern times and circumstances, as has happened in other religious doctrines, will undoubtedly lead to new disturbances and a schism among believers.<sup>124</sup>

Batrov does have his supporters, mostly representatives of the Tatar intelligentsia like Aydar Khayrutdinov, Rafael Muhametdinov, Rezeda Safiullina, and the writer Ildar Abuzyarov.

The reaction to the ideas Batrov has expressed (and we are not talking here about Batrov's still unpublished work on traditional Islam) shows that his ideas are generally accepted by circles of academic scholars and secular intellectuals.

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121 One of the authors of this article, Leila Almazova, interviewed Ishmurad Khaybullin in 2011.

122 Batrov R., "Trend, zadannyi Abu Yusufom hanafizmu, okazalsya v srednevekovye dominiruyushchim" [The Trend of Abu Yusuf Decame Dominant in the Middle Ages], *Business Online*, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/338899/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

123 "Qur'anites' is a word used to refer to people who consistently deny the importance of the Sunnah – the bulk of narratives about the life of Prophet Muhammad. One of the best-known supporters of Qur'anism is Ahmad Mansur (b. 1949), who considered the Qur'an the only sacred source of Islam, denying the authority and authenticity of the hadiths. Calling Rustam Batrov or his teacher Tawfiq Ibrahim, who is incidentally the author of a vast work on the biography of Prophet Muhammad in two volumes, Qur'anites would not be correct. Both refer to certain hadiths as arguments in their works. For more on this, see R.I. Bekkin, "The Renovation Movement in Modern Russian Islam" in this edited volume.

124 "Musul'mane protiv Koranitov" [Muslims Against Qur'anites], <http://ansar.ru/person/obrashhenie-muftiev-i-imamov>, accessed 25 September 2019.



## DISUNITY OF OPINIONS. THE BELIEFS OF VARIOUS SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS ABOUT TRADITIONAL ISLAM

The opinions outlined above represent the positions of well-known figures in the Republic of Tatarstan, 'opinion shapers'. This does not mean the subject of traditional Islam is not discussed in other circles of Tatar society. The value of this social discourse lies in the fact that it allows us to determine the attitudes of the broad masses of the Muslim Ummah, on behalf of which all these social and religious leaders speak.

First, therefore, we shall review certain statements by those who voice the official position of Tatarstan's authorities. For instance, in the opinion of R.A. Nabiev, former chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs affiliated to the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Tatarstan:

Our traditional Islam is a religion whose nature, historically and politically, has turned out to be such that it has not been a cause of religious war for centuries. Precisely that shows Islam as professed by the Tatar people is peaceful, flexible and gentle. Just as it has been in the development of other nations and cultures. It is ready to perceive other cultures positively. We must preserve this traditional Islam, because it is our guarantee of peaceful development. Extremism comes from ignorance and lack of knowledge of Islam.<sup>125</sup>

The subject of traditional Islam is congenial to the nationally-minded intelligentsia, who have their own vision of this problem. The well-known ethnologist Damir Iskhakov counts the Tatar author Fawziya Bayramova<sup>126</sup> among them, along with the authors of the "Tatar Canon" ("Qanunname", 1996).<sup>127</sup> He thinks the group represents a Jihadist and so fundamentalist project for the development of Tatar (Muslim) society. According to Iskhakov, this conservative ideology has roots that go back to 1993–1996, when the consolidation of 'poor democracy' took place, alongside a sudden amplification of social differentiation:<sup>128</sup> "In the opinion of the supporters of

125 "Vera obyedinit narod" ["Faith unites people"], *Tatarskie kraya [Tatar lands]*, 20:537 (2003).

126 Bayramova, Fawziya Awhadieva (b. 1950) is a Tatar writer, politician and human rights activist. In the past she has been chairwoman of the Tatar national party, *Ittifaq*, and a member of Tatarstan's Parliament. She was twice convicted of 'incitement to ethnic hatred'.

127 Iskhakov D., "Formirovaniye antidzhadizma v Tatarstane: Noveyshiye tendentsii" ["Formation of anti-jadidism in Tatarstan: new trends"], *Zvezda Povolzhia [Star of The Volga Region]*, 8:112 (28.02. – 06.03.2002).

128 Here we clearly see the influence of events in the Caucasus at the time. People tried to justify the strengthening of Wahhabi ideas in Dagestan and Chechnya on the basis of social fragmentation, unemployment, etc.



this movement, the spiritual potential of the Tatar nation can only be enhanced if Tatars follow the path inscribed by Allah, which would lead to a logical conclusion – Allah would grant Tatars their own state.”<sup>129</sup>

While Iskhakov’s descriptions of Bayramova are relatively gentle, one of her opponents, former mufti of Tatarstan Farid Salman, has directly accused her of intentionally “disseminating the drivel of Ibn Taymiyyah, [Ibn] ‘Abd al-Wahhab and R. Fakhretdin,” referring to her pro-Salafi views.<sup>130</sup> He came to this conclusion after analysing speeches in which she argues against the ‘pagan’ commemoration gatherings on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> days after death, the ‘hajj’ to Bolgar, decorating interiors with *shamails*, and other similar customs, which, in Salman’s opinion, nonetheless comply with Shariah perfectly well.<sup>131</sup>

Bayramova has set out her thinking on the subject of traditional Islam most clearly in her “Open letter” to the mufti of Tatarstan Kamil Samigullin in 2013: “We request you stop pushing the nation into neo-paganism by using the [term] traditional Islam, which does not exist in Islam. We mustn’t divide the followers of the religion of Allah into traditional and non-traditional ones.”<sup>132</sup>

Theorist of Tatar nationalism and author of the book *Tatar missiyase* [Tatar mission] Rashat Safin is close to Bayramova’s ideas. He believes the future of the Tatar nation will only be bright and hopeful when the national idea, in the form of a ‘Tatar Islam’ that has an educational and ‘prophetic’ mission for all humankind, is reinforced by an “active and hard-nosed” nationalist policy.<sup>133</sup>

These examples are the opinions of people who examine the notion of traditional Islam exclusively in the context of the Islamic religion. There has also been a recent upsurge in Tatarstan of a small group of ‘Tengrists’, pagans who support return to ‘indigenous Tatar’ Turkic pagan roots. Its most characteristic representative is Russian Federal State Duma member from Tatarstan Fatih Sibgatullin, formerly a Soviet Communist Party official and member of the nomenklatura. His variant of traditional Islam is a blend of Tengrism, Islam and certain remnants of Soviet ideologemes.

129 Iskhakov D., “Formirovaniye antidzhadizma v Tatarstane: Noveyshiye tendentsii”.

130 Salman F., “Tatarlarga nindi din kirak?” [“Which religion do the Tatars need?”], *Iman* [Faith], 4 (2000).

131 Salman F., “Tatarlarga nindi din kirak?”

132 Bayramova F., *Millatema khezmat ittem. Publitsistik ham fanni-populyar yazmalar*, [I served to my nation. Journalistic and Science-oriented materials] (Kazan: Ayaz Publishing, 2013), p. 476.

133 Safin R., *Tatar missiyase: tatar yazmyshyna ezoterik analiz* [The mission of the Tatars: esoteric analysis of the Tatar’s destiny] (Kazan: Tatarstan Kitap Nashriyaty, 2006), p. 204.



In his interpretation, "Traditional Islam is the most progressive, the most civilised religion in the world. It draws a lot from Tengrism. And it is called 'traditional' because it incorporates all the customs and traditions of the Tatar people."<sup>134</sup>

In Sibgatullin's view, traditional Tatar Islam advocates tolerance for other religions, patriotism, collectivism and a renunciation of acquisitiveness. Sibgatullin does not reject Islam. According to him, traditional Tatar Islam has evolved and progressed, which is why it has begun treating Islamic prayer as an act beneficial for health ('physical exercise five times a day', 'meditation and relaxation'). The Qur'an can be recited to commemorate the dead, but one still has to visit the graves and 'lay flowers'. In Tatar Islam, women can pray and go to mosque, which Arabs allegedly do not allow. Sibgatullin even casts doubt on the fact that Tatars belong to the Hanafi madhab, insofar as the Afghans are Hanafis as well and "the Afghani and Tatar Islam are worlds apart."<sup>135</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The idea of a search for traditional Islam was introduced primarily by the state. Government representatives often talk about "the need to develop traditional Islam" when meeting Muslims on various social platforms.<sup>136</sup> In their turn, the representatives of the muftiates, imams subordinate to their authority, and other respected leaders who have picked up the idea of de-

134 Sibgatullin F, "Traditsion tatar islamy" [Traditional Tatar Islam], in *Tatarstan yashlare* [Tatarstan Youth], 22:12344 (07.06.2018). This material by F. Sibgatullin was harshly criticised by readers of the *Tatarstan yashlare* newspaper. For instance, a theologian from Naberezhnye Chelny, Syumbelya Fakheretdinova, accused him of incompetence, for each of his arguments coming up against a counterargument based on the Qur'an and the *hadiths*. "Being a member of Parliament, Fatih afandi is so used to passing laws that even here he has started lobbying for new religious laws," she wrote in an article entitled "Islam is neither Tatar nor Arabian", (Fakheretdinova S., "Islam tatarcha da, garapcha da tugel" ["Islam is neither in Tatar nor Arabic"], *Tatarstanyashlare* [Tatarstan Youth], 4:12351 (26.07.2018)).

135 Sibgatullin F, "Traditsion tatar islamy" [Traditional Tatar Islam], *Tatarstan yashlare* [Tatarstan Youth], 22:12344 (07.06.2018).

136 "Vladimir Putin: Traditsionnyi islam yavlyayetsya vazhneyshey chastyu rossiyskogo kulturnogo koda: Prezident RF v Kazani provel vstrechu s predstavatelyami islamskogo duhovenstva" [Traditional Islam has been the Main Part of the Russian Cultural Code], <https://www.tatar-inform.ru/news/2018/01/25/594500/>, accessed 25 September 2019. See also Speech by M. Babich, Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the Volga Federal District, "Muftiy RT prinyal uchastiye vo vstreche M.Babicha s predsdatelem DUM PFO" [The mufti of Tatarstan has Taken Part in the Meeting of M.Babich with the chairman of Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Volga Federal District], [http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news\\_10300.html/](http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news_10300.html/), accessed 25 September 2019.



veloping traditional Islam are all trying to put some content and meaning on the notion. While earlier discussion of traditional Islam was primarily conducted at the level of giving substance to popular customary Islam, now at the end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century theologians who think of themselves as traditionalists are starting to develop Shariah solutions to new problems, while drawing on the Hanafi legal apparatus. Among the problems considered are issues that have arisen in polemic with fundamentalist movements in Islam, including the celebration of the New Year, submission to the secular laws of the Russian state, and developing a Muslim response to the law enforcement agencies' regulation of religious life.

In general, however, the discussion of traditional Islam in Tatarstan has shown that ordinary believers, religious leaders, intellectual elites and politicians do not share a uniform understanding of what it should be. For some, it is mostly a matter of popular traditions (J. Fazlyev), for others the established historical experience of the co-existence of Islam and Christianity and of Islam and secular society in the Russian Empire, the USSR and the Russian Federation (V. Yakupov), while for yet others it means reviving medieval traditionalist ideas and drawing on the experience of Sufism (K. Samigullin). For yet another group traditional Islam means a permanent and living Islamic tradition that changes in accordance with the rules of Islamic law and springs from the principles of preferring the common good, adhering to majority opinion, and the safety of the Muslim community (R. Nurgaleev).

For Rustam Batrov, traditional Islam is a multi-faceted thing with very diverse manifestations at the local level: the muftiate as an institution, female mentorship, the art of *shamail*, and pilgrimage to Bolgar, amongst many other things.

In addition to differences in what the Tatar religious leaders are focusing on, there are also changes in how they interpret the term traditional Islam, which stem from generational change. In the 1990s and 2000s, imams of the older generation (G. Samatov, J. Fazlyev) held more authority and influence because they a) were fluent in Tatar as their native tongue, and b) were the keepers of Soviet forms of Islam. In the 2010s, centre stage in DUM RT was taken by younger imams, aged 35-40, who had received their religious education abroad, often come from outside of Tatarstan, and are not very fluent in spoken Tatar (Rustam Nurgaleev, Damir Shagaviev, Kamil Samigullin<sup>137</sup>).

137 A former participant at Friday prayer led by mufti K. Samigullin has recently said that he no longer goes to Samigullin's mosque because the mufti's speech is not natural, that, when he delivers his sermon in Tatar, it is as though he were translating Russian grammatical structures into Tatar. [Authors' fieldwork materials, November, 2018].



Religious leaders of the middle generation are obliged to conduct state policy in the sphere of Islam and so face an arduous challenge: on the one hand, they have to be true to themselves, while, on the other, being forced to follow the rules set by the authorities. At the same time, they have to offer their own concept of traditional Islam in Tatarstan under conditions of fierce competition with various opponents of the muftiate and the government, none of whom are bound by any obligations and limitations.

In general, one may say that pressure from various sides has stimulated creative activity on the part of official Islamic clerics. For instance, very recently, at a roundtable on the concept of *Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* held as part of the 4<sup>th</sup> *School of Muslim Leaders 'Mahallah 2.3'*, Damir Shagaviev<sup>138</sup> said that the concept had to include not only the followers of the four *madhabs* and two schools of Islamic doctrine (*aqidah*), the Ash'aris and Maturidis, but also representatives of the 'Hanbaliyya school of doctrine', which has been officially recognised in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Applying the concept of 'discursive tradition', therefore, we may note that what was called traditional Islam in the early 2000s differs substantially from the traditional Islam that emerged in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main differences relate to the more elaborate tenets ascribed to traditional Islam with regard to Islamic law (*fiqh*) and the higher level of religious education of the 'rejuvenated' Muslim community of Tatarstan. At the same time, any resort to elements of a rich Islamic legacy that focus on conformist interpretations of Islam is contingent on the objective and subjective conditions under which Muslims live in modern-day Tatarstan.

The documents of the Spiritual Administration of the Republic of Tatarstan say that the Muslims of the Republic should follow the Qur'an, the Sunnah and "the norms of Shariah, which are expressed in the *ijtihad* of *faqihs* and '*ulama*' who adhered to the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet (may Allah honour him and grant him peace) and the madhab of Imam Abu Hanifa."<sup>139</sup> Such broad wording, offered by the muftiate of Tatarstan, represents, in a certain sense, a balanced position that includes both the supporters and the opponents of Sufism, the adherents of moderately

138 The school was organised at Kazan Federal University on 26-29 December, 2018.

139 "In its activities, the centralised religious organisation, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan, abides by: the Revelation of Our Lord Allah – the Qur'an; the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah honour him and grant him peace); the norms of Shariah, which are expressed in the *ijtihad* of *faqihs* and '*ulama*' who adhered to the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet (may Allah honour him and grant him peace) and the *madhab* of Abu Hanifa", Official website of DUM RT, <http://dumrt.ru/ru/about-us/obshchaya-informatsiya/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

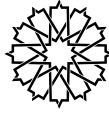




fundamentalist movements and relatively liberal believers, both practicing and 'ethnic'<sup>140</sup> Muslims. The construction of a concept of traditional Islam in Tatarstan reveals a broad range of ideas that, in our view, allows us to arrive at a form of consensus through discussion – not in the sense of developing a uniform opinion, but in the sense of creating a platform to discuss the problems of religion in the public sphere.

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140 According to the Hanafi-Maturidi creed, actions do not enter into the definition of a believer: It is enough to believe with one's heart and acknowledge it with one's tongue. The lack of actions that conform to the believer's faith is not a sign of the believer's infidelity, merely a sign of his/her sin. *Iman asyly. Islam dine nigezler. Uku-ukytu asbaly* [The Basics of Islam. The Textbook] (Kazan: Huzur, 2017), p. 27-28.



# The Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah and the Grozny Fatwa

*Damir Shagaviev*

## ABSTRACT

The author examines whether and to what degree the conclusions of the International Sunni Islam Conference in Grozny in 2016 on defining the term 'Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah' conform to definitions contained in the Sunni theological legacy. The article includes brief analysis of how Saudi Arabian theologians and some representatives of the Muslim community of Russia reacted to the Grozny conference's final document. The author also attempts to show why such theological and legal conferences on the content of the notion of Sunni Islam are important and necessary for Muslims around the world and in Russia particularly.

*Key words:* *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*, *Grozny fatwa*, *Grozny Declaration*, *Sunnis*, *Salafis*, *Wahhabis*, *Russia*, *Saudi Arabia*, *Islamic movements and groups*



## INTRODUCTION

Representatives of the Muslim ummah<sup>1</sup> with a classical religious education<sup>2</sup> will see little point in asking about the content or meaning of the term '*Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*'. For them, it is an established truth there is no sense in discussing. The world, and especially the Islamic world, is changing so fast today, however, that the term's meaning does come up repeatedly as a problem, taking on new dimensions as new ideologies and doctrines emerge and given the superficial religious knowledge of Muslims (including those from Russia). Modern Muslims seem increasingly detached from their ancient heritage. This is the main reason Islamic theologians and leaders gather at such conferences and fora to 'reboot', as it were, the worldview of Muslims and provide them reference points in the contemporary religious situation of Islam. It is also why the International Conference "Who are *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*?" was held from August 25 to 27, 2016, in Chechnya, and why over two hundred theologians attended from all round the world.<sup>3</sup> The document adopted at the conference has been dubbed 'the Grozny *fatwa*' by the mass media. On the official conference website, it is called a declaration.<sup>4</sup>

The *Tabah Foundation for Research and Consulting* from the United Arab Emirates (henceforth UAE) was one of the organisers and coordinator of the Grozny conference.<sup>5</sup> Its chair is a well-known Sufi preacher from

- 1 We are referring to Sunni Muslims, the main branch of Islam. No doubt, however, Islamic minorities such as the Twelver Shiites and the Ibadis would agree that the problem has already been resolved in medieval treatises. In Shiite sources we often find schools and movements in Islam like the Mu'tazila and the Ibadis categorised as Sunni, although the term 'Sunni' here probably means 'non-Shia'. The problem of how Shiites define Sunni Islam is a separate subject worthy of a separate in-depth study.
- 2 By classical educational programmes we mean how Islamic sciences are taught at al-Azhar University (Egypt), the University of Ez-Zitouna (Tunisia), the University of Al Quaraouiyine (al-Qarawiyyin) (Morocco), the Universities of Abu Nur and Al-Fath (Syria), and at similar *madrasahs* throughout the Islamic world.
- 3 See, Fetva "O neotyemlemyh priznakah otlichiya istinnogo Islama ot zabluzhdeniy" [Fatwa "On the inherent signs of the difference between true Islam and misconceptions"], [http://www.sufirb.ru/books\\_data/fatwa\\_grozniy/fatwa\\_grozniy.pdf](http://www.sufirb.ru/books_data/fatwa_grozniy/fatwa_grozniy.pdf), accessed 25 September 2019.
- 4 "Itogovaya deklaratsiya Vsemirnoy konferentsii musul'manskikh uchenykh pod nazvaniyem: 'Kto oni. Ahlus-Sunna val-Dzhama'a? Poyasneniye i harakteristika metoda Ahlus-Sunna val-Dzhama'a v veroubezhdenni. pravovedenii i sufizme i vliyaniye otkloneniya ot nego na sovremennyi mir'" ["The final declaration of the World Conference of Muslim Scholars entitled: 'Who are the Ahl al-Sunnah? A clarification of the methodology of the Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a in relation to tenets of faith, jurisprudence and spirituality and the effects that deviating from it has on world affairs'"], <https://chechnyaconference.org/material/chechnya-conference-statement-russian.pdf>, accessed 25 September 2019.
- 5 The *Tabah Foundation* is a non-profit organization that offers suggestions and recommendations to opinion makers to help them take a wise approach of benefit to society. It also establishes practical projects to promote the sublime values of Islam and express its splendour as a civilization [<https://www.tabahfoundation.org/en/about/>, accessed 25 September 2019].



Yemen and descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, al-Habib 'Ali al-Jifri. As some Arab researchers have pointed out, this indicates the UAE's key role in the event.<sup>6</sup> Tabah's *Senior Consultative Council* includes such theologians as Dr. 'Abdallah Bin Bayyah (currently President of the *Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies*) from Mauritania, Dr. 'Ali Gomaa (former Grand mufti of Egypt), and Habib 'Umar bin Hafiz (Dean, *Dar Al-Mustafa*, Tarim, Yemen). The latter two attended the conference. The council then also included two since deceased sheikhs, Dr. Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Bouti (former Dean of the Department of Religion at the University of Damascus, Syria) and Dr. Noah Qudah (former Grand mufti of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan).

The keynote speaker at the conference was Grand imam of al-Azhar University, sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb from Egypt, who ranked second among the 500 most influential Muslims of the world in 2016.<sup>7</sup> He arrived together with a large delegation of al-Azhar scholars, including former and current Grand muftis of the Arab Republic of Egypt (henceforth ARE), the rector of al-Azhar University, and the President of the ARE advisor on religious affairs, all of whom "represent the elite of the official Islamic clergy of Egypt."<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that affiliation and ties with al-Azhar, other similar educational institutions in the Islamic world such as *Al Quaraouiyine* or *Ez-Zitouna*, or the *Tabah Foundation* played a role in determining the foreign guest list at the event. Given al-Jifri's Sufi background and Sufism's predominance in Chechnya, it is quite understandable that some of the presentations and speeches at the conference were of a 'Sufi nature', and it is correspondingly understandable that participants included representatives of the Sufi tradition in Sunni Islam.

Invitations to the conference were personal, that is most of the people invited were there as scholars and representatives of Sunni Islam. The only participant from Saudi Arabia was a professor from the Meccan Umm

6 Gandhi Antar, "Mu'tamar Grozny wa sahat al-tanafus al-sa'udi al-imarati" ["Grozny conference and arena of Emirate-Saudi competition"], *Egyptian Institute for Political and Strategic studies*, 19 Sep, 2016, <https://eipss-eg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A.pdf>, accessed 25 September 2019.

7 *The Muslim 500: The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims, 2016* (Amman: The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 2016), p. 40.

8 "Mu'tamar Grozny khutwa kubra li-sahb al-marja'iyah al-sunniyyah min al-Sa'udiyah" ["Grozny conference is a major step towards the withdrawal of Sunni reference from Saudi Arabia"], *Raiyoum*, Sep. 2, 2016, [www.raiyoun.com](http://www.raiyoun.com), accessed 25 September 2019.



al-Qura University, Dr. Hatim al-‘Awni, who may not be the most prominent theologian in the Kingdom, as some Arab media put it,<sup>9</sup> but whose works are nonetheless known within the narrow circle of Shariah experts.<sup>10</sup>

The participants from Russia invited by the Chechnya muftiate included the chairmen of the various spiritual administrations of Muslims around the country. In general, all the centralised Islamic religious organisations of the Russian Federation were represented, though not all of them signed the final document, on which more later. There were also guests from neighbouring countries, as representatives of muftiates in other CIS countries.

The main agenda of the conference was taking a clear and uncompromising stand on the growing threat of terrorism of a *takfiri* nature.<sup>11</sup> As one Saudi author, Ahmad ‘Adnan, noted, “Theoretical and ideological differences between Sunni Islam and the Salafi movement are clear and beyond doubt. The step taken by these great and revered theologians in Grozny was a long-awaited one. Because of the confusion between Sunni Islam and the Salafi movement, all Sunni Muslims have been branded ‘terrorists’, even though Sunni Islam has nothing to do with it. The terrorist groups are overwhelmingly Salafi and not Sunni groups. Because the vast majority of Muslims are Sunni Muslims, Islam as a whole stands accused of terrorism, in spite of having nothing to do with it.”<sup>12</sup> As this shows, even in Saudi Arabia there were journalists who supported the idea of the Chechnya conference and its declaration, even if only one official participant attended from the kingdom, to our knowledge.

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9 “Mu’tamar Grozny khutwa kubra li-sahb al-marja’iyyah al-sunniyyah min al-Sa’udiyyah”.  
 10 Hatim al-‘Awni, a *hadith* expert, is related to the Sharif family, who ruled in Hejaz until the 1920s, when it was conquered by Wahhabis. He is a well-known moderate critic of Wahhabi ideology, who has called for a campaign to correct the beliefs and practices informed by the dominant religious ideology in the country. He has, for example, connected the extremist views of some modern Saudis with the well-known 16-volume compendium of Wahhabi epistles, *fatwas* and essays *al-Durar al-saniyya fi-l-ajwiba al-Najdiyya* [*The Glistening Pearls of Najdi Response*], whose authors are sheikh Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab and his descendants, down to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For more see Bunzel C., *The Kingdom and the Caliphate. Duel of the Islamic States* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), p. 21-22.  
 11 Ghulam Rasool Dehlvi, “Islamic conference in Chechnya: Why Sunnis are disassociating themselves from Salafists”, *Firstpost*, Sep 09, 2016, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/islamic-conference-in-chechnya-why-sunnis-are-disassociating-themselves-from-salafists-2998018.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.  
 12 Ahmad ‘Adnan, “Mu’tamar Grozny sham’a tatahadda al-zalam” [“Grozny conference is a candle that challenges darkness”], *Al-Arab*, 09.09.2016, <https://alarab.co.uk/%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%AA%D9%85D8%B1-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%8C-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AF%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B8%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85>, accessed 25 September 2019.



Albir *hadhrat* Krganov is chairman of one of the federal muftiates, the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia, as well as heading up the Russian Federation's Civic Chamber's Working Group to counter pseudo-religious extremism. He has explained the conference's importance as follows, "The Islamic theological conference that took place in the Chechen Republic was a religious forum unprecedented in scale and representation in the contemporary history of Russia. Participants at the event included globally renowned theologians and scholars from the Islamic world, Arab countries, the CIS, and the muftis of Russia. I would like to note that the idea for the conference was discussed over several years, as many people came to the conclusion that we needed to explain the essence of what we mean when we say traditional Islam."<sup>13</sup>

One should add that there had already been an international conference in Grozny in 2014 on *Sufism: safety for people and stability for states (al-Tasawwuf aman li-l-awtan wa istiqrar li-l-insan)*,<sup>14</sup> also under the auspices of the *Tabah Foundation*. It was at this conference that the decision was made to hold one in 2016 to commemorate the 65<sup>th</sup> birthday of the late mufti of Chechnya Ahmad Kadyrov and discuss the subject of the definition of Sunni Islam.

Some Muslims have asked why there is any need for Muslims to discuss the definition of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* in the first place. According to one Arab author, "The main priority for our society is determining its essential nature, its present, the problems and challenges that arise before it, and not defining historical differences, something that neither the people present at the conference nor those absent from it<sup>15</sup> did."<sup>16</sup> This is a quite predictable reaction on the part of contemporary society, particularly of people with insufficient knowledge of the nuances of Shariah and ideological differences within Islam. An example from personal experience may help. Some ten years ago, the author of this article was Dean of

13 "Muftiy Moskvyy rasskazal ob Islame v Rossii i Bashkirii" ["The mufti of Moscow spoke about Islam in Russia and Bashkiria"], [http://www.sufirb.ru/books\\_data/fatwa\\_grozniy/fatwa\\_grozniy.pdf](http://www.sufirb.ru/books_data/fatwa_grozniy/fatwa_grozniy.pdf), accessed 25 September 2019.

14 "Mu'tamar al-Shishan al-thani li-ahl al-sunnah wa-l-jama'ah" ["The second Chechen conference of Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-jama'ah"], <https://chechnyaconference.org/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

15 Viz. Salafi theologians, particularly those from Saudi Arabia.

16 "Mu'tamar al-Shishan: waqi' man dhahaba wa man lam yadhab" ["Chechen conference: the reality of those who went there and those who did not go there"], in *Nun Post*, 03 Dec., 2016, <https://www.noonpost.com/content/13749>, accessed 25 September 2019. The authors of this article are equally unhappy with the positions taken by participants at the Grozny conference and their opponents, the representatives of political Islam, Jihadist Salafis and traditional Salafis, who did not participate, not least because they were not invited.



the Theological Faculty of the Russian Islamic University in Kazan. In 2008, the editorial office of *Ummah*, the official newspaper of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan, asked me to explain the notion of traditional Islam in the context of Tatar-Islamic discourse. I wrote that, based on our own, particularly Tatar and Islamic, heritage, we had three main guides, all from Hanafi tradition, namely imam Abu Hanifa in the sphere of Islamic law (*fiqh*), imam al-Maturidi in the sphere of Islamic doctrine (*‘aqidah*)<sup>17</sup> and sheikh Shah Naqshband in the sphere of Islamic ethics (*tasawwuf*). In this way, I provided an outline of the main path taken by our theological tradition in the Volga-Urals region. The publication resonated, provoking a certain emotional reaction from some local Muslims.<sup>18</sup>



Photo 1. Fragment of the article by D.A. Shagaviev “How do people become Wahhabis?” published in *Ummah* newspaper, 2008

- 17 This clearly refers to specific points of Islamic doctrine or developments in speculative theology (*‘ilm al-Kalam*), since the basic religious creed of the Maturidis, like that of other Sunni Muslims, follows the teachings of imam Abu Hanifa and other well-known theologians, early imams of the Muslim community.
- 18 This happened at the *Enilar* mosque, opposite the Russian Islamic University in Kazan. A group of Muslims gathered to discuss the article in question and prepare the text of a refutation letter. One, a delegated representative, met with me and passed on the letter. He positioned himself as an outside observer and passive sympathiser, however. Indirectly and through hints, he tried to warn me of the danger of such statements in a newspaper article. He pointed out that I, as lecturer on religious movements and groups in Islam should be aware of the fanaticism and aggressiveness of certain groups of young Muslims with negative views of *Maturidiyya* and Sufism. Another young person from this group told me directly that my article in *Ummah* had been commissioned by the secret services. The *Kavkazskiy uzel* (*Caucasian knot*) website, where the *Grozny fatwa* is posted, has two comments reminding me of my situation, “There are only sectarians, orders, clans, and gangs here. Where is a person of faith to go?” and “I wonder who these theologians are, and which party they belong to. Back in the day, they used to be in the Bolshevik Party and were Chekists... Today all those *alims* are secret servicemen, with ranks and titles” (Fatwa “On neoteymlemyh priznakah otlichyia istinnogo Islama ot zabluzhdeniy” [Fatwa “On the inherent signs of the difference between true Islam and misconceptions”], *Kavkazskiy uzel*, September 12, 2016, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/289047/>, accessed 25 September 2019).



In short, while some Muslims, including some from Russia, are quite clear about the definition of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*, there is a need to confirm the tenets and beliefs of earlier generations at a senior and authoritative level. These are tenets and beliefs over which the modern Muslim Ummah of Russia entertains doubts or differences of opinion. It is equally obvious that, regardless of how geographically diverse their origins or senior their positions, the choice of participants at the Conference will continue to call forth critical reaction from some groups of Muslims who either do not understand the purpose of the event or share the views of those invited. This can be explained in terms of both the inherent diversity of forms of Islam and the globalisation processes at work in the modern Islamic world.

## THE GROZNY CONFERENCE AND ITS RESULTS

The Grozny conference was an attempt to eliminate such doubts and failures of understanding, which is exactly what representatives of traditional views in Sunni Islam saw in its final results. The conference also showed that long-established tradition has more than a few opponents today, both in Russia and around the world. In other words, the conference and the public attention it received demonstrate how difficult it is even for theologians to distance themselves from politics in the modern world.

The tone of the international forum was set by the Grand Imam of al-Azhar University, who delivered the inaugural speech. Reviewing the teaching programme at al-Azhar and quoting a variety of traditional Sunni sources, sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb set out a framework for the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*, ending his speech with the following address to the Muslims of Russia:

My appeal to you, o strong-willed people of Chechnya, and to all Muslims of Russia, is that you should continue adhering to the *madhab* of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*, which is the *madhab* of the *Ash'aris*, the *Maturidis*, the 'people of *hadith*' and the 'people of *Tasawwuf*'. Hold to it and stick fast to it!<sup>19</sup>

19 This is a reference to the famous *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad about the Sunnah and the tradition of the Rashidun Caliphs, "Hold to it and stick fast to it (literally: "by grinding your teeth")" [Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, muraja'at Salih Al al-Shaykh [Hadith collection of Abu Dawud, ed. by Salih Al al-Shaykh] (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 1999), p. 651 (*hadith* 4607)].





Preserve it for your sons and daughters! Make it your method of upbringing and teaching in your schools and universities. Stand up with arguments against anyone who wages war on it, or shamelessly attacks it, or tries to exchange it for misguided and misleading *madhabs* whose evil calls have brought nothing to our *ummah* but murder, destruction and hatred against Islam and Muslims!<sup>20</sup>

After his speech, an address of welcome was delivered by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, Doctor of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Hashemite, head of the *Al al-Bayt li-l-fikr al-Islami* organisation and Councillor of the King of Jordan. Prince Ghazi reminded those present of the 2005 Amman conference, at which the question ‘Who is a Muslim?’ was discussed.<sup>21</sup> He thus made clear his opinion that the Grozny event was an echo of the Amman one, but one that was tackling a more specific problem in Islam, without accusing anyone who doesn’t fit the definition of Sunni Muslim of infidelity.

The titles of papers presented and discussed at the conference are given below:<sup>22</sup>

- 1) *Ta’rif ‘amm bi-Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama’ah (A general definition of Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama’ah):*<sup>23</sup>
- 2) *Al-Asha’ira wa-l-maturidiyyah hum al-sawad al-a’zam (Ash’aris and Maturidis are a great multitude [i.e. the clear majority of Muslims]);*
- 3) *Ahammiyyat al-madhabiyyah al-fiqhiyyah fi-l-i’mal al-amthal li-ahkam al-shar’ wa bayan tahafut al-la-madhabiyyah (The importance of legal madhabism in work with Shariah norms and explanation of the unsteadiness of anti-madhabism);*

20 Ahmed el-Tayeb, “al-Kalima al-iftitahiyya...” [“Opening speech”], <https://chechnyaconference.org/material/chechnya-convention2016-imam-alazhar-word.pdf>, accessed 25 September 2019.

21 [https://chechnyaconference.org/material/HRH\\_Prince\\_Ghazi\\_Speech\\_Chechnya\\_ar.pdf](https://chechnyaconference.org/material/HRH_Prince_Ghazi_Speech_Chechnya_ar.pdf), accessed 25 September 2019.

22 “Mu’tamar al-Shishan” [“Chechen conference”], <https://chechnyaconference.org/#portfolio>, accessed 25 September 2019.

23 The author of this paper was Doctor of Theology Sa’id Fudah from Jordan, who has stressed in many speeches the scientific nature of his ideas and their independence of political and economic circumstances. Fudah is known for his research into Ibn Taymiyyah’s beliefs. He is one of those who do not consider Ibn Taymiyyah or his followers to be Sunni Muslims, but nonetheless do not place them outside Islam either. In his presentation he placed special emphasis on the fact that “theologians followed two imams [al-Ash’ari and al-Maturidi] not because they had to follow them blindly (*taqlid*), nor because of affection for them, without any collusion for the mere reason of attachment to these sheikhs, and not for political reasons either, as many of their [Ash’ari and Maturidi] opponents and adversaries and secular people and atheists think, wishing to push people away [from them].”



- 4) *Bayan wa tawsif manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah i'tiqadan wa fiqhan wa sulukan (Explanation and description of Sunni method in religious doctrine, law and ethics);*
- 5) *Mahiyat al-Tasawwuf (The essence of Sufism);*
- 6) *Aqidat al-muhaddithin wa silatu-hum bi-l-Tasawwuf (The religious doctrine of hadith experts and their relation to Sufism);*
- 7) *Athar al-khuruj 'an al-manhaj al-asil li-manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah 'ala-l-waqi' (Consequences of moving beyond the true method of Sunni Muslims for [worldly] events).*

These titles give us direct insight into the boundaries of Sunni Islam in the spheres of the Islamic doctrine, law and ethics. If we consider certain proverbial moments of the Sunni legacy, we will recall that the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* appears for the first time in a *hadith* about how Muhammad's community was divided into 73 groups. The *hadith* says all these groups would go to hellfire except one (*firqah najiyah*), which, in the most popular version, was called *al-Jama'a* and in another *ma ana 'alay-hi wa ashabi* ('what I my and companions stand on').<sup>24</sup> The *hadith* thus mentions the group to be granted salvation – this group adheres to the tradition of the Prophet and his Companions and is otherwise referred to as the 'people of the Sunnah and the agreement of the community' (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*). This is followed by another *hadith*, "Hold firmly to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly Guided Caliphs."<sup>25</sup> Then there is the fact that Imam al-Tahawi referred to his symbol of faith as *Bayan as-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'ah*,<sup>26</sup> briefly narrating the beliefs of certain pious predecessors, viz. the imams Abu Hanifa, Abu Yusuf and al-Shaybani, calling their beliefs Sunni beliefs, which is to say the standard for the *aqidah* of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*.

24 For more on this *hadith*, see Shagaviev D., "Predaniye o 73 sektah (*hadith al-iftiraq*) v verouchenii sunnitov: naslediye i sovremennost'" ["Tradition of 73 sects (Hadith al-iftiraq) in the teaching of the Sunnis: heritage and modernity"], *Kazanskoe islamovedenie [Kazan Islamic review]*, 1 (2015), p. 116-130.

25 Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, muraja'at Salih Al al-Shaykh [*Hadith collection of Abu Dawud, ed. by Salih Al al-Shaykh*] (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 1999), p. 651 (*hadith* 4607).

26 We name this source out of a multitude of early ones both because it is the best-known and unanimously accepted by Sunni Muslims and because it has been passed down several different chains of narrators. For example, Marjani calls it the first authentic universally-recognised work on Islamic doctrine. See: Al-Marjani, "Hashiyat" ["Footnote"] in al-Kalanbawi, *Al-Hashiyat 'ala sharh Jalal ad-Din al-Dawwani ma'a Hashiyat al-Marjani wa hashiyat al-Khalkhali* [Footnote for Dawwani commentary with Marjani and Khalkhali footnotes] (Istanbul: Dar al-Tiba'a al-Amira, 1317 x.), vol. 1, p. 35.



An early doxographer to attempt to interpret the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* was Abu Mansur al-Baghdadi (d. 1037). He distinguished eight categories:

1. *Sifatiyya mutakallims*.<sup>27</sup>
2. Imams of *fiqh* who are 'adherents of *hadith*' or 'supporters of personal opinion' (*al-ra'y*).
3. Experts on the *hadith* and the Sunnah of the Prophet (may peace be upon him).
4. Experts on Arab literature, Arabic grammar and word composition.
5. Experts on the variants of recitation of the Qur'an and the *tafsir*.
6. Sufi ascetics.
7. Fighters for faith, warriors who defend the borders of the Islamic world and demonstrate the teachings of Sunni Muslims.
8. Common people of the lands where Sunni Islam has prevailed.<sup>28</sup>

In a famous book, *al-Milal wa-l-nihal*, the medieval doxographer al-Shahrastani (d. 1158) presented a version of the *hadith* about the divide in the Muslim community that mentions the term '*Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*' directly, "My community will divide into seventy-three sects, one of which will be saved and the rest will die.' Asked, 'Who will be saved?' he replied, 'People of the Sunnah and agreement.' He was asked, 'What is the Sunnah and agreement?' He said, 'What I and my companions adhere to today.'"<sup>29</sup> This version of the *hadith* is not found in any collection and seems to be a later clarification, because the term was not yet used in its full form during the Prophet's time. But it is significant that an author of the 12<sup>th</sup> century uses it in conjunction with the *hadith* on schism.

27 For example, at another point in his book, he names the imams from this category: 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, Ja'far al-Sadiq, Abu Hanifa, al-Shafi'i, Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, etc. See: 'Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq bayna-l-firaq* [The difference between sects], M. Fathi al-Nadi (ed.) (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 2010), p. 397-399. By the *Sifatiyya* the author means "scholars of Islamic theology who are not involved in anthropomorphism, annulment of God's attributes or the heresies of the Rafida, the Khawarij, the Jahmis and other misguided groups" ['Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, *Op.cit.*, p. 349].

28 See 'Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq bayna-l-firaq* [The difference between sects], p. 349-353. The author makes constant remarks to the effect that categories 2-8 only include people who profess the beliefs of the first category. See also: Prozorov S.M., *Islam kak ideologicheskaya sistema* [Islam as an ideological system] (St. Petersburg-Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 2004), p. 24-25.

29 Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa-l-nihal* [Religions and sects] (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'asriyya, 2006), p. 9; al-Shahrastani, *Kniga o religiyah i sektah. Chast' 1. Islam* [The book is about religions and sects. Part 1. Islam], translation from the Arabic, introduction and commentary by S.M. Prozorov (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), p. 27.



Finally, we find the following definitions by Islamic scholars for *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* in theological works written by representatives of the main *madhabs* of Sunni Islam:

In his book *Sharh 'aqidat Ibn Hajib*, Shafi'i scholar Taj al-Din al-Subki (d. 1370) said, "You must know that *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*, when examined, turns out to consist of three groups: (1) followers of *hadith* (*ahl al-hadith*)...; (2) followers of reasoning (*ahl al-nazar al-'aqli*) – Ash'aris and Maturidi Hanafis...; and (3) people of the inner world and enlightenment (*ahl al-wujdan wa-l-kashf*) – Sufis..."<sup>30</sup>

There is a similar statement in *Tuhfat al-muhtaj* by Shafi'i sheikh Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 1567), viz. that "Sunni Islam should be understood as the beliefs of two imams of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*, Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi."<sup>31</sup>

Hanbali scholar 'Abd al-Baqi al-Mawahibi (d. 1661) claimed in *al-Ayn wa-l-athar* that "there are three groups of Sunni Muslims, the Ash'aris, the Hanbalis and the Maturidis."<sup>32</sup>

Ash'ari theologian Hasan bin Abi 'Udhbah (d. after 1758) emphasised in *al-Masail al-Khilafiyah* that "You must know that the stem of all the beliefs of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* rests on the words of two opposing poles, Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari and Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi."<sup>33</sup>

In *Lawami' al-anwar*, Hanbali scholar Muhammad al-Saffarini said, "*Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* consists of three groups: the Atharis, whose imam is Ahmad; the Ash'aris, whose imam is Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari; the Maturidis, whose imam is Abu Mansur al-Maturidi" and that "Some scholars have said that the saved group is *Ahl al-Hadith*, i.e. the Atharis, the Ash'aris and the Maturidis."<sup>34</sup>

In *Ithaf sadat al-muttaqin*, Hanafi sheikh Murtada al-Zabidi (d. 1790) argued that "The term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* refers to the Ash'aris and the Maturidis"<sup>35</sup> and that "Sunni Muslims consist of four groups, the *hadith* experts, the Sufis, the Ash'aris and the Maturidis."<sup>36</sup>

30 'Abd al-Fattah al-Yafi'i, *Masail fi al-manhajiyah al-'amma fi-l-'aqida wa-l-fiqh wa-l-suluk* [Issues in the general methodology in relation to tenets of faith, jurisprudence and spirituality] (Amman: Dar al-Nur al-Mubin, 2016), p. 31.

31 Ashraf Nizar Hasan, *Qadaya mihwariyyah fi mizan al-kitab wa-l-sunnah* [Central issues in the balance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah] (Amman: Dar al-Nur al-Mubin, 2018), p. 146.

32 'Abd al-Fattah al-Yafi'i, *Masail fi al-manhajiyah* [Issues in the general methodology], p. 29.

33 Ashraf Nizar Hasan, *Qadaya mihwariyyah* [Central issues], p. 146.

34 'Abd al-Fattah al-Yafi'i, *Masail fi al-manhajiyah*, p. 29.

35 Ashraf Nizar Hasan, *Qadaya mihwariyyah*, p. 147.

36 'Abd al-Fattah al-Yafi'i, *Masail fi al-manhajiyah*, p. 31.



In *Hashiyat 'ala Umm al-Barahin*, Maliki theologian al-Desuqi (d. 1815) said that “the Ash’aris and the Maturidis are the imams of Sunni Muslims.”<sup>37</sup>

In *Hashiyat Ibn 'Abidin*, Hanafi faqih Ibn 'Abidin (d. 1836) also stated that “what *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* stand on are the Ash’aris and the Maturidis.”<sup>38</sup>

Egyptian theologian and representative of the reform movement Muhammad 'Abduh also wrote in one of his letters that “We [the *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqah* organisation] are Sunni Muslims, Ash’aris and Maturidis. With regard to worshipping God, we are in the framework of the four *madhabs*, which is why there is among us a Maliki, a Shafi’i, a Hanbali and a Hanafi.”<sup>39</sup>

This is in accord with the conclusions to the final resolution of the Grozny conference. An attentive researcher into Islamic heritage will find these definitions of Sunni Islam’s framework in many works by Sunni authors. They are taught in traditional Sunni educational institutions all over the world. There is no doubt that by far the largest part of the Islamic legacy was written by representatives of the Ash’aris and the Maturidis. According to Saudi theologian Safar al-Hawali, a well-known critic of Ash’arism, “...this heretical movement [i.e. Ash’arism and Maturidism] holds the dominant position in Islamic thought, because it is represented by a large number of books on *tafsir*, interpretation of *hadiths*, Arab linguistics and stylistics, methodology of *fiqh*, not to mention books on dogmatic theology. And their universities and institutes are found in most countries of the Islamic world, from Philippines to Senegal.”<sup>40</sup>

To conclude, we find the following in the final Russian-language document of the conference, often called “the Grozny *fatwa*”:

1. In terms of Iman [i.e. faith], *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* are Ash’aris and Maturidis.
2. In terms of obedience to Allah [i.e. Islam in the narrow sense], they are followers of four *madhabs*: the Hanafi, the Maliki, the Shafi’i and the Hanbali.
3. In terms of Ihsan [i.e. piety and spirituality], Sunni Muslims are those who follow the path of moral self-improvement revealed by great teachers, primarily the Sufi imams *Abu-l-Qasim al-Junayd ibn Muhammad*

37 Ashraf Nizar Hasan, *Qadaya mihwariyyah*, p. 147.

38 Ashraf Nizar Hasan, *Qadaya mihwariyyah*, p. 147.

39 Muhammad 'Abduh, *al-'amal al-kamilah*, tahqiq Muhammad 'Imarah [Omnibus edition by Muhammad 'Imarah] (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1993), vol. 1, p. 697.

40 Safar al-Hawali, *Manhaj al-asha'irah fi-l-'aqidah* [*The Ash'ari methodology in the Islamic faith*] (Cairo: Maktabat al-'Ilm, sine anno), p. 4.



*al-Baghdadi, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani, Muhammad Khawaji Baha' al-Din Naqshband* and other righteous mentors.<sup>41</sup>

In the final declaration on the Conference website, these words are expressed somewhat differently. This may be because it was translated by a different person:

*Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* are essentially Ash'aris and Maturidis in religious doctrine, as well as *Ahl al-Hadith* (followers of the teachings of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal who are not anthropomorphists that liken Allah to His creations, assuming that He has a physical image, place and time)<sup>42</sup>, followers of four *madhabs*, the Hanafis, Malikis, Shafi'is and Hanbalis in jurisprudence, adherents of true Sufism in their knowledge, morals and ethics, who follow the path of the master of Sufis Imam al-Junayd and of the righteous imams who followed his path.<sup>43</sup>

The adherents of *hadith* (*ahl al-hadith*)<sup>44</sup> were added to the later redaction, with the stipulation that it referred only to those who are *mufawwidis*, that is who prefer not to apply this interpretation (*ta'wil*) to the category of *al-sifat al-khabariyyah*. This is a point of view inside the Ash'ari and the Maturidi schools.

We did not find any differences between the Arabic and Russian versions of the final declaration on the Conference website. The document found on the Internet as the *fatwa* "On integral attributes of the true Islam as opposed to fallacies"<sup>45</sup> differs from the text of the final declaration,

41 "Tekst fetvy 'O neotyemlemyh priznakah otlichiya istinnogo Islama ot zabluzhdeniy'" ["Text of *fatwa* 'On the inherent signs of the difference between true Islam and misconceptions"], [http://www.sufirb.ru/books\\_data/fatwa\\_grozniy/fatwa\\_grozniy.pdf](http://www.sufirb.ru/books_data/fatwa_grozniy/fatwa_grozniy.pdf), accessed 25 September 2019.

42 Underlined by the author to show a later modification or addition to the text of the declaration. The Arab version had the following laconic text added: "wa ahl al-hadith al-mufawwada". A tweet by one of the Arab organisers and speakers at the conference clarified that there had been a misunderstanding on the part of some readers of the final declaration, who thought that the movement of adherents of *hadith* was excluded from the definition of Sunni Muslims. However, they were meant to be a part of the Ash'aris and Maturidis. As for *hadith* experts who have anthropomorphic views of the Lord, they are a rare exception and they do not represent the majority of Sunni *ahl al-hadith* Muslims.

43 "Itogovaya deklaratsiya Vsemirnoy konferentsii musul'manskikh uchenykh pod nazvaniyem: 'Kto oni. Ahlus-Sunna val-Dzhama'a? Poyasneniye i harakteristika metoda Ahlus-Sunna val-Dzhama'a v veroubezhdanii. pravovedenii i sufizme i vliyaniye otkloneniya ot nego na sovremenniy mir'" ["The final declaration of the World Conference of Muslim Scholars entitled: 'Who are the *Ahl al-Sunnah*? A clarification of the methodology of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'a* in relation to tenets of faith, jurisprudence and spirituality and the effects that deviating from it has on world affairs"], <https://chechnyaconference.org/material/chechnya-conference-statement-russian.pdf>, accessed 25 September 2019.

44 As mentioned above, this group is also called either Hanbalis or Atharis (*al-Athariyyah*).

45 It would be wiser to use the term 'Sunni' Islam, because that is more or less what is intended by the text of the *fatwa*. The authors of the *fatwa* spoke about Islam that is orthodox in their opinion. This does not entail that 'non-orthodox' Muslims should be placed outside Islam.



however, in so far as the declaration does not have a detailed list of groups that Sunni Muslims consider misguided:

The first of those misguided and harmful waves were the early Khawarij, including the modern Khawarij – pseudo-Salafis who accuse Muslims of infidelity, ISIS and those who follow their path from among extremist movements and politicised organisations that have one thing in common: excessive distortion, groundless allegations, ignorant interpretation of religion, which in its turn has generated dozens of misconceptions, wrong interpretations that then led to *takfir*, destruction, shedding of innocent blood and defamation of Islam’s name, which has become the reason for a lot of confrontation with it and hatred to it.<sup>46</sup>

The ‘*fatwa*’ mentions more groups with definite names and brief descriptions. This is the part of the text that may have incurred displeasure from some Muslims. It starts with the following words, “Who are they, these misguided sects of the modern world, which have emerged in Russia and other countries?” The list includes Wahhabis, ISIS, ‘Habashites’ and ‘Qur’anites’.<sup>47</sup> Other names and varieties given for Wahhabis include ‘*al-Taymiyyah*’, ‘Salafis’, ‘*al-Madkhaliyyah*’, and ‘*al la madhabiyyah*’ (‘the *madhab*-less’).

All these names, except perhaps ‘Salafis’, are usually considered offensive by the followers of the doctrine of sheikhs Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. On the other hand, some adherents of traditional Sunni Islam (Ash‘arism and Maturidism) strongly disagree that they are Salafis, considering it either methodologically wrong or unfair to other Muslims who are sure they are following the paths of their pious predecessors (*salaf salih*).

Since the Ottoman period, Muslims have generally referred to the Arabian followers of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab as ‘Wahhabis’, but they prefer to call themselves ‘monotheists’ (*muwahhidun*) and began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century calling themselves ‘Salafis’ (*salafiyyah*). It is worth noting that when the former Grand mufti of Saudi Arabia Ibn Baz was asked “...Some people call KSA *alims*

46 “Itogovaya deklaratsiya Vsemirnoy konferentsii musul'manskikh uchenykh pod nazvaniyem: ‘Kto oni. Ahlus-Sunna val-Dzhama’a? Poyasneniye i harakteristika metoda Ahlus-Sunna val-Dzhama’a v veroubezhdenni. pravovedeni i sufizme i vliyaniye otkloneniya ot nego na sovremennyi mir” [“The final declaration of the World Conference of Muslim Scholars entitled: ‘Who are the *Ahl al-Sunnah*? A clarification of the methodology of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'a* in relation to tenets of faith, jurisprudence and spirituality and the effects that deviating from it has on world affairs”], <https://chechnyaconference.org/material/chechnya-conference-statement-russian.pdf>, accessed 25 September 2019.

47 The latter two groups were not described, just named. *Al-Ahbash* is the name given by Muslims to a group of followers of a prominent Sunni theologian of Ethiopian descent named ‘Abdullah al-Harari al-Habashi (d. 2008), who had a special approach with regard to *takfir* (accusation of infidelity), for which his group became famous. The Qur’anites are a religious group whose representatives refuse to accept the Sunnah as a source of Shariah.



Wahhabis, do you agree with this name?”, he gave a detailed answer, including that, “The followers of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab and those who preached his calling and grew up on this calling in Najd are called Wahhabis... It is a great and honourable name...”<sup>48</sup> This shows that some of the religious leaders of the adherents of this movement’s founder have come to terms with the name ‘Wahhabism’, not least because of its widespread use by scholars and the media.

It is enough to refer here to the works of well-known Russian and foreign researchers into Islam and the Arab world to indicate the use of the term in academic literature.<sup>49</sup> When the Russian expert on Saudi history Aleksey Vasilyev used the term for the religious-political movement that emerged in Arabia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, he noted its acceptance in Western literature but not in Saudi Arabia.<sup>50</sup> A Western researcher into the history of the Wahhabi movement Cole Bunzel of Princeton University also uses the term, writing in an article that “Wahhabism (or Salafism, as most Wahhabis would prefer it be called) has become a global movement not dependent on the support of one state, no matter how great its oil reserves... And the vast majority of Wahhabis, or Salafis, reject the violence and the political project of the Islamic State.”<sup>51</sup> As a result, the final external document of the conference (declaration) turns out to be more politically correct precisely because it does not use this or any similar term.

It is important to note that “the Grozny *fatwa*” was adopted on behalf of muftis and scholars of Russia and is an internal document of the conference valid only for the Russian Federation. Nor have we found that it calls the “misguided sects of the modern world” non-Islamic, in spite of claims.<sup>52</sup>

48 Ibn Baz, *Fatawa nur ‘ala al-darb* [*Fatwas of the project ‘Light on the way’*] (Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, n.d.), p. 16-17.

49 See e.g. *Islam: Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar’* [*Islam: An Encyclopaedic Dictionary*] (Moscow: Nauka; Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury, 1991), p. 51; *Islam na territorii byvshey Rossiyskoi imperii: Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar’* [*Islam in the Former Russian Empire: An Encyclopaedic Dictionary*], Stanislav M. Prozorov (ed.) (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 2006), p. 84, 86-91; Newby G.D., *A Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Oxford, 2004), p. 87-88; Glasse C., Smith H., *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam* (London: Stacey International, 1991), p. 414-416.

50 Vasilyev A.M., *Istoriya Saudovskoy Aravii (1745 g. – konets XX v.)* [*History of Saudi Arabia (1745 - end of the twentieth century)*] (Moscow: Klassika plyus. Knizhnyi dom gazety “Trud”, 1999), p. 6.

51 Bunzel C., *The Kingdom and the Caliphate. Duel of the Islamic States* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), p. 25.

52 For example, analyst Timur Yusupov, writes, “The authors of the *fatwa* declare that the only true Muslims are those who adhere to the school of Kalam (Ash’aris and Maturidis), follow one of the four *madhabs*, and follow ‘the path of moral self-improvement shown by great teachers, primarily Sufi imams.” Yusupov T., “Anti-salafitskaya Konferentsiya v Groznom prevrashchayet Ramzana Kadyrova v pravatelya vseh musul‘man Rossii” [“Anti-Salafi Conference in Grozny turns Ramzan Kadyrov into ruler of all Muslims of Russia”], *ONTV*, 04.09.2016, <https://ontv.su/news/1223-anti-salafitskaja-konferencija-v-groznom-prevraschaet-ramzana-kadyrova-v-pravitelja-musulman-ro.html>, accessed 25 September 2019. The expression ‘true Muslims’, used here in a religious sense, means real Muslims. By





The title of the so-called “Grozny *fatwa*”, with its reference to ‘true Islam’, may have looked provocative to other Muslims, but the document proper makes reference only to Sunni Islam. The term was presumably born out of such expressions as *ahl al-haqq* (‘people of the truth’), used in the famous Creed of Imam al-Nasafi to mean ‘people of the Sunnah and the agreement of the community’.

The list of the Russian Federation muftis who signed the *fatwa* is quite representative.<sup>53</sup> It contains the names of 17 Russian muftis, the most important (those with the largest number of congregations) being the muftis of Dagestan, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chechnya and the mufti of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia Talgat Tadzhuddin. It was also signed by representatives of the spiritual administrations of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Belarus and the Donetsk People’s Republic (Ukraine). Of the representatives of muftiates included in the Council of muftis of Russia (SMR), the muftis of Bashkortostan and North Ossetia–Alania signed it. A significant number of leaders of muftiates in the SMR, including its chairman Ravil Gaynutdin (DUM RF), did not sign the *fatwa*.

## REACTION TO THE GROZNY CONFERENCE IN THE ARAB-ISLAMIC WORLD

Despite the milder Arabic version of the Grozny declaration, scandal could not be avoided in the Arab world. It was virtually the first time in the modern era that Sunni theologians had dissociated themselves, loudly and clearly enough for the entire world to hear, from Wahhabis (Salafis), who do consider themselves Sunni Muslims.<sup>54</sup> This dissociation was indirect.<sup>55</sup> One has to understand the situation in the world at the time.

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extension, others are considered pseudo-Muslims, i.e. infidels. It is worth remembering that the texts of the Grozny declaration and the *fatwa* are about true Sunni Muslims and not defining true Muslims in general or their polar opposites.

53 “Spisok muftiyev RF, podpisavshih fetvu na Vsemirnoy islamskoy konferentsii v Groznom” [“List of Russian Muftis Signing Fatwa at the World Islamic Conference in Grozny”], *Interfax Religiya*, 2016-10-04, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/print.php?act=documents&id=1289>, accessed 25 September 2019.

54 Ghulam Rasool Dehvi, “Islamic conference in Chechnya: Why Sunnis are disassociating themselves from Salafists”, *Firstpost*, Sep 09, 2016, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/islamic-conference-in-chechnya-why-sunnis-are-disassociating-themselves-from-salafists-2998018.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

55 Because we are talking here about the official final declaration, which did not mention Wahhabis (Salafis) by name at all. Only pseudo-Salafis – *takfiris* – were mentioned.



Firstly, it was a time of active military operations by Russian armed forces in the Syrian conflict on the side of Bashar al-Assad's official government. Secondly, shortly before that the KSA had officially banned the activities of the 'Muslim Brotherhood' and related organisations.<sup>56</sup> Given the ambiguity of Russia's public image in Western and Arab media at the time, a reaction was to be expected.

The Arabic daily *Ra'y al-yawm*, whose editorial offices are in London, published a notice on the Sunni conference that caused a storm of displeasure among the official clergy of Saudi Arabia, some of whom proceeded to accuse it of being instigated by the Russian government to aggravate the crisis in relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia.<sup>57</sup> A selection of tweets with the #*mu'tamar\_ash-Shishan* hashtag follow:

All praise to Allah, who has brought the misguided imams to shame and revealed their aims regarding scholars and commoners... (Professor, Doctor of Comparative Jurisprudence, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Fawzan @Abdulazizfawzan).<sup>58</sup>

Let the Chechnya conference be a warning to us that the whole world is trying to destroy us [literally: is collecting wood to burn us down] ('Adel Kalbani @abuabdelelah).<sup>59</sup>

The Chechnya conference, under the pretext of helping Ash'aris, serves Christians and acts against Muslims, because disagreeing with Ash'aris does not put them outside Sunni Islam in the general sense (Doctor of Theology Mohammad al-Barrak @mohamdalbarrak). [Wahhabi

56 The organisation was banned in the UAE and Bahrain at the same time. It was banned in Egypt a little earlier. It was banned and declared terrorist in the Russian Federation in 2003.

57 Ghulam Rasool Dehlvi, "Islamic conference in Chechnya: Why Sunnis are disassociating themselves from Salafists", *Firstpost*, Sep 09, 2016, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/islamic-conference-in-chechnya-why-sunnis-are-disassociating-themselves-from-salafists-2998018.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

58 According to Al Jazeera, the sheikh was arrested last year for another of his tweets ["Bi-sabab taghrida... i'tiqal 'Abd-al-'Aziz al-Fawzan bi-l-Sa'udiyya" ["'Abd-al-'Aziz al-Fawzan's arrest due to a tweet in Saudi Arabia"], 31.07.2018, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2018/7/31/%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D8%BA%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9>, accessed 25 September 2019].

59 'Adel Kalbani is a former imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. He became famous for his statement to journalists. "DAESH [the Arabic term for IS] has adopted Salafist thought. It's not the Muslim Brotherhood's thought, Qutubism, Sufism or Ash'ari thought. They draw their thoughts from what is written in our own books, from our own principles.... The ideological origin is Salafism. They exploited our own principles that can be found in our own books... We follow the same thought but apply it in a refined way." [Dorsey J., "Creating Frankenstein: Saudi export Wahhabism", *International Policy Digest*, 08 Mar 2016, <https://intpolicydigest.org/2016/03/08/creating-frankenstein-saudi-export-wahhabism/>, accessed 25 September 2019].



leaders do not consider Ash'aris or Maturidis to be Sunni Muslims, at least as regards their beliefs, which is the most important marker.]<sup>60</sup>

There were no (!) Sunnis at the Chechnya conference at all, so how do they speak on behalf of Sunni Muslims!? In fact, the people who gathered there are worshippers of graves (*al-quburiyyah*), mercenaries and vermin who worship both the living and the dead. (Hammud bin 'Ali al-'Umri @ Alkreimy)<sup>61</sup> [Apparently, this Salafi Sheikh does not consider Sufis to be Sunnis in any absolute way.]

This conference is of a 'dubious' nature, and I'm almost certain that it is aimed against our country and our Salafi faith... Let Allah rid us of any evil of those who hide behind religion for their own [dirty] benefit. (Doctor of Theology Khalid Al Sa'ud @dr\_khalidalsaud).

Salafis (less than 5% of all Sunni Muslims) are assuring us that Ash'aris and Maturidis (over 95% of all Sunni Muslims) are not Sunnis! The Chechnya conference is a pushback. (Muhammad 'Ali al-Mahmoud @ma573573).

Mutual exclusion [from the body of Sunni Muslims] is not acceptable. However, if Ash'aris accepted that Salafis were Sunnis (which is possible), then would Salafis accept that Ash'aris are Sunnis...? (Muhammad 'Ali al-Mahmoud @ma573573).

Tweets like these, mostly negative, appeared shortly after the conference in Chechnya. Most Saudi theologians took the declaration as an attack on their country. The fact that well-known Salafi theologians from the country were not invited may have hurt the feelings of the kingdom's religious elites, but some nonetheless looked inward to seek the reasons for this estrangement, insofar as Wahhabi alims do not normally consider Ash'aris and Maturidis or Sufis to be orthodox Sunni Muslims either. Other Arab authors considered the conference's final decision a sign of escalation of the situation inside the Islamic world, which suffers enough from the Sunni-Shia schism as it is.

60 E.g. Sheikh Saleh Al al-Sheikh, a descendant of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, has written, "This is why we cannot include them [i.e. Ash'aris] in the notion of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*, and they are one of the [72] misguided sects that the Prophet (peace be upon him) told us about..." Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Laali al-bahiyah fi sharh al-'aqidah al-wasitiyyah* [*The magnificent pearls in the interpretation of "al-Aqidah al-wasitiyyah"*], 'Adil Muhammad Mursi Rifa'i (ed.) (Riyadh: Dar al-'Asima, 2010), vol. 1, p. 481; see also, "Hukm itlaq mustalah Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah" ["Shariah status of using term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*"], in Muhammad ibn Salih al 'Uthaymeen, *Liqa' al-bab al-maftuh* [*Open door meeting*], vol. 8, p. 29, <https://t.co/odwTuPRO6t>, accessed 25 September 2019.

61 This statement sounds strange. If we follow the arguments presented in it we will have to conclude that *hadith* scholar Hatim al-'Awni, a professor of Umm al-Qura University in Mecca who participated at the event, is not a Sunni Muslim. Al-'Awni is a Hanbali critical of the legacy of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, but positions himself as a representative of Salafi thought in Sunni Islam.



Also of note here is a 90-minute video interview with 'Ali al-Jifri,<sup>62</sup> one of the organisers of the Grozny conference, given on 9 September, 2016, to journalist Nadin al-Badir for the Rotana satellite channel, which broadcasts for the Gulf countries. The interview ended up not being aired,<sup>63</sup> even though it was well-advertised. Even the headline for the interview on the thumbnail advertisement was provocative, "Mu'tamar al-shaitan: 'an haqiqat ma jara fi mu'tamar al-Shishan al-akhir. Nadin al-Badir wa-l-Habib 'Ali al-Jifri" ("Satan's conference: what actually happened at the recent conference in Chechnya").<sup>64</sup> The journalist asked the famous preacher some quite difficult questions, which he answered, keeping his composure. The interview contains a rather detailed answer about what happened after the Grozny *fatwa* was published.

Sheikh al-Jifri is a very important figure, and it is possible that this conference would not have happened without him. The accusations were primarily directed at him. He is moreover the only person to have had to defend himself in a long interview and the only one to come up with a serious response to accusations and attacks connected with the Grozny declaration.

We give below a translation of important quotes from the interview that help us understand the intentions of the Grozny conference organisers and participants:<sup>65</sup>

The main idea behind this conference was to correct popular ideas about *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*, because terrorists in Russia are killing people on behalf of Sunni Muslims.

The goal of this conference is to bring it to public attention that those who killing and blowing things up are not Sunnis. And we thought that not only Chechnya needs this sort of a message.

62 This Yemeni preacher advocates peace between Sunni and Shia Muslims and condemns playing them off against each other. That is, he has always been against any forms of conflicts between various groups of Muslims or discord inside the ummah or between Islam and other religions.

63 By mutual agreement, 'Ali al-Jifri was allowed to post the full video of the interview on his YouTube channel.

64 Al-Jifri, "al-Tas'id badaa-hu rumuz al-ikhwan al-muslimun bi-stitharat 'ulama al-Mamlaka bi-da'wa al-iqsa' wa-akhar tijah mu'anat al-shu'ub fi Suriyah" ["The escalation was initiated by the Muslim Brotherhood elements by provoking the Kingdom's scholars with the pretext of exclusion and because of the Syrian people's suffering"], <http://golden.news/articles/684/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

65 Al-Jifri, "al-Tas'id badaa-hu rumuz al-ikhwan al-muslimun bi-stitharat 'ulama al-Mamlaka bi-da'wa al-iqsa' wa-akhar tijah mu'anat al-shu'ub fi Suriyah".



Invitations to the conference were sent to scholars, not states. [This was in answer to a question as to why Saudi Arabia was not invited.]<sup>66</sup>

The conference did not exclude Salafis from the body of Sunni Muslims;<sup>67</sup> it only excluded Salafis of the Takfiri and Jihadist branches, whom KSA theologians officially call a misguided group (*al-fi'a al-dallah*). [It is clear that al-Jifri here takes responsibility for the final declaration of the conference, but not for the *fatwa* signed by the RF muftis].

Iran did not participate in the conference in any way, and there were no Iranian theologians there. [Some of the conference's detractors may have thought Iranian forces were behind it].

Escalation [around the conference] was started by representatives of the 'Muslim Brotherhood', who provoked the Saudi theologians under the pretext of their having being allegedly excluded [from the body of Sunni Muslims] and out of concern for the Syrian people.

For those who do not know, there are 28 million Muslims in Russia.<sup>68</sup> So when we were invited by their scholars to provide [educational] assistance to Sunni Muslims, we considered it our duty to respond. [Some people in the Arab world, and abroad in general, may in fact not know this, especially since Russia is accused of waging war against Sunni Muslims in Syria in alliance with Iran].

Are we to say that people travelling to Islamic conferences in America are thereby allies of a regime that supports the occupation of Palestine and missile strikes against its people!?! [This must be al-Jifri's reaction to the accusations against him and other participants at the conference of supporting the Russian authorities. Another famous theologian from Jordan, Dr. Sa'id Fudah, has also stated repeatedly that this was an academic conference and not a political event and that he gave his speech solely on the basis of Shariah arguments and not some political order.]

There are fragments of speeches on YouTube by such authoritative figures from ['al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun' (the Muslim Brotherhood)] as Dr.

66 As noted above, at least one professor from the Saudi kingdom participated at the conference.

67 As noted, Wahhabis, including those that do call themselves Salafi, were named a misguided sect in the final document prepared for Russia. Al-Jifri's own position is different, insofar as he considers Wahhabis, at least moderate ones, to be Sunni Muslims. Some Islamic scholars still call certain groups 'Sunnis' simply because they are not Shia Muslims, i.e. they use the word broadly.

68 This number is provided by Jifri, he took it from a Arabic source in Internet. Arabic sources give us this number for year 2016 ([https://mawdoo3.com/%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%AF\\_%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86\\_%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86](https://mawdoo3.com/%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%AF_%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86_%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86))



Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Tareq Al-Suwaidan saying that masses of Sunni Muslims are Ash'aris.<sup>69</sup>

The lies and falsehoods about the conference and attempts to pit the UAE, ARE and KSA<sup>70</sup> against each other came to nothing thanks to the kingdom's firm integrity.

## REACTION TO THE GROZNY CONFERENCE AMONG THE MUSLIMS OF RUSSIA

The Grozny conference was particularly keenly discussed by authors from the Caucasus. For instance, the *Kavkaz.Realii* [Caucasus.Realia] website posted that "the *Kavkazskiy uzel* website reported that al-Jifri and another theologian Ahmed el-Tayeb claimed non-involvement in the *fatwa*. The authors of the *fatwa* declare Salafis a dangerous religious sect, while the theologians al-Jifri and el-Tayeb called them brothers." On his Facebook page al-Jifri stated that *Kavkazskiy uzel's* report does not reflect the actual situation: "It was one of the best conferences I have ever had the honour of participating in. Moreover – the work is in progress on implementing its scientific and practical prescriptions to counter the ideas of modern *Khawarij* (heretics) among the infidels."<sup>71</sup>

Although the previous message leaves no doubt about Sheikh al-Jifri's attitude to the conference in Grozny, whether due to a translator's mistake or some other reason his words were distorted and not quoted in full. It looked as though the famous Yemeni preacher though the modern *Khawarij*, i.e. Jihadist Salafis (*salafiyya jihadiyya*), were infidels. But in fact the Arabic original<sup>72</sup> of the sheikh's statement says that modern *Khawarij*

69 Here al-Jifri again addresses the 'Muslim Brotherhood' and their patrons, hinting that there is no difference between them and the participants of the Conference in their definition of the term *Ahl al-Sunnah*.

70 The coordinator and one of the organisers of the Grozny conference was the *Tabah Foundation of research and consulting* (a non-profit from the UAE), while the keynote speaker was Grand Imam of al-Azhar University Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb from Egypt, ranked second amongst the 500 most influential Muslims of the world in 2016 (*The Muslim 500: The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims, 2016* (Amman: The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 2016), p. 40).

71 "Arabskiy bogoslov Dzhifri ne otrekalsya ot groznenskoy fetvy" ["The Arab theologian Jifri did not renounce the Grozny *fatwa*"], *Kavkaz.Realii*, 25 November, 2016, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/groznenskay-fetfa-zastavila-kadyrova-obysnyatysya-s-saudovskoy-araviev/28144117.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

72 The Official Page of Habib 'Ali Al Jifri, <https://www.facebook.com/alhabibali/photos/pb.196704400369548.-2207520000.1480078492./1420811491292160/?type=3&theater>, accessed 25 September 2019.



belong to a misguided group that accuses other Muslims of infidelity and allows itself to murder people and wreak havoc in their countries. At the same time representatives of this group ascribe their own fallacies to Sunni Muslims.

In an article “Arab theologians al-Jifri and el-Tayeb disavowed the Grozny *fatwa*” on the *Kavkazskiy uzel* website we found further contortions and misconceptions. The first is that “...following the results of the Islamic conference... a *fatwa* was adopted, and, according to it, *only* adherents of a Sufi *tariqa* are *true Muslims*.”<sup>73</sup> We can only make wild guesses as to who is supposed to benefit from such an interpretation of the Grozny *fatwa*.

Secondly, we read in the sheikhs’ profile section of the same article that “Ahmed el-Tayeb is the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar University, professor of religious doctrine and a philosophy that adheres to the Ash’ari doctrine (Sufi Islam),”<sup>74</sup> as the institution’s website informs us.<sup>75</sup> Here, we see either incompetence on the subject of Islam on the part of the *Kavkazskiy uzel* journalists or an attempt to tie the Grand Imam to Sufism in order to justify the statement above about *tariqa* members’ exclusive right to be Sunni Muslims.

Global events and the situation around the Grozny conference became the subject of speculation on the part of certain forces,<sup>76</sup> but the subsequent visit of the Chechnya authorities to Saudi Arabia showed that there are no substantial differences between the KSA and Russia over countering religious extremism and that the main message of the Grozny declaration was understood by official Riyadh. In 2017, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman visited Russia, where he had a special meeting with muftis of the Russian Federation,<sup>77</sup> including those who signed the famous *fatwa*. The chairman of DUM RF Ravil Gaynutdin did not attend the meeting, and the spiritual leaders of Russian Muslims were

73 Iliia Arnaut et al., “Arabskiye bogoslovy Dzhifri i Tayib otreklis’ ot groznenskoj fetvy” [“Arab theologians Jifri and Tayyib denied the Grozny *fatwa*”], *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, 20 November, 2016, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/292958/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

74 Ash’aris and Maturidis are not necessarily Sufi, and Ash’arism and Maturidism are not Sufi schools, but schools of Kalam (Islamic theology). There are cases of people of Salafi belief performing Sufi practices and belong to *tariqas*. See Tawfiq Ibrahim et al., “Ibn Taymiyyah,” in *Islam: Entsiklopedicheskij Slovar’* (Moscow: Nauka; Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury, 1991), p. 85; Knysh A., “al-Sanusiya,” *Islam: Entsiklopedicheskij Slovar’* (Moscow: Nauka; Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury, 1991), p. 207-208.

75 Iliia Arnaut et al., “Arabskiye bogoslovy Dzhifri i Tayib otreklis’ ot groznenskoj fetvy”.

76 Here we also see an attempt by the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ organisation to show themselves as defenders of “true” Sunni Islam, in which they are ready to include Wahhabis, despite the ban on their own activities in the KSA – possibly to restore their lost position in the Middle East.

77 “Rossijskiye Muftiy vstretilis’ s koroleom Saudovskoy Aravii” [“Russian Muftis Meet with the King of Saudi Arabia”], TsDUM, 07.10.2017, <http://cdum.ru/news/44/8891/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



represented by the chairman of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia Talgat Tadzhuiddin instead.

The SAUDIANEWS web portal reported that “as the Sabq<sup>78</sup> portal discovered from their own sources, R.A. Kadyrov apologised to His Royal Highness for the conference in Grozny, emphasising that Salafis and the people of *hadith* are in essence the people of the Sunnah and a single community and offering apologies for any possible misunderstanding.”<sup>79</sup> If such apologies have actually been offered to and accepted by the Saudi side, then the quoted fragment has a certain nuance to it.

Firstly, the fragment does not mention so-called ‘Wahhabis’. It uses the term ‘Salafis’ (*Salafiyyah/Salafiyyun*) and ‘people of *hadith*’ (*ahl al-hadith*). The problem is that ‘people of *hadith*’ were only added as a movement within Sunni Islam in the second redaction of the Grozny declaration. Moreover, some theologians use the terms ‘people of *hadith*’ and ‘Salafis’ as synonyms.<sup>80</sup>

Secondly, the mufti of Chechnya Salah Mezhev posted on his Instagram page that all the talk “that the Head of the Chechen Republic visited the Kingdom to offer an official apology for the Chechnya conference on ‘Who are they – *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*?’ is an absolute lie.” According to the mufti:

The undeniable truth is that we have offered a true picture of the Chechnya conference, which has been misrepresented by the envious and extremist movements, particularly by the *Ikhwan al-muslimin* (‘Muslim Brotherhood’) organisation and that this conference was not held with the aim of harming the Kingdom and its people, of dividing Muslims, but, on the contrary, it was organised in order to counter extremist ideologies, which had used the name *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* by falsely attributing their ideology to the path of the pious predecessors and by accusing the Islamic ummah of infidelity and declaring it permissible to shed its blood, as has happened in our countries because of certain imposters who accused Muslims of infidelity,

78 Several Arabic-language editions cited a little-known Saudi website called *as-Sabq*, which, in turn, relied on unnamed “sources” (Bilalov M., “Groznskaya fetva zastavila obyasnatsya s Saudovskoy Araviyey” [“Grozny fatwa forced to speak with Saudi Arabia”], *Kavkaz.Realii*, 28 November 2016, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/groznskay-fetfa-zastavila-kadyrova-obysnyatysya-s-saudovskoy-araviyey/28144117.html>, accessed 25 September 2019).

79 “Ego Korolevskoye Vysochestvo Muhammad bin Salman prinyal glavu Chechenskoy Respubliki v g. Damame” [“His Royal Highness Muhammad bin Salman received the Head of the Chechen Republic in Dammam city”], SAUDIANEWS, 27.11.2016, <http://saudianews.ru/?p=7210>, accessed 25 September 2019.

80 This point of view is shared by many Turkish theologians [see, for instance, Topaloglu B., *Kelam ilmi giris [Introduction to Theology]* (Istanbul: Damla Yayinevi, 2011), p. 79-81, 104; Celebi I., “Din kavrami ve Islam dini” [“Religion concept and Islam”], in *Islam ilmihali* (Istanbul: MIVAF, 2006), p. 37].





performing unlawful acts like *takfir*, murders and destruction. His Highness Muhammad bin Salman was happy to receive such an explanation.<sup>81</sup>

Again we see that the notion and problem of Wahhabism (the official religious ideology of the kingdom) were not touched upon during the conference. According to the mufti of Chechnya, the common enemy of Russia and Saudi Arabia has been determined and it is the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ and those branches of it that call themselves Salafi.

Third, the explanation related to the Grozny declaration (an international document) and not the *fatwa* (an internal Russian document), which mentioned the Wahhabis as a misguided sect but did not mention the ‘people of *hadith*’ among the Sunni Muslims. There was no point in apologising for the text of the declaration or resolution of the Chechnya conference. One gets the impression that the situation and the confusion between the Declaration and the *Fatwa* have been used by opponents of Kadyrov both in Russia and abroad, as well as by adherents of Salafi branches of the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’.

This mention of the ‘people of *hadith*’ or Hanbalis in discussing questions of religious doctrine, particularly disputed aspects, is not an insoluble problem for Sunni Muslims. Representatives of Ash‘arism and Maturidism are the most prevalent group among Sunni Muslims, which is why it is fair for only these two schools to be mentioned, for the most part. Moreover, the position of the classical Hanbalis<sup>82</sup> is congruent with the framework of these schools, meaning there is no reason to give them separate mention. While Hanbali authors do refer to themselves separately, the theologians could still have added the other two groups out of respect for their feelings. Because some Muslims groundlessly refer to themselves as Hanbali in *Aqidah* and *Fiqh*, there are such studies in these fields, including both minor<sup>83</sup> and

81 Bilalov M., “Groznsenskaya fetva zastavila obyasnyatsya s Saudovskoy Araviyey” [“Grozny *fatwa* forced to speak with Saudi Arabia”], in *Kavkaz.Realii*, 28 November 2016, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/groznsenskay-fetfa-zastavila-kadyrova-obysnyatysya-s-saudovskoy-araviy/28144117.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

82 The question may arise of why ‘classical’? There are theological works even by Hanbali authors that state that some Hanbalis held anthropomorphism-related beliefs that are heresies from the point of view of Sunni Islam. For example, Marjani writes, “This illness seized some later scholars from among the followers of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (may Allah have mercy on him), with the exception of a small group that Sheikh Abu-l-Faraj ‘Abd al-Rahman Ibn al-Jawzi (may Allah have mercy on him) and his followers belong to.” Al-Marjani, “Hashiyat,” in al-Kalanbawi, *Al-Hashiyat ‘ala sharh Jalal* [Footnote for Jalal’s commentary] (Istanbul: Dar al-Tiba’a al-‘Amira, 1317 x.), vol. 2, p. 163.

83 See e.g. Ashraf Nizar Hasan, *Qadaya mihwariyyah* [Central issues], p. 109.



major<sup>84</sup> works. It all boils down to the idea that so-called modern Salafis disagree with Hanbalis over '*aqidah*, *fiqh* and *tasawwuf*, which is why they cannot be considered Hanbali.<sup>85</sup>

The negative reaction to the Grozny *fatwa* was caused by fear of an official ban against Wahhabism in Russia, as happened in Dagestan, as well as by widespread rejection of Sufi doctrine, the practice of *tariqas*, and unwillingness to acknowledge Ash'arism and Maturidism as the essence of Sunni Islam. It is enough to Google 'Grozny *fatwa*' to see the many negative reviews and criticism of the conference.

For example, Valeriy Yemeljanov, who represents the '*Vremya i mir*' *Information and Analytics Centre*, states that "there was a mixed response to the final document of the conference – the *fatwa* (theological-legal decision), which, very roughly speaking, declared the only true and full Sunni Muslims (and Sunnis, as is well known, constitute the absolute majority of the world's ummah) to be those who follow Sufism, its teachers and practices."<sup>86</sup> This is a very strange interpretation of the *fatwa's* text, because the *fatwa* clearly states that Sunni Muslims include Sufis and adherents and followers of famous sheikhs of *Tasawwuf* and similar persons *among other categories*.

On another website we see that "following the results of the Islamic conference on 'Who are they – followers of the Sunnah?', which took place in Grozny from August 25 to 27, a *fatwa* was adopted, according to which the only true Muslims are adherents of Sufi *tariqa*. Supporters of the Salafi movement are called dangerous sectarians in this *fatwa*. The *fatwa* says that all Muslims of Russia must accept it."<sup>87</sup> Such a perception of the content

84 See e.g. Mustafa Hamdu 'Ulayyan, *Al-Sada al-hanabilah wa-khtilafu-hum ma'a-l-salafiyah al-mu'asirah fi-l-'aqidah wa-l-fiqh wa-l-tasawwuf* [Great Hanbalite scholars and their differences with modern Salafists in relation to tenets of Islamic faith, jurisprudence and spirituality] (Amman: Dar al-Nur al-Mubin, 2017).

85 When the works of representatives of the *al-Wasatiyyah* Centre for Moderate Islam in Kuwait mention the third of these groups, it is noticeable that they include the followers of Sheikh Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. This was to be expected, however, because adherents of these sheikhs' teachings have participated in the Centre's work. See e.g. Muhammad Abu al-Fath al-Bayanuni, *Mafhum Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah bayna-l-tawsi' wa-l-tadyiq* [The concept of Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah between broad meaning and its limitation] (Kuwait City: Dar Iqra, 2011), p. 14-16, 54-63.

86 Yemeljanov V., "'Sufizatsiya' rossiyskoi ummy. Nedavno prinyataya 'groznenskaya fetva' predpolagayet navyazyvaniye vsem musul'manam Rossii 'chechenskoy modeli' blagochestiya" ["'Sufization' of the Russian Ummah. The recently adopted 'Grozny *fatwa*' implies the imposition of a 'Chechen model' of piety on all Muslims of Russia"], *IATS "Vremya i mir"*, dlya "Portala-Credo. Ru", <https://muslim.ru/articles/278/16162/?print=Y>, accessed 25 September 2019.

87 "Bogoslovy nazvali nedopustimym trebovaniye vseobshchego ispolneniya groznenskoy fetvy" ["Theologians called the unacceptable requirement of universal execution of the Grozny *fatwa*"], *Kavkazskiy uzel*, 11 September, 2016, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/289085/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



of the *fatwa* on the part of some Muslims should be a sign to the editors of both the *Fatwa* and the Declaration. They should pay attention to such interpretations and misconceptions and make the wording less ambiguous. Nor should one exclude the possibility that comments on the Sufi nature of the *fatwa* and supposed attempts to ‘Sufiize’ the Russian ummah may be part of the information policy of certain media.

The representative of one of the largest muftiates in Russia, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF), is known to have left the conference before the official documents were signed. Harsh criticism of the *fatwa* and its consequences for Russia mostly came DUM RF and the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR).<sup>88</sup> The latter made a statement, calling the *fatwa* unfinished and noting that such documents “do not lend themselves to categorical judgement like ‘agree/disagree’. This is why there must be a theological discussion about them, which should have a Russia-wide character and involve all concerned and authorised parties.”<sup>89</sup> It is also why SMR published their own *fatwa*, which they called a reworked version of the Grozny *fatwa* on true Muslims. This *fatwa* lists the attributes of radical Islamic movements.

Commenting on the provisions of the SMR *fatwa* for *RIA Novosti*, the Head of the Centre for Research into Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Urals-Volga Region of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences Alikber Alikberov noted that the document “does not take a stand against that (the Grozny – D.Sh.) *fatwa*.”<sup>90</sup> He continued that “In fact, they support each other in their main provisions. And this in itself is quite good, because we were all afraid that there would be a new dividing line between our regions, between the two schools. But that hasn’t happened.”<sup>91</sup>

In the media you could hear information about a boycott of the Chechnya conference by the representatives of SMR, as online newspaper *Golos*

88 It is important to note that the Moscow Islamic Institute, whose founder is DUM RF, published a learning guide in 2014 called *The History of Islamic madhabs*, translated from the Turkish and dedicated to ideological groups and movements in Islam. This book presents a traditional interpretation of the term *Ahl al-Sunnah*, which complies with the requirements of the Grozny conference [Gümüsoğlu H., *Istoriya islamskih mazhabov [History of Islamic madhabs]* (Moscow: Centr issledovaniya obshchestvenno-religioznykh processov pri MII, 2014), p. 83-89]. So, DUM RF must not have any complaints about the first part of the *fatwa* or the declaration or its definition of Sunni Muslims.

89 “Sovet muftiyev Rossii dorabotal groznenskuyu fetvu ob istinnyh musul’manah” [“The Council of Muftis of Russia finalized the Grozny *fatwa* about true Muslims”], *RIA Novosti*, 21 October, 2016, <https://ria.ru/20161021/1479765081.html>, accessed 25 September 2019

90 “Sovet muftiyev Rossii dorabotal groznenskuyu fetvu ob istinnyh musul’manah”.

91 “Sovet muftiyev Rossii dorabotal groznenskuyu fetvu ob istinnyh musul’manah”.



*Islama* reported. But DUM RF and SMR rebutted this, declaring it an act of provocation and stating that the authors of the material, or the “anti-Russian and anti-Islamic forces” allegedly behind it, were attempting to “drive a wedge between Ravil Gaynutdin and ... Ramzan Kadyrov.”<sup>92</sup>

Chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan (DUM RB) Nurmuhamet Nigmatullin, who has been accused of supporting Wahhabism on more than one occasion, supported the Grozny *fatwa* and, by doing so, went against the opinion of the Council of Muftis of Russia, which DUM RB is a member of. Here we see divisions not just between organisations but even inside families. DUM RB's deputy chairman is Ayub Bibarsov, and his brother Saratov mufti Muqaddas has an important position in SMR. It was Muqaddas Bibarsov who became the mouthpiece of the opponents of the “Grozny *fatwa*” at the Russia-wide level. He thinks that the document is out of tune with the reality of the many peoples of Russia who profess Islam. “What should the majority of Tatars, Bashkirs, Kazakhs, and most Muslims of the Northern Caucasus do? They follow the Hanafi and the Shafi'i *madhabs*, but are not Sufis, while at the same time a lot of them, just like representatives of Sufism, have a high degree of *iman* and *ihsan* and have carried Islam through the hardest times of dictatorship and persecution”,<sup>93</sup> Bibarsov writes. Further in the article, Bibarsov uses the example of a Bashkir hero Salawat Yulayev, who, according to Bibarsov, “did not follow the path of Sufism but was a Muslim who grew up on the principles of *iman*.”<sup>94</sup>

This criticism of the Grozny conference decisions is caused, at least in part, by the confusion between the general international document (the final declaration of the Grozny conference) and the internal Russian document (the Grozny *fatwa* “On integral attributes of the true Islam as opposed to fallacies”). On the other hand, the negative reactions were also due to the difficult political situation in the Middle East, i.e. the war in Syria, the prohibition of the international Islamist organisation, *al-Ihwan al-Muslimun*, and the strained relationship between Saudi Arabia and the other countries of the region.

92 Magomed Tuayev, “Bogoslovy obvinili chechenskikh sufiyev v popytke vnesti raskol sredi musul'man” [“Theologians accuse Chechen Sufis of trying to split among Muslims”], *Kavkazskiy uzel*, 3 September, 2016, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/288674/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

93 Muqaddas Bibarsov, “Groznskaya fetva ne reshit, no mozhet usugubit problemy musul'man RF” [“Grozny *fatwa* will not solve, but may exacerbate the problems of Muslims of the Russian Federation”], Russian Council of Muftis, 14 September, 2016, <https://www.muslim.ru/articles/278/16141/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

94 “Eho ‘Groznskoy fetvy’: kakim byl Islam v Bashkirii” [“Echo of the ‘Grozny *fatwa*’: what Islam was like in Bashkiria”], *Bonus*, No 35 (213), 20 October, 2016, [http://www.sufirb.ru/books\\_data/fatwa\\_grozniy/fatwa\\_grozniy.pdf](http://www.sufirb.ru/books_data/fatwa_grozniy/fatwa_grozniy.pdf), accessed 25 September 2019.



Another problem, in our opinion, is the struggle for leadership in the Russian ummah. This issue has been relevant for Russian Muslims since the 1990s, when a large number of spiritual administrations of Muslims emerged in the country. The strongest positions are occupied by such centres of Russian Muslims as Grozny, Kazan, Makhachkala, Moscow and Ufa. ONTV website analyst Timur Yusupov thinks that one of the main goals of the conference in Chechnya was to shift the centre of Russian Islam to Grozny:

Thus, if all the recommendations of this Conference are fulfilled, it is Grozny that will become the de-facto theological and ideological centre of Russian Islam. Because it will receive the right to determine which Islam is true and which is false at a nation-wide level. And the mufti of Chechnya, whether it is today's Head of DUM of Chechnya Salah Mezhiev or whoever manages to replace him in this position, will thus become the de-facto Grand mufti of all the Russian muftiates. And Ramzan Kadyrov, who, for Moscow, has long been the political leader who represents Russian Islam at the international level, will become the informal ruler of all Muslims of the Russian Federation.<sup>95</sup>

As some authors float the idea of the centre moving to Grozny at some point, it seems reasonable to ask: where is the actual centre of Russian Islam today? If Yusupov thinks that it is Moscow, the Volga-Urals region and Caucasus will hardly agree with him. Given current Russian conditions, Yusupov's speculations sound quite implausible. A more realistic project, and the Conference's decisions suggest it, is the creation of the All-Russian Ulama Council, a consultative and expert body of Muslims of the Russian Federation, to meet at various locations or even by video conference call.

The location of the Conference also raised suspicions of a political subtext. One of its main foreign coordinators 'Ali al-Jifri has said, in the interview cited above, that the *Tabah Foundation*, which he is head of, had decided to hold international Sunni conferences in Chechnya once every two years, in cooperation with the Foundation of Shaheed Ahmad-Haji Kadyrov, and that 2016 coincided with the 65<sup>th</sup> birthday of the late mufti Ahmad Kadyrov<sup>96</sup>, and moreover that the first conference in 2014 was devoted to

95 Yusupov T., "Anti-salafitskaya Konferentsiya v Groznom prevrashchayet Ramzana Kadyrova v pravatelya vseh musul'man Rossii" ["Anti-Salafi Conference in Grozny turns Ramzan Kadyrov into ruler of all Muslims of Russia"], ONTV, 04.09.2016, <https://ontv.su/news/1223-anti-salafitskaja-konferencija-v-groznom-prevraschaet-ramzana-kadyrova-v-pravitelja-musulman-ro.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

96 Al-Jifri, "al-Tas'id badaa-hu rumuz al-ikhwan al-muslimun bi-stitharat 'ulama al-Mamlaka bi-da'wa al-iqsa' wa-akhar tijah mu'anat al-shu'ub fi Suriyah" ["The escalation was initiated by the Muslim Brotherhood elements by provoking the Kingdom's scholars with the pretext of exclusion and because of the Syrian people's suffering"], <http://golden.news/articles/684/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



the subject of *Sufism: safety for people and stability for states (al-Tasawwuf aman li-l-awtan wa istiqrar li-l-insan)*. There was no follow through in 2018, however. We may assume that competition exists between the different centres of Islam in the Russian Federation, but the conference is unlikely to have taken place on the initiative of the Kremlin.

The sharply negative reaction to the results of the Grozny conference may, on the one hand, be indicative of the influence of 'Salafi' views in Russia and abroad, including its critical attitude to the schools of Sunni Kalam: the Ash'aris and Maturidis, and to the practices of Sufi *tariqas* that profess traditional Sunni Islam. On the other hand, Russian society still knows very little about Islam, its ideological movements, or its orthodoxy and heresy from the point of view of mainstream Muslim movements. It is clear that a lot of the Muslim adherents of old Sunni traditions had been waiting for something of this sort to happen for a long time, but other Muslims turned out not to be prepared for or simply opposed to it from the off.

Another question is why an event of such importance for Sunni Muslims around the world was not held in Cairo at al-Azhar University, considered the main centre of Sunni thought today. Why couldn't this renowned centre of Islam provide a theological and scholarly assessment of the term 'Sunni Islam' in the modern era by way of a global forum of Sunni theologians? Clearly, the answers to these questions are wrapped up in the political and economic situation in the Islamic world, obstacles that traditional Islamic theology finds it difficult to overcome. There is, however, a Sunni elite today represented by prominent theologians and like-minded people from many countries who sometimes get together and make joint statements, trying to react to the modern challenges facing humankind.

It is important to note that this was the first attempt of the modern era, whether at the global level or inside Russia, to trace the boundaries of mainstream Islam, i.e. to define the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*, including in our context of traditional Islam. If it naturally called forth a negative reaction, it came mostly from representatives of so-called 'Salafi' Islam, many of whom consider themselves to be the only true Sunnis or orthodox Muslims.

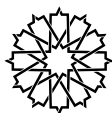


## CONCLUSION

The Islamic world, its religious leaders and scholars are aware of the history of Islam in our lands and the countries of the former USSR. Sunni Islam, as represented by the teachings of Ash'aris and Maturidis, has been the historically dominant stream of Islam there, as it is in most of the world. As for problems of *fiqh*, the Hanafi and the Shafi'i *madhabs* have been the dominant ones in our country. Of the Sufi *tariqas* the most widespread are the Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya.

Our understanding is that traditional Islam is synonymous with 'Sunni Islam', meaning the tradition most Muslims in Russia adhere to. In other words, this tradition is the Sunnah of the Prophet and his Companions (*ma ana 'alay-hi wa ashabi*) and so following the paths of the most pious predecessors and subsequent generations of leading scholars of Sunni Islam (*al-Jama'a*). It is fair to say that the Grozny conference promoted this interpretation of the term 'traditional' Islam in Russia in clarifying and defining the term '*Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*'.

As for passive observers, I think that such events, where Muslim theologians can gather and discuss important issues on a single platform, solving religious problems peacefully and following the principles of their theological ethics, are to be encouraged. This is necessary for Muslims themselves, because, as insiders, they understand and know what is happening in their ummah better than anyone. As for religious problems turning into political problems and theologians' determinations being used for political purposes, of course there is a risk of that. To minimise it, Muslim religious leaders must pay more attention not only to the contents of documents they adopt, but also work to ensure those documents are understood properly by those they are addressed to, in this case Muslims who live in Russia. The debate that grew up over the two documents adopted at the conference in Grozny in 2016, the Declaration and the *Fatwa*, demonstrates that no such efforts were made by any of the Russian muftiates.



# The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam

*Renat Bekkin*

## ABSTRACT

In recent years the Russian Islamic Internet has hosted broad discussion of publications and public speeches by religious figures calling themselves renovationists or modernists. The group's representatives advocate revising the Sunnah and considering Islamic guidance not directly mentioned in the Qur'an optional. This is why they are referred to as 'Qur'anites' by their opponents. This paper analyses the renovationist phenomenon in modern Russian Islam. A specific feature of the movement is that its representatives' ideology combines secularism regarding the provisions of Islam with clericalism regarding government and public institutions. The author questions whether Russian Islamic renovationists should be viewed as a single organisation. The renovationist movement's potential may over time attract the attention of the political regime in modern Russia. The government uses the concept of traditional Islam to detach loyal Muslims from those it sees as a threat. Once this construction is finally rejected, the renovationists' religious and political views may serve as a foundation for a new ideology for Islam in Russia.

Key words: renovationist movement in Islam, 'Qur'anites', traditionalists in Islam, *Jadidists*, traditional Islam





## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Muslim community of Russia has seen discussion between two groups of Islamic religious figures and intellectuals: those who preach the theory of so-called ‘Qur’anic humanism’ and a critical approach to the Sunnah<sup>1</sup> and those who consider such views fundamentally contrary to the Islamic creed.

We should stress, however, that there has never been a proper reasoned debate between individuals from these opposing points of view. Rather, there is an ongoing ‘polemic.’<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, there are publications (print and electronic) by Islamic religious and social figures who share a critical approach to the Sunnah as a source of Islamic belief. They refer especially to a concept of ‘authentic Sunnah’, implying *hadiths* that directly or indirectly contradict the text of the Qur’an should be considered inauthentic.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, they hold that even those *hadiths* that do belong to the ‘authentic Sunnah’ were applicable only at particular (historical) times and places.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the opponents of this view insist the Sunnah remains the second most important source of the Islamic creed and cannot by definition contradict the text of the Qur’an. This position is found in

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- 1 For example, “one should display maximal critical spirit towards *hadiths*, which would include the use of modern historical methods and the achievements of Orientalist criticism. The prophetic Sunnah is important only as the concrete embodiment of Qur’anic commands’ in Mukhetdinov D.V., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)* (Moscow: Medina, 2016), p. 20-21. Here and after I cite the English translation of the book by Mukhetdinov, printed by the same publishing house.
  - 2 The principal difference between a polemic and a discussion is that the goal of the latter is to find a consensus. The goal of polemic is the triumph of only one point of view. See Ivin A.A., Nikiforov A.L., *Slovar’ po logike [Dictionary of Logic]* (Moscow: VLADOS, 1997), p. 90.
  - 3 “Only *hadiths* of the ‘*mutawatir*’ type should be accepted as authentic Sunnah (that is, *hadiths* passed down by a large number of narrators who could not possibly have made a prior arrangement to convey the same story). And this type of *hadiths* is unlikely to contain any extra-Qur’anic information about the creation of the world, angels and demons, the lives of pre-Islamic prophets, Judgement Day, or Heaven and Hell. Moreover, acknowledging the divine origin of such information contradicts the idea of the self-sufficiency of the Qur’an, its completeness and perfection, as repeatedly emphasised by the Scripture itself.” Ibrahim T., *Na puti k koranicheskoy tolerantnosti [On the way to Qur’anic tolerance]* (Nizhny Novgorod: Medina, 2007), p. 155.
  - 4 “The true Sunnah of the Prophet is primarily ‘God’s Sunnah’, the Qur’an itself. The extra-Qur’anic Sunnah, even the most authentic (in terms of reliability of conveyance) can only claim relative (compared to the Qur’an) importance, representing the Prophet’s *ijtihad*. God the Gracious and the Wisest did not wish to bind people forever by established norms of a religious, social and political nature (which are, by their nature, dynamic and prone to change), did not establish certain norms in the Qur’an but left it to the Prophet (and after him – to Muslims) to determine the most suitable norms for a given time and place, trusting in the Lord’s assistance and aligning with the universal principles of the Qur’an, the requirements of reason and the common good.” Ibrahim T., *Na puti k koranicheskoy tolerantnosti [On the way to Qur’anic tolerance]*, p. 155.



concentrated form in a joint *fatwa* issued by the Council of ‘*ulama*’ of two muftiates, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF) and the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR): “The Sunnah never contradicts the Qur’an. Everything mentioned in the Sunnah and not mentioned in the Qur’an is a prophetic precept that is either mandatory or preferable. And there is no contradiction with the Qur’an here, because the Qur’an tells us to obey the Prophet.”<sup>5</sup>

The ongoing polemic between the supporters of these two points of view on the Sunnah’s role gains special poignancy from the fact that both work in the same system of spiritual administrations of Muslims (muftiates). There are religious figures on opposing sides in the same muftiates. For instance, one of the initiators of the *fatwa*, Muqaddas Bibarsov, is a member of the Praesidium of SMR, while Damir Mukhetdinov, a self-proclaimed reform figure, is deputy chairman of DUM RF, a muftiate in the SMR structure. In the author’s opinion, this circumstance offers a key to understanding the essence of the clerical polemic.

## ON TERMINOLOGY

In studying this polemic, the researcher inevitably comes up against the following question: what to call the representatives of these opposing groups of Islamic religious and social figures?

Those calling for a critical approach to use of the Sunnah are termed ‘Qur’anites’ by their opponents. This term was first used primarily in opinion pieces published on Russian-language Muslim web resources,<sup>6</sup> but gained currency after it appeared in a sub-heading of the aforementioned *fatwa* of the Council of ‘*ulama*’ of DUM RF and SMR when it was published on the website of one of the document’s authors – Shamil Alyautdinov.<sup>7</sup>

5 “Fetva DUM RF “O koranitah”. Bogoslovskoye zaklyuchenie № 6/18” [“Fatwa of DUM RF “Concerning the Qur’anites”. Theological statement No 6/18”], <https://umma.ru/fetva-dum-rf-o-koranitah/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

6 See, for example: “Iz SMR izgnali raskryvshegosya koranita. Kak naschet vseh ostalnyh?” [“An exposed Qur’anite was banished from SMR. What about all the rest?”], <https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=32069>, accessed 25 September 2019; “Otkrovennaya diskussiya musul’man s Rustamom Batrovym” [“A candid discussion of Muslims with Rustam Batrov”], <https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=31663>, accessed 25 September 2019; Khaybullin I., “Tawfiq Ibrahim – myslitel’ bez edinomyshlennikov” [“Tawfiq Ibrahim – a thinker with no associates”], <http://www.ansar.ru/analytics/taufik-ibragim-myslitel-bez-edinomyshlennikov>, accessed 25 September 2019, etc.

7 It should be noted that this sub-heading, “Concerning the Qur’anites” is not an official one, because it is not present in the text of the document uploaded to the official websites of SMR and DUM RF. Another, also not quite official, name for the *fatwa* is “On the importance of the Sunnah.”



The so-called 'Qur'anites' draw ideological support for their views from the publications of professor Tawfiq Ibrahim, a leading Russian expert on the Islamic philosophy of the Middle Ages, who happens to be of Syrian extraction.<sup>8</sup>

Prof. Ibrahim's views are very similar to those of Sudanese thinker Mahmoud Taha (1909–1985), accused of apostasy and executed on judicial order under Shariah in his homeland. A cornerstone of Taha's doctrine was his call to free Islam from the accretions of tradition. In Taha's view, true Islam was intended for all humankind and consequently limited to the Meccan period of the Prophet Muhammad's mission:

The Qur'an itself is divided into two parts: one of *al-iman* and the other of *al-islam*, in the sense that the former was revealed in Medina, while the latter was revealed earlier in Mecca. Each class of texts has its own distinguishing features, reflecting the fact that the Medinese Qur'an pertains to the stage of *al-iman*, while the Meccan Qur'an pertains to the stage of *al-islam*. For example, those parts of the Qur'an which use the phrase "O believers", with the exception of *Surah al-Hajj* (chapter 22), are Medinese, as are verses where the hypocrites are mentioned or reference is made to jihad... The Meccan and the Medinese texts differ, not because of the time and place of their revelation, but essentially because of the audience to whom they are addressed. The phrase "O believers" addresses a particular nation, while "O mankind" speaks to all people.<sup>9</sup>

According to Tawfiq Ibrahim too, "it is primarily the Meccan period that gives us the general guidance and reflects the true timeless essence of Islam. The verses revealed in Mecca are the very substance of the Qur'anic revelation. It is these verses that shaped the main universal principles. Loosely speaking, the Meccan Qur'an is the universal, panhuman Qur'an, while the Medinan Qur'an is its attribution in the conditions of Medina. And we need to understand this historicity."<sup>10</sup>

Mahmoud Taha was not a Qur'anite and did not reject the Sunnah. Nor was his exclusionary approach to the sources of the Islamic creed (primarily the Qur'an) at all popular. Taha had a small group of followers who called themselves the Republican Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Jumhuriyin*). One of them, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, translated his teacher's major work, *The*

8 Khaybullin I., "Tawfiq Ibrahim – myslitel' bez edinomyshlennikov" ["Tawfiq Ibrahim – a thinker with no associates"], <http://www.ansar.ru/analytics/taufik-ibragim-myslitel-bez-edinomyshlennikov>, accessed 25 September 2019.

9 Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, *The second message of Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 125.

10 "Tawfiq Ibrahim: "Musul'manin ne mozhet ne byt' salafitom" ["Tawfiq Ibrahim: "A Muslim cannot help being a Salafi"], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/345232>, accessed 25 September 2019.



*Second Message of Islam*, into English, so that Taha's ideas have become well-known in the Western world.

Despite the temptation to look for more detailed parallels between their views, we will limit ourselves here to establishing the major similarity in Taha and Ibrahim's interpretations of the importance of the Meccan period for modern Islam.

In the introduction to the third edition of *The Second Message of Islam*, Taha wrote that his book was intended to proclaim a return to a 'renewed Islam'.<sup>11</sup> Without calling himself or his followers 'renovationists', Taha was nonetheless preaching a renewal of Islam. Renewal is essentially the cleansing of Islam of norms and principles that, in Taha's opinion, were applicable only in a given time and space.

Ibrahim uses the terms 'renovationists' and 'reformers' for advocates of a limited approach to the provisions of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.<sup>12</sup> According to Ibrahim, he and his followers can also be called 'Jadidists'.<sup>13</sup>

The word 'renovation' appears in the name of a book by the deputy chairman of DUM RF Damir Mukhetdinov, *Islam in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: a programme for renewal (Collection of papers)*.<sup>14</sup> Some mass media call Mukhetdinov "the Qur'anites' main lobbyist".<sup>15</sup> Mukhetdinov has referred to himself as an ideologue of renovation in modern Islam since putting forward a series of academic papers and opinion pieces on the problem.<sup>16</sup>

11 Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, *The second message of Islam*, p. 43.

12 Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, *The second message of Islam*, p. 43. One of T. Ibrahim's adherents, D. Mukhetdinov, describes the professor as "a firm believer of the renovationist movement" (Mukhetdinov D.V., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)* (Moscow: Medina, 2016), p. 146).

13 Tawfiq Ibrahim: "V Rossii, k sozhaleniyu, musul'mane do diskussii eshche ne dorosli" ["Tawfiq Ibrahim: "Unfortunately, Russian Muslims have not yet reached the level of being able to hold a discussion"], <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/123702-intervyu-s-islamovedom-taufikom-ibragimom>, accessed 25 September 2019. The word 'Jadidists' is a mangled form of the word 'jadid' (Arab. – new). This term is used to refer to the supporters of reforms in the field of religious education as well as the social-political sphere. Based on the etymology of the word 'jadid', participants of this movement are also often called 'obnovlentsy' (renovationists) in Russian.

14 Mukhetdinov D.V., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)* (Moscow: Medina, 2016).

15 "'Koranity' protiv 'koranitov'. K V medzhlisu Soveta muftiev Rossii" ["'Qur'anites' against 'Qur'anites'. For the 5<sup>th</sup> majlis of the Council of Muftis of Russia"], <http://www.islam.ru/content/analitics/51743>, accessed 25 September 2019.

16 Mukhetdinov D., *Russian Muslim culture: the traditions of the Ummah within the sphere of Eurasian civilization* (Moscow: Medina, 2016); Mukhetdinov D.V., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)* (Moscow: Medina, 2016); Mukhetdinov D.V., "Obnovlencheskoye dvizheniye v Indonezii: zhizn' i uchenie Nurkholisa Madzhida" ["The renovationist movement in Indonesia: the life and teachings of Nurcholish Madjid"], *Islam v sovremennom mire [Islam in the modern world]*, 13-3 (2017), p. 47-66; Mukhetdinov D.V., "Filosofiya Ismaila Radzhi al-Faruki: v poiskakh neomodernizma" ["Philosophy of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi: in search of neomodernism"], *Islam v sovremennom mire [Islam in the modern world]*, 14-2 (2018), p. 165-181, etc.



*Islam in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: a programme for renewal (Collection of papers)* gives a general overview of the problems addressed in publications by other religious figures, like Rustam Batrov (Batyr) and Arslan Sadriev, who make reformist statements in the press on the fundamentals of the Muslim religion, though Mukhetdinov's statements are not couched as radically as theirs.

It is worth noting that some of the people called 'Qur'anites' view the term positively, saying that any Muslim is Qur'anite by definition and that there is nothing offensive in the word.<sup>17</sup> Renovatoinists also frequently deploy the notion of Qur'ano-centrism in describing their own views.<sup>18</sup> The term is almost never used in the works of either the supporters or the opponents of Islamic renovation, however.<sup>19</sup>

In the present author's opinion, using the term 'Qur'anites' for the group of Russian Islamic religious and public figures<sup>20</sup> promoting a critical approach to the authenticity of *hadiths* is incorrect for the following reasons:

- 1) In modern Islam, the word 'Qur'anites' refers to a very definite movement that completely rejects the Sunnah as a source of Islamic creed.<sup>21</sup> Russian 'Qur'anites' do not put forward such radical ideas. They only advocate a limited use of the Sunnah. According to T. Ibrahim, renovationists can, on the criterion of their attitude to the Sunnah, be divided into those who "deny its authenticity" (Qur'anites) and those who advocate "a more critical approach to *hadiths*

17 Poleyve materialy avtora. Interv'y u s Arslanom Sadrievym, 04.08.2018 [Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with Arslan Sadriev, 04.08.2018].

18 E.g., "the renovationist movement is in principle Qur'anocentric" (Mukhetdinov D.V., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 49).

19 The only probable exceptions are the op-ed pieces by Batrov (Batyr) published in the news website *Business Online*. For example, "And that is why the interminable struggle inside Islam between Qur'ano-centrists and Haditho-centrists, now manifest in the text of the *fatwa* as well, does not merely consist of theoretical discussions of unrelated matters but is essentially a struggle for the future of our country and the whole Muslim world" (Batyr R., "Sovet muftiyev Rossii ob'yavil hadisyy vinovnymi v degradatsii islama" ["The Council of Muftis of Russia to declare the *hadiths* guilty of the deterioration of Islam"], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/375729>, accessed 25 September 2019).

20 In polemical pieces against the so-called 'Qur'anites', the term 'near-religious figures' (*okoloreligioznye deyateli*) is sometimes used, (see e.g., "Dzhadidity ili koranity?" ["Jadidites or Qur'anites?"], <http://www.ansar.ru/rightway/dzhadidity-ili-koranity>, accessed 25 September 2019). Nor do they reveal who exactly they mean by the term. Mufti R. Gaynutdin said in a speech at the 5<sup>th</sup> congress of the Council of Muftis of Russia, "We decidedly do not accept the attempts of certain modern near-Islamic figures to reject the Sunnah as the second source, after the Qur'an, of Muslim theology and religious law" ("Vystupleniye muftiya sheykha Ravilya Gaynutdina na V syezde SMR", <http://islamdumpsb.ru/blog/vystuplenie-muftiya-shejha-ravilya-gajnutdina-na-v-sezde-smr>, accessed 25 September 2019). Once again the names of these supposed 'near-Islamic figures' were not revealed.

21 For more information on the Qur'anites, see, for example, Musa A.Y., "The Qur'anists", *Religion Compass*, 4(1) (2010), p. 12–21.



with regard to establishing their authenticity.”<sup>22</sup> He classifies himself and his supporters as belonging to the second category.<sup>23</sup>

- 2) There is no information on relations between Russian supporters of renovation in Islam and representatives of the Qur’anite movement.
- 3) All those called ‘Qur’anites’ in Russia identify themselves differently.<sup>24</sup>

In the present author’s view, the most suitable term for describing the supporters of reforms and renewal is ‘renovationists’. Firstly, it is broader in meaning than ‘modernists’ or ‘*Jadidists*’, which have certain connotations. The term ‘renovationism’ implies a broader range of possible interpretations. It is hardly by chance that Ravil Gaynutdin, the chairman of DUM RF and D. Mukhetdinov’s immediate superior, has been called by the latter “a leading representative of the renovationist movement in modern Russia.”<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, renovationism is etymologically related to *Jadidism*. Finally, ‘renovationist’ is also often used as an endonym by those called ‘Qur’anites’ in opinion pieces.

With certain reservations, it would be acceptable to refer to the so-called ‘Qur’anites’ by a term common in Muslim theology, *Ahl al-Qur’an*. In that case, one would have to use the term *Ahl al-Hadith* to refer to their opponents, which is not quite accurate as a description of the ideological attitudes of those usually termed traditionalists or conservatives in this polemic. They prefer to refer to themselves as Sunni Muslims and followers of *Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah*, or less often as ‘traditionalists’. There have also been attempts to present them as Qadimists<sup>26</sup>, with reference to the second term of the ‘Jadidist – Qadimist’ dichotomy, but without great success. In

22 Ibrahim T., “Mezhdru proshlym i budushchim: zamechaniya ob obnovencheskom dvizhenii v islame” [“Between the past and the future: notes on the renovationist movement in Islam”], *Bigiyevskiy chteniya: bogoslovskaya mysl’ rossiyskikh musul’man 19 – nachala 20 vv. [Readings from Bigiev: theological thought of Russian Muslims of the 19th – early 20th centuries]*, D.V. Mukhetdinov (ed.), (Moscow: Medina, 2015), p. 7.

23 Ibrahim T., when speaking of the *hadiths* he recognizes, uses the term ‘authentic Sunnah’ (Ibrahim T., *Koranicheskiy gumanizm. Tolerantno-plyuralisticheskiye ustanovki [Qur’anic humanism. Non-judgmental and pluralist attitudes]* (Moscow: Medina, 2015), p. 481). The same term is frequently used by D. Mukhetdinov, although he does not reveal what method he uses to separate the authentic *hadiths* from the inauthentic ones.

24 The latter argument is not definitive and only makes sense in combination with the other two.

25 It is noteworthy that a similar characteristic of R. Gaynutdin is contained only in the Russian version of Mukhetdinov’s book (Mukhetdinov D., *Islam v 21 veke: programma obnoveniya [Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)]*, p. 186). At the same time, Gaynutdin is not mentioned in connection with the renovationist movement in the English translation of Mukhetdinov’s book.

26 Qadimists are representatives of the conservative ideological, political, and religious movement among Muslims of Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



any case, as noted above, the term 'Jadidist' has not gained wide currency in referring to the supporters of renovation in modern Russian Islam. Moreover, like 'Jadidist', 'Qadimist' has a particular historical meaning and cannot be automatically transferred to the realia of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>27</sup>

The traditionalists are also sometimes called '*hadisidy*' ('*Hadithites*') by their opponents.<sup>28</sup> This is a calque from the word '*kuranity*' ('*Qur'anites*') but, unlike its model, has not gained wide currency.

It may be considered acceptable to refer to the traditionalist approach to the Sunnah as haditho-centric, but the derivative noun 'hadisotsentristry' ('*Haditho-centrists*') is not used and is unlikely to catch on.

The traditionalists do not have a single ideological leader. The mufti of the Saratov oblast' and chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Volga Region, Muqaddas Bibarsov, was one of the initiators of the *fatwa* "Concerning the Qur'anites", however.<sup>29</sup>

We will later return to the text of this *fatwa* as the key document in the polemic in question. For the moment, it should be noted that, except for the sub-heading added by one of its authors, Shamil Alyautdinov, the text of the *fatwa* contains no mention of Qur'anites. Nor is there any mention of who the proponents of the ideas the *fatwa* is supposed to condemn are either.

This seems to be intentional and there may be several reasons for it. One of the more obvious ones is that the authors themselves did not intend to refer to a *fatwa* issued by the so-called 'Qur'anite' group. This is indirectly alluded to in a comment by Shamil Alyautdinov:

I have never really encountered them myself, but there is this movement called 'Qur'anites'... I have never really been interested in researching them and I don't normally get into the specifics of such things, but the problem exists. I have heard here and there that they are ostensibly called 'Qur'anites'.<sup>30</sup>

27 Poleyve materialy avtora. Interv'y u s Nailem Garipovym, 29.05.2018 [Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with Nail Garipov, 29.05.2018].

28 Batrov R., "Imenno hadisidy priveli islamskiy mir k zastoyu" ["It is the Hadithites that brought the Islamic world to stagnation"], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/359262>, accessed 25 September 2019.

29 The full text of the petition to mufti Ravil Gaynutdin as the chairman of SMR and DUM RF and Shamil Alyautdinov as the chairman of the Council of '*ulama*' of the aforementioned two muftiates can be found here: "Musul'mane protiv sekty 'koranitov'" ["Muslims against the 'Qur'anites' sect"], <http://ansar.ru/person/obrashhenie-muftiev-i-imamov>, accessed 25 September 2019. Another prominent critic of the 'Qur'anites' is the mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Asian Part of Russia (DUM AChR) Nafigulla Ashirov.

30 Alyautdinov Sh., "Fetva o vazhnosti Sunny" ["Fatwa concerning the importance of the Sunnah"], <https://umma.ru/fetva-o-vazhnosti-sunny/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



Even though opinion pieces on Islamic websites often do label individuals ‘Qur’anites’,<sup>31</sup> there is no trustworthy evidence to prove that anything like a unified organisation (with either a horizontal or vertical system of management) exists or that they coordinate their actions. Certainly, the renovatoinists themselves, while acknowledging their similar views on a whole range of problems affecting the Russian Muslim community, continue to deny “coordinating their positions.”<sup>32</sup>

While they share a platform that boils down to the need to re-evaluate the role of the Sunnah in the lives of Muslims, renovatoinists couch their ideological creed in a variety of ways. For instance, Mukhetdinov positions himself as a supporter of reforms.<sup>33</sup> Arslan Sadriev, by contrast, claims to be a true traditionalist who is only calling for the Qur’an to be understood in terms of the meaning Allah put into it.<sup>34</sup> The views expressed by Sadriev in his famous interview to the news website Business Online show otherwise, however, namely that he adheres to extreme reformist opinions regarding the dogmatic side of the Muslim religion.<sup>35</sup> Another renovatoinist, Rustam Batrov, claims to be against reform and one

31 The lists of ‘Qur’anites’ tend to include four significant figures: professor T. Ibrahim, the columnist R. Batrov (Batyr), imam-khatib of the mosque in Sergiyev Posad A. Sadriev and (with some reservations) deputy chairman of DUM RF D. Mukhetdinov. Batrov and Mukhetdinov are strongly supported by Tatarstan scholar Aydar Khayrutdinov in his opinion columns and academic papers (see, e.g. Khayrutdinov A., “Ne nado rugat’ bol’shevikov, chto oni unichtozhili religiyu, duh islama unichtozhili ranshe” [“Do not berate the Bolsheviks for destroying religion, the spirit of Islam was destroyed earlier than that...”, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/339572>, accessed 25 September 2019]). There is also a group of young clerics who do not share the radical attitudes of Batrov and Sadriev but are sympathetic to the idea of renovation of Islam. A significant number of them work in the structure of DUM RF.

32 “R. Batrov would often approach me when he worked as the editor of *Minaret* magazine, where I published my pieces on an almost regular basis. And D. Mukhetdinov also approaches me on mostly the same grounds, as both an editor and a publisher, especially since I am a member of the editorial boards of a number of magazines and periodicals that he publishes. Like many others, they often approach me asking for ‘technical’ advice, like where to find a certain utterance, how to translate a certain term into Russian properly, etc. But we never coordinate our positions regarding our publications or public presentations. The general theoretical and methodological platform for reforming the Muslim thought is well-known – it was established as early as in the last century, including the works of many Russian Jadidists, and each person is trying to implement it to the best of their ability and at their own discretion.” “Tawfiq Ibrahim: “V Rossii, k sozhaleniyu, musul’mane do diskussii eshche ne dorosli” [“Tawfiq Ibrahim: “Unfortunately, Russian Muslims have not yet reached the level of being able to hold a discussion”], <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/123702-intervyu-s-islamovedom-taufikom-ibragimom>, accessed 25 September 2019.

33 Mukhetdinov D., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 135.

34 Polevye materialy avtora. Interv’y u s A. Sadrievym, 04.08.2018 [Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with A. Sadriev, 04.08.2018].

35 “Arslan Sadriev: “Za veka bytovaniya islama namaz iz sredstva prevratilsya v tsel” [“Arslan Sadriev: For centuries of Islam’s existence the prayer became a goal rather than a means”], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/348407>, accessed 25 September 2019.





of his books is even titled, *Vmesto reformy* [Instead of reform].<sup>36</sup> In it, he suggests that, instead of reforming Islam, Muslims should interpret the existing tenets of the Qur'an and the Sunnah correctly. But the revolutionary (in the radical nature of its slogans) interpretation of the Holy Book and *hadiths* that Batrov calls for is essentially a call for reform of the dogmatic aspect of Islam.

Even without evidence of a unified organisation of renovationists in Russia, there is no denying that the social and religious figures who advocate the renovation of Islam at very least facilitate each other's promotion, both inside and outside the spiritual administration system.<sup>37</sup> For example, Mukhetdinov holds the position of deputy chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF), one of the major muftiates in Russia, and has regularly invited T. Ibrahim, R. Batrov and A. Sadriev to events he has been involved in organising, as well as providing them with an outlet through the periodicals he controls.

Of the three leading renovationists employed within the muftiate system, only Sadriev has been disciplined for his views. He was dismissed in June of 2017 (more than half a year before the *fatwa* was issued), after the interview with him was published in the news website *Business Online*. In the interview, Sadriev publicly questioned the requirements to pray five times a day at the prescribed times, to fast all thirty days of Ramadan, etc.<sup>38</sup> The interview was taken by Rustam Batrov.

According to an official statement on the DUM RF website, Ravil Gaynutdin revoked Sadriev's "ecclesiastical capacity (*duhovnyi san*) and removed him from the positions of *imam-muhtasib* of the Moscow oblast' and *imam-khatib* of the Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of the Sergiyev-Posadsky district."<sup>39</sup> De facto, Sadriev has remained leader of the Muslim community in Sergiyev Posad. The only thing that has changed

36 Batyr R., *Vmesto reformy* [Instead of reform] (Nizhny Novgorod-Yaroslavl: Medina, 2007).

37 For more details on how Mukhetdinov promotes Batrov see "Sovet muftiyev Rossii: mezhdunarodnyy i budushchiny" ["The Council of Muftis of Russia: between the past and the future"], <https://goloslama.com/news.php?id=32993>, accessed 25 September 2019.

38 The edict of mufti Gaynutdin on Sadriev's dismissal contained the following: "For assault on and corruption of the true values of Islam, for arbitrary and incompetent interpretation of *fiqh* (Islamic law), for misrepresentation of the teachings of the religious-legal schools-*madhabs*, which were created by great imams on the basis of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, for an attempt to create a schism between Muslims, for distributing obvious heresy." "Muftiy sheykh Ravil Gaynutdin lishil duhovnogo sana Arslana Sadriyeva" ["Mufti sheikh Ravil Gaynutdin revokes Arslan Sadriev's ecclesiastical capacity"], <http://dumrf.ru/common/event/12483>, accessed 25 September 2019).

39 "Muftiy sheykh Ravil Gaynutdin lishil duhovnogo sana Arslana Sadriyeva" ["Mufti sheikh Ravil Gaynutdin revokes Arslan Sadriev's ecclesiastical capacity"], <http://dumrf.ru/common/event/12483>, accessed 25 September 2019.



is that his 'parish' (community) is no longer part of the DUM RF structure.

It is worth noting that Sadriev never disguised his views and stated them very openly long before his dismissal, at least privately.<sup>40</sup> The occasion for his scandalous dismissal was apparently that he did so publicly in a popular periodical.<sup>41</sup>

To sum up, renovationism in modern Russian Islam is represented by religious figures who have held or still hold administrative positions in federal and regional muftiates. Their scholarly authority is professor Tawfiq Ibrahim, a secular academic who advocates a critical approach to the Sunnah in his publications and calls for the Qur'an to be prioritised in tackling theological or legal problems. There does not appear to be an Islamic renovationist organisation with a unified structure and a single ideology in Russia. Even though they accept Ibrahim's authority, other prominent representatives of renovationism in Russian Islam do not coordinate publications with him or with each other but do promote each other in the media and on various public platforms. As for ties with representatives of reform-oriented religious figures abroad, we know nothing for certain. Statements by renovationists that the renovationist movement in Russia is part of an international renovationist movement<sup>42</sup> look more like declarations of intention and attempts to bolster their own validity in the minds of Russian Muslims.<sup>43</sup>

40 The author of this article recalls a conversation with A. Sadriev in the middle of the 2000s in the muftiate building in Moscow. Back then Sadriev came up with ideas that were in discord with the rules of *zakat* widely accepted in Sunni *madhabs*.

41 "Rafik Mukhametshin: "Esli u religioznogo deyatela inye predstavleniya, to on neordinarnymi ideyami vnosit smutu" ["Rafik Mukhametshin: If a religious figure has different beliefs, he is driving a wedge into the community with his unorthodox ideas"], <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/69883-intervyu-s-rafikom-muhametshinym>, accessed 25 September 2019.

42 "Tawfiq Ibrahim: "V Rossii, k sozhaleniyu, musul'mane do diskussii eshche ne dorosli" ["Tawfiq Ibrahim: "Unfortunately, Russian Muslims have not yet reached the level of being able to hold a discussion"], <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/123702-intervyu-s-islamovedom-taufikom-ibragimom>, accessed 25 September 2019.

43 See, for instance, the series of Mukhetdinov's publications in *Islam v sovremennom mire* [Islam in the modern world], a magazine where he promotes the views of various representatives of the Islamic renovationist movement and modernism (Mukhetdinov D.V., "Obnovlencheskoye dvizheniye v Indonezii: zhizn' i uchenie Nurkholisa Madzhida" ["Renovationist movement in Indonesia: the life and teachings of Nurcholish Madjid"], *Islam v sovremennom mire* [Islam in the modern world], 13-3 (2017), p. 47-66; Mukhetdinov D.V., "Filosofiya Ismaila Radzhi al-Faruki: v poiskah neomodernizma" ["Philosophy of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi: in search of neomodernism"], *Islam v sovremennom mire* [Islam in the modern world], 14-2 (2018), p. 165-181, etc.).



## ‘QUR’ANIC HUMANISM’ AND MUSLIM RENOVATIONISM

On publication, the *fatwa* ‘Concerning the Qur’anites’ was subjected to a devastating or, perhaps more exactly, denigratory critique in news website *Business Online* by Rustam Batrov. One of his main conclusions was that it showed the intellectual bankruptcy of the Council of ‘*ulama*’ of DUM RF and SMR. According to Batrov, while aiming to denounce the views of ‘deniers of the Sunnah,’ the *fatwa*’s authors had actually arrived at conclusions quite the opposite of what they had intended.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, those usually called ‘traditionalists’ have not proven capable of offering any serious theological or legal analysis of the texts published by renovationists beyond a few opinion pieces in Islamic websites.<sup>45</sup> The only document that even attempts to consider their views from a theological and legal point of view was the *fatwa*. But, as pointed out above, even it contains no criticisms of renovationists’ (Qur’anites’) views. In fact, both the *fatwa* and the other publications boil down to stating a universally accepted idea, which the so-called ‘Qur’anites’ in no way contest, namely that the Sunnah is an important source of Islamic belief doubting which is evidence of infidelity.<sup>46</sup>

In his publications devoted to criticising the *fatwa*, Batrov shows convincingly that theological Islamic thought in modern Russia is in serious crisis.<sup>47</sup> Batrov is, of course, referring to his opponents – those he calls

44 Batyr R., “Sovet muftiyev Rossii obyavil hadisy vinovnymi v degradatsii islama” [“The Council of Muftis of Russia to declare the hadiths guilty of the deterioration of Islam”], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/375729>, accessed 25 September 2019. Compare, “Of particular significance is the fact that in order to refute the ‘deniers of the Sunnah,’ people usually quote reputable theologians who associate the deterioration of the Islamic world precisely with departure from the Qur’an as a result of overindulgence of the *hadiths*! It turns out that the people who voted for the text of the *fatwa* either have not read it or do not understand what it says – let them choose for themselves which justification is more to their liking.” (“Tawfiq Ibrahim, “V Rossii, k sozhaleniyu, musul’mane do diskussii eshche ne dorosli” [“Tawfiq Ibrahim: “Unfortunately, Russian Muslims have not yet reached the level of being able to hold a discussion”]. <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/123702-intervyu-s-islamovedom-taufikom-ibragimom>, accessed 25 September 2019.)

45 One of the few attempts to give a theological answer to the so-called ‘Qur’anites’ without supplying names was in a publication by imam Ishmurat Khaybullin “Lzhekoranity – pyataya kolonna v Islame” [“Faux-Qur’anites – the fifth column of Islam”], <http://www.ansar.ru/person/lzhekoranity-pyataya-kolonna-v-islame>, accessed 25 September 2019. This text does not hold up against serious criticism, however.

46 “Fetva DUM RF “O koranitah”. *Bogoslovskoye zaklyuchenie № 6/18* [Fatwa of DUM RF “Concerning the Qur’anites”. Theological statement No 6/8], <https://umma.ru/fetva-dum-rf-o-koranitah/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

47 Batyr R., “Pochemu Sovet ulemov SMR – polnye bankroty...” [“Why the Council of ‘ulama’ of SMR are complete failures”], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/373726>, accessed 25 September 2019; Batyr R., “Sovet muftiyev Rossii obyavil hadisy vinovnymi v degradatsii islama” [“The Council of Muftis of Russia to declare the hadiths guilty of the deterioration of Islam”], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/375729>, accessed 25 September 2019.



*Hadithites* or *Haditho-centrists*. His remark is just as true of the renovationists as of the traditionalists, however.

On the face of it, representatives of renovationism in Russian Islam have produced an extensive corpus of publications. Despite their productivity in print and online, however, their pieces mostly replicate the ideas of other foreign and Russian authors.

Their pieces are academic in form but often basically ideology-driven opinion journalism in content, where Qur'anic quotation serves less to support understanding and interpreting social realities or for a theological and legal analysis than to back up the author's point of view. For instance, Mukhetdinov writes:

It might seem that I am putting ethnicity above Islam, but this is not the case. The solution stated in the first position, according to which Islam is above ethnicity and that belonging to the ummah is the most important element, is *wholly supported by the Qur'an* (emphasis mine. – R.B.). It was said to the followers of the Prophet: "You are the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah." (3:110).<sup>48</sup>

In other words, the author expresses an opinion and then comes up with some corroboration of it from the Qur'an. This is similar to what Soviet doctrinaires did, searching for suitable quotes from the classic works of Marxism-Leninism for any possible occasion. Islamic theologians take the Qur'an as a point of departure and, interpreting the provisions of the Holy Book, look for answers to questions that arise rather than enunciating a ready-made solution.

The only work by Mukhetdinov that can lay claim on a technical basis to being theological is his brochure *Koran kak podtverzhdeniye i prodolzheniye missii vseh prorokov i poslannikov* [*The Qur'an as confirmation and continuation of the missions of all the prophets and messengers*].<sup>49</sup> This brochure is, however, essentially a compilation.

Arslan Sadriev and Rustam Batrov have not produced theological works either.<sup>50</sup> Like Mukhetdinov, both prefer to hold positions as re-

48 Mukhetdinov D., *Russian Muslim culture: the traditions of the Ummah within the sphere of Eurasian civilization* (Moscow: Medina, 2016), p. 29.

49 Mukhetdinov D.V., *Koran kak podtverzhdeniye i prodolzheniye missii vseh prorokov i poslannikov* [The Qur'an as confirmation and continuation of missions of all prophets and messengers] (Moscow; Nizhny Novgorod: Medina, 2013).

50 The book *Vmesto reformy* [Instead of reform] is more an example of competent Islamic opinion journalism rather than a theological work. The author himself describes the texts in the book as feature articles (Baty R., *Vmesto reformy. Sb. statey* [Instead of reform. A collection of articles] (Nizhny Novgorod–Yaroslavl: Medina, 2007), <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/theology/?937>, accessed 25 September 2019).



search associates in academic institutions to the status of independent theologian. Both these religious figures cooperated with the Centre of Islamic Studies, which is affiliated with the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan.<sup>51</sup>

Probably the most interesting work by an Islamic renovationist in Russian is Batrov's book *Abu Hanifa: His life and legacy*,<sup>52</sup> as well as a number of articles by him on this outstanding Muslim theologian.<sup>53</sup>

If Tawfiq Ibrahim was attempting to cleanse the Sunnah of the Prophet of several centuries of accretion, Batrov set himself a similar task regarding Abu Hanifa's legacy, trying to reconstruct Abu Hanifa's authentic theological-legal school and counterpose it to the Hanafi *madhab*, as the product of later interpretations of the theologian's views:

...the Hanafi *madhab* and the *madhab* of Abu Hanifa are far from being identical... Speaking briefly, Abu Hanifa's *madhab* (teaching, literally 'way') is how the great Islamic theologian systematised the Islamic legacy of our Prophet, and, one must suppose, he did it in a manner very precisely for his time.

The Hanafi *madhab* is a medieval interpretation of this teaching. It is what Abu Hanifa's disciples and followers have turned his teaching into.<sup>54</sup>

Despite its rather original views on Islamic creedal issues, the monograph nonetheless holds a borderline position between academic research and theology.<sup>55</sup>

51 The Centre of Islamic Research affiliated to the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan is a special-purpose expert centre that mostly conducts restricted-access expert evaluation on Islamic issues for the President and the government of Tatarstan.

52 Batyr R., *Abu Hanifa: zhizn' i nasledie* [*Abu Hanifa: his life and legacy*]. (Nizhnyi Novgorod-Yaroslavl: Medina, 2007), p. 1.

53 Batyr R., "Trend, zadannyi Abu Yusufom hanafizmu, okazalsya v srednevekovye dominiruyushchim" ["The trend set by Abu Yusuf for the Hanafi school became the dominant one in the Middle Ages"], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/338899>, accessed 25 September 2019; Batyr R., "Uchenie Abu Hanify popalo v DUM RT pod neglasnyi zapret?" ["Abu Hanifa's teachings under an unofficial ban in DUM RT?"], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/338218>, accessed 25 September 2019, etc.

54 Batyr R., "Uchenie Abu Hanify popalo v DUM RT pod neglasnyi zapret?" ["Abu Hanifa's teachings under an unofficial ban in DUM RT?"], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/338218>, accessed 25 September 2019.

55 Russian historian I.L. Alexeev effectively describes this book as a blend of "a theological and didactic treatise and a historical study" (Alexeev I.L., "Review of the book: Rustam Batyr. Abu Hanifa: zhizn' i nasledie [Abu Hanifa: life and legacy]" (Nizhnyi Novgorod-Yaroslavl: Medina, 2007). 288p., *Pax Islamica*, 1 (2018), <http://islamoved.ru/2008/retsenziya-na-knigu-rustam-batyr-abu-hanifa-zhizn-i-nasledie/>, accessed 25 September 2019). According to Alexeev, Batrov "is starting a completely new genre in Russian Muslim literature. This genre could be defined as a popular academic historical and theological study" (Alexeev I.L., *Op. cit.*).



Such attempts by Russian renovatoinists to put forward their own theories on the fundamental provisions of Islam and the place of Islam in Russian civilisation cannot be deemed successful. In some cases, they have ended in clear failure, as was, for instance, the case with Mukhetdinov's concept of 'Russian Muslimism (*Musul'manstvo*)', which has been rightly criticised for intellectual impotence even by scholars close to him.<sup>56</sup>

Nor have attempts to enunciate a theoretical and methodological basis for the renovatoinist movement always proved successful. In *Islam in the 21st century: a programme for renewal*, Mukhetdinov states:

... there is another, renovatoinist project for solving the problems of modernization. This consists in the renewal of Islamic civilization. The tendency towards renewal was expressed in a number of tendencies that have been called "reformist". To distinguish the renovatoinist approach from the narrow archaizing approach, we can call the former *intellectual Salafism*. In essence, it tries to separate the substantive from the secondary and external; thus the renovatoinist movement is in principle *Qur'ano-centric*. It also grows out of tradition, from the traditional thesis of *ijtihad* that posits a dynamic development of the *fiqh* and theological thought, but at the same time it seeks to transcend the classical tradition as not conforming to the social conditions of modernity. The representatives of this tendency are convinced that the actual principles of the tradition are in need of reexamination through a reliance on the humanistic and pluralistic potential of the Qur'an. They consider that one needs to check the facts of tradition on the basis of their agreement with the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah, that one needs to carry out a deconstruction of the tradition, and that this is a real alternative to the tendency which has been put into practice by the archaizing model.<sup>57</sup>

It is quite difficult to determine the creed of Islamic renovatoinism in Russia and get any idea of the phenomenon from this extensive quote. Various questions arise immediately, and *Islam in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* does not answer most of them: What does "go beyond the classical tradition" mean? What is tradition? What is the difference between the classical and the non-classical tradition? How to revise the principles of the tradition? In order to revise anything one first needs to enunciate what the Islamic tradition is and what the methodology used by traditionalist theologians is, as well as to demonstrate in specific context what advantages the renovatoinist approach offers. Finally, what is the point of renovatoinism, other than deconstructing tradition?

56 For more on this see, Bekkin R.I., "Russkoye evraziystvo i islam" ["Russian Eurasianism and Islam"], *Zvezda*, 11 (2017), p. 135-148.

57 Mukhetdinov D.V., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 49-50.



A pivotal matter for understanding Muslim renovationists in Russia and their ideas is the so-called 'authentic Sunnah'. Mukhetdinov borrowed this expression from Tawfiq Ibrahim, but neither author suggests any original method that would allow us to distinguish authentic *hadiths* infallibly from inauthentic ones.<sup>58</sup> Ibrahim's book *On the way to Qur'anic tolerance*, quoted above, states that the authentic Sunnah "is unlikely to contain any *hadiths* with extra-Qur'anic information about the creation of the world, angels and demons, the lives of pre-Islamic prophets, the Judgement Day, Heaven and Hell."<sup>59</sup> According to Ibrahim, "acknowledging the divine origin of such information contradicts the idea of self-sufficiency of the Qur'an, its completeness and the perfection that is repeatedly emphasised by the Scripture itself."<sup>60</sup> The researcher is here deploying formal logic as his method of elimination rather than the tools of a Islamic legal theorist, however.

Ibrahim's influence on the renovationists is most clearly manifest in his concept of 'Qur'anic humanism'. In *Islam in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: a programme for renewal*, Mukhetdinov also says that the renovation project of Russian Muslims has been termed 'Qur'anic humanism',<sup>61</sup> a term he borrows from the eponymous book by Tawfiq Ibrahim,<sup>62</sup> itself a reissue of the same author's *On the way to Qur'anic tolerance*, in which he used the term 'Qur'anic/Prophetic humanism', without, however, providing any definition of it. Based on the general idea of this work, Qur'anic humanism is presented as a sort of tolerant model of Islam, with a reformed system of *fiqh* (mainly in the sphere of criminal legislation). In other words, it brings us back to the ideas of Mahmoud Taha and his followers. A fundamental element of the concept of Qur'anic humanism is the theory of the all-inclusiveness of Divine Mercy, first enunciated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Tatar theologian Musa Bigiev (Bigiev) (1873–1949),<sup>63</sup>

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58 The following lines from Batrov's book *Instead of reform* can hardly be considered satisfactory in that regard: "Today Muslims need a methodology that unveils the true spirituality and beauty of the Holy Qur'an, the melody of its timeless sound. And we already have that methodology. It is the Qur'an itself." (Batyr R., *Vmesto reformy. Sb. statey [Instead of reform. A collection of articles]*. (Nizhniy Novgorod–Yaroslavl: Medina, 2007), <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/theology/?937>, accessed 25 September 2019).

59 Ibrahim T., *Na puti k koranicheskoy tolerantnosti [On the way to Qur'anic tolerance]*, p. 155.

60 Ibrahim T., *Na puti k koranicheskoy tolerantnosti*.

61 Mukhetdinov D., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 135.

62 A distinctive feature of Mukhetdinov's publications is an almost complete absence of links to sources and literature in Arabic. Even the Qur'an is quoted in its Russian translation by Elmir Kuliev.

63 Bigiev M., "Dokazatel'stva bozhestvennogo miloserdiya" ["Proof of Divine Mercy"], in Bigiev M., *Izbrannye trudy. V dvuh tomah [Selected works. In two volumes]* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2005), vol. I, p. 77-130.



who believed that all people, regardless of their faith, would go to Heaven.<sup>64</sup>

According to Mukhetdinov, Qur'anic humanism is based on the following principles: methodical struggle against blind *taqlid*, haditho-centricity, and distrust of reason, exclusivism and internal isolation.<sup>65</sup> Further clarifications made in the book provide an interpretation of what the author means by these terms. Not even the briefest theological and legal analysis of the phenomena criticised by the author (*taqlid*, haditho-centrism, etc.) is to be found in Mukhetdinov's work, however. Instead, absent theological and legal explanation, the ideas he expresses sound like glib slogans or mere figures of speech. For example, the paragraph on *taqlid* states:

A Muslim can only have one authority that they should trust unconditionally, and that is Allah. The Word of God, which, as is known, is an attribute of Allah, is eternal and uncreated, and that is why it is the permanent Truth, which is relevant for all time. If conclusions made by respected *faqih*s or theologians diverge from the Word of God, then precedence must be given to the Qur'an, whatever intricate and elaborate streams of thought they come up with to back up these conclusions.<sup>66</sup>

The adamant contraposition of tradition and reason does not hold water either, as may be proved by any handbook on logic:

Tradition should only be contrasted to reason, while taking into consideration that reason is not an inherent factor that serves as impartial and infallible judge. Reason has developed historically, and rationality can be seen as one of the possible traditions.<sup>67</sup>

We also see that Mukhetdinov clearly simplifies the notion of *taqlid*, reducing it to rudimentary apologetics. Were one to attempt to develop this

64 For more on Bigeev's theory of the all-inclusiveness of Divine Mercy, see Khayrutdinov A., "O znachenii podnyatogo Musoy Bigiyevym voprosa o vseokhvatnosti Bozhestvennogo miloserdia" ["On the significance of the question of all-inclusiveness of the Divine Mercy raised by Musa Bigiev"], <http://idmedina.ru/books/materials/?3712>, accessed 25 September 2019. It should be mentioned that Bigeev is one of the most respected theologians among the Islamic renovatoinists of Russia. His works have been translated and published in Russian under the patronage of Mukhetdinov. St. Petersburg hosted the academic and theological conference "Readings from Bigiev". Other authors whom renovatoinists consider their ideological precursors include A. Qursawi, R. Fakhretdin, I. Gasprinskiy (Gaspirali), etc.

65 Mukhetdinov D., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 8.

66 Mukhetdinov D., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 21. In his early works Rustam Batrov contraposes the Qur'an as "a door opening the way to the eternal Truth of God" to Sunnah, relating to the "historical legacy of Islam". (Baty R., *Vmesto reformy. Sb. statey [Instead of reform. A collection of articles]* (Nizhniy Novgorod-Yaroslavl: Medina, 2007), <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/theology/?950>, accessed 25 September 2019).

67 Ivin A.A., Nikiforov A.L., *Slovar' po logike* (Moscow: Vldos, 1997), p. 31.





idea of authority in Islam, its logical continuation would be rejection of *madhabs*. But the author does not quite go there – at least in his public speeches and opinion pieces.

Another thing that must be raised is Mukhetdinov's caution in promoting his ideas. On the one hand, he throws out glib slogans, but on the other he does not follow his train of thought to its logical conclusions, leaving it to his readers or listeners (the book in question consists of public speeches) to develop his ideas for themselves. This tactic certainly pays off: during discussion on the 'Qur'anites' on Islamic websites, Mukhetdinov was not one of the group accused of 'Qur'anism', only of the group suspected of it.<sup>68</sup> This is the difference between Mukhetdinov's publications and pieces by Batrov and Sadriev, which not only raise poignant questions but give no less poignant answers.

It is probably this caution that explains, at least in part, the nature of many of Mukhetdinov's pieces. He draws attention to his subject, without explicitly setting the record straight. This allows him, given his senior position in the muftiate system, to avoid being cast as a holder of extreme opinions in the eyes of believers. The example of Sadriev's dismissal shows that radical statements about the foundations of Islam, if made publicly, can cost one one's job. Even Mukhetdinov has repeatedly found himself in situations where he has had to disavow words that reflect his views on several aspects of Muslim religious life. This happened during an incident regarding the banning of Muslim headscarves in one of the Russian regions, Mordovia. In an interview with the news website *Lenta.ru*, responding to the journalist's question about his view of a claim by the Minister of Education that "a true believer does not need any external emblems of their faith," Mukhetdinov said, among other things:

From a philosophical point of view I share her opinion, and the issue of hijabs is generally open to debate. Even from a theological point of view there is a school of thought that holds that wearing hijab is not so strict a requirement as is commonly thought in Muslim communities.<sup>69</sup>

Later, given rising indignation in the media,<sup>70</sup> Mukhetdinov had to disa-

68 "Sovet muftiyev Rossii nazval 'koranitov' sektoy" ["The Council of Muftis of Russia has called the 'Qur'anites' a sect"], <http://www.ansar.ru/sobcor/sovet-muftiev-rossii-nazval-koranitov-sektoj>, accessed 25 September 2019.

69 "Ramzan Kadyrov vse obyasn timerazoy" ["Ramzan Kadyrov explained everything with just one phrase"], <https://lenta.ru/articles/2017/01/27/hijab/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

70 Ikramutdin Khan, "Zachem Mukhetdinov meshayet Kadyrovu zashchishchat' hidzhab?" ["Why does Mukhetdinov stand in the way of Kadyrov defending hijab?"], <https://golosis->



vow his unequivocal words and state that he had been misunderstood.<sup>71</sup>

That even Islamic religious figures have not quite understood Mukhetdinov's *aqidah* was demonstrated at the congress of the Council of Muftis of Russia in late 2017, when an attempt was made to condemn the Qur'anites. Co-chairman of SMR Muqaddas Bibarsov appealed directly to Mukhetdinov, asking him to give a clear answer as to whether he was a Qur'anite or not.<sup>72</sup>

As a result, one notes a strange phenomenon in modern Russian theology: on the one hand, part of Islamic religious and public figures is battling against non-existent Qur'anites, while, on the other, a group calling themselves renovationists is opposing 'tradition', but without any clear or exhaustive description of it. Moreover, we can no longer talk of religious tradition of the sort supported by Qadimists (viz. traditionalists), given that tradition itself was interrupted during the Soviet era and hardly exists anymore, at least not as presented by the renovationists in their critiques.<sup>73</sup>

Pinning the label of 'Qur'anites' on renovationists has re-channelled this polemic on a different plane. Neither the discussion of the 'Qur'anites' problem at the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Council of Muftis in December 2017 nor the issuing of the *fatwa* in February 2018 offered any answer to the question of what the renovationist movement in modern Russian Islam is. Publications by renovationists do not clarify the situation either. Nor does explaining renovationism via the even vaguer notion of 'Qur'anic humanism' offer any answers as to the direction theological thought in modern Russia has taken.

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lama.com/news.php?id=31079, accessed 25 September 2019.

- 71 "Musul'mane oblegchenno vzdohnuli. Mukhetdinov 'zakryl' vrata svoyego idzhtihada po hidzhabu" ["Muslims take a sigh of relief. Mukhetdinov 'closes' the doors of his hijab ijti-had"], <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-musulmane-oblegchenno-vzdohnuli-dam/>, accessed 25 September 2019.
- 72 "Damir *hadhrat*, you are a prominent figure in the Russian Muslim community. To prevent these rumours becoming real, you need to make your position on the so-called 'Qur'anites' clear. We don't really need these problems brought by a Syrian philosopher. We have enough unsettled issues of our own", Muqaddas *hadhrat* Bibarsov told Mukhetdinov", "Sovet muftiyev Rossii nazval 'koranitov' sektoy" ["The Council of Muftis of Russia has called the 'Qur'anites' a sect"], <http://www.ansar.ru/sobcor/sovets-muftiev-rossii-nazval-koranitov-sektoj>, accessed 25 September 2019).
- 73 Such people as the muftis Muqaddas Bibarsov and Nafigulla Ashirov and other representatives of the official Islamic 'clergy' can hardly be called conservatives or blind supporters of *taqlid*.



## THEOLOGIAN OR ISLAMIC STUDIES SCHOLARS?

It is a signature feature of the renovationist movement in modern Russian Islam that its most notable representatives are trying to straddle the border between academic Islamic studies and Islamic theology. This sometimes takes quite unusual forms. For instance, in one of his interviews Damir Mukhetdinov virtually equated Islamic theologians to Soviet researchers into Islam.<sup>74</sup> Renovationists themselves mostly seek recognition as Islamic studies scholars rather than as Islamic theologians. At the same time, their pieces tend to be less purely academic or theological than examples of religious journalism.<sup>75</sup>

Their combining of European, Islamic and Russian intellectual traditions should, according to Mukhetdinov, be a feature in the education of future imams as well. In one of his interviews, he offers the following description of a Muslim cleric of the new generation:

... I see a modern imam as someone fluent in at least five languages – a couple of Asian and European languages and Russian, as well as his first language, as someone who understands the spirit of the times, is well-versed in political science, sociology and other sciences, and who is an imam at the same time. He has no problem with putting on a turban, donning a traditional robe and stepping out to greet his congregation and talk to them, to reshape himself from a researcher of Islam into a theologian. And in such a manner that no one will tell him, “Young man, you are at a Friday prayer, you are speaking to dozens of thousands of people, and what they want to hear from you are the *ayahs* of the Qur’an, *hadiths* of the Prophet, etc., not quotes from academician Krachkovskiy or Bertels or someone else of that sort.”<sup>76</sup>

74 “...a certain substitute role in the intellectual process of Russian Muslims as played by Soviet Islamic studies school, whose most prominent representatives, due to the profundity of their knowledge and the scope of the material covered by them, can be classified as the ‘ulama’ of the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” (“Damir Mukhetdinov: my prizyvayem k gumanizatsii islamskogo diskursa” [“Damir Mukhetdinov: we call for humanisation of the Islamic discourse”], <http://www.dumrf.ru/upravlenie/speeches/13089>, accessed 25 September 2019).

75 An example of religious editorializing that is very clearly alarmist in nature is the work of Orthodox Christian columnist Roman Silantyev, who presents himself as an academic researcher of Islam (for more on him, see Ragozina S., “Zashchishchaya ‘traditsionnyi’ islam ot ‘radikal’nogo’: diskurs islamofobii v rossiyskikh SMI” [“Defending ‘traditional’ Islam from ‘radical’ Islam: islamophobic discourse in the Russian mass media”], *Gosudarstvo, religiya, tserkov’ v Rossii i za rubezhom* [State, religion, church in Russia and abroad], 2 (36) (2018), p. 289-292).

76 “Damir Mukhetdinov: Mezhdistsiplinarnost’ v islamovedenii sposobna prinesti kolossal’nyu pol’zu rossiyskoi nauke” [“Damir Mukhetdinov: Interdisciplinary approach in Islamic studies can be extremely beneficial for Russian science”], <https://spbu.ru/news-events/krupnym-planom/damir-mukhetdinov-mezhdistsiplinarnost-v-islamovedenii-sposobna-prinesti>, accessed 25 September 2019.



The fact that the ummah needs imams of this sort is never disputed by the so-called 'traditionalists' either, a fact proved by interviews conducted by the author with a number of Islamic religious figures.<sup>77</sup>

The problem is that the schools where renovatoinists have held or still hold managerial positions or have taught or are still teaching<sup>78</sup> have not trained any alumni of the sort Mukhetdinov writes about during the past ten years.

Perhaps the Islamic theologian most revered by the renovatoinists, Musa Bigeev, visited a number of different Muslim regions at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, studying in *madrasahs* in Kazan, Bakhchysarai, Bukhara, and Cairo. Modern imams, having graduated from Islamic institutions of higher education, prefer to do their post-graduate studies in secular schools and gain recognition as Islamic studies scholars.

This aspiration for legitimatoin as Asian and African studies scholars has become an obvious trend with the 'Islamic religious figures' of renovatoinist views.<sup>79</sup> The use of the strategy allows several tasks to be met at once. Firstly, renovatoinists find support amongst secular scholars for their views promoting 'Qur'anic humanism' (i.e. 'peaceful Islam'). Secondly, association with famous researchers helps raise their own status in the eyes of their fellow believers. And thirdly, secularised Russian society, which includes most educated Muslims, generally prefers academic to theological works, as the latter are typically written in a completely different manner. Reading Islamic theological literature requires a special educational background and awareness of context, one which most modern Muslims in Russia simply do not have.

A further thing standing in the way of the appearance of well-rounded polymath imams is the fact that neither Mukhetdinov himself nor his protegees want to be mere ministers of the Islamic religion, i.e. to engage in daily ministerial and educational activities as leaders of Muslim

77 Poleyve materialy avtora. Interv'y'u s Nailem Garipovym, 29.05.2018 [Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with Nail Garipov, 29.05.2018]; Poleyve materialy avtora. Interv'y'u s Damirom Shagaviyevym, 31.05.2018 [Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with Damir Shagaviev, 31.05.2018], etc. Thus, M. Bibarsov thinks that in the present context an imam should be a highly educated person, whose horizon of knowledge should not be limited to knowing the ritual side of the religion (Poleyve materialy avtora. Interv'y'u s Muqaddasom Bibarsovym, 08.08.2018 [Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with Muqaddas Bibarsov, 08.08.2018]).

78 R. Batrov was the vice-rector for Research of the Russian Islamic University in Kazan from 2007 to 2013, while A. Sadriev was the rector of the Moscow Islamic College from 2007 to 2017. D. Mukhetdinov is the rector of as many as two Islamic schools of higher education – the Nizhniy Novgorod Islamic Institute named after H. Faizkhanov (since 2005) and the Moscow Islamic Institute (since 2017).

79 D. Mukhetdinov holds Ph.D. in political sciences, while A. Sadriev has a Ph.D. degree in history.



communities. As the biographies of the young people working under Mukhetdinov show, most of them have both a religious and a secular education and want administrative positions in the muftiate system. This accords with Mukhetdinov's own interests as deputy chairman of DUM RF. He needs an inside track in those places. It is not by chance that his young proteges are often transferred to other regions as the need arises.<sup>80</sup>

Spending at least ten years getting the education Mukhetdinov is talking about with a view to an administrative career in a muftiate seems an unnecessary luxury. While that young person is studying Islam first as a scholar, then as a theologian, or vice versa, spending time in libraries and archives, and writing and defending dissertations based on researching Islamic manuscripts, the muftiate positions he aspires to will be taken by others.

Yet again we find ourselves facing the system of muftiates we began the article with. The system itself does not require profound theological knowledge or qualifications from those in the position of mufti. Only two of the leaders of the federal and major regional muftiates, the chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUM RT) Kamil Samigullin and, with certain reservations, the chairman of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia (TsDUM) Talgat Tadzhuiddin, are muftis in the proper sense of the word, i.e. theologians with the qualifications to issue *fatwas*.

## THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF THE RENOVATIONISTS

No study of Muslim renovationists in modern Russia would be complete without looking into the political views of the representatives of the renovationist movement. This is easier said than done, however, as the renovationists normally prefer not to speak publicly of their political views. This remark is true of T. Ibrahim and A. Sadriev and partially of R. Batrov. In fact, only Mukhetdinov openly holds a specific political agenda.

As with his opinion pieces on religious issues, Mukhetdinov usually confines himself to general comments when articulating the political ide-

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80 This is, for instance, what happened to Artur Mukhutdinov, who held the position of chief of staff of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Saint Petersburg and the Leningrad oblast' (Saint Petersburg Muhtasibat). In 2016 the 27-year old Mukhutdinov was appointed chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Sverdlovsk oblast'. Another protégé of Mukhetdinov's in St. Petersburg, also born in a village near Nizhny Novgorod, Ravil Seyfedinov, was transferred into the central office of the DUM RF in Moscow after holding the position of chief of staff at the Saint Petersburg Muhtasibat.



ology of the movement. Thus, he writes on the subject of the political platform of renovationism:

In my opinion, the Russian ummah is drawn towards anti-globalism, the defense of traditional values, traditional multiculturalism, and moderate conservatism.<sup>81</sup>

Mukhetdinov then devotes a paragraph to each of the said principles. In particular, he says of defending traditional values:

The defense of traditional values assumes the active defense of those values that reflect long established norms of behavior and attitudes to reality and which were clearly formulated in the injunctions of the world religions. Such a defense is necessary in the face of the post-modern critique and the relativization of all forms of identity.<sup>82</sup>

So, Mukhetdinov uses his signature move: he explains certain terms by using pseudoscientific words and expressions without providing any definitions for them. The word 'tradition' implies, among other things, the 'reproducibility' of certain standards of behaviour over generations. At the same time, Mukhetdinov claims tradition involves "standards of behaviour and attitudes" specified in the sacred books of the universal religions.

As for the other principle, moderate conservatism, in Mukhetdinov's opinion it manifests itself in the fact that Russian Muslims try "to combine the principles of Islamic doctrine with a modern lifestyle."<sup>83</sup> "Due to its flexibility and moderateness," he writes, Russian Muslims "to absorb the best of modern civilization with Muslim, European and Russian intellectual traditions. However, it still faithfully adheres to the moral principles bequeathed us by the Prophet (peace be upon him)."<sup>84</sup>

Mukhetdinov's publications repeatedly mention Eurasianism as, in his view, the most suitable ideology for modern Russia. He sees the right-wing ideology as a possible platform for Muslim participation in the Eurasian project and constructing a new Eurasian identity. The following propagandistic clichés are to be found in his pieces:

...as the events of the last year show, Atlanticism is leading an obvious ideological and political war with Russia, being adverse to everything that characterises Russia as an independent conservative civilisation.<sup>85</sup>

81 Mukhetdinov D., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 84.

82 Mukhetdinov D., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 29.

83 Mukhetdinov D., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 30.

84 Mukhetdinov D., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 30.

85 Mukhetdinov D., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 30.



Mukhetdinov claims that the Western liberal-democratic model “is not in accord with the social and cultural features of our unique civilisation.”<sup>86</sup> What these features are he does not say. The West, as imagined by Mukhetdinov, is just as mythical and fictitious as the East was in the minds of early Eurasians.

In his eyes, the renovationists’ ideological allies are those who support Russian President V.V. Putin. For example, Mukhetdinov has the following to say about Dugin:

One of the critics mentioned the dubiousness of such figures as Buchanan and Dugin. However, the fact that I reference them in my work does not mean that I agree with these thinkers in everything they say. It is enough for me that both of them are conservatives, both adhere to traditional values, and both support cultural diversity and the line pursued by Putin.<sup>87</sup>

In other words, the political creed of renovationism – at least as Mukhetdinov understands it – supports the policy adopted by Putin. One of the characteristic features of this strategy is loyalty to the Russian state and the current Russian regime. As early as 2007 Mukhetdinov mentioned in a BBC Russian Service programme that government and supreme power have sacral significance for him. In reply to the journalist’s question about what to do if the government creates obstacles to Muslims practicing their religion, Mukhetdinov replied:

If it creates obstacles for Muslims then we need to guide such a government, and we need to pray for them, and Islamic *aqidah* says: ‘And we do not consider armed risings against the supreme power, because supreme power is a sacred thing.’ The Holy *hadiths* say: ‘One day of unjust governance is better than 60 days of no governance.’<sup>88</sup>

Another renovationist, Rustam Batrov, also positions himself as a conservative. He does not articulate his political position very clearly, but he supports active involvement of the state in controlling the Muslim religion. Heads of the muftiates, according to Batrov, are primarily government officials who perform the task given them by the leader of the country: “A mufti cannot but be a government official. At least in those places where Muslim peoples have

86 Mukhetdinov D., “Otvét na kritiku”, p. 106.

87 Mukhetdinov D., “Otvét na kritiku”, p. 95.

88 “Damir Mukhetdinov vs Geydar Dzhemal: dva vzglyada na budushcheye musul'manskogo soobshchestva v Rossii” [“Damir Mukhetdinov vs Geydar Dzhemal: two different views on the future of the Muslim community in Russia”], <http://www.kontrudar.com/komments/damir-muhetdinov-vs-geydar-dzhemal-dva-vzglyada-na-budushchee-musul'mansko-soobshchestva-v>, accessed 25 September 2019.



their own state. Islam only accepts singleness of authority, dual power is not appropriate for our faith.”<sup>89</sup> Batrov thinks that “Islam as an institution cannot fully function outside government control.”<sup>90</sup> He continues that “for Muslims the Islamic ‘church’ is the state itself.” Since we elect the ruler of the state, Batrov continues, we can trust him to appoint the leader of the Muslim community – a mufti or other government official who will be responsible for pursuing religious policy.<sup>91</sup>

Rustam Batrov’s political views are thus at least moderately conservative, if we follow Mukhetdinov’s terminology.

Examining the renovatoinists’ political views allows us a better understanding of the role they see for Islamic religion in modern Russia. Their vision of the relationship between Islam and the state is a Russian version of Kemalism. Its specific features in the sphere of religion are strict government control of religious activities and attempts to create a secularised version of Islam. A feature of the latter is pushing the norms and principles of Shariah out of the social sphere, even where current legislation allows for their unrestricted application (e.g. with wearing hijab in public, the order of Muslim prayer, fasting in Ramadan, etc.).

Once the Kemalist concept of religious policy is adopted in a systematic and consistent manner, it inevitably comes into conflict with the traditionalist approach. It has become customary to address the concept of traditional Islam in terms of the relationship between the Muslim community and the state over the past ten years. A key principle for this concept is thus loyalty toward the state and the government.<sup>92</sup> This loyalty is built on consensus: the official Islamic ‘clergy’ supports the state (or, more accurately, the regime) in exchange for inviolability of the religious sphere and the right to practice their religion, albeit within certain limitations.

The renovatoinists’ ideology opens up great possibilities for the state

89 Batyr R., “Muftiy ne mozhet ne byt’ chinovnikom” [“A mufti cannot but be a government official”], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/345697?fbclid=IwAR2uP5bJmjY47dt1euFwvDO6Nwc45B3pUJtFRHdU7bZ453W2OwoIj9pS9tU%C2%BB>, accessed 25 September 2019.

90 Compare a statement by Orthodox Christian columnist Roman Silantiev, “...Islam, unlike Orthodox Christianity, cannot enjoy normal development outside a state. It has to be a part of the state apparatus. That is, Islam feel comfortable when a mufti is a government official and a part of the oppressive machine.” Roman Silantiev, “Uroven’ ponimaniya togo, chto proiskhodit u musul’man, u nas do sih por nevysook” [“Our level of understanding of what is happening with Muslims is still quite low”], <https://regnum.ru/news/1553525.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

91 Batyr R., “Muftiy ne mozhet ne byt’ chinovnikom” [“A mufti cannot but be a government official”], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/345697?fbclid=IwAR2uP5bJmjY47dt1euFwvDO6Nwc45B3pUJtFRHdU7bZ453W2OwoIj9pS9tU%C2%BB>, accessed 25 September 2019.

92 Bustanov A.K., Kemper M., “Valiulla Iakupov’s Tatar Islamic Traditionalism”, *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft*, 67-3 (2013), p. 827-828.





in terms of controlling religion. The government is not only offered complete support for both internal and external policy but also a trimmed-down version of Islam that allows Muslims' religious commitment to be reduced not just on the administrative and legal level but on the dogmatic level too. Given complete acceptance of the renovationist doctrine, it becomes possible to reduce Islam from the level of religious practice to that of a philosophical worldview.<sup>93</sup>

How aware renovationists are themselves of the consequences of their agenda for Russian Islam is not the subject of this article, however.

## CONCLUSION

In this article an attempt has been made to explore the essence of the renovationist movement in modern Russian Islam. In spite of the extensive corpus of writings by renovationists themselves, it is no easy task to make sense of their religious and political attitudes. It is complicated by the renovationist movement not being organised as any sort of strictly hierarchical structure. It is a small group of like-minded people united by their intention to limit the use of the Sunnah in the modern Islamic world to issues of religious morals and so reduce to a minimum its importance as the second source of *fiqh* (Islamic law), after the Qur'an.

It is a notable feature of Muslim renovationism in Russia that its advocates tend not to be independent theologians and intellectuals but either former or incumbent employees of official Islamic religious organisations – the muftiates. Their ideological leader Tawfiq Ibrahim is an exception, as a research associate at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The renovationists' administrative status as officials in Muslim religious organisations influences how their opinion pieces become part of official discourse. For example, the books and articles of one of the leading ideologists, deputy chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation Damir Mukhetdinov, are published with his muftiate's *imprimatur*. The ideas propagated by both Russian and foreign ideologists of the renovationist movement have been and continue to be taught in the Muslim

93 Quite typical in that regard is Mukhetdinov's statement, quoted already above, that "from a philosophical point of view" he shares the position of the Minister of Education about the unacceptability of Muslim schoolgirls wearing the hijab ("Ramzan Kadyrov vse obyasnil odnoy frazoy" ["Ramzan Kadyrov explained everything with just one phrase"], <https://lenta.ru/articles/2017/01/27/hijab/>, accessed 25 September 2019).



educational institutions controlled by Mukhetdinov and his associates.

At first glance, renovationists seem to be a fringe group and are obviously in the minority among the so-called Islamic ‘clergy’ of Russia. The influence of a religious group, however, is not determined by the number of members but by the degree of support the state can and does grant them, however. An example is the experience of creating two federal muftiates from scratch: the Russian Association of Islamic Consensus (All-Russian Muftiate) (RAIS) in 2010 and the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (DSMR) in 2016. Thanks to state assistance, they were able to register in the shortest possible time and include a number of local muftiates in their structures – qualifying them for national-level activities. In the view of many Islamic religious figures, the creation of RAIS and DSMR was the federal government in Moscow’s response to Russian Muslims’ attempts to create a single muftiate in 2009–2010 and in 2015.<sup>94</sup>

Judging on the basis of the available data, the renovationist movement in modern Russian Islam does not seem to have been instigated by the government, but the renovationists may over time become useful to government officials with responsibility for the formation and adoption of official religious policy in the Russian Federation.

The renovationist movement in Russian Orthodox Christianity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century offers a good comparison. The precursor of Orthodox renovationism was the Church reformation movement that emerged during the Russian Revolution of 1905–1907. The members of the so-called ‘circle of 32 priests,’ headed by the bishop of Narva Antonin (Granovskiy), discussed the need for (primarily liturgical) reforms in Russian Orthodoxy.

Renovationists constituted a minority of the Orthodox clergy, however, as clearly demonstrated at the Local Council (Pomestniy Sobor) of the Russian Orthodox Church<sup>95</sup> of 1917–1918, when a majority of the clergy

94 Poleyve materialy avtora. Interv’yu s Abdul-Vahedom Niyazovym, 29.05.2018 [Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Abdul-Vahed Niyazov, 29.05.2018]. See also “Vpered k proshlomu. Perspektivy Duhovnogo sobraniya musul’man Rossii” [“Forward to the past. The prospects of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia”], <http://www.islamrf.ru/news/russia/rusmonitorings/41031/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

95 The name ‘Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov’ (The Russian Orthodox Church) was only formalised in 1943. Legislation of the Russian Empire used the name ‘Pravoslavnaya Rossiyskaya Tserkov’ [The Orthodox Church of Russia]. In the theological and secular literature, the following names also appear: ‘Rossiyskaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov’ [in English again The Russian Orthodox Church, but using a different adjective for Russian], ‘Vserossiyskaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov’ [The All-Russian Orthodox Church], ‘Pravoslavnaya Kafolicheskaya Grekorossiyskaya Tserkov’ [The Orthodox Catholic Greco-Russian Church], and ‘Pravoslavnaya Greko-Rossiyskaya Tserkov’ [The Orthodox Greco-Russian Church].



participating rejected the ideas of reforming both the organisational structure of the church and its ceremonial aspect.

In 1922 the Bolshevik government decided to rely on the renovationists in their efforts to create a schism and bring about the destruction of the Orthodox Church in Russia.<sup>96</sup> The renovationists did not manage to carry out the tasks given them, however and failed to take control of most of the Orthodox congregations in the USSR. By the second half of the 1920s the government cut the renovationists loose and attempted instead to create a new Orthodox church with clergy loyal to the Soviet government.

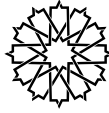
This potted history of the rise of renovationism in Russian Orthodox Christianity shows that, despite its marginality, it was nonetheless important and influential at a certain stage of history.

Despite the significant differences between them, Orthodox Christian renovationism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Islamic renovationism of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century have one common feature. Just like the representatives of the church reformation movement in the Russian Orthodox Christianity in early 1920s, Islamic renovationists are proposing a light version of Islam that does not require abandoning the worldly life in order to follow the precepts of the religion, something that may prove useful to the government. Their ideas are popular with some Muslim liberals from among the so-called ethnic Muslims, who often find making the performance of major Islamic rituals optional attractive in the context of fast-paced modern life.

At present, the country's Islamic leaders prefer to deal with so-called traditional Islam, as represented by the official Muslim 'clergy' employed in the various muftiates. This situation may change over time, however, and government officials may come to feel that institutionalising Islamic renovationism is more effective than building relations with representatives of traditional Islam.

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96 Shkarovskiy V., *Obnovlencheskoye dvizheniye v Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi XX veka* [Renovationist movement in the Russian Orthodox Church of the 20th century] (Saint Petersburg: Nestor, 1999), p. 66.



# Official Discourse on Islam and Islamic Discourse in Contemporary Russia: Stereotypes and Intertextuality

*Sofya Ragozina*

## ABSTRACT

This paper considers intertextuality between official discourse on Islam and Islamic discourse in contemporary Russia. This divide between discourses transmitted by government agencies and Russian Muslim leaders allows for an analysis of the differences and similarities between them. A major goal of this paper is to identify the origins of these modern discourses on Islam. To this end, it examines analytical parliamentary papers and transcripts of parliamentary meetings, but also expert materials from the Russian media and results of public opinion polls, in order to demonstrate how the idea of 'fighting Islam' flows across discourses to become a dominant discourse in the Russian political sphere. Analysis of Russian Muslim leaders' rhetoric demonstrates close semantic connections with government discourse (not just on Islam), insofar as their rhetoric is full of conceptual metaphors indicating loyalty to the ruling elite.

Key words: Islam in Russia, image of Islam, Islam, sociology of Islam

There are two opposing trends associated with perceptions of Islam in the modern Russian public sphere. The first relates to the positive image of traditional Islam, one of the four 'traditional' religions of Russia – alongside Russian Orthodox Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism. The second is the



widespread belief in Islam's militant nature and its inseparability from the activities of extremist organizations around the world. The latter view has contributed to the development of negative stereotypes about Islam, leading to increased social tension in Russia's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. This element of Islamophobia dominates a range of discursive genres in modern Russia: the journalistic, the governmental and even the scientific.

This paper looks at how the official discourse on Islam is currently being constructed. Official here means as transmitted by government institutions and statesmen. Analysis of discursive dynamics and changes allows the major categories and opinions promoted by the authorities or structures close to them to be identified. They tend to be repeated by the expert community and media, finally becoming firmly entrenched in public opinion. An example is the 'friend-enemy' dichotomy, frequently deployed in analyses of matters related to Islam.

Because of their many shared features, no examination of contemporary Russian governmental discourse would be complete without an analysis of contemporary official Islamic discourse in Russia. By official Islamic discourse we mean statements by Russian muftiates, the largest religious organizations representing the Muslim communities in the country. The rhetoric of the leaders of Russia's muftiates is characterized by a high level of intertextuality that indicates close semantic connections with governmental discourse (not just about Islam). Their rhetoric abounds in conceptual metaphors indicating loyalty to the ruling elite. Official Islamic discourse also offers us a better understanding of the use of the 'good' vs. 'bad' Islam dichotomy in Russia.

A major goal of this paper is to identify the origins of contemporary discourse on Islam in Russia. It includes analysis of analytical papers from Parliament and transcripts of parliamentary meetings. It also examines expert materials in the Russian media and the results of several public opinion polls to demonstrate the flow of the idea of 'fighting Islam' across discursive fields and its success in dominating the Russian political sphere.

This paper argues that official Islamic discourse in Russia is a distorted reflection of the official government discourse on Islam. A rhetorical and semantic analysis of mufti Ravil Gaynutdin's<sup>1</sup> speeches illustrates this close relationship between official Islamic and government discourses.

The methodology applied in this paper is derived from the critical

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1 As a mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF) and the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR), Gaynutdin pretends to have leadership of the overall Russian Muslim community.



discourse analysis (CDA) theory of N. Fairclough. It is a text-oriented form of discourse analysis based on socio-linguistic methods and a deep interpretational approach. The central concept of Fairclough's theory is approaching language as a social phenomenon: discourse is a linguistic reflection of social practice. Fairclough notes that while all linguistic phenomena are social, not all social phenomena are linguistic. He distinguishes three types of critique relevant to CDA: ideological, rhetorical and strategic critique. "Whereas ideological critique focuses on the effects of semiosis on social relations of power, and rhetorical critique on persuasion (including 'manipulation') in individual texts or talk, what we might call 'strategic critique' focuses on how semiosis figures within the strategies pursued by groups of social agents to change societies in particular directions."<sup>2</sup> Different variants of critique allow us to analyse different levels of discourse. Thus, regulatory documents make it possible to reveal the structure of power relations through rhetorical figures in the speeches of politicians and public figures – the major political orientations in public space. An analysis of a broader context, including, for example, the activities of official religious organizations, allows us to establish how words are transformed into real actions.

## OFFICIAL DISCOURSE ON ISLAM: MAJOR TRENDS

Western society was deeply influenced by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 in New York, which became a key event in the development of a negative image of Islam. The situation is different in Russia. Of course, the impact of the Anti-Extremism law passed in 2002 should not be underestimated. It made it easier to prosecute the adherents of 'bad' and 'non-traditional' religious organizations and movements, including Islamic ones. Yet a negative image of Islam was already widespread in Russia before 9/11 and the Anti-Extremism law was introduced. The Second Chechen War and, indirectly, the collapse of the Soviet Union played a crucial role in the development of this negative image of Islam in Russia. In the early 2000s, discussion about the leading role of the 'external factor' in the Caucasus conflict intensified.

The dominant image of the enemy has changed several times since

2 Fairclough N., *Critical discourse Analysis. The Critical Study of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 509.



then. The first 'threat' was connected with what was called the 'export of Wahhabism.' For example, a parliamentary analytical paper states that "after December 1994, Russia was for the first time openly confronted by terrorist actions of influential forces connected with the Islamic world."<sup>3</sup> The same report contains ideas about Muslim countries become active in financing various organizations of Russian Muslims. Saudi Arabia was declared enemy number one because it supported the largest number of foreign organizations and institutions: the Department of diplomatic missions in Islam, the World Islamic League and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, numerous charity foundations, its allies in Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan, the General Intelligence Service, and the World Assembly of Islamic Youth, recruiting young people all over the world. The second most important external threat was the Muslim Brotherhood. Unlike the Saudis, its main target was not the Northern Caucasus but the republics of Central Asia. To emphasize the threat posed by such organizations, authors use military terminology, such as "the association's weapons", "agents", and "they recruited students". Finally, the authors draw conclusions about the "implementation of a grand plan against Russia".

It is worth noting that members of Russia's Muslim community were accused of having links with external forces. "From the beginning of the 1990s, North Caucasian nationalists, Sufis and local fundamentalists began to receive financial support from Muslim countries, as well as from international Islamist organizations and the Vainakh diaspora." The approach of dividing Islam into traditional Islam and 'Wahhabism' seemed dysfunctional to government experts, however. "One can only defeat fundamentalist Islam by relying on the forces of humanistic Islam. At the same time, the peacekeeping potential of religion is limited. (...) Islam as a political means for achieving inter-ethnic harmony has shown its limitations."<sup>4</sup>

The idea of a 'Wahhabi threat' retains its potential to the present. As a concept, however, it contains serious contradictions. In the early 2000s, the use of the term 'Wahhabism' could somehow be justified on the

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3 *Analiticheskiy vestnik "Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny" (chast' II). Vyp. 38 [Analytical bulletin "Terrorism in Modern World: Some Facts, Organizations, Causes" (Part II). Vol. 38] (2001), <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/8/4606/16223>, accessed 25 September 2019.*

4 *Analiticheskiy vestnik "Problemy zakonodatel'nogo obespecheniya regional'noi bezopasnosti na Severnom Kavkaze". Vyp. 28 [Analytical bulletin. Problems of legislative provision of regional security in the North Caucasus. Vol. 28] (2000), <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/8/4612/16255>, accessed 25 September 2019.*



grounds of social and political realities, as an 'export version' of the ideology was being distributed across the Northern Caucasus. Later the term was used in any case involving radicals associated with Islam and for all militants. Wahhabism was a religious and political doctrine in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Islam associated with Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab at-Tamimi. Without going into the doctrine's ideological features, one must be aware of one crucial feature: from the moment the Saudi state was created, Wahhabism has been its state ideology and as such this term is not applicable to the situation in the Northern Caucasus. How one should describe the activities of Islamic radical groups in the area requires thorough consideration. The notion of a 'Wahhabi threat' has taken root in modern Russian discourse on Islam, however, despite the inherent ambiguity of the term.

This confidence over the external nature of the Islamic threat presupposes three main ideas. First, that an inherent feature of certain Muslim organizations is their dependence on external sources of financial support, which automatically makes them 'enemies of Russia'. Second, that Islam is associated with terrorism. Third, that this problem can be solved only by violent means. Since the early 2000s, when the main enemy was the 'Ichkerian separatist', and since 2007, when this enemy was transformed into the Islamist from the 'Caucasus Emirate', these ideas have been very popular. They did not suffer even after 2009, when the counterterrorism operation was officially completed. Given continued reports from the Northern Caucasus about attacks on the authorities, the image of a threat remains strong, as does the idea that it is inspired by external factors.

Contemporary politics reflects these tendencies. For example, the *Counter-terrorism Plan*,<sup>5</sup> a document setting out the basic principles of state policy in the field of counter-terrorism, contains a list of external factors "contributing to the emergence and spread of terrorism" that is almost twice as long as the internal ones. The document includes these related to the financing of international terrorist organizations, the desire of "a number of foreign states to weaken the Russian Federation and its position in the world", the presence of sources of instability along the borders, and fighter camps in other states. The Plan clarifies that the process of countering terrorism includes three components: prevention, struggle and the elimination of consequences. In the section on counter-terrorism

5 *Kontseptsiya protivodeistviya terrorizmu v Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Utverzhdena Prezidentom Rossiiskoi Federatsii D. Medvedevym 5 oktiabria 2009 goda* [Concept of countering terrorism in Russian Federation. Approved by President of Russian Federation D. Medvedev on October 5, 2009], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 20 October 2009.





measures, special attention is paid to what is commonly called 'social and humanitarian counteraction to terrorism', while political, socio-informational, cultural and educational countermeasures are described. The plan was adopted in 2009. Amendments to the Federal Law on counter-terrorism,<sup>6</sup> which addresses the prevention of terrorist activities, have not been passed. The Law is largely devoted to the role of the Armed Forces in counter-terrorist operations. Analysis of official discourse on Islam requires examples from the legal framework on counter-terrorism, insofar as they are 'symptomatic' of the current situation.

In the early 2000s, another form of external threat was defined, the 'liberal West': "Liberal western policy, mostly in France, Germany, Britain and the United States, has allowed extremists from the Middle East to create favorable conditions in Europe for their activities, and for expanding their influence."<sup>7</sup> The liberal approach is also criticized in statements such as "The liberal educational policy adopted in the Arab states allowed young people from among the poor to receive education in colleges and universities that were influenced by the most conservative ideologues. As a result, they were easily drawn into the orbit of extremist movements."<sup>8</sup>

This problem is somewhat differently presented in the Duma speeches of V.V. Zhirinovskiy.<sup>9</sup> Due to his orientalist education, he quite often refers to examples from the Islamic world. He advocates for the idea that the Muslim world has become a victim of Western aggression:<sup>10</sup> "That's what America is doing in front of our eyes – it mocks the Islamic world in general, and Iraq in particular, with which we had a friendship agreement, our workers worked there, and there was peace and quiet in this country."<sup>11</sup> Zhirinovskiy considers Muslim countries to be strategic partners now adversely affected by Western countries. This idea further reinforces

6 *Federal'nyi zakon ot 6 marta 2006 g. N 35-FZ "O protivodeistvii terrorizmu" [Federal Law of March 6, 2006 N 35-FZ "On Countering Terrorism"]*.

7 *Analiticheskiy vestnik "Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny" (chast' I). Vyp. 38 [Analytical bulletin. Terrorism in Modern World: Some Facts, Organizations, Causes (Part I). Vol. 38] (2001), <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/8/4607/16229>, accessed 25 September 2019.*

8 *Analiticheskiy vestnik "Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny" (chast' I). Vyp. 38.*

9 Vladimir Zhirinovskiy is a Russian politician, leader of nationalist *Liberal Democratic party of Russia*.

10 *Stenogramma zasedaniya 11 oktyabrya 2001 g. [Transcript of meeting 11 October, 2001], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/1865/>, accessed 25 September 2019.*

11 *Stenogramma zasedaniya 20 marta 2009 g., N 81 (1054) [Transcript of meeting 20 March, 2009, No. 81 (1054)], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/372/>, accessed 25 September 2019.*



perception of the West as enemy.

Other variations of external threat relate to the activities of a number of specific international radical non-governmental organizations in Russia. One such is the *Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami* organization. Founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, it positions itself as a pan-Islamist political organization and describes its ideology as Islamic and its aim as the re-establishment of the Islamic Caliphate to resume the Islamic way of life. By decision of Russia's Supreme Court, it was declared a 'terrorist movement' in 2003. Descriptions of the organization's activities tend to include, among other things, allusions to the external factor: "militant Islamist propaganda combined with intolerance towards other religions; active recruitment of supporters, purposeful work to split society (primarily through propaganda with strong financial support)."<sup>12</sup> This decision provoked a number of critical comments. Firstly, while *Hizb at-Tahrir* is a radical organization, experts nonetheless emphasize that it does not use violent methods to achieve its goals.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, the active struggle that started after it was designated a terrorist organization is being waged against not just its members but Muslims with no link to radical activities. The loudest voices against the 'legitimation of repression' and 'fabrication of criminal cases and torture' were human rights organizations like the "Memorial" Human Rights Center, the Committee for "Civic Assistance", the Institute of Human Rights and the "SOVA" Research Center.<sup>14</sup>

SOVA specialists have analysed the legal basis of Russian state action against social and religious organizations, including *Hizb at-Tahrir*. The head of SOVA, A. Verkhovskiy, says he is neither a "scholar of Islam" nor a "connoisseur of history", just an analyst of law enforcement practice in Russia. SOVA's main critique of these practices is that members of the organization are being prosecuted simply for being affiliated with it, so that "... the courts do not consider whether the nature of Hizb's activities is extremist or terrorist; they refer only to the decision of the Supreme Court," which indicates a lack of motivation. Verkhovskiy also stresses

12 "Reshenie VS RF o priznanii terroristicheskimi ryada inostrannykh organizatsii" ["Decision of Supreme Court about recognizing a number of foreign organizations as terrorist"], *Religare.ru*, 24 June, 2003, [http://www.religare.ru/2\\_5347.html](http://www.religare.ru/2_5347.html), accessed 25 September 2019.

13 "Malashenko: Moskve nuzhno osteregat'sia provokatsii v Krymu" ["Malashenko: Moscow needs to beware of provocations in Crimea"], *IslamNews*, 10 September, 2014, <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-432444.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

14 "Vitaliy Ponomarev. "Spetssluzhby protiv islamskoi partii 'Hizbut-Tahrir'" ["Vitaliy Ponomarev. Intelligence agencies against the Islamic party "Hizb at-Tahrir"], *Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsentr "Sova"*, 8 February, 2005, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2005/02/d3504/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



that “it is unlikely that the Russian Hizb groups are preparing for violent activities (if anyone has been preparing for them, they have been extremely unsuccessful).”<sup>15</sup>

In Russian public discourse, human rights organizations and their sympathizers are considered adherents of the same ‘hostile liberal West’ or a ‘fifth column,’ and, in light of recent legislative initiatives, as ‘foreign agents.’ The image of *Hizb at-Tahrir* as a ‘terrorist threat’ is spreading much more efficiently than any idea of it as a victim of the Russian political regime, as a result. Semen Bagdasarov is a popular expert and media figure who often focuses on the ‘threat’ represented by *Hizb at-Tahrir* to national security. After serving in Tajikistan during the 1994–1996 civil war, he began his political career, working at the Ministry of Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs. In 2007, he was elected to the State Duma (during the fifth convocation) as a member of the Spravedlivaya Rossiya party. In his speeches, he repeatedly addressed the topic of Islamic fundamentalism. More recently, he has positioned himself as an expert on the Middle East. Bagdasarov is convinced that the visa-free regime for “dubious allies within the Collective Security Treaty Organization” and immigrants from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan poses the main current threat to Russia. They are the main reason for the emergence of groups such as *Hizb at-Tahrir* and the Islamic Party of Turkestan in Russia.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, such organizations are associated with global jihad,<sup>17</sup> a result of “serious reform” in the world of radical Islam. Bagdasarov also emphasizes the effectiveness of *Hizb at-Tahrir*’s ideological activities, which is why he stresses the need to “unleash ideological struggle.”<sup>18</sup>

An Islamic organization that receives less attention is *at-Takfir wa-l-Hijra* (“Excommunication and Exodus”). Its emergence, like that of Wahhabi ideologists, was originally a purely local phenomenon. It appeared in the early 1970s on a wave of discussion within the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood about the possibility of using violence against the ruling re-

15 Verkhovskiy A., “Yavlyayetsa li Hizbut-Tahrir ekstremistskoi organizatsiei?” [“Is Hizb at-Tahrir an extremist organization?”], *Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsentr “Sova”*, October, 2005, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2005/10/d6036>, accessed 25 September 2019.

16 *Stenogramma zasedaniya 03 dekabrya 2008 g., N 58 (1031)* [Transcript of meeting 03 December, 2008, No. 58 (1031)], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/441/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

17 In the very broad sense now used in the public sphere, *jihad* is the struggle of Muslims against unbelievers.

18 *Stenogramma zasedaniya 06 noyabrya 2009 g., N 121 (1094)* [Transcript of meeting 06 November, 2009, No. 121 (1094)], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/252/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



gime. Those who supported the idea withdrew from the Muslim Brotherhood and created their own organization, *at-Takfir wa-l-Hijra*. This group legitimized the use of violence by declaring other Muslim communities 'non-believers.' There are no data on its institutionalized international networks of the sort that exist for *Hizb at-Tahrir* or *Al-Qaida* for example. It may be assumed therefore that its activities are not systematic. The organization was banned in Russia by decision of the Supreme Court on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010. As with *Hizb at-Tahrir*, this led to a new wave of arrests and critique from human rights defenders against the law enforcement agencies' unfounded accusations.<sup>19</sup>

Such defamation of Muslim political organizations gives the impression that any party that uses Islamic rhetoric will be deemed unacceptable, regardless of how radical it truly is. Even if some deputies do take a more sympathetic stance, the general view supports strict prohibition of such parties. During discussion on the Law on political parties, member of parliament Alexander Chuev (the "Rodina" faction, 4<sup>th</sup> convocation) said that the existence of "Islamic-democratic ideologies" in Russia is legal but creating parties with such an ideology would nonetheless be unconstitutional. As a result, some Russian citizen would be forced to vote not for a party that reflects their views. His idea failed to get support in the Duma.<sup>20</sup> The prevailing point of view is the opposite, namely that "... even the slightest accommodation of extremist groups gives them political identity and strengthens their influence among the masses. Rejection of their practices will reduce their effectiveness. As history shows, assistance from the government and recognition of extremists as subject to the law affects the growth of their popularity in society. However, some time later they begin to work against the official structures that directly or indirectly contributed to their formation and activity."<sup>21</sup> In other words, according to the government, the most dangerous scenario is for a new popular actor to emerge, causing a change in the alignment of political forces. Even though

19 "Dzhemal': prinadlezhnost' zaderzhannyh v Moskve urozhentsev Severnogo Kavkaza k "At-Takfir w-al'-Khidzhra" somnitel'na" [Dzhemal: the affiliation of natives of the North Caucasus to *at-Takfir wa-l-Hijra* detained in Moscow is dubious], *Kavkazskii Uzel*, 29 November, 2013, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/234286/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

20 More: *Stenogramma zasedaniya 08 noyabria 2006 g., N 191 (905)* [Transcript of meeting 08 November, 2006, No. 191 (905)], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/816/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

21 *Analiticheskiy vestnik "Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny" (chast' I). Vyp. 38* [Analytical bulletin "Terrorism in Modern World: Some Facts, Organizations, Causes" (Part I). Vol. 38] (2001), <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/8/4607/16229>, accessed 25 September 2019.



this report is from 2001, it is relevant to this day.

Radical Islamic organizations' activities are still viewed as destabilizing in several Russian regions. That they receive external financial support plays a significant role in the development of this image. For this reason, at the meeting of the State Duma mentioned above, the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party Vladimir Zhirinovskiy argued against Alexander Chuev and his plea for the creation of Islamic parties, stating that "They will not only be able to carry out an election campaign better, but also pay voters who vote for them. Orthodox voters will vote for them, because Saudi Arabia has an enormous amount of money."<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that the theme of the political participation of Muslims is not only marginal to public debate, but has even, to some extent, become taboo.

The concept of so-called 'political Salafism'<sup>23</sup> has been gaining popularity, as in the West. Allowing radical elements to become involved in politics is seen as an option for reducing social tensions and the danger of extremist activity. The Russian government, however, considers that it cannot afford to 'make concessions' to groups it has declared enemies. At the same time, the sustained scale of this threat contradicts constant official reports on the effectiveness of the special services in combating the so-called "terrorist underground mafia."<sup>24</sup> The decriminalization of radical Islamic organizations is not considered a feasible alternative to forceful counter-action.

As public opinion polls show, the use of force is perceived to be the most effective approach to many problems in Russia. According to a recent large-scale study on perceptions of war and terror conducted by the Levada Center,<sup>25</sup> citizens perceive military operations as 'necessary and valuable.' This military mobilization strategy is used by the authorities to shore up support for the regime. As regards Islam, the results of a public opinion poll

22 *Stenogramma zasedaniya 08 noyabrya 2006 g., N 191 (905)* [Transcript of meeting 08 November, 2006, No. 191 (905)], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/816/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

23 See e.g. al-Anani K., Malik M., "Pious way to politics: the rise of political Salafism in post-Mubarak Egypt", *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 22:1 (2013), p. 57-73.

24 See e.g. "Pochti 100 boevikov likvidirovani v Dagestane v 2015 godu" [Almost 100 militants were liquidated in Dagestan in 2015], *RIA Novosti*, 30 January, 2016, <http://ria.ru/incidents/20160130/1367469302.html>; "FSB: v 2014 godu likvidirovani 130 boevikov i predotvrashcheny shest' teraktov" [FSB: in 2014 130 militants were liquidated and six terrorist attacks were prevented], *Gazeta.ru*, 10 June, 2014, [http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2014/06/10/n\\_6219949.shtm](http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2014/06/10/n_6219949.shtm); "Za 2013 god v Rossii likvidirovano bolee 250 boevikov" [In 2013 more than 250 militants were eliminated in Russia], *TASS*, 28 April, 2014, <http://tass.ru/politika/1153362>, accessed 25 September 2019.

25 "Khotiat li russkie voiny. Voina i terror v vospriyatii rossiyan" ["Do Russians want war? War and terror in the perception of Russians"], *Levada-tsentri*, 23 March, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/2016/03/23/hotyat-li-russkie-voiny-vojna-i-terror-v-vospriyatii-rossiyan/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



conducted by the same research centre to assess the impact of the Charlie Hebdo case are particularly informative. Nearly 75% of those surveyed were in favour of tightening policies towards migrants, ramping up the struggle against al-Qaida, and increasing control over the Muslim community in France, while only 12% were in favour of assimilating Muslims and expanding their rights.<sup>26</sup> The tough stance may be related to the formulation of the questionnaire, however, as it did not allow for alternatives.

## THE DICHOTOMY OF 'RADICAL' AND 'TRADITIONAL' ISLAM

The idea that Islam is completely hostile to the Russian political regime is gradually changing with the introduction of a new discursive model: the division of Islam into 'good' and 'bad', traditional Islam and 'radical Islam'. If the category of 'radical Islam' is generally understood to describe various illegal organizations of political Islam, the notion of traditional Islam is more difficult to understand and define. These two categories first appeared in the Russian media in 2003–2004 and were firmly entrenched by 2009–2010 in both scientific and public discourses and stereotypes.

The concept of 'radical Islam' is amply described in a parliamentary analytical paper titled 'Islamic extremism'.<sup>27</sup> According to this document, all 'Islamic extremists' are united around common goals, namely: establishing an Islamic theocratic state, introducing Shariah law into public practice, and restoring the Caliphate. The appearance of the Kharijites<sup>28</sup> is also offered as an example of the emergence of extremism in Islam: "Khawarij doctrine was taken up in following years by many extremist and anarchist groups in Muslim countries and is being actively used nowadays."<sup>29</sup> Another key feature of radical Islam from this perspective is its being perceived as a problem that can be solved only by force.

The concept of traditional Islam is, in turn, used to describe both reli-

26 "Terakt v Parizhe: karikatury, islam, zaprety", *Levada-tsentr*, 29 January, 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/01/29/terakt-v-parizhe-karikatury-islam-zaprety/>, accessed on 25.11.2018.

27 *Analiticheskiy vestnik "Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny" (chast' I). Vyp. 38* [Analytical bulletin. *Terrorism in Modern World: Some Facts, Organizations, Causes (Part I). Vol. 38*] (2001), <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/8/4607/16229>, accessed 25 September 2019.

28 Kharijites (Khawarij) – members of a school of thought that appeared in the first century of Islam during the First *Fitna*.

29 *Analiticheskiy vestnik "Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny" (chast' I). Vyp. 38* [Analytical bulletin. *Terrorism in Modern World: Some Facts, Organizations, Causes (Part I). Vol. 38*] (2001), <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/8/4607/16229>, accessed 25 September 2019.



gious and political conditions in a number of Russian regions. In all cases, traditional Islam is juxtaposed, explicitly or implicitly, with 'radical Islam'. The term 'traditional' is often applied to all forms of Islam in Russia. Crucial features of this 'traditional' and supposedly 'peaceful' Islam are that its traditions have been successfully incorporated (or must be incorporated) into Russian socio-cultural reality, and, secondly, that it is seen as a regional political actor capable of resolving potential conflicts. The dichotomy between 'radical Islam' and traditional Islam does not always stop at academic discussion (though the effectiveness of so simplified a conceptual model is questionable).<sup>30</sup> It is sometimes used as an aggressive discursive strategy that allows a clear line to be drawn between a hostile 'radical Islam' and an endangered traditional Islam.

The use of this dichotomy is typical of the expert community close to the Russian political establishment. Reports by employees at the *Russian Institute for Strategic Studies* (RISI) offer perhaps the clearest examples. Established on February 29<sup>th</sup>, 1992, RISI functions as a state-sponsored think tank. In many of her papers and interviews, the Head of the Caucasus Studies section Yana Amelina addresses the problem of 'radical Islam'. In her opinion, radical Islamism is one of the most serious threats to public order and state.<sup>31</sup> Amelina characterizes the current state of Islam in Russia as follows: the gradual formation of a 'united Islamist front', bringing together the Islamists of the Northern Caucasus and Volga regions; the formation of an eclectic Islamist ideology in Russia; a growing orientation towards a foreign, especially Arab, Islamic community, external forces that supposedly lead to archaic regression ('Arabization', 'hijabization') of the more radical part of the Russian Ummah; and the activities of a federal Islamist lobby, which popularizes and promotes the ideas of Islamists in the all-Russian media and government structures. This rhetoric again displays the images of an external enemy and of a 'fifth column', represented by the Islamist lobby. This rhetoric is alarmist and some of the arguments unsubstantiated. For example, according to the statistics it provides, "3.3% of Ingush men and 2.3% of women named Arabs among the desirable nationalities for

30 See e.g. Akaev V.Kh., *Sufizm i vahhabizm na Severnom Kavkaze [Sufism and Wahhabism in the North Caucasus]*, Seriya "Issledovaniia po prikladnoi i neotlozhnoi etnologii" Instituta antropologii RAN. Dokument No. 127 (1999); Kisriev E.F. *Islam v Dagestane [Islam in Dagestan]*, (Moscow: Logos, 2007); Makarov D.V. *Ofitsial'nyi i neofitsial'nyi islam v Dagestane [Official and non-official Islam in Dagestan]*, (Moscow, 2000).

31 "Yana Amelina: Namereniya islamistov v Rossii ser'ezny kak nikogda" ["Yana Amelina: The intentions of Islamists in Russia are more serious than ever"], *Rossiiskiy institut strategicheskikh issledovaniy*, 30 September, 2013, <http://riss.ru/smi/3919/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



marriage.” From this the author draws the conclusion that there is an observable “gradual fundamentalization of Ingush youth.”<sup>32</sup>

RISI experts also quite often point to the problem of responding to *at-Takfīr wa-l-Hijra* and *Hizb at-Tahrir*, reinforcing their image as an enemy by emphasising the use of force against radical Islamism.<sup>33</sup>

Rais Suleymanov, a former research fellow at RISI, expresses even more radical views on counter-extremism measures. In most of his papers and speeches, he calls for extremely stringent measures to counter Islamic radicalism in Russian regions, labelling the phenomenon ‘Wahhabism’. He also greatly exaggerates the scale of the threat, talking about Islamist training camps and the emergence of new ‘Mujahideen groups’. In 2013, Suleymanov was summoned by the Tatarstan Prosecutor’s Office, as “his [publications] functioned on the basis of false information, his assumptions about the development of Wahhabism in the country lacked factual substantiation, and he imparted exaggerated significance to certain facts about extremism, while knowingly keeping silent about the actions of law enforcement agencies to prevent them.”<sup>34</sup>

To understand how widespread such ideas about radical Islam are, it suffices to look at some of the results of sociological studies by Russian sociological centres. For example, the number of people expressing no opinion on the possible construction of a mosque in their city or district is about 36%. Around 30% reacted more or less positively to the idea, but 27% took a negative view.<sup>35</sup> A study conducted by the *Foundation for Public Opinion* (FOM) in 2012 included questions asked to gain a more thorough understanding of the situation. Three questions were asked about the role, positive or negative, of Islam in the history of Russia, in contemporary Russia, and in the world. About half of the respondents expressed difficulty answering these questions, while 32%, 39% and 40%, respectively, stressed Islam’s negative role.<sup>36</sup> To a certain extent, these fears have been caused by the fact that approximately a third of the Russian popula-

32 “Yana Amelina: Namereniya islamistov v Rossii ser’ezny kak nikogda”.

33 “Takfir wa-l-Khidzra v Rossii: ideologiya, rasprostranenie, mery protivodeistviya” [*At-Takfīr wa-l-Hijra* in Russia: ideology, distribution, countermeasures], *Rossiiskiy institut strategicheskikh issledovaniy*, 30 October, 2013, <http://riss.ru/actions/4039/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

34 “Who is Mr Rais Suleymanov?”, *Biznes Online*, 7 September, 2013, <http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/87208>, accessed 25 September 2019.

35 “Terakt v Parizhe: karikatury, islam, zaprety” [“Terrorist attack in Paris: cartoons, Islam and prohibitions”], *Levada-tsentr*, 29 January, 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/01/29/terakt-v-parizhe-karikatury-islam-zaprety/>, accessed on 25 September 2019.

36 “Rossiyane ob islame” [“Russians about Islam”], *FOM*, 8 October, 2012, <http://fom.ru/TSennosti/10652>, accessed on 25 September 2019.





tion gets is knowledge about Islam through the media, and one fourth knows nothing about Islamic religion and culture. 19% learns about Islam from Muslim relatives, 13% gains relevant knowledge at school, 11% reads the literature independently, 10% turn to the Internet, and 6% have learned about Islam by traveling to Muslim countries.<sup>37</sup>

## TRADITIONAL ISLAM: PATRIOTISM, HUMANISM AND LOYALTY TO THE RUSSIAN STATE

There has been an overwhelming number of public discussions devoted to 'radical Islam'. What about traditional Islam? Many events under the slogan of humanitarian counter-terrorism<sup>38</sup> aim to create a positive image of certain forms of Islam.<sup>39</sup> They generally remain marginal, however, and do not enjoy wide support. Most initiatives of the Muslim community itself are either theoretical or merely declarative. A vivid example is the statement "The Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims" published by the Council of Muftis of Russia in 2001.<sup>40</sup> According to its authors, "the structuring processes in the Muslim community itself and changes in the public life of the country demanded a balanced approach on the part of the leaders of Islamic community".<sup>41</sup> Active discussion only took place in 2014 – 2015, however, because of a number of factors. First, the document had to be adapted to fit changing realities in Russia. The concept of a "brand of good traditional Islam" needed support from the Muslim community itself. Second, elaboration of the concept paper allowed Muslim leaders to

37 "Terakt v Parizhe: karikatury, islam, zaprety" ["Terrorist attack in Paris: cartoons, Islam and prohibitions"], *Levada-tsentr*, 29 January, 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/01/29/terakt-v-parizhe-karikatury-islam-zaprety/>, accessed on 25 September 2019.

38 See e.g. "'Protivostoiat' ekstremizmu cherez rasprostranenie idei 'zolotoy serediny'" ["Counteract Extremism through the Spread of Idea of 'Golden Mean'"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 19 July, 2016, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/event/11036>; "Komitet po bezopasnosti SMR provel kruglyi stol" ["Committee of the Council of Muftis held a round table"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 18 July, 2016, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/event/11035>, accessed on 25 September 2019.

39 For example, a great number of charity projects of the Moscow Spiritual Muslim Department are devoted to veterans, orphanages, donor campaigns. See <http://mosdum.ru/>.

40 "'Sotsial'naya doktrina rossiyskih musul'man' prizyvaet veruyushchih prinosit' pol'zu obshchestvu" ["Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims" calls on believers to benefit society"], *TASS*, 27 May, 2015, <http://tass.ru/obschestvo/1999282>, accessed 25 September 2019.

41 Abbyasov R.R., "Informirovannost' musul'man o kontseptual'nom dokumente 'Osnovnyye polozheniya sotsial'noi programmy rossiyskih musul'man'" ["Awareness of Muslims about the conceptual document "The main provisions of the social program of Russian Muslims"], *Teoriya i praktika obshchestvennogo razvitiya*, 23, (2015), p. 21–24.



give an impression of unity based on the principles set forth in it. On June 14, 2015, it was officially adopted. Despite many years of conflict, the document was signed by the leader of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia, Talgat Tadzhuiddin; the leader of the Coordination Centre of Muslims of the North Caucasus, Ismail Berdyev; and the leaders of the Spiritual Administrations of Muslims of Russia (DUM RF) and Tatarstan (DUM RT), Ravil Gaynutdin and Kamil Samigullin respectively.<sup>42</sup>

The idea of tolerance of ideological diversity and other religious tendencies runs through the document, which emphasizes the humanistic nature of Islam.<sup>43</sup> A positive image of Islam is created by evoking the contributions of Muslim scholars from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (such as Shihabuddin Marjani, Galimdzhan Barudi, Rizaeddin Fakhretdin, Musa Bigiev (Bigeev), and Ismail Gasprinskiy) to the development of science, education and culture in Russia.

The body of the document is dedicated to Muslim patriotism and civil duties. It is interesting to observe how political categories are legitimized in this religious discourse. The mechanism is similar for most categories: first, a definition is provided of a political concept, and then an analogy selected from a religious or historical context. This demonstrates both the susceptibility of Islam to political discourses and the closeness of the Islamic and Russian traditions of political philosophy. For example, the text states that the “term ‘patriotism’ is used when priority is given to the idea of connecting and uniting all citizens”. Further, the existence of patriotism within the Muslim community is explained by reference to the Medina Constitution, which presupposes “along with community in religion, community in citizenship and the importance of living in one common homeland”. The category of civil rights is explained with references to “the words of Allah.”

Certain parts of this “Social Doctrine” represent a response to the difficulties faced by the Muslim community in Russia. The fifth section, which discusses the “Attitude of Islam towards Extremes and Radicalism”, includes a consistent argument that directly addresses the main categories used by their opponents. For example, an answer to common misinterpretations of the concept of *jihad* is considered in detail: “The greatest task facing our *alims* [Islamic scholars], imams, and preachers is offering the

42 “Prinyata ‘Sotsial’naya doktrina rossiyskih musul’man’” [“Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims” is adopted], *Kommersant*, 14 June, 2015, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2746763>, accessed 25 September 2019.

43 “Sotsial’naya doktrina rossiyskih musul’man’” [“Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims”], *Sovet muftiev Rossii*, <http://www.muslim.ru/actual/13636/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



younger generation of Muslims a clear and complete picture of jihad.” The meaning of *takfir*<sup>44</sup> is explained and the exceptional nature of such action emphasised. The last paragraph in the chapter aims to interpret the thesis of the division of the world into a ‘territory of war’ and a ‘territory of peace’. Rather than to war, priority should be given to the peaceful spread of Islam through various media. The authors warn against a “biased approach to covering religious issues” and point out the need for strict adherence to professional journalistic ethics, as well as for a rejection of value judgments that exacerbate false notions about Islam. Although only a short paragraph in the text is devoted to this problem, it is significant that it is included in the statement’s agenda.

Finally, it is worth noting that the authors of the “Social Doctrine” also partially accept the dichotomy of ‘radical’ vs. ‘traditional’ Islam. The term ‘radical’ appears only sporadically (twice) in the document, while references to ‘traditional’ Islam are frequent (29). More importantly, the authors identify themselves as representatives of traditional Islam and they do so in a rather emotional manner: “Traditional Islam in Russia is true Islam related to the conditions and traditions of our country. This new identity and integration, which has prompted a natural all-Russian patriotism in Muslims, allows the Muslim community in Russia to overcome many of the threats that occur in other non-Muslim countries, due to differences in their understanding of traditions and cultures.” “Traditions’ play an extremely positive role in the history and present of the Muslim community of Russia: “Russian Muslims are directing their efforts towards strengthening traditional family values”, “for Russian Muslims, cultural traditions are the source of their national-religious identity”, and “representatives of the peoples of Muslim tradition stood side by side with Russians and shed their blood for Russia.”

The document thus represents a peculiar testimony to the loyalty of ‘good Islam’ to Russian state. In fact, this is an essential characteristic of traditional Islam. It declares humanism and patriotism to be the most important values. The main problem, however, as mentioned above, is the extremely low awareness in Russian society of the project of the “Social Doctrine”. According to a survey conducted by representatives of the Council of Muftis of Russia, 84.1% of respondents said they had not heard anything about the first version of the “Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims” and more than half of respondents consequently found it difficult to answer questions

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44 The procedure when one Muslim declares another a non-believer.



on the need to modernize the document.<sup>45</sup>

One also finds patriotic rhetoric in the speeches of Ravil Gaynutdin. Obvious manifestations of loyalty to the Russian authorities are expressed in the many references to the words of the Russian President. There are several other interesting tropes in Gaynutdin's rhetoric, however. His speeches contain three important interconnected narratives: those of unity, Eurasianism, and spirituality. In any of its manifestations, unity, whether the unity of the Muslim community (alluding to conflict of the DUMs) or unity between Muslim and Russian civilization on the basis of a Eurasian community, turns out to be a fundamental existential principle for Russian Muslims: "It is symbolic that it is a native citizen of St. Petersburg, our President, who will cut the ribbon at the entrance to the Moscow Cathedral mosque. We will thereby identify our common roots as a unified multinational and multi-religious Eurasian civilization."<sup>46</sup> Spirituality is emphasized as an attribute in the political sphere, as well. For example, Gaynutdin argues that the main mosque will "bring enormous benefits in strengthening the spiritual qualities and sovereignty of our state."<sup>47</sup> The idea of a "spiritual gene pool" is on a par with notions of peace, stability and harmony, and is opposed to extremism and radicalism.<sup>48</sup> He also uses such phrases as "spiritual roots" and "spiritual abyss."

Loyalty to the authorities is also demonstrated in less obvious ways. Gaynutdin uses Orthodox terminology to describe Muslim realities. For example, a large part of his 'Christmas message' (the title given on the official website of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation) is a comparison of *Mawlid an-Nabi* (celebration of the Birth of the Prophet) with Christmas: "I try – to make the language and the message of Islam available to our contemporaries I therefore use words and images

45 Abbyasov R.R., "Informirovannost' musul'man o kontseptual'nom dokumente 'Osnovnye polozheniya sotsial'noi programmy rossiyskikh musul'man'" ["Awareness of Muslims about the conceptual document "The main provisions of the social program of Russian Muslims"], *Teoriya i praktika obshchestvennogo razvitiya*, 23, (2015), p. 22.

46 "Muftiy Gaynutdin: rossiyskoe musul'manstvo smozhet stat' liderom vsei ummy" ["Mufti Gaynutdin: Russian Islam can become the leader of the whole Ummah"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 11 June, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9411>, accessed 25 September 2019.

47 "Muftiy Gaynutdin: otkrytie Moskovskoi Sobornoj mecheti – sobytie gosudarstvennogo mashtaba dlya RF" ["Mufti Gaynutdin: opening of Moscow Cathedral mosque is an event of a state scale for the Russian Federation"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 23 September, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9735>, accessed 25 September 2019.

48 "Muftiy Gaynutdin: ya dumayu, ne odna mechet' budet postroena v Moskve" ["Mufti Gaynutdin: I think more than one mosque will be built in Moscow"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 18 September, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9718>, accessed 25 September 2019.



that are familiar in Russian culture. The Old Slavonic 'Christmas' was in the Middle Ages the most common way to denote the physical appearance of man into the world. Therefore, the phrase 'Christmas of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)' is perfectly valid in Russian culture and retains its Islamic essence".<sup>49</sup> Quoting various *surahs* (chapters of the Qur'an), Gaynutdin unfolds a theological argument about the shared Christian and Islamic traditions associated with the birth of Jesus and Muhammad, and draws an analogy between the ascension and the *Mi'raj*.<sup>50</sup>

In a different speech, Gaynutdin compares Christian and Islamic eschatology to revise Russia's special role in the international arena. "Christian and Islamic eschatology are close and claim that before the Messiah (*Mahdi*) arrives, the Antichrist (*Dajjal*) will appear, and the role of the *Kat-echon* (the Retainer) will be especially important. Obviously, our policy and our experience of interreligious harmony and cooperation will become the core of world politics."<sup>51</sup>

In these texts, mosques are occasionally compared with Orthodox churches. For example, in an interview about the Cathedral mosque under construction, Gaynutdin said that "our mosque is gold-domed (*zlato-glavaya*) and fits into the ensemble of Moscow churches."<sup>52</sup>

Gaynutdin also draws parallels between mosques and the symbols of Russian statehood. "The new look of the mosque, which at the same time resembles both the Spasskaya tower of the Moscow Kremlin and the elegant Syuyumbike Tower in the Kazan white-stone Kremlin, demonstrates the irreversible connection of our Islam to its spiritual roots, to the Eurasian foundations of Russian civilization and statehood."<sup>53</sup>

Following official state discourse, Gaynutdin evokes the same threats identified above. In his texts, the main enemies of Russian Muslims are Western philosophy and liberal ideology. According to Gaynutdin, the idea

49 "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie muftiya Rossii Gaynutdina" ["Christmas message by mufti Gaynutdin"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 27 January, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/8925>, accessed 25 September 2019.

50 Isra' and Mi'raj – two parts of Muhammed's Night Journey to Jerusalem described in the *Surah al-Isra* (17).

51 "Muftiy Gaynutdin: rossiyskoe musul'manstvo smozhet stat' liderom vsei ummy" ["Mufti Gaynutdin: Russian Islam can become the leader of the whole Ummah"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 11 June, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9411>, accessed 25 September 2019.

52 "Muftiy Gaynutdin: ya dumayu, ne odna mechet' budet postroena v Moskve" ["Mufti Gaynutdin: I think more than one mosque will be built in Moscow"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 18 September, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9718>, accessed 25 September 2019.

53 "Muftiy Gaynutdin: otkrytie Moskovskoi Sobornoj mecheti – sobytie gosudarstvennogo mashtaba dlya RF" ["Mufti Gaynutdin: opening of Moscow Cathedral mosque is an event of a state scale for the Russian Federation"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 23 September, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9735>, accessed 25 September 2019.



that 'man is the measure of all things' is unacceptable since it leads to egocentrism and causes the many disasters of modern civilization.<sup>54</sup> He calls this concept 'I as a thing-in-itself'.<sup>55</sup> Such unlimited freedom brings liberalism to its extreme: "Chasing imaginary freedom, the ultra-liberals have directed their society along the path of a new form of slavery – slavery to the instincts, illusory comfort, the slavery of illusions of consciousness. Does God not speak of such slaves of instincts in the Holy Scripture..."<sup>56</sup>

Islamic official discourse thus becomes indistinguishable from the official governmental discourse on Islam. There is a high level of intertextuality between these two discourses, in which representatives of the Muslim community use the same categories as government officials, appealing to values of unity, spirituality and Eurasianism, as well as to the image of a liberal Western enemy. Gaynutdin's parallels with Christian religious traditions follow the same logic.

## CONCLUSION

This paper analyses a selection of sources reflecting both Russian Islamic official discourse and official Russian governmental discourse on Islam. It does not claim to paint a comprehensive picture, seeking rather to identify major trends and so contribute to a general understanding of the situation. The official discourse on Islam is filled with alarmist rhetoric. It claims that, under the influence of external factors, Islam in Russia is radicalizing and turning into a threat to the country's national security. This point of view first developed during the 'second Chechen war' and has remained strong since. For the government and experts close to it, force remains the only real and effective way of dealing with what is considered radical Islam. At the same time, social and humanitarian initiatives, including those of the Muslim community itself, remain on the margins of public consciousness. The much-promoted 'brand of traditional Islam' has

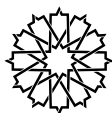
54 "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie muftiya Rossii Gaynutdina" ["Christmas message by mufti Gaynutdin"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 27 January, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/8925>, accessed 25 September 2019.

55 "Fundamental'nyi vyzov chelovechestvu imeet tsennostnuyu prirodu" ["Fundamental challenge to humanity has a value nature"], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 10 December, 2014, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/8810>, accessed 25 September 2019.

56 "Fundamental'nyi vyzov chelovechestvu imeet tsennostnuyu prirodu".



been actively used to oppose 'radical Islam', but that does not go beyond the scope of the dichotomy or offer a new solution to the problem. Representatives of the official Muslim community limit themselves to mimicking official governmental rhetoric in the theological sphere, which allows them to demonstrate their loyalty to the authorities.



# The Faizrakhmanists of the Volga Region as a Religious Community Opposing ‘Traditional Islam’

*Renat Bekkin*

## ABSTRACT

This article presents an analysis of the theological and legal nature of the religious community of Faizrakhmanists (Mu’mins). The author critiques the use by Russian authors of the term ‘sect’ to describe their religious group. After a review of the biography of Faizrakhman Sattarov, the author concludes that the Faizrakhmanist community’s creation was a natural outcome of its leader’s spiritual and ideological evolution as a member of the official Muslim ‘clergy’ in the 1960s and 1970s. The author uses the example of the Faizrakhmanist movement to examine the concept of ‘traditional Islam’ and its usefulness for research into religious movements and groups in modern Islam, concluding that it fails to facilitate understanding of the theological and legal nature of modern Islam’s groups and movements and leads to incorrect conclusions.

Key words: Faizrakhmanists, Faizrakhman Sattarov, traditional Islam, *muftiates*, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia (DUMES), Islam in the USSR.





## LOOKING AGAIN AT THE TERM 'SECT' IN RESEARCH ON MOVEMENTS AND GROUPS IN MODERN ISLAM

The creation of a typology of religious communities in Islam is complicated by the Muslim religion's lack of institutions of the sort found in the various branches of Christianity. Almost all Islamic studies scholars agree that M. Weber and E. Troeltsch's classification of religious organizations<sup>1</sup> is inapplicable to Islam.<sup>2</sup> The same goes for improvements to it by G. Becker, R. Niebuhr, and other researchers. In dealing with actual examples, however, and particularly religious groups and movements in modern-day Islam, researchers often forget this rule and, intentionally or otherwise, turn to the Christianity-centric terminology of Weber and Troeltsch.

Even where a consensus survives among Islamic studies scholars, researchers of religion, sociologists and representatives of other fields on the incorrectness of using the term 'church' for movements and schools of Islam, one finds the term 'sect' deployed not only by historians, political theorists, sociologists and religion scholars whose main field of research lies outside the history and dogmatics of Islam, but in studies by experts in Islamic studies.<sup>3</sup>

For example, Russian researcher A.A. Ignatenko, who was trained in classical Islamic studies, considers 'sectarianism' the natural form of existence for Islam.<sup>4</sup> In his opinion, there has been a "neverending... process of sectarian division (*iftiraq* in Arabic)" in Islam, while "Schism (*iftiraq*), or division into sects (*firaq*) and the existence of Muslims in that state right until the Last Judgment, is one of the fundamental premises of the Sunnah."<sup>5</sup> The researcher thus references basic tenets of Islamic doctrine to back up his position on the immanence of sects in the Muslim religion. He supports

1 For more on this classification, see Vasilyeva E.N., "Tipologii religioznych obyedineniy: metodologiya i sovremennye napravleniya razvitiya" ["Typologies of religious associations: methodology and modern trajectories of development"], *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvenno-gosudarstvennoy universiteta* [Bulletin of Volgograd State University]. Series 7: Philosophy, sociology and social technologies, 2 (2015), p. 54–61.

2 *Islam: Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'* [Islam: Encyclopaedic Dictionary], G.V. Miloslavskiy et al. (ed.) (Moscow: Nauka; Glavnaya redakciya vostochnoi literatury, 1991), p. 106.

3 Such a 'sect' can sometimes artificially unite the representatives of various Islamic movements. For instance, the Wahhabi 'sect' may be described as including followers of several different theological and legal schools or *madhabs* (not just the Hanbali one) that advocate for radical political causes.

4 Ignatenko A., "Raskolotaya umma v ozhidanii Sudnogo dnya" ["Shattered ummah awaiting Doomsday"], *Otechestvennye zapiski* [Annals of the Fatherland], 5 (2003), <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2003/5/raskolotaya-umma-v-ozhidanii-sudnogo-dnya>, accessed 25 September 2019.

5 Ignatenko A., "Raskolotaya umma v ozhidanii Sudnogo dnya".



his claim by reference to the current state of affairs, whereby Islam is divided into a variety of different movements and schools, and by pointing to the existence of the term '*firqah*' (pl. *firaq*) in Arabic.

So far as the present author can see, this claim that Islam being divided into movements and schools justifies talk of sects is fatally flawed because the very notion of 'sect' implies an orthodoxy, a dominant church.<sup>6</sup> Islam does not have an orthodoxy or an "institution of the legitimization of dogmas."<sup>7</sup> This is due to the very nature of the Muslim religion. As for '*firqah*', the problem lies in the translation of the term into Russian. In referring to movements and schools in Islam, we are better translating it as '*gruppa*' [group] than '*sekta*' [sect],<sup>8</sup> if we want to avoid imposing external connotations (i.e. from the Christian understanding of the orthodoxy problem).

The term 'sect' therefore offers us no key to understanding the formation of religious movements and groups in modern Islam. Until we have a typology of Islamic religious communities that suits Islamic studies scholars and other researchers of Islam equally, we shall just have to consider each case separately. Moreover, we have to consider not only the dogmatic but the political aspect, because, as many examples from past and present show, theological decisions can have motives unrelated to religion.

An example is the official Islamic institutions' attitudes to Sufism in the USSR and in contemporary Russia. In the USSR, any manifestations of mysticism in Islam were viewed as negative and to be combatted. Sufi practices were banned as 'unofficial Islam'.<sup>9</sup> In modern Russia, by contrast, Sufism is part of the 'traditional Islamic' discourse. The so-called

6 For instance, a specialist dictionary offers the following definition of the term 'sect': "a religious community that appears inside a church organization, is isolated inside it, and then separates from it as an independent community" (Smirnov M.Y., *Sotsiologiya religii: Slovar'* [*Sociology of Religion: A Dictionary*] (S-Petersburg: Izatel'stvo S.-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 2011), p. 240).

7 *Islam: Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'*, G.V. Miloslavsky et al. (ed.), p. 106.

8 In his work on movements and schools in modern Islam, the Islamic theologian from Russia Damir Shagaviev offers a range of examples of how to translate the word '*firqah*' into Russian, but in the end chooses, in this author's opinion, the least suitable one – '*sekta*' [sect]. He does, however, use it alongside the term 'group' (Shagaviev D.A., *Islamskiye techeniya i gruppy* [*Islamic movements and groups*] (Kazan: Kazanskiy Federal'nyi universitet, 2015), p. 11–15).

9 The line dividing official and non-official Islam in the USSR was often difficult to trace. A registered mullah could perform activities beyond the control of government authorities, while mosqueless mullahs were sometimes invited by the official 'clergy' to assist with their performance of religious rites. For more on this, see, for example, Bekkin R.I., "Materialy chastnykh i gosudarstvennykh fotoarhivov kak istochnik po istorii tataro-musul'manskoy obshchiny sovetskogo Petrograda–Leningrada. 1917–1991 gg." ["History of Tatar-Muslims Community in Soviet Petrograd-Leningrad (1917–1991). Based on Private and State Photo Archives"], *Gosudarstvo, religia, tserkov v Rossii i za rubezhom* [*State, religion and church in Russia and Worldwide*], 4 (2016), p. 118–147.



'Grozny fatwa',<sup>10</sup> issued in August 2016 in the capital of the Chechen Republic by Islamic religious figures from Russia and other countries, states that following the path prescribed by such Sufi sheikhs as Abu-l-Qasim al-Junayd ibn Muhammad al-Baghdadi and 'Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani, Muhammad Khawaji Baha' al-Din Naqshband is one of the attributes of true Islam.<sup>11</sup>

From the dogmatic point of view, however, the situation regarding Islam in Russia has not changed at all. The dominant *madhab* among the Tatars and other Muslim Turkic peoples is the Hanafi school, to which quite a few well-known Sufi sheikhs have belonged. The Shafi'i *madhab*, where the Sufi tradition is better preserved, is more prevalent in the North-East Caucasus.

The Grozny *fatwa* was only the theological and legal consolidation of a phenomenon much disputed over the past ten years, namely so-called 'traditional Islam'. Let us now try to investigate how helpful this construct is in understanding the theological and legal nature of movements and groups in modern-day Russian Islam.

## TRADITIONAL ISLAM AS A TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Russian legislation, academia, and Islamic theology do not share a commonly accepted definition of 'traditional Islam'. The notion is an artificial one and, rather than being a conceptual product of the theological and judicial legacy of Islamic scholars,<sup>12</sup> it is a political construct that government officials have found convenient in determining which religious groups are acceptable as partners for the government authorities.

The construct of 'traditional Islam' is closely related to another term, that of 'traditional religions' commonly used by politicians, religious figures and academicians. According to this concept, all religions found in the Russian Federation may be categorized as traditional or non-traditional. At the all-Russian level the first category includes Orthodox Chris-

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10 The official name of the *fatwa* in Russian is "O neotyemlemyh priznakah otlichiya istinnogo Islama ot zabluzhdeniy" ["On the inherent signs of the difference between true Islam and misconceptions"].

11 The *fatwa*'s full Russian text is available here: [http://www.sufirb.ru/books\\_data/fatwa\\_grozniy/fatwa\\_grozniy.pdf](http://www.sufirb.ru/books_data/fatwa_grozniy/fatwa_grozniy.pdf), accessed 25 September 2019.

12 The very notion of 'traditional Islam' (*al-Islam at-taqlidi*) was unknown to theological and legal thought of the medieval age or indeed to modern and contemporary times.



tianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. All other religions belong to the second group.

The main difference between the non-traditional and the traditional religions from the legal perspective (though, as mentioned above, the Russian law does not operate with such terms) was the registration procedure. For a religion to be registered as such in Russia, its representatives must provide evidence of having been active in the country for at least 15 years prior to the registration date. According to many experts in religion, this prerequisite has *de facto* meant limited freedom of conscience in the country.<sup>13</sup> This discriminatory provision was abolished in 2015 when the so-called Yarovaya set of amendments into the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations” was adopted. These amendments have, however, significantly hampered missionary and other activities of religious organisations in Russia in general.

In some way the division of all faiths into traditional and non-traditional ones resembles the confessional situation in the Russian Empire between 1905 and 1917. Even after religious freedoms were proclaimed in 1905, the country nonetheless retained the division into ‘tolerated’ and ‘not tolerated’ religions.<sup>14</sup> As the modern Russian legislation regulating confessional relations has developed, this analogy has become even more evident. Some religious movements and groups have been labelled ‘not tolerated’ and so prohibited by law (the Jehovah’s Witnesses, etc.). Analogies (albeit imperfect ones) with the situation at the beginning of the last century are also to be seen in the preamble to the 1997 Law “The special role of Orthodox Christianity in the history of Russia and in the formation of its spirituality and culture”, which emphasises that Orthodox Christianity has a higher status than the other ‘traditional religions’.

Another specific feature of the current legislation is that, while a single religious organisation is granted the exclusive privilege of speaking on behalf of all the Orthodox Christians of Russia, namely the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP), the same is not true of the

13 See, for example, Verkhovskiy A., “Bitva za privilegii” [“The battle for privileges”], *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [Independent newspaper], 2005, 19 January, [http://www.ng.ru/politic/2005-01-19/3\\_islam.html](http://www.ng.ru/politic/2005-01-19/3_islam.html), accessed 25 September 2019; Daniel W.L., Marsh C., “Russia’s 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience in Context and Retrospect”, *Journal of Church and State*, 49 (2007), p. 19–26.

14 According to the legislation which was at that time in force in the Russian Empire, all religions professed in the empire were divided into: state religion (Orthodoxy according to the Synodal Church’s version), ‘tolerated’ and “unrecognized and intolerable”. Tolerated religions, in turn, were further divided into “recognized and tolerated” (*priznannye terpimye*) and “tolerated and unrecognized” (*terpimye nepriznannye*). Among the unrecognized and intolerable religions were various sects (*Khlysty, Skoptsy, Molokans, Dukhobors*, etc.).



other traditional faiths, each of which – Islam, Buddhism and Judaism – is represented by several religious associations. For Islam these are the federal muftiates (spiritual administrations of Muslims).<sup>15</sup>

The first muftiate in the country – subsequently known as the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly (OMDS) – was founded in 1788 by an edict of Catherine the Great. This institution has survived to the present under the name of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia (TsDUM). There are over 80 active muftiates in Russia, including 3 nationwide spiritual administrations,<sup>16</sup> operating as the equivalent of an institutionalised church created to manage the religious affairs of Muslims. Muftiates have thus played and still play the role of an institution determining ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘deviation’ since the days of the Russian Empire.

In the Soviet Union, the dichotomy of ‘official vs unofficial Islam’ meant the opposition of a version of Islam that was loyal to the social and political regime in the country at the time and one that was disloyal to it. The authorities allocated the muftiates the role of tool for fighting unofficial Islam.<sup>17</sup>

In modern Russia the terms ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ Islam are rarely used. A different pair of terms is used instead, namely ‘traditional Islam – non-traditional Islam’. As mentioned, there is no clear doctrinal or legal definition of ‘traditional Islam.’ Most authors who support the construct, however, point to the same important feature: loyalty to the government authorities.<sup>18</sup>

Given such an understanding of ‘traditional Islam’, its opposite will necessarily include a wide range of Islamic movements and groups of a political (Salafis, etc.) or purely religious nature, that none the less represent some

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15 Over the past several years there has been a steady increase in the influence of the regional muftiates: in Dagestan, Chechnya, Tatarstan. In 2017, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUM RT) was included in the Interreligious Council of Russia (ICR), the main platform for the interaction between the leaders of the primary religious organisations that represent the traditional religions in the country. Besides DUM RT, the ICR also includes three muftiates, TsDUM, the Coordinating Centre of Muslims of the North Caucasus (KCMSK) and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation.

16 TsDUM, the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR) and the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (DSMR).

17 For more information, see Bekkin R.I., “The muftiates and the state in the Soviet time: the evolution of relationship”, in *Rossiyskiy islam v transformacionnyh processah sovremennosti: novye vyzovy i tendencii razvitiya v XXI veke [Islam in Russia during today's transformation processes: New challenges and development trends in the 21st century]*, Z.R. Khabibullina (ed.) (Ufa: Dialog, 2017), p. 54-75.

18 For instance, Orthodox Christian columnist Roman Silantyev states that “for Russia only that Islam is traditional whose followers are ready to be law-abiding citizens of their state and respect the Christian majority” (Mel'nikov A., “Prinuzhdenie k mezhhobshinnomu miru” [“Coercion to intercommunal peace”], *NG-Religii [NG-Religions]*, 2 February (2011), [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2011-02-02/1\\_islam.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2011-02-02/1_islam.html), accessed 25 September 2019).



form of challenge to the spiritual and administrative power of the muftiates. The Faizrakhmanists which will be examined further in this article are an example of the purely religious group<sup>19</sup>.

## THE FAIZRAKHMANISTS: INSIDE OR OUTSIDE ISLAM?

In the scant existing literature on the subject, followers of Faizrakhman Minnahmetovich Sattarov (1929 – 2015) are, as a rule, referred to as “the sect of the Faizrakhmanists.”<sup>20</sup> Most writers also note that the ‘sect’ is not strictly Islamic. For example, a columnist from Kazan, Rais Suleymanov, includes this understanding of the group’s nature in the title of his text: “Faizrakhmanisty: sekta islamskogo proishozhdeniya v Tatarstane v nachale XXI veka” [The Faizrakhmanists: a sect of Islamic origin in Tatarstan at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century]<sup>21</sup>.

The question of how Faizrakhmanist doctrine squares with the basic principles of Islam is contested. Articles on the community tend not to

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- 19 The more precise transliteration of the group’s name is ‘Faizrakhmanists’. In the English language scholarly and popular scientific literature, however, the following spelling has become more common: Faizrakhmanists. The same applies to spelling of the name of the group’s leader – Faizrakhman Sattarov.
- 20 Yakupov V., *Neofitsialnyi islam v Tatarstane: dvizheniya, techeniya, sekty* [Unofficial Islam in Tatarstan: movements, currents, sects] (Kazan: Iman, 2003), p. 22–23; Suleymanov R., “Faizrakhmanisty: sekta islamskogo proishozhdeniya v Tatarstane v nachale XXI veka” [“Faizrakhmanists: a sect of Islamic origin in Tatarstan at the beginning of the 21 century”], in *Evrasiyskoye prostranstvo: tsivilizatsionnye krizisy i poisk putey grazhdanskogo soglasiya: materialy I Evraziyskogo nauchnogo foruma (30 iyunya – 2 iyulya 2008 g.)* [Eurasian Space: Civilization Crises and the Search for Civil Concord: Materials of the 1st Kazan Eurasian Scientific Forum (June 30 – July 2, 2008)] in 2 volumes, B.M. Yagudin (ed.) (Kazan: Intelpress+, 2013), vol. I, p. 6–12; Syzranov A., “Deyatel’nost nekotorykh netraditsionnykh musulmanskiykh organizatsiy na territorii Povolzhia v kontse XX – nachale XXI v.” [“The activity of some non-traditional Muslim organizations in the Volga region at the end of 20 – beginning of the 21 century”], *Gumanitarnye i yuridicheskiye issledovaniya* [Humanitarian and legal studies] (2015), p. 55. The term “Faizrakhmanists” is perceived as offensive by the actual representatives of this community. They prefer to call themselves “true Muslims” (Mu’mins) or the Party of Allah (Hizballah). Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev, 07.06.2017 (with participation of A. Akhunov). An exception is articles by K. Aitamurto and R. Bekkin, in which the use of the term ‘sect’ when referring to Faizrakhmanists is criticised (see, Aitamurto K., “The Faizrakhmanisty: the Islamic Sect as a Social Problem in Russia”, *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review*, 9:2 (2018), p. 1–25; See Bekkin R.I., “Ukorotit’ hvost nezakonnnykh religioznykh deyatel’ey. Ob ideynoy evolyutsii vzglyadov Faizrakhmana Sattarova na rol’ ‘ofitsialnogo duhovenstva’ v religioznoy zhizni musul’man Rossii” [“Dock the Tail of Illegal Religious Figures.” Ideological Evolution of Faizrakhman Sattarov’s Views on the Role of Official Clergy in the Life of the Russian Muslims”], *Gosudarstvo, religiya, tserkov’ v Rossii i za rubezhom* [State, religion, and church in Russia and Worldwide], 4 (2018), p. 277–323).
- 21 Suleymanov R., “Faizrakhmanisty: sekta islamskogo proishozhdeniya v Tatarstane v nachale XXI veka”, p. 6–12.



contain in-depth analysis of Sattarov’s ideology.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, it seems appropriate to set out the fundamental tenets of the group’s teachings here, before speculating on the Faizrakhmanists’ theological and judicial nature.

The observation that Faizrakhmanist doctrine is eclectic in nature<sup>23</sup> is fair. One finds the influence of Islamic mysticism, Shia Islam, and other Islamic movements and schools in Sattarov’s teachings. The injunction to honour the Sabbath seems to have been borrowed from the Old Testament. Male members of the community usually spend that day in prayer and religious education.<sup>24</sup>

A good place to start a review of Sattarov’s teachings is his and his followers’ attitudes to the Five Pillars of Islam.

- 1) *The Shahada* (the Islamic testimony of faith). Some researchers claim that, by their actions, Sattarov and his followers in fact reject *the Shahada*. They are referring here to a certain ambiguity over the issue of the prophetic mission of Faizrakhman *hadhrat*,<sup>25</sup> about which the Faizrakhmanists themselves have never made any public claims.
- 2) *Prayer*. Faizrakhmanists perform the obligatory five-fold daily prayers. The form differs from the order accepted by other *madhabs* (both Sunni and Shia). Faizrakhmanists perform their prayers in accordance with a *hadith* from Abu Dawud’s collection.<sup>26</sup> The duration of each prayer is set and lasts about 75 minutes.<sup>27</sup>
- 3) *Zakat*. Faizrakhmanists do not reject *zakat* but have replaced it *de facto* by a different Islamic “tithe” – *khums*, which is one-fifth of income. *Khums* is an obligatory payment for all members of the

22 There is a brief analysis of the specific features of F. Sattarov’s teachings in an article by A.M. Akhunov on the Faizrakhmanists in the encyclopaedic dictionary, *Islam v Tatarstane: entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar’ [Islam in Tatarstan: an encyclopaedic dictionary]* (Moscow: Medina, 2017), p. 225. R.N. Mansurov’s article “Innovations in Islam on the example of the religious group of Faizrakhmanists” provides a chart that compares the main ideas of F. Sattarov and the pertinent regulations of Sunni Islam: Mansurov R., “Novovvedeniya v islame na primere religioznoy gruppy faizrakhmanistov” in *Etika menyayushchegosya mira: teoriya, praktika, tehnologii. Sbornik materialov Vserossiyskoi nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii v ramkah III Mezhdunarodnogo nauchno-obrazovatel’nogo foruma*, E.N. Viktoruk (ed.) (Krasnoyarsk, 2015), p. 35–36.

23 Akhunov A., “Faizrakhmanisty”, *Islam v Tatarstane: entsiklopedicheskiy slovar’*, p. 225.

24 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev, 07.06.2017.

25 Mansurov R., “Novovvedeniya v islame na primere religioznoy gruppy faizrakhmanistov”, p. 35–36.

26 This collection is held in much higher regard by the Faizrakhmanists than the other *hadith* collections (*Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim*, etc.).

27 Mansurov R., “Novovvedeniya v islame na primere religioznoy gruppy faizrakhmanistov”, p. 36.



community, with no exceptions.<sup>28</sup> According to the Faizrakhmanists, the money raised from *zakat* cannot cover the community's expenses.<sup>29</sup> The rules for this form of ritual alms-giving do not allow the community much scope for raising even minor amounts of money. Generally speaking, *zakat* is not paid on property used for one's personal needs, but this is the only kind of property most of the members of the community in Kazan and other cities have.<sup>30</sup> So, the question of alms-giving has been significantly modified in Sattarov's teachings for practical purposes.<sup>31</sup> According to Faizrakhmanists, those who dismiss *khums* are disobeying Allah's command.<sup>32</sup> Sattarov's followers do also pay such varieties of *zakat* as *'ushr* (a tithe on agricultural produce) and *zakat al-fitr*.

- 4) *Fasting*. Faizrakhmanists recognise fasting and perform it at the appointed time during Ramadan and other months of the lunar calendar, in accordance with Shariah injunctions.<sup>33</sup> In Sattarov's opinion, the new moon phenomenon cannot be observed in the Volga and Urals region, which is why members of the community always start Ramadan fasting the day after fasting begins in most Muslim countries and postpone its end for one or two days as well. Their fast lasts exactly thirty days.<sup>34</sup>
- 5) *Hajj*. In a dream vision, Sattarov allegedly received a revelation that the Black Stone from the Kaaba in Mecca had been transported into the residence of the Faizrakhmanists in Torfyanoy, a residential area in Kazan. As a result, the participants of the group were freed from the duty of Hajj. Simply being present on the community's holy land was equivalent to visiting Mecca and Medina.

28 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev, 07.06.2017.

29 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev, 07.06.2017.

30 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev, 07.06.2017.

31 Some tenets in Faizrakhmanist doctrine may seem to indicate sectarianism, but there may also be reasons far removed from religious dogmatics. For instance, Faizrakhmanists do not bury the deceased members of their community at Muslim cemeteries, but in forests, because they do not want to deal with the state in any way. As the leader of this community, the Caliph G. Ganiev explained to me in interview, if death occurs outside a hospital, an autopsy is normally required, which is unacceptable for a believer. They therefore prefer not to inform government bodies of deaths of fellow believers, performing the rites themselves in a secret place. Ganiev also said that he and his fellow believers had not been able to prevent the autopsy of Sattarov's body when he died. Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev, 07.06.2017.

32 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev, 07.06.2017.

33 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev, 07.06.2017.

34 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev, 07.06.2017.



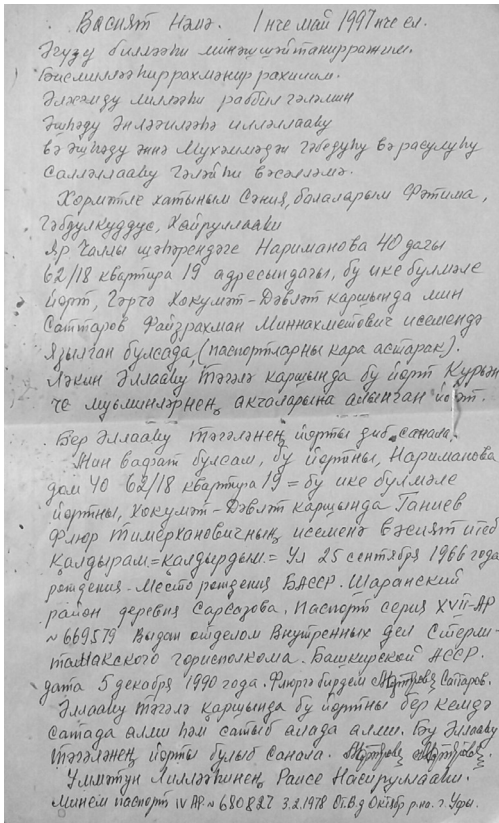


Photo 1. Wasiyat-name handwritten by Faizrakhman Sattarov, 1997. Courtesy of Gumar Ganiev.

It should be noted that dreams are an important source of revelation for Faizrakhmanists. I argue, however, that it is not quite correct to claim that dreams are a third credal source for the group, as A. Akhunov does.<sup>35</sup> The actual third source is in fact Sattarov's book, *Iman tamynlary (The Roots of Faith)*. Dreams are not so much a source of creed as a means of receiving the necessary answers to various questions, a practice common not just to Sattarov but

to other representatives of the group, both when searching for answers to theological questions and in solving problems in everyday life.<sup>36</sup>

In speaking of the theological and judicial nature of the Faizrakhmanist community, one cannot ignore the issue of how its representatives perceive other Muslims.

Sattarov's doctrine divides Muslims into several groups: 1) *mu'mins* (believers who "try to achieve the grace of Allah with body and soul"), 2) *madhabists* or *mushriks* (followers of traditional Islam, which equates its leaders and the scholars of the *madhab* with Allah), 3) hypocrites, 4) recent converts to Islam, 5) the unobservant (those who do not perform prayers, do not pay *zakat* or *khumus (khums)*).<sup>37</sup> Sattarov included himself

35 Akhunov A. "Faizrakhmanisty", *Islam v Tatarstane: entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'*, p. 225.

36 For example, when arranging an interview with the head of the community, Caliph Gumar Ganiev, I was told that he would decide on the meeting once he had received a suitable answer in a dream.

37 Sattarov F., "Chto takoye din?" ["What is din?"], *Zvezda Povolzhia [The Star of Volga region]* (2012), 13–19 December, p. 3.



and his followers in the first group, the Mu'mins. Most Muslims, however, fall under the rubric of *madhabists* or *mushriks*, according to this classification. It is noteworthy that, in an article "What is din?", Sattarov uses the additional label of 'traditional Islam' to designate his opponents.

Having set themselves against most other believers on the doctrinal level, the Faizrakhmanists did not proceed to separate themselves from Muslims, however, actively interacting with them in their daily ritual practice. It is only in the second half of the 2000s that we see Sattarov and his followers become isolated from the centres of Muslim religious life (primarily mosques).<sup>38</sup> Before that, Faizrakhmanists participated in collective prayers in the mosques of Kazan: the Marjani mosque, the Zakabannaya mosque, etc. During service, Sattarov, or Nasrullah-babay as he was often called in the community, would correct those he considered to be making mistakes in performing certain rituals and even preach his ideas. This, and especially the preaching, provided an excuse for banning Sattarov and his followers from the Zakabannaya mosque.<sup>39</sup>

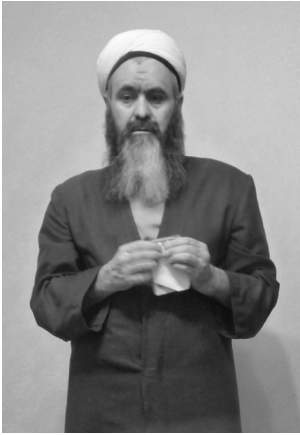
The marginalisation of the community in the second half of the 2000s was thus due to a combination of internal and external factors. That Faizrakhmanists were not allowed to participate in joint religious practices in Kazan mosques was down to the mosque imams refusing to accept how Sattarov interpreted certain issues of religious dogmatics and *fiqh*.<sup>40</sup> As for Faizrakhman *hadhrat* himself and his followers, I repeat that not only did they not avoid talking to other Muslims, but they actively sought out interaction with the ummah as an opportunity to spread the word about their teachings.<sup>41</sup> Sattarov was eager to influence both the common congregants

38 Russian researcher of Islam A.M. Akhunov considers 2007 a landmark date, the year the Faizrakhmanists "were visiting mosques, churches and sinagogues of Kazan, informing their congregations of the coming of the 'new prophet' F. Sattarov." See, Akhunov A., "Faizrakhmanisty", *Islam v Tatarstane: entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'*, p. 225. Since the late 2000s, the Faizrakhmanists have been transforming gradually from an open religious organisation into a closed structure.

39 For instance, as witnessed by D. Shagaviev in the Zakabannaya mosque, Sattarov publicly claimed to have had a revelation in which intimate relations between spouses at night were declared forbidden, regardless of whether it was during Ramadan or any other month. The imam-khatib of the mosque Ishaq Lutfullin then banished Sattarov, telling him that "an illegitimate child (Tatar: *zinadan tugan*) has no place here." After that, Sattarov and his followers began attending Friday Prayers at the Marjani mosque [Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with D. Shagaviev, 31.05.2018].

40 In A. Akhunov's view, as expressed in conversation with the author of this article, one should not ignore the economic factor. The reduction of the community's material resources as a result of the authorities' ban of the Faizrakhmanists' illegal commercial activities may be a reason for their self-isolation. The fact is that Sattarov forbade that members of the community pay rent for sales premises, pay for utilities, or pay any sort of taxes to government authorities. See, Akhunov A., "Faizrakhmanisty", *Islam v Tatarstane: entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'*, p. 225.

41 In the 1990s, they would preach door-to-door, while in the 2000s and 2010s they mostly



at mosques and the representatives of the so-called “official Islamic clergy”.<sup>42</sup> After the banishment of the Faizrakhmanists from Kazan’s mosques, they began performing their prayers in a house in Torfyanoy that Sattarov had purchased using community funds. Nor did the Faizrakhmanists’ isolation mean they abandoned preaching.

Photo 2. Gumar Ganiev before praying in the residence of Faizrakhmanists in Naberezhnye Chelny (the Republic of Tatarstan). Photo by Renat Bekkin.

It is difficult to describe the Faizrakhmanist community of the 1990s and mid-2000s in terms of allegiance to any school of Islam. The definition proposed by an expert on modern Islamic movements and schools, D. A. Shagaviev, is an effective one, in my opinion. According to it, the Faizrakhmanist community as it existed until the late 2000s can be characterised as a *takfiri jama’ah*, and its leader as a figure similar to Salafi theologian al-Albani (1914 – 1999).<sup>43</sup>

In the second half of the 2000s, when Faizrakhmanist sermons began to meet with open resistance from imams, Nasrullah-babay started signing his messages *Rasul Allah* (the Messenger of Allah). It should be noted that Sattarov clearly differentiated between the terms “messenger” and “prophet” in Islam. A prophet is someone who receives revelations from Allah, while the task of a messenger is to spread these ideas among people.<sup>44</sup> In practice, however, Sattarov took on the functions of both messenger and prophet of Allah, proclaiming ideas allegedly revealed to him by God in his sleep. He thus combined his theological activities with mystic experience. As a result, not only the imams but even the mufti of the Spiritual administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan had to make a public denunciation of Sattarov’s doctrine as not complying with Islam.<sup>45</sup>

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promoted their teachings through conversations with random strangers in the street. As the Faizrakhmanist Caliph G. Ganiev has noted, these conversations had no significant success and led to no influx of new members [Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev. 07.06.2017].

42 During the early stages of his work, Ildus Fayzov, who held the position of mufti of DUM RT, was under Sattarov’s influence. He was the member of the community in the 1990s but later disengaged himself [Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with D. Shagaviev, 31.05.2018; Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with R. Aysin. 30.05.2018].

43 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with D. Shagaviev, 31.05.2018.

44 Akhunov A., “Faizrakhmanisty”, *Islam v Tatarstane: entsiklopedicheskiy slovar’*, p. 225.

45 Akhunov A., “Faizrakhmanisty”, *Islam v Tatarstane: entsiklopedicheskiy slovar’*, p. 226.



At the same time, Sattarov's public image as a self-proclaimed prophet does not give a full idea of the personality of this controversial religious figure, who was after all a representative of the so-called 'official Muslim clergy' for almost fifteen years.<sup>46</sup> With some reservations, Sattarov's biography between 1963 and 1975 presents an exemplary career of a successful young imam.

## FAIZRAKHMAN SATTAROV: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

An alumnus of the Mir-i Arab Madrasah in Bukhara,<sup>47</sup> the main talent foundry for Soviet Muslim religious figures, Faizrakhman Sattarov began work in 1964 as imam-khatib of the Marjani mosque in Kazan.<sup>48</sup> Given opposition from the officer-in-charge (*upolnomochennyi*) of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (SDRK)<sup>49</sup> for the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), F.S. Mangutkin,<sup>50</sup> mufti Shakir Khiyaletdinov (1890 – 1974) had to withdraw Sattarov and send him back to Ufa, where he worked as secretary of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia (DUMES) from 1964 to 1966.

46 The term 'clergy' is a tentative one and should be used with disclaimers – at least when used of Sunni muftis, imams, etc. In Russia, the term 'Muslim clergy' can probably be understood as referring primarily to muftis, their deputies and other administrative officials of the spiritual administrations of Muslims (muftiates). This is connected with the muftiates' role in the institutionalisation of Muslim religious life. As for regular imams, in this paper I use the term 'official clergy' (in quotes), to distinguish between mosque-affiliated and mosqueless ministers of religion, as the context requires.

47 According to the appendix to Sattarov's employment record book, he enrolled at the Mir-i Arab madrasah in 1956 and graduated from it in 1964. *Appendix to F.M. Sattarov's employment record book: copy*, Author's archives.

48 It was at the time the only functioning mosque in the city.

49 In 1965, the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (SDRK) and the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church affiliated to the Council of Ministers of the USSR were united into the Council for Religious Affairs (SDR) affiliated to the Council of Ministers of USSR.

50 In April of 1963 mufti Sh. Khiyaletdinov received a petition from the Muslims of Kazan (signed by 49 people) with a request to appoint Sattarov imam-khatib of the Marjani mosque. On 01.04.1964, F.S. Mangutkin sent the following telegram to his colleague, SDRK's officer-in-charge for the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic M.H. Arduvanov: "I ask you to tell Khiyaletdinov not to send seminary student Sattarov to Kazan" (Central State History Archives of the Republic of Bashkortostan, collection R-873, inv. 1, file 9, p. 8). It appears that Faizrakhman *hadhrat* fate was influenced by comments similar to the description of Sattarov by the chairman of the executive administration of the religious society of Muslims of Kazan, Timirkhanov. In a conversation with a senior inspector of SDRK, N.I. Smirnov, Timirkhanov said "in a year Mr. Sattarov, born in 1929, is going to graduate from a *madrasah* in Bukhara... but his views and his fanatical behaviour, which show no respect for religious legislation, make me conclude that Sattarov will not be suitable for the position of mullah in Kazan." (State Archive of the Russian Federation, collection R-6991, inv. 4, file 137, p. 16–17).



In 1966, Sattarov came to Leningrad, and from January 1967 to July 1970 he served as imam-khatib of the Leningrad Cathedral mosque.<sup>51</sup> In 1970–1972 he held a similar position in Rostov-on-Don. In 1972 Sattarov came back to Ufa, where he worked as the executive secretary of DUMES until 1975. *De facto* Sattarov was the right-hand man of mufti Khiyaletdinov. After Khiyaletdinov's death in 1974, the position of *ad interim* mufti was given to Ahmetzyan Mustafin (1902 – 1986), imam-khatib of the Moscow Cathedral mosque. Mustafin was the main candidate for the position of DUMES chairman and considered a shoo-in by both the Council for Religious Affairs (SDR) under the Council of Ministers of the USSR and most imams.<sup>52</sup>

Mustafin's refusal to run for the position of mufti forced officials to search hastily for a new candidate, however. As one of the most educated religious figures in the DUMES system, Sattarov was technically the right candidate to head this muftiate, but he did not have much chance of being elected. We only have odd bits of information about how his colleagues (other imams) viewed him.<sup>53</sup> Nor did they have the decisive word in the matter of appointing the new mufti. The key role here was that of the Council for Religious Affairs and Sattarov had a strained relationship with this organisation. As stated above, in 1964, the officer-in-charge of the Council for Affairs of Religious Cults for the Tatar ASSR had opposed Sattarov's appointment. And in 1970, at the insistence of the officer-in-charge of SDR for Leningrad and the Leningrad oblast', he was removed from his position of imam-khatib of the Leningrad Cathedral mosque.<sup>54</sup>

As mentioned in N. Ashirov's (A.A. Nurullaev's)<sup>55</sup> book *Evolution of Islam in the USSR*, "believers who were outraged by the imam's actions,

51 Hereinafter, I use the term 'Cathedral mosque' (Sobornaya mechet') where it is part of the official name of the mosque in question. *Appendix to F.M. Sattarov's employment record book: copy*. Author's archives. For more on the Leningrad period in Sattarov's life, see Bekkin R.I., "Ukorotit' hvost nezakonnnyh religioznyh deyateley'. Ob ideynoy evolyutsii vzglyadov Fayzrakhmana Sattarova na rol' 'ofitsialnogo duhovenstva' v religioznoy zhizni musul'man Rossii" ["Dock the Tail of Illegal Religious Figures." Ideological Evolution of Faizrakhman Sattarov's Views on the Role of Official Clergy in the Life of the Russian Muslims"], *Gosudarstvo, religiya, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom [State, religion, and church in Russia and Worldwide]*, 4 (2018), p. 277-323.

52 For more see Zaripov I., Safarov M., *Ahmetzyan Mustafin: iz istorii islama v SSSR [Ahmetzyan Mustafin: from the history of Islam in the USSR]* (Moscow: Medina, 2017), p. 198–199.

53 According to the available information, Sattarov's predecessor as imam-khatib of the Leningrad Cathedral mosque, G.N. Isaev, gave a generally negative assessment of his work in Leningrad. By contrast, H.V. Mahmutov, who replaced Sattarov in the position, spoke positively of him. In 1992 he wrote: "These days I often meet him (Sattarov – R.B.) and discuss various religious issues with him. He really possesses profound knowledge." Mahmutov H.V., *Avtobiografiya: kopiya*, Author's archives, p. 6.

54 *Perepiska s Sovetom po delam religiy [Correspondence with the Council for Religious Affairs]*, Central State Archive of Saint Petersburg, collection R-2017, inv. 1, file 24, p. 60.

55 This pseudonym was used by an officer of the Council for Religious Affairs (SDR) affiliated to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, A.A. Nurullaev, who supervised work with Muslims and Buddhists from 1967 to 1987 (Zaripov I. A., Safarov M.A., *Ahmetzyan Mustafin: iz istorii islama v SSSR*, p. 23).



bombarded the various authorities with complaints, in which they noted that such a backward and fanatical imam was not to be tolerated in Leningrad, one of the largest cultural centres of the country.”<sup>56</sup>

On a formal level, the question of Sattarov’s resignation from the position of imam-khatib of the Leningrad Cathedral mosque was initiated by members of ‘the twenty’ (*‘dvadtsatka’*, a congregational council that was responsible for executive management) in the form of a petition to mufti Sh. Khiyaletdinov regarding the “inappropriate behaviour of imam Sattarov”.<sup>57</sup> As we know from the story of Faizrakhman *hadhrat’s* predecessor, Gabelbari Isaev (1907 – 1983), however, the person behind these actions of *‘dvadtsatka’* was most probably the officer-in-charge of the Council for Religious Affairs for Leningrad and the Leningrad oblast,<sup>58</sup> who, in Sattarov’s case, was G.S. Zharinov.



*Photo 3. Imam Faizrakhman Sattarov during praying in the Leningrad Cathedral mosque, 1967. Photo by D.I. Iskhakov. Courtesy of the State Museum of the History of Religion (St. Petersburg)*

As for the common believers’ attitude towards Faizrakhman *hadhrat*, comparison to G.N. Isaev, who had served as imam-khatib of the Leningrad Cathedral mosque from 1956 to 1966, was not to Sattarov’s advantage either. During the years Sattarov worked in Leningrad, Isaev continued to live in the city, as a mosqueless mullah (*bezmechetnyi mulla*) and informal religious leader of the city’s Muslims. His relationship with Sattarov was very complicated.<sup>59</sup>

56 Ashirov N., *Evolutsiya islama v SSSR [The evolution of Islam in the USSR]* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1973), p. 10.

57 *Perepiska s Sovetom po delam religiy [Correspondence with the Council for Religious Affairs]*, Central State Archive of Saint Petersburg, collection R-2017, inv. 1, file 24, p. 60.

58 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with G.G. Isaev, 17.05.2018.

59 In particular, one of the petitions to the DUMES mufti Sh. Khiyaletdinov from congregant of the Leningrad Cathedral mosque G. Valeev contained the following: “I had to send you this letter because I was extremely outraged by the heinous words that Gabelbari Isaev is spreading about you in Leningrad. He says: ‘This mufti is an ignoramus himself and he has



Leningrad would appear in Sattarov’s life again, several years after he had left the city. In 1975, Isaev was elected mufti of DUMES and he soon dismissed Sattarov from his position as executive secretary of the Spiritual Administration.<sup>60</sup> As a result, Sattarov worked outside the DUMES system for several years, from November 1975 ‘till September 1978, as a yard cleaner at day-care centre number 248 in Ufa.<sup>61</sup> Only in 1978 did he manage to return to work at the muftiate, when he was appointed imam-khatib of a mosque in Oktyabrsk, Bashkir ASSR.<sup>62</sup>

It was perhaps during these years, when Sattarov was excluded from the DUMES system, that he came to rethink his views on the role of the so-called ‘official Muslim clergy’ in the lives of believers. The next in this series of dismissals as imam came in 1980, this time at the initiative of new mufti Talgat Tazeev (subsequently – Tadzhuddin). This dismissal could only serve as yet another stimulus to consider the need for religious service outside the official muftiate system.

The main tenets of Sattarov’s religious doctrine were formulated by him in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Despite the fact that Sattarov and his followers opposed an ‘official Muslim clergy’, for a long time neither the federal government nor the local authorities (essentially the Republic of Tatarstan, where the community’s centre was based) took any repressive actions against the Faizrakhmanists.<sup>63</sup> This may well have been because the Faizrakhmanists did not interfere in politics and, from a certain point on, were barely interested in events outside their community.

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appointed another ignoramus in the Leningrad mosque.” See Bustanov A., “Ssora po-islamski: zhaloby i anonimki sovetskikh musul’man”, [“Muslims’ quarell: complaints and denouncements of Soviet Muslims”], *Islamology*, 2 (2017), p. 133. The article’s author erroneously thinks that these words, attributed to Isaev, refer to Hafiz Mahmutov, the imam-khatib of the Cathedral mosque from 1971 to 1977 (Bustanov A., *Op. cit.*, p. 133). In fact they refer to Sattarov, who was sent to replace Isaev by mufti Khiyaletdinov at the end of 1966.

60 Of the reasons for this decision by mufti G.N. Isaev I know nothing. According to G. Ganiev, Sattarov began propagating his doctrine as early as in 1975. Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Ganiev, 07.06.2017. So, the formal reason for Faizrakhman *hadhrat*’s removal from his position could have been his religious views.

61 *Appendix to F.M. Sattarov’s employment record book: copy*, Author’s archives.

62 According to Sattarov’s daughter Fatima, her father already took guidance from his dreams when making important decisions in the late 1970s, believing them to be instructions given him by Allah. For instance, before travelling to Oktyabrsk he said he had seen a warning in a dream that if he moved to that town with his children, his children would become *kafirs* (infidels). Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with M. Ibragimov and F. Sattarova, 07.06.2018.

63 Muslim religious figures of Tatarstan mostly ignored Faizrakhmanists after official statements by the mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan and a number of imams saying that Sattarov’s followers were not to be considered Muslims.



After an assassination attempt on the mufti of DUM RT, Ildus Fayzov, and the murder of his deputy, Valiulla Yakupov, in the summer of 2012, however, religious organisations and personalities started being subjected to thorough inspection. Although Faizrakhmanist complicity in these crimes was never established by the police investigation, they nonetheless found grounds for banning both the religious group and Sattarov's writings, which dated largely from the 1980s and 1990s.

## EVOLUTION OF SATTAROV'S VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF THE MUFTIATE

The fact that Sattarov, who had previously opposed unregistered priests, himself ended up a 'vagabond mullah', may seem quite paradoxical at first glance. But only at first glance. By banishing Sattarov from their midst, the 'official clergy' demonstrated that they did not share the ideas and values preached by Sattarov. The conflict between him and the clergy was over beliefs and worldview. The system of spiritual administrations, initially seen by Sattarov as advocating the ideas of 'pure Islam', exhibited inability and/or unwillingness to defend these ideas. Thus, viewing Sattarov's development of his doctrine as merely a result of his personal disappointment in the results of the mufti elections in 1975 and 1980 is to oversimplify the situation.<sup>64</sup>

At the beginning of his religious career, Sattarov was an unconditional supporter of the muftiate system. Subsequently, he came to reject its significance in the religious life of Muslims and viewed it more as a divisive than a uniting factor.

So long as Faizrakhman *hadhrat* was a representative of the so-called 'official clergy', his goal was to eliminate or take control of any mosqueless religious activity. In this, his interests coincided with those of the Soviet authorities. Using modern terms, one might say that Sattarov was an adamant supporter of 'traditional Islam', i.e. Islam that is loyal to both the

64 In the present author's opinion, it is not correct to explain all the changes in Sattarov's religious worldview solely by his mental condition. For example, the mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan in 1998–2011, G. Iskhakov thinks that Sattarov's condition was directly influenced by the collapse of his plans to become mufti of DUMES in 1980. Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with G. Iskhakov, 16.08. 2018. Firstly, we do not have a medical certificate confirming his diagnosis. Secondly, even if Sattarov had a condition, we would need to understand when, from what time and to what degree his illness could have interfered with him establishing his own doctrine or, on the contrary, helped him with it.





spiritual and the secular power. This is reflected in documents that date from the Leningrad period of Sattarov’s work,<sup>65</sup> particularly a sermon delivered to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution and a compendium he is presumed to have created at the request of the officer-in-charge of the Council for Religious Affairs for Leningrad and Leningrad oblast’.<sup>66</sup>

In general, Sattarov was harsher in his fight against mosqueless religious figures than most of his colleagues, who not only knew of unregistered mullahs and other priests but engaged them as helpers when they couldn’t cope with their workload themselves.<sup>67</sup>

In the Soviet period (at least in the 1950s – 1970s), the muftiates acted as allies of the state in eradicating any religious activity independent from it.<sup>68</sup> This is why there were documents designed to condemn any such activities. A copy of one of such documents is currently held in the collection of the State Museum of the History of Religion in St. Petersburg. It appears to be a translation (or possibly the original handed down to the muftiate from the Council for Religious Affairs) of a DUMES *fatwa* dated 18 June 1961.<sup>69</sup> This *fatwa* is against mosqueless mullahs and other unregistered religious workers.<sup>70</sup>

The response of the representatives of the so-called ‘official clergy’ to this *fatwa* was mixed. While Sattarov, as becomes obvious from the surviving documents, took the *fatwa* as a guide for action at that point in his

65 See Bekkin R.I., “‘Ukorotit’ hvost nezakonnyh deyateley’. Ob ideynoy evolyutsii vzglyadov Fayzrakhmana Sattarova na rol’ ‘ofitsialnogo duhovenstva’ v religioznoy zhizni musul’man Rossii”, p. 277–323.

66 The full Russian text and an analysis of both of these documents are available here: Bekkin R.I., “‘Ukorotit’ hvost nezakonnyh religioznyh deyateley’. Ob ideynoy evolyutsii vzglyadov Faizrakhmana Sattarova na rol’ ‘ofitsialnogo duhovenstva’ v religioznoy zhizni musul’man Rossii”, p. 272–291.

67 Zaripov I., Safarov M., *Ahmetzyan Mustafin: iz istorii islama v SSSR*, p. 190. For more information on how easy it was during Soviet times to go from being a part of the ‘official clergy’ to being a mosqueless (unregistered) priest, see Bekkin R.I., “Imam Yakub Khalekov i musul’manskaya obshchina sovetskogo Petrograda–Leningrada” [“Imam Yaqub Khalekov and the Muslim community in Soviet Petrograd–Leningrad”], *Rossiyskaya istoriya [Russian history]*, 1 (2017), p. 148–156.

68 One of the reasons for mosqueless mullahs’ services being in high demand was that both communists and non-party people who wanted a certain rite performed did not want it done officially (publicly) in a mosque, because that could cause trouble at work or even destroy one’s career. For more see Zaripov I., Safarov M. *Ahmetzyan Mustafin: iz istorii islama v SSSR*, p. 75.

69 *Fatwa without title. Typescript* (Leningrad), State Museum of the History of Religion, p. 1–8.

70 The main points of this *fatwa* have been listed by Russian historian Yu. Guseva in Guseva Yu.N., *Ishanizm kak sufiyskaya traditsiya Sredney Volgi v XX veke: formy. smysly. znachenie* [ishanism as a Sufi tradition of the Middle Volga in the 20th century: forms, meanings, significance], (Moscow: Medina, 2013), p. 132–133.



career, Isaev was very critical of it.<sup>71</sup> At the same time Sattarov's understanding of the task of fighting the unofficial mullahs was slightly different from how it was stated in the 1961 *fatwa*. In Sattarov's opinion, mosqueless mullahs were dangerous because they appropriated several of the functions of official priests and competed with them. It is perhaps not unwarranted to suppose that the main drawback of the mosqueless mullahs, for Sattarov, was that, intentionally or not, they brought non-Islamic folk beliefs and traditions into Islamic ritual.

In his opposition to unregistered priests and their activities, Sattarov sometimes found himself in conflict not only with believers but with his colleagues – imams who were loyal to certain rituals and traditions that did not exist in 'traditional Islam'.

From this we can, for our purposes, reconstruct the evolution of Sattarov's views on the role of the muftiates and the Muslim 'clergy'. At first, he thought that the 'official clergy' could and should be the guardians of Islam's purity. When he realised that they were encouraging 'unacceptable innovations' themselves, or at least taking a relaxed view of them, he then came into conflict with individual imams and believers and ultimately with the system of spiritual administrations itself. Sattarov's banishment from this system was thus a predictable result of his spiritual evolution. At the same time, left in the cold, he had a chance to look at things from a different perspective, including dogmatically.

Initially, Faizrakhman *hadhrat* did not preach a separate doctrine but merely advocated strict following of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. In the 1980s, when the Soviet system of controlling religious affairs was still in place, Sattarov had only one path open to him, to become a mosqueless mullah. In the 1990s, ministers of Islamic religion opposed to TsDUM<sup>72</sup> and its chairman T. Tadzhuiddin created their own spiritual administrations.<sup>73</sup> By that time, however, Sattarov had already shaped his basic doctrine, and there was no place in it for any official religious structures, even ones independent from the muftiate in Ufa. Sattarov's reconsideration of the role of the spiritual administrations of Muslims (muftiates) in the lives of Russian

71 Bustanov A., *Ssora po-islamski: zhaloby i anonimki sovetskikh musul'man*, p. 143.

72 In 1992, DUMES changed its name to the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia and the European Countries of the CIS (TsDUM). In 1994, this muftiate was registered at the Ministry of Justice of Russia with a slightly modified name – the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia.

73 One has to agree with V. Yakupov that one of the reasons for the weakening and subsequent breakup of DUMES in the 1990s was T. Tadzhuiddin's repressive actions toward imams disloyal to him. This started in 1980. See Yakupov V., *Islam v Tatarstane v 1990-e gody [Islam in Tatarstan in the 1990s]* (Kazan: Iman, 2005), p. 124.



believers had had a significant influence on the evolution of his worldview.

In short, we may emphasise that, as a religious group that appeared in the late Soviet era, the Faizrakhmanists can be described in the terms of those times as a manifestation of 'unofficial Islam', and Sattarov himself as a mosqueless or 'vagabond' mullah. In modern Russia, Sattarov's followers found themselves relegated into the category of so-called 'non-traditional Islam'. As may be seen from the later publications of Faizrakhman *hadhrat*, he also counterposed himself and his community to the adherents of 'traditional Islam', even going so far as to call the latter *mushriks* (polytheists).

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have considered the scope for using the construct 'traditional Islam' in studying religious movements and groups in modern Islam. I took the Faizrakhmanists as an example of such a group. Most authors writing on this group describe it as a pseudo-Islamic 'sect'. In their descriptions they rely on the views of the so-called official Muslim 'clergy', who themselves use the term 'sect', itself uncharacteristic of Islam, to refer to the followers of Faizrakhman Sattarov.

The Faizrakhmanist group is a good illustration of how the artificial construct of 'traditional Islam' not just hinders our understanding of the nature of religious movements but actually creates difficulties for classification. The predecessor of the 'traditional and non-traditional Islam' dichotomy was the 'official and unofficial Islam' one. What these two pairs of oppositions have in common is the contrast between a systemic Muslim 'clergy' and an extra-systemic one.

Sattarov had already formed his basic doctrine during the Soviet time, when ministers of Islamic religion who renounced the authority of the spiritual administrations were labelled as followers of 'unofficial Islam'. In modern Russia, the Faizrakhmanists became one of the movements and groups that represent so-called 'non-traditional Islam'.

Whether or not a movement or group is placed in that category depends less on any analysis of their doctrine from an Islamic studies or theological or legal perspective than on how well or poorly integrated they are in the system of the official Muslim 'clergy'. Using the example of the Faizrakhmanists, I have shown that the criterion for labelling movements and groups 'extra-systemic' is the nature of their relationship with



the official clergy, represented by the muftiates.

In Russia, the muftiates are the authority that decides on what complies with tradition and what does not. When such political and administrative decisions are made, both in the Soviet period and in modern Russia, the official 'clergy' is used to explain them, whether imposed on the muftiate from outside or instigated by circles inside the spiritual administrations themselves.

A case in point was the attempt to discuss the so-called 'Qur'anists' in early 2018. A feature the representatives of this group share is their critical approach to the Sunnah, manifested in calls to revise the large corpus of *hadiths*. In February of 2018, *fatwa* No 6/18 of the Council of 'ulama' of the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR) and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF) was issued. The sub-title of this *fatwa* included the phrase "against the Qur'anists", but the group's actual views were not analysed or given any theological and legal evaluation.<sup>74</sup> A group of clerics casting doubt on the second most important source of Shariah was thus not condemned.<sup>75</sup>

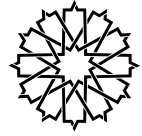
This example shows that decisions about whether to acknowledge a group or movement as diverging from Islam (a 'sect') are made arbitrarily and are not based on any profound theological and legal analysis of their doctrines. Therefore, the attempts by some researchers to base their descriptions of new movements and groups in Islam on what representatives of the official clergy think may lead them to incorrect conclusions.

In spite of some significant deviations in doctrine from the basic principles of Islam in their interpretation of the main theological and legal currents in Sunni and Shia Islam, the Faizrakhmanists should be described as a community or religious group of Islamic origin rather than as a pseudo-Islamic 'sect'. Faizrakhman Sattarov's religious doctrine requires deeper analysis, not only from Islamic studies scholars and experts in religion who specialise in theological and legal texts and religious practices, but also historians researching the history of Islam in the Soviet Union and modern Russia.

74 For detailed criticism of the *fatwa* from one of the representatives of the so-called "Qur'anists", Rustam Batrov (Batyr), see Batyr R. "Pochemu Sovet ulemov SMR – polnye bankroty..." ["Why the Council of 'ulama' of SMR are complete failures"], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/373726>, accessed 25 September 2019; Batyr R., "Sovet muftiyev Ros-sii ob'yavil hadisy vinovnymi v degradatsii islama" ["The Council of Muftis of Russia to declare the hadiths guilty of the deterioration of Islam"], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/375729>, accessed 25 September 2019.

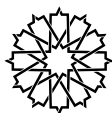
75 For more information on the Qur'anists, see R.I. Bekkin's article "The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam" in this edited volume.





**Traditional Islam  
in Russian Regions and Crimea**





# Sufism in Tatarstan: Revival of a Tradition, Export or Expansion?

*Rezeda Safiullina-Ibragimova*

## ABSTRACT

In Tatar social and religious discourse, the idea of re-evaluating the Sufi legacy to serve as a tool for preserving ethnic, cultural and religious identity is a constant. So too is talk of reviving Sufism as a 'traditional' form of Islam and alternative to Wahhabism. Which prompts one to ask whether a complete and meaningful revival of the institutions and ethics of Sufism is even possible in the modern Tatar environment. Scholars differ on the issue. Some take the view that Sufism in the Volga Region and Tatarstan can only be "exported, not revived". Others consider the present situation an "expansion of Sufism into the Muslim ummah of the Volga Region", while still others speak of "constructing images of the past and projecting them onto other regions."

This article looks at modern ideological and institutional transformations of "Tatar" Sufism and how they relate to politics and globalisation, drawing on the author's field research and materials published in the media, as well as work by other researchers. The article examines the Sufi orders of the Qadiriyya and the Shadhiliyya, as well as several branches of the Naqshbandiyya: the Khalidiyya, the jama'ahs of the Topbaşıyya and the Haqqaniyya, and the offshoots of the Mujaddidiyya branch – the Mahmoudiyya, the Husayniyya, and the followers of the sheikh of the Deobandi school, Ahmad Zulfiqar. Analysis of relations between Sufis and their mentors, the details and dynamics of ritual practices, and attitudes to other groups and branches is fleshed out by individual accounts of their internal spiritual experiences by followers of the Tasawwuf in Tatarstan. The author





does not distinguish between Sufi and pseudo-Sufi brotherhoods. All descriptions cited in the paper reflect the personal opinions of the informants.

Key words: *Sufism, tariqa, tradition, Islam in Tatarstan.*

## INTRODUCTION

In 2012, a student studying for a master's degree was doing their degree thesis with me on Sufism in Tatarstan. In preparing that thesis, a questionnaire was prepared for use with people who considered themselves Sufis and interviews conducted to serve as the basis for the research. In re-reading the thesis, the following excerpt struck me particularly: "Kamil *hadhrat* of the Tynychlyk mosque in Mirnyi (a suburb of Kazan) noted that there are very few true followers of Sufism in Kazan. A lot of so-called Sufis will swear an oath to any random sheikh they meet. In his opinion, such members of the *tariqa* cannot be considered Sufis."<sup>1</sup> It turned out my student had managed to interview the future mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan, Kamil *hadhrat* Samigullin, back when he was a simple imam at a suburban mosque in Kazan.

Six years later, in preparing this article, we met mufti Samigullin again.<sup>2</sup> Asked "Do you think it is possible to talk of a revival of Sufism in modern Tatarstan?", he confirmed his view that not all self-proclaimed Sufis should be considered representatives of *tariqas*. Having noted that there is no longer any tradition of sheikhs in Tatarstan, as the chain of succession was broken during the Soviet era, the mufti mentioned the names of some outstanding Sufis of the past. Among them were the "last great sheikh" of the *Naqshbandi tariqa* in the Volga-Urals region, Zaynulla Rasulev,<sup>3</sup> and his apprentice and head of the famous new-method *Muhammadiyah madrasah*, Galimdzhan Barudi.<sup>4</sup> The current Qadi of Bahrain Ibrahim Muraihi traces his chain of apprenticeship and succession back to Barudi (who taught in Damascus in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and had many

1 From the manuscript of the master's degree thesis by Mindubaev L.L., *Rasprostraneniye sufizma nakshbandiyskogo tarikata v Volgo-Ural'skom regione* [The spread of Sufism of the Naqshbandi tariqa in the Volga-Urals region] (Kazan: Rossiyskiy Islamskiy Institut, 2013), p. 77.

2 Kamil Iskanderovich Samigullin (b. 1985) is a Muslim cleric, mufti, and chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (since 2013).

3 Zaynulla Rasulev (1833–1917) – a Russian religious figure, ishan and sheikh of the Naqshbandi tariqa.

4 Galimdzhan Barudi (1857–1921) – a Russian theologian, scholar, religious and social figure, educator, and founder of the *ad-Din wal-Adab* magazine (1906 – 1908, 1913 – 1917).



students there). The first mufti of Dagestan Sayfulla Qadi Bashlarov<sup>5</sup> was also mentioned. He had been a *murid* of Zaynulla Rasulev and had taught in a Muhammadiya *madrakah* for three years of his exile in Kazan. Zaynulla Rasulev gave Sayfulla Qadi a *chapan* (an overcoat – R.S.) of the Prophet for safekeeping, and the relic is now in Dagestan. Concluding our meeting, the mufti of Tatarstan said “When this *amanah* – the *chapan* of the Prophet, entrusted for safekeeping, returns to Tatarstan, and when we have our own sheikhs, then we will be able to say that the tradition has been revived in our Republic.”<sup>6</sup>

Insistence on the need to re-evaluate the Sufi legacy as a tool for preserving ethnic, cultural, and religious identity is accompanied in Tatarstan social and religious discourse by continuous advancement of the idea of reviving Sufism as the ‘traditional’ form of Islam and an alternative to Wahhabism. This raises a reasonable question: is a complete and meaningful revival of the institutions and ethics of Sufism even possible in the modern Tatar environment, given that the tradition of passing the *ijazah* (the authorisation to pass-on of knowledge from mentor to apprentice) from *sheikh* to *sheikh*, from *ishan* to *ishan*, has been almost completely lost for some years now?<sup>7</sup> According to the head of the Department of Islamic Studies at the Institute of the CIS Countries, Ildar Safargaleev, Sufism can only be imported into the Volga Region, not revived.<sup>8</sup> Rais Suleymanov, a columnist specialised in ethnic and religious conflict in the region, regards the current situation as an “expansion of Sufism into the Muslim ummah of the Volga Region”,<sup>9</sup> while Russian Islamic studies scholar A. Bustanov speaks of “constructing images of the past” and the “projection of these images” onto other regions.<sup>10</sup>

5 Sayfulla Qadi Bashlarov (1853–1919) – mufti of Dagestan and the Northern Caucasus (1909–1918) and Sufi sheikh of the *Naqshbandi*, *Shadhili* and *Qadiri tariqas*.

6 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with mufti K. Samigullin, 27.07.2018.

7 Safargaleev I., “Tasavvuf ili ‘tatarskiy sufizm?’” [“Tasavvuf or ‘Tatar Sufism?’”], <http://www.gumilev-center.ru/tasavvuf-ili-tatarskij-sufizm>, accessed 25 September 2019.

8 Kemper M., *Sufii i uchenye v Tatarstane i Bashkortostane: Islamskiy diskurs pod russkim gospodstvom* [Sufis and scholars in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan: Islamic discourse under Russian rule] (Kazan: Rossiyskiy Islamskiy Institut, 2008), p. 654.

9 Suleymanov R., Sufizm v Tatarstane v postsovetitskiy period: raznobraziye grupp, rasprostraneniye, vliyaniye na ummu regiona [Sufism in Tatarstan in the post-Soviet era: diversity of groups, spread, and influence on the ummah of the region], *Religiovedcheskiye issledovaniya* [Studies of religion], 2 (2016), p. 87-124; Suleymanov R.R., Religioznaya ekspansiya Turtsii v Tatarstan v postsovetitskiy period [Religious expansion of Turkey into Tatarstan in the post-Soviet era], *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* [Bulletin of MGIMO University], 47 (2) (2016), p. 40-48.

10 Bustanov A., “Sufizm v Rossii: pro et contra” [“Sufism in Russia: pro et contra”], <http://realnoevremya.ru/articles/46721>, accessed 25 October 2019.



This article is based on material from the author's field research<sup>11</sup> and information gleaned from print and online media. It seems to the author that any answer to the question of Sufism's prospects in Tatarstan will need close examination of the opinions of representatives of the various *tariqas* in the Republic.

## SUFISM AND TATARS IN THE PAST: A BRIEF FORAY

A complex and subtle instrument for influencing the consciousness of the faithful, Sufism has contributed considerably to shaping the public face of the various Islamic nations and peoples. Once they had extended their influence throughout the Volga-Urals region, the Sufi brotherhoods of the *Kubrawiyya*, *Yasawiyya*, *Naqshbandiyya*, and *Qadiriyya* (the first and last less so than the middle pair) contributed much to the formation and development of the Islamic literature, poetry, educational system and worldview of the Muslims of the region.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, an Islamic primer entitled *Iman sharty* [*The Conditions of Faith*] was the first reader for children. It was written in the form of a catechism and widely used in Tatar *madrasahs*. It posed the question "Which *silsila* do you belong to?", and the answer referred to the *silsila* of Khawaja Ahmad Yasawi, founder of the Sufi brotherhood of the *Yasawiyya* and considered one of the first Sufis amongst the Turkic peoples. His *tariqa* was widespread in the Volga-Urals region during the Golden Horde period. It was followed in influence by the *Naqshbandiyya tariqa*. The adoption of the *Mujaddidiyya* branch, founded by Ahmad Sirhindi (Imam Rabbani, d. 1624), was associated with the activities of two Central Asian sheikhs, Niayzkuli al-Turkmani in Bukhara and Faizkhan al-Qabuli, who were very active amongst the *madrasah* students of the Volga and Urals Region, and favoured the *Naqshbandi tariqa*.<sup>12</sup>

11 This field research was conducted in Kazan in 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016 and 2018, in the Arsky district in 2012 and 2018, and in the Aznakaevsky district of the Republic of Tatarstan in 2016 and 2018, and it included participant observation at ceremonies of *sohbet* and *dhikr*, individual rituals of *dhikr and yasin*, and 13 individual semi-structured interviews and 8 informal interviews with members of the following *tariqas*: *Qadiriyya* (followers of Haydar Nuri Topbaş), *Shadhili*, *Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya* (*Haqqaniyya* – followers of Nazim al-Haqqani; *Topbaşiyya* – followers of Osman Nuri Topbaş, as well as the followers of the Ismail Aga *jama'ah*) and the *Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya* (*Husayniyya* – followers of the Tatarstani sheikh Rishat Musin, *Mahmoudiyya* – followers of the late Dagestani sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi, as well as the followers of the Pakistani sheikh Zulfiqar Ahmad), *Tijaniyya* (followers of sheikh Ali Abdu-s-Samad), as well as their supporters and opponents.

12 Khamidov E.N., "Mashaikh-i tyurk' i Nakshbandiya v Volgo-Ural'skom regione" ["Mashaikh-i tyurk' and *Naqshbandiyya* in the Volga-Urals region], *Islam v multikul'turnom mire: Sbornik*



The Tatar ulama have themselves often borrowed from the traditions of the Sufi *tariqas*, including the idea that they should remain spiritually and intellectually autonomous from the authorities. As former deputy chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUM RT) Rustam Batrov noted during our interview with him, “While the essence of Sufism lies in overcoming forms and shapes, in seeing God beyond the forms and shapes, after a while Sufism became shrouded in ritual and itself started showing an inclination to stagnancy, formality, narrow-mindedness and pedantry. It is possible that, at a certain point, the great mentors of past centuries understood that and that was why they took their turn from the *Yasawiyya* to the *Naqshbandiyya*.”<sup>13</sup>

According to students of the question, the stability of Islam’s position in the life of the Tatar community has been less due to its traditional system of dogma and rituals than to the Sufi interpretation of it as “the religion of the heart”.<sup>14</sup> The Muslims of the region have tended, at times, less to “participate collectively with an emphasis on ritual, than to follow the path of individual obedience”. For the most part, they have been “followers of a special form of Sufism – ‘*kitap suze*’ (‘the word of the book’).”<sup>15</sup>

The Muslims of the Volga-Urals region have always had a preference for works that present the history and essence of the *Naqshbandi tariqa’s* teachings, guidebooks for the *murid*, and collections of prayers mandatory for members of the *tariqa*, etc. Many such books were published by the publishing houses of Kazan.<sup>16</sup> In addition, textbooks on ethics (*akhlaq*) and Tatar poetry, full of Sufi themes and motifs, were quite popular. The works of Ahmad Yasawi, his apprentice Suleyman Baqyrgani (1091–1186), the Central Asian

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*materialov i tezisov 2-go Kazanskogo mezhdunarodnogo nauchnogo foruma. 29-31 okt. 2012 g. [Islam in a multicultural world. Collection of materials and abstracts of the 2nd Kazan International Academic Forum. 29-31 October 2012]* (Kazan: Art-Logic, 2012), p. 78-80.

13 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Rustam Batrov, 20.09.2018.

14 Ildiyatullina G., Duhovno-religioznaya atmosfera v Povolzhye v XVII–XVIII vv. [The spiritual and religious atmosphere in the Volga Region in the 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries], *Islam i musul’manskaya kultura v Srednem Povolzhye: istoriya i sovremennost. Ocherki* [Islam and Islamic culture in the Middle Volga region: history and modernity. Essays] (Kazan: Master-Line, 2002), <http://www.tataroved.ru/publication/jad/2/g13/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

15 Speech by the director of the Regional Social Organisation – the Centre for Qur’anic and Sunnah Research, Farid Salman, at the IV International Academic Conference on Interpretation of the Holy Qur’an in the past and present, organised by the Centre for Research into the Holy Qur’an and the Pure Sunnah of the Republic of Tatarstan on 13.09.2018 in Kazan. As it turned out, there were Sufis in Farid Salman’s family as well: his maternal uncle Ahmadulla mullah was a follower of a sheikh from a dynasty of *Naqshbandi ishans* from the village of Kizlau, and they were associated with Zaynulla Rasulev.

16 Safiullina-Al Ansi R. R., “Islamskaya etika v knizhnoy kulture musul’man Volgo-Uralskogo regiona” [“Islamic ethics in the book culture of Muslims of the Volga-Urals region”], *Filologiya i kultura* [Philology and culture], 3 (45) (2016), p. 145.



Sufi poet Allahyar Sufi (1616–1713), and other authors who gained widespread recognition among the students of the *qadimi madrasahs*<sup>17</sup> dwelt upon the theme of devaluing the worldly. One often finds calls in such works to leave behind all earthly thoughts and make haste towards the world that awaits each of us beyond death's door.

The development of Sufi literature in the Urals and Volga Region is associated with the works of Mawla Qolyi, Gabdrahim Usmanov, and Tadzhetdin Yalchygul. Sufi themes are present in abundance in the works of Hisam Katib, Ummi Kamal, Gabdrahim Utyz Imyani, Hibatulla Salihov, Shamsutdin Zaki, Dardmand, etc. Sufism greatly influenced the famous Tatar scholar Shihabuddin Marjani (1818–1889), who was a student of three *Naqshbandi* sheikhs of the *Mujaddidiyya* branch, 'Ubaydulla ben Ni-yazkuli (d. 1852), 'Abd al-Qadir al-Faruqi al-Hindi (Sahibzade) (d. 1855), and Muzhir ben Ahmad al-Hindi (d. 1883). In his works he refers respectfully to Ibn 'Arabi, 'Abd ar-Rahman Jami, and Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari, who is quoted from well-known Sufi sources, such as *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* [*The Meccan Revelations*] by Ibn Arabi, *Al-Durrah al-Fakhirah* [*The Precious Pearl*] by Jami, *Hilyat al-Awliya'* [*The Adornment of the Saints*] by Abu Nu'aym, *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* [*Deliverance From Error*] by al-Ghazali, *Qut al-Qulub* [*The Sustenance of Hearts*] by al-Makki, and *Maktubat mujaddidiyya* [*Letters of Renewal*] by al-Sirhindi, etc.

Since Sufism began its advance in the Tatar Islamic world, there has always been discussion of two paths, the *Shariah* and the *tariqa*, and of the dichotomy between legal and mystical Islam. The so-called “anti-Sufi” literature was sometimes written by Sufi sheikhs themselves, in polemic with other *tariqas*. The critique of Sufism and *ishanism* featured quite prominently in works by Tatar authors. This was especially evident in works by Gadberahim Utyz Imyani (1754–1834), a notable representative of Sufi poetry, with its distinctive asceticism and call to Sufis to avoid government and legal authority.

Various traditions and rituals connected with the reverence of Sufi sheikhs and mentors were criticised by Tatar scholars and considered *bid'ah*, which is unacceptable innovation in religion. This debate on the topic of Sufism can be seen reflected in the Tatar press of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Common Muslims of the time naturally felt a need to understand

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17 A *qadimi madrasah* is a school of an “old” type, where traditional methods of teaching are used. The main indicator of progress in learning was the books that students studied, because a course in madrasahs of this type consisted of studying a number of strictly ordered, commonly accepted books written in the 11 – 16 centuries.



aspects of their religious practice, when performing certain traditions and rituals. Theological discussion in Tatar newspapers and magazines could leave a lasting impression on the average Muslim citizen and were popular with them. For instance, the magazine *Ad-din wal-adab* [Religion and morality], published by Barudi, had a special section, *Bab al-fatwa* [Section on fatwas], for replies to the many letters received by the editorial staff. Readers were asking them to offer their expert theological opinion on questions that concerned the Tatar ummah, some of which were connected with Sufi practices, like the collective performance of loud *dhikr*, the veneration of distinguished leaders, visiting tombs, performing sacrificial offerings at places referred to as '*izgelyar tavy*' [the mountains of the Saints].<sup>18</sup> The authors of these fatwas were usually such people as Galimdzhan Barudi, Shahar Sharif, and Muhammadnadhhib Tuntari.

In his book, *Jawami' al-kalim sharkhe* [Commentary on the sayings of the Prophet], Rizaeddin Fakhretdin,<sup>19</sup> who opposed so-called "folk Islam" and its cult of the saints, criticised pagan vestiges harshly. He listed innovations he considered unacceptable, including reciting the Qur'an for money or beside the body of a dead person before the *Salat al-Janazah* prayer, giving alms for a deceased person ('*ghur sadaqasy*'), and prayers during the nights of *al-Raghaib* and *Bara'a*. Some of these traditions, Fakhretdin held, had been introduced by Abu Talib al-Makki and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, whom he called Sufis with "little knowledge of the *hadiths* or the *Sunnah*." Visiting tombs to ask the dead for help could, in Fakhretdin's opinion, "be even worse than innovation."<sup>20</sup> In another book, *Ibn Taymiyyah*, he calls Sufism "a heretical way of discovering religion and the religious sciences."<sup>21</sup> There were, he held, among the supporters and opponents of Sufism "many who show excessiveness and cross the line," so that "there is no denying that there are both very good and helpful people among them and very bad and harmful ones."<sup>22</sup>

During the Soviet years of anti-religious propaganda that followed, the word '*ishan*'<sup>23</sup> took on disdainful or downright negative connotations.

18 "Khujalar tavy" nda korban chalu [A sacrificial offering on the mountain of masters], *Ad-din wal-adab*, 5 (1917), p. 167.

19 Rizaeddin Fakhretdin (1859–1936) – a Tatar and Bashkir theologian and mufti of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Internal Russia and Siberia (1922–1936).

20 Fakhretdin, R., *Jawamigh al-kalim sharkhe* [Commentary on the sayings of the Prophet] (Orenburg: Waqyt, 1916), p. 285.

21 Fakhretdin R., *Ibn Taymiyyah* (Orenburg: Waqyt, 1913), p. 37.

22 Fakhretdin R., *Ibn Taymiyyah*, p. 39.

23 *Ishan* (Pers. – they) is an honorific term of address for spiritual leaders of Sufi *tariqas* who have the right of mentorship.



Attempts to revive the Sufi tradition in the form of “ishanism” and any manifestations of such illegal practices as pilgrimage to the so-called ‘holy places’ (*awliya*, *ziyarat*) were viewed negatively and furiously opposed by government officials and Soviet intellectuals. Later, “due to powerful influence from outside forces and certain objective circumstances (natural generational change, the predominance of the secular Soviet mindset over most of the population of the Middle Volga), by the early 1970s the scale and level of Sufism’s influence would be insignificant.”<sup>24</sup>

### THE RETURN OF SUFISM TO THE RELIGIOUS LIVES OF THE MUSLIMS OF TATARSTAN IN THE LATE 20TH AND EARLY 21ST CENTURIES

For all its frequent opposition to official Islam, Sufism has always been in high demand. This is most true of the Northern Caucasus, where its traditions and institutional forms were never lost, unlike the Volga-Urals region, where the tradition of formal succession to Sufi knowledge was abandoned in the Soviet period. In more recent decades, following certain ideological and institutional transformations, Sufism has returned to religious life.

In modern Tatarstan, through “the construction of images of the past,” we observe “an appeal to the great figures of Tatar Sufism.”<sup>25</sup> Readings and conferences have been held, works of Sufi poetry published, as have didactic writings by local Sufi authors and leaders such as Zaynulla Rasulev, Muhammad-Zakir Chistawi,<sup>26</sup> Tadzhetdin Yalchygul, Abu An-Nasr Qursawi, Gabderahim Utyz Imyani, Ahmadzaki Safiullin<sup>27</sup> and others. A subject called “The History of Sufism” is taught at the Kazan Islamic Uni-

24 Guseva Yu., “Sufiyskiye bratstva, ‘brodyachiye mully’ i ‘svyatyie mesta’ Srednego Povolzhya v 1950–1960-e gody kak proyavleniya ‘neofitsialnogo islama’” [“Sufi brotherhoods, ‘vagabond mullahs’ and ‘holy places’ of the Middle Volga Region in the 1950s and 1960s as manifestations of “unofficial Islam”], *Islamovedeniye [Islamic Studies]*, 2 (2013), p. 35–43.

25 Bustanov A., “Sufizm v Rossii: pro et contra” [“Sufism in Russia: pro et contra”], <http://realnoevremya.ru/articles/46721>, accessed 25 September 2019.

26 Respublika Tatarstan. Vyshla v svet kniga sufiyskogo sheykha Muhammad-Zakira Chistavi [Republic of Tatarstan. A book by Sufi sheikh Muhammad-Zakir Chistawi was published], <https://regnum.ru/news/47196>, accessed 25 September 2019.

27 III Chteniya, posvyashchennye pamyati Ahmadzaki hazrata Safiullina proydut na rodine bogoslova [III Readings dedicated to the memory of Ahmadzaki *hadhrat* Safiullin will be held in the theologian’s homeland], [http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news\\_19982.html](http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news_19982.html), accessed 25 September 2019.



versity,<sup>28</sup> while the Kazan Federal University has a course “The Theory and Practice of Sufism.” Information about local traditions of Sufism is presented at the Russian Islamic Institute (in Kazan) to students pursuing a degree in Theology, under the rubric of courses “Local Spiritual History” and “Tatar Theological Thought.” The Bolgar Islamic Academy (Bolgar, Republic of Tatarstan) only started activities in 2017 and does not yet have a course on Sufism, but some of the masters and doctoral candidates are expected to do their theses on Sufism.

Organisational structures have also been becoming more active, as is evident at the annual “*Izge Bolgar jyeny*” (the Gathering in Holy Bolgar)<sup>29</sup> and the meetings of the imams of Bashkortostan in Chishmy and the Rasulev Readings in Troitsk. Sufism’s role and meaning is discussed in the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation.<sup>30</sup>

In media and academic circles, the problem of the revival of “Tatar Sufism” has thus been gaining in relevance. The issue’s pronounced social and political aspect, its anti-extremist potential, is often noted. Alongside the view that the Sufi legacy is ripe for re-evaluation,<sup>31</sup> the idea that a revived Sufism could help in combating radical foreign movements within Islam keeps resurfacing in social and religious discourse.<sup>32</sup> It is often accompanied by the thought that ‘traditional Islam’, seen as an alternative to Salafism/Wahhabism, is essentially the same as Sufism. The so-called “Grozny *fatwa*”, passed at the International Theological Conference in Chechnya on 25-27 August, 2016, attempted to define the boundaries of Sunni Islam within the Muslim community of Russia. Three interconnected and basic elements were declared the attributes of ‘traditional Islam’, namely “*iman* (religious faith), *islam* (personal submission to Allah), and

28 Kazan Islamic University is an institution of higher professional religious education founded to train Muslim clerics and experts in Islamic religious disciplines.

29 *Izge Bolgar jyeny* is a large-scale festival that is usually celebrated in the last week of June on the ruins of the ancient capital of Volga Bulgaria, where, according to historical sources, the ancestors of the Kazan Tatars adopted Islam in 922. The history of this holiday dates back to the pre-Islamic period. Currently this festival is held with active support from the local government in order to strengthen the public image of Bolgar as a centre of Russian Muslims.

30 Muftiy Tatarstana v Obshchestvennoy palate RF obsuzhdayet rol’ i znacheniyе sufizma [The mufti of Tatarstan discusses the role and meaning of Sufism in the Civic Chamber of RF], [http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news\\_13441](http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news_13441), accessed 25 October 2019.

31 Nasyrov I., “Edinstvo islama i tasavvufa (sufizma)” [“Unity of Islam and Tasawwuf (Sufism)”], *Sufizm kak faktor sohraneniya mira i stabil’nosti: Materialy Respublikanskoj nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii (29 maya 2004 g.)* [Sufism as the factor in preserving peace and stability: Materials of the Republic-wide academic and practical conference (29 May, 2004)]. (Makhachkala, 2005), p. 92-101.

32 Safargaleev I.F., *Bestsennaya duhovnaya traditsiya. Sbornik statey* [Invaluable spiritual tradition. A collection of articles] (Moscow: Izd-vo Instituta stran SNG, 2016), p. 76.





*ihсан* (sincerity).” As to faith (*iman*), this means following the *Maturidi* or *Ash‘ari aqidah*; as to submission to Allah (*islam*), it is following one of the four *madhabs*, whether *Hanafi*, *Shafi‘i*, *Maliki* or *Hanbali*; and as to sincerity (*ihсан*), it is following the Sufi way of “moral self-improvement”.<sup>33</sup> We thus see a fusion of traditionalism and Sufism in opposition to Salafism.

It is interesting to note the transformation these names have undergone in the history of Islam over the centuries. For instance, in early Islam, the traditionalists were a major school, *Ahl al-Hadith* (adherents of the *hadith*), which denounced any innovation in dealing with problems of religious law,<sup>34</sup> insisting instead on action purely on the basis of the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. The most conservative supporters of tradition and literalism, they defined everyone who opposed their point of view and allowed questions of religious law to be addressed on the basis of reasoning, thought and logic (*Ashab al-Ra’y*) as *Ahl al-Kalam* (the adherents of reasoning).

So, if in the early period of Islam the traditionalists were the *Ahl al-Hadith* (adherents of the *hadith*), today it is the Salafis who use the term of themselves. The usual term now for the followers of traditional Islam is *mutakallim* (representatives of speculative theology, which interprets the dogmas of Islam by reasoning rather than by following religious leaders’ opinions). But it was precisely the resort to reason as the highest authority that distinguished the *mutakallim* and set them apart, alongside the representatives of *falsafa*, from both the *Salafis* and the *Sufis*.

Finally, it was traditionalists who tended to keep to the methodology of *taqlid* (following revered figures of the past). And it is exactly there that the method of the traditional textual acquisition of knowledge comes into its own. One can figuratively describe this method as “sitting on one’s knees at the knees of great scholars”, i.e. the student studies a book by learning its content by heart from cover to cover, and only then do student and sheikh start on another book, etc. Traditionalists see this as *barakah* (a blessing).<sup>35</sup> Some of the scholars associated with this movement in the history of Rus-

33 Fetva “O neotyemlemykh priznakakh otlichiya istinnogo Islama ot zabluzhdeniy” [Fatwa “On the inherent signs of the difference between true Islam and misconceptions”], [http://www.sufirb.ru/books\\_data/fatwa\\_grozniy/fatwa\\_grozniy.pdf](http://www.sufirb.ru/books_data/fatwa_grozniy/fatwa_grozniy.pdf), accessed 25 September 2019. For more on this, see article by D.A. Shagaviev “The Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama‘ah and the Grozny fatwa” in this edited volume.

34 Birinjkar R., *Znakomstvo s islamskimi naukami: kalam, falsafa, irfan* [Getting to know Islamic sciences: kalam, falsafa, irfan] (Moscow, Sadra, 2014), p. 17.

35 “Rezeda Safiullina: “Smozhet li rektor Bolgarskoy akademii soblyudat’ neytralitet v etoy situatsii...” [“Rezeda Safiullina: “Can the rector of the Bolgar Academy remain neutral in this situation...”], <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/73789-rezeda-safiullina-o-razviti-bolgarskoy-islamskoy-akademii>, accessed 25 September 2019.



sian theological thought are Gadberahim Utyz Imyani al-Bulgari (1754–1834), Murad Ramzi (1855–1934), Ishmuhammad Dinmuhammadov (1842–1919) and other *qadimists* or supporters of the traditional old style of education. Such conservatism had its justification in the Tatar society of that time, when it was important for the nation to survive and preserve its identity by whatever means necessary, under conditions of an Orthodox Christian state. Today, tradition, as the stable aspect of any people's culture, social thought and religious life, is seen as an essential condition of their existence and development, on the basis of the principles of continuity and inheritance of religious mentality under conditions of globalisation and unification. It is no coincidence that the curriculum at the Kazan Islamic University is constructed after the traditionalist/*qadimist* methodology, or that this is the form of learning used by a leading visiting professor to the Bolgar Islamic Academy, sheikh 'Abdurrazaq as-Sa'adi, and by the mufti of Tatarstan, who is also director of the leading Tatarstani *Muhammadiyya madrasah*, Kamil Samigullin.<sup>36</sup> Both are related to Sufi *tariqas* that were present in the Volga-Urals region in the past, but whose leaders (*murshids*) and major centres lie outside Russia and the countries of the CIS today.

Famous sheikhs of the *Naqshbandi* and *Qadiri tariqas*, which are based in Turkey, include Osman Nuri Topbaş (Istanbul), Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu al-Ofi (Istanbul), Muhammad Ibrahim Khizr al-Amedi (Konya and Bursa), 'Abdulkaki al-Huseyni Gavs as-Sani (Istanbul), and Haydar Baş (Istanbul). Other sheikhs from foreign countries who deserve mention are Mehmet Nazım Adil al-Qibrisi al-Haqqani (Cyprus) and Ahmad Zulfiqar (Pakistan). Of spiritual leaders who live geographically closer to Tatarstan, one may name some who are no longer among the living, like the Dagestani sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi (1937–2012) and Turkestani sheikh Ibrahim Muhametkul uly.

A visit by a Sufi mentor to Kazan, such as that of sheikh of the *Shadhili*, *Naqshbandi* and *Qadiri tariqas*, Muhammad Ibrahim Khizr al-Amedi,<sup>37</sup> or of sheikh of the *Haqqaniyya* branch of the *Naqshbandi tariqa*, Mehmet

36 "Rezeda Safiullina: "Smozhet li rektor Bolgarskoy akademii soblyudat' neytralitet v etoy situatsii...".

37 V Kazan priyehal pryamoy potomok proroka Muhammada [A direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad arrives in Kazan], <http://m.business-gazeta.ru/article/306463/>, accessed 25 September 2019; Zakabannoy mecheti podarena Kisva Kaaby [The Mosque Across the Kaban is presented with the Kisva from the Kaaba], <http://isxak.ru/zakabannoy-mecheti-podarena-kisva-kaaby/>, accessed 25 September 2019; Muhammad Ibrahim Khizr al-Amedi, <http://shifa-med.ru/video/video-otzyvy/muhamad-ibrahim-hyzyr-al-amadi.html>, accessed 25 September 2019; Zur iftar [Big iftar], [http://islam-today.ru/islam\\_v\\_rossii/zur\\_iftar/](http://islam-today.ru/islam_v_rossii/zur_iftar/), accessed 25 September 2019.



Nazim Adil al-Qibrisi al-Haqqani,<sup>38</sup> or sheikh Nigmatulla Khalil Ibrahim,<sup>39</sup> or even such an exotic personage as sheikh of the *Tijaniyya tariqa*, Ali Abdu-s-Samad (Freddy Bollag)<sup>40</sup> is always a significant event for their followers.

For a beginner *murid*, the choice of sheikh is not always a simple task, but it is frowned upon when, as Kamil Samigullin put it, “one jumps from mentor to mentor and takes a bit from everyone”.<sup>41</sup> He also noted that not all *ijazahs* are equal:

“There are sheikhs of *Tarbiyah* (upbringing). They are spiritual mentors who instruct and educate students. But there are only a handful of them. There is *ijazah amm* – a general type of *ijazah*, which is given in *barakah* (blessing – R.S.). It is easy to become a sheikh of this type. So there are, as it were, ‘run-of-the-mill’ sheikhs, who conduct *dhikrs*, and of them there are many. Then there are sheikhs of *tanbih*, who preach *waghaz* (sermon – R.S.) and awaken people’s hearts. And then there are those who are like personal coaches, who tell you, ‘I’ll teach you how to make a million.’ And you are presumably going to make your million in just the same way he has just made one on you.”<sup>42</sup>

For members of the *Naqshbandi tariqa*, the three-volume *Maktubat* of Imam Rabbani is a reputable source. It divides sheikhs into different categories: the *sheikh kamil* (the perfect sheikh), the *sheikh naqis* (the flawed sheikh), “who is in the process of development, still has flaws, but has already been given an *ijazah*”, and the *sheikh mukamil*, who can influence his apprentices because “he is perfect, and people who are close to him become like him, too”.<sup>43</sup>

Alongside other personal qualities, a future mentor must possess *fayz*,<sup>44</sup> *barakah*,<sup>45</sup> and *inayat*<sup>46</sup> from Allah. If he does not have all of them,

38 Sheykh Mehmet ‘Adil: “Kazan – gorod uchenyh” [Sheikh Mehmet ‘Adil: “Kazan is a city of scholars”], <http://kazanriu.ru/news/926/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

39 Nigmatulla hazrat: “V Kobe mnogo tatar, no oni nazyvayut sebya turkami.” V Kazani gostit znamenityi sufiyskiy propovednik, kotoryi prodolzhayet v Yaponii delo Abdurashida Ibragimova [Nigmatulla *hadhrat*: “There are a lot of Tatars in Kobe but they call themselves Turks.” Kazan is visited by famous Sufi preacher who continues the work of Abdurashid Ibragimov in Japan], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/365006>, accessed 25 September 2019.

40 Vstrecha s sufiyskim sheykhom Ali [A meeting with Sufi sheikh Ali], <https://vk.com/event8107982>, accessed 25 September 2019.

41 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Kamil Samigullin, 27.07.2018.

42 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Kamil Samigullin, 27.07.2018.

43 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Kamil Samigullin, 27.07.2018.

44 Fayz is spiritual energy.

45 Barakah is divine blessing.

46 Inayat is mercy or blessing.



according to one of our respondents, you end up with a “quasi-*tariqa* organisation”, where the role of sheikh is fulfilled by a person without the necessary spiritual qualities.

An important part of a Sufi’s life is the spiritual bond (*rabita*) with *murshid*. Many of our respondents noted that they constantly feel the spiritual bond with their sheikh, even at a distance. Some followers manage to visit their mentors on a yearly basis, while others have met their mentors only a few times in 20 years. One of our respondents, of the *Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya* branch, described the motivation for visiting one’s spiritual mentor as follows:

“I visit him quite often, preferably once a year. Otherwise my batteries run down, so to speak. You visit him, and you recharge with this *nur* (light). You live and breathe this atmosphere. Even those three days that you’re allowed to have, according to Islam, are enough. But if you want to stay for longer, you have to ask for permission.”<sup>47</sup>

Representatives of some *tariqas* carry a photo of their mentor with them, though some sheikhs disapprove of this.

As for the relations with the representatives of other *tariqas*, as one of the respondents from the *Qadiriyya* brotherhood put it, “*Rabita* is a living tissue, a living organism, in which the *murid* is united with his *murshid* and they constitute a whole. A similar single field with representatives of other *tariqas* is impossible. You can be friends with them, communicate, but what the *murid* of a single sheikh experience is solely their experience.”<sup>48</sup> This shared condition, which the followers of a single brotherhood experience, is called “*fana fi ikhwan*” and it is an elevated experience of brotherhood toward one’s *tariqa* fellows. This feeling sets all the *murid* to the same wavelength.

## RITUALS AND PRACTICES OF SUFISM IN MODERN TATARSTAN

Entering the *tariqa* begins with an initiation ritual, the nuances of which may differ for different brotherhoods. Then, the life of the *murid* continues under the supervision of their *murshid* and must conform to the rules

47 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with the assistant of the mufti of the Perm krai, Vasil Mindubaev, 24.07.2018.

48 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with A.M., 5.06.2018.



prescribed for this *tariqa*. Each murid is given an individual *wird*, a task that can include *dhikr*, meditation, reciting certain prayers and *surahs* of the Qur'an, a forty-day seclusion (*halwa*), etc.

The followers of Sufism practice collective and individual *dhikr*, a spiritual exercise whose aim is to feel a state of constant Divine presence and whose essence is multiple recitations of theonymic formulas, the names and attributes of Allah. Much emphasis is placed on the consistency of these practices.

There are also differences between the followers of different *tariqas* in how they perform the so-called "quiet" (*dhikr qalbi*) and "loud" (*dhikr jahri*) *dhikr*, as well as quite a few other rites and practices, such as *rabita* (maintaining one's spiritual bond with one's mentor), *khatm* (collective *dhikr*), and *ijazah* (graduating from mentorship and attaining the right to teach *murid* oneself). The number of formulae recited can vary within a *tariqa* and even a group, because a *murshid* can give each of his *murid* individual tasks to complete.

*Khatm khwajagan* is a distinctive practice of the *Naqshbandiyya* brotherhood. It is meditative recitation with a variable number of repetitions of a combination of Qur'anic *surahs*, ritual formulas, and names of Allah. The practice includes honorific recital of the names of the sheikhs that were predecessors in the *tariqa*.<sup>49</sup> The right to hold a *khatm khwajagan* in their local area is only given once a person has an *ijazah* or has received a behest (*amr*) to hold this ritual, which, according to our informant, "is reflected in all the classic books".<sup>50</sup> When performing the rite, special emphasis is placed on secrecy. The presence of any outsiders who are not members of the brotherhood is forbidden, and even the members should not be wearing items of anyone else's clothing. This is why our respondents did not go into the nuances of the *khatm*. Even the options described, however, were substantially different from each other and from well-known descriptions in the literature (A.A. Khismatullin,<sup>51</sup> H.K. Yilmaz,<sup>52</sup> M.A. Al-Erbili,<sup>53</sup> M.S. Hashimi<sup>54</sup>).

49 Seyid Muhammad Saki Hashimi, *Adaby na puti pravednikov [Adabs on the path of the righteous]* (Perm: Izdatel'stvo PM, 2011), p. 124.

50 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with A., 21.08.2018.

51 Khismatullin A.A., *Sufiyskaya ritual'naya praktika: (Na primere bratstv Nakshbandiyya) [Sufi ritual practices: (Case study: Naqshbandiyya brotherhoods)]* (Saint Petersburg: Peterburgskoye Vostokovedeniye, 1996), p. 208.

52 Yilmaz H.K., *Tasavvuf i tarikaty [Tasawwuf and tariqas]*, A. Urmanov (translation from Turkish) (Moscow: SAD, 2007), p. 171.

53 Sheikh Mohammed al-Amin al-Kurdi al-Erbili, *Kniga vechnyh darov: (O dostoinstvah i pohvalnyh kachestvah sufiskogo bratstva Nakshbandiya i ego Puti k Bogu) [The Book of Eternal Gifts: (About advantages and favourable qualities of the Sufi brotherhood Naqshbandiyya and their Path to God)]*, I.R. Nasyrov (translation from Arabic, ed., commentary and annotation) (Ufa, 2000), p. 249.

54 Seyid Muhammad Saki Hashimi, *Adaby [Adabs]*, p. 124.



In the *Qadiri tariqa*, the *khatm* is carried out during the night between Thursday and Friday, while in the *Naqshbandi* order it is the night between Sunday and Monday. It is known that *Naqshbandi khatm* are regularly held in two places in Tatarstan, namely in Kazan, at the Ājem mosque, one of the most beautiful old mosques of the city, and in the small village of Balan Bulyaq in the Aznakaevsky district of the Republic. There are also known instances of *khatm* being performed in the Tynychlyk mosque of Kazan. Extramural students at the Russian Islamic Institute from Perm krai, who belong to the *Khalidiyya* branch and whose mentor is in Turkey, also regularly perform *khatm* when in Kazan for examinations. One described specific details of the *khatm* they perform in a very comprehensive manner in an publication of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Perm krai in 2011.<sup>55</sup> According to that description, the word *khawajagan* means “great people” or “distinguished scholars”, while the form of the *khatm khawajagan* was designed by Sufi mentors of the past, particularly Abdul Khaliq Ghijduvani,<sup>56</sup> and has been being constantly perfected. The book gives two possible reasons as to why this type of *dhikr* is called *khatm*, which is translated as “conclusion”. According to the first, it is because scholars in the past concluded their meetings by performing *dhikr*. The other reason is because “one receives as much *sawab* (reward from Allah – R. S.) for reciting the ‘al-Fatiha’<sup>57</sup> and ‘Ikhlās’<sup>58</sup> *surahs* as for reciting the entire Qur’an.”<sup>59</sup> While preserving a common basis, the various brotherhoods thus retain differences in the detail of how they perform *khatm*.

For some brotherhoods, abiding by Shariah norms is a mandatory condition of joining the *tariqa*, while others consider joining the *tariqa* the path to learning and adoption of the Shariah. The main difference between a true Sufi path and a pseudo-Sufi one is, however, according to Muslim scholars, the obligatory interaction between the *tariqa*, which gives the life of the Muslim its internal dynamic and brings joy in one’s personal relationship with God, and the Shariah, which sets the external and regulatory structure of the Muslim’s life. Following the rules of Shariah is a necessary condition, without which the path onwards is impossible.

Let us now look at certain of the Sufi groups that exist in Tatarstan.

55 Seyid Muhammad Saki Hashimi, *Adaby [Adabs]*, p. 124.

56 Abdul Khaliq Ghijduvani (12<sup>th</sup> century) – a famous Sufi, the tenth spiritual link in the golden chain of succession of the *Naqshbandi tariqa* sheikhs.

57 Al-Fatiha (Arab. – The Opening) is the first *surah* of the Qur’an.

58 Al-Ikhlās (Arab. – Sincerity) is the one hundred and twelfth *surah* of the Qur’an.

59 Seyid Muhammad Saki Hashimi. *Adaby [Adabs]*, p. 29.



## THE QADIRIYYA

Representatives of this *tariqa*, which is one of the most widespread Sufi orders in the entire Islamic world and whose name comes from that of its founder, 'Abd-al-Qadir al-Gilani (d. 1166), were very active in Kazan in the 1990s. They are followers of a Turkish politician, writer and educator, Haydar Bař (b. 1947), famous not only for his religious books but also for works on economics. Many of his books have been translated into Russian.<sup>60</sup> During the first years, the order gathered in the Nurulla Mosque in a downtown area of Kazan, which led to the imam being reprimanded frequently by advocates of 'pure Islam' and the government authorities. As remembered by one of the members of the *tariqa*, "In the early 1990s, some people would come to our mosque, make a scene, and there would be conflict, but then they themselves became Sufis."<sup>61</sup> Members of the brotherhood later started to gather in private apartments.

The members of the *tariqa* and its sympathisers include many representatives of the Tatar intelligentsia: artists, writers, theatre directors, filmmakers, researchers, journalists. According to our respondent, about 20 people regularly attend collective meetings. Some, whether followers or just people who respect the founder of the *jama'ah*, turn up about once every five years. Based on our interviews, most of the representatives of this *tariqa* seem quite open people, easy to get in touch with and to talk to, with a bent for self-reflection and intellectual comprehension of their spiritual path. One of our respondents noted, "Qadiri Sufis of all countries have common traits, such as extroversion and creativity". While al-Ghazali's *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* emphasizes the fear of God, al-Gilani accentuates love. "Qadiriyya is the path of love".<sup>62</sup>

Members of the *tariqa* practice both collective and individual *dhikr*. Individual *dhikr* in the *Qadiri tariqa* is called *dars*. Performing full *dars* (100 times) takes between a half an hour and 40 minutes, while the short version (33 times) may take 10 to 20 minutes. The preferred time of performance is after morning prayer. After obligatory (*fard*) prayers, a short *dhikr muhafaza* is practiced. This type of *dhikr* consists in pronouncing

60 Bař H., *Maqalat. Islam: sekret stanovleniya* [*Maqalat. Islam: The secret of becoming*] (Moscow: Dia-press, 2000); Bař H., *Milost' dlya mirov – Muhammad (SAV). Zhizn' i smysly. Tom 1* [*Mercy for the worlds – Muhammad (SAS). Life and meanings*], Vol. 1 (Moscow: Ansar, 2005), p. 400; Bař H., *Model natsional'noy ekonomiki – novaya ekonomicheskaya sistema* [Model of national economics – the new economic system] (Kazan: Idel-press, 2011), p. 160.

61 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with A.M., 5.06.2018.

62 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with A.M., 5.06.2018.



the names of Allah in a certain sequence. The names are believed to grant protection from various calamities. Another type of *dhikr*, practiced after the prayer, is supplication for forgiveness of sins and it is pronounced a certain number of times (*istighfar*), followed by a short variant of witness to the Oneness of God (*tahlil*) and a prayer of blessings for the Prophet Muhammad (*salawat*).

While Indian branches of *Qadiriyya* show some influences of yoga and other Indian teachings,<sup>63</sup> Tatarstani followers of this *tariqa* do not encourage it. According to one of our respondents, the silent *dhikr*, performed initially in the heart (*dhikr qalbi*) and then moving from the heart to various focal energy points of the body (*chakras*), which is practiced by the *Naqshbandiyya*, the *Qadiriyya* consider inauthentic, because “it is not supported by the *riwayahs* (versions of a *hadith* from different narrators – R.S.), so when pronouncing our *dhikr* you must always move your tongue.”<sup>64</sup>

Collective *dhikr* lasts for between thirty and forty minutes. On special occasions, such as the *Mawlid* (the Prophet’s birthday), *Eid al-Fitr*, or before a burial ceremony, *tahlil* is performed several times, while collective *dhikr* can take from an hour and a half to two hours. After *dhikr*, a tribute to the *tariqa*’s sheikhs is performed, with obligatory mention of Hasan al-Basri,<sup>65</sup> ‘Abdul Qadir al-Gilani, Haydar Baş, and others. During collective *dhikr*, religious chants may be performed as well. These are called *ilahi*.

The followers of the *Qadiriyya tariqa* had several groups on the Russian social networking site, VK, some of which, they say, “present themselves more as Islamic groups than as groups for the followers of this *tariqa*.”<sup>66</sup> One of these groups<sup>67</sup> had posted a lot of *hadiths* about *Ahl al-Bayt* (the Prophet’s family) and the fourth of the *Rashidun* (Righteous) Caliphs, ‘Ali. Respondents noted that all the *tariqas* place special emphasis on *wilayah* (spiritual guidance) and attitudes towards the *Ahl al-Bayt*:

“Imams belonging to the *Ahl al-Bayt* are key figures in the *tariqa* of Tasawwuf [...] even Shihabuddin Marjani spoke about attitudes to Hadrhat

63 “Qadiriyya”, *Kultura very. Putevoditel somnevayushchihsya* [Qadiriyya. The culture of faith. A guide for the doubtful], <http://religiocivilis.ru/islam/islamk/325-kadiriia.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

64 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with A.M., 5.06.2018.

65 Hasan al-Basri (642–728) was an Islamic theologian and *hadith* expert, one of the first Islamic ascetics (*zahid*).

66 The most recent update on the *Path to haqq* social media group ([https://vk.com/put\\_k\\_hakku](https://vk.com/put_k_hakku)), which has 330 followers, was on 5 November 2014. The *Ya Haydar!* group (<https://vk.com/yahaydar>) has 379 followers, and the last update there and on the eponymous page on the LiveJournal blog platform (<https://yahaydar.livejournal.com/>) was in 2013.

67 *Ahlus-Sunna Muslim School* ([https://vk.com/muslim\\_school](https://vk.com/muslim_school)).





'Ali and how many pages Taftazani wrote on him, for instance,<sup>68</sup> which is why his contemporaries referred to him as 'Shia bi-d-din' (a Shiite in religion – R.S.)."<sup>69</sup>

One of Haydar Baš's followers, a researcher at an academic institution, explained how important it was for him, as a historian, to trace back the history of the Sufi schools and movements and how they developed. In his opinion, "all these movements will inevitably come together in a single flow", because "the relationship between Sunni and Shia Islam were formed in the same environment of early Islamic asceticism, which was developed by the imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt*", and "if we examine authentic *Tasawwuf* sources, we see there something that today would probably be called Shia Islam," because "there were no *tariqas* at the early stage to follow Sunni doctrine so zealously and literally". In the schools of Sufism formed later, "many things had to be modified to fit into official doctrine: certain things had to be reconsidered, other things were removed altogether", so that now they "emphasise how much of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah* they are". According to our interviewee, "there isn't a single Sufi author that would fit under the definition of Sunni Orthodoxy". He mentions Haydar Amuli<sup>70</sup> from Khorasan as an example. Amuli was the first of the Shiites to accept Ibn Arabi's doctrine of '*wahdat al-wujud*' and famously said that "a true Shiite is a Sufi, and a true Sufi is a Shiite." The interviewee also offered a selection of quotes from Jalal ad-Din Rumi, "which even made some people think of him as a closeted Twelver Shia or even an Isma'ilite."<sup>71</sup>

Representatives and followers of the *Qadiriyya tariqa* are often criticised for their typically keen interest in politics. As a member of another school of Sufism noted, "They are highly politicised, constantly discussing Israel and world politics. This attachment to real life, to *dunya* (the material world – R.S.) causes dissonance."<sup>72</sup> In this regard, the polar opposite of the *Qadiriyya* is another Sufi group, the *Husayniyya* branch of the *Naqsh-bandiyya tariqa*, who prefer to distance themselves from politics, thinking that "politics must not be associated with Islam".

68 Sa'ad al-Din Taftazani (1322–1390) was an Arab and Islamic philosopher and a prominent representative of late-period Kalam.

69 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with A.M., 5.06.2018.

70 Haydar Amuli (14<sup>th</sup> century) was a Shiite philosopher and a follower of the 'unity of being' concept.

71 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with I.G., 5.06.2018.

72 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with I.N., 1.06.2018.



## THE HUSAYNIYYA

The *Husayniyya* is one of the few branches of the *Naqshbandiyya* to have managed to continue its activities during the Soviet era. The name of this Turkestani and Northern Transoxianan branch of the *Mujaddidiyya* is derived from its founder, caliph Husayn (d. 1833–34). Its main representative in Tatarstan and the last living Tatar *ustad* (teacher or mentor) is considered to be Rishat Musin (b. 1931), who lives in the village of Staroe Churilino in Arsky district. He was a *murid* of the *Naqshbandiyya* sheikh for Central Asia and the Russian Federation, Ibrahim Mamatkulov (1937–2009) from Kokand. Some people believe that Mamatkulov gave Rishat Musin his *ijazah* at the personal request of the former deputy mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan, Valiulla Yakupov. Certain representatives and followers of other branches of the *Naqshbandiyya* have doubts as to the authenticity of this branch's *silsila*, because Mamatkulov himself never received an *ijazah* for mentoring from his *murshid*. After Mamatkulov's death, however, it was declared that "all his apprentices must now go to sheikh Nazim" (sheikh of the *Haqqaniyya* branch – R.S.),<sup>73</sup> because "Sheikh Ibrahim left no successors during his lifetime", and the *murid* of another sheikh of this branch, Maqsum Aqa, in the *khanqah* of Qush Ata, "have no right to call themselves his [Sheikh Ibrahim's] successors".<sup>74</sup>

Many Tatarstani followers of other branches of the *Naqshbandiyya* and the *Qadiriyya tariqa* were *murid* of Rishat Musin at a certain stage of their spiritual quest but later changed mentor. In interviews, similar reasons were given, "not my thing" or "I couldn't feel a bond". Nonetheless, despite this open resentment and the direct counter position taken by certain proponents of 'pure Islam', the branch gained in popularity very quickly. Among its representatives are common working-class people, en-

73 "Sheykh Nazim al-Hakkani Kiprskiy Glava vseh svyatyh nashih dney" ["Sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani of Cyprus, the Head of all the saints of our time"], <http://archive.li/smLgR#selection-4889.1-4891.26>, accessed 25 September 2019.

74 "Nakshbandiyskiy Tarikat v Pitere, Sufizm. Sheykh Nazim obyasnayet sheykham vsego mira sufizma i islama pochemu net u nih bolshe prava prodolzhat uchit', i ih uchenikam, pochemu bolshe netu preyemnikov u ih sheykhov" ["The *Naqshbandi tariqa* in Petersburg, Sufism. sheikh Nazim explains to sheikhs from the entire world of Sufism and Islam why they do not have the right to continue teaching any longer, and to their apprentices why their sheikhs no longer have successors"], [https://vk.com/topic-31837474\\_25843722](https://vk.com/topic-31837474_25843722), accessed 25 September 2019. Besides Maqsum Aqa, there is one other successor of sheikh Ibrahim – *Hadhrat* Qurbanghali, who took the *ijazah* back when his teacher was still alive. One of the Sufi Internet forums mentions "Moscow caliph Pir Ibrahim" among the representatives of several faux-tariqas that are functioning in Russia (<http://tazkiyah.editboard.com/f24-forum>, accessed 25 September 2019).



trepreneurs, teachers at Islamic educational institutions, and religious figures.

According to one of our respondents, a member of the branch, there are no special initiation rituals when joining the *tariqa*. The *murid* sits in front of the *murshid*, their knees touching each other. Joining the *tariqa* is called *ishanga kul biru* ('giving one's hand to the ishan') and includes repentance (*tawba*), the ishan's prayer that this repentance be accepted, and ensuring that all the sins of the person joining the *tariqa* have been repented for. Then obligations (*wazifa*) are handed down to the *murid*, who take an oath to fulfil them. When women take the oath, they touch the sheikh's hand through a kerchief or a napkin. When a *murid* enters the *tariqa*, the *murshid* gives him or her special prayer beads (*a tasbih*) and a book. They perform *tawajjuh* together. This is a practice aimed at attaching one's heart to one's *ustad*. After this, the *murid*, already in their new status, performs a prayer. Finally, the *murid* regularly visits the mentor, participates in conversation (*sohbet*), and asks questions, if any arise. He tries to maintain this spiritual bond (*rabita*) with his mentor and keep his image always in memory, "so that the spiritual energy in the mentor's soul may pass into the soul of his apprentice."<sup>75</sup>

*Murid* are also given written instructions with descriptions of certain practices. Some of them are described by A. Khismatullin in his book.<sup>76</sup> In the *Husayniyya*, they only practice the quiet *dhikr* of the heart, and the Sufi is trying constantly to remain in this state of *dhikr*. Quiet *dhikr* is based on mental concentration (*tawajjuh*) on the seven focal points of the body (*lataif*), each of which has its own name and is associated with certain stages (*maqam*) of spiritual being.<sup>77</sup>

In this brotherhood, it is forbidden to show external signs of piety ("the sheikh forbade his *murid* to walk around openly with prayer beads").

A follower of this branch we interviewed noted that adopting Sufism had had a positive influence on his life and that now he lives with a constant sense that his pleas to Allah are accepted. He has started to get moral satisfaction from worshipping God. He also said that he no longer offends anyone or takes offense at anyone, which has made his life much easier.

75 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with I.G., 5.06.2018.

76 Khismatullin A.A., *Sufiyskaya ritual'naya praktika: (Na primere bratstva Nakshbandiyya) [Sufi ritual practices: (Case study: Naqshbandiyya brotherhoods)]* (Saint Petersburg: Peterburgskoye Vostokovedeniye, 1996), p. 208.

77 *Islam na territorii byvshey Rossiyskoi imperii: Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'* [Islam in the territories of the former Russian Empire. An Encyclopedic dictionary], Vol. 1, S.M. Prozorov (ed.) (St. Petersburg: Vostochnaya literatura, 2006), p. 655.



Another respondent mentioned that joining the *tariqa* had increased his attention to worship and his understanding and love of Allah and the Prophet:

“While Muslims outside the *tariqa* pray at night only during Ramadan, *tariqa* members spend every night as though it were *Laylat al-Qadr* (the Night of Decree – R.S.). This path teaches you to perform *dhikr* with your soul, to avoid window-dressing and veneer. It teaches you that Allah always sees and hears us. *Dhikr* fosters these qualities in us, teaches us to steer clear of temptations, to train our *nafs* (Ego – R.S.), to restrain it. If a practicing *murid* gives in to temptations and depravity, they get no satisfaction from doing so and understand that *dhikr* will not be maintained.”<sup>78</sup>

Yet another respondent in the brotherhood admitted he could not call himself a good *murid*, as “I have a problem with performing the *wird* and I am not always able to find the right way to influence my *nafs*.” This *murid* did not agree with the widespread opinion that Muslims are less prone to depression, because it is an individual experience connected with the psyche. He understood that, due to insufficient consistency in performing the prescribed practices, he was “not yet able to get rid of [his] flaws: laziness, rudeness, acerbity and harshness with other people”. This *murid* was more attracted to the philosophical component of Sufism than to its practices, finding the concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (the unity of existence<sup>79</sup> – R.S.) more congenial than *Wahdat ash-Shuhud* (unity of contemplation<sup>80</sup> – R.S.), an attitude more typical of the *Naqshbandiyya*. At the same time he considered it all “sheer escapism”, because, in his understanding, “there is nothing except God”, so that the idea that “there is nothing more important and valuable than rejecting everything except God” is an “ostrich policy” caused by “existential aimlessness and horror” and “obsession with *Thanatos* (death – R.S.)”.

Having been a student at an Islamic higher educational institution, this interviewee had previously had an extremely negative opinion of Sufism and been “basically a Wahhabi without realising it”:

78 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with head of the Department of da’wah of DUM RT Niyaz Sabirov, 11.06.2018.

79 *Wahdat al-Wujud* [unity of existence] is a Sufi doctrine developed on the basis of a philosophical category that characterises Ibn Arabi’s teachings. According to this concept, there is only one existence, and this existence is God. The reason of creation is in the World Spirit’s intention to self-contemplation and self-cognition in the objects of the created universe, and the ultimate goal of a Sufi is mystical reunion with God.

80 *Wahdat ash-Shuhud* [unity of contemplation] is a Sufi doctrine which was put forward by Ala’ ad-Dawlah Simnani as an alternative to Ibn Arabi’s teaching. According to this doctrine, a Sufi does not dissolve into God through various spiritual practices but instead experiences His presence when meeting Him, and is thus able to testify to His unity.



“We laughed at the *Maturidiyya* (the rationalist school of speculative theology, popular amongst the Muslims of the Volga-Urals region – R.S.) without really knowing anything about them, taking it for *Murji’ah* (a general name for representatives of various Islamic schools that ‘postponed’ speculation on the place of human beings in this world until Judgment Day – R.S.). Nobody talked about *sifat subutiya* and *salbiyah* (ontological attributes and negative attributes of Allah – R.S.), or about *kasb* (a key term in Al-Ash’ari’s doctrine, which refers to a human being’s ‘acquisition’ of actions created by Allah inside humans, the blending of this act of creation with human will) and *iktisab* (a notion that is taken from Ibn Rushd’s philosophy and is contrasted to *kasb*; according to it, external circumstances determine human will, so that ‘coercion’ and ‘God’s free choice’ are replaced by ‘necessity’ – R.S.).<sup>81</sup> Nobody told us how this was related to the Tatar tradition.”<sup>82</sup>

The change in this *murid*’s views was caused by reading a book, *Kto oni neokharidzhity, vahhabity* [*Who are they, the Neo-Kharijites, the Wahhabis?*], after which, he said, he came to understand that “Wahhabism is a dead end.”<sup>83</sup> Subsequently, he found answers, in a book called *Mausuf as-sufiya*,<sup>84</sup> to many of the questions that he had previously thought problematic aspects of Sufism. Nevertheless, he admits, “I still share the Wahhabi *aqidah*, with its classification of *tawhid* into *uluhiyyah*, *rububiyyah* and *asma wa sifat*.”<sup>85</sup>

Thanks to this respondent’s openness to communication, we now have an example of how joining a *tariqa* implies various ways of self-cognition and of understanding one’s path during spiritual search. This may be a straightforwardly sincere following of the voice of one’s heart in search of truth, or a thorny path full of doubts, conflicts and challenges.

81 *Kasb* and *iktisab* are the key notions of the Islamic creed connected with predestination.

82 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with I.N., 5.06.2018.

83 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with I.N., 6.06.2018.

84 Yusuf Khattar Muhammad, “*Entsiklopediya sufizma*” [*Encyclopaedia of Sufism*], R. Adygamov (translation from Arabic) (Moscow: Ansar, 2005), p. 479.

85 The Salafi doctrine of monotheism consists of three basic elements: the divine rule over the entire universe (*tawhid al-rububiyyah*), God’s exclusive right to be the only object of worship (*tawhid al-uluhiyyah*), the unity of God in his possession of beautiful names and attributes (*tawhid al-asma wa-s-sifat*), which implies that God has various epithets and attributive qualities.



## THE KHALIDIYYA

This branch of the *Naqshbandiyya* brotherhood, named after its founder, Khalid al-Shahrazuri Baghdadi (1776–1827), had only a few adherents in the Volga and Urals Region in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One famous follower was sheikh Murad Ramzi, who left much information on the previous sheikhs who had been links in his chain of succession.<sup>86</sup> The followers of sheikh Zaynulla Rasulev played a role in preserving this branch of the *Naqshbandi tariqa* in the Volga-Urals region under the persecution of religious activities.<sup>87</sup> He is the individual to whom the Soviet ishans who lived and worked in Dagestan, viz. Bayazid Khayrullin (1871–1950), Garifulla Gaynullin (1894–1984), and Gabdelhannan Safiullin (1883–1971), trace their chain of succession to. This chain of succession is no longer extant.

In the late 1990s, two people expressed a wish to take an oath to one of Garifulla ishan's *murid*, one Kamil Bikmuhametov (1922–2000), who lived in Buinsk<sup>88</sup>. As one of them later remembered, the last representative of the *Naqshbandiyya Khalidiyya tariqa* in Tatarstan had admitted he would not be able to train them, however, and he died some months after, without having left any successor behind. Despite this, one of the two had pursued inquiries with Kamil ishan and, after talking with him and have a shared spiritual experience (a state of lightness of soul, exhilaration and escalation of spirit), nonetheless claimed that spiritual initiation did happen, and he continued to perform *rabita* to Kamil ishan, considering him his guide to the *tariqa*. After Kamil ishan's death and a long subsequent spiritual search, this person met another person "with inner light", which resembled what he had experienced with Kamil ishan, whose follower he became.<sup>89</sup> That was a representative of the Pakistani sheikh Ahmad Zulfikar, considered below.

86 Ramzi al-Manzalavi al-Makki M., *Talfiq al-akhbar wa talqikh-al-asar fi waqai Kazan wa Bolgar wa muluk at-tatar*, (Orenburg: Al-Karimiyya wa-l-Husayniyya, 1908), p. 452, 475-476.

87 Gatin A.A., "Tatarskiye ishany – prodolzhateli duhovnoy tsepochnki Zaynulli Rasuleva: opyt istoricheskoy rekonstruktsii" ["Tatar ishans – the successors in the spiritual chain of Zaynulla Rasulev: a historical reconstruction experiment"], *Islam v multikul'turnom mire: Sbornik materialov i tezisov 2-go Kazanskogo mezhdunarodnogo nauchnogo foruma. 29-31 okt. 2012 g.* [Islam in a multicultural world. Collection of materials and abstracts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kazan International Academic Forum. 29-31 October, 2012] (Kazan: Art-Logic, 2012), p. 76-77.

88 The biography of Kamil Bikmuhametov is presented in the following book: Malikov R., "Bua shaharenen meselman ghyibatatkhanalare tarikhy" ["History of Muslim houses of worship of Buinsk"] (Kazan: Idel-Press, 2009), p. 24-25.

89 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with I., 18.09.2018.



The second individual to approach Kamil Bikmuhametov is now imam of the Shamil Mosque in Kazan, Mahmut Sharafutdinov, whom Tatarstani Muslims know as the author of books on Sufism and a healer.<sup>90</sup> During his period of spiritual search, he met a lot of distinguished sheikhs, including the sheikh of the *Haqqaniyya* branch, Nazim of Cyprus. While studying in Turkey, he visited a *Khalidiyya* sheikh of Turkish *jama'ah* of the *İsmailağa*, Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu al-Ofi, but still considers Kamil Bikmuhametov his mentor. In L. Almazova's description,

The strong, vigorous personality of this imam is a result of a surprising combination of incongruous elements in his worldview: his loyalty to ancient Islamic traditions and local forms of Islam, as well as his careful and discreet adoption of new spiritual streams such as the New Age. There are also Sufi elements that have helped to form this imam's personality, such as the search for and finding of spiritual mentors, having his own *silsila*, his gift of healing, his prophetic dreams – all of this contributes to *hadhrat's* unique style, which attracts a lot of grateful parishioners to him.<sup>91</sup>

As for the *İsmailağa jama'ah*, its leaders in Turkey mostly hold anti-modernist views and reject modern technology and the achievements of science. This brotherhood's emergence and expansion, with its aim of profound knowledge of Hanafi *fiqh*, in combination with Sufi practices, are most probably reflections of modernisation, westernisation, and secularisation, etc., under relatively democratic social conditions. The followers of this *jama'ah* lead an ascetic lifestyle, which they contrast to the modern Western lifestyle.<sup>92</sup> The *İsmailağa jama'ah* is described by respondents from a different *tariqa* as a highly politicised and controversial movement that is close to the Turkish authorities, and its members are often called '*erbakancilar*.' They are also sometimes referred to as the Turkish *Taliban*, because their sheikhs often practice *takfir* toward other *tariqas*.

90 Shamil mosque conducts collective *dhikrs*, as well as the ritual of *Oshkeru* [healing with a prayer] is performed three times a week, with required prior registration.

91 Almazova L.I., "Fenomen kazanskoy mecheti 'Shamil': sufiyskiye istoki tselitelnoy praktiki" ["The phenomenon of the Shamil mosque in Kazan: Sufi sources of healing practice"], *Islam v multikul'turnom mire: Islamskiye dvizheniya i formirovaniye musul'manskoj ideologii v sovremennom informatsionnom prostranstve* [Islam in a multicultural world: Islamic movements and the formation of Islamic ideology in the modern information landscape] (Kazan: Izdatel'stvo Kazanskogo universiteta, 2014), p. 253-272.

92 Saetov I.G., "Vyzov modernu iz tsentra Stambula: Dzhamaat «İsmail aga» v obshchestvennoy zhizni Turtsii" ["A challenge to modernism from the centre of Istanbul: the '*İsmailağa jama'ah* in the social life of Turkey"], *Uchenye zapiski Kazanskogo universiteta. Seriya Gumanitarniye nauki* [Proceedings of Kazan University. Series: Social Sciences and Humanities], Vol. 155, Book 3 (2013), p. 90-96.



There are followers of the *İsmailağa* in Tatarstan as well. Respondents that belong to this branch were very reluctant to answer any questions connected with their ritual practices on the pretext that this information is confidential and only available to members of the *tariqa*. The sheikh gives each follower an individual task. There is a hierarchy amongst his apprentices, which depends on how much each student succeeds in fulfilling their *wird*. A junior student does not know what task a senior student has.

In a *Khalidiyya* branch connected with another Turkish teacher, ‘Abdulbaki al-Huseyni Gavs as-Sani, the practice of quiet solitary *dhikr* is performed while sitting under a scarf draped from above. Depending on the *murid’s* progress, each four months the amount of *dhikr* set may be increased. According to a member of this brotherhood we interviewed, the number of repetitions to be performed is constantly raised, so that “In the beginning you have to do quite a lot of it, and your fingers are not really used to it at first. But after a while you don’t even notice. You perform it for about 20-25 minutes. Usually you want to do that after the morning prayer. If you still have some repetitions left, you finish them later, in the evening after work.”<sup>93</sup>

The members of this brotherhood also practice *khatm khwajagan*, which is divided into major and minor varieties. The difference between them is the number of participants and the formulas to be recited. Not everyone who has joined the *tariqa* is allowed to attend the *khatm* performance. First, one must meet eight conditions (*shart*), from ablution to *ra-bita*. During the small *khatm*, people sit in a circle with the supervisor of the ritual in the middle. Twenty stones, each the size of a pea, are distributed to those present. There are also large stones to keep count. *Khatm* is always performed with the eyes closed. In a performance of the major *khatm* there are two supervisors: one distributes the stones, so he is given 21 stones to keep count, while a further 79 stones are divided equally between the participants. By the end of the ritual, the “Ikhlās” *surah* alone has been recited 10,000 times. Depending on the number of people present and the duration of the prayer performed in the end of the rite, *khatm* takes between 15 and 20 minutes.

The followers of some branches of the *Naqshbandiyya tariqa* are often accused of occult practices, in particular “Aramaic spells, which the accusers trace back to Caliph ‘Ali, for some reason”, or of “resorting to

93 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Vasil Mindubaev, 24.07.2018.





household magic, including the use of amulets and tables that are similar to those used in Kabbalah”. One of the respondents remembered that he had come across this very often among the followers of the Nur movement during the period of his spiritual search. In his words, “all kinds of aberrations occur – rites and prayers that are not practiced in Islam”. According to him, “a lot of my acquaintances were put off by this lowness”, and some graduates of Turkish-Tatar lyceums, “very capable kids, who went through intellectual selection back in the day, switched from soft Nurcu to hard Wahhabism”, on the grounds that they “do not want to be pawns in somebody else’s game, to serve other people’s interests or be a part of a *jamia* that is governed from God knows where”.<sup>94</sup>

According to this respondent, “a fondness for *karamats* (miracles – R.S.), which is typical of *Naqshbandi* Sufis, their love of levitation and flying inevitably contributes to attracting a large number of *majnuns*, i.e. mentally unstable people”. The respondent explains this by a false understanding of spirituality, which “renders people insane, obsessed, hell-bent on all kinds of thaumaturgics”. The positive influence of spiritual practices is, however, in the interviewee’s opinion, obvious when a person becomes prudent and feels a surge of energy for the performance of productive work instead of “turning into an idler who loafs around, looking for something and prone to scandalous behaviour”.<sup>95</sup>

Among the traits typical of the *Naqshbandiyya tariqa*, their critics mention violations of the order of succession. According to the same respondent, this trait manifests itself most distinctly in the *jama’ah* of the *Süleymançılar*, where the administrator of the *waqf* after Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan’s death<sup>96</sup> was his son-in-law. As a result, you get a “formal, top-heavy structure”, i.e. an institution with a certain system of practices, but one that “is not so much a *tariqa* as an empty sign, a brand or a banner that many representatives of this *tariqa* have held; their *tariqa* clings onto form by sacrificing meaning. There is no substance, and neither is there any *fayz*”.<sup>97</sup>

The interviewee admitted he was not ready to discuss such questions openly with other people, because he was trying to treat every person and the path they follow with care: “this can throw you off your stride and make you doubt Islam”. In his view, none of that prevents simple followers

94 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with I.G., 5.06.2018.

95 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with I.G., 5.06.2018.

96 Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (1888–1959) – the founder of the *Süleymançılar jama’ah* of the *Naqshbandiyyah Mujaddidiyya Khalidiyya* branch of Sufism.

97 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with I.G., 5.06.2018.



from being pure and righteous, however, and “the mere fact of belonging to a given *tariqa* does not make anyone a bad person”.<sup>98</sup>

## THE HAQQANIYYA-RABBANIYYA

This branch of the *Naqshbandiyya tariqa* is named after its founder, sheikh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Qibrisi al-Haqqani (1922–2014), and is one of those international Sufi organisations that were built up immediately after the emergence of their main ideological opponents, the transnational networks of radical Islam. These networks are not merely incorporated into global information networks. They are well adapted to the conditions of functioning in Western culture. Having first emerged as a local Sufi group in Dagestan, within three generations, the spiritual centre of this branch of the *Naqshbandiyya* had moved to Northern Cyprus, via Turkey and Syria. In 1974, they started to promote the *Haqqaniyya-Rabbaniyya* extensively in the West, but primarily in the UK, Germany, and the USA.<sup>99</sup>

One of the first public meetings of Tatarstan Muslims with representatives of this branch took place in 2005 (a notice for the upcoming meeting was placed at the entrance to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tatarstan). A witness describes the meeting with a representative of the *Haqqaniyya* as follows: “A nice young man in a white *tubeteika* spoke about Nazim Haqqani, the *tariqa*, *dhikr*, and he told us that he had been to India and now lived in Moscow. I listened to him enthusiastically. They asked questions, and then I bought their book.”<sup>100</sup>

Among sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani’s books popular with members of the *tariqa* are his *Spiritual Discussions*,<sup>101</sup> *Natural Medicine. Prophetic Medicine*,<sup>102</sup> *Love. Sufi Teachings and Spiritual Practices*, and *On the Bridge to*

98 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with I.G., 5.06.2018.

99 Briil’ov D.V., “Sufiyskaya transnatsionalnaya kommunikativnaya set’ al-Ahbash na postsovetском prostranstve: primer Ukrainy” [“The transnational Sufi communication network *al-Ahbash* in the post-Soviet area: case study of Ukraine”], *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya: Ekonomicheskiye i sotsial’niye peremeny* [Monitoring of public opinion: Economic and social changes], 2 (2018), p. 180-193.

100 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with F.Z., 18.05.2018.

101 The content of the book is basically the text of “lectures and spiritual conversations of sheikh of the Sufi order of the *Naqshbandiyya*, Muhammad Nazim al-Haqqani, with his apprentices” (available on Sufi.su as an application for Android devices).

102 The following brochure on medicine and treatment is freely available: Mawlana sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani. “*Narodnye retsepty. Prirodnaya meditsina*” [“*Natural recipes: Natural medicine*”], <http://www.sufi.su/books/prirodnaya-meditsina-shejkh-nazim-al-khakkani>, accessed 25 September 2019.



*Eternity*. Audio versions of the last two were released on March 2, 2017 and are available in the public domain.

After sheikh Nazim's passing on May 7, 2014, his son, sheikh Mehmet Adil, became leader of the *tariqa*. Sheikh Mehmet visited Tatarstan in 2015 and participated at meetings in the Spiritual Administration of Muslims and the Russian Islamic University with the deputies of the mufti and the rector, administrative staff, and faculty of the University. Photos from the event are available on the websites of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan, the Russian Islamic Institute, and the *tariqa*.



Photo 1. The ritual *baigat* (collective dedication) to sheikh Mehmet Nazim Adil al-Qibrisi al-Haqqani at the entrance of the Russian Islamic University, April 2015 (Kazan, the Republic of Tatarstan). Courtesy of Rezeda Safiullina.

The membership of the *Haqqaniyya* brotherhood in Tatarstan includes people from various social strata: workers, teachers, doctors, and actors, including some rather famous individuals.<sup>103</sup> They have a tradition of simultaneous performance of *dhikr* on Friday evenings in order to help people in need. The name of the person the *dhikr* is dedicated to is given

103 Followers of the *Haqqaniyya* branch include Tereza Kamalova, daughter of former mayor of Kazan Kamil Iskhakov, and Marat Safin, the brother of popular singer Alsou. Famous Kazan preacher (*abystay*) Faniya Zalyalieva is the organiser and supervisor of a training course at the Gadel Mosque. Her book on the benefits of *dhikr* is quite popular with believers.



in advance by video call, and the time and length of the *dhikr* are also determined in advance. Particularly long rites are performed for severely ill people, for those undergoing court trials or for any facing a dangerous situation. Such requests come from cities all around Russia (Ufa, Moscow, etc.), as well as in Georgia and Iran.

The members of the *Haqqaniyya* branch are often accused of violating the *Shariah*. Prominent examples include women kissing the sheikh's hand, though *Shariah* has a strict rule that women must not physically touch a sheikh, even when taking an oath. A respondent also described an occurrence he witnessed in Cyprus, when a group of sheikh Nazim al-Haqqani's followers did not pray at the time for prayer, when everybody else was going to the mosque. When I asked Tatarstani mufti Kamil Samigullin for his opinion on this during our interview, he advised against jumping to conclusions:

We do not know the reason. They may have been visiting foreigners, or Shafi'is who had combined several prayers into one. It happens to me too, when I have to receive visitors, and it's time for prayer, but I cannot leave, that I have to miss the main *jamia*, but later make up for it here. It is likely some people will see this and misunderstand. They will say the mufti does not pray. We need to have *husnu-dhann* (assuming the best of others – R.S.). One should try and find a justification for other's supposedly bad behaviour. The beauty of Islam is that it has a lot of different *jamias* and interests. The most important thing is for them all to be a part of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*.<sup>104</sup>

## THE DAGESTANI BRANCHES OF THE *NAQSHBANDIYYA*: THE *MAHMOUDIYYA* AND THE *SHADHILIYYA*

The Dagestani branch of the *Mahmoudiyya* originated with Dagestani sheikh Mahmoud al-Almali (1810–1877), who joined the brotherhood of the *Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya* in Kazan during his exile to the internal areas of Russia and, having garnered the support of the *Naqshbandi* sheikhs active in Tatarstan, gained many followers on return to his homeland. His tomb is in Astrakhan, where he spent some time in exile, up until his death in 1877, all while gathering new *murids* around him. This branch, called

104 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with Kamil Samigullin, 27.07.2018.



the *Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya-Mahmoudiyya*, spread particularly in Turkic-language regions, including the Volga, where it had some popularity with Tatars. It is substantially different from the Dagestani branch of the *Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya*, led by ‘Abdurahman as-Sughuri and his caliph, who were active in Central and Northern Dagestan, mostly among the Avars, i.e. in areas overtaken by jihad in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>105</sup>

The *Shadhili tariqa*, founded by sheikh Abul Hasan ash-Shadhili in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was brought to early 20<sup>th</sup> century Dagestan by Sayfulla Qadi Bashlarov. The first *ustad* of the *Naqshbandi* way was the famous Tatar ishan Muhammad Zakir-Chistawi, while the sheikh who passed on the *ijazah* for the further advancement of this teaching was Zaynulla Rasulev. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, sheikh Sayfulla Qadi combined these two lines,<sup>106</sup> and sheikhs of the *Mahmoudiyya* line in Dagestan act as mentors for two *tariqas* at once – the *Shadhiliyya* and the *Naqshbandiyya*. The former is seen by them as a preparatory stage for people who wish to join the *Naqshbandiyya*.

Followers of the Dagestani branches are very active in Tatarstan and have gained notable influence. While their representatives were previously mostly *murids* of the Dagestani sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi (1937–2012), today there are quite a lot of Tatars among them. After Said Afandi’s death, the role of mentor of the followers from outside Dagestan was taken by the mufti of the Republic of Dagestan Ahmad Haji Abdulaev.

In an interview with members of the school six years ago, I noted that the tendency to consider their teaching the only correct one and denounce all other *tariqas* was quite typical of them. Followers of other branches connected with Turkish mentors usually pay them back in the same coin. A representative of the Chirkawi branch said, “Turkish teachers do not recognise the *Shadhiliyya*, where you get a simplified variant of practices at the beginner stage. Instead, they accept you right away into the *Naqshbandiyya*, which is more demanding”.

The life story of I.M., an imam from a common village in a district in Tatarstan and member of the *Naqshbandiyya-Mahmoudiyya* brotherhood, may serve as an example of this. I.M.’s childhood and adolescence were in the 1990s, and he grew up amidst the unsightly post-Soviet mundanity of an industrial Tatarstani city. In order to change his son’s environment, I.M.’s father decided to move to the country and become a farmer. He sent his son to study

105 Kurbanova G.M., “Problemy dzihhada v dagestanskoy religioznoy mysli XIX – nachala XX vv.” [“Problems of jihad in the Dagestani religious thought of the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries”], *Islamovedeniye [Islamic Studies]*, 2 (2009), p. 48-58.

106 Shikhaliyev Sh., “Sufiyskiy sheykh segodnya” [“Sufi sheikh today”], *Etnograficheskoye obozreniye [Ethnographic review]*, 2 (2006), p. 25-34.



at courses in the local mosque, then to the local *madrasah*, and the young man became involved in religion. Then he travelled to Turkey and studied at the Ziya Paşa Qur'an courses in Eskişehir for half a year. He also studied at the Russian Islamic Institute in Kazan for a year but did not complete his studies. For three years, he attended the Muhammad Arif *madrasah*-mosque in Makhachkala, which is the only *madrasah*-mosque of the Hanafi *madhab* in that city. During his stay in Makhachkala his relatives helped him to marry a young local woman who was the follower of the Shafi'i *madhab*. The young family was provided a home to live in and financial support. Two years later, on I.M.'s initiative his parents visited Dagestan, performed a traditional *ziyarat*, during which they visited the mufti of the Republic of Dagestan Ahmad Haji Abdulaev, joined the *tariqa*, and received the *wird*.

In conspicuous places around his parents' home, one cannot help noticing texts of the *silsila* (continuous genealogical chains of spiritual succession) listing the names of those who have transmitted the esoteric knowledge of the *Shadhili* (tracing back to the Prophet via 'Ali and Hasan) and the *Naqshbandi* (tracing back to the Prophet via Abu Bakr and Salman the Persian) branches, with each of these *silsila* ending with Said Afandi al-Chirkawi, who was sheikh of both these *tariqas*. One also finds pictures of distinguished sheikhs, with special places dedicated to the founder of the *Shadhiliyya* branch, Abul Hasan ash-Shadhili (1196–1258), to Sayfulla Qadi Bashlarov (1856–1919), and to Said Afandi al-Chirkawi. There are many books in the house, most published in Makhachkala, but also some from Moscow and Kazan.

Our first meeting with I.M.'s parents – a couple who had lived in marriage for 43 years and had previously been indifferent to religion – took place two years ago. Their son was still studying in Dagestan. After travelling to Dagestan and joining the *tariqa*, his parents had tried to fulfil the prescribed tasks. His father was struggling to master the esoteric knowledge. He would remark that people really need to learn things like that from early childhood. His mother, to her surprise, discovered in herself a talent for preaching after their visit to Dagestan. She would often be invited by locals when someone died, because the village had no competent Muslim priest or even person capable of preparing the deceased for burial. Still, the locals perceived them as somewhat alien, exotic strangers, representatives of 'non-traditional Islam'. The inhabitants of the village were, nonetheless, looking forward to the young imam's return with his new wife. On his arrival, he took up the position of imam at a mosque in a neighbouring village. Here, we see two different *madhabs* combined with-



in a single family, and each member maintaining their loyalty to their own school of Islamic jurisprudence. The imam's Dagestani wife is Shafi'i, he Hanafi, a combination that involves some limitations in terms of ritual purity, etc., but nothing that prevents them being a single family.

When I visited them again two years later, doing research for this article, I found that over those two years they had formed a small *jama'ah* there. They perform the *khatm khwajagan* every week, and followers visit from Aznakaevo, Urussu and Naberezhnye Chelny every week just to attend it. It so happened that on the day I was there, they had a small *majlis* to commemorate *Eid al-Adha*, with about 20 guests present, of different ages, mostly young, and including a few Dagestanis.

The imam spoke about some general nuances of the *khatm*, showed a brochure that had been made specifically for the followers of the branch. According to the imam, they perform the *khatm* of Imam Rabbani. There is also the *Shadhili khatm*, which lasts longer – 40 minutes. The *Naqshbandi khatm* is easier and takes less time. In his description of the *khatm khwajagan* performed by this group, he named a few additional aspects which were not mentioned above in our description of the *khatm* performed by followers of a different *jama'ah* of the *Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya* branch, one associated with a Turkish teacher. These aspects have to do with the phrases recited during the *khatm*.

When I asked them to tell me more about the nuances of performing *dhikr* in the *Shadhili tariqa* and the Chirkawi branch of the *Naqshbandi tariqa*, they replied that one should not ask or answer such questions because otherwise “*the barakah* goes away.” They compared it to a treatment prescribed by a doctor. A mentor similarly “prescribes” for each *murid* “their own medicine” on an individual basis. At first, they are given the *wird* for the *Shadhili dhikr*, which is recited aloud. Having completed this level, which takes about half-a-year, the *murid* then has to switch to the *Naqshbandi dhikr*, which is performed with one's heart, and now they have to work on the level of chakras (*lataif*), which are “turned on” consecutively. After that the *murid* must move to a deeper level, called “*the sultan*,” when all these focal points are combined simultaneously during the rite. It can take from two to ten years for different apprentices to pass these levels. The general rules of *khatm* and *dhikr* that the *murid* of this branch follow are listed on the educational website of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan, *as-Sunnah*.<sup>107</sup>

107 “Etika Khatmu-Salavata” [“The ethics of *khatmu-salawat*”], <http://as-sunna.ru/post/1323.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.



Since 2016, the Dagestani community had held an annual festive ceremony in the “Riviera” mall of the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan to commemorate the *Mawlid*, the birthday of Prophet Muhammad. This event is normally attended by clerics, athletes, public figures, and government officials. A religious and educational newspaper called *as-Salam* circulates in the Republic, and throughout Russia. It is published under the imprimatur of the Muftiate of the Republic of Dagestan. In 2016 this paper started being published in Tatar as well. Despite the fact that the mufti of Tatarstan Kamil Samigullin is a member of the editorial board, we observed some opposition to its circulation from official representatives of DUM RT, which in turn causes discontent amongst the followers of the Dagestani branch: “Why won’t the Tatarstani religious authorities accept the *Shadhili tariqa* on the grounds of difference in *madhabs*. They don’t understand that this is a Tatarstani *tariqa*, which emerged thanks to Tatar mentors.”<sup>108</sup>

In official discourse, we see the tendency to cover up or ignore spiritual ties between Dagestan and Tatarstan. This is confirmed by the fact that the opening ceremonies in Dagestan in early August 2016 for two new mosques, named after distinguished Tatar ishans, Zaynulla Rasulev and Bayazid Khayrullin, was not covered by the Tatarstan media in any way. The website of the DUM of the Republic of Tatarstan only had a few short updates on the opening of mosques named after Tatar *ustads* in Makhachkala. Noting that, an author on the *EADaily.com* website, Musa Ibragimbekov, commented that “In Tatarstan, everything that has to do with Sufism is either ignored or shamefacedly sidestepped.”<sup>109</sup>

Representatives of the Tatarstani clergy nonetheless visit Dagestan frequently. In fact, during the All-Russia theological conference “The role of religion in strengthening the unity of the peoples of Russia”, which took place on September 21, 2018, in Makhachkala, the mufti of Tatarstan Kamil Samigullin conducted the Friday sermon and prayers at the mosque of Zaynulla sharif Rasulev in Makhachkala.<sup>110</sup>

108 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with I.M., 17.07.2018.

109 Ibragimbekov M., “Prazdnik tatarskogo sufizma v Dagestane tatarstanskiye SMI stydlivo umolchali: mneniye” [“The celebration of ‘Tatar Sufism’ in Dagestan was shamefacedly ignored by Tatarstan media: an opinion”], <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2016/08/03/prazdnik-tatarskogo-sufizma-v-dagestane-tatarstanskiye-smi-stydlivo-umolchali-mnenie>, accessed 25 September 2019.

110 “Dzhuma-namaz v makhachkalinskoy mecheti imeni tatarskogo ishana provel muftiy Tatarstana” [“The Jum’ah in a Makhachkala mosque named after a Tatar ishan was held by the mufti of Tatarstan”], [http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news\\_20851.html](http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news_20851.html), accessed 25 September 2019.





As for the opponents of the Dagestani Sufi brotherhood's spread into Tatarstan, their position was expressed during an interview we conducted with a respected religious figure from the Republic, the General Director of the Sayiid Kul Sharif Charity Foundation to Support Islamic Civilisation, Science and Education and former mufti of the United Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Penza oblast', Abdurauf Zabirov. According to him, to be a mentor one must know the history, culture, customs, mindset ("you even have to understand the jokes specific to this culture, what they will find funny and what they won't") and language ("you can't preach in broken Tatar using translated books"). Our respondent was also alarmed by the close relationship between the Sufi *tariqas* and the representatives of government bodies and agencies, "I am not pleased when the *ahl at-Tasawwuf* reach out to government officials and start making agreements with them, making concessions, compromises... Even one bad apple is not good for the whole barrel."<sup>111</sup> The primary reason for this appears to be these opponents' concern that bringing the Dagestan model of Sufism into Tatarstan may bring with it an entire tangle of problems and conflicts that have been typical of Dagestan up until very recently.

## THE TOPBAŞIYYA

As remembered by one of our respondents, on a joint trip abroad in 2004, the former deputy mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan, the late Valiulla Yakupov, shared his conclusion, after analysing the existing *tariqas*, that, to judge by the literature in circulation, this Sufi *jama'ah* was the most acceptable for Tatars, because it was basically a branch of the *Khalidiyya* line of the *Naqshbandi tariqa*, with its spiritual leader Osman Nuri Topbaş residing in Turkey. This *jama'ah* failed, however, to gain wide recognition or support in Tatarstan, despite extensive efforts during the early 2000s.

In 2005, the Moscow publishing house of *Sad [Garden]* was founded. They published and distributed a lot of Sufi literature, including the works of Osman Nuri Topbaş himself. *Sad* also published their own magazine. A foundation connected with the *jama'ah* supervised the Kazan Islamic College, whose rector, the imam of the Marjani mosque of Kazan and incumbent deputy mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan, Mansur Zalyaletdinov, had received his religious education in Turkey.

<sup>111</sup> Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with Abdurauf Zabirov, 28.08.2018.



When a number of works by Osman Nuri Topbaş were banned and the director of *Sad Aydar* Habibullin arrested (in 2012 he was sentenced to four years of prison for alleged “illegal possession of ammunition” and “incitement of hatred or animosity, as well as abasement of human dignity”), hard times began for the followers of the *jama'ah*. Its followers still exist in Moscow, Penza oblast', and Bashkortostan, however. In Tatarstan, there are only a handful of them, and they are not united into a single group. They include several imams of Kazan mosques and leaders of religious organisations, including the abovementioned General Director of the Sayiid Kul Sharif Charity Foundation to Support Islamic Civilisation, Science and Education and former mufti of the United Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Penza oblast', Abdurauf Zabiroy, who is currently imam of the *Mirghaziyan* mosque in Kazan, where collective *dhikr* is performed each Friday after morning prayer. Attending the *dhikr* is open to the general public. On Sundays, they also have collective *dhikr* for a limited circle of followers.

## FOLLOWERS OF THE PAKISTANI SHEIKH OF THE DEOBANDI SCHOOL, ZULFIQAR AHMAD

This is a branch of the *Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya tariqa*. In 1992, Zulfiqar Ahmad personally visited Kazan, as part of his travels around the republics of Central Asia and Russia. He did not receive a very warm welcome in Tatarstan, where, unlike Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Gorky and Ufa, few people wished to swear an oath to him. He was allowed to perform a 15-minute sermon in the *Marjani* mosque. A representative of the mosque acted as interpreter, inserting his own comments into the speech and recommending that listeners refrain from swearing an oath to a foreign sheikh and that they should give preference to local leaders instead. These events are described by Zulfiqar in his autobiographical book, *From Lahore to Samarkand and Bukhara*,<sup>112</sup> published in Urdu and

112 Safargaleev I.F., *Vozvrashcheniye mnogovekovoy traditsii i lichnost' sheykha Maulany Zulfikara Ahmada Nakshbandi-Mudzhadedi* [The return of the centuries-old tradition and personality of sheikh Mawlana Zulfiqar Ahmad Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi], *Tezisy vystupleniya na mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii "Obnovlencheskiye dvizheniya v islame," 1-2 dekabrya 2011 goda, Kazan* [Abstract of the presentation at the International Academic Conference 'Renovationist movements in Islam', 1-2 December, 2011, Kazan], <http://www.materik.ru/rubric/detail.php?ID=14390&print=Y>, accessed 25 September 2019.



English.<sup>113</sup> In the book, Zulfiqar says that after the sermon in the mosque five madrasah students approached him and asked him to accept them into the *tariqa*. They took the oath then and there, in the mosque under the stairs. There is little likelihood of finding out whether this story is true or who those students may have been.

Another of Zulfiqar’s books, *Love for Allah*, was translated from English into Russian and published in Kazan by the *Iman* publishing house in 2010.<sup>114</sup> In 2008, his Russian followers wanted to organise a further visit by Zulfiqar to Kazan and even prepared accommodation for him, but they were unable to get official permission, and the sheikh’s visit was cancelled.

### THE TIJANIYYAH

The first time a representative of this *tariqa* appeared in Tatarstan was in 2007, when Kazan was visited by the leader of the European and Russian community of the *Tijaniyyah tariqa*, sheikh Ali Abdu-s-Samad, a wealthy Swiss entrepreneur of Jewish descent, whose given name was Freddy Bollag (1935–2010). His teacher, as of 1960, was a sheikh of the *Tijaniyyah tariqa*, Hampâté Bâ. In 1980, Freddy Bollag also became a follower of the Indian master Haidakhan Baba (Babaji), who “opened many secrets of Indian meditation to him and helped him fathom the numerological secrets of the sacred texts of the Qur’an”.<sup>115</sup> Bollag is the author of *The name of Allah and the number 66*,<sup>116</sup> a book devoted to studying the secret symbolism behind letters and numbers as an expression of the unity of all religions. Bollag began regularly visiting Russia in 1996. A documentary about him, called *Freddy Ali*, was selected for two film festivals: *The Stalker* International Human Rights Film Festival (Moscow, 2011) and the *Saint*

113 The text of the book in Russian: Zulfiqar Ahmad Naqshbandi. *Po respublikam byvshego SSSR [In the republics of the former USSR]*, p. 290-273, <https://azan.kz/upload/%D0%9F%D0%BE%20%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BC%20%D0%B1%D1%8B%D0%B2%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%BE%20%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A0.pdf>, accessed 25 September 2019.

114 Zulfiqar Ahmad Naqshbandi. *Lyubov k Allahu [Love for Allah]*, Transl. from English by G.R. Ahmetyanova (Kazan: Iman, 2010), p. 100.

115 Vstrecha s sufiyskim sheykhom Ali [A meeting with Sufi sheikh Ali], <https://vk.com/event8107982>, accessed 25 September 2019.

116 Bollag F. *Imya Allaha i chislo 66 [The name of Allah and the number 66]* (Moscow: Belovodye, 2001).



*Anna* Open Festival of Student and Debut Films (Moscow, 2011). The film is publicly available on the Internet.

This sheikh has followers in various Russian cities, including Saint Petersburg, Moscow, and Omsk. In March 2009, he visited Kazan for the second time. A small group of people was formed, who always came to talk to the sheikh. Following Bollag's death in 2010, the Kazan group eventually broke up.

Ten years after these events I met one of the sheikh's followers from the Kazan Islamic Institute, where she had been a third-year student of the Department of Religious Disciplines. She had not been particularly familiar with Islam before, because her family was not a religious one, and there was no succession or transfer of knowledge. The young woman's parents are engineers. Her mother has two sisters, married to ethnic Russians, and her own sister is also married to an ethnic Russian husband. D. attended classes in Norbekov's group. Not having been a practicing Muslim, she experienced the power of the prayers that other members of the group performed during breaks between classes on behalf of those attending the course and in the classroom at the time: "Nobody had ever prayed for me before. And here I felt how during those breaks they were praying for me. As soon as they left and the prayer started, within three minutes you could start to feel such an incredible flow of energy, such joy. Now, when I pray myself, I feel that too."<sup>117</sup>

D. joined sheikh Ali's group at the invitation of some of the women from Norbekov's group and immediately let him and the people accompanying him use her apartment during their visit to Kazan. There were several followers of the sheikh from Kazan. They communicated through an interpreter. The sheikh gave her a Muslim name, a *wazifa* (individual assignment for everyday ritual practices). And she started to perform prayers the very next day. She fulfilled her *wazifa* every day for five years. She also undertook an *Umrah* (a minor pilgrimage to Mecca). Subsequently she experienced, in her own words, a "tough situation" with certain "Nationalist Tatar Muslims", which facilitated a shift away from Islam for a certain period of time. She remembers that when she received the blessing the sheikh had advised her against attending the mosque and establishing close relationships with other Muslims until her faith grew stronger:

He must have foreseen what would happen to me. They (Muslims – R.S.) do not accept me as one of their kind [...] While for me sheikh Ali is the embo-

<sup>117</sup> Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with D., 22.06.2018.



diment of light, Muslims that I meet do not exhibit the best of human qualities, which really puts me off them... Slander, creating negative public opinion, double-crossing... It seems that they are driven by fear or internal trauma and do these things because they probably think I can cause them harm. They want to protect themselves against negative eventualities.<sup>118</sup>

D. is unsure whether, if she had not met Freddy Bollag, she would have adopted Islam and become a student of an Islamic university. Three other young women who joined the *tariqa* with her have already abandoned Sufism because they have not found an appropriate environment. She too had a difficult time after the death of the sheikh. While she was searching for another spiritual mentor, she briefly met the sheikh of the *Husayniyya Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya* branch, Rishat Musin. She visited him for initiation. She notes that the practices are similar in some ways, but the *Husayniyya* has fewer assignments than the *Tijaniyyah*.

D. admits that she did not feel any spiritual bond with her new mentor, unlike her other spiritual teachers. She has also travelled to India in search of spiritual experience. According to her, spiritual mentors of the Vedic tradition told her that her path is Islam, but she resisted that at first. Now, in her understanding, "Islam is a body of rules that, if you live by them, allow you to achieve internal harmony". In D.'s words, she now feels a connection with all her spiritual teachers, including her former mentor, the rector of the Unity University of Vedic Knowledge. She also constantly feels the presence of sheikh Ali, "At difficult times I can see his image and I hear his advice. Before all this, I used to have a lot of questions that I could not find answers to anywhere: not psychology nor all sorts of other courses answered those questions for me, but Islam did."<sup>119</sup>

The *Tijaniyyah tariqa* is a relatively young Sufi order. Its founder, Ahmad al-Tijani, started his preaching in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, claiming that he had received "instruction" from the Prophet Muhammad himself, who appeared to him in a dream and explained his teaching and prayer to him, i.e. gave him his *wird* and permission to start his own independent *tariqa*. Such a departure from the chain of spiritual succession goes against what is customary for traditional *tariqas* such as the *Naqshbandiyya*. Imam Rabbani wrote, "Let him who became a *murshid* in a dream teach *murid* in his dreams too."<sup>120</sup>

118 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with D., 22.06.2018.

119 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with D., 22.06.2018.

120 Author's fieldwork materials. Interview with Kamil Samigullin, 27.07.2018.



## SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The interviews and materials presented above clearly show that there are various points of view in Tatarstan about Sufism. Alongside a generally positive attitude towards Sufism and its prospects, there are more negative ones, expressed both by the opponents of Sufism and by members of certain of the *tariqas* regarding the other brotherhoods.

The reason some Muslims have such an aggressive reaction to Sufism seems to be the existence of certain misconceptions about Sufism as well as of actual groups whose behaviour discredits Sufism's ideas. A good example is the way various New Age movements invite all and sundry to join them, not just Muslims, and actively promote all kinds of courses, training sessions, yoga lessons, and Sufi massage therapy, etc. A relevant anecdotal case is that of "Gena the Sufi", who claims to be a philosopher and visionary and conducts practical sessions with a mix of vodka, pop psychology and psychotherapy.

It is no coincidence that we were advised during talks with respondents to avoid the word "Sufism" and speak only of "purification of the heart". Some people have even suggested changing the terminology, on the grounds that "when we talk about *Tasawwuf*, people start thinking of innovation".<sup>121</sup>

The fact that Sufi tradition has been turned into a taboo subject in the media by the official clerical organisations and the expert community is acknowledged even by so vocal an advocate of Sufism as Ildar Safagaleev, "The senior positions of all these VIPs in society and their public exposure prevent them from advertising their affiliation to a given school of *Tasawwuf* or ties with the school's sheikhs."<sup>122</sup> Ildar Safagaleev lists the names of people who "do not openly admit to being Sufis", from the chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (DSMR) Albir Krganov, to the ex-mufti of DUM RT Ildus Fayzov, the *qadi* of Tatarstan Jalil Fazlyev, the chairman of the Council of 'ulama' of DUM RT Abdulla Adygamov, and the head of the Department of da'wah of DUM RT Niyaz Sabirov. "A similar example is set by mufti Kamil Samigullin, who had the experience of learning in Dagestan."<sup>123</sup>

121 Transcript of the speech of the sheikh Muhammad Sharif as-Sawwaf, at the IV International Academic Conference on Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an in the past and the present, organised by the Centre for Research of the Holy Qur'an and the Pure Sunnah of the Republic of Tatarstan on 13.09.2018 in Kazan.

122 Safargaleev I., "Tasavvuf ili "tatarskiy sufizm"?" ["Tasawwuf or "Tatar Sufism"?"], <http://www.gumilev-center.ru/tasavvuf-ili-tatarskiy-sufizm>, accessed 25 September 2019.

123 Safargaleev I., "Tasavvuf ili "tatarskiy sufizm"?"



During our interviews, some of the individuals mentioned here did in fact deny belonging to a Sufi brotherhood. Others, who agreed to such conversations, preferred not to have their names mentioned in this article. Asked “Why won’t public officials openly declare their Sufism instead of bashfully keep quiet about it?”, they said they have their reasons to be cautious. Political figures who belong to Sufi *tariqas* “do not want to exacerbate the situation with the Wahhabis”, because, when they came back from completing their education in Turkey or elsewhere, most of them faced the antagonism against *madhabs* and the *Maturidi aqidah*. According to the mufti, “Back in the day, admitting you were a *Maturidi* was basically asking to be anathematised. Sufis were frequently called deluded, they were banished from mosques, from the Russian Islamic University, and there were people saying how acceptable it was to have to pray in a mosque whose imam is Sufi.”<sup>124</sup>

When I pointed out that the situation had changed and attitudes to Sufism were much more tolerant, the mufti responded, “Even so, they are cautious, to be on the safe side”.<sup>125</sup> This can be explained by the absence of actual sheikhs in any proximity, as the common followers’ spiritual strength is insufficient to back up their position and support it publicly. The mufti admits that he too is sometimes hurt by the criticisms:

They say and write all kinds of things about me on social media, ‘A warning from Samigullin et al.: they think Allah does not disapprove of Christians for praying to Jesus’. When did I ever say anything of the sort? Paper tolerates pretty much anything, you know. They might as well write that I have said that Muslims can kiss icons. Or, here is another one: ‘They tinker with the texts of their righteous predecessors, so as to make them fit their philosophy’, ‘he denies that Allah is above the throne’, ‘he denies the external meaning of Allah’s attributes, thinking belief in them infidelity or *shirk*’. And then these modern Internet *mujahideen* start their *jihad*.<sup>126</sup>

Nevertheless, as chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims, who enjoys government support, the incumbent mufti of Tatarstan shows truly “Sufi-like humility and forgiveness”, as, he says, he has no intention of settling scores with his ideological opponents:

At first they ‘slandered’ us: when we came back from Turkey, they called us *mushrik*. But we endured. We just kept working in the mosques. Now it’s our turn, but we won’t slander them. I have not reported them to the police

124 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Kamil Samigullin, 27.07.2018.

125 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Kamil Samigullin, 27.07.2018.

126 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Kamil Samigullin, 27.07.2018.



authorities. Even though the option is open to me. And they know I never will. Because that would not be the right thing to do. I have never committed such *zulum* (evil – R.S.), and I am not going to. I am against propaganda.<sup>127</sup>

Despite his openness to communication, however, Kamil Samigullin did not agree to separate publication of a full interview with him on a popular Tatarstan website, on the grounds that his task is “to unite the *ummah*”, while an interview, in which he would have to declare openly his predisposition for Sufism, would only facilitate disruption and an aggravation of antagonisms. As a result, interesting materials that show the mufti’s personality in a new light and from different angles and that would reveal an interesting partner in dialogue, and one with his own internal conflicts and self-reflexiveness, remain unpublished.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up the findings of this study, the claim of an expansion of Sufism in modern Tatarstan has simply not been confirmed. The growth in the number of representatives of Sufi *tariqas*, which can be observed there, is due to both political and social processes. There is an actual re-Islamisation of the region, but also a quite ambiguous search for a “new ideology” and the formation of a new view of Tatar history and cultural identity.

It is both interesting and noteworthy that, among Haydar Baş’ modern followers in the *Qadiriyya* brotherhood, for example, we observe a certain acceptance of closeness between key paradigms of Sufism and of Shia Islam. Such an idea has been mentioned by H. Corbin, S. Nasr, M. Molé, F. Meier, and A.D. Knysh<sup>128</sup> (e.g., on “the ‘Alid sympathies of quite a few Sunni Sufis” of the past, and *al-wilaya* or the doctrine of sainthood). Another thing we see is some acceptance of the idea of a synthesis of ideological movements in Islam, right down to an individual’s formal affiliation to a Sufi or a Shia tradition no longer mattering.

Changes in society, urbanisation and rapid Europeanization, all facilitate the substitution of previously popular forms of Sufism by others. Today, one can undergo initiation and join a *tariqa*, with all subsequent training via the

127 Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Kamil Samigullin, 27.07.2018.

128 Knysh A.D., “Sufizm” [“Sufism”], *Islam. Istoriograficheskiye ocherki* [Islam. Historical essays] (Moscow: Nauka; Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury, 1991), p. 181.





Internet.<sup>129</sup> In recent decades, all kinds of New Age movements have blossomed. These movements use “the signage of Sufism” and the Islamic tradition for spiritual self-search and the improvement of physical health, rather than for “worship of the Lord”,<sup>130</sup> which has always been the Islamic tradition.

The Russian state supports traditional Sufism, because it does not see it as a threat. It tries to establish a connection between this form of Islam and the artificial bureaucratic construct of ‘traditional Islam’. As my interviews have shown, most followers of Sufism are quite reluctant to take advantage of this situation. Such people cannot be labelled opportunistic traditionalists merely carrying out government orders simply because they profess Sufism at the bidding of their hearts.

Many of them find scholastic discussions that end in the triumph of only one side quite alien. In their opinion, following the mainstream of the acquisition and mastery of knowledge within one’s heart and forming one’s own view of existence and our place within it, as human beings, do not require being in a Sufi brotherhood or religious group, any more than being the follower of a Salafi or *Ash’ari/Maturidi*, or any other “most correct” understanding of the *aqidah*. Just as it was in previous centuries, choosing the Sufi path today serves for many as an “alternative (or supplement) to the jurisprudential Islam of the theologians”, who are confined “to their scholastic problems and isolated from topical issues connected with the Muslim community’s daily life.”<sup>131</sup> As a result, their need to fill the vacuum in their spiritual lives makes the mass of common believers seek leaders of their own. Sufism is mostly relevant as a tradition of passing on knowledge, a system of Islamic education, and a system of personal development after the example of one’s mentor.

Given this, “under conditions of the co-existence of traditional (archaic) and modern society, especially with the advent of postmodernism, elements labelled ‘archaic’ manifest time and again as reaction to extraneous, foreign impact.”<sup>132</sup> This concerns not just the Muslim community, but

129 Safargaleev I., “Obuchenie Tasavvufu i Internet” [“Teaching Tasawwuf and the Internet”], <http://www.gumilev-center.ru/obuchenie-tasavvufu-i-internet/>, accessed 25 September 2019; Safargaleev I., “Sufizm v seti” [“Sufism in the Net”], <http://www.gumilev-center.ru/sufizm-v-seti/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

130 Batyr R., Na nashih glazah rozhdaietsya novyi format duhovnosti – religiya bez Boga [“We are witnessing the birth of a new format of spirituality - religion without God”], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/101067>, accessed 25 September 2019.

131 Knysht A.D., “Sufizm” [“Sufism”], in *Islam. Istoriograficheskiye ocherki* [Islam. *Historiographical essays*] (Moscow: Nauka; Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury, 1991), p. 109-163.

132 Saetov I.G., “Vyzov modernu iz tsentra Stambula: Dzhamaat «Ismail aga» v obshchestvennoy zhizni Turtsii” [“A challenge to modernism from the centre of Istanbul: the *Ismaillağa jama’ah* in the social life of Turkey”], *Uchenye zapiski Kazanskogo universiteta. Seriya ‘Gumanitarnye nauki’* [Proceedings of Kazan University. Series: Social Sciences and Humanities], Vol. 155, book 3 (2013), p. 90-96.



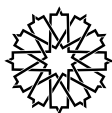
Russian society in general. The archaization of the worldview and the system of values, typical of conservative and traditionalist trends, facilitates a more widespread occurrence of a mythological worldview, at the expense of higher forms of belief systems, including rational and philosophical ones. At the same time, the religious outlook, without taking on real shape, acts increasingly as a sort of mimicry of the philosophical mindset. There are negative trends towards the reanimation of archaic social practices and generation of “minor” social ties, as well as resistance to innovation, escapism, and the abandonment of various forms of social commitment.<sup>133</sup>

This is the background to the state’s attempt to support the artificial bureaucratic construct of ‘traditional Islam’ and the concomitant social passivity of the Spiritual Administrations of Muslims, which have led to the marginalisation of very large groups of Muslims.

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133 Kuzmenkov V.A., “Arhaizatsiya mirovozzreniya i sistemy tsennostey v sovremennoy Rossii” [“Archaization of the worldview and the system of values in modern Russia”], *Sistema tsennostey sovremennogo obshchestva* [The system of values of the modern society], 33 (2014), p. 115-119.





# ‘Traditional Islam’ in the Discourse of Religious Associations, Ethnic Organisations and Government Structures in Bashkortostan

*Zilya Khabibullina*

## ABSTRACT

The well-known and widely used term ‘traditional Islam’ first appeared during the Islamic revival in post-Soviet Russia. It refers to something that has become a very relevant issue in those regions of the country with a predominantly Muslim population. This article analyses the discourse on ‘traditional Islam’ in the Republic of Bashkortostan, particularly in relation to the spiritual administrations, Muslim movements, and schools and ethnic organisations. It also looks at different interpretations of common religious practices, e.g. regional pilgrimages, and whether they are considered to belong to ‘traditional’ or ‘non-traditional’ Islam. Research confirms the existence of multiple interpretations of ‘traditional Islam’ in society and a lack of unanimity over how to understand the term. Debates over ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ Islam and the search for ethnically relevant forms of religion thus remain factors in the generation of conflict and facilitate further fragmentation of the Muslim community in the Republic.

Key words: Islam, traditional Islam, Bashkortostan, state, TsDUM, DUM RB, Islamic movements, ethnic organisations, pilgrimage



## INTRODUCTION

The term 'traditional Islam' first appeared in a Russian context in the early 1990s. As state policy on religion and its institutional formations changed radically, religious uplift and growth in the number of believers prompted organisational restructuring of the spiritual administrations that had regulated the life of the Muslim community in the USSR. As the autonomous republics gained sovereignty, the four Soviet muftiates (the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European part of the USSR and Siberia, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Northern Caucasus, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Transcaucasia, and the Central Asian Spiritual Administration of Muslims) disintegrated and new independent and competing spiritual administrations emerged all over the Russian Federation, generally on ethnic and territorial principles.

This organisational fragmentation of the Muslim community was aggravated by radical and extremist interventions within the Islamic landscape of Russia, combined with the absence of a high-quality system of religious education. During the Soviet period, the major educational centres for Muslims were in Uzbekistan (the Mir-i Arab *madrasah* in Bukhara and the Imam al-Bukhari Islamic Institute in Tashkent). The newly founded *madrasahs* and the R. Fakhretdinov Islamic University<sup>1</sup> in Ufa were not yet capable of providing high-quality education in the 1990s. Many young believers were therefore educated abroad, in Arab countries, Turkey, Pakistan, etc. Several researchers have contended that, when they returned with their newly acquired knowledge and foreign interpretations of the tenets of Islam, these young people often had difficulty fitting into Russian Islamic communities.<sup>2</sup>

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1 In 1989–1996, the University operated as the Madrasah named after R. Fakhretdinov. In 1996–2003, it was called the Russian Islamic Institute of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia (TsDUM), and in 2003 it obtained accreditation as a university.

2 Gallyamov R.R., "Islamskoye vozrozhdeniye v Volgo-Ural'skom makroregione: sravnitelniy analiz modeley Bashkortostana i Tatarstana" ["Islamic revival in the Volga-Urals macro-region: comparative analysis of the Bashkortostan and Tatarstan models"], in *Islam ot Kaspiya do Urala: Makroregional'nyi podkhod [Islam from the Caspian Sea to the Urals: Macroregional approach. Collection of articles]* (Moscow: Rospen, 2007), p. 98; Mukhametshin R.M., "Sistema musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v sovremennoy Rossii" ["System of Islamic education in modern Russia"], in *Razvitiye islamskogo teologicheskogo i religioznogo obrazovaniya v Rossii i za rubezhom [Development of Islamic theological and religious education in Russia and abroad]* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo islamskogo universiteta, 2009), p. 75; Khasanova A.G., *Religiozniye obyedineniya Respubliki Bashkortostan v 1985–2005 gg.: dis. ...kand. ist. nauk [Religious associations of the Republic of Bashkortostan in 1985–2005: dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Historical Sciences]* (Ufa: BSU, 2007), p. 127; Yakupov R.I., Rayev R.A., "K noveyshey istorii razvitiya sistem mnogourovnevnogo obrazovaniya u tyurko-musul'man Rossii" ["Revisiting the contemporary history of developing systems of multi-level education



Such were the conditions under which the dichotomy between ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ (‘right/wrong’) Islam was introduced. The main aims were to distinguish radical interpretations of Islam and define the specific features of Russian Islam. The terms were therefore widely deployed in the rhetoric of Muslim leaders competing for congregations and muftiates.<sup>3</sup>

The state’s current religious policy is for ‘traditional Islam’ to consolidate Russian Muslims within each country and so develop it as a powerful resource for encouraging civil unity.<sup>4</sup> The term is deployed by representatives of government bodies, religious organisations, ethnic associations, academia, and the media and has widespread currency among Russia’s Islamic community. There is no single or authoritative definition of it, because different social groups have different understandings of it and use it to support their different points of view on issues of concern to the Russian ummah.<sup>5</sup>

Given the regionalisation of Russia’s Islamic community (there are several autonomous Islamic areas inside the country, including the Urals and Volga Region, the Northern Caucasus, and Western Siberia, each with its own religious and political leaders and social, cultural, and psychological features), debates on the essence of ‘traditional Islam’ tend to be region-specific and influenced by socio-political, ethnic-religious, and personal factors.

In this paper we will be looking at these processes of interpretation from an anthropological point-of-view and explaining how it is perceived and used by Muslims in their daily life in the Republic of Bashkortostan, a major territory of the Russian Federation whose population has historically been largely Muslim. The goal of this study is to determine the field

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for the Muslim Turkic peoples of Russia”, in *Idealy i tsennosti islama v obrazovatel'nom prostranstve XXI veka. Materialy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii [Ideals and values of Islam in the educational landscape of the 21st century. Materials from the International Conference]* (Ufa: Bashkir'skiy Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2014), p. 20–25, etc.

3 “Ekspert: termin ‘traditsionnyi islam’ vvel Talgat Tadzhuddin v lihiye 90-e” [“Expert: the term ‘traditional Islam’ introduced Talgat Tadzhuddin into the dashing 90s”], <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-jekspert-termin-tradicionnyj-islam-vvel-talgat-tadzhuddin-v-lihie-90-e/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

4 Pyatkov V.P., “Sovremennaya religioznaya situatsiya v Respublike Bashkortostan” [The current religious situation in the Republic of Bashkortostan], in *Islam i gosudarstvo v Rossii: sbornik materialov Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii, posvyashchennoy 225-letiyu Tsentralnogo duhovnogo upravleniya musulman Rossii – Orenburgskogo magometanskogo duhovnogo sobraniya. Ufa, 22 oktyabrya 2013 g.* [Islam and the state in Russia: collection of materials from the International Academic Conference to mark the 225th anniversary of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia – the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly. Ufa, 22 October, 2013], (Ufa: GUP RB Ufimskiy poligrafkombinat, 2013), p. 5.

5 See, *Traditsionnyi islam: ponyatiye, sushchnost, sodержaniye. Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara, provedennogo v Ufe 21 iyulya 2015 g.* [Traditional Islam: notion, essence, content. Collection of materials from an academic seminar held in Ufa on 21 July, 2015], G.B. Faizov (ed.), (Ufa: Bashkir'skiy Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2015).



of discussion for the problem of 'traditional Islam' and so to establish its general character and focus.

This paper is based on ethnographical materials collected in the Republic of Bashkortostan: interviews with clerics, believers, and the leaders of ethnic organisations, official and unofficial associations, as well as research into popular Muslim practices in the Republic, e.g. visiting the tombs of 'saints' ('*awliya*'), which have become the subject of religious and jurisprudential dispute.

## ETHNIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF BASHKORTOSTAN

The Republic of Bashkortostan is a multi-ethnic<sup>6</sup> and multi-religious region of Russia, most of whose population are Muslims native to the Republic. According to information from the Council for State-Religion Relations affiliated to the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Islamic associations constitute some 68% of all religious organisations there, the remainder comprising a further 20% of Orthodox Christian associations and 12% of Protestant movements (Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals, etc.), along with a smattering of Old Believers, Buddhists, and adherents of pagan beliefs.<sup>7</sup> The number of Islamic religious organisations is still growing, and, as of January 1 2018, there were 1,392 active Islamic religious associations in the Republic.<sup>8</sup> The region is thus of significant interest for researchers into Islam and Islamic communities.

According to the last census, the Islamic ummah of Bashkortostan predominantly comprises two Turkic peoples, the Bashkirs, who number

6 According to the 2010 census, there are representatives of over 160 peoples living in the Republic of Bashkortostan, speaking 150 different languages and dialects (see, *Natsional'nyy sostav i vladeniye yazykami, grazhdanstvo naseleniya Respubliki Bashkortostan po dannym Vserossiyskoi perepisi naseleniya 2010 goda: statisticheskiy sbornik* [Ethnic composition and languages, citizenship of the population of the Republic of Bashkortostan according to the results of the Russian Census of 2010: statistical compendium] 2 volumes, Vol. 1. (Ufa: Bashkortostan, 2013), p. 13–27.

7 "Informatsionnyi otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2017 g." [Information Report of the Council on State-Confessional Relations under the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan for 2017], in *Tekushchiy arkhiv Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan* [The current archive of the Council on State-Confessional Relations under the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan].

8 "Informatsionnyi otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2018 g.", in *Tekushchiy arkhiv Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan*.



1,172,287 people (29.5%), and the Tatars, who number 1,009,295 people (25.4%). The majority of Bashkirs live in the southern, south-eastern, eastern and north-eastern districts of the Republic (the so-called Bashkir Trans-Urals), while most of the Republic's Tatars are concentrated in the western and north-western districts, which border in Tatarstan. As one travels from west to east and south-east, Tatar Muslims thus represent a gradually decreasing percentage of the population.<sup>9</sup>

One should bear in mind that the ratio of Tatars to Bashkirs in Bashkortostan reported in Russian censuses tended to fluctuate in accordance with changes in formal ethnic identification, under the influence of state policy and institutional factors. Such changes in ethnic identification were most common in areas of intense inter-ethnic contact in the north-western parts of the present-day Republic during the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since the ethnonym (Bashkir) was state-sponsored, rejecting it could have a negative impact on one's everyday life, losing one privileges. Some people therefore accepted the ethnonym as designating their social (publicly declared) identity, while keeping their previous ethnicity in their private circle.<sup>10</sup> Shortly before the Russian Censuses of 2002 and 2010, the "Tatar-Bashkir issue" had thus become a widely discussed one.<sup>11</sup>

After the collapse of the USSR, the Bashkir intelligentsia had the task of consolidating the titular population into a "nation" by creating a high Bashkir culture that was distinct from Tatar culture, as had previously been the case when the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was formed in 1919. These processes were then projected on to the Muslim environment and took the form of seeking differences between "Bashkir" and "Tatar" Islam, which is what Bashkir activists went on to do.<sup>12</sup>

The native Muslim community of the Republic was supplemented by Muslim immigrants in the 1990s and visitors from CIS countries, most of whom stayed for short periods to earn money. According to figures from

9 *Narody Bashkortostana v perepisyah naseleniya [Peoples of Bashkortostan in censuses]*, Part I. (Ufa: Kitap, 2016).

10 Gorenburg D., "Tatory – bashkiry – snova tatory: izmeneniya etnicheskoy identichnosti v Bashkortostane" [Tatars – Bashkirs – Tatars again: changes of the ethnic identity in Bashkortostan], *Vestnik Evrazii [Bulletin of Eurasia]*, 1 (2004). p. 68.

11 Gabdrafikov I.M., "Fenomen Bashkortostana: ot "tragicheskoy demografii" k "zakonomernoy rekonfiguratsii chislennosti" [The phenomenon of Bashkortostan: from "tragic demography" to "natural reconfiguration of the population"], *Etnograficheskoye obozreniye [Ethnographic review]*, 5 (2007), p. 126.

12 *100 let duhovnomu upravleniyu musul'man Respubliki Bashkortostan: istoriya i sovremennost' [The 100th anniversary of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan: history and present]* (Ufa: Kitap, 2018), p. 12.





the Administration for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Bashkortostan, 631,000 people moved to Bashkortostan between 1992 and 2005. This included 109,566 from republics of the former USSR.<sup>13</sup> These Muslim migrants included Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Azerbaijanis, Tajiks, and Turkmens. The cities have neighbourhoods where migrants from the various ethnicities concentrate.

Attitudes towards migrant Muslims are mixed in the Islamic ummah of Bashkortostan. In the 1990s, migrants from Central Asian countries helped revive Islam in Bashkiria, as well as in forming an institutional Islamic clergy<sup>14</sup> in the region and re-establishing Islamic congregations, and for these reasons they were often held in high regard by the local population, not least because of popular assumptions regarding the high level of development of Islam in Central Asia.<sup>15</sup> Attitudes towards migrants in society were, however, also influenced by the expert assessment of the migration processes as a source of radicalisation of the Republic's Muslims, given the migrants increasing role in "Hizb at-Tahrir" activities. This is a religiously oriented political party<sup>16</sup> that is considered a terrorist group in Russia.<sup>17</sup>

In CIS countries and the other republics of Russia, ethnic Bashkir migrants are themselves currently viewed in increasingly negative ways, which are, however, caused by social and cultural differences and economic factors rather than religious practices. This trend has been reinforced by two instances of conflict in 2018 between representatives of the Muslim peoples in the Republic, namely the Bashkirs and Chechens and

13 "Migranty v etnokul'turnom prostranstve Bashkortostana" ["Migrants in the ethnocultural space of Bashkortostan"], <https://www.fergananews.com/articles/6510>, accessed 25 September 2019.

14 Unlike other universal religions, Islam has no institutional church to serve as intermediary between believers and God. Nor is there a special social class of clerics supposed to possess divine grace. The situation in the Russian state is different for historical reasons. In 1789, Catherine the Great founded the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly, which institutionalised the Muslim clergy in the country. The Islamic clergy in modern Russia include muftis, imams, mullahs, and muezzins, who perform and organise acts of worship. Currently, the Islamic clergy is a social-professional group with certain elements of stratification and some hierarchical patterns.

15 Khabibullina Z.R., *Musul'manskoe duhovenstvo v Respublike Bashkortostan na rubezhe XX–XXI vekov [Islamic clergy in the Republic of Bashkortostan on the verge of the 21st century]* (Ufa: Mir pechati, 2015), p. 57.

16 Prohibited in the Russian Federation by decision of the Supreme Court, dated February 14, 2003, No GKPI 03-116.

17 "Bashkirskogo separatizma ne sushchestvuyet" Islamoved Ayslu Yunusova o natsionalnyh i religioznyh problemah Bashkortostana" ["Bashkir separatism does not exist" Islamologist Ayslu Yunusova about ethnic and religious problems of Bashkortostan"], <https://lenta.ru/articles/2015/06/23/bashkir/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



the Bashkirs and Tajiks, where ethnic differences exacerbated everyday conflicts and put them in the public spotlight.<sup>18</sup>

Concern over migrants is also rising in Bashkortostan at the level of government institutions. According to the Council for State-Religion Relations, affiliated to the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan, only those native to the region and educated in Russian institutes and *madrasahs* or with a good education abroad should be appointed as imams – in other words, they should be people who know the local culture and customs very well as a prerequisite to meeting the spiritual needs of the residents of the Republic, rather than outsiders to Bashkortostan.<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that there was a wave, particularly in Bashkir districts, of forcing migrant imams out of the Republic during the 2000s. Their places were usually taken by radically oriented local imams who had just returned from foreign educational institutions.<sup>20</sup> One of DUM RB’s proclaimed priorities is the cultural integration of migrants from other regions of Russia, coun-

- 18 “Skandal o massovoi drake s chechentsami v bashkirskom sele vyshel za predely respubliki” [“The scandal of a mass brawl with Chechens in the Bashkir village went beyond the borders of the Republic”], <https://rb.versia.ru/skandal-o-massovoj-drake-s-chechencami-v-bashkirskom-sele-vyshel-za-predely-respubliki>, accessed 25 September 2019; “Boynya v Baymake: ofitsial’no – bytovaya draka, neofitsial’no – natsional’niy konflikt” [“The massacre in Baymak: officially – a domestic fight, unofficially – an ethnic conflict”], <https://mkset.ru/news/incident/01-10-2018/boynya-v-baymake-ofitsialno-bytovaya-draka-neofitsialno-natsionalnyy-konflikt>, accessed 25 September 2019; Turov V., “Mezhnatsional’niy konflikt v pervoy stolitse Bashkortostana vyzval nedovol’stvo v Moskve i Chechne” [“Interethnic conflict in the first capital of Bashkortostan caused discontent in Moscow and Chechnya”], <http://pravdapfo.ru/articles/90663-mezhnatsionalnyy-konflikt-v-pervoy>, accessed 25 September 2019; Rahmatullin T., “Izvinyayus pered vsem bashkirskim narodom”: chto proizoshlo v Beloretske?” [“I apologize to the whole Bashkir people”: what happened in Beloretsk?], <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/122472-beloreckiy-konflikt-s-mezhethnicheskoy-okraskoy>, accessed 25 September 2019; Sitikov I., V Bashkortostane proizoshla ocherednaya mezhnatsional’naya draka [There was another ethnic fight in Bashkortostan], <http://pravdapfo.ru/news/91389-v-bashkortostane-proizoshla-ocherednaya>, accessed 25 September 2019.
- 19 Karamyshev R.D., “Trudovaya migratsiya i islamskaya umma RB” [“Labor Migration and the Islamic Ummah of the Republic of Bashkortostan”], <http://lawinrussia.ru/content/trudovaya-migraciya-i-islamskaya-umma-rb>, accessed 25 September 2019.
- 20 In 2011, we noted such a case at the village of Abzakovo in Beloretsky district, when an imam from Central Asia, accepted and revered by most of the residents, was banished for ideological differences by a group of young local imams under the age of 35, who had returned to their homeland after studying abroad. Senior members of the village described these young people as failing to measure up to the moral requirements of the imamate and noted that they did not share the same understanding of Islam. The locals said that during the time of the previous imam, who had been forced to leave the village, the mosque had been its cultural centre, they had spent religious and other public holidays in the mosque, held all kinds of social gatherings and tea parties. The young imams prohibited cooking and bringing food to the mosque, discouraged the presence of women, etc. Locals stopped going and the mosque became a meeting place for just five young people with new views. During our fieldwork, the mosque was closed.



tries of the former Soviet Union, and beyond. Islamic traditions and the Bashkir language are supposed to be major factors in such integration, according to the Spiritual Administration's development strategy.<sup>21</sup>

## THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF BASHKORTOSTAN

In organisational terms, the Muslim ummah of Bashkortostan is represented by two officially registered religious centres:

- The Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia (TsDUM), chaired by Grand mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin (since 1980, when he was appointed to head TsDUM's predecessor, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia). It brings together more than 2,000 Islamic organisations from all over the Russian Federation, including 622 in the Republic of Bashkortostan.<sup>22</sup>
- The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan (DUM RB), led by mufti Nurmuhamet Nigmatullin (from 1992 to 2019).<sup>23</sup> DUM RB is included in the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR), chaired by Ravil Gaynutdin. From 1994 to 2017, Nigmatullin was also co-chair of the SMR. DUM RB brings together 773 Muslim communities in the Republic, which constitutes a majority of the SMR's member communities.<sup>24</sup>

There are 1,173 mosques in the Republic. The 1,392 Islamic organisations have 1,275 imam-khatibs between them. There are 77 mosques without a permanent priest and a lot of imams serve 2 or 3 mosques. This shortage of clerics, most of whom are senior citizens (65–70 years old), has existed for some years.<sup>25</sup>

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21 *100 let dukhovnomu upravleniyu musulman Respubliki Bashkortostan: istoriya i sovremennost* (Ufa: Kitap, 2018), p. 6.

22 "Informatsionnyi otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2018 g.", in *Tekushchiy arkhiv Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan*.

23 In April 2019, mufti Nurmuhamet Nigmatullin resigned, in June he died.

24 "Informatsionnyi otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2018 g." in *Tekushchiy arkhiv Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan*.

25 "Informatsionnyi otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2018 g."



Photo 1. Imams of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan at the 10th International Scientific and Practical Conference “Ideals and Values of Islam in the Educational Space of the 21st Century”, October 2017. Courtesy of Z.R. Khabibullina.

Some districts of the Republic have seen an increase in the number of supporters of ‘unofficial’ Islam. The largest ‘unofficial’ religious groups are the Salafis and the so-called ‘Haqqanis’ (followers of the Naqshbandi Haqqaniyya *tariqa*). Their main ideologist was Nazim al-Haqqani,<sup>26</sup> who was followed, after his death, by his son, sheikh Mehmet Adil.

The self-proclaimed leader of the Salafis of the Republic is I. N. Khaybullin, who chaired the “Shura of the Muslims of Bashkortostan” until 2017<sup>27</sup> (when the association dissolved itself, announcing that its members should continue their activities within the official muftiates).<sup>28</sup> The Bashkir Salafis consider Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait their religious centres and maintain communication with similar organisations in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

26 Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Qibrisi al-Haqqani (1922–2014). According to his official biography, he was a paternal descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and the Sufi ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani (1077–1166), and so inherited his affiliation to the Qadiriyya *tariqa*. On his mother’s side, sheikh Nazim was a descendant of the Sufi Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207–1273), the originator of the Mevlevi *tariqa*. In his own words, sheikh Nazim received spiritual initiation into the Qadiriyya *tariqa* from the late al-Gilani himself at the Sufi’s grave in Baghdad. In the golden chain of succession (*altyn silsile*), recognised by the Haqqaniyya *tariqa*, sheikh Nazim follows right after Abdullah ad-Daghestani.

27 The “Shura of the Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan” was founded in 2009 as a part of the World Qurultay of the Bashkirs, and members were present as speakers at the Youth Qurultay of the World Qurultay of the Bashkirs in 2010. Their priorities were in philanthropy, Islamic education and awareness-building, organising religious social events and publishing (including the “Waqt” newspaper).

28 “Obyavleniye o samorospuske Shury! Ishmurat Khaybullin” [“Announcement of the self-dissolution of Shura! Ishmurat Khaybullin”], [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a37KS\\_wN-Hjk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a37KS_wN-Hjk), accessed 25 September 2019.



A neo-Sufi group called the Haqqaniyya *tariqa* operates under the leadership of S. Kildin, a former government official and General Director of the Bashkortostan State Broadcasting Company. Neo-Sufi ideas have proved popular with creative and academic Bashkir intellectuals, businesspeople, and political figures. The movement's religious centre is the town of Lefka (in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus), which Bashkir adherents visit frequently. The leaders of the group position themselves as adherents of 'traditional Islam'<sup>29</sup> and have actively participated in the work of Bashkir ethnic organisations. The *tariqa* is most popular in the southern and eastern areas of the Republic of Bashkortostan.

Representatives of the Sufi *tariqas* (Naqshbandiyya and Shadhiliyya) of Dagestan also associate their work with the clerical administrations of Bashkortostan and contact them through immigrants from this Northern Caucasus republic.<sup>30</sup>

There is also noteworthy and growing influence of Azerbaijani and Iranian Shiites on the local Muslims, even if the former are not particularly evident in the social life of the Republic. An online group called the "Shiites of Bashkortostan", on the VK social networking website, has about 600 members.<sup>31</sup> The Khamza mosque in Ufa hosts annual mourning events during Ashura week, but their activities are limited to that. Of international radical organisations that have been declared terrorist or prohibited in the Russian Federation, the following are active in the Republic: Islamic State,<sup>32</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra,<sup>33</sup> Hizb at-Tahrir, and Tablighi Jamaat.<sup>34</sup>

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29 Mawlana Sutan al-Awliya Sheikh Muhammad Mehmet Adil al-Naqshbandi, *Sokhbety (besedy) v Bashkortostane [Sokhbets (conversations) in Bashkortostan]*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ufa: Bashkortostan, 2015), p. 3–4.

30 Author's fieldwork materials, Davlekanovo, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2018.

31 "Shiity Bashkortostana" ["Shiites of Bashkortostan"], [https://vk.com/shia\\_bashkortostan](https://vk.com/shia_bashkortostan), accessed 25 September 2019. The very existence of this group speaks to the religious mobilisation of Shiites in the Republic.

32 Prohibited in the RF by decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, dated 29.12.2014, No AKPI 14-1424S.

33 Prohibited in the RF by decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, dates 29.12.2014, No AKPI 14-1424S.

34 "Informatsionnyi otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2018 g.", in *Tekushchiy arkhiv Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan*.



## THE EMERGENCE OF THE TERM 'TRADITIONAL ISLAM'

The first people to introduce the term 'traditional Islam' were representatives of religious organisations. The term appeared in the 1990s in response to the growth of foreign radical influences among Russian Muslims and the need to distinguish radical from peaceful interpretations of Islam. Authorship of the term is usually ascribed to the mufti of TsDUM, T. Tadzhuiddin.<sup>35</sup> The term has proven useful in clerical competition for muftiates and the repartition of the Islamic landscape that took place in the 1990s. The notion of 'non-traditional Islam' was deployed by the management of the then-disintegrating Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia to describe their opponents' religious views.<sup>36</sup> A term initially aimed at post-Soviet believers has thus stuck and continues in use. It was taken over by other Russian muftis and government officials and journalists, ensuring it a widespread distribution in the media landscape.

A well-known religious figure, V. Yakupov, has explained the new term's appearance as related to a need for countermeasures to radical ideology and preservation of Islam's unique nature in Russia, given the extent of foreign influence and the wide distribution of so-called 'modernised Islam'.<sup>37</sup> Yakupov was one of the first religious figures to stress the distinctiveness of the Russian tradition of Islam and claim it as closest to the 'prophetic ideal'. He considered 'Tatar Islam' such a version of Islam, typified by the "Tatars' high level of literacy, the higher position afforded women than by other Muslim peoples, the strong anti-assimilationist potential, and a centuries-old tradition of electing Islamic clergy".<sup>38</sup> Regardless of his ethnic (Tatar) focus, Yakupov's definition of 'prophetic Islam' is shared by some Bashkortostan Muslims, mostly in points related to following the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet and cleaving to distinctive regional and ethnic features that not merely don't contradict Islam but go hand-in-glove with love of one's homeland and upholding its interests.<sup>39</sup>

35 "Ekspert: termin 'traditsionnyi islam' vvel Talgat Tadzhuiddin v lihiye 90-e", <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-jekspert-termin-tradicionnyj-islam-vvel-talgat-tadzhuiddin-v-lihiye-90-e/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

36 Yunusova A.B., "Islam i musul'mane v obshchestvennom i bytovom prostranstve Respubliki Bashkortostan" ["Islam and Muslims in the social and household space of the Republic of Bashkortostan"], in *Rossiya i Islam: mezhtsivilizatsionnyi dialog* [*Russia and Islam: inter-civilisational dialogue. Collection of research articles*] (Ufa: Centre for Ethnological Research of the Ufa Science Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2006), p. 142.

37 See, Yakupov V., *K prorocheskomu islamu* [*Toward prophetic Islam*] (Kazan: Iman, 2006).

38 Yakupov V., *K prorocheskomu islamu*, p. 72.

39 Author's fieldwork materials, 2018. Opinion poll of believers about traditional Islam.



Russian scholars have thus developed a theory of the distinctiveness of Russian Islam<sup>40</sup> and its regional forms.<sup>41</sup> Russia is accordingly considered one of the more distinctive areas of the Islamic world, where Muslims have been the second-largest religious group (after Orthodox Christianity) coexisting for a considerable historical period with the non-Muslim peoples of Russia. Areas of primarily Muslim population existed under the Russian Empire and the USSR, and the peoples that inhabited those areas had much in common in terms of their material, cultural, and religious life. The common geopolitical space they have occupied has facilitated various integration processes in social organisation, household life, culture and intellectual values. All those factors have influenced the form Russian Islam takes today. Its current specific features are underpinned by the ethnic and cultural peculiarities of the Muslim peoples of Russia.<sup>42</sup> For such researchers, the general Islamic principles that unite the entire Islamic world are supplemented by regional forms of Islam. Russia both represents a regional form of Islam in the Islamic world and unites different regional forms of Islam within a single country. How these forms have been established has depended on the traditions of those peoples of Russia that adopted Islam.

## TRADITIONAL ISLAM ACCORDING TO THE IMAMS OF BASHKORTOSTAN

The Islamic clergy of Bashkortostan reduces traditional Islam to the historical tradition of the Hanafi school. Bashkortostani theologians associate the traditional nature of Russian Islam primarily with Sunni Islam, which 90% of the world's Muslims belong to, and the four *madhabs*. When clerics of the Republic talk about traditional Islam, they generally mean Sunni Islam of the Hanafi *madhab*, based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>43</sup> Some clerics also say that, as most Muslims in

40 Prozorov S.M., "Vstupitel'naya statya" ["Introductory article"], *Islam na territorii byvshey Rossiyskoi imperii: Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar'* [*Islam in the former Russian Empire: An Encyclopaedic dictionary*], S.M. Prozorov (ed.), Vol. 1. (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 2006), p. 9–14.

41 Knysch A.D., *Islam v istoricheskoy perspektive: nachal'nyi etap i osnovnye istochniki* [*Islam in historical perspective: initial stage and main sources*] (Kazan: Izdatel'stvo Kazanskogo universiteta, 2015), p. 9.

42 Prozorov S.M., "Vstupitel'naya statya", p. 10.

43 Author's fieldwork materials, Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2005. Interviews with the mufti of DUM RB N. Nigmatullin; the rector of the Russian Islamic University R. Raev, and the head of the "Ikhlās" Muslim Religious Organisation of Kirovsky district of Ufa, M. Gallyamov.



Russia adhere to the Hanafi *madhab*, the question of *madhabs* is essentially irrelevant for the country’s modern Muslim community.<sup>44</sup>

Some opinions about ‘traditional Islam’ frequently expressed by imams from both of the spiritual administrations of Muslims in Bashkortostan follow. They are taken from questionnaires and opinion polls and show how the term is generally understood:

- “Traditional Islam in Russia is Islam as it came from the Prophet and it has a 1000-year history of coexistence with other peoples in peace and unity. It’s our Islam. This long history of inhabiting the same space has led to mutual understanding between ethnic groups, tolerance and mutual assistance between Christians, Jewish people, Buddhists.”
- “Traditional Islam in Russia is a form of Islamic creed of Sunni orientation, established as a religious belief in Russia within the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. It takes into consideration the traditions of the peoples that profess Islam.”
- “Traditional Islam is the Islam of Abu Hanifa’s *madhab*. The Muslims of Russia have always professed moderate Islam.”
- “Traditional Islam is the Hanafi *madhab*. It is the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.”
- “Traditional Islam is the religion that Muhammad’s Islam provides the basis for. Why is it called traditional? Because it was prohibited, or almost prohibited, in Russia, but our ancestors preserved it for us with all its traditions and customs, as they were established by various circumstances of a social and political nature.”
- “Traditional Islam is the Islam that follows what is prescribed in the Qur’an and acknowledges ethnic traditions and culture. As established in a given area and passed down from generation to generation.”
- “Traditional Islam is firstly Sunni Islam of the two *madhabs* (schools of religious jurisprudence) that have gained a foothold with the Muslims of Russia – the Hanafi *madhab*, to which the Tatars, Bashkirs and some Caucasus Muslims belong, and the Shafi’i *madhab*, which is widespread in Dagestan and Chechnya. Secondly, it is Sufism, which is represented by several brotherhoods – Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya, Shadhiliyya.”

44 Author’s fieldwork materials, Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2005. Interviews with the first deputy of the mufti of DUM RB A. Bibarsov; the rector of the “M. Sultanova *madrasah*” Islamic College I. Malakhov; the rector of the “Galiya” *madrasah*, I. Mukhamadiyev and imam-*muhtasib* of Iglninsky district of the Republic of Bashkortostan, R. Kurbanov.





- “Traditional Islam is Sunni Islam, a symbiosis of ethnic tradition and religious dogma. So long as tradition does not contradict Islam and sharia, it should be accepted. For example, if a society traditionally sets a high bride price, and a Muslim man cannot marry because of it, that is a harmful tradition. Traditional Islam knows where tradition ends and sharia begins.”<sup>45</sup>

On July 21, 2015, there was an academic seminar in Ufa on the problem of traditional Islam and its nature. The participating institutions included the Bashkir State Pedagogical University named after M. Akmulla, TsDUM and DUM RB. The proceedings were published in a dedicated volume, which has served as an instructional guide for students at the Russian Islamic University of TsDUM and the Bashkir State Pedagogical University (whose curriculum includes in-depth study of the history and culture of Islam). The guide does not present a determinate concept. Instead, it offers the opinions of various participants in the debate on ‘traditional Islam’, including the official point of view, as expressed by the religious administrations. According to this point of view, the main focus of religious organisations is preserving ‘traditional Islam’, which includes promoting peace and unity between peoples and traditional religious groups. This is the ‘antithesis’ of ‘non-traditionalism’, associated with groups that identify as ‘Wahhabis’ and ‘Salafis’ and are completely opposed to the official government authorities and religious administrations.<sup>46</sup>

## TRADITIONAL ISLAM AND THE STATE

According to the Constitution of the Russian Federation (art. 14, 28), religion is separated from the state, religious associations are equal before the law, and citizens are guaranteed the right for freedom of conscience and religion. In Russia, Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism are the traditional religions, established by the Federal Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations” (1997). This Law mentions a special role of Orthodox Christianity in the history of Russia and notes that Christianity, Islam,

45 Author’s fieldwork materials, Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2018. Survey of imams on “Traditional Islam in Russia” at career enhancement training courses at the Russian Islamic University and Bashkir State Pedagogical University named after M. Akmulla.

46 Yakupov R.I., “Traditsionnyi islam: terminologiya i ritorika” [“Traditional Islam: terminology and rhetoric”], in *Traditsionnyi islam: ponyatiye, sushchnost’, soderzhanije. Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara, provedennogo v Ufe 21 iyulya 2015 g.*, G.B. Faizov (ed.), (Ufa: Bashkir’skiy Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2015), p. 29.



Buddhism, Judaism and other religions constitute an integral part of the historical legacy of the peoples of Russia and so deserve respect.<sup>47</sup>

That these traditional Russian religious denominations have been formalised in legislation and their organizations guaranteed priority cooperation with the state shows that a cooperative model of relations between the state and the religions has been established in Russia. According to it, the state both preserves religious freedom and retains the right to regulation religious organisations' legal status differently.

The term 'traditional Islam' is nowhere mentioned in the legislation of the Russian Federation. Representatives of government institutions do talk about 'traditional Islam', however, which raises the question of a 'non-traditional Islam'.

The state authorities of Bashkortostan responsible for religious policies use the term 'traditional Islam' to distinguish between 'peaceful' Islam and emergent radical movements that claim a grounding in the Islamic creed and are spreading throughout the world, including modern Russia. In the understanding of statesmen and government officials, 'traditional Islam' means a doctrine that respects the religious feelings of other religious groups and does not propagate extremist ideas or hate.<sup>48</sup> It is thus equated to the religion of peace. According to a member of the Council for State-Religion Relations, which is affiliated to the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan, it means an "Islam that is loyal to the state, and whose representatives are respectful of the Orthodox Christian majority and ready to fight for their country, even if it means fighting their faith allies."<sup>49</sup> One should mention that this quote may be found on many Islamic websites attributed to the columnist Roman Silant'ev.<sup>50</sup>

47 Federal Law dates 26 September, 1997, No 125-FZ, "O svobode sovesti i o religioznykh obyedineniyah" ["On freedom of conscience and religious organizations"] (revised and expanded), <http://ivo.garant.ru/#/document/171640/paragraph/20608:2>, accessed 25 September 2019.

48 *Traditsionnyi islam: ponyatiye, sushchnost', sodержaniye. Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara, provedennogo v Ufe 21 iyulya 2015 g.*, G.B. Faizov (ed.), (Ufa: Bashkir'skiy Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2015), p. 5.

49 Karamyshev R.D., "Traditsionnyi rossiyskiy islam: ideologema ili real'nost'?" ["Traditional Russian Islam: premise or reality?"] in *Traditsionnyi islam: ponyatiye, sushchnost', sodержaniye. Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara, provedennogo v Ufe 21 iyulya 2015 g.*, G.B. Faizov (ed.), (Ufa: Bashkir'skiy Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2015), p. 8.

50 "V poiskah identichnosti. Osnovniye problemy i protsessy razvitiya musul'manskogo soobshchestva Rossii" ["In search of identity. The main problems and development processes of the Muslim community of Russia"], <https://islamrf.ru/news/analytics/point-of-view/36890>, accessed 25 September 2019; "Traditsionnyi islam" – chto eto? ["Traditional Islam – what is it?"], <https://www.umma-42.ru/news-65270.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.



State religious policies in the Republic of Bashkortostan are formulated by a special government body, the Council for State-Religion Relations affiliated to the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan (with five staff members). Its origins lie in the Soviet period, as a Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (SDRK) affiliated to the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union was founded in 1944 for the purpose of “maintaining communication between the government of the USSR and the leaders of religious associations.”<sup>51</sup> SDRK was active until 1965, when the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults were united into the single Council for Religious Affairs (SDR). The representatives of the Council in territorial districts were *chargés d'affaires* whose task was to control the development of religious life in the regions. According to the law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations in the USSR”, dated 1 October, 1990, their position was abolished. In November 1990, however, the office of the *chargé d'affaires* for the Bashkir ASSR was transformed into a Council for Religious Affairs affiliated to the Council of Ministers of the Bashkir ASSR. It was preserved under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Bashkortostan, and, when that was abolished in 1996, under the Government of the Republic of Bashkortostan as well. Its main declared functions were facilitating the regulation of relations between the government and religious organisations and ensuring the public’s right to freedom of conscience.<sup>52</sup>

The Council currently regulates relations between the state and religious associations, municipal government bodies, law-enforcement agencies, ministries and agencies dealing with the prevention of religious extremism.<sup>53</sup> The Council influences relations between Muslims in the Republic and actively observes and even participates, through particular individuals, in confrontations between Islamic groups and movements. We must agree with A. Malashenko that “the secular authorities of Bashkortostan, relying on administrative leverage, freely control the religious situation.”<sup>54</sup> Acting as proponents of secularism, the secular leaders be-

51 Central Historical Archive of the Republic of Bashkortostan. collection R-4732, inv. 1, file 1, p. 5.

52 Law of the Republic of Bashkortostan dated 20 June, 1991, No VS-6/19, “O svobode sovesti i veroispovedaniya v Respublike Bashkortostan” [“On freedom of conscience and worship in the Republic of Bashkortostan”], *Electronic fund of legal and regulatory technical documentation*, <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/935107751>, accessed 25 September 2019.

53 *Religioznye obyedineniya Respubliki Bashkortostan. Spravochnik* [Religious organisations of the Republic of Bashkortostan. Reference book] (Ufa: GUP RB Ufimskiy poligrafkombinat, 2014), p. 7.

54 Malashenko A.V., “Federal’nyi tsentr i “musul’manskaya provintsiya” [“The federal centre



have as if they were figures of religious authority.<sup>55</sup> In 2018, the heightened interest of Ufa officials in the election of a new head at the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan was extensively covered in the media. Quite a few online media publications covered the issue of how the Office of the Head of the Republic was exerting influence on the staff of DUM RB during nominations for mufti.<sup>56</sup> Recent change in who is Head of the Republic (12.10.2018) has caused the election for mufti of DUM RB to be rescheduled to the autumn of 2019.

The Council made clear in 2018 that the state continues to play a large role in the religious sphere in the Republic.<sup>57</sup> The Council’s achievements were announced at a regional conference, “as a result of work undertaken by the Council for State-Religion Relations affiliated to the Head of Republic of Bashkortostan over the past 3 years, using the social-political technology of ‘soft power,’ in August of 2017 the unofficial leader of the Salafis of the Republic I.N. Khaybullin declared the voluntary dissolution of a large pro-Salafi association – ‘the Shura of the Muslims of Bashkortostan,’ and the continuation of their religious activities within mosques affiliated to the spiritual administrations of Muslims.”<sup>58</sup>

From the point of view of state officials, ‘traditional Islam’ is an ideologue which has yet to be firmly established in Russian Islam and society, and its main goal is to guard the interests of dominant social groups and the state and thus preserve the stability of the social order.<sup>59</sup>

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and the “Muslim province”), *Islam i gosudarstvo: Sbornik nauchnykh statey [Islam and the state: Collection of research articles]* (Moscow, Ufa: Informreklama, 2007), p. 38.

55 Malashenko A.V., “Federal’nyi tseñtr i “musul’manskaya provintsiya”.

56 “Musul’mane Bashkortostana ustali ot ufimskogo chinovnika Pyatkova” [“Muslims of Bashkortostan are tired of the Ufa official Pyatkov”], <https://islamnews.ru/news-musulmane-bashkorostana-ustali-ot-ufimskogo-chinovnika-pjatkova>, accessed 25 September 2019; “Plan “Petrovicha”. Vybory muftiya DUM RB prevrashchayutsya v bitvu politikov i kriminala” [“The plan of “Petrovich”. Election of the mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan turns into a battle of politicians and crime”], <https://mynamaz.ru/news/7156886>, accessed 25 September 2019.

57 Karamyshev R.D., “Profilaktika radikalizma i ekstremizma v konfessional’noy srede v Respublike Bashkortostan” [“Prevention of radicalism and extremism in the religious environment in the Republic of Bashkortostan”], *Ekstremizm i terrorism v sovremennom obshchestve: usloviya vozniknoveniya i formy protivodeystviya: sbornik materialov kruglogo stola [Extremism and terrorism in modern society: conditions of its emergence and forms of counterterrorism: collection of materials of the roundtable]* (Ufa: IP Abdullina I.A., 2018), p. 48.

58 Karamyshev R.D., “Profilaktika radikalizma i ekstremizma v konfessional’noy srede v Respublike Bashkortostan”, p. 53.

59 Karamyshev R.D., “Traditsionnyi rossiyskiy islam: ideologema ili real’nost’?” [“Traditional Russian Islam: premise or reality?”], in *Traditsionnyi islam: ponyatiye, sushchnost’, soderzhanie. Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara, provedennogo v Ufe 21 iyulya 2015 g.*, G.B. Faizov (ed.), (Ufa: Bashkir’skiy Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2015), p. 12.



## POLEMICS BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND THE ETHNIC FACTOR

Discussions on traditional Islam may also be observed amongst the spiritual administrations of unofficial groups (the Salafis and Sufis) and Islamicised members of Bashkir ethnic movements.

The internal discourse of the Muslim community of the Republic was rendered relevant by the Grozny *fatwa* of 2016, which defined Sufism as traditional Islam and an effective alternative to religious extremism.<sup>60</sup> The *fatwa* was signed by representatives of muftis Talgat Tadzhuiddin and Nurmuhamet Nigmatullin. The non-government media of Bashkiria reacted to the *fatwa* immediately.<sup>61</sup> The Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Bashkortostan held the conference “Models of interaction between religious groups in the formation of a common Russian identity” on September 5, 2016, at which the question of the unacceptability of the “Grozny *fatwa*” for the Muslims of Bashkortostan became a subject of debate outside the official programme.<sup>62</sup>

The factor of politicised ethnicity has substantial influence on processes inside the Muslim community in Bashkortostan. Regional experts think the reason competing movements have emerged within the Islamic ummah was the dismantlement of Bashkortostan’s political system in 2010 and they associate this crisis with the accession to power of new President R.Z. Khamitov.<sup>63</sup> In their view, the political system that had been being formed over the 20 years from 1990 to 2010 in the course of the governmentalisation of the Bashkir ethnicity was a framework that consolidated and structured Bashkir society.<sup>64</sup> A part of the Bashkir elite did indeed “Islamicise” and divide into various Islamic movements. In the present au-

60 Fetva “O neotyemlemyh priznakah otlichiya istinnogo Islama ot zabluzhdeniy” [Fatwa “On the inherent signs of the difference between true Islam and misconceptions”], [http://www.sufirb.ru/books\\_data/fatwa\\_grozny/fatwa\\_grozny.pdf](http://www.sufirb.ru/books_data/fatwa_grozny/fatwa_grozny.pdf), accessed 25 September 2019.

61 “Eho “Groznskoy fetvy”: kakim byl Islam v Bashkirii” [“The echo of the Grozny *fatwa*: what was Islam in Bashkiria”], *Bonus – Newspaper*, No 35 (213), 20 October, 2016.

62 “05 sentyabrya 2016 goda provedena Mezhdunarodnaya nauchno-prakticheskaya konferentsiya “Modeli mezhekfessional’nogo vzaimodeystviya v formirovaniy obshcherossiyskoi identichnosti” [“On 5 September, 2016, the International Scientific and Practical Conference “Models of Inter-Confessional Interaction in the Formation of All-Russian Identity” was held”], <http://www.bashedu.ru/nauchno-obrazovatelny-tsentr-po-teologii-sobytiya-i-meropriyatiya/05-sentyabrya-2016-goda-provedena>, accessed 25 September 2019.

63 In 2010, the Republic of Bashkortostan saw a change of power. During complicated backstage negotiations with the federal centre, the President of the region Murtaza Rakhimov, who had governed the Republic for 20 years (1990–2010), was forced to resign. Rustem Khamitov was appointed Head of the Republic, breaking the succession line. This change in the ruling elite was accompanied by a growth of animosity in the ethnic sphere.

64 Buranchin A.M., Vakhitov R.R., Demichev I.V., *Sotsiokul’turnye aspekty modernizatsionnyh protsessov v Respublike Bashkortostan* [Social and cultural aspects of modernisation processes in the Republic of Bashkortostan] (Ufa: Design-Press, 2014), p. 183–184.



thor’s opinion, however, the reason for this division was not a change in power but an absence of consolidation and unity in the Bashkir national movement itself and the continuing contradistinction between ethnic and Islamic identities by Bashkir scholars (according to whom, ethnic identity has a secular origin and is thus less susceptible to radicalisation than archaic Islam).<sup>65</sup>

The expansion of Salafism in the Republic coincided with systemic crisis in the Bashkir national movement, and Salafism was perceived as a protest against this state of affairs. Certain activists in the Bashkir ethnic organisations, the “Union of Bashkir youth”<sup>66</sup> and the “Kuk bure”,<sup>67</sup> whose activities are currently suspended, became Salafis. Salafis do not consider Bashkir traditional Islam in opposition to the Islam of the Prophet Muhammad but its equal, unlike ‘Tatar Islam’.<sup>68</sup> The stereotype of a “Tatarization” of the spiritual administrations of the Republic, propagated by Bashkir historians, has also served to unite those oriented by their ethnicity and culture under the sign of Salafism. In a new reference book on the religious associations of the Republic of Bashkortostan, created at the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Bashkortostan with the participation of the Council for State-Religion Relations, one finds that “surprisingly, in a Salafism that vehemently rejects ethnic nationalism the Bashkir national factor is more pronounced than in the muftiates.”<sup>69</sup> And this, even though the “Bashkir ethnic national factor” is very distinctly expressed in the muftiates. The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Bashkortostan unites a majority of the Republic’s congregations from the regions with a predominantly Muslim population. According to our research,

65 Buranchin A.M., “Islamskaya identichnost’ v sovremennom bashkirskom obshchestve: istoki, soderzhaniye, prespektivy” [“Islamic identity in modern Bashkir society: origins, contents, prospects”], *Rossiyskiy islam v transformatsionnyh protsessah sovremennosti: novye vyzovy i tendentsii razvitiya v XXI veke. Sbornik nauchnyh statey* [Russian Islam in the transformational processes of today: new challenges and trends of development in the 21st century. Collection of research articles], Z.R. Khabibullina (ed.) (Ufa: Dialog, 2017), p. 116–118; Mardanov M., “Problematika religioznoy identichnosti v svetskom obshchestve sovremennogo Bashkortostana” [“The problematics of religious identity in the secular society of modern Bashkortostan”], *Ekonomika i upravleniye. Nauchno-prakticheskiy zhurnal* [Economy and management. Journal of research and practice], 5 (133) (2016), p. 83–86.

66 The “Union of Bashkir youth” (Bashkir: Bashkort yashtare ittifaghy) is a social organisation founded in 1990 to promote the self-actualisation of Bashkir youth in the social life of Bashkortostan and defence of their rights and freedoms.

67 “Kuk bure” (Bashkir: “sky wolf”) is a social union (movement) created in 2007 to protect the ethnic, cultural, social, economic and political rights and interests of Bashkirs in the Russian Federation and the citizens of the Republic of Bashkortostan.

68 Author’s fieldwork materials, Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2017.

69 *Religiozniye obyedineniya respubliki Bashkortostan. Spravochnik* (Ufa: GUP RB Ufimskiy poligrafkombinat, 2014), p. 17.



70% of clerics in DUM RB are Bashkirs. There are also Bashkirs in the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia, where they constitute about 30% of clerics.<sup>70</sup>

Salafis are against a regionally specific Islam, and for them ‘traditional Islam’ is Islam in the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and his righteous companions, which is the understanding of the religion the first generations of Muslims had. Salafis claim that pilgrimage to the graves of saints is prohibited, because they see it as worshipping the dead. They also consider it inadvisable to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.

Another pole of consolidation for the Bashkir intelligentsia has been the Neo-Sufi brotherhood of Haqqaniyya (Rabbaniyya). The Cypriot sheikhs Nazim al-Haqqani and Mehmet Adil visited Bashkiria in 2013–2014 and, during their travels to various districts of the Republic, “pointed” local Muslims towards the places of burial of “*sahabs*”. This started active processes of creating new places of worship, accompanied by sacralisation and mythmaking.

The Haqqaniyya *tariqa* is famous in the Middle East and in South and South-East Asia and is active in the USA, UK, Germany, and, as of recently, in Russia. Of the Russian regions, it the Muslims of Bashkortostan that proved most responsive to the sheikhs’ calls. On February 18, 2013, sheikh Nazim personally appointed Sheikh Abdulrafiq, who lives some 200 km from Ufa, as his person in charge of Russia. A well-known businessman, son of an influential politician and brother of popular Russian singer Marat Safin (sheikh Murad), he became the representative of the *tariqa* in Moscow. In reality, the *tariqa* exists mostly in cyberspace, and its members participate in its activities via online communication.

Sheikh Nazim’s doctrine is characterised by syncretism, up to the point of borrowing elements of Christianity, Buddhism and New Age teachings, as well as by a flexible policy towards attracting recent converts to Islam. Such people (including people in Russia), who tend to be disappointed in Western culture and are looking for enlightenment from the East, are offered a Westernised form of Sufism with images and notions that are already familiar to the Western mind. The key elements of his preaching are: waiting for Judgement Day, opposing individualism and egoism, developing spirituality, obtaining divine energy, self-actualisation and self-improvement. The Islamic *dhikr* is turned into “Sufi meditation”. Haqqaniyya sheikhs often act as uncompromising adversaries of Salafis.<sup>71</sup>

70 Khabibullina Z.R., *Musulmanskoye duhovenstvo v Respublike Bashkortostan na rubezhe XXI vekov* (Ufa: Print world, 2015), p. 112.

71 Tsibenko V.V., “Nakshbandiyskiy tarikat Hakkaniya (Rabbaniya) i neoosmanskiy proyekt sheykha



The supporters of this *tariqa* in Bashkortostan, as followers of Nazim al-Haqqani, have officially declared Naqshbandi Sufism a traditional school of Islam and accepted well-known religious figures and educators from the Volga-Urals region as their sheikhs, including “Sheikh Husain-bek, Mawlana Sheikh Abdulkhakim Kurbangaliyev, Abdulla Saidi Ishan and Muzhahir *Hadhrat*, Gataulla ishan, Tolomguzha Ishan, Sakhiulla Ishan, Mawlana Sheikh Gilyazhetdin, Mawlana Sheikh Abdulgani, Shamigul Khalfa, Seyyidi Yaghfar, Muradym Ishan, Ali Chukuri and Arifulla Kiyekov.”<sup>72</sup> Others are Salawat Yulayev, Seyyidi Jafar Awliya, sheikh Murat Kuchukov, Kilmyak-hafiz Nuru-shev, Kinzya-abyz Arslanov, sheikh Zaynulla ar-Rasuli (Rasulev).<sup>73</sup>

To advance their ideas, the leaders of the *tariqa* use Bashkir historical subjects and Bashkir cultural sites (usually the graves of famous religious figures of the Republic); adherents with psychic powers who demonstrate ‘*karamats*’, or miracles and supernatural phenomena; foreign preachers; anti-Salafi rhetoric; and media resources.

In the 1990s, ethnic movements’ influence on the political process ran high. Ethnic organisations, which had picked up momentum during the “parade of sovereignties” period, instigated confrontation between different ethnic groups at the political level. The political elites of the ethnicity-based republics of the Russian Federation were interested in drawing spiritual and ideological support from the traditional religions to strengthen their national ideologies. Each republic was trying to centralise power in the religious sphere. The ethnic factor played an important role in the disintegration of the Muslim communities of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan, as the ideologists of their national movements supported the division of *mahallahs* and their withdrawal from DUMES.

The well-regarded Bashkir national centre (BNC), “Ural”, founded in 1989, supported the highest possible degree of sovereignty for Bashkortostan, as well as giving the Republic an ethnic/national character in internal policy, including all relevant professional, linguistic, cultural and economic programmes.<sup>74</sup> This proactive attitude on the part of the national movement had a major influence on the formation of a strong sense

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Nazima Kipriotskogo” [“The Naqshbandi Haqqaniyya (Rabbaniyya) *tariqa* and the Neo-Ottoman project of sheikh Nazim of Cyprus”], *Islamovedeniye [Islamic Studies]*, 4 (2014), p. 97.

72 Mawlana Sutan al-Awliya Sheikh Muhammad Mehmet Adil al-Naqshbandi, *Sokhbety (besedy) v Bashkortostane [Sokhbets (conversations) in Bashkortostan]*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ufa: Bashkortostan, 2015), p. 3–4.

73 Adil al-Naqshbandi, *Sokhbety (besedy) v Bashkortostane*.

74 Valeev D.Zh., *Istoriya bashkirskoy filosofskoy i obshchestvenno-politicheskoy mysli Bashkortostana [The history of the Bashkir philosophical, social, and political thought of Bashkortostan]* (Ufa: Kitap, 2001), p. 188.





of ethnic/national identity in Bashkir society, one of whose main components is loyalty to Islam. The organisation did much to promote Islam. Under its auspices, the Qur'an<sup>75</sup> was translated into Bashkir, much other religious literature was published, various educational programmes were organised, and funds were raised for the construction of mosques.

The religious program of the BNC included developing Islam for Bashkirs and reinstating the spiritual administration of the Bashkurdistan era<sup>76</sup> (the Global Congress of Bashkirs, held in December of 1917 in Orenburg to consider the desire of Bashkir clergy for independence in the organisation of Islamic worship, had accompanied the proclamation of political autonomy with a declaration of the creation of the Bashkir Spiritual Administration (BDU). The central administration, TsDUM, had continued its work alongside BDU. In 1936, the state closed down BDU<sup>77</sup>). The Bashkir spiritual administration is now a symbol of the unity of the Bashkir nation and the embodiment of its people's will.<sup>78</sup>

For religious leaders, relations with the national movement played a pivotal role in the struggle for influence. The BCN initiated creation of DUM RB by electing N. Nigmatullin, an ethnic Bashkir with a religious education, to lead it. During negotiations, he was promised support in reinstating the spiritual administration. A book on N. Nigmatullin states that the "Ural" BNC approached him multiple times with the offer to resurrect DUM RB. Influenced by these proposals, the future mufti started to pay attention to the "unequal attitude to the Muslim communities on the part of the leaders of DUMES ('centrists') and felt an urge to promote and strengthen the Islamic faith among the Bashkir people." Every day, he became more and more convinced that the "Ural" members were right in what they were doing.<sup>79</sup>

A student of religion, S.B. Filatov, who studied the relations of nation

75 *Koran* (Ufa: Bashkirskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1993).

76 Bashkurdistan (Bashkortostan, Small Bashkiria) was a national-territorial autonomy proclaimed on 15 (28) November 1917 by the Bashkir regional Shuro and approved by the Constituent Congress of Bashkurdistan. An army, government, parliament, state symbols were created. It was the first self-proclaimed autonomous area in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

77 Kasimov S.F., *Natsional'no-gosudarstvennoye stroitel'stvo v Bashkortostane. XX vek [National-state construction in Bashkortostan. 20th century]*, 2nd edition (Ufa: Gilem, Bashkirskaya Entsiklopediya, 2014), p. 79.

78 *100 let duhovnomu upravleniyu musul'man Respubliki Bashkortostan: istoriya i sovremennost'* (Ufa: Kitap, 2018), p. 5.

79 Utyabayev A., Khisamov G., *Mufti Nurmuhamet khazret Nigmatullin. Dokumental'naya povest' s illyustratsiyami [Mufti Nurmuhamet hadhrat Nigmatullin. Illustrated documentary narrative]* (Ufa: Profizdat, 2014), p. 218, 221.



and state to religion in Bashkortostan in the mid-1990s, has noted, however, that the conflict between TsDUM and DUM RB had its origins in a religious dispute and was not directly related to either the Bashkir national movement or the establishment of Bashkir sovereignty.<sup>80</sup> In Filatov’s view, the leaders of DUM RB are of a radical bent, unlike T. Tadzhuiddin, who is more focused on the values of modern civilisation, freedom and democracy, and so on so-called “Euro-Islam.” Unlike TsDUM, which is trying to establish the closest possible ties with the Russian Orthodox Church, DUM RB’s contacts are generally formal and perfunctory. Tadzhuiddin has accused the leaders of DUM RB of propagating political and religious extremism and racial hatred and of having ties to Wahhabism. DUM RB has countered with accusations against Tadzhuiddin of amoral behaviour, servility toward the Russian authorities, ecumenism, and distortion of Islam’s truths.<sup>81</sup>

The participation of the Bashkir national movement in the confrontation between post-Soviet religious leaders and the search for a ‘Bashkir Islam’ have facilitated the growth of the influence of Muslim radical reformers in the Republic, leading to increased support for a ‘cleansed Islam’ and neo-Sufism, as represented by the followers of Nazim al-Haqqani.

### MUSLIM ‘HOLY PLACES’ – ‘TRADITIONALISM’ AND ‘NON-TRADITIONALISM’ IN ISLAM

There has been practically no public discussion in the press on the issue of ‘traditional Islam’ that covers current problems or attempt to discover the truth whether in the spiritual administrations or the unofficial Islamic movements. It is more evident in the ethnographic material. The question of traditional Islam has a very prominent place in the attitudes of the Muslim ummah of Bashkortostan to local holy places and related rites. Negative perception of the ‘holy places’ has become an indicator of affiliation with the Salafi movement, as the Salafis proclaim pilgrimage to the graves of saints forbidden. They see it as worshipping the dead, which means committing an act of unbelief.

80 Filatov S.B., “Religiya i obshchestvo v Bashkortostane” [“Religion and society in Bashkortostan”], *Religiya i obshchestvo: Ocherki religioznoy zhizni sovremennoy Rossii* [Religion and society: essays on the religious life in modern Russia] (Moscow, St. Petersburg: Letniy sad, 2002), p. 132.

81 Filatov S.B., “Religiya i obshchestvo v Bashkortostane”, p. 126–127.



As Islam gained its foothold with the Bashkir people, a lot of ancient traditions took on new forms and became part of the Muslim worldview. This includes the tradition of honouring holy places. The main places of pilgrimage are the burial places of the 'saints' or *awliya* (Arab. 'awliyā' – holy people who are under the protection of Allah). For Bashkirs, the notion of the 'awliya' applied not only to famous religious leaders renowned for their righteousness and profound religious knowledge, but also to common people who distinguished themselves by their good deeds or supernatural abilities. People who died as martyrs were also typically considered *awliya*.<sup>82</sup>

Almost every district in Bashkiria has graves of 'saints' revered by Muslims (*awliya kebere/awliya ziaraty*). Most are at Islamic cemeteries, which are separate from other graveyards. It is customary to visit them on both weekdays and Islamic holidays. A visit involves reciting *surahs* of the Qur'an and prayers, decorating the grave, walking around it, sacrificial offerings, and almsgiving with the aim of receiving God's blessing. It is considered an act of grace and beneficial to bury ordinary people alongside the graves of saints. In many villages in the Republic, entire cemeteries have emerged around the grave of a single *awliya*.

There is currently a group of "holy" places that attract pilgrims all year round, with Muslim visitors from both Bashkortostan and other regions of the Russian Federation. These are the burial place (tomb) of Husain-bek in Chishminsky district, the burial place on the hill of Narys-tau in Miyakinsky district (mass pilgrimage was initiated and organised by the adherents of the Haqqani *tariqa* in 2014, as visiting the "grave" of Companions of the Prophet Muhammad – the father and son pair of Abd ar-Rahman ibn Zubayr<sup>83</sup> and Zubayr ibn Zait<sup>84</sup>), the grave of Muzhahir *hadhrat*<sup>85</sup> in Baymasksy district, the Aush-tau hill and the "Awliya" spring in Uchalinsky district, the grave of Gataulla Ishan<sup>86</sup> in Khaybullinsky district, the place of burial of Sabir

82 *Bashkiriy [Bashkirs]*, R.G. Kuzeev, E.S. Danilko (eds.) (Moscow: Nauka, 2016), p. 511.

83 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr al-Qurayshi (approx. May 624, Medina – approx. November 692, Mecca) was one of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad and a political figure of 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia who aspired to the position of caliph. Son of Zubayr ibn al-Awwam and Asma' bint Abi Bakr, daughter of the first caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, Abu Bakr. Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr was nephew of Aisha, third wife of the Prophet Muhammad.

84 Son of 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr al-Qurayshi, a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad.

85 Muzhahir Wildanovich Sirazhetdinov (1882–1967), born in the village of Bakhtigareevo (Mansurovo) in Baymasksy district of the Republic of Bashkortostan, was a Muslim religious leader who became known as an *awliya*. Repressed in 1939, vindicated on 28 June 1961.

86 Gataulla Abdelmalikov (Alibaev) (1836–1914) was a religious leader, adherent of Sufism. He was educated in Istanbul (together with Zaynulla Rasulev). After returning to his home-



*hadhrat*<sup>87</sup> in Gafuriysky district, and the grave of *mudarris* Haris Biktimirov<sup>88</sup> in Sterlibashevsky district. The best-known hieratic complexes are at the Muslim cemeteries of the villages of Raevka and Idrisovo in Alsheyevsky district, the village of Kilimovo in Buzdyaksky district, the village of Starotimoshkino in Aurgazinsky district, the village of Novyi Kainlyk in Krasnokamsky district (a place called “Kladbische svyatyh”), and the village of Chishmy in Chishminsky district (Akzirat cemetery).



Photo 2. Tomb of *awliya* at the Aush-tau hill, 2018 (Uchalinsky district of the Republic of Bashkortostan). Photo by Z.R. Khabibullina.

Of these popular places, it is the graves of *Narys-tau* that stand out because of their ambiguous interpretation. The followers of the *Haqqaniyya tariqa* announced that they were the burial places of “Companions” of the Prophet Muhammad – the son and father Zubayr ibn Zait and Abd ar-Rahman ibn Zubayr. According to the archaeologists, this “holy” place is a burial

mound (Ilchigulovo IV). The mound is located on the plateau of the elevated syrt or flat ridge of the *Narys-tau* hill, to the east of “sacred springs” that runs at its foot.<sup>89</sup> This monument was investigated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the an-

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land, he opened a *madrasah*, where he taught the doctrine of the Sufi brotherhood of the *Naqshbandiyya*. He also practiced folk medicine and became a renowned *awliya*.

- 87 Muhametsabir Abdulkhaliqovich Khalikov (1854–1931), of the village of Saitbaba of Gafuriysky district in the RB, was a religious leader and educator. He studied in one of the *madrasahs* of Kargala. In 1904 (or 1890) he became imam-khatib of the 2<sup>nd</sup> congregational mosque in Saitbaba and founded a *madrasah*. Legend has it that he had the gift of prophecy, practiced folk medicine, and became a renowned *awliya*. He did the Hajj twice (in 1901 and 1905).
- 88 Muhammad-Haris Biktimirov (1810–1870) was a religious leader, educator and *mudarris* of the famous Sterlibashevo *madrasah*. He was a murid of Bukhara sheikh Ubaydalla bin Niyazkuli at-Turkmani (the son of Abu Salih Niyazkuli at-Turkmani), from whom he received his *ijaz-nama* (permission to teach *murids*). During his time, Sterlibashevo became one of the religious centres of the region.
- 89 Akhatov A.T., Bakhshiyev I.I., Tuzbekov A.I., “Rol’ arheologicheskikh obyektov v formirovaniy novykh sakralnykh prostranstv Yuzhnogo Urala” [Role of archaeological sites in the formation



thropologist N.M. Maliev and in 1986 by the archaeologist G.N. Garustovich. Two constructions were discovered during excavations: one of them was empty, while underneath the other there was the burial site of a nomad from the early Islamic period (14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries). This burial site on Narys-tau is mentioned in the ancient Bashkir epic, “Idukay and Muradym”, which dates back to the late 14<sup>th</sup> – early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. It tells a story of the Golden Horde emir Edigu (Idukay),<sup>90</sup> who started his military career in Tamerlane’s<sup>91</sup> army and had to face off against the Tokhtamysh khan.<sup>92</sup> The story ends with the hero dying and being buried atop this hill.

In 2010, Sheikh Muhammad Nazim al-Haqqani, during his stay in Bashkortostan, announced that Narys-tau hill was the place of burial of two ‘sahabs’. The local media circulated reports of the discovery of the sahabs’ supposed burial site, which prompted active construction works at the mound.<sup>93</sup> In 2011, a monument was erect on the hill under a dome-like structure. Inscribed on the monument are the names of two Companions of the Prophet – Zubayr ibn Zaid and Abd ar-Rahman ibn Zubayr. In 2012, a mosque was built at the foot of the hill to commemorate the “holy” place. The cost of construction of the entire complex was defrayed by the Charity Foundation of the first president of the Republic, M. Rakhimov “Ural”. The “holy” place is being rapidly developed and considered one of the more promising tourist sites in the Republic. Further plans include turning the site into an even more attractive place for tourists, by building a hotel, a religious educational institution, and a good access road.<sup>94</sup>

The monument is currently a site of pilgrimage for representatives from various peoples and religions. Russians, Chuvash and Mari people visit the site quite frequently. Those who come here usually do so as tourists or with pleas and hopes that the Lord will heal them of some disease.<sup>95</sup>

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of new sacral spaces of the Southern Ural], *Uralskiy istoricheskiy vestnik [Ural Historical Journal]*, 4 (2016), p. 42.

90 Edigu (Edigey) (1352–1419) was an emir of the Golden Horde in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. He founded the dynasty that ruled the Nogai Horde. His direct paternal descendants were the Russian princely families of the Urusovs and the Yusupovs.

91 Tamerlane (also known as Timur) (1336–1405) was a Central Asian Turkic-Mongolian military leader and conqueror, who played a significant role in the history of the Middle, South and Western Asia, as well as the Caucasus, Volga Region and Rus’. He was founder of the Timurid Empire (around 1370), whose capital was in Samarkand. A national hero of the Uzbek people.

92 Tokhtamysh (d. 1406) was khan of the Golden Horde in 1380–1395 and became khan of the Tyumen Khanate in 1400. A descendant of Jochi, the oldest son of Genghis Khan.

93 “Mekka v Miyakakh. Bashkiriya mozhnet stat’ zhemchuzhinoy religioznogo palomnichestva” [“Mecca in Miyaki. Bashkiriya may become a pearl of religious pilgrimage”], [ufa.mk.ru/articles/2012/05/23/706919-mekka-v-miyakah](http://ufa.mk.ru/articles/2012/05/23/706919-mekka-v-miyakah), accessed 25 September 2019.

94 Author’s fieldwork materials, Ilchigulovo, Miyakinsky district, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2014.

95 Author’s fieldwork materials, Narys-tau, Miyakinsky district, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2016.



It is not too much to say, with regard to this “holy place”, that there is an uncontrolled process of the sacralisation of archaeological sites going on, and that these symbols are being managed to spread the ideas of Neo-Sufism, so that we may see an ethnic consolidation of the Republic’s faithful around this “Bashkir Mecca”.<sup>96</sup> The “Holy places” in Bashkortostan are not an explicit part of the government’s ethnic policy in this region. This reproduction of tradition was brought about by ethnic/national groups and the adherents of the Neo-Sufi *tariqas* and religious movements in order to attract new members.<sup>97</sup> The preservation of history, memory and tradition associated with local sites of public worship depends on the clergy. There are many abandoned graves of ‘*awliya*’ in the Republic, particularly in villages whose imams take a negative attitude to visiting them or are indifferent to it. The modern Islamic clergy does not always approve of the custom of visiting holy places. A survey of religious leaders conducted in 2011 to discover the clergy’s attitude on the acceptability of worshipping the “holy” places in Bashkortostan found that 44% of respondents described the rite as a harmful superstition and said Muslims were not allowed to worship these places. 25% said that visiting the “holy” places was acceptable and even necessary, but worshipping them was not allowed, because a Muslim must only worship the holy places in Mecca and Medina. 19.8% expressed a positive attitude towards the phenomenon and said there was a long-standing tradition of worshipping such local Muslim sanctuaries in the Republic. 11.2% were undecided.<sup>98</sup>

The current period in the development of Islam in Bashkortostan may be characterised as one of the extensive reconstruction of old places of worship and creation of new ones, of the revival of the historical memory of the ‘saints’ of and prominent religious leaders. Another aspect of the development of local Islamic pilgrimages is that they often serve as the basis for destructive cults, financial schemes, and the distribution of various myths, all with the “blessing” of foreign preachers (Turkish sheikhs). Archival documents show that during the Soviet years there were several places frequently visited by believers in Bashkortostan: the

96 “Syemochnaya gruppa kanala TV3 rasskazhet zritelyam o “Bashkirskoy Mekke” [“The camera crew of the TV3 channel will tell the audience about the “Bashkir Mecca”], [www.bashinform.ru/news/915434-semochnaya-gruppa-kanala-tv3-rasskazhet-zritelyam-o-bashkirskoy-mekke/](http://www.bashinform.ru/news/915434-semochnaya-gruppa-kanala-tv3-rasskazhet-zritelyam-o-bashkirskoy-mekke/), accessed 25 September 2019.

97 “Zhitel’ Bashkirii lechil patsiyentov pletkami i molitvami” [“A resident of Bashkiria treated patients with whips and prayers”], [www.ufa.kp.ru/online/news/1586581/](http://www.ufa.kp.ru/online/news/1586581/), accessed 25 September 2019.

98 Author’s fieldwork materials, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2011. Survey of the clergy on visiting the “holy” places in the Republic of Bashkortostan.



tombs (mausoleum) of Husain-bek and Tura-khan and the grave of Ishan Yaghafar.<sup>99</sup> Currently there are over one hundred such places visited by several thousand people each year. New sacral objects are being created in the place of old archaeological monuments, all of which is accompanied by extensive myth-making. In 2014, the staff of the R.G. Kuzeev Institute of Ethnological Research of the Ufa Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences catalogued 113 archaeological monuments as places of pilgrimage for Muslims.<sup>100</sup> Over 70% of them are in the eastern foothills of the Uraltau range and the forest-steppe parts of the Ural Region, which has a predominantly Bashkir population.

The traditions of local pilgrimage still maintain their foothold with the Muslim population. This model of worship became a foundation for advancing the ideas of the Neo-Sufi Haqqaniyya *tariqa*. This in turn influenced the conflict between the Haqqanis and the Salafis over the debate about the “correct understanding” and fulfilment of the principles of the Islamic creed. To stabilise the pilgrim movement in Bashkiria, the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan annually organise memorial days for the first preacher of Islam in the Southern Urals, Husain-bek, which involve visiting his grave and mass prayers. In 2004, the first gathering of Muslims to commemorate Husain-bek was organised. This gathering has since become annual. It involves the participation of believers not only from Bashkortostan but from the surrounding regions as well. In 2016, a ceremonial reburial of Husain-bek’s relics took place at the request of Muslims. The relics had been removed for research purposes in 1985 by the Institute of History, Language and Literature of the Ufa Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The reburial ceremony was attended by Grand mufti T. Tadzhuiddin, representatives of the administration, and residents.<sup>101</sup>

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99 Central Historical Archive of the Republic of Bashkortostan. Collection R-4732, inv. 1, file 16, p. 15.

100 Akhatov A.T., Bakhshiyev I.I., Tuzbekov A.I., “Rol’ arheologicheskikh obyektov v formirovaniy novykh sakralnykh prostranstv Yuzhnogo Urala”, *Uralskiy istoricheskiy vestnik [Ural Historical Journal]*, 4 (2016), p. 36.

101 “Bashkiriya: ostanki prosvetitel’ya Huseyn-beka snova zahoronyat v ego mavzoleye” [“Bashkiria: the remains of the enlightener Hussein-bey will be buried again in his mausoleum”], [www.ufa.kp.ru/online/news/1586581/](http://www.ufa.kp.ru/online/news/1586581/), accessed 25 September 2019.



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This study has shown that the groups being examined, viz. the representatives of religious, ethnic/national and state organisations in the Republic of Bashkortostan, have their own understandings both of Islam and of 'traditionalism'. According to the representatives of the government bodies, 'traditional Islam' is peaceful Islam, which accepts the existing state structure and coexists with other religious denominations. National movements consider 'traditional Islam' Islam that accepts itself as a part of the Bashkir nation and facilitates its unity.

The faithful have an ambiguous understanding of 'traditional Islam', as they are divided by different spiritual administrations and conflicting Islamic movements and groups. On the other hand, they are united by their affiliation with Sunni Islam and, more or less, with the Hanafi *madhab*. Each Islamic group's understanding of 'traditional Islam' thus includes its basic ideas about the Islamic "model" and its place in Russian society.

Our survey of the religious leaders of the Republic on their understanding of 'traditional Islam' showed that their views were not just divided by affiliation to one or other of the Republic's two muftiates, TsDUM and DUM RB. There proved to be no unity inside either religious organisation in how they defined the term they used so widely. A demonstrative acceptance of Sufism and loyalty to the practice of pilgrimage of Muslims to the graves of 'saints' were instrumental as indicators of Islam's 'non-traditionalism' in the promotion of the Haqqaniyya *tariqa* in the Republic and its adherents' construction of new sacral monuments. At the same time, this proactive attitude provoked an upsurge of fundamentalism on the part of the more radically minded part of the Muslim youth, or Salafis.

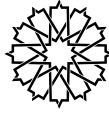
To sum up this analysis of the 'traditional Islam' discourse in Bashkortostan, several factors appear to have substantially influenced the formation of ideas about 'traditional Islam':

- 1) The *specific nature of religious identity*. Most of the population admit an affiliation to the Islamic faith but are not practicing believers. Islamic identity is, largely, part of ethnic identity.
- 2) The *ethnic/national factor*. Bashkir social and political organisations are trying to become the patrons of religion in the Republic and participate covertly in the activities of the spiritual administrations of Muslims.





- 3) *Conflicts between Muslim groups.* There is a crisis in the official religious institutions that position themselves as adherents of 'traditional Islam' but cannot unite the Muslim youth. As more young people in the Republic of Bashkortostan enter the clergy, we can trace a generational conflict here, as well as a turf war for spheres of influence between religious leaders with traditionalist views and younger more radically minded imams.



# Inventing a New Legal Tradition: the Discourse of ‘Traditional Islam’ in Post-Communist Dagestan<sup>1</sup>

*Vladimir Bobrovnikov*

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines a serious shift in the legal discourse of Islam in Russian Dagestan after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. The end of anti-religious persecution resulted in a stormy growth of religious enthusiasm, which is often misunderstood as a revival of pre-Soviet Islamic traditions. Such a revival was in fact impossible, given the destructive impact of forced Soviet modernisation. Controversies between different factions of post-Soviet Muslims are usually treated as arising due to the encounter of Russia’s Islamic traditions and foreign extremist influences, mostly from the Arab Middle East. The author proposes to rethink this ongoing re-Islamisation as a local reaction to the global challenges involved in transforming local Muslim society under both Tsarist and Soviet rule. He argues that so-called ‘traditional’ Islam is a new-invented tradition of the post-communist Russian state.

Key words: Islam, confessional legislation, ethnology, invention of tradition, discursive analysis, survival, post-Soviet Dagestan, Russia

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In recent decades the religious landscape and so religious policy in Russia have abruptly changed. A generation ago, religion as such was officially considered an embarrassing anachronism and expressing it in public was considered bad manners. In the context of political liberalisation and the religious surge of the late 1980s and early 1990s, both the federal government and the regional authorities of the Russian Federation had recourse to a maxim of Catherine the Great era that not only a nationalised Orthodox Christianity but even “foreign” faiths could be of service to the Russian state. To come up with some justification for this idea, the government turned to academia.

### APOLOGY FOR THE LOCAL POST-SOVIET TRADITION IN ACADEMIC AND POLITICAL LIFE

As early as the 1990s, ethnographers and legal experts had rejected the Soviet-era view of religious tradition as a relic of the past that impeded social progress or “a nightmare of all the dead generations” that “weighs... upon the brains of the living”, as Karl Marx put it.<sup>2</sup> To the contrary, most experts took a very hopeful view of local customs as a possible pillar of the Russian legal and state system under the unstable conditions of post-Soviet society. It became a sign of good manners for politicians of all orientations to parade their devotion to religion and the traditions of their peoples. On both the federal and regional level, the authorities undertook to protect them and even recognised customary law as a possible source of legislation. A growing hybridisation of Russian legislation began to take place, with both legal procedures and politicians presenting the Russia of today, at least to some degree, as the sole legitimate successor to the Russian Empire.

There has been change in various spheres of legislation – the criminal, civil, and land codes. As well as the laws on rural communities and arbitration, there is the well-known Article 14 of the 1999 Federal Law “On Guarantees of Rights for Indigenous Minorities in the Russian Federation”, which recognizes ‘traditions and customs’ as a source of written state law, except where they contradict existing federal and local legislation. It also guarantees state protection of ‘traditional lifestyles’ to titular minorities in the northern and southern borderlands of the country. The significance of these truly revolutionary changes in how customs and

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2 Marx K., *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Transl. by D. De Leon (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co, 1919, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), p. 9.



traditions are perceived becomes clear when compared to the provisions of Soviet criminal legislation. Just as famous in the past, Chapter X dealt with *Crimes that Constitute Survivals of Tribal Customs* and was incorporated into the Criminal Code (CC) of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) in 1928. Customs and traditions that were causes of grave infringement of the law were characterised as “socially dangerous actions”. This negative attitude to custom and tradition was preserved in the 1960 revision of the CC<sup>3</sup> and remained in force until the post-Soviet CC of the Russian Federation was passed in 1996.

When discussing local customs and traditions recognized by the state, scholars often forget about the legislation on religious denominations, which has undergone equally extensive changes during the post-Soviet era. Similar trends are to be seen in this sphere at federal and republican levels. By legalizing Orthodox Christianity, Islam and other “religions traditionally practiced by the peoples of Russia”, the authorities were choosing to rely not only on legal custom but on religious tradition. A close relationship was established between the state and so-called traditional Islam. The notion of traditional Islam had not yet been properly examined.<sup>4</sup> Comparative discourse analysis can shed light on the curious but also underexplored problem of the connections between politics, law and ethnology in Russia in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In the various regions, legislation on freedom of conscience and religious organisations has its own nuances and differences. In this paper I will limit myself to examining the federal and local wordings passed in 1990–2010<sup>5</sup> in one

- 3 *Sistematizirovannyi tekst obshcheyuznykh ugovolnykh zakonov i ugovolnykh kodeksov soyuznykh respublik* [The systematic text of the All-Union criminal laws and the Criminal codes of the Union Republics] (Moscow: Publishing House for Legal Literature of the Ministry of Justice of the USSR, 1948), p. 495–505; ch. XI “Prestupleniya, sostavlyayushchiye perezhitki mestnykh obychayev [“Crimes comprising remnants of local customs”]”, in *Ugovolnyy kodeks RSFSR* [Criminal Code of the RSFS Republic] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo yuridicheskoi literatury, 1960).
- 4 There are only a few recent studies of this topos, mostly from a socio-linguistic perspective. See: Sibgatullina G., *Languages of Islam and Christianity in Post-Soviet Russia. Institutional Discourses, Community Strategies and Missionary Rhetoric*. PhD Thesis (Leiden: Leiden University, 2018); Ragozina S., *Politicheskiy obraz islama (na materiale tsentral'nykh rossiyskikh pechatnykh SMI, 2010–2017)* [The political image of Islam after the central Russian printed media, 2010–2017], Candidate (PhD) Thesis, Moscow: Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2019.
- 5 USSR Law “O svobode sovesti i religioznykh organizatsiyah [“On freedom of conscience and religious organizations”]; RSFSR Law “O svobode veroispovedaniya [“On freedom of worship”], *Vedomosti Syezda narodnykh deputatov RSFSR i Verhovnogo Soveta RSFSR* [Bulletin of the Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR and the Supreme Council of the RSFSR], 1990, 21 (1990); DASSR Law “O svobode sovesti i religioznykh organizatsiyah [“On freedom of conscience and religious organizations”], in Gryzlov V.F., *Dagestan: Etnopoliticheskiy portret. Ocherki. Dokumenty. Hronika* [Ethnopolitical portrait of Dagestan: studies, documents,



small but important federal subject, the Republic of Dagestan, a centre of the post-Soviet Islamic upsurge.

In the 1990s, Islam received a new privileged status in Moscow. It had never enjoyed any privileges under either the Soviet or the Tsarist authorities. The constitution of the country recognises it as a native religious tradition of Russian society and mandates state protection. Since the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, the federal authorities have repeatedly stated their support for Islam as a 'traditional' religious denomination. In *Russia's National Security Plan* of 1997, the President incorrectly declared traditional Islam to be one of the "churches", noting that "the Russian Orthodox Church and the churches of other religions play an important role in preserving traditional cultural and spiritual values".<sup>6</sup> Emphasising the Russian state's concern for not just the Orthodox Christian but also the Muslim citizens of the Russian Federation, the President began addressing them annually in holiday greetings for *Eid al-Adha* (Kurban bayram) and *Eid al-Fitr* (Uraza bayram), just as he did Orthodox Christians on Easter and Christmas.

Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin continued this tradition. The latter notably labelled Russia "a great Christian and Islamic nation" at a meeting with the Council of Muftis of Russia just before his first inauguration in 2000. At a meeting with muftis in Ufa on 22 October, 2013, timed to coincide with the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the first Russian muftiate (the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly), set up by Catherine the Great, Putin again emphasised the significance of Islam as "one of the Russia's traditional religions," alongside Orthodox Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

Official statements tend to play the Islamic card to justify aggressive foreign policy and propagate pro-governmental domestic jingoism, though their incompetent authors show exceptional ignorance of both Islamic dogmatics and the history of the country's Muslim communities. The president

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*news*], (Moscow: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of RAS, 1993), vol. 1, p. 107–116; RF Law "O svobode sovesti i religioznyh obyedineniyah ["On freedom of conscience and religious associations"], *Sobraniye zakonodatelstva Rossiyskoi Federatsii* [Collection of Russian federal laws], 1997, No 26; Republic of Dagestan Law "O svobode sovesti, svobode veroispovedaniya i religioznyh organizatsiyah ["On freedom of conscience, freedom of worship and religious organizations"], *Dagestanskaya Pravda*, 30.12.1997; Republic of Dagestan Law "O zaprete vahhabitskoy i inoy ekstremistskoy deyatelnosti na territorii Respubliki Dagestan ["On the prohibition of Wahhabi and other extremist activities on the territory of the Republic of Dagestan"], in Khanbabayev K.M., *Religioznye organizatsii v Dagestane. Spravochnik* [Handbook on religious organizations in Dagestan], (Makhachkala: Dagestanskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 2001), p. 87–89.

6 "Decree No. 1300 of the President of the RF, dated 17 December, 1997", *Sobraniye zakonodatelstva Rossiyskoi Federatsii* [Collection of Russian federal laws], 1997, 52 (1997), art. 5909, p. 10432.

7 <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/19473>, accessed 25 September 2019.



thus had good reason for putting so much emphasis on the role of traditional Islam in the patriotic education of youths and the unity of Russian citizens at the meeting in Ufa, and in justifying the alleged interest of Muslims in a Russian military presence in Syria. At the same time, he invented an *ayah* on love for country and misquoted and confused the second part of the Sunni creed (Arab. *al-Shahada*) with a mysterious *surah* of the Qur'an.<sup>8</sup> The muftis present did not correct the leader of the nation, however. Mistakes concerning Islam as grave or worse than this are not uncommon in the public speeches of top officials in post-Soviet Russia. In 2000, in an interview with American journalist Larry King, Putin confused the Shafi'is of Chechnya and Dagestan with Twelver Shia Muslims and connected the beginning of the Second Chechen War with the expansion of mercenaries from the Arab Middle East who had unsuccessfully attempted "to convince the local community to adopt Sunni Islam".<sup>9</sup>

Islam did not obtain new legal status as a state-supported traditional religion immediately. At first, the state declared freedom of religion for all religious denominations without exception, along with the freedom to create religious organisations in the country. The previously proclaimed but never honoured democratic provisions of the Decree "On the separation of church and state, and of school from church" (1918) were guaranteed. The state is secular. Religion is separate from the state. These freedoms were guaranteed in the USSR Law "On freedom of conscience and religious organisations", passed by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 2 October, 1990.<sup>10</sup> Soon after, they were confirmed in the RSFSR Law "On freedom of worship", dated 25 October, 1990, and in its Dagestan version, "On freedom of conscience and religious organisations", passed by the supreme representative and legislative body of the Republic, the Supreme Soviet of the Dagestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (DASSR), on 5 May, 1991.<sup>11</sup> None of these normative acts were well grounded in post-Communist reality and they barely consider the historical context of today's Dagestan. For instance, the Dagestani bill does not even mention

8 <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/page/151>, accessed 25 September 2019.

9 <http://www.ateism.ru/articles/putin02.htm>, accessed 25 September 2019.

10 *Vedomosti Syezda narodnyh deputatov RSFSR i Verhovnogo Soveta RSFSR [Bulletin of the Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR and the Supreme Council of the RSFSR]*, 21 (1990).

11 According to art. 5 of the DASSR Law "On freedom of conscience and religious organisations", "all confessions and religious denominations are equal before the law... The state does not finance... activities propagating atheism." All religious organisations without exception have the right as legal persons (Art. 17) to own property (Art. 23) and to engage in productive operations (Art. 24). Missionary activities have been legalized in Dagestan (Art. 11, 29). See Gryzlov V.F., *Dagestan: Etnopoliticheskiy portret*, vol. 1, p. 107–116.



*jama'ah* or mosque congregations (communities), mosques or Sufi lodges, but it does refer to non-existent monasteries and religious missions in the republic (Art. 11, 14, 18, 28).<sup>12</sup>

## TRADITIONAL ISLAM AS A LEGISLATIVE NON-ENTITY

At first it was the federal and only later the Dagestani authorities that shaped the idea of 'traditional Russian Islam' during the final third of the 1990s. To some degree it defines the line of the new Federal Law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations", passed by the State Duma of the Russian Federation on 26 September, 1997, and of its Dagestani version, "*On freedom of worship and religious organisations*", approved by the supreme (and only) legislative body of the Republic (since 1995), the People's Assembly, on 30 December, 1997. In the preamble to the Federal Law, Islam is named, alongside Orthodox Christianity, among the religions "that constitute an integral part of the historical legacy of the peoples of Russia".<sup>13</sup> The state pledges to respect and support the rights of both the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and Islam. For the first time, we see the simplified dichotomy of religious denominations into 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' congregations. The term 'traditional' here has the connotation of 'officially accepted, legal'. It is opposed to 'non-traditional confessions', which in the post-Soviet legislation usually referred to foreign missions and domestic religious dissidents.

The rights of 'non-traditional' religious congregations, which mostly comprise organisations and movements that appeared in Russia after 1991, have been substantially limited. A probation period of fifteen years was introduced. In Russia, the law requires annual re-registration (Art. 11; 27.3).<sup>14</sup> Moreover, they have no right to material or other support from the federal or local government. If Russian citizens, their priests and min-

12 Cf. the opinion on the 1991 law of the then chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan, mufti Isaev B.-Kh., in *Dagestanskaya pravda* [*Dagestani pravda*], 15.05.1991; Gryzlov V.F., *Dagestan: Etnopoliticheskiy portret*, vol. 4, p. 254.

13 Besides Orthodox Christianity and Islam, this list also includes "Buddhism, Judaism and other religions [i.e. pagan cults of the Far North - V.B.]". Islam is in second position on this list. See the Federal Law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations", *Sobraniye zakonodatelstva Rossiyskoi Federatsii* [*Collection of Russian federal laws*], 39 (1997), art. 4465, p. 7666.

14 *Sobraniye zakonodatelstva Rossiyskoi Federatsii* [*Collection of Russian federal laws*], 39 (1997), p. 7671-7672, 7677.



isters are not exempt from military service. They are prohibited from opening religious schools or providing religious education to children, conducting religious rites in health care facilities and penitentiaries, publishing or distributing religious literature, having foreign branches and offices, or inviting preachers or other clerics from abroad (Art. 27.3; 3.4; 5. 3 and 4; 13.5; 16.3; 17. 1 and 2; 18.2; 19; 20.2).<sup>15</sup> This new legally entrenched political line of the federal government aimed at establishing state control over all religious organisations without exception and limiting the activities of foreign missions.

The idea of ‘non-traditional religions’ reflects the federal centre’s xenophobia regarding the allegedly subversive activities of various Western and foreign Muslim political actors, perceived as attempting to bring about the disintegration of Russia. They are the result of general Orientalist fears in the global community following the series of terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, in the USA, but even more from the two succeeding violent Russian-Chechen wars. Over recent years, the ghost of the “Islamic threat” and the upcoming Caucasus War has been haunting the Russian government relentlessly. These fears have determined a number of declarations made by the federal government and Parliament, as well as by Russian Prime Ministers and Presidents Yeltsin, Medvedev and Putin.

The 1997 *Russian National Security Plan* refers explicitly to ‘non-traditional Islam’, namely, the so-called Wahhabi movement, when urging the authorities to “take into account [under federal confessional policy – V.B.] the destructive role of various religious sects, which do quite a lot of damage to the spiritual life of the Russian society, present a direct danger to the lives and health of the Russian citizens, and are often used to cover up unlawful activities.”<sup>16</sup> Amendments to the federal legislation on freedom of conscience and religious associations passed with the new Federal Law on 18 November 2015 deprive all the ‘non-traditional’ religious organisations of their privileged status as non-profit organisations. At the same time those of them that are financed from abroad are obliged to present annual reports on their financial and operational activities to public judicial bodies.<sup>17</sup> Essentially, this sort of tightening of accountability for religious organisations can lead to serious limitations on their activities un-

15 *Sobraniye zakonodatelstva Rossiyskoi Federatsii*, 39 (1997), p. 7677–7678, 7667, 7669, 7673, 7674–7676.

16 *Sobraniye zakonodatelstva Rossiyskoi Federatsii*, 52 (1997), art. 5909, p. 10432.

17 “On amendments to the Federal Law “On freedom of conscience and religious associations” and to some legislative acts of the Russian Federation” dated 28 November 2015 No 341-FZ. See: [www.pravo.gov.ru](http://www.pravo.gov.ru).





der the infamous Russian Law “On foreign agents” (2012), and even to shut-down.

Sharing these fears of ‘non-traditional Islam’ imported from abroad, the Dagestani government attempted to establish a legal barrier to its introduction into the Republic by a new version of the law on freedom of conscience passed in 1997.<sup>18</sup> Taking its cue from the federal centre, the law distinguishes ‘traditional’ from ‘non-traditional’ religious congregations. Following the general Russian line of tightening-up state control over religion, it does not slavishly copy its federal model, however. It does not establish a fifteen-year eligibility requirement for ‘non-traditional religions’, because, with the exception of the Russian Orthodox Church, not a single religious association in Dagestan (including the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan (DUM D) aka the Muftiate of the Republic of Dagestan, created in 1992) could meet that requirement. A number of nationwide norms have been rendered more specific, given the specific circumstances of Dagestan. The law now does not mention monasteries anymore. It distinguishes Republic-wide centralized religious associations and lower local ones, including all kinds of voluntary associations of citizens and residents of the Republic (Art. 10.1). Each religious denomination is allowed to have only one centralized organisation, which must consist, at least in half, of local organisations whose members are Russian nationals and residents of Dagestan (Art. 10.4).

Eventually, the policy of supporting local traditional Islam and fighting against its allegedly foreign ‘non-traditional’ opponents led to the infamous Law “On the prohibition of Wahhabi and other extremist activities on the territory of the Republic of Dagestan”.<sup>19</sup> The People’s Assembly passed it on 16 September, 1999, after the total defeat of Chechen troops supporting Dagestani Wahhabis in Northern Dagestan and the beginning of the lengthy second Russian-Chechen war. Taking advantage of the wartime state of emergency, the government smashed all ‘non-traditional’ Wahhabi congregations and associations (*jama’ah*) in the Republic. The passing of this law was in some ways a throwback to the Soviet policy of belligerent and not always well-considered solutions to religious problems. “Wahhabis and other extremists” are defined in the law in too broad and uncertain a manner. There is a serious risk that all political and ideological enemies of DUM D may fall under the notion. The Dagestan authorities do not currently have the power to put all the provisions of this law

18 *Dagestanskaya pravda* [Dagestani pravda], 6.03.1997.

19 *Dagestanskaya pravda* [Dagestani pravda], 24.09.1999.



into effect or establish strict control over the everyday activities of religious organisations in the Republic, however.

The 1999 law only specified restraints on the rights of ‘non-traditional’ religious congregations as defined in the current legislation of the Republic of Dagestan. All those officially labelled Wahhabis were forbidden to build mosques, prayer houses or schools independent of DUM D (Art. 1, 3). The activities of religious missions and the distribution and possession of printed media, audio and video materials coming out of the Wahhabi camp were prohibited in Dagestan (Art. 1). To train students at any level, Islamic educational institutions had to be certified by DUM D (Art. 3). All religious organisations in the Republic had to re-register within three months of the Law’s entry into force (Art. 4). Violating the provisions of the Law entailed administrative penalty according to the norms of federal legislation (Art. 5). Appealing to this emergency law, during the autumn and beginning of the winter of 1999, the Dagestani government was able to suppress all the opposition Islamic political parties and cultural movements, as well as all the branches of foreign Islamic organisations and foundations. In 2000, the People’s Assembly requested the State Duma of the Russian Federation to broaden the law’s status to federal act but failed to secure its goal. The 1999 Law contravenes a number of articles of the Russian Constitution and Federal Laws “On freedom of conscience and religious associations” and “On education”, as well as the federal Criminal Code and that on the Code on Administrative Offenses, but nonetheless retains statutory force in Dagestan.

While the 1997 Federal Law was lobbied for by the Russian Orthodox Church, the Dagestani version was fronted by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan. This is why it contained several new provisions prohibiting Muslim communities unregistered with the DUM D from keeping mosques or schools or publishing and distributing Islamic literature (Ch. I, Art. 4, 7; Ch. III, Art. 12; Ch. IV, Art. 15, 22). Serious debate broke out around the Federal Law in the State Duma between the liberal and the conservative factions. The Russian Islamic opposition, including the then-active Union of Muslims of Russia (SMR) was against the law.<sup>20</sup> It

20 In 1995–2003 the Union of Muslims of Russia (SMR) was an All-Russian movement advocating revival of Islam, representation of Muslims in the State Duma of the Russian Federation, and a socially oriented economy. They had branch offices in over 50 federal subjects, the most active being in the Volga-Urals region and the Northern Caucasus. The leaders of the SMR included Muslim politicians and clerics from the North Caucasus and the Volga-Ural region like Kh.A. Khalitov, M.A. Bibarsov (b. 1960), N.Kh. Ashirov (b. 1954), A.-V. Niyazov (b. 1969) and N.M. Khachilayev (1958–2003).



also faced harsh criticism from the governments of the USA and Western European countries with Protestant missions in Russia. On 23 July 1997, under pressure from abroad, President Yeltsin vetoed the Law.<sup>21</sup> After three readings in the State Duma, however, it was passed, nonetheless. A lengthy struggle then began between the authorities of the Republic and the national and Islamic opposition, before passage of the Dagestani law. After nationwide discussion and the first reading of the bill, the People's Assembly made substantial amendments on 27 February 1997.

It seems that the federal and the local authorities accepted the idea of an Islamic threat to Russia from those parts of the 'non-traditional' congregations, under the influence of the legalised Muslim clergy in the North Caucasus and Moscow, who had been trying to incite the government to violence against their own political and ideological adversaries in post-Soviet Muslim society. It is no coincidence that it was the DUM D that initiated the demonization of Wahhabis in the Caucasus. The late mufti of Dagestan S.-M. Abubakarov (1959 – 1998) repeatedly condemned Wahhabism as “a dangerous pseudo-religious political movement of an exceptionally extremist nature” to be fought against.<sup>22</sup> DUM D formed a strong lobby in the Supreme Council of the Republic of Dagestan through the Islamic Party of Dagestan (IPD), whose leaders also belonged to the muftiate. On 26 February 1994, under pressure from the IPD, a law was passed prohibiting any administrations of Muslims in the Republic other than the DUM D. In August of 1998, the muftiate supported the creation of the Coordinating Centre of Muslims of the North Caucasus (KCMSK) to coordinate regional clerical opposition to “Wahhabism.” It united the Spiritual Administrations of Muslims of Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia and Stavropol krai, Adygea, North Ossetia-Alania.<sup>23</sup> More recently, on 18 March 2017, DUM D withdrew from membership of the Coordinating Centre because of the contest for influence between Spiritual Administrations.<sup>24</sup>

On the federal level, DUM D contacted the chief executives of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB), the legal succes-

21 *Sobraniye zakonodatelstva Rossiyskoi Federatsii* [Collection of Russian federal laws], 26 (1997), art. 3009; 28 (1997), art. 3382 and 3357; 39 (1997), art. 4515. See also *Moskovskiy komsomolets* [Moscow Komsomol member], 11.11.1997; Roschin M., “Legislating Religion”, *War report*, November 1997, p. 40.

22 *Musul'manskiye duhovnye organizatsii i obyedineniya Rossiyskoi Federatsii* [Muslim religious organizations and associations of the Russian Federation] (Moscow: Sovet muftiev Rossii, 1999), p. 17.

23 *Musul'manskiye duhovnye organizatsii i obyedineniya Rossiyskoi Federatsii*, p. 18.

24 <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/299426/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



sor of KGB. In its attempt to control most of the Muslim congregations in the Republic, DUM D were unwilling to subordinate themselves to the Dagestani and federal state authorities. Consequently they opposed the creation, on 23 December, 1993, of an Administration for Religious Affairs by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Dagestan (later the Committee for Religious Affairs – KDR, as of 26 October, 1998, until abolished on 6 March, 2006), calling it “unconstitutional interference in the affairs of the faithful.”<sup>25</sup> Close contacts were nonetheless soon established between DUM D, the KDR, and the State Council, the supreme executive body of the Republic, and the People’s Assembly. Former representatives of the communist political elites, who had taken over leadership of post-Soviet Dagestan, now also advocated an alliance with traditional Islam. The former chairman of the People’s Assembly M.G. Aliev defined their current creed as, “Without religion we have no history, and thus we will help our traditional religious movements... and for these reasons we will strengthen the positions of the Spiritual Administration.”<sup>26</sup>

## SOVIET ROOTS OF THE DISCOURSE ON TRADITIONAL ISLAM

Investigation of the political background to the struggle over new religious legislation does not remove the issue of rhetoric from the table or, indeed, the general problem of traditionalist language at the federal and local levels. The careful examination of normative and narrative historical sources from twentieth-century North Caucasus reveals the general Soviet roots of contemporary traditionalist legal discourse. Although the laws of 1990–1991 and 1997–1999, along with their more recent amendments from the late 2010s, formally postulate a break with the Soviet atheistic past, claiming that the Russian Federation is the only legal successor of the Russian Empire as protector of Russian Muslims’ religious traditions, they in fact resulted in no small measure from state policy conducted in Dagestan and other regions of the Northern Caucasus under Soviet rule. Right after the establishment of Soviet power in the region, Shariah courts and other Islamic legal and religious practices, which the

25 *Dagestanskaya pravda* [*Dagestani pravda*], 27.01.1994; *Severnyi Kavkaz* [*Northern Caucasus*], 29.01.1994, p. 1.

26 Cited in the article: Shikhsaidov A.R., “Islam in Dagestan”, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 4 (1999), p. 113. Available online at <https://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/06.shikhs.shtml>, accessed 25 September 2019.



tsarist administration had been suspicious of, were legalised. So long as Soviet power in the Northern Caucasus was weak, the Bolsheviks sided with the local Muslim elites. They succeeded in winning native Muslims of the North Caucasus to their side by declaring their legal and judicial autonomy in the RSFSR. Shariah was recognized as a source of state law in the region. In the context of early Soviet Dagestan, this meant the emergence of a network of legally plural judicial institutions.<sup>27</sup>

The young Soviet state considered Shariah authentic “people’s customary law” (sic) of the Dagestani Muslims. Addressing delegates at the Founding Congress of the Dagestan’s Peoples on 13 November 1920, the People’s Commissar of Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, declared that “Dagestan is to be governed according to its national peculiarities, its lifestyle, and its customs. Shariah is said to play an important role among Dagestan’s peoples. We also know that the enemies of Soviet power are spreading rumours that the Soviet authorities are prohibiting Shariah. On behalf of the government of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, I am authorised to declare that these rumours are wrong. The Russian government provides each people with the full right to self-government according to their laws and customs.”<sup>28</sup> From the rostrum of the Congress, Stalin defined the policy of the Soviet authorities with regard to the Muslim traditions of the North Caucasus highlanders as follows, “If a people want, as a backward nation, to be governed according to customs, let them do so. Let them go to the Shariah courts in Dagestan. Communists think there is nothing wrong in it... We should not break with but modernise customs, law and the direction [of transformation of] the way of life in Dagestan.”<sup>29</sup>

Such views were shared by G.K. Ordzhonikidze, S.M. Kirov, A.I. Mikoyan and other leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet state and determined the policy of the Soviet government to Islam in the autonomous republics and provinces of the North Caucasus through the first half of the 1920s. The “people’s revolutionary Shariah traditions”, including the Shariah courts, mosque schools, Sufi lodges, and *waqf* endowments, continued to operate quite legally at the level of village communities and rural districts (*rayony*)

27 For more see Bobrovnikov V., “Shariah vs. ‘Adat in Post-Imperial Law-making. Political Discourse on Shariah Courts in Dagestan, 1917–1927”, *Annals of the Japanese Association for Middle Eastern Studies (AJAMES)*, 32-2 (2016), p. 37–41.

28 Stalin I.V., *Sochineniya [Works]* (Moscow: OGIz, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1947), vol. 4, p. 113.

29 Photocopy of draft notes for a speech by Comrade I.V. Stalin at the Congress of Dagestan’s peoples on 13 November, 1920, *Scientific archive of the Institute of History, Archaeology, Ethnography of the Dagestan Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Makhachkala)*, collection 6, inv. 1, file 6, p. 2, 3.



right up to the beginning of implementation of the All-Union programmes of collectivisation, industrialisation and cultural revolution in the regions.

Under early Soviet rule, legal pluralism took a more explicit “strong” form as John Griffiths defines it.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the Shariah courts, there was a parallel system of Soviet people’s ones, established in 1920. Muslims could settle lawsuits in either. The authorities supervised their activities through a set of District investigative commissions and the Shariah department of the Dagestani *revkom*, which became later the Shariah section of the republican People’s Commissariat of Justice.<sup>31</sup> These institutions provided the republican authorities with a more effective means of state control than the pre-revolutionary Dagestani people’s court, which supervised the activities of the district people’s courts. A more regulated pattern of judicial policy was adopted in Soviet Dagestan, fashioned along the principles of the well-ordered police state (*Polizeistaat*). The state also relied on a ramified network of the Soviet political police (the State Political Directorate, GPU). To suppress any anti-Soviet movement, the authorities made use of Red Army troops stationed in Mountain Dagestan after the suppression of al-Hutsi’s uprising in 1920–1921.

In Dagestan, Shariah institutions and practices were banned in 1927–1928. From the late 1920s, the Soviet authorities considered Islam an enemy rather than an ally. They proclaimed a fight against “harmful feudal and patriarchal relics of the past”, including Shariah law and Muslims legal customs (Arab. *‘adat*).<sup>32</sup> The Sovietization of Dagestani society gradually reduced the social field of Shariah jurisdiction. It was limited to the realm of family life and everyday religious rites. The short period of early socialist legal pluralism came to an end.

A new turn in state policy toward the Muslim highlanders’ ‘traditions’ took place in the 1950s–1970s. After WWII, the Soviet authorities no longer saw Muslim legal customs (*‘adat*) as a dangerous political force. Nor is it a coincidence that, in the second half of the 1950s and more especially in the 1960s, Dagestani media started speculating on a need to differentiate between “good” and “bad” traditions. Continuing to bash such “relics of *‘adat*” as discrimination against women, blood feuding, and, ironically, Shariah matri-

30 Griffiths J., “What is Legal Pluralism?”, *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, 24 (1986), p. 1.

31 From the Decrees on Shariah Courts, at the *Central State Archive of the Republic of Dagestan* (Makhachkala), collection R-209, inv. 1, file 2, p. 11, 64, 64 rev.

32 *Central State Archive of the Republic of Dagestan* (Makhachkala), collection P-1, inv. 2, file 2054, p. 195; see also: Khashayev H.-M., *Perezhitki shariata i vrednykh adatov i bor’by s nimi* [The relics of Shariah and harmful customs, and the fight against them] (Makhachkala: Obshchestvo “Znanie”, 1957), p. 3, 10.



mony, *zakat* taxes and the cult of Muslim saints, Soviet mass media became increasingly sympathetic to the highland customs of honouring one's elders, the peaceful settlement of disputes between neighbours, and their thrifty attitude to communal property.<sup>33</sup> It was decided that "good" *'adats* should be put to the service of Soviet power. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the question of replacing Muslim family customs with Soviet customs was a seriously disputed one. One of the vital tasks of state cultural policy was the "creation of Socialist customs, rites and traditions and their adoption."<sup>34</sup>

In practice this did not mean legalising particular local rituals but introducing unofficial public institutions in the *kolkhoz* village. In the 1960s–1970s, councils of elders (*sovety stareyshin*) were created within village soviets in both highland and lowland collective and state farms in Dagestan. They were supposed to assist the people's courts and *selsoviets* in maintaining public order, to settle conflicts between members of *kolkhozes* and *sovhozes*, to prevent, to the extent possible, cases of blood feud, to maintain roads, irrigation canals, and village cultural centres, and to prevent embezzlement of *kolkhoz* property. In Novolaksky district, villagers resettled from the highlands formed a district-wide council of elders tasked with coordinating the actions of *selsoviets* in this matter.<sup>35</sup> Village committees were created in the 1950s–1970s to promote "good *'adats*" and eradicate "harmful traditions... incompatible with the socialist way of life". These committees comprised men aged between 60 and 70 years of age, most of them former red partisans, participants in the establishment of Soviet power in the highlands, communists and Komsomol members in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>36</sup>

## STATE-COMMISSIONED ETHNOGRAPHY OF TRADITIONALISM

The policy of the Soviet state on traditions and customs in Dagestan was not merely a product of tactical and political concerns. It respected learning. The

33 See, for example, *Dagestanskaya Pravda* [*Dagestani pravda*], 28.04, 23.11.1979; 07.05.1982; 26.02.1983; 28.06.1984; 30.11.1985 and other issues from 1960–1989.

34 Islammagomedov A.I., Sergeeva G.A. (eds.-in-chief), *Traditsionnoye i novoye v sovremennom byte i kulture dagestantsev pereselentsev* [*Tradition and novelty in contemporary life and culture of Dagestani resettlers*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), p. 214–215.

35 Islammagomedov A.I., Sergeeva G.A. (eds.-in-chief), *Traditsionnoye i novoye v sovremennom byte i kulture dagestantsev pereselentsev*, p. 221.

36 For more see Bobrovnikov V.O., *Musul'mane Severnogo Kavkaza: obychai, pravo, nasilie (ocherki po istorii i etnografii prava nagornogo Dagestana)* [*Custom, law and violence between the North Caucasus Muslims (studies in legal history and anthropology of Highland Dagestan)*] (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 2002), p. 233–234.



Bolsheviks always followed Karl Marx's injunction that the social sciences should have practical application and serve society and the task of its revolutionary transformation. They made the famous statement from Marx's rough draft their motto, "The philosophers (i.e. scientists as such. – *VB.*) have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."<sup>37</sup> This message became a watchword for early Soviet ethnographers. The great authority in the Russian ethnography of that time was Vladimir Bogoraz who urged ethnographers to combine field research with participation in reconstructing the borderlands and conducting cultural and educational work among the peoples they studied. In ethnography, "as the science of peoples and human society in general", he saw "the true fundamentals for all sociological and social research".<sup>38</sup> Bogoraz's ideas and research methods had enormous influence on interwar Soviet ethnography in general. Ethnographers became the guides of Soviet policy in the Eastern borderlands of the country.

After WWII, ethnographers would no longer participate so actively in drafting Soviet cultural, social, and legal reforms. As Aleksey Nikishenkov has rightly noted, research into the non-governmental norms of social relations "sort of disappeared from the legal field and was no longer conducted as part of the analysis of 'relics' of ancient forms of tribal and community-based organisation and ancient matrimonial relations."<sup>39</sup> During the second third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ethnographers gradually gave way to lawyers in the Northern Caucasus. Already in the 1920s, legal experts had participated in preparing the aforementioned Chapter X of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR "On crimes that constitute remnants of tribal customs". Later, in cooperation with prosecutors, they developed specific control measures to combat phenomena the Soviet legal literature defines as "domestic crimes." From the 1960s on, most legal studies of the modern socio-normative culture of the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus were conducted at the All-Union Institute for Researching Reasons and Developing Measures for Crime Prevention, affiliated with the Procurator General of the USSR.<sup>40</sup>

37 Marx K., ["Theses on Feuerbach"], in Marx K., Engels F., *Sochineniya [Works]*, ed. by V. Adoratsky, (Moscow: 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Partynoye izdatel'stvo, 1933), vol. IV, p. 591.

38 Bogoraz V.G., "Ob izuchenii i ohrane okrainnykh narodov ["On the study and protection of borderland peoples"], *Zhizn' natsionalnostey [Life of nationalities]*, 3-4 (1923), p. 176.

39 Nikishenkov A.A., "Obychnoye pravo i problemy ego bibliografii" ["Customary law and issues of its bibliography"] in Nikishenkov A.A., *Obychnoye pravo narodov Rossii. Bibliograficheskiy ukazatel'* [Customary law of Russia's peoples. Bibliographical index], ed. by Yu. I. Semenov, (Moscow: Staryi sad, 1998), p. 4.

40 For more see Babich I.L., *Evolyutsiya pravovoy kultury adygov (1860–1990-e gody) [Evolution of the Adygs' legal culture in the 1860s–1990s]* (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii RAN, 1999), p. 10–13. For a bibliography of works by Soviet lawyers on customary law and on blood feud, in particular, see Babich I.L., *Op.cit.* p. 24–27.





Such “research and practice” legal studies were conducted in Makhachkala and other republic centres in the Northern Caucasus. The specific feature of Dagestan was the involvement of Dagestani ethnographers and historians in this work. As early as the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they included well-known experts on the socio-normative culture of the Northern Caucasus peoples, for example an apprentice of Maksim Kovalevsky (1851 – 1916), the ethnographer of law and lawyer Bashir Dalgat (1870 – 1934). It wasn’t rare for former historians and ethnographers to become practicing lawyers or officials of the Supreme Court or the Procurator’s office of the Republic. There were very few such professionals and almost all of them ended up leaving academia for politics. Among the well-known Dagestani historians, ethnographers and lawyers affiliated with the Soviet state, one figure deserves a special mention, the famous Dagestani *‘adat* expert Hadzhi-Murad Khashayev, who ran the office of the Prosecutor General of the DASSR in the second half of the 1950s.<sup>41</sup> The Dagestani lawyer and historian A.B. Baymurzaev, who did research into sharia trials in the USSR, was an investigator at the Prosecutor’s office for some time. Another researcher of Dagestani *‘adat* and *Shariah*, Avadzi Omarov, was in charge of the Supreme Court of the DASSR in 1970–1995.

Although historians of law replaced ethnographers as state experts in studying legal customs, ethnographic theory greatly influenced approaches in the field. The very notion of ‘tradition’ was taken over from the vocabulary of the 19<sup>th</sup> century evolutionist school. Its epistemology traces back to talk of “survivals”, as theorized by the well-known ethnographer Edward Tylor. Soviet ethnographers rethought it and made it a key term in Soviet policy toward legal customs in the North Caucasus.<sup>42</sup> They considered rite a form of the existence of traditions, while the rite’s content was custom. Soviet ethnographers divided traditions into positive, neutral and negative. Most Soviet Russian ethnologists believed “the normative role of tradition is gradually diminishing in the historical process.”<sup>43</sup>

41 *Khashayev, Hadzhi-Murad Omarovich. 1909–1971. Bibliografiya [Khashayev, Hadzhi-Murad Omarovich. 1909–1971. Bibliography]* (Makhachkala: Dagestanskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1980).

42 For more detail, see my article, Bobrovnikov V., “From Collective Farm to Islamic Museum? Deconstructing the Narrative of Highlander Traditions in Dagestan”, in F. Mühlfried, S. Sokolovsky (eds.), *Exploring the Edge of Empire. Socialist Era Anthropology in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Berlin, Münster, Wien, Zürich. London: LIT, Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia, 25 (2011), p. 99–117.

43 Pershits A.I., “Traditsii” [“Traditions”], in Tishkov V.A. (ed.), *Narody Rossii. Encyclopedia [Encyclopaedia of Russia's peoples]* (Moscow: Great Russian Encyclopaedia, 1994), p. 462. See also: Pershits A.I., “Problemy teorii traditsii glazami etnografa” [“Problems of the theory of tradition through the eyes of an ethnographer”], *Sovetskaya etnografiya [Soviet ethnography]*, 3 (1981), p. 45–46.



This definition shows well how the notion of ‘tradition’ was placed beyond the boundaries of history. If, according to the logic of the evolutionist Marxist paradigm, a society was developing progressively, moving from a simpler to a higher and more complex formation, then traditions were clearly pushing back against this or any other development. Changes in tradition should only aim at their gradual obsolescence or deterioration. At the same time the dominant approach of Soviet ethnography was primordialist, stipulating that there were no societies without traditions. The latter were considered the basis on which national law and culture were built. The main goal of ethnographic investigation was to investigate “people’s traditions”, even where there were none! Insofar as Muslim highlanders did not accept different aspects of officious Soviet culture and lifestyle, it was explained as evidence of the resilience of local pre-Soviet traditions. Ethnographers were expected to assist the “revival” of the “good” traditions of post-war Dagestani (and North Caucasus) *kolkhoz* villages, which were to be local in form but socialist in content.<sup>44</sup>

In spite of how profoundly anachronistic this positivist thesis about the traditional nature of the Northern Caucasus society was, it continued to have a certain influence on the post-Soviet Russian science, society and politics. Under the influence of the Soviet school of ethnography, in academia and the circles surrounding it, a misconception spread about the ‘traditional character’ of the highlanders’ society. In exaggerated but naked form, it remains present in Moscow journalists’ speculations about Dagestan and the Northern Caucasus. This stereotypical idea may be briefly described as follows: in the Caucasus everybody lives according to traditions; each individual is obliged to conform to custom (*‘adat*), so that the ethnographer’s job is to record the ancient customs and help the authorities to use *‘adat* to civilise the “wild highlanders”. For the sake of illustration, we offer this representative opinion, “Chechen society is still largely pre-state, traditional. It lives according to customary law, not written law...”<sup>45</sup> Hundreds, if not thousands of such strange insinuations may be found scattered even today in the Moscow press and on the Internet,

44 Hobsbawm E., “Inventing Traditions”, in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 1–14.

45 Fadin A., “Islamskiy poryadok protiv anarhii” [“Islamic order against anarchy”], *Obshchaya gazeta* [General newspaper], 18–24.09.1997. See also Kovalskaya G., “Posle voyny” [“After the war”], *Itogi* [Results], 10.09.1996; Tsipko A., “Torzhestva v Chechne stali simbolom raspada strany” [“Celebrations in Chechnya become a symbol of the collapse of the country”], *Novaya Gazeta* [New newspaper]. 13.02.1997; Snegirev Yu., “El Vahhab prishel v Dagestan” [“El Wahhab arrived in Dagestan”], *Izvestiya* [News]. 19.02.1998; Bikalov E., “Dzhihad do poslednego barrelya” [“Jihad until the last barrel”], *Stringer*, November, 2000, p. 18–19, etc.



along with equally absurd recommendations on how to civilise the Muslims of the region.

But one should not overestimate the influence of mass media stereotypes on Russian scholarship and politics either. Today, the myth of the traditionalism of the Dagestan highlander is most popular with ordinary media consumers who know the North Caucasus. Almost no scholars specialized in this region share this misconception. At the same time, one must not underestimate the influence Soviet ethnography has had on Russian legal studies and legislation, both in the centre and in the regions. And these are indeed rooted in the Soviet era. The ways this influence has been exerted were various. It is worth noting that Presidents Yeltsin and Putin and other members of the government and top state officials of the 1990s and early 2000s referred to professional ethnographers such as the late Galina Starovoytova and Andrey Loginov. Due to their influence, positivist ethnographical clichés (albeit stripped of their Marxist form) were introduced into post-Communist legislation. This in turn led to the creation of legal nonsenses like the discourse of traditional Islam analysed in this paper. It is no coincidence that the key term is ‘traditions’.

### INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION: THE SPECTRE OF ‘TRADITIONAL ISLAM’ HAUNTING THE POST-SOVIET NORTHERN CAUCASUS

After the collapse of the Soviet regime and state supported scholarship, certain changes occurred in the understanding of ‘traditions’. Soviet Marxist rhetoric was forgotten. There appeared new key notions of post-Soviet traditional discourse in the region, including equally *a priori* “civilisational categories” like “highlanders’ traditions”, “Islamic revival” and “Shariah”. This so-called civilisational approach, so fashionable among contemporary Russian scholars over recent decades, is essentially just a modified formational “five-piece” pattern. Local traditions were rethought in it from a positive point of view. From “harmful relics of the past”, they were turned into a source of “spiritual revival” and “solidarity” between Dagestan and the other federal subjects of Russia. By the final years of the Soviet era a trend had already emerged of applying the term ‘tradition’ to



all local institutions and practices without exception.<sup>46</sup> This approach gave birth to research literature of dubious scientific value. Even serious historians became fascinated with this traditionalist fashion.<sup>47</sup>

From the second half of the 1990s on, the official structures of the regional muftiates, legalised by the regional and federal governments, themselves came to be known as 'traditional'. In different regions of post-Soviet Russia, the traditionalist religious discourse had its own peculiar features. In contrast to the Volga-Urals region,<sup>48</sup> in Dagestan it did not enter the vocabulary of Muslim clerics who relied on local traditions. Only journalists, political experts, and local politicians close to the muftiate have propagated traditional Islam, which, in their opinion, is based on the network of Sufi brotherhoods, mostly the Naqshbandiyya, Khalidiyya, and Mahmudiyya, with the late sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi (1937–2012) as their head.<sup>49</sup>

Contemporary Muslim missionary literature (*da'wah*) adopted a somewhat pejorative attitude towards this official legal term of 'traditional religion'. Religious dissidents, often referred to as Wahhabis or Salafis, place it outside Islam, as the faith of infidels (Arab. *kuffar*). For instance, a well-known ideologist of the Dagestani Salafis Bagauddin Magomedov considers the various sorts of traditionalist, whether the followers of Sufi sheikhs, adherents of the cult of the Prophet and other saints, or uninformed commoners, to be enemies of pure Islam. At the same time, under the influence of Soviet atheistic clichés, he depicts them as obstinate religious fanatics.<sup>50</sup> From the perspective of Shariah-based prohibitions, Magomedov defines traditional religion, which he argues is simply following the line of ignorant ancestors, as illegal innovation (Arab. *bid'ah*) without foundation in the Qur'an or Islamic tradition (the *Sunnah* of the Prophet).<sup>51</sup>

46 Islammagomedov A.I., Sergeeva G.A. (eds.-in-chief), *Traditsionnoye i novoye v sovremennom byte i kulture dagestantsev pereselentsev [Tradition and novelty in contemporary life and culture of Dagestani resettlers]* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), p. 9.

47 See, for example, Magomedov R.M., *Edinstvo narodov – velikoye blago [The unity of peoples is a great blessing]* (Makhachkala: Dagestanskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 2004), p. 36–38.

48 For more on this, see the article by L.I. Almazova and A.M. Akhunov "In Search of traditional Islam in Tatarstan: Between National Project and Universalist Theories" in this edited volume.

49 See, for example, Khanbabaev K.M., "Islam v duhovnoy i obshchestvennoy zhizni narodov Dagestana" ["Islam in the spiritual and social life of Dagestan's peoples"], *Nauka i sotsial'nyi progress [Science and social progress]*, 1997, p. 61–63.

50 Abdullah Muhammad al-Dagestani, *Litso sufizma v svete ubezhdenny lyudey sunny i dzhamaa (ahl sunna va dzhamaa) [The face of Sufism in the light of the views of the people of the Sunnah and Jama'ah (Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah)]* (Moscow: Badr, 2006), p. 9–10.

51 Abdullah Muhammad al-Dagestani, *Litso sufizma v svete ubezhdenny lyudey sunny i dzha-*



The opponents of the Salafis, who refer to them with the no less pejorative nickname of Wahhabis, are sure that the purest form of Islam has been kept only in the Northern Caucasus, essentially in Dagestan. They believe Sufism, in the form of the Naqshbandiyya, Khalidiyya, and Mahmoudiyya brotherhoods dominant in post-Soviet Dagestan, to belong to the most valuable part of the Islamic legacy. They also avoid speaking of traditional Islam, however, in their missionary Russian-language literature, just like their Salafi rivals. Instead, they use Islamic terms of Arabic origin, as more appropriate and familiar to Muslims. It is noteworthy that both the traditionalists and the Salafis define themselves as “adherents of the Islamic tradition who unite upon it” (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama’a*).<sup>52</sup>

In this respect, the case of a fervent preacher of traditional Islamic and Sufi values from Dagestan, Kuramuhhammad-hajji Ramazanov (1956–2007), is typical. He was in charge of the canonical department of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Dagestan or over ten years and perished in a terrorist attack, the organization of which traditionalists have attributed to the Wahhabis. He authored numerous sermons, lectures, brochures and other works on the call to Islam, in which he blamed both Salafis and academic scholars from Russia and the Middle East for their “wrong” interpretations of Islam. The language of his works, their themes and even arguments are surprisingly reminiscent of the propagandist works against traditional Islam composed by Bagauddin Magomedov and other North Caucasian Salafis. Like them, he quotes exclusively from the Qur’an and the *hadiths*, while ignoring the rich Dagestani Arabic-language tradition, only occasionally mentioning the names of Shafi’i legal scholars and Sufi masters from the Middle East and Dagestan. At the same time, Ramazanov refers to “religious traditions” in a clearly negative sense, for instance in describing the pagan customs and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad’s religious opponents in pre-Islamic Mecca.<sup>53</sup> Ramazanov and like-minded thinkers clearly avoid using any Russian-language definitions for their own traditionalist school.

From the scientific and legal points of view, the dichotomy of ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ Islam in Dagestan is beneath criticism. It is incorrectly

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*maata (ahl sunna va dzhamaa)*, p. 435–441.

52 For more on this, see article by D.A. Shagaviev “The Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jama’ah and the Grozny fatwa” in this edited volume.

53 Ramazanov K., Sultanmagomedov S.N., Gadzhiev M.P., *Azbuka islama. Uchebno-metodicheskoye posobiye po osnovam islama dlya nachinayushchih* [*The ABC of Islam. Teaching aid on the basics of Islam for beginners*] (Makhachkala: Duhovnoe upravlenie musul’man Dagestana, 2005), p. 40.



posed. Academic scholars long ago rejected the division of societies into traditional and modern.<sup>54</sup> In a well-known collection of articles edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger from 1983, historians of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe established that its so-called state traditions were actually invented during the modern era.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, similar phenomena have been found in other regions with a colonial or Soviet past. Nor can one reduce the diversity of regional forms of Islam to an allegedly “classical” or “national” version, as is clear to anyone engaged in Islamic studies.

In the Russian North Caucasus, homogeneous traditional Islam is a fictional construct. Both the ‘traditionalists’ and their Salafi opponents are divided into a large number of competing religious factions of varying religious and political orientations. Muslims of the Northern Caucasus are not just encountering modernisation, as certain naive political scientists seem to think.<sup>56</sup> They have been living under continuous transformation for more than two centuries. Colonial modernization of local Muslim societies began with peasant and judiciary reforms under late tsarist rule in the second third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Post-reform village communities were constructed by imperial lawmakers after the Russian peasant pattern and became the basis for collectivisation. Urbanisation of the region took place during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The mass resettlement of Dagestani highlanders to the plains started in the 1950s, not the 1990s. And the 1960s saw the start of massive migration from rural districts to the growing cities in the North Caucasus and other areas of the USSR, mainly southern and central Russia. Similar movements of Muslim populations had happened in the North-West Caucasus almost a hundred years earlier, during the final third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Soviet modernisation failed to destroy religion as planned. But religious practices and beliefs were much changed, and society was secularized and Russified.<sup>57</sup> The

54 See, for example, Tipps D., “Modernization theory and the comparative study of societies: A critical perspective”, *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, 15 (2) (1973), p. 199–226; Latour B., *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes. Essai d’anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006); Abashin S.N., *Sovetskiy kishlak: Mezhdú kolonializmom i modernizatsiyey* [Soviet oriental village between colonialism and modernization] (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 2015), p. 10–27.

55 Hobsbawm E., Ranger T. (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

56 Starodubrovskaya I., “Islamskaya reformatsiya: evristicheskaya tsennost’ podhoda” [“Islamic Reformation: heuristic value of the approach”], *Gosudarstvo, religiya, tserkov v Rossii i za rubezhom* [State, religion, and church in Russia and Worldwide], 3 (2017), p. 31.

57 For more see Bobrovnikov V., “Withering Heights. The Re-Islamization of a Kolkhoz Village in Dagestan: a Micro-History”, and Shikhaliev Sh., “Downward mobility and spiritual life: The Development of Sufism in the context of migrations in Dagestan, 1940s–2000s”, both in S.A. Dudoignon, C. Noack (eds.), *Allah’s Kolkhozes. Migration, De-Stalinisation, Privatisation,*

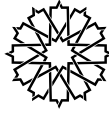


vast majority of so-called “Muslim highlanders” have not been mountaineers for generations. The last three or even four generations of Dagestani Muslims have been living under the legal framework of a secular Russian state. Legal and social traditions and the forms and social role of Islam have changed irreversibly.

Last but not least, one should keep in mind the possible legal complications of the discourse on traditional Islam. By confusing the terms ‘legal’ and ‘traditional’ in federal and Dagestani legislation, the state has supported both positive and negative and even non-existent normative principles and practices, bringing about change to the forms and functions of pre-Soviet ‘tradition’ in Dagestani society. Some no longer exist. Some have become illegal. Some barely fit within the republican or national legal system. Some Muslim manners and customs generally perceived as Islamic, such as polygyny or bride price, have no direct relation to Islam whatsoever and are not even widespread in the region. A reasonable question arises: should the state support all local “Islamic traditions” without exception? Siding with the Muftiate of the Republic of Dagestan against its ideological opponents, Russian lawmakers do not regulate so much as they translate internal conflicts between competing local factions or Muslim communities to the republican and even national level.

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*and the New Muslim Congregations in the Soviet Realm (1950s–2000s)*, (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2014), p. 367–420.



# ‘Traditional Islam’ in Crimean Tatar Discourse and Politics

*Elmira Muratova*

## ABSTRACT

This paper treats the analysis of the concept of traditional Islam in Crimean Tatar discourse and politics. It shows how this discourse and politics were transformed under the influence of political change in Crimea in 2014. The concept of traditional Islam, which did not have a wide circulation in religious circles in post-Soviet Crimea, began to occupy an increasingly noticeable place in the rhetoric of official Islamic religious leaders, who have used it as a tool for eliminating competitors and monopolising influence in the Muslim public sphere. This concept has become closely linked to Russian official policy for combating extremism. This article uses the evolution of the concept in a particular region to illustrate the specifics of state-Islamic relations in the Russian Federation. It uses research data from interviews, focus-groups and the content-analysis of official statements by Islamic leaders.

Key words: traditional Islam, Crimea, Crimean Tatars, discourse, Russia

## INTRODUCTION

After the USSR’s collapse, Crimea developed as an autonomous republic under the Ukrainian state. The specifics of its religious policy were primarily determined by the Ukraine’s relatively liberal legislation in the





sphere.<sup>1</sup> The liberal nature of these laws had a major impact on processes within the country's Muslim ummah. As a region with a large Muslim population,<sup>2</sup> Crimea demonstrated an impressive diversity of Islamic movements, practices and discourses. Official and unofficial Islamic structures used their full arsenal of resources (institutional, financial, informational, etc.) to compete for influence over Crimean Muslims. The state mostly acted as a passive onlooker, only occasionally interfering in processes inside the Muslim community. The problem of the division of Crimean Muslims into the followers of various movements were primarily an 'internal matter' for Crimean Tatar ethnic institutes and had little or no reflection within official discourse.

The situation began changing in the spring of 2014. Russia's entry into Crimea was accompanied by a change in the political and legal foundations of the Crimean people's life, as well as changes in the power balance of the peninsula's Muslim community and transformation of its discourses. After some five years of de-facto Russian control of the peninsula, one can state that its model of state-Islamic relations has been introduced into Crimea in full measure. This is evident in how government bodies communicate with official Islamic institutes, in public discourse on 'traditional vs. non-traditional' Islamic movements, and in the legal regulation of their activities. The 'struggle against extremism' launched by the Russian government has become an integral part of new Crimean realities. These processes of transformation affecting the Islamic ummah of Crimea since its status changed cast a long shadow over this study, the aim of which is to present the situation regarding the discourse of traditional Islam both before and after the events of 2014.

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- 1 In Ukrainian legislation, all religions, faiths and religious organisations are equal before the law, with no special role given any of them. Nor is it mandatory to inform government bodies of the creation of a religious community. The charter of a religious community may be registered by the citizens who formed it, so long as they number no fewer than ten individuals over the age of 18. No confirmation of this religious group having existed in a given area for a given period of time is required. Finally, Ukrainian legislation does not use the term 'extremism'. Instead, liability is incurred for concrete violations by concrete persons. See the Law of Ukraine "On freedom of conscience and religious organisations" dated 23.04.1991.
  - 2 According to various estimates, as of 2014 there were about 250-300,000 Crimean Tatars in Crimea. According to the Ukrainian census of 2001, the population of Crimean Tatars was about 243,000 people (Osaulenko, O.G. (ed.) *Natsional'nyi sklad naseleennya Ukrainy ta yogo movni oznaki za danyimi Vseukrains'kogo perepisu naseleennya 2001 r.* [*National composition of the population of Ukraine and their language characteristics based on the data of the 2001 Ukrainian census*] (Kiev: State Committee of Statistics of Ukraine, 2003). Unofficial data of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People brought the figure to 300,000. In percentage terms, this is between 12% and 15% of Crimea's population.



This article was written using data from field research (both published and unpublished) by the author over the past seven years, the results of two focus group studies, *Proshloye, nastoyashcheye i budushcheye krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma* [The past, present and future of Crimean Tatars in the discourse of the Muslim community of Crimea] (2012) and *Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskih tatar* [Values and needs of Crimean Tatars] (2017–2019), and content analysis of materials from the Crimean mass media. In preparing this article, the author relied on works of such researchers as S. Chervonnaya,<sup>3</sup> V. Grigoryants,<sup>4</sup> A. Bulatov,<sup>5</sup> A. Bogomolov,<sup>6</sup> etc., who have studied various aspects of relations between the ethnic institutes of the Crimean Tatars and the representatives of the so-called ‘Islamic opposition’ in Crimea.

The article has three parts. The first part shows the state of Crimean Tatar discourses on ‘native vs. alien’ Islam in the post-Soviet period of Crimean history. The second is devoted to analysis of the discourse of traditional Islam at two official religious centres of the peninsula’s Muslims. Finally, the third part of the paper shows changes in the discourse and politics of Crimean Muslims since the arrival of Russia in post-Soviet Crimea.

## ‘NATIVE VS. ALIEN’ ISLAM IN POST-SOVIET CRIMEA

The problem of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam was first publicly raised in Crimea’s Muslim community only in the late 1990s. Before that time, Crimean

- 3 Chervonnaya S.M., “Vozvrashchenie krymskotatarskogo naroda: problemy etnokul’turnogo vozrozhdeniya” [“Return of the Crimean Tatar people: problems of ethnic and cultural revival”], in *Krymskotatarskoe natsional’noe dvizhenie* [Crimean Tatar national movement], 4 (1994-1997), M.N. Guboklo (ed.) (Moscow, 1997); Chervonnaya S.M., “Islamskiy faktor v natsional’nom i pravozashchitnom dvizhenii krymskih tatar (1990-e gody)” [“Islamic factor in national and human rights movement of the Crimean Tatars (1990-s)”] in *Islam v Evrazii: sovremennyye eticheskie i esteticheskie kontseptsii sunnitskogo islama, ih transformatsiya v massovom soznanii i vyrazhenie v iskusstve musul'manskikh narodov Rossii* [Islam in Eurasia: modern ethical and aesthetic concepts of Sunni Islam, their transformation in the mass consciousness and expression in the art of the Muslim peoples of Russia] (Moscow: Progress-Tradition, 2001), p. 304-339.
- 4 Grigoryants V. E., *O nekotorykh osobennostyakh protsessa vozrozhdeniya islama v Krymu (1989-2001)* [On some features of the process of Islamic revival in Crimea (1989-2001)] (Simferopol, 2002).
- 5 Bulatov A., “Vozrozhdenie islama v Krymu: sovremennost’, problemy, perspektiva” [“Revival of Islam in Crimea: modernity, problems, perspective”], *Golos Kryma*, 2004, 1 January; Bulatov A., “Islam v Krymu: ot tragicheskogo proshlogo k problemam sovremennosti” [“Islam in Crimea: from the tragic past to the problems of our time”], <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/islamic/?4166>, accessed 25 September 2019.
- 6 Bogomolov A.V. et.al. *Islamskaya identichnost’ v Ukraine* [Islamic identity in Ukraine] (Kiev: Stilos, 2006).



Tatars' religious and political organisations and leaders were busy tackling a range of social, economic, political and legal issues connected with resettling Crimean Tatars returning from Soviet mass deportation.<sup>7</sup> The agenda included such questions as ensuring Ukrainian citizenship and plots of land for the construction of private housing, obtaining a quota in the Crimean parliament, etc. Decision-making on these questions took place in the 1990s against a background of religious revival, with the creation of Islamic communities, the restoration of old mosques and building of new ones, and the opening of Islamic educational institutions.

Substantial assistance to revitalising the religious life of Crimean Muslims was provided by Islamic countries and organisations. Their help was accepted by Crimean Tatars with gratitude and perceived as a manifestation of Islamic solidarity. Given the low level of religious literacy among Crimean Tatars, due to years of atheist propaganda and the consequences of deportation, foreign missionaries, who freely and easily quoted *surahs* from the Qur'an and the *hadiths* of the Prophet Muhammad, inspired unreflecting respect and authority in the minds of Crimean Tatars. In the early 1990s few in Crimea were thinking about the range of religious movements within Islam or their specific features.

The ambiguous nature of these foreign missionaries' activities only became evident some years later, by which time the adherents of all kinds of movements and groups had appeared among the Crimean Tatars. Some proceeded to criticise the religious rites and traditions of the people and contrasting themselves with the majority. The problem was quite serious by the late 1990s, as the adherents of some movements had formed relatively stable groups with their own structures, discourses and practices. They started to question the authority of the political and religious institutes of the Crimean Tatars – the Mejlis<sup>8</sup> and muftiate<sup>9</sup> – and called for

7 In May of 1944 the entire Crimean Tatar people was deported from Crimea on charges of collaboration and resettled in Uzbekistan, the Urals and other republics and regions of the USSR. Most Crimean Tatars were able to return to Crimea only in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

8 The Mejlis is a representative administrative body of the Crimean Tatars formed in 1991 during the II Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People. It consists of 33 people elected by delegates of the national congress. For a long time (1991–2013) the Mejlis was chaired by Soviet dissident Mustafa Dzhemilev. In 2013 he was replaced by Refat Chubarov. In 2016, after the arrival of Russia in Crimea, the Mejlis was included on the list of extremist organisations and prohibited in the Russian Federation.

9 The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (DUMK), or the Crimean Muftiate, is a centralised Islamic organisation created in 1992 to coordinate processes in the religious life of Crimean Tatars. The muftiate is headed by the mufti, who is elected by the delegates of the Qurultay of the Muslims of Crimea. There have been three muftis: Seitzdzhelil Ibragimov (1992–1995), Nuri Mustafaev (1995–1999), Emirali Ablaev (since 1999).



their initiatives to be ignored. Adherents of the Salafi movement<sup>10</sup> and the Islamic party of *Hizb at-Tahrir*<sup>11</sup> urged Crimean Tatars to boycott elections or protest marches organised by the Mejlis and criticised the muftiate for its lack of independence and 'wrong' interpretation of Islam. They also ceased to rely on the calendar of religious events and holidays offered by DUMK. This in particular led to disagreement between Muslims over the question of when to start the Islamic holidays of *Oraza-bayram* (*Eid al-Fitr*) and *Qurban-bayram* (*Eid al-Adha*). In some mosques these celebrations started on the day determined by the muftiate, while in others it was a day later.<sup>12</sup> All this forced the political and religious leaders of the Crimean Tatars to focus on the situation in the religious sphere and start speaking out about the unacceptability of a schism amongst Crimean Muslims and the importance of preserving their religious traditions.

The first such statement was a speech by the mufti of DUMK Nuri Mustafaev at the II Qurultay of the Muslims of Crimea, on December 4, 1999, in Simferopol. In his summary report he drew the audience's attention to the negative influence of foreign religious movements on the preservation and revival of the religious customs and traditions of Crimean Tatars.<sup>13</sup> He said that the discrepancies that had affected the beginning of Ramadan and of the *Eid al-Fitr* celebrations a year before had been the result of the activities of foreign missionaries. The mufti appealed to his brothers in faith, asking them not to forget or reject the legacy of their ancestors – traditions established in Crimea on the basis of Islam and that had played such an important role in the formation of Crimean Tatar ethnic culture and identity.<sup>14</sup>

10 The Arabic word '*salafiya*' means return to the origins of the Islamic tradition and the example of the first Muslims – the pious predecessors (*as-salaf as-salih*). Crimean Tatars call Salafis *Wahhabis* (after the 18<sup>th</sup> century Arabian Islamic reformer Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab).

11 *Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami* (the Islamic Party of Liberation) is an international pan-Islamic political party founded in 1953 in Jerusalem by judge of the local Shariah appeal court Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani. Its declared goal is the re-establishment of a fair and just Islamic way of life and the Islamic state (Caliphate), as well as the implementation of the Islamic system in it.

12 When determining the first and last days of Ramadan fasting, the Muftiate of Crimea relies on astronomical calculations, while its opponents rely on direct observation of the Moon.

13 What is meant here by traditions are primarily the custom of collective recitation of the Qur'an (*du'a*) on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup> and other days after a death, as well as the funeral (*janazah*) and matrimonial (*nikah*) rites of Crimean Tatars, all of which are criticised by Salafis for not conforming to the Islam of the 'pious predecessors' period. To this one may add the refusal of Salafis and members of *Hizb at-Tahrir* (*Hizbs*) to follow the Hanafi *madhab* when praying, which is especially obvious at Friday prayers in mosques.

14 Kerimova G., "Krymskie tatarskie izbrali novogo muftiya" ["Crimean Tatars have elected the new mufti"], *Avdet*, 1999, 14 December.



The chairman of the Mejlis Mustafa Dzhemilev's speech at the Qurultay was very similar in tone. He thanked all the Islamic countries that had supported the Crimean Tatar people but declared that Crimean Tatars would not be led by the nose by the representatives of religious movements and would live in accordance with the traditions of their ancestors instead. He also expressed the right of Crimean Muslims to exclude from membership any members of the muftiate who tried to impose alien customs on Crimean Muslims or stir up religious discord.<sup>15</sup>

Over the following several years, discussion inside the Crimean Tatar community on 'alien' movements and ideologies became increasingly focused and serious. An illustrative event was a meeting of mufti Emirali Ablaev, M. Dzhemilev, and other representatives of the Mejlis with the Crimean Tatar population of the village of Plodovoe in the Bakhchysarai district, which took place on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001. At this meeting, which more than 500 villagers attended, the head of the local mejlis,<sup>16</sup> A. Abdullaev, noted:

Four years ago the first supporters of the so-called 'new movement in Islam' appeared amongst us here in the village of Plodovoe. This new movement is based on an ideology imposed on us by Arab missionaries. Its adherents consider only those who follow them to be Muslims and refer to everyone else as 'kafirs' (infidels). This movement runs contrary to our national traditions, customs and rites, established over thousands of years. These people respect no one and listen to no one except their own teachers.<sup>17</sup>

Mufti Emirali Ablaev's speech at the meeting was even more emotional:

The Crimean Tatars, living far away from their homeland, dying of hunger and disease in the hovels that were all they had to live in, did not fall to their knees or demean themselves in front of anybody. They did not forget their language, their customs, or their traditions, and did not betray the national movement of the Crimean Tatars, of those who devoted their lives to reviving our nation. Today, however, there are those among us who hold emissaries from a faraway land closer and dearer than their own people, who are ready to undo and abandon everything, their ethnicity, their ancestors, their national customs and traditions.<sup>18</sup>

15 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessy vozrozhdeniya [Islam in contemporary Crimea: indicators and problem of revival]* (Simferopol: Elinio, 2008), p. 133.

16 The Mejlis system had a multi-level structure. Besides the central Mejlis (Milli Mejlis) in Simferopol, there were regional offices at the administrative centres of the Republic and local mejlises in each residential area with a compact Crimean Tatar population.

17 "Krymskie tatory dolzhny zashchitit' svoe edinstvo (informatsionnaya sluzhba Bakhchisaraiskogo regional'nogo medzhlisa)" ["Crimean Tatars must protect their unity (information service of the Bakhchysarai regional Majlis)"], *Golos Kryma*, 2001, 16 February.

18 "Krymskie tatory dolzhny zashchitit' svoe edinstvo..."



In his speech at the meeting, Dzhemilev called for the unity of the Crimean Tatars to be protected and a stand taken against the Arab emissaries spreading foreign ideologies. As early as March 2001 Dzhemilev held a briefing with the editors-in-chief of the Crimean Tatar mass media to organise awareness-raising activities for the media, which they supervised, in order to counter further distribution of ‘Wahhabi ideas’.<sup>19</sup>

The tensions between the official Crimean Tatar structures and the representatives of ‘alien’ Islamic movements became so significant that discussion of them was put on the agenda of the national congress. During the first session of the IV Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People, on November 11, 2001, in Simferopol, the delegates discussed and then adopted a statement “On the revival of the religious life of the Crimean Tatars and the preservation of religious tolerance in Crimea.” The statement contained a call to preserve the Islamic norms and customs that are traditional among the Crimean Tatars and have been passed “by previous generations of Muslims of Crimea,” and for condemnation of the activities of the Islamic missionaries who were criticising these norms and customs.<sup>20</sup>

At following Qurultays of the Crimean Tatar People, criticism of the activities of the various Islamic movements in Crimea gained even more traction. In Dzhemilev’s summary report at the third session of the IV Qurultay (September 10-12, 2004), he critically analyses the activities of the Islamic opposition in Crimea, represented by the adherents of Salafism and the *Hizb at-Tahrir* organisation. As a result, the Qurultay adopted an “Address to the Muslims of Crimea,” calling for unified efforts to revive and preserve the ‘true’ values of Islam, values that had been “the prop and salvation of our people, during both the most glorious and the most tragic periods of our history.”<sup>21</sup>

The tone and content of Dzhemilev’s speech at the next and fourth session of the IV Qurultay (December 9, 2005) show the degree of the Mejlis’s concern over the activities of the religious opposition in Crimea. In a part of his speech entitled “Religious sects in Crimea,” the chairman of the Mejlis presented a general picture of these groups’ activities, with quantitative indicators of their membership and an outline of their ideo-

19 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya [Islam in contemporary Crimea: indicators and problem of revival]* (Simferopol: Elinio, 2008), p. 133.

20 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya*, p. 134.

21 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya*, p.135.



logical positions and of their differences with the management of DUMK and each other. His speech contained information on the consequences of their activities in other countries, quotes from Qur'anic *surahs*, and calls for delegates to take all measures possible to combat these 'sects'.<sup>22</sup>

Dzhemilev offered a very harsh assessment of the 'religious sectarians' and their activities in a speech at the first session of the V Qurultay (December 2007), in which he listed his main objections: their declaration that the Mejlis and the Muftiate are 'infidel' structures, their rejection of ethnicities and calls for a struggle to create a 'mythical' Islamic Caliphate, their refusal to recognise the national flag and anthem, etc.<sup>23</sup> According to Dzhemilev, the activities of these supporters of 'non-traditional forms of Islam' among the Crimean Tatars were a direct strike against the national movement for the restoration of the people's rights and were intended to benefit external forces at work to stop the Crimean Tatars achieving precisely that restoration.<sup>24</sup>

After a speech by mufti Emirali Ablaev at the second session of the V Qurultay (December 5, 2009), delegates adopted a resolution "On the responsibility of national self-government bodies to strengthen the spiritual unity of the Crimean Tatar people" that stresses unity as a major factor in the revival and development of the Crimean Tatar nation. The document sets out a whole range of measures for the preservation of the values of Crimean Tatar material, intellectual and spiritual culture as inherited from previous generations.<sup>25</sup>

Analysis of these statements and documents from Crimean Tatar political and religious leaders allows us to draw several conclusions. Firstly, the discourse of 'native vs. alien' Islam appeared relatively late in Crimea (compared to other regions of the post-Soviet landscape), viz. toward the end of the 1990s. By then groups of followers of various Islamic movements had already formed relatively stable communities with their own

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22 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessy vozrozhdeniya*, p. 135-136.

23 Vystuplenie M. Dzhemileva. "Dokumenty pervoi sessii V Kurultaya (dekabr' 2007 g.)" ["Speech by M. Dzhemilev. Documents of the first session of the V Qurultay"], *Kryms'kotatars'ke pytannya [Crimean Tatar issues]*, 1:30 (2008), p.89.

24 "Mustafa Dzhemilev: na vyborah prezidenta podderzhim demokratov (interv'yu)" ["Mustafa Dzhemilev: we will support democrats in the presidential election (interview)"], *Kryms'kotatars'ke pytannya [Crimean Tatar issues]*, 3:34 (2009), p. 6-7.

25 Postanovlenie Kurultaya krymskotatarskogo naroda 'O zadachakh organov natsional'nogo samoupravleniya po ukrepleniyu dukhovnogo edinstva krymskotatarskogo naroda' [Resolution of the Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar people 'On the tasks of national self-government bodies to strengthen the spiritual unity of the Crimean Tatar people'], *Kryms'kotatars'ke pytannya [Crimean Tatar issues]*, 1:35 (2010), p. 65-66.



leaders, discourses and practices. Their ostentatious way of contrasting themselves to the majority of Crimean Tatars and their open criticism of the policies of the Mejlis and DUMK could no longer pass unremarked by the latter two official bodies. These tensions and differences grew into open conflict and became a matter of public discussion.

Secondly, during the 1990s, the leaders of the Mejlis and DUMK did not see a critical difference between Salafis and the followers of *Hizb at-Tahrir*. Both groups were perceived as ‘alien’ to the Crimean Tatar people, as groups pursuing a policy aimed at blurring ethnic identity. The apolitical nature of the Crimean Salafis and calls from *Hizb at-Tahrir* followers to build the Caliphate were considered equally dangerous. In a situation where the leaders of the Mejlis and DUMK were using Islam as an important resource for mobilising the Crimean Tatars, they viewed such behaviour on the part of any of their people as a betrayal of national interests.

Third, even though words and expressions like ‘tradition’, ‘traditional form of Islam’, ‘national traditions’, etc. were often deployed to connote the Crimean Tatars’ ‘native’ Islam, there was no stable concept in the ethnic discourse of the period for precisely this form of Islam. Instead they used terms like ‘Crimean Islam’,<sup>26</sup> ‘Crimean Tatar Islam’, ‘our Islam’, ‘true Islam’, etc. The concept of traditional Islam had next to no purchase. The term occasionally occurred in the works of Crimean researchers but was not yet a part of social discourse.<sup>27</sup> The general concept of ‘outsider’ Islam did not yet exist in Crimea either. The terms used to denote such forms of Islam were ‘sects’, ‘non-traditional form of Islam’, ‘new movements in Islam’, ‘Wahhabis’, etc.

Fourth, one may note the desire of the Crimean Tatar leaders to keep the discussion of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam within the Crimean Tatar community and not let it leak into the wider Crimean public sphere. This can be seen, for example, in how vehemently they reacted to statements by Crimean and Russian politicians and in the mass media about the growing popularity of radical Islamic movements among Crimean Tatars. All such statements were refuted and their authors accused of hate-mongering and aggravating the ethnic and religious situation in Crimea.<sup>28</sup>

26 See, for instance, Bulatov A., “Islam v Krymu: ot tragicheskogo proshlogo k problemam sovremennosti” [“Islam in Crimea: from the tragic past to the problems of our time”], <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/islamic/?4166>, accessed 25 September 2019.

27 See, for example, Grigoryants V.E., *O nekotoryh osobennostyah protsessa vozrozhdeniya islama v Krymu (1989-2001)* [On some features of the process of Islamic revival in Crimea (1989-2001)] (Simferopol, 2002).

28 See, for example, “Zayavlenie Prezidiuma Medzhliisa krymskotatarskogo naroda v svyazi s





## TRADITIONAL ISLAM IN THE DISCOURSE OF OFFICIAL ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS

In the post-Soviet period, two of the official Islamic institutions of Crimea were positioning themselves as successors and defenders of the Islamic traditions of the Crimean Tatars. The first was the above-mentioned DUMK, which acted in close cooperation with the Mejlis and controlled most Muslim communities and places of Islamic worship of the peninsula.<sup>29</sup> The second was the Spiritual Centre of Muslims of Crimea (DTsMK), chaired by mufti Ridvan Veliev. DTsMK was created over opposition from the DUMK and the Mejlis and united several dozen Muslim communities. Its organisational core consists of students and followers of the mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine (DUMU), Ahmet Tamim, in Kiev, who, in turn, was an apprentice of Ethiopian sheikh 'Abdullah al-Harari al-Habashi (1910–2008).<sup>30</sup> The sheikh's followers are often referred to as 'Habashites'.<sup>31</sup>

Relations between the two muftiates were conflict-ridden and involved mutual accusations and a struggle for influence in 2010–2014. DUMK called DTsMK “a Habashite sect” whose followers viewed supporters of their own doctrine as the only ‘true’ Muslims. The latter, in turn, accused DUMK of condoning radicals like ‘Wahhabis’ and *Hizb at-Tahrir*, who had gained a foothold in several Crimean mosques.

The ideologies of both muftiates have quite a lot in common, particularly their criticism of ‘non-traditional’ Islamic groups in Crimea, their disapproval of the lack of unity amongst Crimean Muslims, and their internal division into factions. Research by the present author in 2012 re-

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provokatsiyami v possiiskoi presse, napravlennymi na razzhiganie religioznoi i natsional'noi nenavisti v Krymu ot 9 dekabrya 1999 g.” [“Statement of the Presidium of the Majlis of the Crimean Tatar People in connection with provocative acts in the Russian press aimed at inciting religious and ethnic hatred in Crimea, 9 December, 1999”], *Kryms'kotatars'ke pytannya [Crimean Tatar issue]*, 6:10 (1999), p. 3-5.

29 By 2014 there were about 350 Muslim communities, 300 mosques and 5 *madrasahs* under the jurisdiction of DUMK. See: “Muftiyat”, <http://qmd.org/muftiyat-4/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

30 In 1983 'Abdullah al-Harari took over the leadership of the Association of Islamic Charitable Projects (AICP, founded in 1930 in Lebanon), which from then on was called *Al-Ahbash*. Today *Al-Ahbash* is a transnational Islamic movement with branches in the South, South-East and Central Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, as well as North America. The work of *Al-Ahbash* is aimed at combating political Islam and the Salafi movement. It involves Sufi discourses and practices but, according to experts, they are less pronounced in *Al-Ahbash* than in other Sufi groups of Europe (See Yarosh O., Globalization of redemptive sociality: al-Ahbash and Haqqaniyya transnational Sufi networks in West Asia and Central-Eastern Europe, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 10:1 (2019), p. 27-28).

31 The *Habashi nisba* means ‘Ethiopian’.



vealed several common points between them on these issues, both at the level of the leaders and of their supporters. As one of the leaders of DUMK noted in an interview, "even in a country with a population of a hundred million there probably aren't as many sects as we have in Crimea."<sup>32</sup> These words were echoed by the leader of DTsMK:

Missionaries from different countries began arriving in Crimea and presenting their own ideologies. These were representatives of Wahhabism, *Hizb at-Tahrir* and the so-called 'Muslim Brotherhood'... These people took advantage of the moment and gave our people their alien ideologies, which contradict the religion of Islam and the customs of Crimean Tatars... Our Prophet, may peace be upon Him, taught us that, if we see a violation, we need to correct it, and that is what we are trying to do...<sup>33</sup>

Representatives of both muftiates have identified reasons for the spread of 'non-traditional' movements in Crimea. The first was the religious illiteracy of the people, which was largely due to years of living in an atheistic state that repressed imams and people with religious education. The second was the 'nefarious activities' on the part of dishonest and opportunistic missionaries from abroad, who took advantage of the Crimean Tatars' naiveté to propagate their teachings.

The discourse of supporters of the official spiritual administrations has tended to deploy a strict dichotomy of 'us vs. them'. 'We' are the successors of our ancestral traditions, bearers of the Crimean Tatar language and culture. 'They' are the supporters of alien traditions, indifferent to everything ethnicity-related.

When we say one thing and they say another thing, it is hard to talk about any sort of unity. We tell them to speak Tatar, and they tell us that Tatar is an ethnic language and that the language of inter-ethnic communication is Russian. They even want to demand that we deliver the *khutbah* in Russian. This means schism, it is very bad. (DUMK)<sup>34</sup>

Currently there are quite a lot of misguided beliefs that cultivate dislike of Muslims and our traditions. They instil these misconceptions in our youths, make them think that traditions are not good, etc. And the young, not knowing the traditions of their ancestors, follow these people, because they paint wonderful pictures for them and tell them things that young people

32 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma* [Past, present and future of the Crimean Tatars in the discourse of Muslim community of Crimea] (Kiev: K.I.C., 2014), p. 15.

33 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma*.

34 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma*.



like to hear. (DTsMK)<sup>35</sup>

I am very much amazed at how these Hizbuttahririans, Habashites, Wahhabis walk from door to door. Who educates them? We have madrasahs in Kalay and Simferopol. Go there and learn, then go and unite with your people, because you have to walk together with your people. We can't be Arabs, we can't be Turks, we have to remain Crimean Tatars and be proud of our own people. (DUMK)<sup>36</sup>

The rejection of 'alien' religious ideas and the struggle against 'non-traditional' Islam were not enough to provide a common unifying platform for the representatives of DUMK and DTsMK. Ideological differences given their different understandings of the essence of 'traditional' Crimean Islam and the struggle for influence over Crimean Muslims turned them into entrenched adversaries. As we will see below, this adversarial relationship, which began in 2010, continued after the change in the status of Crimea in 2014.

The ideas of some DUMK leaders on traditional Islam were formed either during their religious education at theological departments in Turkish universities<sup>37</sup> or through communication with Turkish teachers involved in Islamic education in Crimea.<sup>38</sup> This is why their views are so similar to the official Turkish model of Islam.

The leaders of DUMK repeatedly emphasised the contribution of Turkish missionaries to the process of reviving Islam in post-Soviet Crimea. Their role became particularly noticeable in 2014, when Russia's arrival in Crimea meant an overwhelming majority of Turkish teachers had to leave the peninsula. At the time, general opinion on the matter was voiced by the deputy mufti of DUMK Ayder Ismailov:

...about 16 teachers from Turkey had to leave. For us what was important was that they had been in Crimea and helped us. For 15 years they facilitated religious education, helped to foster the traditional understanding of Islam, which complies with our traditional practices. The fact that we haven't had any terrorist acts or religion-caused violence in our region is a major achievement for these teachers from Turkey. Together with us, they

35 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskikh tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma*.

36 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskikh tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma*.

37 The DUMK system has up to a dozen graduates of Turkish universities as staff members in leading positions and determining the ideological vector of this organisation.

38 Until 2014 the role of Turkish teachers as representatives of both state and private institutions in the system of Islamic education of Crimea was crucial. They coordinated the learning process within Islamic training courses and madrasahs. For more details, see: Muratova E.S., "Osnovnye tendentsii v razvitiu islamskogo obrazovaniya Kryma posle 2014 goda" ["The main trends in the development of Islamic education in Crimea after 2014"], *Islamovedenie [Islamic Studies]*, 8:3 (2017), p. 35-45.



taught people the form of Islam that matches our understanding, does not run counter to modern trends, and is far removed from radical ideas.<sup>39</sup>

Besides this affirmation of the importance of Turkish teachers, his statement also contains a reference to the precise image of Islam DUMK was trying to develop in Crimea. It is an Islam that conforms to the traditions of Crimean Tatars and is at the same time modern and non-radical. One may add that it is Sunni Islam of the Hanafi *madhab*, as representatives of this organisation so often stress, as well as of the Maturidi school of belief (*aqidah*):

...we decidedly do not approve of ... any divergence from the accepted understanding of Islam: the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and the traditional Hanafi *madhab*, which has been professed by the Muslims of Crimea since olden times. That means that we, as the Spiritual Administration, do not accept anything that does not accord with the long-standing theological tradition of the Crimean Tatars.<sup>40</sup>

In their interviews and statements, DUMK representatives repeatedly note how important it is for Crimean Tatars to go back to their roots, which implies a need to become more pious, more devout in following such mandatory prescriptions of Islam as prayer, fasting during Ramadan, *zakat*, visiting the mosque on Fridays, etc. At the same time, it was an important part of the traditional Islam discourse of DUMK to stress the need to preserve the religious traditions of the Crimean Tatars, like collective *du'a* (recitals of the Qur'an) to commemorate the birth or death of a person (on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, and other days). It is these religious traditions, which preserved the Crimean Tatars's connection to Islam during the Soviet period, that were caught in the cross-hairs of criticism from representatives of the various 'new' movements and groups, which declared them unacceptable innovations (*bid'ah*) in Islam. An important part of DUMK religious practice was celebrating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (*Mawlid*), which was, as a rule, organised in collaboration with the branch office of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), usually on a grand scale. At the same time, one may note the lukewarm attitude of DUMK to various Sufi practices (such as the *ziyarat*), which

39 "Zammuftiya Kryma: "Daite lyudyam vremya opomnit'sya!" ["Deputy mufti of Crimea: "Give people time to recover!"], <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-432867.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

40 Sharipov A., "Ayder Ismailov: Problemy musul'man Kryma reshayutsya" ["Ayder Ismailov: The problems of the Muslims of Crimea are solved"], <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-449216.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.



were once widespread in Crimea. While DUMK representatives accepted these practices as an important part of the people's spiritual legacy, they took no measures to revive them.

The image of traditional Islam presented by the leaders of DTsMK was, in contrast, mostly formed under the influence of the transnational Sufi movement of *Al-Ahbash*, whose most active advocate in the post-Soviet space has been sheikh Ahmet Tamim. Its members accept all four Sunni *madhabs* and are followers of both the Maturidi and the Ash'ari *aqidahs*. An important part of *Al-Ahbash's* ideology is the religious practice of excluding a person who has committed a blasphemy from Islam (*takfir*). Among their rituals and rites, substantial attention is paid to practices associated with Sufism (e.g. *ziyarat*). Part of their members' theological discourse is promoting and legitimating the practice of blessing by relics (*tabarruk*).<sup>41</sup>

The annual collective pilgrimage to the grave of the 'saint' Eskender, known as the Karly-Aziz, in the Bakhchysarai district of Crimea, held an important place in DTsMK leaders' activities (even before it was formalised). This *ziyarat* usually took place in May and involved recitation of the Qur'an and the *Mawlid*, as well as some relatively secular events, including an entertainment programme, sports competitions and a free lunch. DUMK and the Salafi groups were very critical of these initiatives, as they consider the performance of such activities near graves unacceptable.<sup>42</sup> In 2012 DUMK even attempted to interfere with this event on the grounds that they had not approved it and it would "negatively affect the unity of the peninsula's Muslims."<sup>43</sup> The gravestone of the Karly-Aziz was repeatedly destroyed by persons unknown.

DTsMK also regularly organised celebrations of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. The practice of *tabarruk* – blessing by the Prophet's relics – was widespread among *Al-Ahbash* adherents in Crimea. For instance, in 2013, DTsMK organised a festive event in Simferopol, where anyone interested was shown a hair from the Prophet Muhammad's beard and a scroll with a list of names of its supposed keepers.<sup>44</sup>

41 Bril'ov D.V., "Teologichnyi diskurs Dukhovnogo upravlinnya musul'man Ukrainy" ["Theological discourse of the Spiritual administration of Muslims of Ukraine"], *Gileya*, 130 (2018), p. 208.

42 Abdullaev R., "DUM Kryma: Ocherednoi akt vandalizma svyazan s massovymi palomnichestvami" [DUM of Crimea: Another act of vandalism associated with mass pilgrimages], <http://www.islamsng.com/ukr/news/4815>, accessed 25 September 2019.

43 "Nesmotrya ni na chto 'Karly-Aziz 2012' sostoyalsya!" ["Despite everything 'Karly-Aziz 2012' took place!"], <http://islamnik.com/news/nesmotrya-ni-na-chto-karly-aziz-2012-sostoyalsya>, accessed 25 September 2019.

44 "Volos Proroka Muhammada, mir Emu, v Simferopole" ["A hair of Prophet Muhammad, peace



To sum up, one may say that, despite a certain similarity in their discourses of traditional Islam and their appeals to traditions and the legacy of ancestors, there remain several substantial differences between the supporters of DUMK and DTsMK. The first is the significant influence of Sufism on DTsMK ideology, which explains its emphasis on the revival of Sufi practices, once quite widespread in Crimea. A return to such practices, which were no longer popular with Crimean Tatars by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seems like an attempt to artificially re-traditionalise and archaicise religious life. Compared to such attempts, DUMK looks like an organisation propagating a more 'modern' project of Islam, designed to combine Crimean Tatar religiosity with their secular lifestyle.

The second difference is DTsMK's uncompromising position compared to DUMK with regard to various 'non-traditional' Islamic movements. While DUMK has for some years been trying to become the spiritual centre of a majority of Crimean Tatars, regardless of their views, and has consequently pursued a relatively tolerant policy toward such movements, the rhetoric of the DTsMK leaders has been substantially more aggressive and unbending. This is motivated by the *Al-Ahbash* movement's ideology, which prioritises the struggle against 'modernising' movements like the Salafis, Muslim Brotherhood, and *Hizb at-Tahrir*. The 'Habashite' ideology is thus a Sufi reaction to the spread of political Islam, whose roots and sources of inspiration lie in Salafi religious thought.<sup>45</sup>

## THE SITUATION AFTER 2014

Russia's arrival in Crimea in the spring of 2014 caused substantial adjustments to Crimean Tatar religious life. Changes on the institutional level manifested themselves in the re-registration of DUMK under Russian legislation with a new name – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea and Sevastopol (DUM KS). As an organisation connected with the Ukrainian muftiate, DTsMK also decided to change its name. Since 2014, it has been called the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims 'Tauride muftiate' (TsDUM TM). The change of names had little impact on the nature of the muftiates' relationship, which has remained confrontational.

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be upon Him, in Simferopol"], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dW507w96Zg&feature=youtu.be>, accessed 25 September 2019.

45 Bogomolov A.V. et.al. *Islamskaya identichnost' v Ukraine [Islamic identity in Ukraine]* (Kiev: Stilos, 2006), p.41.



The level of confrontation has, however, been significantly higher than previously, particularly in 2014–2015.

The rhetoric of both muftiates' leaders underwent a certain shift, giving greater weight to the specific nature of Russian relations between Islam and the state. This was manifest, for instance, in more active use of the concept of traditional Islam, in ostentatious demonstrations of loyalty to the Russian state, and resentment toward 'non-traditional' Islamic groups. Particularly zealous actions in this regard were taken by the Tauride muftiate, whose leaders thought, not without reason, that the change in Crimea's status offered a long-anticipated chance to shift the balance in the Muslim community of Crimea. Actively using the rhetoric of 'struggling against extremism', the Tauride muftiate tried to eliminate DUMK, presenting it as a disloyal organisation with connection to an out-of-favour Mejlis that condoned radical movements and groups. They positioned themselves, on the other hand, as an Islamic organisation with deep roots in Crimean Tatar tradition and as a dedicated opponent of radical groups. The Tauride muftiate's mufti, Ruslan Saitvaleev, spoke of TM's intentions in a quite unequivocal way:<sup>46</sup>

One of the reasons why we got the idea to revive the Tauride muftiate is that we have a lot in common with The Taurian Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate.<sup>47</sup> Firstly, it's cultural continuity. We follow the legal school of imam Abu Hanifa and observe our traditions, developed in accordance with Islam over centuries, such as performing *du'a*, holding *mawlid*s and *iftars*. Secondly, it is ethnic and linguistic continuity. The Tauride muftiate represented the interests of all Muslims of the peninsula, most of whom were Crimean Tatars, and we too want to represent the interests of all Muslims, including the Crimean Tatars. Thirdly, it is territorial continuity. The Tauride muftiate was based in Crimea with its seat in Simferopol, just like the present Muftiate.<sup>48</sup>

TM's plans to establish a monopoly of influence over the Crimean Muslim

46 Ruslan Saitvaliev was the deputy chairman of DTsMK.

47 The Taurian Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate (TMDP) was created by an edict of Catherine II dated 23 January, 1794, in the Tauride oblast'. On December 23, 1831, Emperor Nicholas I approved the 'Charter of the structure of the Taurian Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate', giving it the right to consider and make decisions about various 'spiritual affairs of Mohammedans' 'according to the rules of their faith', in particular: the order of 'divine worship', rites, addressing 'spiritual needs' and the 'conclusion and annulment of marriages'. In 1831 Muslims of the Western provinces, namely the Vilna, Volhynian, Grodno, Kovno, Courland and Minsk Governorates, were put under the jurisdiction of TMDP. TMDP ceased to exist in 1917.

48 "V Krymu poyavilis' lyudi, kotorye iskadzhayut nashu religiyu" ["There are people in Crimea who distort our religion"], <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=interview&div=406>, accessed 25 September 2019.



community were not destined to come to pass, however.<sup>49</sup> A short period of problematic relations between DUMK and the new authorities in 2014 ended with the establishment of partnership relations. Of course, this required a change in rhetoric from DUMK, with regard to both the Mejlis<sup>50</sup> and 'non-traditional' Islamic groups. While at first DUMK leaders requested that the authorities not use force against representatives of these groups because of differences in Ukrainian and Russian legislations and spoke of decapitating the groups by making their leaders leave for the Ukraine and generally of their excessive influence on Crimean Tatars, gradually the paternalistic notes in their discourse faded, eroding in the end to nothing. The following quote is from an interview with deputy mufti Ayder Ismailov in September 2014:

Now that new laws have just been introduced, it wouldn't be right to arrest people and put them in prison for something they did in the past or to sanction them. We need to give people time to come to their senses and mend their ways. We note that the voices of the representatives of this party in Crimea are hardly to be heard at all any more. That is, the simple existence of the prohibition is effective in itself: people are afraid and are not expressing their radical calls and shouts.<sup>51</sup>

A statement he posted on the social networking site Facebook in July 2017 takes a completely different tone. By then, relations between DUM KS and the Mejlis had grown into open conflict, and a wave of arrests of *Hizb at-Tahrir* adherents had just taken place in Crimea:

Naturally, with no support amongst the people or from religious leaders, the representatives of the Mejlis had no choice but to join forces with *Hizb at-Tahrir*, all the more so as they are unrivalled in the business of discrediting the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea. Alongside other sects, under the pretext of 'disseminating pure Islam, returning to the Islamic way of life', for twenty years in Crimea, they have shamelessly criticised the muftiate of Crimea, antagonised it in all things, and spread discord in mosques, humiliating the elderly and trying to take control of the mosques. Through these actions they were trying to destroy the muftiate of Crimea, which was and is the only stronghold of traditional Sunni understanding of

49 It should be noted that not a few Russian secular and religious public figures provide ideological and administrative support to the Tauride muftiate, prominent among them the not exactly unknown 'expert on Islam' Roman Silantyev.

50 For more details, see Muratova E., "Musul'mane Kryma v novyh politicheskikh realiyah" ["Crimean Muslims in new political realities"], *Orient*, 5 (2016), p. 163-171.

51 "Zamuftiya Kryma: "Daite lyudyam vremya opomnit'sya!" ["Deputy mufti of Crimea: "Give people time to recover!"], <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-432867.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.





Islam in Crimea! Our muftiate was also the only obstacle standing in the way of the spread of an alien and false ideology that leads to the rejection of our national traditions and language and to a schism, which is but a stone's throw from assimilation.<sup>52</sup>

This change in the DUM KS leaders' rhetoric did not go unnoticed by the Crimean Tatar community. Some Crimean Tatars began distancing themselves from the muftiate because of disagreement with this attitude towards their fellow countrymen and the muftiate's overzealous readiness to bow to the new authorities.<sup>53</sup> The defining moment for many people was public disclosure of a statement written in July 2016 and addressed to the head of the Crimean directorate of the Federal Security Service of Russia (FSB), in which mufti Emirali Ablaev asked them to deal with "radical sects", *Hizb at-Tahrir* and the *Habashites*, who had "sabotaged" the celebration of *Eid al-Fitr* in 12 Crimean mosques on the day "set by our Administration according to the traditional laws of Islam."<sup>54</sup> The part of the statement that followed contained the names and contact data of the "guilty" imams. Many Crimean Tatars took this statement as a denunciation.<sup>55</sup> The clear pro-government position of DUM KS even prompted some Crimean Tatars to draw an analogy between the existing muftiate and its predecessor from the period of the Russian Empire:

I understand that the leadership of DUMK are people the government has done a background check on, and I wouldn't be surprised if they were paid by the government. I think the entire structure of muftiates, or at least their leadership, gets some sort of remuneration, but that it is covered up. In any case, they get serious privileges in the form of grants. As to why they fight other religious movements so vehemently – it's because it suits the government to create socio-religious organisations under their control like the muftiate, just as they did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>56</sup>

52 The Official Page of Ayder Ismailov, <https://www.facebook.com/ayder.ismailov.5/posts/1240514696094091>, accessed 25 September 2019.

53 Author's fieldwork materials. Fokus-gruppy v ramkakh issledovaniya 'Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskih tatar', yanvar 2017 g. [Focus groups as part of a study on 'Values and needs of Crimean Tatars', January 2017].

54 Khan I., "Donos DUM Kryma v FSB (skan dokumenta)" ["The denunciation of DUM of Crimea to FSB (scan of the document)"], <https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=30348>, accessed 25 September 2019.

55 Author's fieldwork materials. Fokus-gruppy v ramkah issledovaniya 'Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskih tatar', yanvar 2017 g. [Focus groups as part of a study on 'Values and needs of Crimean Tatars', January 2017].

56 Author's fieldwork materials. Interv'y u v ramkah issledovaniya 'Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskih tatar', yanvar 2019 g. [Interviews as part of a study on 'Values and needs of Crimean Tatars', January 2019].



Under such conditions of constant criticism, social condemnation, and loss of respect and popularity with Crimean Tatars, the DUM KS media office was forced to issue a special statement explaining their position. Its message can be summed up in a single phrase: “they have only themselves to blame”:

In 2014 the mufti of Crimean Muslims Hajji Emirali Ablaev made a statement on the unacceptability of criminal prosecution under Russian legislation of persons who had participated in radical religious movements during the period when Crimea was under the jurisdiction of the Ukraine... The spiritual leader of Crimean Muslims repeatedly addressed the Muslims of the Republic with an appeal for them to stay away from the ideologies of Hizb at-Tahrir and Al-Ahbash, Wahhabism, and other radical movements and by no means to participate in their activities, as well as to restrain others from doing so. Unfortunately, not everyone listened to DUMK’s advice. Everyone must decide for themselves.<sup>57</sup>

A common speech technique used in public condemnation of ‘non-traditional’ Islamic groups by representatives of the spiritual administrations of Crimea is invoking the concept of traditional Islam, which is widespread in Russian discourse:

In the past ten years there have been over a dozen cases of mosques falling under the influence of radical organisations, particularly Wahhabis, *Hizbs* and Habashites. The rural councils provided the local religious community land for construction. Under the law, a community must consist of more than 10 people. Where these people then became adherents of radical religious movements, they drove out the followers of traditional Islam and propagated their own ideology instead. Because the mosques were owned by the community, the sects were able to control the infrastructure.<sup>58</sup>

It is noteworthy that the discourse of traditional Islam started to gain in popularity not only with representatives of the muftiates but also with Crimean politicians, some of whom mastered the Russian rhetoric quickly. For example, one often hears the expression from member of the State Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament) Ruslan Balbek, who, among other things, has oversight over religious issues in the life of the Crimean Tatars:

57 “Kto ‘podstavlyayet’ krymskih musul’man?” [“Who ‘frames’ Crimean Muslims?”], <http://qmdi.org/index.php/ru/glavnye-novosti/2895-kto-podstavlyayet-krymskih-musulman>, accessed 25 September 2019.

58 “My schitaem plany Sovmina peredat’ mecheti muftiate pravil’nymi, – zamuftiya Kryma” [“We consider the plans of the Council of Ministers to transfer the mosques to Muftiyat correct, – deputy to the mufti of Crimea”], <http://www.dumrf.ru/regions/82/regnews/9134>, accessed 25 September 2019.



During the Ukrainian period, of 400 mosques only 5 had documents of entitlement. This gave extremist religious organisations the opportunity to participate in the struggle for houses of worship. Traditional Islam could not defend itself. The platform was accessed by destructive sects. Now all the mosques are under a single canonical and legal jurisdiction. Russia has united the Muslims of Crimea and is protecting them from the influence of extremist movements.<sup>59</sup> Just as in the Republics of the Russian Federation, the concept of traditional Islam has become interspersed in Crimea with the general discourse of 'fighting extremism', as developed by government bodies, official Islamic institutions and researchers. It is as part of this struggle that the followers of two Islamic organisations, *Hizb at-Tahrir* and *Tablighi Jama'at*, are currently being criminally prosecuted on the peninsula. About 60 Crimean Tatars have already been sentenced to prison or are currently under investigation on charges of participation in these organisations' activities.<sup>60</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The discourse of 'native vs. alien' Islam has been present in the Crimean Tatar community since the late 1990s. 'Native' Islam is associated with the surviving religious traditions of the Crimean Tatars, especially the rites that accompany key events in the life cycle – birth, marriage, funeral, etc. The main criterion differentiating 'insider' (native) and 'outsider' (alien) traditions for many Crimean Tatars is whether or not it goes back at least two generations (parents and grandparents).

The discourse of 'native vs. alien' Islam developed by representatives of the Islamic spiritual administrations of Crimea uses the same appeal to the legacy of the ancestors but usually less to the recent past than to a more distant one. The pre-Soviet period, when Islam's status on the peninsula was stronger and people were more pious and devout, usually serves as the basis for such rhetoric. The revival of the Crimean Muslims' 'native' Islam is seen through the preservation of customary rituals (birth-marriage-funeral) and returning to the practice of following the mandatory prescriptions of Islam (DUMK) and certain Sufi practices (DTsMK).

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59 "Rossiya ukrepila pozitsii traditsionnogo islama v Krymu – Bal'bek" ["Russia has strengthened the position of traditional Islam in Crimea – Balbek"], <https://www.politnavigator.net/rossiya-ukrepila-pozitsii-tradicionnogo-islama-v-krymu-balbek.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

60 "V ramkah politicheskikh i religioznyh presledovaniy v Krymu lisheny svobody 86 chelovek" ["Within the framework of political and religious persecution in Crimea 86 people are imprisoned"]. 2019. *Crimean human rights group*. May 3. <https://crimeahrg.org/v-ramkahpoliticheskikh-i-religioznyh-presledovaniy-v-krymu-lisheny-svobody-86-chelovek/>, accessed 25 September 2019



For Crimean Tatar political leaders, the discourse of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam has been directly connected with maintaining their influence and using Islam as a resource for political mobilisation. Any ideologies that limit the scope for using this resource have therefore been treated as a threat to the integrity of the Crimean Tatar people and undermining the defence of collective rights in various spheres. For this reason, as the adherents of ‘outsider’ Islam gain in strength, so do the criticisms of and antagonism toward them. What is more, while at first the Mejlis and DUMK did not distinguish between ‘outsider’ Islamic movements, from the mid-2000s their main opponent came to be the *Hizb at-Tahrir* party, which advanced a political project that did not stipulate the preservation of ethnic authenticity or the institutions of Crimean Tatarhood. It was under these circumstances that the apolitical Salafis, who had by then chosen the tactic of demonstrating at least superficial loyalty to the Mejlis and DUMK, began to be treated as ‘the lesser evil’.

The discourse of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam developed in Crimea prior to 2014 lacked certain features of the discourse as it has developed since. First was its internal nature. To begin with, this discourse was largely restricted to the Crimean Tatar community, and no actors from outside were admitted to it. This included the state. A good example was the reluctance to allow the problem of a Crimean Tatar religious disunity become a matter of public discussion, particularly when in the context of the measures taken by Mejlis leaders to counter attempts at legislative prohibition of the *Hizb at-Tahrir* party in the Ukraine.<sup>61</sup>

A second distinctive feature was the lack of any important consequences for the parties involved. The main ‘punishments’ were public reprimand or being disqualified from holding the position of imam at a mosque. Today accusations of ‘non-traditionalism’ can have much more serious consequences, even prison sentences.

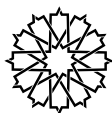
The third and final peculiarity of the discourse has been the increasing use of the concept of traditional Islam since 2014. Under the influence of this discourse, which is prevalent in the Russian Federation, this concept has become increasingly popular with representatives of the Crimean spiritual administrations of Muslims, politicians and the intelligentsia. Even after five years of de-facto status as part of the Russian state, this discourse is not yet the dominant one in Crimea, however.

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61 In September of 2009, the chief of the Crimean Militiya (police forces) Gennadiy Moskal contacted the Security Services of the Ukraine with a request to ban the *Hizb at-Tahrir* movement in Ukraine. See “Moskal’ trebuet ot SBU zapretit’ partiyu ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir’” [“Moskal demands from the Security Service of Ukraine to ban the Hizb at-Tahrir party”], <https://sevastopol.su/news/moskal-trebuet-ot-sbu-zapretit-partiyu-hizb-ut-tahrir>, accessed 25 September 2019.



To sum up, one may note that the events of 2014 have radically changed the lives of Crimean Muslims. The state's active involvement in the regulation of religious processes has led to a narrowing of the space of freedom and a transformation of discourses and politics. The Muslim community of Crimea is still trying to understand the new 'rules of the game', identify red lines, and work out a strategy for survival and development. It has been taking a while for Crimean Muslims to get used to the new Russian reality, and this process has been accompanied by the shattering of customary patterns of conduct and of integration within the established system of relations between the state and religious organisations.



## List of abbreviations

- BASSR – the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.
- BDU – the Bashkir Spiritual Administration.
- BNC – the Bashkir National Centre.
- DASSR – the Dagestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.
- DSMR – the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia.
- DTsMK – the Spiritual Centre of Muslims of Crimea.
- DUM AChR – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Asian Part of Russia
- DUM D – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan.
- DUMES – to the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia.
- DUM K – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea.
- DUM KS – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea and Sevastopol.
- DUM RB – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan.
- DUM RF – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation.
- DUM RT – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan.
- DUM T – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Tatarstan.
- DUMU – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine.
- FSB – the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation.
- ICR – the Interreligious Council of Russia.
- IPD – the Islamic Party of Dagestan.
- KCMSK – the Coordinating Centre of Muslims of the North Caucasus.
- OMDS – the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly.
- RAIS – the Russian Association of Islamic Consensus (All-Russian Muftiate).



## List of abbreviations

RISI – the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies.

ROC – the Russian Orthodox Church.

RSFSR – the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

SDR – the Council for Religious Affairs.

SDRK – the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults.

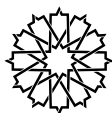
SMR – the Council of Muftis of Russia.

SMR – the Union of Muslims of Russia.

TASSR – the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

TsDUM – the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia.

TsDUM TM – the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims 'Tauride muftiate'.



## Glossary

*Prepared by Renat Bekkin*

*Abystay* – among Tatars and Bashkirs: the term denoting an elderly authoritative woman who is well versed in religious rites and traditions. *Abystay* teaches children the fundamentals of the Islamic religion. As a rule, it is the wife of a mullah or another minister of Islamic religion who assumes the role of *abystay*.

*Adab* – a set of rules of conduct

*Adat* (singular *'adah*) – custom, customary law. *Adat* can also mean customary law court and legal custom.

*Aqsaqal*, also: *aksakal* (from Turkic languages: *aq* – white, *sakal* – beard) – among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus: an authoritative elderly man. The head or patriarch of the clan can also be called *aqsaqal*.

*Baigat* (Arab. – bay'a) – oath (individual or collective) to the Islamic religious or political leader.

*Bid'ah* (Arab. – innovation) is the common name for the innovations that appeared in Islam after the Prophet Muhammad.

*Chapan* – outerwear of a religious figure in Islam.

*Doga* (in the Tatar language – du'a) – a prayer addressed to Allah. Unlike the fivefold prayer (*al-salat*), *doga* can be said at any time and in any language.





*Fatwa* – a legal opinion of a qualified Islamic lawyer on practical issues of Islamic law.

*Fiqh* (Arab. – deep knowledge) – Islamic jurisprudence.

*Ghur sadaqasy* (Tatar. – grave alms) – funereal almsgiving for a deceased person. It was usually provided to the mullah before the body of a deceased was buried into the grave.

*Hadhrat* (Arab. – master) – a form of respectful address to a minister of Islamic religion among Tatars and Bashkirs in 20-21 centuries. The word is placed after a person's name.

*Hafiz* (Arab. – keeper) – a person who knows the full text of the Qu'ran by heart.

*Ihsan* (Arab. – honesty) – the highest stage of faith, above *iman* (belief).

*Ijtihad* (Arab. – diligence) – the activity of a theologian or jurist aimed at deriving legal norms on questions for which there is neither direct answer in the Qur'an or Sunnah nor answer formulated by way of *ijma'* (consensus).

*Ishan* (Persian – they) – a title used in relation to authoritative religious figures (mainly, leaders of Sufi *tariqas*, as well as their descendants). It was widely used in the Central Asia starting from 15-16 centuries. In the Volga-Ural region people called *ishans* were associated with the Central Asian spiritual tradition.

*Izge Bolgar jyeny* (Tatar – the Gathering in Holy Bolgar) – a large-scale festival that is usually celebrated during the last week of June on the ruins of the ancient capital of Volga Bulgaria, where, according to historical sources, the ancestors of the Kazan Tatars adopted Islam in 922.

*Jadidism* – a socio-political movement among Muslims of the Russian Empire and Soviet Russia in the 1880-1920s. Initially, the agenda of this movement was limited to the reform of Islamic religious education (introduction of a new sound method of teaching literacy in primary schools (*maktabas*), natural science disciplines in *madrasahs*, and teaching disciplines in the native language). At the beginning of the 20th century proponents of *Jadidism* also began to come up with political slogans.

*Karamat* (Arab. – miracle) – a supernatural phenomenon associated with a person leading a pious lifestyle.

*Khatm al-khwajagan* – in Naqshbandi *tariqa*: congregational *dhikr*, a meditative recitation with a variable number of repetitions of a combination of Qur’anic *surahs*, ritual formulas, and names of Allah. The practice includes honorific recital of the names of the *sheikhs* that were predecessors in the *tariqa*.

*Madhab* (Arab. – the path to follow) – school of jurisprudence in Islamic law.

*Madrasah, medrese* (Arab. – place of study) – Muslim educational and religious institution. In the Islamic educational system, *madrasahs* represent the second stage after the elementary school – *maktab* or *kuttab*.

*Mahalla* – Muslim community (Local Religious Organization of Muslims under Russian law). The center of religious and social life of the *mahalla* is a mosque or *musallah*.

*Majlis* (Arab. – gathering, meeting) – any meeting or gathering. The Volga Tatars usually understand the term as referring to gatherings to commemorate the deceased, recite the Qur’an, etc. Instead of ‘*majlis*’, the Tatar ‘*ash*’ (‘Islamic meal’) is often used.

*Mejlis* – a representative administrative body of the Crimean Tatars formed in 1991 during the II Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People.

*Mujtahid* – Islamic scholar qualified to engage in *Ijtihad*.

*Muhtasibat* – an administrative unit within the structure of the muftiates in the USSR and the Russian Federation which unites several Muslim communities (*mahallas*). *Muhtasibat* is headed by *muhtasib*, who is appointed by the mufti.

*Mufti* – in Russia and former Soviet republics – the head of the Spiritual administration of Muslims (muftiate).

*Muftiate* (synonym: spiritual administration of Muslims) – in Russia and some other countries – a collegial body acting as an official representative of Muslims in their relations with other confessions and the state and performing certain administrative functions (e.g. administering Muslim communities under their jurisdiction).

*Sadaqa* – voluntary alms provided to the needy. In the USSR and Russia, the term ‘*sadaqa*’ was also used to denote the remuneration paid to the imam for the performed ceremony.



*Shamail* – a type of fine art that became widespread among the Sunni Muslims of the Middle Volga region in the late 19<sup>th</sup>– early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Shamail* was a work of easel painting, made on the basis of Arabic calligraphy. Most *shamail* stories had religious content.

*Sohbet* (Turkish – conversation) – a conversation between a sheikh and his students (often in the form of a monologue) on religious and ethical topics, one of the types of spiritual practice in Sufism.

*Tabarruk* – receipt of the blessing of Allah with the help of any tangible or intangible object of sacred significance.

*Taqlid* (Arab. – following, imitation) – in its original meaning: following the authority of a Muslim jurist in studying issues of *fiqh*. In modern literature, *taqlid* serves as a synonym for the concept of conservatism in both dogmatic and practical issues of Islamic jurisprudence.

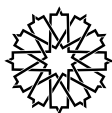
*Tubeteika* (Tatar – түбәтәй) – a headdress among Muslims of Eurasia. It is a round (less often – with four ribbed corners) fabric cap with embroidered or woven patterns.

'*Ulama*' (plural from Arabic 'alim – expert, scholar) – in a broad sense: Muslim theologians.

*Waghaz, wa'z* (Arab. – admonition) – part of the Muslim Friday sermon. It is read by imam during Friday prayers and usually addresses a pressing social problem.

*Zahid* (Arab. – abstaining) – in Sufism: a person who abandoned thoughts and deeds that impede the service to Allah; an ascetic.

*Ziyarat* (Arab. – visiting) – a pilgrimage to the graves of revered religious leaders (prophets and saints (*awliya'*)), accompanied by a certain ritual. *Ziyarat* also refers to the very place of burial.



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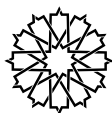
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The following articles from this edited volume were previously published in the *Context: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2019:

*In Search of 'Traditional Islam' in Tatarstan: Between National Project and Universalist Theories*, Leila Almazova and Azat Akhunov

*Official Discourse on Islam and Islamic Discourse in Contemporary Russia*, Sofya Ragozina

*The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam*, Renat Bekkin

*'Traditional Islam' in the Discourse of Religious Associations, Ethnic Organisations and Government Structures in Bashkortostan*, Zilya Khabibullina

*'Traditional Islam' in Crimean Tatar Discourse and Politics*, Elmira Muratova



In recent years, the concept of traditional Islam has attracted attention of researchers both in Russia and beyond. A serious drawback of some of the works is excessive politicization of discourse, as well as that authors seem to have only superficial acquaintance with sources both in the languages of the so-called Muslim peoples of Russia and in Russian language. The first problem is inherent mainly in the works of Russian authors, the second one in publications by authors from the West.

\* \* \*

Structurally, the book has two parts: a theoretical part *Traditional Islam: the concept and its interpretations* and a practical one *Traditional Islam in the Russian regions and Crimea*.

\* \* \*

All the articles in the book include some consideration of the traditional Islam concept as an artificial construct promoted by the state to designate their preferred model of state-confessional relations, in which religious organisations and individual believers demonstrate their loyalty to the political regime. Organisations and believers who criticize the state's domestic and foreign policy can then be described by the authorities and the muftiates to be representatives of 'non-traditional Islam'.