

In Search of 'Traditional Islam' in Tatarstan: Between National Project and Universalist Theories

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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'.

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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)¹ headquartered in Ufa.² It was only in 1991 that the head of DUMES mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin agreed to create 5 *muhtasibats*³ 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 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.⁴

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 rasshirenniy 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.

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 Sabestiensis*, Special Issue, (2014), p. 135–36.

In 1985 there were 18 functioning mosques in Tatarstan. By 1998 there were 998, and by 2019 as many as 1531.⁵ 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.⁶

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.⁷

People from the middle generation, most of whom are profoundly atheistic and Soviet-minded, had lost touch with Islam, while the young 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.⁸ Young imams educated abroad are often

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 postsovetском 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.

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

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.⁹

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).¹⁰ 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 or abandoned), through a present (how it is linked to other practices, institutions and social conditions).¹¹

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."¹²

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.¹³

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

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.

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.

associating a certain tradition with certain groups and individuals.¹⁴ 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 (Batyр), 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 on "Anglo-American 'Traditional Islam' and Its Discourse of Orthodoxy"¹⁵ Danish scholar Kasper Mathiesen of the University of Copenhagen notes that the very phrase 'traditional Islam' is a completely Western construct. Internet word search for '*al-Islam at-taqlidi*' 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.¹⁶

Criticisms of *taqlid* in Tatar theological literature become very pronounced with the appearance of two figures, Abu Nasr Qursawi¹⁷ and an admirer of his work

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.

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. accessed 25 September 2019.

17 See, Abu-Nasr Qursawi. "Nastavleniye lyudey na put' istiny" [People's Guidance on the Path of Truth], *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya* [Selected Works] (Kazan: Tatarskoye knizhnoye izdatelstvo, 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.

Shihabuddin Marjani.¹⁸ Their work was later continued by Ziyaeddin Kamali¹⁹ and Musa Bigiev,²⁰ and supported by the more moderate thinker, Rizaeddin Fakhreddin. 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 statements made by some of our prominent scholars, with all due respect to them."²¹

The opposite camp, supporters of *taqlid* in the region, was led by the *Din wa magishat* (*Religion and life*) magazine.²² Applying the classification offered by William Shepard,²³ we find that these early 20th 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

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- 18 See, Ilyas T., "Koran i Sunna. Idzhtihad i taklid", *Sbornik statey. posvyashchennyy 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 brat'yev 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., *Izbrannyye 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) in Russia in the early 20th century.
- 21 Bigiev M., *Istoriya Korana i ego svodov*. [The History of the Qur'an and its Consolidated Texts] (Moscow: Medina, 2016), p. 23.
- 22 The *Din wa 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., *Problemy tatarskogo traditsionalizma na straniatsab zhurnala 'Din vamagishat': 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 maishat zhurnalnyyn 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.

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.²⁴

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 behind progressive nations,²⁵ while others saw *taqlid* as a way of preserving religious and ethnic identity.²⁶ 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.²⁷

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 20th century. He distinguishes between two types of ideological systems: ‘traditionalism’ for the period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and ‘neo-traditionalism’ for the second half of the 20th century.²⁸ 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

24 Mukhametshin R.R., *Problemy tatarskogo traditsionalizma na stranitsakh zhurnala «Dina va magishat» (1906-1918)* [The Issue of Tatar Traditionalism on the Pages of the Journal ‘Religion and Life’ (1906–1918)] Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskaniye uchenoy stepeni kandidata istoricheskikh nauk [Thesis Topic for degree in Historical Sciences] (Kazan, 2004), p. 15.

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.M., “Dzhadidizm i Kadimizm” [Jadidism and Qadimism]. URL: <https://islam-today.ru/blogi/rafik-muhametsin/kadimizm-i-dzadidizm/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

27 Chapter on “Taklid est neobhodimost” [Taqlid is a Necessity] in Muhammad Yusuf Khattar, *Aktualnyye 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.

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.²⁹

Similar characterisations can be seen in works of recent years. A review of works on Islamic traditionalism by contemporary authors shows that the 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 Keller³⁰ and Abdul Hakim Murad³¹), 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-Quṣayrī (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-Quṣayrī and Māturīdism/ Hanafiyya in the case of al -Hujwīrī.³²

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":³³

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

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

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 Shadhili Order 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, a conference on "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*.

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 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 Gilani, Muhammad Khawaji Baha' al-Din Naqshband and other righteous mentors.³⁴

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 Dagestan³⁵ and the Naqshbandi and Qadiri *tariqas* in Ingushetia³⁶ and Chechnya.³⁷

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 on "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."³⁸ 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 movements³⁹ has a certain similarity with the processes in the Islamic and quasi-Islamic⁴⁰ community of Tatarstan, elaborated on below.

34 Ikramuddin Khan, "V Groznom oglaslyat 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 virdy Nakshbandiya i Shaziliya v Dagestane" [Sufi Virds Naqshbandiya and Shadhiliya in Dagestan], *Vestnik Evrazii* [Bulletin of Eurasia], 3:37 (2007), p.135-160.

36 Albogachiyeva M., *Islam v Ingushetii: etnografiya i istoriko-kulturnyye 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 least⁴¹ 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 10th 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.⁴²

Later in his introduction the author presents a sub-section on “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 reformism⁴³ (which argued against following *madhabs* or popular traditions) and the Islamic traditional legacy of the early 20th 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 znachenije i aktualnost” [“The Hanafi *madhab*, its meaning and relevance”]: “As we can see, for serious 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.”⁴⁴ When republishing this work in a collection

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 *madrasabs*) to Ziyaeddin Kamali’s pro-reform stance (Kamali was director of the ‘Galiya’ *madrasab* 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.

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

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').⁴⁵ 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."⁴⁶

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 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.

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.

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,⁴⁷ and support for Naqshbandi Sufism, with its traditions of quiet *dhikr*.⁴⁸ 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’.⁴⁹

One of the most recent works to look at the phenomenon of ‘traditional Islam’ is an article by Matteo Benussi on “Sovereign Islam and Tatar Aqīdah: Normative Religious Narratives and Grassroots Criticism Amongst Tatarstan’s Muslims”.⁵⁰ It is an interesting anthropological study, but the author’s 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

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--85c5a4a789a451e8ed4caa800d674ba5af5756ca40557ae4d5a0a8983a74e8438fdd452ec0d9a5b-51f54ee3ed965624c0ac82694978113ce6b3999ed78c60c35>, accessed 25 September 2019.

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."⁵¹

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".⁵² 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 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 fatwa⁵³ 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

51 Benussi M., "'Sovereign' Islam and Tatar 'Aqidah': 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.

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

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."⁵⁴ 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*.⁵⁵ Musa Bigiev defended Sufism, emphasising its importance for the development of Islamic civilisation.⁵⁶ 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 Schmöller), 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

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 tadbirlər* [Religious Establishments]. (Ufa: Tipografiya brat'yev Karimovyh, 1913), p. 60-65.

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., *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya* [Selected Works]. (Kazan: Tatarskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 2014), p. 262.

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 Baltasinskiy District civil service. In 1990, he became imam of Burbash's mosque and since 2006 has been Chief qadi of the Republic of Tatarstan.⁵⁷ 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 Baltasinskiy District. In 1998, there were 140 children in Burbash performing prayers five times a day, 70 of whom could read the Qur'an.⁵⁸

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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰ The celebration of Victory Day (May 9th) is also, in his opinion,

57 "Jalil hazrat Fazlyev – glavniy kaziy 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.

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 kushylasymy?" ["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.

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.”⁶¹

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.⁶²

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 19th 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”.⁶³

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.⁶⁴

A matter of much dispute and discussion is the problem of commemoration ceremonies for the deceased on the 3rd, 7th, and 40th 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

61 Rashit Minhaj, “Bərbashlar bashlap yeri” [“Bərbashlar - are the initiators”], *Watanyim Tatarstan* [Our Homeland Tatarstan], 51-52 (24920-24921) (March 25, 2005).

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

63 Fazlyev Jalil, *Rebenok musulmanina. O vospitanii*, p. 26.

64 Fazlyev Jalil, *Rebenok musulmanina. O vospitanii*, [On Fortering Muslim Kid] (Kazan: Iman, 2012/1433), p. 25.

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.⁶⁵

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 3rd, 7th, and 40th 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 3rd, 7th, and 40th 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 funeral 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.⁶⁶

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*⁶⁷ 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

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 3rd, 7th, and 40th 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) Sryatogo Bulgara* (Kazan: Iman, 1431/2010), p. 3-4.

66 Fazlyev, *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.

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.⁶⁸

For his part, the ex-deputy of the mufti of DUM RT Ramil Adygamov, in the section on “Provody usopshikh” [“Parting with the deceased”] in his book *Osnovy propovedi i obyazannosti imama* [*The basics of preaching and the duties of the Imam*], simply describes the order in which the ‘majlises of the 3rd, 7th, and 40th days and one year’ are supposed to be held.⁶⁹

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*⁷⁰ among the guests, he collects it into a separate bag and then spends it on maintenance of the mosque.⁷¹

The muftiate is also known to have taken steps to limit the rights of unregistered imams⁷² 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 Shariah 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

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

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 samoindetifikatsii)”, *Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii ‘Obshchestvenno-politicheskaya zhizn’ Tatarstana v usloviyakh sotsiokulturnogo i konyatsionalnogo pilyuralizma’* [Proceedings of Scientific and Practical Conference ‘Socio-Political Life of Tatarstan in Socio-Cultural and Conventional Plurality’] (Kazan: Iman, 2006), p. 45.

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.

Valiulla 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,⁷³ 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 Russian⁷⁴ and 627 editions in Tatar between 1991 and 2011 on a wide range of Islam-related topics.⁷⁵

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.⁷⁶

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 *Khanafitskiy mazhab, ego znachenije i aktualnost* [*The Hanafi madhab, its*

73 Kemper M., Bustanov A., "Yazyk 'tradicionnogo 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, izdannykh na russkom yazyke* [Catalogue of books published by 'Iman' Publishing House]. <http://textarchive.ru/c-2145652.html/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

75 *'Iman' nashriyaty kitaplary 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 Meselmannarynyn 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, predlozhivshego szhigat' knigi po islamu", *Tatarmoscow.ru*, 14.04.2008, http://tatarmoscow.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2167&Itemid=99999999/, accessed 25 September 2019.

meaning and relevance],⁷⁷ and pieces written at various times and then collected in the 2006 book *K prorocheskomu islamu [Toward prophetic Islam]*⁷⁸, 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]* on “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 sermon⁷⁹ 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,⁸⁰ as is the preservation of the nation inside a single madhab culture, because it makes the grandeur of Islamic prayer, its dignified sublimity and its acceptance by God much higher and more effective.⁸¹ 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.⁸² Regarding the majlises on the 3rd, 7th, and 40th 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.⁸³

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 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*.⁸⁴

77 Yakupov, V. *Hanafitskiy mazhab, ego znachenije i aktualnost’* [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* [Towards Prophetic Islam] (Kazan: Iman, 2006), 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.

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

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*],⁸⁵ 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',⁸⁶ who equated religious reform with Jadidism,⁸⁷ 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 today⁸⁸ is not only ready to compete 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."⁸⁹

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*',⁹⁰ which, as Yakupov suggests, should be interpreted as 'Allah is above the throne'.

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 Mihaylovicha 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.

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.

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.⁹¹

'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*⁹² from its leader, Sheikh Mahmut al-Ufi. The İsmailağa brotherhood is one of the branches of the Sufi Naqshbandiyya brotherhood.⁹³ In 2013,⁹⁴ 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'.⁹⁵

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

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.

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).

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.⁹⁶

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":⁹⁷

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.⁹⁸

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

96 Kamil Samigullin, "Islam prevratili v pole, na kotorom kazhdiy 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).

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

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.

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.⁹⁹

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.¹⁰⁰

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.¹⁰¹

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

99 “Kamil khazrat Samigullin: “Pravilno ponimat’ islam i byt’ bogoboyaznennymi – eto luchsheye 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 Obshestvennoy palate RF obsuzhdayet rol’ i znachenije sufizma” [“Muftiy 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, accessed 25 September 2019.

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

explanations,¹⁰² 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's 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.

'Traditional Islam' does not contradict the Hanafi madhab (the point of view of Islamic legal expert Rustam Nurgaleev)

In November 2017, there was a roundtable at the Kazan Federal University on 'traditional Islam'.¹⁰³ 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 Kazan Islamic University, Deputy Chairman of the Council of 'ulama' of DUM RT and counsellor of the Chief Qadi of the Republic of Tatarstan.

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).

103 A full recording of this roundtable is available on YouTube: "Traditsionniy 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.

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”¹⁰⁴;
- 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 pushes them to commit *haram* – to take alcohol, which is forbidden in Islam.¹⁰⁵

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 3rd, 7th, and 40th 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

104 Ibn Majah, *Sunan, Bab Aswad Azam, Hadith 3950*. http://islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?flag=1&bk_no=54&ID=7249 accessed 25 September 2019.

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

the norms of a non-Muslim state (the wording was quite forceful – ‘a *kufri* 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.”¹⁰⁶

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 3rd, 7th, 40th days and one year after a death, visiting Bolgar, etc.) but also to the much wider range of problems that arise in polemic with orthodox-minded¹⁰⁷ opponents from the so-called Salafi camp.¹⁰⁸

Rustam Batrov’s theory of ‘traditional Islam’

Rustam Gayazovich Batrov was born in 1978 in Gorky (now Nizhny 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*,¹⁰⁹ 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

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. “Traditsionniy 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.

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-salib* (‘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.

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.¹¹⁰

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 Muhammad¹¹¹ and a theological treatise called *Koranicheskiy gumanizm* [*Qur'anic humanism*].¹¹²

In 2016, Batrov presented the manuscript of a theosophical work, *Traditsionnyy islam Rossii. Kontseptualnyye 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 reform* was published.¹¹³

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 al-Sunnah wa-l- Jama'ah* are believers who represent the religion in its three foundations: *Iman, Islam* and *Ihsan*.¹¹⁴

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.¹¹⁵

110 Batyr R., *Abu Hanifa: zhizn i nasledie* [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* [Qur'anic Humanism] (Moscow: Medina, 2015). For more details on the views of T. Ibrahim and his followers, see the article by R.I. Bekkin "The Renovatoinist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam" in this issue.

113 For a brief analysis of this work see Leila Almazova. "Sovremennyye 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]. (Nizhniy Novgorod: Medina, 2007).

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

115 Batyr R., *Traditsionnyy islam Rossii: kontseptual'niye osnovaniya*.

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.¹¹⁶

It should also be noted that the author does not reduce the term 'traditional Islam' to notions of 'patriotic Islam'¹¹⁷ 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.¹¹⁸

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.¹¹⁹

Beyond Batrov's concept of 'traditional Islam', we should also mention that his publications generally receive very various assessment from his fellow believers –

116 Batyr R., *Traditsionnyy islam Rossii: kontseptual'niye osnovaniya*.

117 "Traditsionnyy 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., *Traditsionnyy islam Rossii: kontseptual'niye osnovaniya* [Traditional Islam in Russia: Conceptual Grounds]. Kazan, 2016. (In manuscript).

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

from the harshest possible criticism to approval and gratitude. In particular, the leader of the *Shura*¹²⁰ of the Muslims of Bashkortostan, Ishmurad Khaybullin,¹²¹ has suggested Muslims should declare a ‘general boycott’ of Batrov.¹²²

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 Nurmuhammed 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’¹²³ 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.¹²⁴

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.

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 Discription] (Ufa: Salam, 2010). Timur Rahmatullin notes that the Shura has been repeatedly criticised for its Salafi views, see “Musul’manskiye molodezhnyye 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/, accessed 25 September 2019.

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 srednevekoye 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, see R.I. Bekkin, “The Renovation Movement in Modern Russian Islam” in this issue.

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.¹²⁵

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 Bayramova¹²⁶ among them, along with the authors of the "Tatar Canon" ("Qanunname", 1996).¹²⁷ 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:¹²⁸ "In the opinion of the supporters of 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."¹²⁹

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

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

127 Iskhakov D., "Formirovaniye antizhadiizma 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.

129 Iskhakov D., "Formirovaniye antizhadiizma v Tatarstane: Noveyshiye tendentsii".

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. Fakhreddin," referring to her pro-Salafi views.¹³⁰ He came to this conclusion after analysing speeches in which she argues against the 'pagan' commemoration gatherings on the 3rd, 7th and 40th 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.¹³¹

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."¹³²

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.¹³³

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. 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."¹³⁴

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.

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"], *Tatarstan yashlare* [Tatarstan Youth], 4:12351 (26.07.2018)).

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 Afghani are Hanafis as well and "the Afghani and Tatar Islam are worlds apart."¹³⁵

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.¹³⁶ In their turn, the representatives of the muftiates, imams subordinate to their authority, and other respected leaders who have picked up the idea of developing 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 21st 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

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

136 "Vladimir Putin: 'Traditsionnyy 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 predsedatelem DUM PFO" [The Muftiy of Tatarstan has Taken Part in the Meeting of M.Babich with the Chair of Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Volga Federal District], http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news_10300.html/, accessed 25 September 2019.

a matter of popular traditions (Jalil 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 (Gabelkhaq Samatov, Jalil 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 Samigullin¹³⁷).

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 4th School of Muslim Leaders ‘Mahallah 2.3’, Damir Shagaviev¹³⁸ 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

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].

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

representatives of the 'Hakimiyyah 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 21st 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 *faqih*s 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."¹³⁹ 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 fundamentalist movements and relatively liberal believers, both practicing and 'ethnic'¹⁴⁰ 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.

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 *faqih*s 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/obschaya-informatsiya/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

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 nigezlerle. Uku-ukytu asbaly* [The Basics of Islam. The Textbook] (Kazan: Huzur, 2017), p. 27-28.

U potrazi za “tradicionalnim islamom” u Tataristanu: Između nacionalnog projekta i univerzalističkih teorija

Sažetak

Nakon što je krajem prošlog stoljeća pala komunistička ideologija, u mnogim zemljama bivšeg socijalističkog bloka zamijenile su je islamske vrijednosti. Kao odgovor na to, sekularne zajednice izgradile su koncept “tradicionalnog” (dobrog) islama. Vlasti Rusije i Tataristana slijede ovaj trend. U Ruskoj Federaciji su, historijski gledano, zvanične religijske strukture poprimale formu duhovnih uprava muslimana (muftijstva). One su po nalogu državnih vlasti nastojale ojačati ideju “tradicionalnog islama”, tvrdeći da se domaća “islamska tradicija” u svakoj regiji mora očuvati, a da se ostale moraju odbaciti. U ovom članku se utvrđuje kako se razvoj pojave “tradicionalnog islama” u Republici Tataristanu tumačio od 1990-ih do 2018. godine, korištenjem širokog spektra izvora na tatarskom i ruskom jeziku, uključujući i lične intervju autorâ s vođama tatarske muslimanske zajednice, kao i terenska istraživanja u okruzima i gradovima ove Republike.

Ključne riječi: postsovjetski islam, islam u Tataristanu, “tradicionalni islam”