

## The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam

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### Abstract

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

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

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## Introduction

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

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

On the other hand, the opponents of this view insist the Sunnah remains the second most important source of the Islamic creed and cannot by definition contradict the text of the Qur’an. This position is found in concentrated form in a joint *fatwa* issued by the Council of ‘*ulama*’ of two muftiates, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF) and the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR): “The Sunnah never contradicts the Qur’an. Everything mentioned in the Sunnah and not mentioned in the Qur’an is a prophetic precept that is either mandatory or preferable. And there is no contradiction with the Qur’an here, because the Qur’an tells us to obey the Prophet.”<sup>5</sup>

1 For example, “one should display maximal critical spirit towards *hadiths*, which would include the use of modern historical methods and the achievements of Orientalist criticism. The prophetic Sunnah is important only as the concrete embodiment of Qur’anic commands” in Mukhetdinov D.V., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)* (Moscow: Medina, 2016), p. 20-21. Here and after I cite the English translation of the book by Mukhetdinov, printed by the same publishing house.

2 The principal difference between a polemic and a discussion is that the goal of the latter is to find a consensus. The goal of polemic is the triumph of only one point of view. See Ivin A.A., Nikiforov A.L., *Slovar’ po logike [Dictionary of Logic]* (Moscow: VLADOS, 1997), p. 90.

3 “Only *hadiths* of the ‘*mutawatir*’ type should be accepted as authentic Sunnah (that is, *hadiths* passed down by a large number of narrators who could not possibly have made a prior arrangement to convey the same story). And this type of *hadiths* is unlikely to contain any extra-Qur’anic information about the creation of the world, angels and demons, the lives of pre-Islamic prophets, Judgement Day, or Heaven and Hell. Moreover, acknowledging the divine origin of such information contradicts the idea of the self-sufficiency of the Qur’an, its completeness and perfection, as repeatedly emphasised by the Scripture itself.” Ibrahim T., *Na puti k koranicheskoy tolerantnosti [On the way to Qur’anic tolerance]* (Nizhny Novgorod: Medina, 2007), p. 155.

4 “The true Sunnah of the Prophet is primarily ‘God’s Sunnah’, the Qur’an itself. The extra-Qur’anic Sunnah, even the most authentic (in terms of reliability of conveyance) can only claim relative (compared to the Qur’an) importance, representing the Prophet’s *ijtihad*. God the Gracious and the Wisest did not wish to bind people forever by established norms of a religious, social and political nature (which are, by their nature, dynamic and prone to change), did not establish certain norms in the Qur’an but left it to the Prophet (and after him – to Muslims) to determine the most suitable norms for a given time and place, trusting in the Lord’s assistance and aligning with the universal principles of the Qur’an, the requirements of reason and the common good.” Ibrahim T., *Na puti k koranicheskoy tolerantnosti [On the way to Qur’anic tolerance]*, p. 155.

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

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

## On terminology

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

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

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

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

The Qur'an itself is divided into two parts: one of *al-iman* and the other of *al-islam*, in the sense that the former was revealed in Medina, while the latter was

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

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

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

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

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

Mahmoud Taha was not a Qur'anite and did not reject the Sunnah. Nor was his exclusionary approach to the sources of the Islamic creed (primarily the Qur'an) at all popular. Taha had a small group of followers who called themselves the Republican Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Jumhuriyin*). One of them, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, translated his teacher's major work, *The Second Message of Islam*, into English, so that Taha's ideas have become well-known in the Western world.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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- 14 Mukhetdinov D.V., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)* (Moscow: Medina, 2016).
- 15 “‘Koranity’ protiv ‘koranitov’. K V medzhlisu Soveta muftiev Rossii” [“‘Qur’anites’ against ‘Qur’anites’. For the 5<sup>th</sup> majlis of the Council of Muftis of Russia”], <http://www.islam.ru/content/analytics/51743>, accessed 25 September 2019.
- 16 Mukhetdinov D., *Russian Muslim culture: the traditions of the Ummah within the sphere of Eurasian civilization* (Moscow: Medina, 2016); Mukhetdinov D.V., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)* (Moscow: Medina, 2016); Mukhetdinov D.V., “Obnovlencheskoye dvizheniye v Indonezii: zhizn’ i uchenie Nurkholisa Madzhida” [“The renovatist movement in Indonesia: the life and teachings of Nurkholish Madjid”], *Islam v sovremennom mire [Islam in the modern world]* 13-3 (2017), p. 47-66; Mukhetdinov D.V., “Filosofiya Ismaila Radzhi al-Faruki: v poiskakh neomodernizma” [“Philosophy of Ismail Raji al-Faruki: in search of neomodernism”], *Islam v sovremennom mire [Islam in the modern world]*, 14-2 (2018), p. 165-181, etc.
- 17 Polevye materialy avtora. Interv’yu s Arslanom Sadrievym, 04.08.2018 [Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Arslan Sadriev, 04.08.2018].
- 18 E.g., “the renovatist movement is in principle Qur’anocentric” (Mukhetdinov D.V., *Islam in the 21st century: a program for renewal (Selected papers)*, p. 49).
- 19 The only probable exceptions are the op-ed pieces by Batrov (Batyrr) published in the news website *Business Online*. For example, “And that is why the interminable struggle inside Islam between Qur’ano-centrists and Haditho-centrists, now manifest in the text of the *fatwa* as well, does not merely consist of theoretical discussions of unrelated matters but is essentially a struggle for the future of our country and the whole Muslim world” (Batrov R., “Sovet muftiyev Rossii ob’yavil hadisy vinovnymi v degradatsii islama” [“The Council of Muftis of Russia to declare the *hadiths* guilty of the deterioration of Islam”], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/375729>, accessed 25 September 2019).
- 20 In polemical pieces against the so-called ‘Qur’anites’, the term ‘near-religious figures’ (*okoloreligioznye deyateli*) is sometimes used, (see e.g., “Dzhadidity ili koranity?” [“Jadidites or Qur’anites?”], <http://www.ansar.ru/rightway/dzhadidity-ili-koranity>, accessed 25 September 2019). Nor do they reveal who exactly they mean by the term. Mufti R. Gaynutdin said in a speech at the 5<sup>th</sup> congress of the Council of Muftis of Russia, “We decidedly do not accept the attempts of certain modern near-Islamic figures to reject the Sunnah as the second source, after the Qur’an, of Muslim theology and religious law” (“Vystupleniye muftiya sheykha Ravilya Gaynutdina na V syezde SMR”, <http://islamdumpsb.ru/blog/vystuplenie-muftiya-shejha-ravilya-gajnutdina-na-v-sezde-smr>, accessed 25 September 2019). Once again the names of these supposed ‘near-Islamic figures’ were not revealed.

- 1) In modern Islam, the word ‘Qur’anites’ refers to a very definite movement that completely rejects the Sunnah as a source of Islamic creed.<sup>21</sup> Russian ‘Qur’anites’ do not put forward such radical ideas. They only advocate a limited use of the Sunnah. According to T. Ibrahim, renovationists can, on the criterion of their attitude to the Sunnah, be divided into those who “deny its authenticity” (Qur’anites) and those who advocate “a more critical approach to *hadiths* with regard to establishing their authenticity.”<sup>22</sup> He classifies himself and his supporters as belonging to the second category.<sup>23</sup>
- 2) There is no information on relations between Russian supporters of renovation in Islam and representatives of the Qur’anite movement.
- 3) All those called ‘Qur’anites’ in Russia identify themselves differently.<sup>24</sup>

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

With certain reservations, it would be acceptable to refer to the so-called ‘Qur’anites’ by a term common in Muslim theology, *Ahl al-Qur’an*. In that case, one would have to use the term *Ahl al-Hadith* to refer to their opponents, which is not quite accurate as a description of the ideological attitudes of those usually termed traditionalists or conservatives in this polemic. They prefer to refer to themselves as Sunni Muslims and followers of *Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah*, or less often as ‘traditionalists’. There have also been attempts to present them as

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

22 Ibrahim T., “Mezhdru proshlym i budushchim: zamechaniya ob obnovlencheskom dvizhenii v islame” [“Between the past and the future: notes on the renovationist movement in Islam”], *Bigiyevskiy chteniya: bogoslovskaya mysl rossiyskikh musulman 19 – nachala 20 vv.* [Readings from Bigiev: theological thought of Russian Muslims of the 19th – early 20th centuries], D.V. Mukhetdinov (ed.), (Moscow: Medina, 2015), p. 7.

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

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

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

Qadimists<sup>26</sup>, with reference to the second term of the ‘Jadidist – Qadimist’ dichotomy, but without great success. In any case, as noted above, the term ‘Jadidist’ has not gained wide currency in referring to the supporters of renovation in modern Russian Islam. Moreover, like ‘Jadidist’, ‘Qadimist’ has a particular historical meaning and cannot be automatically transferred to the realia of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>27</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

27 Poleyve materialy avtora. Interv’yu s Nailom Garipovym, 29.05.2018 [Author’s fieldwork materials. Interview with Nail Garipov, 29.05.2018].

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

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

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

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

While they share a platform that boils down to the need to re-evaluate the role of the Sunnah in the lives of Muslims, renovationists couch their ideological creed in a variety of ways. For instance, Mukhetdinov positions himself as a supporter of reforms.<sup>33</sup> Arslan Sadriev, by contrast, claims to be a true traditionalist who is only calling for the Qur’an to be understood in terms of the meaning Allah put into it.<sup>34</sup> The views expressed by Sadriev in his famous interview to the news website Business Online show otherwise, however, namely that he adheres to extreme reformist opinions regarding the dogmatic side of the Muslim religion.<sup>35</sup> Another renovationist, Rustam Batrov, claims to be against reform and one of his books is even titled, *Vmesto reformy* [Instead of reform].<sup>36</sup> In it, he suggests that, instead of reforming Islam, Muslims should interpret the existing tenets of the Qur’an and the Sunnah correctly. But the revolutionary (in the radical nature of its slogans) interpretation of the Holy Book and *hadiths* that Batrov calls for is essentially a call for reform of the dogmatic aspect of Islam.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to an official statement on the DUM RF website, Ravil Gaynutdin revoked Sadriev's "ecclesiastical capacity (*duhovniy san*) and removed him from the positions of *imam-muhtasib* of the Moscow oblast' and *imam-khatib* of the Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of the Sergiyevo-Posadskiy District."<sup>39</sup> De facto, Sadriev has remained leader of the Muslim community in Sergiyev Posad. The only thing that has changed is that his 'parish' (community) is no longer part of the DUM RF structure.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 'Qur'anic humanism' and Muslim renovationism

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

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

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

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

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

In his publications devoted to criticising the *fatwa*, Batrov shows convincingly that theological Islamic thought in modern Russia is in serious crisis.<sup>47</sup> Batrov is, of course, referring to his opponents – those he calls *Hadithites* or *Haditho-centrists*. His remark is just as true of the renovationists as of the traditionalists, however.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Arslan Sadriev and Rustam Batrov have not produced theological works either.<sup>50</sup> Like Mukhetdinov, both prefer to hold positions as research associates in academic institutions to the status of independent theologian. Both these religious figures cooperated with the *Centre of Islamic Studies*, which is affiliated with the *Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan*.<sup>51</sup>

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

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

...the Hanafi *madhab* and the *madhab* of Abu Hanifa are far from being identical... Speaking briefly, Abu Hanifa's *madhab* (teaching, literally 'way') is

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

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

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

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

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

how the great Islamic theologian systematised the Islamic legacy of our Prophet, and, one must suppose, he did it in a manner very precisely for his time. The Hanafi *madhab* is a medieval interpretation of this teaching. It is what Abu Hanifa's disciples and followers have turned his teaching into.<sup>54</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

fundamental element of the concept of Qur'anic humanism is the theory of the all-inclusiveness of Divine Mercy, first enunciated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Tatar theologian Musa Bigeev (Bigiev) (1873–1949),<sup>63</sup> who believed that all people, regardless of their faith, would go to Heaven.<sup>64</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We also see that Mukhetdinov clearly simplifies the notion of *taqlid*, reducing it to rudimentary apologetics. Were one to attempt to develop this idea of authority in Islam, its logical continuation would be rejection of *madhabs*. But the author does not quite go there – at least in his public speeches and opinion pieces.

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

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

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

Later, given rising indignation in the media,<sup>70</sup> Mukhetdinov had to disavow his unequivocal words and state that he had been misunderstood.<sup>71</sup>

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

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

70 Ikramutdin Khan, "Zachem Mukhetdinov meshayet Kadyrovu zashchishchat hidzhab?" ["Why does Mukhetdinov stand in the way of Kadyrov defending hijab?"], <https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=31079>, accessed 25 September 2019.

71 "Musul'mane oblegchenno vzdohnuli. Mukhetdinov 'zakryl' vrata svoyego idzhtihada po hidzhabu" ["Muslims take a sigh of relief. Mukhetdinov 'closes' the doors of his hijab ijihad"], <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-musulmane-oblegchenno-vzdohnuli-dam/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

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

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

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

## Theologians or Islamic studies scholars?

It is a signature feature of the renovatist movement in modern Russian Islam that its most notable representatives are trying to straddle the border between academic Islamic studies and Islamic theology. This sometimes takes quite unusual forms. For instance, in one of his interviews Damir Mukhetdinov virtually equated Islamic theologians to Soviet researchers into Islam.<sup>74</sup> Renovatists

72 "Damir *hadhrat*, you are a prominent figure in the Russian Muslim community. To prevent these rumours becoming real, you need to make your position on the so-called 'Qur'anites' clear. We don't really need these problems brought by a Syrian philosopher. We have enough unsettled issues of our own", Muqaddas *hadhrat* Bibarsov told Mukhetdinov, "Sovet muftiyev Rossii nazval 'koranitov' sektoj" ["The Russian Council of Muftis has called the 'Qur'anites' a sect"], <http://www.ansar.ru/sobcor/sov-mufti-ev-rossii-nazval-koranitov-sektoj>, accessed 25 September 2019).

73 Such people as the muftis Muqaddas Bibarsov and Nafigulla Ashirov and other representatives of the official Islamic 'clergy' can hardly be called conservatives or blind supporters of *taqlid*.

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

themselves mostly seek recognition as Islamic studies scholars rather than as Islamic theologians. At the same time, their pieces tend to be less purely academic or theological than examples of religious journalism.<sup>75</sup>

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

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

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

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

Perhaps the Islamic theologian most revered by the renovationists, Musa

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

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

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

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

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

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

A further thing standing in the way of the appearance of well-rounded polymath imams is the fact that neither Mukhetdinov himself nor his proteges want to be mere ministers of the Islamic religion, i.e. to engage in daily ministerial and educational activities as leaders of Muslim communities. As the biographies of the young people working under Mukhetdinov show, most of them have both a religious and a secular education and want administrative positions in the muftiate system. This accords with Mukhetdinov's own interests as Deputy Chairman of DUM RF. He needs an inside track in those places. It is not by chance that his young proteges are often transferred to other regions as the need arises.<sup>80</sup>

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

Yet again we find ourselves facing the system of muftiates we began the article with. The system itself does not require profound theological knowledge or qualifications from those in the position of mufti. Only two of the leaders of the

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

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

federal and major regional muftiates, the Chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUM RT) Kamil Samigullin and, with certain reservations, the Chairman of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia (TsDUM) Talgat Tadzhuddin, are muftis in the proper sense of the word, i.e. theologians with the qualifications to issue *fatwas*.

## The political ideology of the renovationists

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

As with his opinion pieces on religious issues, Mukhetdinov usually confines himself to general comments when articulating the political ideology of the movement. Thus, he writes on the subject of the political platform of renovationism:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

86 Mukhetdinov D., "Otvét na kritiku", p. 106.

87 Mukhetdinov D., "Otvét na kritiku", p. 95.

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

Another renovationist, Rustam Batrov, also positions himself as a conservative. He does not articulate his political position very clearly, but he supports active involvement of the state in controlling the Muslim religion. Heads of the muftiates, according to Batrov, are primarily government officials who perform the task given them by the leader of the country: "A mufti cannot but be a government official. At least in those places where Muslim peoples have their own state. Islam only accepts singleness of authority, dual power is not appropriate for our faith."<sup>89</sup> Batrov thinks that "Islam as an institution cannot fully function outside government control."<sup>90</sup> He continues that "for Muslims the Islamic 'church' is the state itself." Since we elect the ruler of the state, Batrov continues, we can trust him to appoint the leader of the Muslim community – a mufti or other government official who will be responsible for pursuing religious policy.<sup>91</sup>

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

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

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

89 Batyr R., "Muftiy ne mozhet ne byt' chinovnikom" ["A mufti cannot but be a government official"], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/345697?fbclid=IwAR2uP5bJmjY47dt1euFwwDO6Nwc45B3pU-JtFRHdU7bZ453W2OwoIJ9pS9tU%C2%BB>, accessed 25 September 2019.

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

91 Batyr R., "Muftiy ne mozhet ne byt' chinovnikom" ["A mufti cannot but be a government official"], <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/345697?fbclid=IwAR2uP5bJmjY47dt1euFwwDO6Nwc45B3pU-JtFRHdU7bZ453W2OwoIJ9pS9tU%C2%BB>, accessed 25 September 2019.

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

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

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

## Conclusion

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

It is a notable feature of Muslim renovatistism in Russia that its advocates tend not to be independent theologians and intellectuals but either former or incumbent employees of official Islamic religious organisations – the muftiates.

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

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

Their ideological leader Tawfiq Ibrahim is an exception, as a research associate at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

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

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

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

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

Renovationists constituted a minority of the Orthodox clergy, however, as clearly demonstrated at the Local Council (Pomestniy Sobor) of the Russian

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

Orthodox Church<sup>95</sup> of 1917–1918, when a majority of the clergy participating rejected the ideas of reforming both the organisational structure of the church and its ceremonial aspect.

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Renovacionistički pokret u savremenom ruskom islamu

## Sažetak

Posljednjih godina na ruskom islamskom internetu odomaćile su se široke diskusije o publikacijama i javnim govorima vjerskih ličnosti koje sebe nazivaju renovacionistima ili modernistima. Predstavnici ove grupe zagovaraju revidiranje *sunmeta* i smatraju da uputa koja nije direktno spomenuta u Kur'anu nije obavezna. Zato ih njihovi protivnici nazivaju "kur'anijama". U ovom radu analizira se pojava renovacionizma u modernom ruskom islamu. Specifično obilježje ovog pokreta jeste to što ideologija njegovih predstavnika spaja sekularizam u pogledu islamskih propisa, s klerikalizmom u pogledu vlasti i javnih institucija. Autor postavlja pitanje da li na ruske islamske renovacioniste treba gledati kao na jednu organizaciju. Potencijal renovacionističkog pokreta s vremenom može privući pažnju političkog režima savremene Rusije. Vlast koristi pojam "tradicionalnog islama" da odvoji lojalne muslimane od onih koje smatra prijetnjom. Kada se jednom, napokon, ovaj konstrukt odbaci, za islam u Rusiji renovacionistički religijski i politički stavovi mogu poslužiti kao osnova nove ideologije.

**Ključne riječi:** renovacionistički pokret u islamu, "kur'anije", tradicionalisti u islamu, džedidije, tradicionalni islam