

# CONTEXT

JOURNAL OF  
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

■ VOLUME 6  
NUMBER 1  
2019

ČASOPIS ZA  
INTERDISCIPLINARNE STUDIJE

■ GODINA 6  
BROJ 1  
2019.

ISSN 2303-6966



9 772303 695801

**CNS**  
CENTAR ZA NAPREDNE STUDIJE  
CENTER FOR ADVANCED STUDIES  
SARAJEVO

# CONTEXT

JOURNAL OF  
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

ČASOPIS ZA  
INTERDISCIPLINARNE STUDIJE

# CONTEXT

ČASOPIS ZA  
INTERDISCIPLINARNE STUDIJE

---

*Context: Časopis za interdisciplinarne studije* je recenzirani, naučni časopis posvećen unapređenju interdisciplinarnih istraživanja najurgentnijih društvenih i političkih tema našeg vremena kao što su posljedice ubrzane globalizacije, pluralizam i raznolikost, ljudska prava i slobode, održivi razvoj i međureligijska susretanja. Pozivamo istraživače u humanističkim i društvenim naukama da daju doprinos boljem razumijevanju glavnih moralnih i etičkih problema kroz kreativnu razmjenu ideja, gledišta i metodologija. U nastojanju da premostimo razlike među kulturama, u ovom časopisu objavljivat ćemo i prijevode važnijih radova. U *Contextu* su dobrodošli i članci i prikazi knjiga iz svih područja interdisciplinarnih istraživanja.

---

## REDAKCIJA

Ahmet Alibašić, *Univerzitet u Sarajevu*, glavni urednik  
Munir Drkić, *Univerzitet u Sarajevu*, izvršni urednik  
Renat Bekkin, *Södertörn univerzitet*, gost urednik  
Aid Smajić, *Univerzitet u Sarajevu*  
Dževada Šuško, *Islamska zajednica u BiH*  
Ermin Sinanović, *Univerzitet Shenandoah*  
Ešref-Kenan Rašidagić, *Univerzitet u Sarajevu*  
Munir Mujić, *Univerzitet u Sarajevu*

## SAVJET ČASOPISA

Fikret Karčić, *Univerzitet u Sarajevu*  
Nusret Isanović, *Univerzitet u Sarajevu*  
Omer Spahić, *Međunarodni islamski univerzitet u Maleziji*

## UPUTE ZA PREDAJU RADOVA

Detaljne upute pogledati na [cns.ba/context](http://cns.ba/context).

## ADRESA

*Context: Časopis za interdisciplinarne studije*  
Centar za napredne studije  
Marka Marulića 2C, Sarajevo 71 000  
Bosna i Hercegovina  
E-mail: [sekretar@cns.ba](mailto:sekretar@cns.ba)

---

*Context: Časopis za interdisciplinarne studije* (ISSN-print 2303-6958, ISSN-online 2303-6966)  
dva puta godišnje izdaje  
Centar za napredne studije, Marka Marulića 2C, 71 000 Sarajevo, Bosna i Hercegovina,  
tel: +387 33 716 040, fax: +387 33 716 041, email: [sekretar@cns.ba](mailto:sekretar@cns.ba).

Slobodan online pristup časopisu na: [cns.ba/context](http://cns.ba/context).

© Centar za napredne studije, Sarajevo, Bosna i Hercegovina. Sva prava zadržana. Nijedan dio ove publikacije ne može biti reproduciran, prevođen, pohranjivan u sisteme za čuvanje i pretraživanje podataka, u bilo kojem obliku i bilo kojim sredstvima, elektronskim, mehaničkim, kopiranjem ili na drugi način, bez prethodnoga odobrenja izdavača.

Štampano u Bosni i Hercegovini.

---

# CONTEXT

JOURNAL OF  
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES ■ VOLUME 6  
NUMBER 1  
2019

ČASOPIS ZA  
INTERDISCIPLINARNE STUDIJE ■ GODINA 6  
BROJ 1  
2019.

# CONTEXT

## JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

---

*Context: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal committed to the advancement of interdisciplinary research in exploration of the most pressing and emerging key social and political issues of the 21st century. These include the implications of accelerated globalization, pluralism and diversity, human rights and freedoms, sustainable development, and inter-religious encounters. Researchers in the humanities and social sciences are invited to contribute to a better understanding of major moral and ethical issues through creative cross-pollination of ideas, perspectives, and methodologies. In an effort to bridge different cultures, the journal will also publish translations of significant articles. *Context* welcomes articles, essays and book reviews in all areas of interdisciplinary studies.

---

### EDITORS

Ahmet Alibašić, *University of Sarajevo*, Editor in Chief  
Munir Drkić, *University of Sarajevo*, Executive Editor  
Renat Bekkin, *Södertörn University*, Guest Editor  
Aid Smajić, *University of Sarajevo*  
Dževada Šuško, *The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina*  
Ermin Sinanović, *Shenandoah University*  
Ešref-Kenan Rašidagić, *University of Sarajevo*  
Munir Mujić, *University of Sarajevo*

### ADVISORY BOARD

Fikret Karčić, *University of Sarajevo*  
Nusret Isanović, *University of Sarajevo*  
Omer Spahić, *International Islamic University Malaysia*

### SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

For detailed instructions, please visit the journal's homepage at [cns.ba/context](http://cns.ba/context).

### CORRESPONDENCE

*Context: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*  
Center for Advanced Studies / Centar za napredne studije  
Marka Marulića 2C, Sarajevo 71 000  
Bosnia and Herzegovina  
E: [sekretar@cns.ba](mailto:sekretar@cns.ba)

---

*Context: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* (ISSN-print 2303-6958, ISSN-online 2303-6966) is published biannually by the Center for Advanced Studies, Marka Marulića 2C, Sarajevo 71 000, Bosna and Herzegovina, tel: +387 33 716 040, fax: +387 33 716 041, email: [sekretar@cns.ba](mailto:sekretar@cns.ba).

For detailed instructions, please visit the journal's homepage at [cns.ba/context](http://cns.ba/context).

© Center for Advanced Studies, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Printed in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

---

# CONTEXT

Članci i rasprave / Articles

---



## Introduction

---

*Renat Bekkin*

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

Nevertheless, even those works that do not fully meet the scholarly criteria or fail to be based on reliable sources are important per se as they indicate public interest in such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon as traditional Islam. Thanks to a number of objective and subjective factors the concept of traditional Islam, albeit an artificial construct, has become an important element, without which it is difficult to imagine the portrait of Islam in modern Russia.

A few years ago, I came up with an idea to put together a book that would examine both the theoretical aspects of traditional Islam and individual cases from different regions of Russia with a significant Muslim population. Eventually, with the assistance from the Center for Advanced Studies in Sarajevo, an edited volume “The concept of ‘Traditional Islam’ in modern Islamic discourse in Russia” was prepared, which is due to be published soon.

This issue of Context journal presents selected articles from the edited volume. Before giving a brief description of the articles included in the issue, a few words should be said about the authors who collaborated in this work.

The authors are representatives of various Russian schools of historical and Oriental studies. While sociologists and representatives of other social sciences have had a significant influence on research by Western historians and Orientalists for



more than a decade, this is not the case for Russian scholars (except some staff at certain research centres in Moscow and St. Petersburg). I am not inclined to give this circumstance either a positive or a negative evaluation but do consider it my duty to note it and its significance for the reader. My experience working on the edited volume has shown that the collaboration of authors from different academic backgrounds can be positive both for a book as a whole and for the individual articles in the journal.

Another important point to note is that the authors of some of the articles are involved in the subject matter discussed in this issue of Context in various ways. Some are both students and subjects of the discourses in question at the same time, which is to say they are both professional researchers of and active participants in Islamic discourse in Russia.

These significant differences between the authors are not, in my opinion, a disadvantage. In fact, they have turned out to be a significant advantage for this special issue of the journal.

The journal opens with an article by Leila Almazova and Azat Akhunov on “In Search of ‘Traditional Islam’ in Tatarstan: Between National Project and Universalist Theories”. It contains a comprehensive analysis of the concept of ‘traditional Islam’. The authors attempted to consider the phenomenon of traditional Islam and analyse sources that flesh out the concept. In investigating the question of the origins of the concept of ‘traditional Islam’, the authors turn to the history of theological thought in the Volga-Ural region. They consider the etymology of the Arabic word *taqlid* in the context of Tatar theological discourse in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, concluding that ‘traditional Islam’ and similar concepts were unfamiliar to Muslim theologians in pre-revolutionary Russia.

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

The article by Moscow-based religious scholar Sofya Ragozina “Official Discourse on Islam and Islamic Discourse in Contemporary Russia” focuses on all-Russian aspects of the problem and includes a look at the official discourse on Islam, by which the author understands “the discourse transmitted by various government institutions and statesmen”. Ragozina considers Islamic official discourse to be part of this discourse, as it “includes statements by Russia’s muftiates,

the largest religious organizations representing the country's Muslim community". "The rhetoric of the leaders of Russia's muftiates", Ragozina writes, "is characterized by a high level of intertextuality that indicates close semantic connections with governmental discourse (not just about Islam). Their rhetoric abounds in conceptual metaphors indicating loyalty to the ruling elite. Official Islamic discourse also offers us a better understanding of the use of the 'good' vs. 'bad' Islam dichotomy in Russia."

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

Participation of the Russian muftiates in the formation of the discourse on traditional Islam is also discussed in the article "'Traditional Islam' in the discourse of religious associations, ethnic organizations and government structures in Bashkortostan" by ethnographer from Ufa, Zilya Khabibullina.

Particular attention in this article is given to the role of Sufism and pseudo-Sufism in the discourse on traditional Islam. The author analyses the role of Sufi *tariqas* in the formation of Bashkir identity in modern Bashkortostan. According to Khabibullina, one of the most effective tools for the formation of this identity is the *Haqqaniyya tariqa's* vigorous activity to create "new places of worship, accompanied by sacralisation and mythmaking". She says that studying practices related to pilgrimage and the creation and functioning of holy places will help to understand the phenomenon of traditional Islam in Bashkortostan better, "There has been practically no public discussion in the press on the issue of 'traditional Islam' that covers current problems or attempt to discover the truth whether in the spiritual administrations or the unofficial Islamic movements. It is more evident in the ethnographic material. The question of traditional Islam has

a very prominent place in the attitudes of the Muslim ummah of Bashkortostan to local holy places and related rites.”

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

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

At the same time, as noted by Muratova, even after its introduction into official Islamic discourse, the concept of ‘traditional Islam’ did not become part of the official doctrine of the two muftiates operating in Crimea, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (DUMK) and the Spiritual Centre of Muslims of Crimea (DTsMK). These structures interpret the content of the notion of ‘traditional Islam’ differently, however, “despite a certain similarity in their discourses of ‘traditional Islam’ and their appeals to traditions and the legacy of ancestors, there remain several substantial differences between the supporters of DUMK and DTsMK. The first is the significant influence of Sufism on DTsMK ideology, which explains its emphasis on the revival of Sufi practices, once quite widespread in Crimea. A return to such practices, which were no longer popular with Crimean Tatars by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seems like an attempt to artificially re-traditionalise and archaicise religious life. Compared to such attempts, DUMK looks like an organisation propagating a more ‘modern’ project of Islam, designed to combine Crimean Tatar religiosity with their secular lifestyle.”

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

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

---

*Leila Almazova\* and Azat Akhunov\*\**

### Abstract

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

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

---

\* Cand.Sc. in History; Associate Professor at the Department of Oriental and Islamic Studies of the Kazan Federal University.

\*\* Cand.Sc. in Philology; Leading Research Fellow at G. Ibragimov Institute of Language, Literature and Art of the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences.

## Introduction

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

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

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

The ‘Unifying’ congress of 1998 played an important role in the post-Soviet history of the Republic of Tatarstan. It made it possible for the Muslim community of the Republic to overcome its internal differences and facilitated the creation of a single Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

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

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

People from the middle generation, most of whom are profoundly atheistic and Soviet-minded, had lost touch with Islam, while the young had only started to show interest to Islam. There were no longer any religious authority figures to take the lead in the Muslim community. Elderly Tatars, who just yesterday had been communists and Komsomol members, were not able to pick up the baton, due to their religious illiteracy. Young imams, who had received their education abroad, entered the arena later, from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, but received little support from common Muslims due to their youth. It is important to note, however, that the average age of devout Muslims in Tatarstan has become much lower. Most of the congregation is now aged between 20–50 years. The senior generation, given its atheistic worldview, is largely absent.<sup>8</sup> Young imams educated abroad are often

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.<sup>9</sup>

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

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

... instructing practitioners regarding the correct form and purposes of a given practice that, precisely because it has been established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to a past (when the practice was instituted and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and a future (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through a present (how it is linked to other practices, institutions and social conditions).<sup>11</sup>

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

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

We also think that the word 'tradition' tends to be used as a weapon in the state authorities' discourse with a view to memory and identity construction by

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.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, virtually every Muslim public figure appeals to the term in one way or another, though each understands it in their own way.

What exactly the religious authorities of Tatarstan understand by 'Islamic tradition' and how this concept is used by various actors will be the subject of this article. Our sources include works by such authors as Jalil Fazlyev, Ramil Adygamov, Mahmut Sharafutdinov, Valiulla Yakupov, Kamil Samigullin, Rustam Nurgaleev, Rustam Batrov (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"<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

Criticisms of *taqlid* in Tatar theological literature become very pronounced with the appearance of two figures, Abu Nasr Qursawi<sup>17</sup> and an admirer of his work

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](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.<sup>18</sup> Their work was later continued by Ziyaeddin Kamali<sup>19</sup> and Musa Bigiev,<sup>20</sup> and supported by the more moderate thinker, Rizaeddin 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."<sup>21</sup>

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

In our opinion, there are no grounds today for a decisively negative assessment of the old-method school. Islam was the ideological content of Tatar social life, which is why it was primarily focused on the Islamic form of public education. Given Tsarism's colonial anti-Muslim policy, the main goal of Tatars was simply to survive, to preserve

- 
- 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 zhurnalnyn bibliografik kursatkech* (Kazan: Iman, 2004); Rustem Mukhametshin. *Tatarskiy traditsionalizm: osobennosti i formy proyavleniya* (Kazan: Meddok, 2005).
- 23 Shepard W., "Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 19, No 3. (Aug 1987), p. 318.

themselves as a nation and to prove their historical strength. This is why the old-method school played a very important role in the consolidation of the Tatar people as a single entity. Despite the inevitable losses in the contents of the learning process, it is historically justified to consider the school progressive.<sup>24</sup>

Going back to the two terms used in modern Tatar Islamic discourse for the Muslim tradition – ‘traditional Islam’ and ‘Islamic traditions’ – one should point out that its historical counterpart, *taqlid*, was perceived differently by different segments of Tatar society: some considered it a clearly harmful phenomenon that caused a ‘sleep of reason’ for Muslims and led to them lagging behind progressive nations,<sup>25</sup> while others saw *taqlid* as a way of preserving religious and ethnic identity.<sup>26</sup> In Islamic law (*fiqh*), *taqlid* still means to follow religious authority figures of the past, and an absolute majority of legal experts accept the justification for its presence in Muslim practice.<sup>27</sup>

## Historiographical outline of the ‘traditional Islam’ problem

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

[...]the] neo-traditionalist may see positive value in local traditions *qua* local traditions, over against Western ways and also over against the more unitary

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.<sup>29</sup>

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

Traditional Islamic discourse has its scholarly Islamic roots in a pervasively normative scholarly marriage that dates back to the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries, in a holistic Islamic vision that intermarries sober Sufism, Sunni theological discourse as instigated by al-Aš'arī and al-Māturīdī and by then well consolidated legal schools. The subsequently dominant Sunni Islamic paradigm that began taking form amongst the immediate predecessors of al-Ġazālī, al-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.<sup>32</sup>

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

Based on the decisions of this conference regarding the distinguishing features of Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah compared to the misguided people, we hereby give

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.<sup>34</sup>

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

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

For example, in her article 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."<sup>38</sup> Such an approach to Islam as a set of rituals, conceptions and habits popular with the older generation and considered 'correct' Islam compared to the fundamentalist ideas of modern Islamist movements<sup>39</sup> has a certain similarity with the processes in the Islamic and quasi-Islamic<sup>40</sup> community of Tatarstan, elaborated on below.

34 Ikramuddin Khan, "V Groznom 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 Chechenskoj Respublike*, [Islam in Modern Chechen Republic] (Moscow: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of RAS, 2002), p. 14.

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

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

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

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

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

Later in his introduction the author presents a sub-section 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 reformism<sup>43</sup> (which argued against following *madhabs* or popular traditions) and the Islamic traditional legacy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which took the form of conservative orthodoxy, as expressed by following the Hanafi *madhab*, traditional Islamic education (Qadimism), and popular religiously embellished traditions.

To support his argument, Frank appeals to a 2004 work by Valiulla Yakupov entitled “Hanafitskiy mazhab, ego 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.”<sup>44</sup> 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').<sup>45</sup> Yakupov thus reconsidered his views and ceased to claim that there was any ideological connection between Islamic terrorism and the Jadidists. At the same time, one should note that Frank was undoubtedly right in saying that contradictions have existed between different Islamic trends in the past and that anyone serious about formulating a concept of Tatar tradition must explain which tradition it applies to.

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

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

In general, it is a drawback of works by Western researchers (notwithstanding their undeniable achievements, like being able to look at the situation from the outside and come to reasonable conclusions on the 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,<sup>47</sup> and support for Naqshbandi Sufism, with its traditions of quiet *dhikr*.<sup>48</sup> In other work, the authors both state that the very notion of ‘traditional Islam’ is an umbrella term whose unifying feature is loyalty to the Kremlin and its apolitical nature. At the same time, Kemper and Bustanov note that each region builds up its own line of understanding of what is traditional. For Tatarstan they point out the paradigm shift from apologia for Jadidism in the early 1990s to apologia for Qadimism in the 2000s, as the local variant of ‘traditional Islam’.<sup>49</sup>

One of the most recent works to look at the phenomenon of ‘traditional Islam’ is an article by Matteo Benussi on “Sovereign Islam and Tatar Aqīdah: Normative Religious Narratives and Grassroots Criticism Amongst Tatarstan’s Muslims”.<sup>50</sup> It is an interesting anthropological study, but the author’s 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."<sup>51</sup>

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

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

The final work for us to consider was published in 2019. It is an article by Lili Di Puppò and Jesko Schmoller called "Here or Elsewhere: Sufism and Traditional Islam in Russia's Volga-Ural Region".<sup>52</sup> Analysing the correlation between the terms 'traditional Islam' and 'Sufism', the authors conclude that both notions are rather ambivalent and can take on contradictory meanings. For instance, Sufism can historically be traced back to the local phenomenon of pre-revolutionary '*Ishanism*' and as such demonstrates commitment to domestic traditions. On the other hand, because the succession line of Sufi sheikhs was broken in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan during the Soviet period, contemporary murids are apprentices of Dagestani, Turkish, Tajik, or other regional sheikhs of *Tasawwuf*. It is therefore difficult to say how traditional Sufism actually is under really existing local conditions. Or indeed how traditional the notion of 'traditional Islam' itself is in the Volga-Urals region, given that the Grozny fatwa<sup>53</sup> interprets it as including the notion of *ihsan* (which in Russian case means the adherence to moderate or sober Sufi brotherhoods).

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

In analysing statements on Sufism made by respondents, the authors present a mosaic of opinions – from the idea that the land of Bashkortostan is filled with barakah to the belief that Sufism should be rejected because of the practice of the apprentice's unquestioning obedience to the teacher. The reader will likely not understand the cause of this polyphony. In our opinion, the problem is that the

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."<sup>54</sup> As noted above in our review of Frank's work, the term 'Jadidism' is only applicable to educational reform and its adherents often held widely diverse opinions on religious problems. For example, Ziyaeddin Kamali completely denied the importance of Sufism, considering it an 'innovation' - *bid'ah*.<sup>55</sup> Musa Bigiev defended Sufism, emphasising its importance for the development of Islamic civilisation.<sup>56</sup> One should note that the Tatar religious reformers of the early 20th century, whom the authors count among the Jadid movement, did not share a unanimous attitude to Sufism.

To sum up, this review of these works on 'traditional Islam' in Tatarstan has made clear that their drawbacks are often due to their authors' lack of knowledge of local realities and insufficient use of sources from regional religious figures and ordinary Muslims, and especially of Tatar-language sources (there is not a single link to Tatar sources in the works of Derek, Benussi, or Di Puppò and 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.<sup>57</sup> He became well-known in the 1990s, when he started teaching the basics of Islam in his home village and later rolled out the experience to all of Baltasinskiy District. In 1998, there were 140 children in Burbash performing prayers five times a day, 70 of whom could read the Qur'an.<sup>58</sup>

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

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.”<sup>61</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

61 Rashit Minhaj, “Bərbashlar bashlap yeri” [“Bərbashlar - are the initiators”], *Watanyım 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.<sup>65</sup>

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

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

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

These *majlises*<sup>67</sup> preserved our people's faith during the era of godlessness and atheism; what is more, they helped to pass on religious knowledge. As a result, for 70-80 years of godlessness, knowledge of the existence of Allah, His truthfulness, and the purity of our religion was passed on to our people... And nowadays these *majlises* serve as a means to create strong ties between spiritual

65 As an example of the position of the secular authorities, we can quote a speech by first President of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev at the IVth Congress of Muslims of Tatarstan (February of 2010), "I think we still undervalue the role of ethnic and historical consciousness in understanding our religious traditions. I see that in the example of the disputes about Bolgar and the interpretation of some rituals. What's wrong with Tatars having religious ceremonies on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> day or a year after a close relative's death? These customs not only do not contradict Islam but are actually quite an effective form of preserving and reproducing Islamic traditions, albeit in a very simple form. And they help a lot of people — our children and grandchildren, old and young — to get their introduction to Islam. They hear recital of the Qur'an, the sermon of the mullah, ask questions." Cited after Yakupov V., *Ziyarat (poseshcheniye) 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.<sup>68</sup>

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 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> days and one year’ are supposed to be held.<sup>69</sup>

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

The muftiate is also known to have taken steps to limit the rights of unregistered imams<sup>72</sup> to perform commemoration rituals for the deceased. The main motive of the ban is concern that imams not registered with the muftiate may not adopt the Spiritual Administration’s official policy, which may give rise to deviation and loose interpretation of 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,<sup>73</sup> which is why we will not dwell upon the particulars of his views in this article. We cannot forego all discussion of Yakupov's beliefs here, however, since he defined the image of Islam in Tatarstan for over 20 years. One could say he shaped the image as chief editor of the Iman publishing house, which published 402 editions in Russian<sup>74</sup> and 627 editions in Tatar between 1991 and 2011 on a wide range of Islam-related topics.<sup>75</sup>

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

He published a number of articles explaining the notion of 'traditional Islam' in one way or another. Key among them were a brochure published in 2004 called *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/](http://tatarmoscow.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2167&Itemid=99999999/), accessed 25 September 2019.

meaning and relevance],<sup>77</sup> and pieces written at various times and then collected in the 2006 book *K prorocheskomu islamu [Toward prophetic Islam]*<sup>78</sup>, namely “The role of Traditional Islam in the Religious revival”, “Ethnic customs, traditions and Hadiths”, “Rituals for commemorating the deceased”, “On visiting Bolgar and Bilyar”, “Understanding the term ‘bid‘a’”, “The dichotomy of ‘adat- bid‘a’”, and an article from a 2011 book *Islam segodnya [Islam today]* 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 sermon<sup>79</sup> and the popularity of *du‘a*, personal appeals to the Lord, because Tatars cannot be satisfied with a merely mechanical approach to performing ritual. In his opinion, individual perception of the Divine with the heart is particularly important,<sup>80</sup> as is the preservation of the nation inside a single madhab culture, because it makes the grandeur of Islamic prayer, its dignified sublimity and its acceptance by God much higher and more effective.<sup>81</sup> Valiulla Yakupov also defends the Shariah right to visit Bolgar to commemorate the Volga Bulgars’ conversion to Islam, citing as an argument the fact that Muslims celebrate the holiday of Ashura to commemorate the liberation of the Jewish people from Egyptian rule.<sup>82</sup> Regarding the majlises on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> days after a death, he says these rituals gained a foothold during pre-Soviet times as a form of philanthropy and mutual assistance amongst Tatars under conditions of economic oppression by colonial (Russian) powers.<sup>83</sup>

It needs to be said that, in addition to explaining what ‘traditional Islam’ is in his understanding (Tatar as the language of sermons, Qur’an majlises, all kinds of *du‘a*, visiting Bolgar), Yakupov quite often uses the term ‘traditional Islam’ in the context of polemic:

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

77 Yakupov, V. *Hanafitskiy mazhab, ego znachenie 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*],<sup>85</sup> which criticises several such movements, starting with Wahhabism and ending with Jadidism, Euro-Islam and Neopaganism, has become something of a classic. By the start of the second decade, the impulse given by the 'mirasists',<sup>86</sup> who equated religious reform with Jadidism,<sup>87</sup> ceased to be relevant (although Yakupov's work still contained occasional attacks on reformers, it was more by force of habit than for any strategic reason – authors' note), but his anti-Wahhabist rhetoric remained intact and even enhanced: "The official clergy in the inner part of Russia today<sup>88</sup> is not only ready to 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."<sup>89</sup>

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

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.<sup>91</sup>

## 'Traditional Islam' in the evolution of mufti Kamil Samigullin's views

Kamil Samigullin is the youngest mufti in Russia. He was born in 1985 in Mari El, a Finno-Ugric republic adjacent to Tatarstan, where traditional pagan customs are still quite strong. He received his religious education in Kazan, Makhachkala and Istanbul. He studied in Turkey from 2003 to 2007 at a *madrasah* affiliated to the İsmailağa mosque and received an *ijazah*<sup>92</sup> from its leader, Sheikh Mahmut al-Ufi. The İsmailağa brotherhood is one of the branches of the Sufi Naqshbandiyya brotherhood.<sup>93</sup> In 2013,<sup>94</sup> at the age of 28, Kamil Samigullin was elected mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan. In 2017 he was re-elected for a new term on an uncontested basis. He had no rivals..

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

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

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.<sup>96</sup>

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

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

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

In his early speeches Kamil Samigullin thus alternated in his interpretation of 'traditional Islam' between a focus on its religious (the Hanafi tradition) and its ethnic (folk customs) content. At first stressing that Tatars need to adhere to the

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.<sup>99</sup>

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

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

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

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

As a result, we can see that over the past several years the religious leader of the Tatarstan Muslims’ understanding of ‘traditional Islam’ has evolved. Putting forward various concepts, such as ‘historical memory’, ‘ethnic identity’, ‘Sunni Islam’, and ‘Sufism’, he has recently been leaning more toward purely religious

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 znachenie 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](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,<sup>102</sup> but has still not made a final choice in favour of any particular concept. This is all due to the fact that, in contrast to the Islamic republics of the Russian Caucasus, where there is a clear understanding of the religious tradition within Sufism, the concept of 'traditional Islam' has not yet been worked out in Tatar society. Sufism has played an important role in the life of Tatars, but not to the same degree as in the Caucasus, and almost faded away during the Soviet era. In Tatarstan, Islam was preserved thanks to a number of quasi-Islamic rituals connected with the life cycle. These customs were considered so sacred that neither communists nor atheists have been able to do without them.

Under conditions where the religious leaders of Tatarstan are unable to make up their minds on the concept of 'traditional Islam', the secular authorities insist on the idea of ritual ('ethnographic') Tatar Islam, which they consider a cure-all or 'vaccine' against 'destructive' foreign influence. That is what makes it easy to understand mufti Kamil Samigullin'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'.<sup>103</sup> The main speaker at the event was Rustam Nurgaleev, one of the promising young Islamic religious figures of Tatarstan.

Rustam Nurgaleev was born in 1981 in the town of Megion in the Tyumen Oblast. Tatar is not his first language. He graduated from al-Azhar University in Egypt, majoring in Islamic Law (2008), and then studied at the Higher Education Institute affiliated to the Ministry of Awqaf of the Arab Republic of Egypt (2010). He also has a secular law degree. Nurgaleev is currently Vice Rector for Education at 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”<sup>104</sup>;
- 4) A core principle Muslims should follow is that of safety (*amn*).

In Nurgaleev’s interpretation, Muslims can make decisions on many questions regarding life in secular society on the basis of these principles. For instance, the ‘pagan’ custom of celebrating New Year is met with reproach by some religious leaders: according to more orthodox Muslims, the holiday is not just of non-Islamic origin, but also brings material losses to Muslims and pushes them to commit *haram* – to take alcohol, which is forbidden in Islam.<sup>105</sup>

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

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

Several participants at the roundtable asked Nurgaleev ‘tough’ questions: whether it is right and normal for Russian law enforcement agencies to tell Muslims what to do or what is right and wrong in Islam; or for Muslims to follow

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

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.”<sup>106</sup>

In Rustam Nurgaleev’s answers, the notion of ‘traditional Islam’ thus forms an entire conceptual framework that is well-grounded from a legal point of view. Based on this framework, Nurgaleev offers answers not only to questions on customs (like having gatherings on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> days and one year after a death, visiting Bolgar, etc.) but also to the much wider range of problems that arise in polemic with orthodox-minded<sup>107</sup> opponents from the so-called Salafi camp.<sup>108</sup>

## Rustam Batrov’s theory of ‘traditional Islam’

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

Batrov is the author of several books, including *Vmesto reformy [Instead of reform]*, where he offers not a reform of Islam but a proper reading of Islam’s main sources – the Qur’an and the Sunnah, as well as Abu Hanifa’s works. Batrov has also published

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

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

work on Abu Hanifa, in which he pays attention to the wide diversity of interpretations of Islamic law, as well as to the absence of dogmatism in the *faqih's* decisions.<sup>110</sup>

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

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.<sup>113</sup>

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

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

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

He adds a clarification:

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

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: Ladomir, 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.<sup>116</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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*<sup>120</sup> of the Muslims of Bashkortostan, Ishmurad Khaybullin,<sup>121</sup> has suggested Muslims should declare a ‘general boycott’ of Batrov.<sup>122</sup>

Those who opposed him and others holding similar views, like T. Ibrahim and A. Sadriev, include 73 Muslim public figures, among them the journalist Orkhan Dzhemal, the muftis Muqaddas Bibarsov, Nafigulla Ashirov, and 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’<sup>123</sup> as renewed religious norms and rules according to their understanding of the Qur’an may serve to disrupt the foundations of traditional Islam, which is based on works and studies recognised throughout the Islamic world and by the great imams of our Ummah. This activity, which aims to ‘modernise’ Islam and its religious norms in favour of modern times and circumstances, as has happened in other religious doctrines, will undoubtedly lead to new disturbances and a schism among believers.<sup>124</sup>

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

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

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/](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.<sup>125</sup>

The subject of traditional Islam is congenial to the nationally-minded intelligentsia, who have their own vision of this problem. The well-known ethnologist Damir Iskhakov counts the Tatar author Fawziya Bayramova<sup>126</sup> among them, along with the authors of the "Tatar Canon" ("Qanunnama", 1996).<sup>127</sup> He thinks the group represents a Jihadist and so fundamentalist project for the development of Tatar (Muslim) society. According to Iskhakov, this conservative ideology has roots that go back to 1993-1996, when the consolidation of 'poor democracy' took place, alongside a sudden amplification of social differentiation:<sup>128</sup> "In the opinion of the supporters of this movement, the spiritual potential of the Tatar nation can only be enhanced if Tatars follow the path inscribed by Allah, which would lead to a logical conclusion – Allah would grant Tatars their own state."<sup>129</sup>

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.<sup>130</sup> He came to this conclusion after analysing speeches in which she argues against the 'pagan' commemoration gatherings on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> days after death, the 'hajj' to Bolgar, decorating interiors with *shamails*, and other similar customs, which, in Salman's opinion, nonetheless comply with Shariah perfectly well.<sup>131</sup>

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

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

These examples are the opinions of people who examine the notion of 'traditional Islam' exclusively in the context of the Islamic religion. There has also been a recent upsurge in Tatarstan of a small group of 'Tengrists', pagans who support return to 'indigenous Tatar' Turkic pagan roots. Its most characteristic representative is Russian Federal State Duma member from Tatarstan *Fatih Sibgatullin*, formerly a Soviet Communist Party official and member of the nomenklatura. His variant of 'traditional Islam' is a blend of Tengrism, Islam and certain remnants of Soviet ideologemes. In his interpretation, "Traditional Islam is the most progressive, the most civilised religion in the world. It draws a lot from Tengrism. And it is called 'traditional' because it incorporates all the customs and traditions of the Tatar people."<sup>134</sup>

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."<sup>135</sup>

## Conclusion

The idea of a search for 'traditional Islam' was introduced primarily by the state. Government representatives often talk about "the need to develop traditional Islam" when meeting Muslims on various social platforms.<sup>136</sup> In their turn, the representatives of the muftiates, imams subordinate to their authority, and other respected leaders who have picked up the idea of 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 21<sup>st</sup> century theologians who think of themselves as traditionalists are starting to develop Shariah solutions to new problems, while drawing on the Hanafi legal apparatus. Among the problems considered are issues that have arisen in polemic with fundamentalist movements in Islam, including the celebration of the New Year, submission to the secular laws of the Russian state, and developing a Muslim response to the law enforcement agencies' regulation of religious life.

In general, however, the discussion of 'traditional Islam' in Tatarstan has shown that ordinary believers, religious leaders, intellectual elites and politicians do not share a uniform understanding of what it should be. For some, it is mostly

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/](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 Samigullin<sup>137</sup>).

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

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

---

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 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main differences relate to the more elaborate tenets ascribed to 'traditional Islam' with regard to Islamic law (*fiqh*) and the higher level of religious education of the 'rejuvenated' Muslim community of Tatarstan. At the same time, any resort to elements of a rich Islamic legacy that focus on conformist interpretations of Islam is contingent on the objective and subjective conditions under which Muslims live in modern-day Tatarstan.

The documents of the Spiritual Administration of the Republic of Tatarstan say that the Muslims of the Republic should follow the Qur'an, the Sunnah and "the norms of Shariah, which are expressed in the *ijtihad* of *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."<sup>139</sup> Such broad wording, offered by the muftiate of Tatarstan, represents, in a certain sense, a balanced position that includes both the supporters and the opponents of Sufism, the adherents of moderately fundamentalist movements and relatively liberal believers, both practicing and 'ethnic'<sup>140</sup> Muslims. The construction of a concept of 'traditional Islam' in Tatarstan reveals a broad range of ideas that, in our view, allows us to arrive at a form of consensus through discussion – not in the sense of developing a uniform opinion, but in the sense of creating a platform to discuss the problems of religion in the public sphere.

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 intervjuje 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”

## Official Discourse on Islam and Islamic Discourse in Contemporary Russia

---

*Sofya Ragozina\**

### Abstract

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

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

There are two opposing trends associated with perceptions of Islam in the modern Russian public sphere. The first relates to the positive image of ‘traditional Islam’, one of the four ‘traditional’ religions of Russia – alongside Russian Orthodox Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism. The second is the widespread belief in Islam’s militant nature and its inseparability from the activities of extremist organizations around the world. The latter view has contributed to the development

---

\* Research fellow at Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration; lecturer at National Research University “Higher School of Economics” (Moscow).



of negative stereotypes about Islam, leading to increased social tension in Russia's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. This element of Islamophobia dominates a range of discursive genres in modern Russia: the journalistic, the governmental and even the scientific.

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

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

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

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

The methodology applied in this paper is derived from the critical discourse analysis (CDA) theory of N. Fairclough. It is a text-oriented form of discourse analysis based on socio-linguistic methods and a deep interpretational approach. The central concept of Fairclough's theory is approaching language as a social phenomenon: discourse is a linguistic reflection of social practice. Fairclough notes that while all linguistic phenomena are social, not all social phenomena are

---

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

linguistic. He distinguishes three types of critique relevant to CDA: ideological, rhetorical and strategic critique. “Whereas ideological critique focuses on the effects of semiosis on social relations of power, and rhetorical critique on persuasion (including ‘manipulation’) in individual texts or talk, what we might call ‘strategic critique’ focuses on how semiosis figures within the strategies pursued by groups of social agents to change societies in particular directions.”<sup>2</sup> Different variants of critique allow us to analyse different levels of discourse. Thus, regulatory documents make it possible to reveal the structure of power relations through rhetorical figures in the speeches of politicians and public figures – the major political orientations in public space. An analysis of a broader context, including, for example, the activities of official religious organizations, allows us to establish how words are transformed into real actions.

## Official Discourse on Islam: Major Trends

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

The dominant image of the enemy has changed several times since then. The first ‘threat’ was connected with what was called the ‘export of Wahhabism.’ For example, a parliamentary analytical paper states that “after December 1994, Russia was for the first time openly confronted by terrorist actions of influential forces connected with the Islamic world.”<sup>3</sup> The same report contains ideas about Muslim countries become active in financing various organizations of Russian Muslims. Saudi Arabia was declared enemy number one because it supported the largest number of foreign organizations and institutions: the Department of diplomatic missions in Islam, the World Islamic League and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs,

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

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

numerous charity foundations, its allies in Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan, the General Intelligence Service, and the World Assembly of Islamic Youth, recruiting young people all over the world. The second most important external threat was the Muslim Brotherhood. Unlike the Saudis, its main target was not the Northern Caucasus but the republics of Central Asia. To emphasize the threat posed by such organizations, authors use military terminology, such as “the association’s weapons”, “agents”, and “they recruited students”. Finally, the authors draw conclusions about the “implementation of a grand plan against Russia”.

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

The idea of a ‘Wahhabi threat’ retains its potential to the present. As a concept, however, it contains serious contradictions. In the early 2000s, the use of the term ‘Wahhabism’ could somehow be justified on the grounds of social and political realities, as an ‘export version’ of the ideology was being distributed across the Northern Caucasus. Later the term was used in any case involving radicals associated with Islam and for all militants. Wahhabism was a religious and political doctrine in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Islam associated with Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab at-Tamimi. Without going into the doctrine’s ideological features, one must be aware of one crucial feature: from the moment the Saudi state was created, Wahhabism has been its state ideology and as such this term is not applicable to the situation in the Northern Caucasus. How one should describe the activities of Islamic radical groups in the area requires thorough consideration. The notion of a ‘Wahhabi threat’ has taken root in modern Russian discourse on Islam, however, despite the inherent ambiguity of the term.

This confidence over the external nature of the Islamic threat presupposes three main ideas. First, that an inherent feature of certain Muslim organizations is their dependence on external sources of financial support, which automatically makes them ‘enemies of Russia’. Second, that Islam is associated with terrorism. Third, that this problem can be solved only by violent means. Since the early

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

2000s, when the main enemy was the 'Ichkerian separatist', and since 2007, when this enemy was transformed into the Islamist from the 'Caucasus Emirate', these ideas have been very popular. They did not suffer even after 2009, when the counterterrorism operation was officially completed. Given continued reports from the Northern Caucasus about attacks on the authorities, the image of a threat remains strong, as does the idea that it is inspired by external factors.

Contemporary politics reflects these tendencies. For example, the *Counter-terrorism Plan*,<sup>5</sup> a document setting out the basic principles of state policy in the field of counter-terrorism, contains a list of external factors "contributing to the emergence and spread of terrorism" that is almost twice as long as the internal ones. The document includes theses related to the financing of international terrorist organizations, the desire of "a number of foreign states to weaken the Russian Federation and its position in the world", the presence of sources of instability along the borders, and fighter camps in other states. The Plan clarifies that the process of countering terrorism includes three components: prevention, struggle and the elimination of consequences. In the section on counter-terrorism measures, special attention is paid to what is commonly called 'social and humanitarian counteraction to terrorism', while political, socio-informational, cultural and educational countermeasures are described. The plan was adopted in 2009. Amendments to the Federal Law on counter-terrorism,<sup>6</sup> which addresses the prevention of terrorist activities, have not been passed. The Law is largely devoted to the role of the Armed Forces in counter-terrorist operations. Analysis of official discourse on Islam requires examples from the legal framework on counter-terrorism, insofar as they are 'symptomatic' of the current situation.

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

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

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

7 *Analiticheskiy vestnik Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny (chast' I). Vyp. 38* [Analytical bulletin. Terrorism in Modern World: Some Facts, Organizations, Causes (Part I). Vol. 38] (2001), <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/8/4607/16229>, accessed 25 September 2019.

8 *Analiticheskiy vestnik Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny (chast' I). Vyp. 38*.

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

Other variations of external threat relate to the activities of a number of specific international radical non-governmental organizations in Russia. One such is the *Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami* organization. Founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, it positions itself as a pan-Islamist political organization and describes its ideology as Islamic and its aim as the re-establishment of the Islamic Caliphate to resume the Islamic way of life. By decision of Russia’s Supreme Court, it was declared a ‘terrorist movement’ in 2003. Descriptions of the organization’s activities tend to include, among other things, allusions to the external factor: “militant Islamist propaganda combined with intolerance towards other religions; active recruitment of supporters, purposeful work to split society (primarily through propaganda with strong financial support).”<sup>12</sup> This decision provoked a number of critical comments. Firstly, while *Hizb at-Tahrir* is a radical organization, experts nonetheless emphasize that it does not use violent methods to achieve its goals.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, the active struggle that started after it was designated a terrorist organization is being waged against not just its members but Muslims with no link to radical activities. The loudest voices against the ‘legitimation of repression’ and ‘fabrication of criminal cases and torture’ were human rights organizations like the “Memorial” Human Rights Center, the Committee for “Civic Assistance”, the Institute of Human Rights and the “SOVA” Research Center.<sup>14</sup>

9 Vladimir Zhirinovskiy is a Russian politician, leader of nationalist *Liberal Democratic party of Russia*.

10 *Stenogramma zasedaniya 11 oktyabrya 2001 g.* [Transcript of meeting 11 October, 2001], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/1865/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

11 *Stenogramma zasedaniya 20 marta 2009 g., N 81 (1054)* [Transcript of meeting 20 March, 2009, No. 81 (1054)], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/372/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

12 “Reshenie VS RF o priznanii terroristicheskimi ryada inostrannykh organizatsii” [“Decision of Supreme Court about recognizing a number of foreign organizations as terrorist”], *Religare.ru*, 24 June, 2003, [http://www.religare.ru/2\\_5347.html](http://www.religare.ru/2_5347.html), accessed 25 September 2019.

13 “Malashenko: Moskve nuzhno osteregat’sia provokatsii v Krymu” [“Malashenko: Moscow needs to beware of provocations in Crimea”], *IslamNews*, 10 September, 2014, <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-432444.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

14 “Vitaliy Ponomarev. “Spetssluzhby protiv islamskoi partii ‘Khizbut-Takhrir’” [“Vitaly Ponomarev. Intelligence agencies against the Islamic party “Hizbut-Tahrir”], *Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsentr “Sova”*, 8 February, 2005, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2005/02/d3504/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

SOVA specialists have analysed the legal basis of Russian state action against social and religious organizations, including *Hizb al-Tahrir*. The head of SOVA, A. Verkhovskiy, says he is neither a “scholar of Islam” nor a “connoisseur of history”, just an analyst of law enforcement practice in Russia. SOVA’s main critique of these practices is that members of the organization are being prosecuted simply for being affiliated with it, so that “... the courts do not consider whether the nature of Hizb’s activities is extremist or terrorist; they refer only to the decision of the Supreme Court,” which indicates a lack of motivation. Verkhovskiy also stresses that “it is unlikely that the Russian Hizb groups are preparing for violent activities (if anyone has been preparing for them, they have been extremely unsuccessful).”<sup>15</sup>

In Russian public discourse, human rights organizations and their sympathizers are considered adherents of the same ‘hostile liberal West’ or a ‘fifth column,’ and, in light of recent legislative initiatives, as ‘foreign agents.’ The image of *Hizb at-Tahrir* as a ‘terrorist threat’ is spreading much more efficiently than any idea of it as a victim of the Russian political regime, as a result. Semen Bagdasarov is a popular expert and media figure who often focuses on the ‘threat’ represented by *Hizb at-Tahrir* to national security. After serving in Tajikistan during the 1994–1996 civil war, he began his political career, working at the Ministry of Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs. In 2007, he was elected to the State Duma (during the fifth convocation) as a member of the Spravedlivaya Rossiya party. In his speeches, he repeatedly addressed the topic of Islamic fundamentalism. More recently, he has positioned himself as an expert on the Middle East. Bagdasarov is convinced that the visa-free regime for “dubious allies within the Collective Security Treaty Organization” and immigrants from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan poses the main current threat to Russia. They are the main reason for the emergence of groups such as *Hizb at-Tahrir* and the Islamic Party of Turkestan in Russia.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, such organizations are associated with global jihad,<sup>17</sup> a result of “serious reform” in the world of radical Islam. Bagdasarov also emphasizes the effectiveness of *Hizb at-Tahrir*’s ideological activities, which is why he stresses the need to “unleash ideological struggle.”<sup>18</sup>

15 Verkhovskiy A., “Yavlyaetsa li Khizbut-Takhrir ekstremistskoi organizatsiei?” [“Is Hizbut-Tahrir an extremist organization?”], *Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsentr “Sova”*, October, 2005, <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2005/10/d6036>, accessed 25 September 2019.

16 *Stenogramma zasedaniya 03 dekabrya 2008 g., N 58 (1031)* [Transcript of meeting 03 December, 2008, No. 58 (1031)], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/441/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

17 In the very broad sense now used in the public sphere, *jihad* is the struggle of Muslims against unbelievers.

18 *Stenogramma zasedaniya 06 noyabrya 2009 g., N 121 (1094)* [Transcript of meeting 06 November, 2009, No. 121 (1094)], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/252/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

An Islamic organization that receives less attention is *at-Takfir wa-l-Higra* (“Excommunication and Exodus”). Its emergence, like that of Wahhabi ideologists, was originally a purely local phenomenon. It appeared in the early 1970s on a wave of discussion within the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood about the possibility of using violence against the ruling regime. Those who supported the idea withdrew from the Muslim Brotherhood and created their own organization, *at-Takfir wa-l-Higra*. This group legitimized the use of violence by declaring other Muslim communities ‘non-believers.’ There are no data on its institutionalized international networks of the sort that exist for *Hizb at-Tahrir* or *Al-Qaida* for example. It may be assumed therefore that its activities are not systematic. The organization was banned in Russia by decision of the Supreme Court on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010. As with *Hizb at-Tahrir*, this led to a new wave of arrests and critique from human rights defenders against the law enforcement agencies’ unfounded accusations.<sup>19</sup>

Such defamation of Muslim political organizations gives the impression that any party that uses Islamic rhetoric will be deemed unacceptable, regardless of how radical it truly is. Even if some deputies do take a more sympathetic stance, the general view supports strict prohibition of such parties. During discussion on the Law on political parties, member of parliament Alexander Chuev (the “Rodina” faction, 4<sup>th</sup> convocation) said that the existence of “Islamic-democratic ideologies” in Russia is legal but creating parties with such an ideology would nonetheless be unconstitutional. As a result, some Russian citizen would be forced to vote not for a party that reflects their views. His idea failed to get support in the Duma.<sup>20</sup> The prevailing point of view is the opposite, namely that “... even the slightest accommodation of extremist groups gives them political identity and strengthens their influence among the masses. Rejection of their practices will reduce their effectiveness. As history shows, assistance from the government and recognition of extremists as subject to the law affects the growth of their popularity in society. However, some time later they begin to work against the official structures that directly or indirectly contributed to their formation and activity.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, according to the government, the most dangerous scenario is for a new popular actor to emerge, causing a change in the alignment of political forces. Even though this report is from 2001, it is relevant to this day.

19 “Dzhemal’: prinadlezhnost’ zaderzhannyh v Moskve urozhentsev Severnogo Kavkaza k “At-Takfir w-al-Khidhra” somnitel’na” [Dzhemal: the affiliation of natives of the North Caucasus to *at-Takfir wa-l-Higra* detained in Moscow is dubious], *Kavkazskii Uzel*, 29 November, 2013, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/234286/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

20 More: *Stenogramma zasedaniya 08 noyabrya 2006 g., N 191 (905)* [Transcript of meeting 08 November, 2006, No. 191 (905)], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/816/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

21 *Analiticheskiy vestnik “Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny” (chast’ I). Vyp. 38* [Analytical bulletin “Terrorism in Modern World: Some Facts, Organizations, Causes” (Part I). Vol. 38] (2001), <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/8/4607/16229>, accessed 25 September 2019.

Radical Islamic organizations' activities are still viewed as destabilizing in several Russian regions. That they receive external financial support plays a significant role in the development of this image. For this reason, at the meeting of the State Duma mentioned above, the leader of the Liberal democratic Party Vladimir Zhirinovskiy argued against Alexander Chuev and his plea for the creation of Islamic parties, stating that "They will not only be able to carry out an election campaign better, but also pay voters who vote for them. Orthodox voters will vote for them, because Saudi Arabia has an enormous amount of money."<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that the theme of the political participation of Muslims is not only marginal to public debate, but has even, to some extent, become taboo.

The concept of so-called 'political Salafism'<sup>23</sup> has been gaining popularity, as in the West. Allowing radical elements to become involved in politics is seen as an option for reducing social tensions and the danger of extremist activity. The Russian government, however, considers that it cannot afford to 'make concessions' to groups it has declared enemies. At the same time, the sustained scale of this threat contradicts constant official reports on the effectiveness of the special services in combating the so-called "terrorist underground mafia."<sup>24</sup> The decriminalization of radical Islamic organizations is not considered a feasible alternative to forceful counter-action.

As public opinion polls show, the use of force is perceived to be the most effective approach to many problems in Russia. According to a recent large-scale study on perceptions of war and terror conducted by the Levada Center,<sup>25</sup> citizens perceive military operations as 'necessary and valuable.' This military mobilization strategy is used by the authorities to shore up support for the regime. As regards Islam, the results of a public opinion poll conducted by the same research centre to assess the impact of the Charlie Hebdo case are particularly informative. Nearly 75% of those surveyed were in favour of tightening policies towards migrants, ramping up the struggle against al-Qaida, and increasing control over the Muslim community in France, while only 12% were in favour of assimilating

22 *Stenogramma zasedaniya 08 noyabria 2006 g., N 191 (905)* [Transcript of meeting 08 November, 2006, No. 191 (905)], Gosudarstvennaya Duma, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/816/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

23 See e.g. al-Anani K., Malik M., "Pious way to politics: the rise of political Salafism in post-Mubarak Egypt", *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 22:1 (2013), p. 57–73.

24 See e.g. "Pochti 100 boevikov likvidirovani v Dagestane v 2015 godu" [Almost 100 militants were liquidated in Dagestan in 2015], *RIA Novosti*, 30 January, 2016, <http://ria.ru/incidents/20160130/1367469302.html>; "FSB: v 2014 godu likvidirovani 130 boevikov i predotvrashcheny shest' teraktov" [130 militants were liquidated and six terrorist attacks were prevented], *Gazeta.ru*, 10 June, 2014, [http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2014/06/10/n\\_6219949.shtm](http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2014/06/10/n_6219949.shtm); "Za 2013 god v Rossii likvidirovano bolee 250 boevikov" [In 2013 more than 250 militants were eliminated in Russia], *TASS*, 28 April, 2014, <http://tass.ru/politika/1153362>, accessed 25 September 2019.

25 "Khotiat li russkie voyny. Voyna i terror v vospriyatii rossiyan" ["Do Russians want war? War and terror in the perception of Russians"], *Levada-tsentr*, 23 March, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/2016/03/23/hotyat-li-russkie-voyny-voyna-i-terror-v-vospriyatii-rossiyan/>, accessed 25 September 2019.



Muslims and expanding their rights.<sup>26</sup> The tough stance may be related to the formulation of the questionnaire, however, as it did not allow for alternatives.

## The dichotomy of ‘radical’ and ‘traditional’ Islam

The idea that Islam is completely hostile to the Russian political regime is gradually changing with the introduction of a new discursive model: the division of Islam into ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘traditional Islam’ and ‘radical Islam’. If the category of ‘radical Islam’ is generally understood to describe various illegal organizations of political Islam, the notion of traditional Islam is more difficult to understand and define. These two categories first appeared in the Russian media in 2003–2004 and were firmly entrenched by 2009–2010 in both scientific and public discourses and stereotypes.

The concept of ‘radical Islam’ is amply described in a parliamentary analytical paper titled ‘Islamic extremism’.<sup>27</sup> According to this document, all ‘Islamic extremists’ are united around common goals, namely: establishing an Islamic theocratic state, introducing Shariah law into public practice, and restoring the Caliphate. The appearance of the Kharijites<sup>28</sup> is also offered as an example of the emergence of extremism in Islam: “Khawarij doctrine was taken up in following years by many extremist and anarchist groups in Muslim countries and is being actively used nowadays.”<sup>29</sup> Another key feature of radical Islam from this perspective is its being perceived as a problem that can be solved only by force.

The concept of ‘traditional Islam’ is, in turn, used to describe both religious and political conditions in a number of Russian regions. In all cases, ‘traditional Islam’ is juxtaposed, explicitly or implicitly, with ‘radical Islam’. The term ‘traditional’ is often applied to all forms of Islam in Russia. Crucial features of this ‘traditional’ and supposedly ‘peaceful’ Islam are that its traditions have been successfully incorporated (or must be incorporated) into Russian socio-cultural reality, and, secondly, that it is seen as a regional political actor capable of resolving potential conflicts. The dichotomy between ‘radical Islam’ and ‘traditional Islam’

26 “Terakt v Parizhe: karikatury, islam, zaprety”, *Levada-tsentr*, 29 January, 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/01/29/terakt-v-parizhe-karikatury-islam-zaprety/>, accessed on 25.11.2018.

27 *Analitycheskiy vestnik “Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny (chast’ I). Vyp. 38 [Analytical bulletin. Terrorism in Modern World: Some Facts, Organizations, Causes (Part I). Vol. 38]* (2001), <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/8/4607/16229>, accessed 25 September 2019.

28 Kharijites (Khawarij) – members of a school of thought that appeared in the first century of Islam during the First *Fitna*.

29 *Analitycheskiy vestnik “Terrorizm v sovremennom mire: nekotorye fakty, organizatsii, prichiny (chast’ I). Vyp. 38 [Analytical bulletin. Terrorism in Modern World: Some Facts, Organizations, Causes (Part I). Vol. 38]* (2001), <http://iam.duma.gov.ru/node/8/4607/16229>, accessed 25 September 2019.

does not always stop at academic discussion (though the effectiveness of so simplified a conceptual model is questionable).<sup>30</sup> It is sometimes used as an aggressive discursive strategy that allows a clear line to be drawn between a hostile ‘radical Islam’ and an endangered ‘traditional Islam’.

The use of this dichotomy is typical of the expert community close to the Russian political establishment. Reports by employees at the *Russian Institute for Strategic Studies* (RISI) offer perhaps the clearest examples. Established on February 29<sup>th</sup>, 1992, RISI functions as a state-sponsored think tank. In many of her papers and interviews, the Head of the Caucasus Studies section Yana Amelina addresses the problem of ‘radical Islam’. In her opinion, radical Islamism is one of the most serious threats to public order and state.<sup>31</sup> Amelina characterizes the current state of Islam in Russia as follows: the gradual formation of a ‘united Islamist front’, bringing together the Islamists of the Northern Caucasus and Volga regions; the formation of an eclectic Islamist ideology in Russia; a growing orientation towards a foreign, especially Arab, Islamic community, external forces that supposedly lead to archaic regression (‘Arabization’, ‘hijabization’) of the more radical part of the Russian Ummah; and the activities of a federal Islamist lobby, which popularizes and promotes the ideas of Islamists in the all-Russian media and government structures. This rhetoric again displays the images of an external enemy and of a ‘fifth column’, represented by the Islamist lobby. This rhetoric is alarmist and some of the arguments unsubstantiated. For example, according to the statistics it provides, “3.3% of Ingush men and 2.3% of women named Arabs among the desirable nationalities for marriage.” From this the author draws the conclusion that there is an observable “gradual fundamentalization of Ingush youth.”<sup>32</sup>

RISI experts also quite often point to the problem of responding to *at-Takfir wa-l-Higra* and *Hizb at-Tahrir*, reinforcing their image as an enemy by emphasizing the use of force against radical Islamism.<sup>33</sup>

Rais Suleymanov, a former research fellow at RISI, expresses even more radical views on counter-extremism measures. In most of his papers and speeches, he calls for extremely stringent measures to counter Islamic radicalism in Russian regions, labelling the phenomenon ‘Wahhabism’. He also greatly exaggerates the

30 See e.g. Akaev V.Kh., *Sufizm i vabbabizm na Severnom Kavkaze* [*Sufism and Wahhabism in the North Caucasus*], Seriya “Issledovaniia po prikladnoi i neotlozhnoi etnologii” Instituta antropologii RAN. Dokument No. 127 (1999); Kisriev E.F. *Islam v Dagestane* [*Islam in Dagestan*], (Moscow: Logos, 2007); Makarov D.V. *Ofitsial’nyi i neofitsial’nyi islam v Dagestane* [*Official and non-official Islam in Dagestan*], (Moscow, 2000).

31 “Yana Amelina: Namereniya islamistov v Rossii ser’ezny kak nikogda” [“Yana Amelina: The intentions of Islamists in Russia are more serious than ever”], *Rossiiskiy institut strategicheskikh issledovaniy*, 30 September, 2013, <http://riss.ru/smi/3919/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

32 “Yana Amelina: Namereniya islamistov v Rossii ser’ezny kak nikogda”.

33 “Takfir wa-l’-Khidzra v Rossii: ideologiya, rasprostranenie, mery protivodeistviya” [“*At-Takfir wa-l-Higra* in Russia: ideology, distribution, countermeasures”], *Rossiiskiy institut strategicheskikh issledovaniy*, 30 October, 2013, <http://riss.ru/actions/4039/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

scale of the threat, talking about Islamist training camps and the emergence of new ‘Mujahideen groups’. In 2013, Suleymanov was summoned by the Tatarstan Prosecutor’s Office, as “his [publications] functioned on the basis of false information, his assumptions about the development of Wahhabism in the country lacked factual substantiation, and he imparted exaggerated significance to certain facts about extremism, while knowingly keeping silent about the actions of law enforcement agencies to prevent them.”<sup>34</sup>

To understand how widespread such ideas about radical Islam are, it suffices to look at some of the results of sociological studies by Russian sociological centres. For example, the number of people expressing no opinion on the possible construction of a mosque in their city or district is about 36%. Around 30% reacted more or less positively to the idea, but 27% took a negative view.<sup>35</sup> A study conducted by the *Foundation for Public Opinion* (FOM) in 2012 included questions asked to gain a more thorough understanding of the situation. Three questions were asked about the role, positive or negative, of Islam in the history of Russia, in contemporary Russia, and in the world. About half of the respondents expressed difficulty answering these questions, while 32%, 39% and 40%, respectively, stressed Islam’s negative role.<sup>36</sup> To a certain extent, these fears have been caused by the fact that approximately a third of the Russian population gets its knowledge about Islam through the media, and one fourth knows nothing about Islamic religion and culture. 19% learns about Islam from Muslim relatives, 13% gains relevant knowledge at school, 11% reads the literature independently, 10% turn to the Internet, and 6% have learned about Islam by traveling to Muslim countries.<sup>37</sup>

## Traditional Islam: Patriotism, Humanism and Loyalty to the Russian State

There has been an overwhelming number of public discussions devoted to ‘radical Islam’. What about ‘traditional Islam’? Many events under the slogan of humanitarian

34 “Who is Mr Rais Suleymanov?” [“Who is Mr Rais Suleymanov?”], *Biznes Online*, 7 September, 2013, <http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/87208>, accessed 25 September 2019.

35 “Terakt v Parizhe: karikatury, islam, zaprety” [“Terrorist attack in Paris: cartoons, Islam and prohibitions”], *Levada-tsentr*, 29 January, 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/01/29/terakt-v-parizhe-karikatury-islam-zaprety/>, accessed on 25 September 2019.

36 “Rossiiane ob islame” [“Russians about Islam”], *FOM*, 8 October, 2012, <http://fom.ru/TSennosti/10652>, accessed on 25 September 2019.

37 “Terakt v Parizhe: karikatury, islam, zaprety” [“Terrorist attack in Paris: cartoons, Islam and prohibitions”], *Levada-tsentr*, 29 January, 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/2015/01/29/terakt-v-parizhe-karikatury-islam-zaprety/>, accessed on 25 September 2019.

counter-terrorism<sup>38</sup> aim to create a positive image of certain forms of Islam.<sup>39</sup> They generally remain marginal, however, and do not enjoy wide support. Most initiatives of the Muslim community itself are either theoretical or merely declarative. A vivid example is the statement on “The Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims” published by the Council of Muftis of Russia in 2001.<sup>40</sup> According to its authors, “the structuring processes in the Muslim community itself and changes in the public life of the country demanded a balanced approach on the part of the leaders of Islamic community”.<sup>41</sup> Active discussion only took place in 2014–2015, however, because of a number of factors. First, the document had to be adapted to fit changing realities in Russia. The concept of a “brand of good traditional Islam” needed support from the Muslim community itself. Second, elaboration of the concept paper allowed Muslim leaders to give an impression of unity based on the principles set forth in it. On June 14, 2015, it was officially adopted. Despite many years of conflict, the document was signed by the leader of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia, Talgat Tadzhuiddin; the leader of the Coordination Centre of Muslims of the North Caucasus, Ismail Berdiyev; and the leaders of the Spiritual Administrations of Muslims of Russia (DUM RF) and Tatarstan (DUM RT), Ravil Gaynutdin and Kamil Samigullin respectively.<sup>42</sup>

The idea of tolerance of ideological diversity and other religious tendencies runs through the document, which emphasizes the humanistic nature of Islam.<sup>43</sup> A positive image of Islam is created by evoking the contributions of Muslim scholars from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (such as Shihabuddin Marjani, Galimdzhan Barudi, Rizaeddin Fakhretdin, Musa Bigiev (Bigeev), and Ismail Gasprinskiy) to the development of science, education and culture in Russia.

The body of the document is dedicated to Muslim patriotism and civil duties. It is interesting to observe how political categories are legitimized in this religious

38 See e.g. “‘Protivostoia’ ekstremizmu cherez rasprostranenie idei ‘zolotoy serediny’” [“Counteract Extremism through the Spread of Idea of ‘Golden Mean’”], *Musulmane Rossii*, 19 July, 2016, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/event/11036>; “Komitet po bezopasnosti SMR provel krugliy stol” [“Committee of the Council of Muftis held a round table”], *Musulmane Rossii*, 18 July, 2016, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/event/11035>, accessed on 25 September 2019.

39 For example, a great number of charity projects of the Moscow Spiritual Muslim Department are devoted to veterans, orphanages, donor campaigns. See <http://mosdum.ru/>.

40 “‘Sotsial’naya doktrina rossiyskikh musul’man’ prizyvaet veruyushchih prinosit’ pol’zu obshchestvu” [“Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims” calls on believers to benefit society”], *TASS*, 27 May, 2015, <http://tass.ru/obschestvo/1999282>, accessed 25 September 2019.

41 Abbyasov R.R., “‘Informirovannost’ musul’man o kontseptual’nom dokumente ‘Osnovnye polozeniya sotsial’noi programmy rossiyskikh musul’man’” [“Awareness of Muslims about the conceptual document ‘The main provisions of the social program of Russian Muslims’”], *Teoriya i praktika obschestvennogo razvitiya* 23, (2015), p. 21–24.

42 “Prinyata ‘Sotsial’naya doktrina rossiyskikh musul’man’” [“Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims” is adopted], *Kommersant*, 14 June, 2015, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2746763>, accessed 25 September 2019.

43 “Sotsial’naya doktrina rossiyskikh musul’man” [“Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims”], *Sovet muftiev Rossii*, <http://www.muslim.ru/actual/13636/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

discourse. The mechanism is similar for most categories: first, a definition is provided of a political concept, and then an analogy selected from a religious or historical context. This demonstrates both the susceptibility of Islam to political discourses and the closeness of the Islamic and Russian traditions of political philosophy. For example, the text states that the “term ‘patriotism’ is used when priority is given to the idea of connecting and uniting all citizens”. Further, the existence of patriotism within the Muslim community is explained by reference to the Medina Constitution, which presupposes “along with community in religion, community in citizenship and the importance of living in one common homeland”. The category of civil rights is explained with references to “the words of Allah.”

Certain parts of this “Social Doctrine” represent a response to the difficulties faced by the Muslim community in Russia. The fifth section, which discusses the “Attitude of Islam towards Extremes and Radicalism”, includes a consistent argument that directly addresses the main categories used by their opponents. For example, an answer to common misinterpretations of the concept of *jihad* is considered in detail: “The greatest task facing our *alims* [Islamic scholars], imams, and preachers is offering the younger generation of Muslims a clear and complete picture of jihad.” The meaning of *takfir*<sup>44</sup> is explained and the exceptional nature of such action emphasised. The last paragraph in the chapter aims to interpret the thesis of the division of the world into a ‘territory of war’ and a ‘territory of peace’. Rather than to war, priority should be given to the peaceful spread of Islam through various media. The authors warn against a “biased approach to covering religious issues” and point out the need for strict adherence to professional journalistic ethics, as well as for a rejection of value judgments that exacerbate false notions about Islam. Although only a short paragraph in the text is devoted to this problem, it is significant that it is included in the statement’s agenda.

Finally, it is worth noting that the authors of the “Social Doctrine” also partially accept the dichotomy of ‘radical’ vs. ‘traditional’ Islam. The term ‘radical’ appears only sporadically (twice) in the document, while references to ‘traditional’ Islam are frequent (29). More importantly, the authors identify themselves as representatives of ‘traditional Islam’ and they do so in a rather emotional manner: “Traditional Islam in Russia is true Islam related to the conditions and traditions of our country. This new identity and integration, which has prompted a natural all-Russian patriotism in Muslims, allows the Muslim community in Russia to overcome many of the threats that occur in other non-Muslim countries, due to differences in their understanding of traditions and cultures.” “Traditions’ play an extremely positive role in the history and present of the Muslim community of Russia: “Russian Muslims are directing their efforts towards strengthening traditional family values”, “for

---

44 The procedure when one Muslim declares another a non-believer.

Russian Muslims, cultural traditions are the source of their national-religious identity”, and “representatives of the peoples of Muslim tradition stood side by side with Russians and shed their blood for Russia.”

The document thus represents a peculiar testimony to the loyalty of ‘good Islam’ to Russian state. In fact, this is an essential characteristic of traditional Islam. It declares humanism and patriotism to be the most important values. The main problem, however, as mentioned above, is the extremely low awareness in Russian society of the project of the “Social Doctrine”. According to a survey conducted by representatives of the Council of Muftis of Russia, 84.1% of respondents said they had not heard anything about the first version of the “Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims” and more than half of respondents consequently found it difficult to answer questions on the need to modernize the document.<sup>45</sup>

One also finds patriotic rhetoric in the speeches of Ravil Gaynutdin. Obvious manifestations of loyalty to the Russian authorities are expressed in the many references to the words of the Russian President. There are several other interesting tropes in Gaynutdin’s rhetoric, however. His speeches contain three important interconnected narratives: those of unity, Eurasianism, and spirituality. In any of its manifestations, unity, whether the unity of the Muslim community (alluding to conflict of the DUMs) or unity between Muslim and Russian civilization on the basis of a Eurasian community, turns out to be a fundamental existential principle for Russian Muslims: “It is symbolic that it is a native citizen of St. Petersburg, our President, who will cut the ribbon at the entrance to the Moscow Cathedral Mosque. We will thereby identify our common roots as a unified multinational and multi-religious Eurasian civilization.”<sup>46</sup> Spirituality is emphasized as an attribute in the political sphere, as well. For example, Gaynutdin argues that the main mosque will “bring enormous benefits in strengthening the spiritual qualities and sovereignty of our state.”<sup>47</sup> The idea of a “spiritual gene pool” is on a par with notions of peace, stability and harmony, and is opposed to extremism and radicalism.<sup>48</sup> He also uses such phrases as “spiritual roots” and “spiritual abyss.”

45 Abbyasov R.R., “Informirovannost’ musul’man o kontseptual’nom dokumente ‘Osnovnye polozeniya sotsial’noi programmy rossiyskikh musul’man’” [“Awareness of Muslims about the conceptual document ‘The main provisions of the social program of Russian Muslims’”], *Teoriya i praktika obschestvennogo razvitiya* 23, (2015), p. 22.

46 “Muftii Gaynutdin: rossiyskoe musul’mansvo smozhet stat’ liderom vsei ummah” [“Mufti Gaynutdin: Russian Islam can become the leader of the whole Ummah”], *Musul’mane Rossii*, 11 June, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9411>, accessed 25 September 2019.

47 “Muftiy Gaynutdin: otkrytie Moskovskoi Sobornoj mecheti – sobytie gosudarstvennogo mashtaba dlya RF” [“Mufti Gaynutdin: opening of Moscow Cathedral Mosque is an event of a state scale for the Russian Federation”], *Musul’mane Rossii*, 23 September, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9735>, accessed 25 September 2019.

48 “Muftiy Gaynutdin: ya dumayu, ne odna mechet’ budet postroena v Moskve” [“Mufti Gaynutdin: I think more than one mosque will be built in Moscow”], *Musul’mane Rossii*, 18 September, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9718>, accessed 25 September 2019.

Loyalty to the authorities is also demonstrated in less obvious ways. Gaynutdin uses Orthodox terminology to describe Muslim realities. For example, a large part of his ‘Christmas message’ (the title given on the official website of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation) is a comparison of *Mawlid an-Nabi* (celebration of the Birth of the Prophet) with Christmas: “I try – to make the language and the message of Islam available to our contemporaries I therefore use words and images that are familiar in Russian culture. The Old Slavonic ‘Christmas’ was in the Middle Ages the most common way to denote the physical appearance of man into the world. Therefore, the phrase ‘Christmas of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)’ is perfectly valid in Russian culture and retains its Islamic essence”.<sup>49</sup> Quoting various surahs (chapters of the Qur’an), Gaynutdin unfolds a theological argument about the shared Christian and Islamic traditions associated with the birth of Jesus and Muhammad, and draws an analogy between the ascension and the *Mi’raj*.<sup>50</sup>

In a different speech, Gaynutdin compares Christian and Islamic eschatology to revise Russia’s special role in the international arena. “Christian and Islamic eschatology are close and claim that before the Messiah (*Mahdi*) arrives, the Antichrist (*Dajjal*) will appear, and the role of the *Katechon* (the Retainer) will be especially important. Obviously, our policy and our experience of interreligious harmony and cooperation will become the core of world politics.”<sup>51</sup>

In these texts, mosques are occasionally compared with Orthodox churches. For example, in an interview about the Cathedral Mosque under construction, Gaynutdin said that “our mosque is gold-domed (*‘zlatoglavaya’*) and fits into the ensemble of Moscow churches.”<sup>52</sup>

Gaynutdin also draws parallels between mosques and the symbols of Russian statehood. “The new look of the mosque, which at the same time resembles both the Spassky tower of the Moscow Kremlin and the elegant Syuyumbike Tower in the Kazan white-stone Kremlin, demonstrates the irreversible connection of our Islam to its spiritual roots, to the Eurasian foundations of Russian civilization and statehood.”<sup>53</sup>

49 “Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie muftiya Rossii Gaynutdina” [“Christmas message by mufti Gaynutdin”], *Musul’mane Rossii*, 27 January, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/8925>, accessed 25 September 2019.

50 Isra’ and Mi’raj – two parts of Muhammed’s Night Journey to Jerusalem described in the *Sura al-Isra* (17).

51 “Muftii Gaynutdin: rossiyskoe musul’mansvo smozhet stat’ liderom vsei ummy” [“Mufti Gaynutdin: Russian Islam can become the leader of the whole Ummah”], *Musul’mane Rossii*, 11 June, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9411>, accessed 25 September 2019.

52 “Muftiy Gaynutdin: ya dumayu, ne odna mechet’ budet postroena v Moskve” [“Mufti Gaynutdin: I think more than one mosque will be built in Moscow”], *Musul’mane Rossii*, 18 September, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9718>, accessed 25 September 2019.

53 “Muftiy Gaynutdin: otkrytie Moskovskoi Sobornoj mecheti – sobytie gosudarstvennogo mashtaba dlya RF” [“Mufti Gaynutdin: opening of Moscow Cathedral Mosque is an event of a state scale for the Russian Federation”], *Musul’mane Rossii*, 23 September, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/9735>, accessed 25 September 2019.

Following official state discourse, Gaynutdin evokes the same threats identified above. In his texts, the main enemies of Russian Muslims are Western philosophy and liberal ideology. According to Gaynutdin, the idea that ‘man is the measure of all things’ is unacceptable since it leads to egocentrism and causes the many disasters of modern civilization.<sup>54</sup> He calls this concept ‘I as a thing-in-itself’.<sup>55</sup> Such unlimited freedom brings liberalism to its extreme: “Chasing imaginary freedom, the ultra-liberals have directed their society along the path of a new form of slavery – slavery to the instincts, illusory comfort, the slavery of illusions of consciousness. Does God not speak of such slaves of instincts in the Holy Scripture...”<sup>56</sup>

Islamic official discourse thus becomes indistinguishable from the official governmental discourse on Islam. There is a high level of intertextuality between these two discourses, in which representatives of the Muslim community use the same categories as government officials, appealing to values of unity, spirituality and Eurasianism, as well as to the image of a liberal Western enemy. Gaynutdin’s parallels with Christian religious traditions follow the same logic.

## Conclusion

This paper analyses a selection of sources reflecting both Russian Islamic official discourse and official Russian governmental discourse on Islam. It does not claim to paint a comprehensive picture, seeking rather to identify major trends and so contribute to a general understanding of the situation. The official discourse on Islam is filled with alarmist rhetoric. It claims that, under the influence of external factors, Islam in Russia is radicalizing and turning into a threat to the country’s national security. This point of view first developed during the ‘second Chechen war’ and has remained strong since. For the government and experts close to it, force remains the only real and effective way of dealing with what is considered radical Islam. At the same time, social and humanitarian initiatives, including those of the Muslim community itself, remain on the margins of public consciousness. The much-promoted ‘brand of traditional Islam’ has been actively used to oppose ‘radical Islam’, but that does not go beyond the scope of the

54 “Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie muftiya Rossii Gaynutdina” [“Christmas message by mufti Gaynutdin”], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 27 January, 2015, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/8925>, accessed 25 September 2019.

55 “Fundamental'nyi vyzov chelovechestvu imeet tsennostnuyu prirodu” [“Fundamental challenge to humanity has a value nature”], *Musul'mane Rossii*, 10 December, 2014, <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/8810>, accessed 25 September 2019.

56 “Fundamental'nyi vyzov chelovechestvu imeet tsennostnuyu prirodu”.



dichotomy or offer a new solution to the problem. Representatives of the official Muslim community limit themselves to mimicking official governmental rhetoric in the theological sphere, which allows them to demonstrate their loyalty to the authorities.

## Zvanični diskurs o islamu i islamski diskurs u savremenoj Rusiji: stereotipi i intertekstualnost

### Sažetak

U ovom radu se razmatra intertekstualnost zvaničnog diskursa o islamu i islamskog diskursa u savremenoj Rusiji. Takva podjela između diskursa, kakvu prave vladine agencije i ruski muslimanski lideri, omogućuje analizu razlika i sličnosti među njima. Glavni cilj ovog članka jeste identificirati izvore modernog diskursa o islamu. U tu svrhu, analizirani su parlamentarni dokumenti i transkripti parlamentarnih sjednica, ali i stručni materijali iz ruskih medija i rezultati ispitivanja javnog mišljenja, a da bi se pokazalo kako se ideja “borbe protiv islama” prelijeva iz jednog u drugi diskurs i postaje dominantna u ruskoj političkoj sferi. Analiza retorike ruskih muslimanskih lidera pokazuje bliske semantičke veze s diskursom vlasti (ne samo o islamu), po tome što je njihova retorika puna konceptualnih metafora koje ukazuju na lojalnost vladajućoj eliti.

**Ključne riječi:** Islam u Rusiji, slika o islamu, islam, sociologija islama

## The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam

---

*Renat Bekkin\**

### Abstract

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

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

---

\* D.Sc. in Economics, Cand.Sc. in Law; Professor of the Russian Academy of Sciences; professor at the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia; Doctorand at Södertörn University (Stockholm).

## 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:

- 
- 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 Poleyev 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 renovatists 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 renovatists 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., "Obnovlencheskoye dvizheniye v Indonezii: zhizn' i uchenie Nurkholisa Madzhida" ["Renovationist movement in Indonesia: the life and teachings of Nurcholish Madjid"], *Islam v sovremennom mire [Islam in the modern world]* 13-3 (2017), p. 47-66; Mukhetdinov D.V., "Filosofiya Ismaila Radzhi al-Faruki: v poiskah neomodernizma" ["Philosophy of Ismail Raji al-Faruqi: in search of neomodernism"], *Islam v sovremennom mire [Islam in the modern world]*, 14-2 (2018), p. 165-181, etc.).

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 srednevekoye 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 neglasniy 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 obyasnil 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/sovets-muftiev-rossii-nazval-koranitov-sektoj>, accessed 25 September 2019).

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

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: Mezhdistsiplinarnost’ 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-mezhdistsiplinarnost-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.

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

---

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

## “Traditional Islam” in the discourse of religious associations, ethnic organisations and government structures in Bashkortostan

---

*Zilya Khabibullina\**

### Abstract

The well-known and widely used term “traditional Islam” first appeared during the Islamic revival in post-Soviet Russia. It refers to something that has become a very relevant issue in those regions of the country with a predominantly Muslim population. This article analyses the discourse on “traditional Islam” in the Republic of Bashkortostan, particularly in relation to the spiritual administrations, Muslim movements, and schools and ethnic organisations. It also looks at different interpretations of common religious practices, e.g. regional pilgrimages, and whether they are considered to belong to “traditional” or “non-traditional” Islam. Research confirms the existence of multiple interpretations of “traditional Islam” in society and a lack of unanimity over how to understand the term. Debates over “traditional” and “non-traditional” Islam and the search for ethnically relevant forms of religion thus remain factors in the generation of conflict and facilitate further fragmentation of the Muslim community in the Republic.

**Key words:** Islam, traditional Islam, Bashkortostan, state, TsDUM, DUM RB, Islamic movements, ethnic organisations, pilgrimage

---

\* Cand.Sc. in History; Senior Research Fellow at R.G. Kuzeev Institute for Ethnological Studies – Subdivision of the Ufa Federal Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

## Introduction

The term “traditional Islam” first appeared in a Russian context in the early 1990s. As state policy on religion and its institutional formations changed radically, religious uplift and growth in the number of believers prompted organisational restructuring of the spiritual administrations that had regulated the life of the Muslim community in the USSR. As the autonomous republics gained sovereignty, the four Soviet muftiates (the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European part of the USSR and Siberia, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Northern Caucasus, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Transcaucasia, and the Central Asian Spiritual Administration of Muslims) disintegrated and new independent and competing spiritual administrations emerged all over the Russian Federation, generally on ethnic and territorial principles.

This organisational fragmentation of the Muslim community was aggravated by radical and extremist interventions within the Islamic landscape of Russia, combined with the absence of a high-quality system of religious education. During the Soviet period, the major educational centres for Muslims were in Uzbekistan (the Mir-i Arab *madrasah* in Bukhara and the Imam al-Bukhari Islamic Institute in Tashkent). The newly founded *madrasahs* and the R. Fakhretdinov Islamic University<sup>1</sup> in Ufa were not yet capable of providing high-quality education in the 1990s. Many young believers were therefore educated abroad, in Arab countries, Turkey, Pakistan, etc. Several researchers have contended that, when they returned with their newly acquired knowledge and foreign interpretations of the tenets of Islam, these young people often had difficulty fitting into Russian Islamic communities.<sup>2</sup>

Such were the conditions under which the dichotomy between “traditional”

1 In 1989–1996, the University operated as the Madrasah named after R. Fakhretdinov. In 1996–2003, it was called the Russian Islamic Institute of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia (TsDUM), and in 2003 it obtained accreditation as a university.

2 Gallyamov R.R., “Islamskoye vozrozhdeniye v Volgo-Ural’skom makroregione: sravnitelnyy analiz modeley Bashkortostana i Tatarstana” [“Islamic revival in the Volga-Urals macro-region: comparative analysis of the Bashkortostan and Tatarstan models”], in *Islam ot Kaspiya do Urala: Makroregional’nyy podkhod [Islam from the Caspian Sea to the Urals: Macroregional approach. Collection of articles]* (Moscow: Rospen, 2007), p. 98; Mukhametshin R.M., “Sistema musul’manskogo obrazovaniya v sovremennoy Rossii” [“System of Islamic education in modern Russia”], in *Razvitiye islamskogo teologicheskogo i religioznogo obrazovaniya v Rossii i za rubezhom [Development of Islamic theological and religious education in Russia and abroad]* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Moskovskogo islamskogo universiteta, 2009), p. 75; Khasanova A.G., *Religioznye obyedineniya Respubliki Bashkortostan v 1985–2005 gg.: dis. ... kand. ist. nauk [Religious associations of the Republic of Bashkortostan in 1985–2005: dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Historical Sciences]* (Ufa: BSU, 2007), p. 127; Yakupov R.I., Rayev R.A., “K noveyshey istorii razvitiya sistem mnogourovnevnogo obrazovaniya u tyurko-musul’man Rossii” [“Revisiting the contemporary history of developing systems of multi-level education for the Muslim Turkic peoples of Russia”], in *Idealy i tsennosti islama v obrazovatel’nom prostranstve XXI veka. Materialy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii [Ideals and values of Islam in the educational landscape of the 21st century. Materials from the International Conference]* (Ufa: Bashkir’skiy Gosudarstvennyy Pedagogicheskii Universitet, 2014), p. 20–25, etc.

and "non-traditional" ("right/wrong") Islam was introduced. The main aims were to distinguish radical interpretations of Islam and define the specific features of Russian Islam. The terms were therefore widely deployed in the rhetoric of Muslim leaders competing for congregations and muftiates.<sup>3</sup>

The state's current religious policy is for "traditional Islam" to consolidate Russian Muslims within each country and so develop it as a powerful resource for encouraging civil unity.<sup>4</sup> The term is deployed by representatives of government bodies, religious organisations, ethnic associations, academia, and the media and has widespread currency among Russia's Islamic community. There is no single or authoritative definition of it, because different social groups have different understandings of it and use it to support their different points of view on issues of concern to the Russian ummah.<sup>5</sup>

Given the regionalisation of Russia's Islamic community (there are several autonomous Islamic areas inside the country, including the Urals and Volga Region, the Northern Caucasus, and Western Siberia, each with its own religious and political leaders and social, cultural, and psychological features), debates on the essence of "traditional Islam" tend to be region-specific and influenced by socio-political, ethnic-religious, and personal factors.

In this paper we will be looking at these processes of interpretation from an anthropological point-of-view and explaining how it is perceived and used by Muslims in their daily life in the Republic of Bashkortostan, a major territory of the Russian Federation whose population has historically been largely Muslim. The goal of this study is to determine the field of discussion for the problem of "traditional Islam" and so to establish its general character and focus.

This paper is based on ethnographical materials collected in the Republic of Bashkortostan: interviews with clerics, believers, and the leaders of ethnic organisations, official and unofficial associations, as well as research into popular Muslim practices in the Republic, e.g. visiting the tombs of "saints" ("awliya"), which have become the subject of religious and jurisprudential dispute.

3 "Ekspert: termin "traditsionnyy islam" vvel Talgat Tadzhuddin v lihiye 90-e" ["Expert: the term "traditional Islam" introduced Talgat Tadzhuddin into the dashing 90s"], <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-jekspert-termin-tradicionnyj-islam-vvel-talgat-tadzhuddin-v-lihiye-90-e/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

4 Pyatkov V.P., "Sovremennaya religioznaya situatsiya v Respublike Bashkortostan" [The current religious situation in the Republic of Bashkortostan], in *Islam i gosudarstvo v Rossii: sbornik materialov Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii, posvyashchennoy 225-letiyu Tsentralnogo duhovnogo upravleniya musulman Rossii – Orenburgskogo magometanskogo duhovnogo sobraniya. Ufa, 22 oktyabrya 2013 g.* [Islam and the state in Russia: collection of materials from the International Academic Conference to mark the 225th anniversary of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia – the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly. Ufa, 22 October, 2013], (Ufa: GUP RB Ufimskiy poligrafkombinat, 2013), p. 5.

5 See, *Traditsionnyy islam: ponyatiye, sushchnost', sodержaniye. Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara, provedennogo v Ufe 21 iyulya 2015 g.* [Traditional Islam: notion, essence, content. Collection of materials from an academic seminar held in Ufa on 21 July, 2015], G.B. Faizov (ed.), (Ufa: Bashkir'skiy Gosudarstvennyy Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2015).

## Ethnic and demographic overview of the Muslim community of Bashkortostan

The Republic of Bashkortostan is a multi-ethnic<sup>6</sup> and multi-religious region of Russia, most of whose population are Muslims native to the Republic. According to information from the Council for State-Religion Relations affiliated to the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Islamic associations constitute some 68% of all religious organisations there, the remainder comprising a further 20% of Orthodox Christian associations and 12% of Protestant movements (Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostalists, Mormons, etc.), along with a smattering of Old Believers, Buddhists, and adherents of pagan beliefs.<sup>7</sup> The number of Islamic religious organisations is still growing, and, as of January 1 2018, there were 1,392 active Islamic religious associations in the Republic.<sup>8</sup> The region is thus of significant interest for researchers into Islam and Islamic communities.

According to the last census, the Islamic ummah of Bashkortostan predominantly comprises two Turkic peoples, the Bashkirs, who number 1,172,287 people (29.5%), and the Tatars, who number 1,009,295 people (25.4%). The majority of Bashkirs live in the southern, south-eastern, eastern and north-eastern districts of the Republic (the so-called Bashkir Trans-Urals), while most of the Republic's Tatars are concentrated in the western and north-western districts, which border in Tatarstan. As one travels from west to east and south-east, Tatar Muslims thus represent a gradually decreasing percentage of the population.<sup>9</sup>

One should bear in mind that the ratio of Tatars to Bashkirs in Bashkortostan reported in Russian censuses tended to fluctuate in accordance with changes in formal ethnic identification, under the influence of state policy and institutional factors. Such changes in ethnic identification were most common in areas of intense inter-ethnic contact in the north-western parts of the present-day Re-

6 According to the 2010 census, there are representatives of over 160 peoples living in the Republic of Bashkortostan, speaking 150 different languages and dialects (see *Natsionalniy sostav i vladeniye yazykami, grazhdanstvo naseleniya Respubliki Bashkortostan po dannym Vserossiyskoy perepisi naseleniya 2010 goda: statisticheskiy sbornik* [Ethnic composition and languages, citizenship of the population of the Republic of Bashkortostan according to the results of the Russian Census of 2010: statistical compendium] 2 volumes, Vol. 1. (Ufa: Bashkortostan, 2013), p. 13–27.

7 "Informatsionniy otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessionalnym otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2017 g." [Information Report of the Council on State-Confessional Relations under the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan for 2017], in *Tekushchiy arkhiv Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessionalnym otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan* [The current archive of the Council on State-Confessional Relations under the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan].

8 "Informatsionniy otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessionalnym otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2018 g." in *Tekushchiy arkhiv Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessionalnym otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan*.

9 *Narody Bashkortostana v perepisyah naseleniya* [Peoples of Bashkortostan in censuses], Part I. (Ufa: Kitap, 2016).

public during the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since the ethnonym (Bashkir) was state-sponsored, rejecting it could have a negative impact on one's everyday life, losing one privileges. Some people therefore accepted the ethnonym as designating their social (publicly declared) identity, while keeping their previous ethnicity in their private circle.<sup>10</sup> Shortly before the Russian Censuses of 2002 and 2010, the "Tatar-Bashkir issue" had thus become a widely discussed one.<sup>11</sup>

After the collapse of the USSR, the Bashkir intelligentsia had the task of consolidating the titular population into a "nation" by creating a high Bashkir culture that was distinct from Tatar culture, as had previously been the case when the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was formed in 1919. These processes were then projected on to the Muslim environment and took the form of seeking differences between "Bashkir" and "Tatar" Islam, which is what Bashkir activists went on to do.<sup>12</sup>

The native Muslim community of the Republic was supplemented by Muslim immigrants in the 1990s and visitors from CIS countries, most of whom stayed for short periods to earn money. According to figures from the Administration for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Bashkortostan, 631,000 people moved to Bashkortostan between 1992 and 2005. This included 109,566 from republics of the former USSR.<sup>13</sup> These Muslim migrants included Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Azerbaijanis, Tajiks, and Turkmen. The cities have neighbourhoods where migrants from the various ethnicities concentrate.

Attitudes towards migrant Muslims are mixed in the Islamic ummah of Bashkortostan. In the 1990s, migrants from Central Asian countries helped revive Islam in Bashkiria, as well as in forming an institutional Islamic clergy<sup>14</sup> in the region and re-establishing Islamic congregations, and for these reasons they were often held in high regard by the local population, not least because of popular assumptions re-

10 Gorenburg D., "Tatary – bashkiry – snova tatary: izmeneniya etnicheskoy identichnosti v Bashkortostane" [Tatars – Bashkirs – Tatars again: changes of the ethnic identity in Bashkortostan], *Vestnik Evrazii* [Bulletin of Eurasia], 1 (2004). p. 68.

11 Gabdrafikov I.M., "Fenomen Bashkortostana: ot "tragicheskoy demografii" k "zakonomernoy rekonfiguratsii chislennosti" [The phenomenon of Bashkortostan: from "tragic demography" to "natural reconfiguration of the population"], *Etnograficheskoye obozreniye* [Ethnographic review], 5 (2007), p. 126.

12 *100 let duhovnomu upravleniyu musulman Respubliki Bashkortostan: istoriya i sovremennost'* [The 100th anniversary of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan: history and present] (Ufa: Kitap, 2018), p. 12.

13 "Migranty v etnokul'turnom prostranstve Bashkortostana" ["Migrants in the ethnocultural space of Bashkortostan"], <https://www.fergananews.com/articles/6510>, accessed 25 September 2019.

14 Unlike other universal religions, Islam has no institutional church to serve as intermediary between believers and God. Nor is there a special social class of clerics supposed to possess divine grace. The situation in the Russian state is different for historical reasons. In 1789, Catherine the Great founded the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly, which institutionalised the Muslim clergy in the country. The Islamic clergy in modern Russia include muftis, imams, mullahs, and muezzins, who perform and organise acts of worship. Currently, the Islamic clergy is a social-professional group with certain elements of stratification and some hierarchical patterns.



garding the high level of development of Islam in Central Asia.<sup>15</sup> Attitudes towards migrants in society were, however, also influenced by the expert assessment of the migration processes as a source of radicalisation of the Republic's Muslims, given the migrants increasing role in "Hizb at-Tahrir" activities. This is a religiously oriented political party<sup>16</sup> that is considered a terrorist group in Russia.<sup>17</sup>

In CIS countries and the other republics of Russia, ethnic Bashkir migrants are themselves currently viewed in increasingly negative ways, which are, however, caused by social and cultural differences and economic factors rather than religious practices. This trend has been reinforced by two instances of conflict in 2018 between representatives of the Muslim peoples in the Republic, namely the Bashkirs and Chechens and the Bashkirs and Tajiks, where ethnic differences exacerbated everyday conflicts and put them in the public spotlight.<sup>18</sup>

Concern over migrants is also rising in Bashkortostan at the level of government institutions. According to the Council for State-Religion Relations, affiliated to the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan, only those native to the region and educated in Russian institutes and *madrasahs* or with a good education abroad should be appointed as imams – in other words, they should be people who know the local culture and customs very well as a prerequisite to meeting the spiritual needs of the residents of the Republic, rather than outsiders to Bashkortostan.<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that there was a wave, particularly in Bashkir districts, of forcing migrant imams out of the Republic during the 2000s. Their places were usually taken by radically oriented local

15 Khabibullina Z.R., *Musul'manskoe duhovenstvo v Respublike Bashkortostan na rubezhe XX–XXI vekov [Islamic clergy in the Republic of Bashkortostan on the verge of the 21st century]* (Ufa: Mir pechati, 2015), p. 57.

16 Prohibited in the Russian Federation by decision of the Supreme Court, dated February 14, 2003, No GKPI 03-116.

17 "Bashkirskogo separatizma ne sushchestvuyet" Islamoved Ayslu Yunusova o natsionalnyh i religioznyh problemah Bashkortostana ["Bashkir separatism does not exist" Islamologist Aislu Yunusova about ethnic and religious problems of Bashkortostan"], <https://lenta.ru/articles/2015/06/23/bashkir/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

18 "Skandal o massovoi drake s chechentsami v bashkirskom sele vyshel za predely respublikii" ["The scandal of a mass brawl with Chechens in the Bashkir village went beyond the borders of the Republic"], <https://rb.veria.ru/skandal-o-massovoj-drake-s-chechencami-v-bashkirskom-sele-vyshel-za-predely-respubliki>, accessed 25 September 2019; "Boynya v Baymake: ofitsial'no – bytovaya draka, neofitsial'no – natsionalniy konflikt" ["The massacre in Baymak: officially – a domestic fight, unofficially – an ethnic conflict"], <https://mkset.ru/news/incident/01-10-2018/boynya-v-baymake-ofitsialno-bytovaya-draka-neofitsialno-natsionalnyy-konflikt>, accessed 25 September 2019; Turov V., "Mezhnatsionalniy konflikt v pervoy stolitse Bashkortostana vyzval nedovol'stvo v Moskve i Chechne" ["Interethnic conflict in the first capital of Bashkortostan caused discontent in Moscow and Chechnya"], <http://pravdapfo.ru/articles/90663-mezhnatsionalnyy-konflikt-v-pervoy>, accessed 25 September 2019; Rahmatullin T., "Izvin'yayus pered vsem bashkirskim narodom": chto proizoshlo v Beloretske? ["I apologize to the whole Bashkir people": what happened in Beloretsk?], <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/122472-beloreckiyy-konflikt-s-mezhnetnicheskoy-okraskoy>, accessed 25 September 2019; Sitikov I., V Bashkortostane proizoshla ocherednaya mezhnatsional'naya draka [There was another ethnic fight in Bashkortostan], <http://pravdapfo.ru/news/91389-v-bashkortostane-proizoshla-ocherednaya>, accessed 25 September 2019.

19 Karamyshev R.D., "Trudovaya migratsiya i islamskaya umma RB" ["Labor Migration and the Islamic Ummah of the Republic of Bashkortostan"], <http://lawinrussia.ru/content/trudovaya-migratsiya-i-islamskaya-umma-rb>, accessed 25 September 2019.

imams who had just returned from foreign educational institutions.<sup>20</sup> One of DUM RB's proclaimed priorities is the cultural integration of migrants from other regions of Russia, countries of the former Soviet Union, and beyond. Islamic traditions and the Bashkir language are supposed to be major factors in such integration, according to the Spiritual Administration's development strategy.<sup>21</sup>

## The organisational structure of the Muslim community of Bashkortostan

In organisational terms, the Muslim ummah of Bashkortostan is represented by two officially registered religious centres:

- The Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia (TsDUM), chaired by Grand mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin (since 1980, when he was appointed to head TsDUM's predecessor, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia). It brings together more than 2,000 Islamic organisations from all over the Russian Federation, including 622 in the Republic of Bashkortostan.<sup>22</sup>
- The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan (DUM RB), led by Mufti Nurmuhamet Nigmatullin (from 1992 to 2019).<sup>23</sup> DUM RB is included in the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR), chaired by Ravil Gaynutdin. From 1994 to 2017, Nigmatullin was also co-chair of the SMR. He is currently a member of its General Committee. DUM RB brings together 773 Muslim communities in the Republic, which constitutes a majority of the SMR's member communities.<sup>24</sup>

20 In 2011, we noted such a case at the village of Abzakovo in Beloretsky district, when an imam from Central Asia, accepted and revered by most of the residents, was banished for ideological differences by a group of young local imams under the age of 35, who had returned to their homeland after studying abroad. Senior members of the village described these young people as failing to measure up to the moral requirements of the imamate and noted that they did not share the same understanding of Islam. The locals said that during the time of the previous imam, who had been forced to leave the village, the mosque had been its cultural centre, they had spent religious and other public holidays in the mosque, held all kinds of social gatherings and tea parties. The young imams prohibited cooking and bringing food to the mosque, discouraged the presence of women, etc. Locals stopped going and the mosque became a meeting place for just five young people with new views. During our fieldwork, the mosque was closed.

21 *100 let dukhovnomu upravleniyu musulman Respubliki Bashkortostan: istoriya i sovremennost* (Ufa: Kitap, 2018), p. 6.

22 "Informatsionniy otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2018 g.", in *Tekushchiy arhiv Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan*.

23 In April 2019, mufti Nurmuhamet Nigmatullin resigned, in June he died.

24 "Informatsionniy otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2018 g." in *Tekushchiy arhiv Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nyim otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan*.

There are 1,173 mosques in the Republic. The 1,392 Islamic organisations have 1,275 imam-khatibs between them. There are 77 mosques without a permanent priest and a lot of imams serve 2 or 3 mosques. This shortage of clerics, most of whom are senior citizens (65–70 years old), has existed for some years.<sup>25</sup>

Some districts of the Republic have seen an increase in the number of supporters of “unofficial” Islam. The largest “unofficial” religious groups are the Salafis and the so-called “Haqqanis” (followers of the Naqshbandi Haqqaniyya *tariqa*). Their main ideologist was Nazim Al-Haqqani,<sup>26</sup> who was followed, after his death, by his son, Sheikh Mehmet Adil.

The self-proclaimed leader of the Salafis of the Republic is I. N. Khaybullin, who chaired the “Shura of the Muslims of Bashkortostan” until 2017<sup>27</sup> (when the association dissolved itself, announcing that its members should continue their activities within the official muftiates).<sup>28</sup> The Bashkir Salafis consider Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait their religious centres and maintain communication with similar organisations in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

A neo-Sufi group called the Haqqaniyya *tariqa* operates under the leadership of S. Kildin, a former government official and General Director of the Bashkortostan State Broadcasting Company. Neo-Sufi ideas have proved popular with creative and academic Bashkir intellectuals, businesspeople, and political figures. The movement’s religious centre is the town of Lefka (in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus), which Bashkir adherents visit frequently. The leaders of the group position themselves as adherents of “traditional Islam”<sup>29</sup> and have actively participated in the work of Bashkir ethnic organisations. The *tariqa* is most popular in the southern and eastern areas of the Republic of Bashkortostan.

25 “Informatsionnyy otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessionalnym otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2018 g.”

26 Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Qibrisi al-Haqqani (1922–2014). According to his official biography, he was a paternal descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and the Sufi ‘Abd al-Qadir Gilani (1077–1166), and so inherited his affiliation to the Qadiriyya *tariqa*. On his mother’s side, sheikh Nazim was a descendant of the Sufi Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207–1273), the originator of the Mevlevi *tariqa*. In his own words, sheikh Nazim received spiritual initiation into the Qadiriyya *tariqa* from the late Gilani himself at the Sufi’s grave in Baghdad. In the golden chain of succession (*altny silsile*), recognised by the Haqqaniyya *tariqa*, Sheikh Nazim follows right after Abdullah ad-Daghestani.

27 The “Shura of the Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan” was founded in 2009 as a part of the World Qoroltai of the Bashkirs, and members were present as speakers at the Youth Qoroltai of the World Qoroltai of the Bashkirs in 2010. Their priorities were in philanthropy, Islamic education and awareness-building, organising religious social events and publishing (including the “Waqyt” newspaper).

28 “Obyavleniye o samorospuske Shury! Ishmurat Khaybullin” [“Announcement of the self-dissolution of Shura! Ishmurat Khaybullin”], [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a37KS\\_wNHJk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a37KS_wNHJk), accessed 25 September 2019.

29 Mawlana Sutan al-Awliya Sheikh Muhammad Mehmet Adil al-Naqshbandi, *Sokhbety (besedy) v Bashkortostane [Sokhbets (conversations) in Bashkortostan]*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ufa: Bashkortostan, 2015), p. 3–4.

Representatives of the Sufi *tariqas* (Naqshbandiyya and Shadhiliyya) of Dagestan also associate their work with the clerical administrations of Bashkortostan and contact them through immigrants from this Northern Caucasus republic.<sup>30</sup>

There is also noteworthy and growing influence of Azerbaijani and Iranian Shiites on the local Muslims, even if the former are not particularly evident in the social life of the Republic. An online group called the "Shiites of Bashkortostan", on the VK social networking website, has about 600 members.<sup>31</sup> The Khamza mosque in Ufa hosts annual mourning events during Ashura week, but their activities are limited to that. Of international radical organisations that have been declared terrorist or prohibited in the Russian Federation, the following are active in the Republic: Islamic State,<sup>32</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra,<sup>33</sup> Hizb at-Tahrir, and Tablighi Jamaat.<sup>34</sup>

## The emergence of the term "traditional Islam"

The first people to introduce the term "traditional Islam" were representatives of religious organisations. The term appeared in the 1990s in response to the growth of foreign radical influences among Russian Muslims and the need to distinguish radical from peaceful interpretations of Islam. Authorship of the term is usually ascribed to the mufti of TsDUM, T. Tadzhuiddin.<sup>35</sup> The term has proven useful in clerical competition for muftiates and the repartition of the Islamic landscape that took place in the 1990s. The notion of "non-traditional Islam" was deployed by the management of the then-disintegrating Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia to describe their opponents' religious views.<sup>36</sup> A term initially aimed at post-Soviet believers has thus stuck and

30 Author's fieldwork materials, Davlekanovo, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2018.

31 "Shiity Bashkortostana" ["Shiites of Bashkortostan"], [https://vk.com/shia\\_bashkortostan](https://vk.com/shia_bashkortostan), accessed 25 September 2019. The very existence of this group speaks to the religious mobilisation of Shiites in the Republic.

32 Prohibited in the RF by decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, dated 29.12.2014, No AKPI 14-1424S.

33 Prohibited in the RF by decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, dates 29.12.2014, No AKPI 14-1424S.

34 "Informatsionniy otchet Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nym otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan za 2018 g.", in *Tekushchiy arkhiv Soveta po gosudarstvenno-konfessionalnym otnosheniyam pri Glave Respubliki Bashkortostan*.

35 "Ekspert: termin "traditsionniy islam" vvel Talgat Tadzhuiddin v lihiye 90-e", <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-jekspert-termin-tradicionnyj-islam-vvel-talgat-tadzhuiddin-v-lihiye-90-e/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

36 Yunusova A.B., "Islam i musul'mane v obshchestvennom i bytovom prostranstve Respubliki Bashkortostan" ["Islam and Muslims in the social and household space of the Republic of Bashkortostan"], in *Rossiia i Islam: mezhtsivilizatsionniy dialog* [*Russia and Islam: inter-civilisational dialogue. Collection of research articles*] (Ufa: Centre for Ethnological Research of the Ufa Science Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2006), p. 142.

continues in use. It was taken over by other Russian muftis and government officials and journalists, ensuring it a widespread distribution in the media landscape.

A well-known religious figure, V. Yakupov, has explained the new term's appearance as related to a need for countermeasures to radical ideology and preservation of Islam's unique nature in Russia, given the extent of foreign influence and the wide distribution of so-called "modernised Islam".<sup>37</sup> Yakupov was one of the first religious figures to stress the distinctiveness of the Russian tradition of Islam and claim it as closest to the "prophetic ideal". He considered "Tatar Islam" such a version of Islam, typified by the "Tatars' high level of literacy, the higher position afforded women than by other Muslim peoples, the strong anti-assimilationist potential, and a centuries-old tradition of electing Islamic clergy".<sup>38</sup> Regardless of his ethnic (Tatar) focus, Yakupov's definition of "prophetic Islam" is shared by some Bashkortostan Muslims, mostly in points related to following the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet and cleaving to distinctive regional and ethnic features that not merely don't contradict Islam but go hand-in-glove with love of one's homeland and upholding its interests.<sup>39</sup>

Russian scholars have thus developed a theory of the distinctiveness of Russian Islam<sup>40</sup> and its regional forms.<sup>41</sup> Russia is accordingly considered one of the more distinctive areas of the Islamic world, where Muslims have been the second-largest religious group (after Orthodox Christianity) coexisting for a considerable historical period with the non-Muslim peoples of Russia. Areas of primarily Muslim population existed under the Russian Empire and the USSR, and the peoples that inhabited those areas had much in common in terms of their material, cultural, and religious life. The common geopolitical space they have occupied has facilitated various integration processes in social organisation, household life, culture and intellectual values. All those factors have influenced the form Russian Islam takes today. Its current specific features are underpinned by the ethnic and cultural peculiarities of the Muslim peoples of Russia.<sup>42</sup> For such researchers, the general Islamic principles that unite the entire Islamic world are supplemented by regional forms of Islam. Russia both represents a regional form of Islam in the Islamic world and unites different regional forms of Islam within a single country. How these forms have been established has depended on the traditions of those peoples of Russia that adopted Islam.

37 See, Yakupov V., *K prorocheskomu islamu [Toward prophetic Islam]* (Kazan: Iman, 2006).

38 Yakupov V., *K prorocheskomu islamu*, p. 72.

39 Author's fieldwork materials, 2018. Opinion poll of believers about "Traditional Islam".

40 Prozorov S.M., "Vstupitel'naya statya" ["Introductory article"], *Islam na territorii byvshey Rossiyskoy imperii: Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar' [Islam in the former Russian Empire: An Encyclopaedic dictionary]*, S.M. Prozorov (ed.), Vol. 1. (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 2006), p. 9–14.

41 Knysch A. D., *Islam v istoricheskoy perspektive: nachalniy etap i osnovniye istochniki [Islam in historical perspective: initial stage and main sources]* (Kazan: Izdatel'stvo Kazanskogo universiteta, 2015), p. 9.

42 Prozorov S.M., "Vstupitel'naya statia", p. 10.

## "Traditional Islam" according to the imams of Bashkortostan

The Islamic clergy of Bashkortostan reduces traditional Islam to the historical tradition of the Hanafi school. Bashkortostani theologians associate the traditional nature of Russian Islam primarily with Sunni Islam, which 90% of the world's Muslims belong to, and the four *madhabs*. When clerics of the Republic talk about traditional Islam, they generally mean Sunni Islam of the Hanafi *madhab*, based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>43</sup> Some clerics also say that, as most Muslims in Russia adhere to the Hanafi *madhab*, the question of *madhabs* is essentially irrelevant for the country's modern Muslim community.<sup>44</sup>

Some opinions about "traditional Islam" frequently expressed by imams from both of the spiritual administrations of Muslims in Bashkortostan follow. They are taken from questionnaires and opinion polls and show how the term is generally understood:

- "Traditional Islam in Russia is Islam as it came from the Prophet and it has a 1000-year history of coexistence with other peoples in peace and unity. It's our Islam. This long history of inhabiting the same space has led to mutual understanding between ethnic groups, tolerance and mutual assistance between Christians, Jewish people, Buddhists."
- "Traditional Islam in Russia is a form of Islamic creed of Sunni orientation, established as a religious belief in Russia within the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. It takes into consideration the traditions of the peoples that profess Islam."
- "Traditional Islam is the Islam of Abu Hanifa's *madhab*. The Muslims of Russia have always professed moderate Islam."
- "Traditional Islam is the Hanafi *madhab*. It is the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet."
- "Traditional Islam is the religion that Muhammad's Islam provides the basis for. Why is it called traditional? Because it was prohibited, or almost prohibited, in Russia, but our ancestors preserved it for us with all its traditions and customs, as they were established by various circumstances of a social and political nature."
- "Traditional Islam is the Islam that follows what is prescribed in the Qur'an and acknowledges ethnic traditions and culture. As established in a given area and passed down from generation to generation."

43 Author's fieldwork materials, Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2005. Interviews with the mufti of DUM RB N. Nigmatullin; the Rector of the Russian Islamic University R. Rae, and the Head of the "Ikhlas" Muslim Religious Organisation of Kirovsky district of Ufa, M. Gallyamov.

44 Author's fieldwork materials, Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2005. Interviews with the First Deputy of the mufti of DUM RB A. Bibarsov; the Rector of the "M. Sultanova *madrasah*" Islamic College I. Malakhov; the Rector of the "Galiya" *madrasah*, I. Mukhamadiev and imam-*muhtasib* of Iglinsky district of the Republic of Bashkortostan, R. Kurbanov.

- “Traditional Islam is firstly Sunni Islam of the two *madhabs* (schools of religious jurisprudence) that have gained a foothold with the Muslims of Russia – the Hanafi *madhab*, to which the Tatars, Bashkirs and some Caucasus Muslims belong, and the Shafi‘i *madhab*, which is widespread in Dagestan and Chechnya. Secondly, it is Sufism, which is represented by several brotherhoods – Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya, Shadhiliyya.”
- “Traditional Islam is Sunni Islam, a symbiosis of ethnic tradition and religious dogma. So long as tradition does not contradict Islam and sharia, it should be accepted. For example, if a society traditionally sets a high bride price, and a Muslim man cannot marry because of it, that is a harmful tradition. Traditional Islam knows where tradition ends and sharia begins.”<sup>45</sup>

On July 21, 2015, there was an academic seminar in Ufa on the problem of traditional Islam and its nature. The participating institutions included the Bashkir State Pedagogical University named after M. Akmulla, TsDUM and DUM RB. The proceedings were published in a dedicated volume, which has served as an instructional guide for students at the Russian Islamic University of TsDUM and the Bashkir State Pedagogical University (whose curriculum includes in-depth study of the history and culture of Islam). The guide does not present a determinate concept. Instead, it offers the opinions of various participants in the debate on “traditional Islam”, including the official point of view, as expressed by the religious administrations. According to this point of view, the main focus of religious organisations is preserving “traditional Islam”, which includes promoting peace and unity between peoples and traditional religious groups. This is the “antithesis” of “non-traditionalism”, associated with groups that identify as “Wahhabis” and “Salafis” and are completely opposed to the official government authorities and religious administrations.<sup>46</sup>

## “Traditional Islam” and the state

According to the Constitution of the Russian Federation (art. 14, 28), religion is separated from the state, religious associations are equal before the law, and citizens are guaranteed the right for freedom of conscience and religion. In Russia, Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism are the traditional religions, established by

45 Author’s fieldwork materials, Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2018. Survey of imams on “Traditional Islam in Russia” at career enhancement training courses at the Russian Islamic University and Bashkir State Pedagogical University named after M. Akmulla.

46 Yakupov R.I., “Traditsionniy islam: terminologiya i ritorika” [“Traditional Islam: terminology and rhetoric”], in *Traditsionniy islam: ponyatiye, sushchnost’, sodержaniye. Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara, provedennogo v Ufe 21 iyulya 2015 g.*, G.B. Faizov (ed.), (Ufa: Bashkir’skiy Gosudarstvenniy Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2015), p. 29.

the Federal Law "On freedom of conscience and religious organisations" (1997). This law mentions a special role of Orthodox Christianity in the history of Russia and notes that Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and other religions constitute an integral part of the historical legacy of the peoples of Russia and so deserve respect.<sup>47</sup>

That these traditional Russian religious denominations have been formalised in legislation and their organizations guaranteed priority cooperation with the state shows that a cooperative model of relations between the state and the religions has been established in Russia. According to it, the state both preserves religious freedom and retains the right to regulation religious organisations' legal status differently.

The term "traditional Islam" is nowhere mentioned in the legislation of the Russian Federation. Representatives of government institutions do talk about "traditional Islam", however, which raises the question of a "non-traditional Islam".

The state authorities of Bashkortostan responsible for religious policies use the term "traditional Islam" to distinguish between "peaceful" Islam and emergent radical movements that claim a grounding in the Islamic creed and are spreading throughout the world, including modern Russia. In the understanding of statesmen and government officials, "traditional Islam" means a doctrine that respects the religious feelings of other religious groups and does not propagate extremist ideas or hate.<sup>48</sup> It is thus equated to the religion of peace. According to a member of the Council for State-Religion Relations, which is affiliated to the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan, it means an "Islam that is loyal to the state, and whose representatives are respectful of the Orthodox Christian majority and ready to fight for their country, even if it means fighting their faith allies."<sup>49</sup> One should mention that this quote may be found on many Islamic websites attributed to the columnist R. Silantyev<sup>50, 51</sup>

47 Federal Law dates 26 September, 1997, No 125-FZ, "O svobode sovesti i o religioznykh obyedineniyah" ["On freedom of conscience and religious organizations"] (revised and expanded), <http://ivo.garant.ru/#/document/171640/paragraph/20608:2>, accessed 25 September 2019.

48 *Traditsionniy islam: ponyatiye, sushchnost', sodержaniye. Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara, provedennogo v Ufe 21 iyulya 2015 g.*, G.B. Faizov (ed.), (Ufa: Bashkir'skiy Gosudarstvenniy Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2015), p. 5.

49 Karamyshev R.D., "Traditsionniy rossiyskiy islam: ideologema ili realnost'?" ["Traditional Russian Islam: premise or reality?"] in *Traditsionniy islam: ponyatiye, sushchnost', sodержaniye. Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara, provedennogo v Ufe 21 iyulya 2015 g.*, G.B. Faizov (ed.), (Ufa: Bashkir'skiy Gosudarstvenniy Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2015), p. 8.

50 Roman Anatolyevich Silantyev, professor of Moscow State Linguistic University, executive director of the Human Rights Centre of the World Russian People's Council, Deputy Chairman of the Expert Council for State Expert Assessment on Religion affiliated to the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation.

51 "V poiskah identichnosti. Osnovniye problemy i protsessy razvitiya musul'manskogo soobshchestva Rossii" ["In search of identity. The main problems and development processes of the Muslim community of Russia"], <https://islamrf.ru/news/analytcs/point-of-view/36890>, accessed 25 September 2019; "Traditsionnyy islam" – chto eto? ["Traditional Islam – what is it?"], <https://www.umma-42.ru/news-65270.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.



State religious policies in the Republic of Bashkortostan are formulated by a special government body, the Council for State-Religion Relations affiliated to the Head of the Republic of Bashkortostan (with five staff members). Its origins lie in the Soviet period, as a Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (SDRK) affiliated to the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union was founded in 1944 for the purpose of “maintaining communication between the government of the USSR and the leaders of religious associations.”<sup>52</sup> SDRK was active until 1965, when the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults were united into the single Council for Religious Affairs (SDR). The representatives of the Council in territorial districts were *chargés d'affaires* whose task was to control the development of religious life in the regions. According to the law “On freedom of conscience and religious organisations in the USSR”, dated 1 October, 1990, their position was abolished. In November 1990, however, the office of the *chargé d'affaires* for the Bashkir ASSR was transformed into a Council for Religious Affairs affiliated to the Council of Ministers of the Bashkir ASSR. It was preserved under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Bashkortostan, and, when that was abolished in 1996, under the Government of the Republic of Bashkortostan as well. Its main declared functions were facilitating the regulation of relations between the government and religious organisations and ensuring the public’s right to freedom of conscience.<sup>53</sup>

The Council currently regulates relations between the state and religious associations, municipal government bodies, law-enforcement agencies, ministries and agencies dealing with the prevention of religious extremism.<sup>54</sup> The Council influences relations between Muslims in the Republic and actively observes and even participates, through particular individuals, in confrontations between Islamic groups and movements. We must agree with A. Malashenko that “the secular authorities of Bashkortostan, relying on administrative leverage, freely control the religious situation.”<sup>55</sup> Acting as proponents of secularism, the secular leaders behave as if they were figures of religious authority.<sup>56</sup> In 2018, the heightened interest of Ufa officials in the election of a new head at the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan was extensively covered in the media. Quite

52 Central Historical Archive of the Republic of Bashkortostan. Fund R-4732. Inv. 1. File 1. Sheet 5.

53 Law of the Republic of Bashkortostan dated 20 June, 1991, No VS-6/19, “O svobode sovesti i veroisповедaniya v Respublike Bashkortostan” [“On freedom of conscience and religion in the Republic of Bashkortostan”], *Electronic fund of legal and regulatory technical documentation?* <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/935107751>, accessed 25 September 2019.

54 *Religiozniye obyedineniya Respubliki Bashkortostan. Spravochnik* [Religious organisations of the Republic of Bashkortostan. Reference book] (Ufa: GUP RB Ufimskiy poligrafkombinat, 2014), p. 7.

55 Malashenko A.V., “Federalniy tsentr i “musul’manskaya provintsiya” [“The federal centre and the “Muslim province”], *Islam i gosudarstvo: Sbornik nauchnykh statey* [Islam and the state: Collection of research articles] (Moscow, Ufa: Informreklama, 2007), p. 38.

56 Malashenko A.V., “Federalniy tsentr i “musul’manskaya provintsiya”.

a few online media publications covered the issue of how the Office of the Head of the Republic was exerting influence on the staff of DUM RB during nominations for mufti.<sup>57</sup> Recent change in who is Head of the Republic (12.10.2018) has caused the election for mufti of DUM RB to be rescheduled to the autumn of 2019.

The Council made clear in 2018 that the state continues to play a large role in the religious sphere in the Republic.<sup>58</sup> The Council's achievements were announced at a regional conference, "as a result of work undertaken by the Council for State-Religion Relations affiliated to the Head of Republic of Bashkortostan over the past 3 years, using the social-political technology of 'soft power,' in August of 2017 the unofficial leader of the Salafis of the Republic I.N. Khaybullin declared the voluntary dissolution of a large pro-Salafi association – 'the Shura of the Muslims of Bashkortostan,' and the continuation of their religious activities within mosques affiliated to the spiritual administrations of Muslims."<sup>59</sup>

From the point of view of state officials, "traditional Islam" is an ideologeme which has yet to be firmly established in Russian Islam and society, and its main goal is to guard the interests of dominant social groups and the state and thus preserve the stability of the social order.<sup>60</sup>

## Polemics between Muslims and the ethnic factor

Discussions on traditional Islam may also be observed amongst the spiritual administrations of unofficial groups (the Salafis and Sufis) and Islamicised members of Bashkir ethnic movements.

The internal discourse of the Muslim community of the Republic was rendered relevant by the "Grozny *fatwa*" of 2016, which defined Sufism as traditional

57 "Musul'mane Bashkortostana ustali ot ufimskogo chinovnika Pyatkova" ["Muslims of Bashkortostan are tired of the Ufa official Pyatkov"], <https://islamnews.ru/news-musulmane-bashkortostana-ustali-ot-ufimskogo-chinovnika-pyatkov>, accessed 25 September 2019; "Plan "Petrovicha". Vybory muftiya DUM RB prevrashchayutsya v bitvu politikov i kriminala" ["The plan of "Petrovich". Election of the Mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan turns into a battle of politicians and crime"], <https://mynamaz.ru/news/7156886>, accessed 25 September 2019.

58 Karamyshev R.D., "Profilaktika radikalizma i ekstremizma v konfessional'noy srede v Respublike Bashkortostan" ["Prevention of radicalism and extremism in the religious environment in the Republic of Bashkortostan"], *Ekstremizm i terrorizm v sovremennom obshchestve: usloviya vozniknoveniya i formy protivodeystviya: sbornik materialov kruglogo stola* [Extremism and terrorism in modern society: conditions of its emergence and forms of counterterrorism: collection of materials of the roundtable] (Ufa: IP Abdullina I. A., 2018), p. 48.

59 Karamyshev R.D., "Profilaktika radikalizma i ekstremizma v konfessional'noy srede v Respublike Bashkortostan", p. 53.

60 Karamyshev R.D., "Traditsionniy rossiyskiy islam: ideologema ili realnost'?" ["Traditional Russian Islam: premise or reality?"], in *Traditsionniy islam: ponyatiye, sushchnost', soderzhaniye. Sbornik materialov nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara, provedennogo v Ufe 21 iyulya 2015 g.*, G.B. Faizov (ed.), (Ufa: Bashkir'skiy Gosudarstvenniy Pedagogicheskiy Universitet, 2015), p. 12.

Islam and an effective alternative to religious extremism.<sup>61</sup> The *fatwa* was signed by representatives of muftis Talgat Tadzhuiddin and Nurmuhamet Nigmatullin. The non-government media of Bashkiria reacted to the fatwa immediately.<sup>62</sup> The Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Bashkortostan held a conference on “Models of interaction between religious groups in the formation of a common Russian identity” on September 5, 2016, at which the question of the unacceptability of the “Grozny fatwa” for the Muslims of Bashkortostan became a subject of debate outside the official programme.<sup>63</sup>

The factor of politicised ethnicity has substantial influence on processes inside the Muslim community in Bashkortostan. Regional experts think the reason competing movements have emerged within the Islamic ummah was the dismantlement of Bashkortostan’s political system in 2010 and they associate this crisis with the accession to power of new President R.Z. Khamitov.<sup>64</sup> In their view, the political system that had been being formed over the 20 years from 1990 to 2010 in the course of the governmentalisation of the Bashkir ethnicity was a framework that consolidated and structured Bashkir society.<sup>65</sup> A part of the Bashkir elite did indeed “Islamicise” and divide into various Islamic movements. In the present author’s opinion, however, the reason for this division was not a change in power but an absence of consolidation and unity in the Bashkir national movement itself and the continuing contradistinction between ethnic and Islamic identities by Bashkir scholars (according to whom, ethnic identity has a secular origin and is thus less susceptible to radicalisation than archaic Islam).<sup>66</sup>

61 Fatwa “O neotyemlemykh priznakah otlichyia istinnogo Islama ot zabluzhdeniy” [Fatwa “On the inherent signs of the difference between true Islam and misconceptions”], [http://www.sufir.ru/books\\_data/fatwa\\_grozniy/fatwa\\_grozniy.pdf](http://www.sufir.ru/books_data/fatwa_grozniy/fatwa_grozniy.pdf), accessed 25 September 2019.

62 “Ekho “Groznskoy fetvy”: kakim byl Islam v Bashkirii” [“The echo of the Grozny fatwa: what was Islam in Bashkiria”], *Bonus – Newspaper*, No 35 (213), 20 October, 2016.

63 “05 sentyabrya 2016 goda provedena Mezhdunarodnaya nauchno-prakticheskaya konferentsiya “Modeli mezkhkonnatsionalnogo vzaimodeystviya v formirovaniy obshcherossiyskoy identichnosti” [“On 5 September, 2016, the International Scientific and Practical Conference “Models of Inter-Confessional Interaction in the Formation of All-Russian Identity” was held”], <http://www.bashedu.ru/nauchno-obrazovatelny-tsentri-polegii/sobytiya-i-meropriyatiya/05-sentyabrya-2016-goda-provedena>, accessed 25 September 2019.

64 In 2010, the Republic of Bashkortostan saw a change of power. During complicated backstage negotiations with the federal centre, the Head of the region Murtaza Rakhimov, who had governed the Republic for 20 years (1990–2010), was forced to resign. Rustem Khamitov was appointed Head of the Republic, breaking the succession line. This change in the ruling elite was accompanied by a growth of animosity in the ethnic sphere.

65 Buranchin A.M., Vakhitov R.R., Demichev I.V., *Sotsiokulturniye aspekty modernizatsionnykh protsessov v Respublike Bashkortostan* [Social and cultural aspects of modernisation processes in the Republic of Bashkortostan] (Ufa: Design-Press, 2014), p. 183–184.

66 Buranchin A.M., “Islamskaya identichnost’ v sovremennom bashkirskom obshchestve: istoki, sodержaniye, perspektivy” [“Islamic identity in modern Bashkir society: origins, contents, prospects”], *Rossiyskiy islam v transformatsionnykh protsessakh sovremennosti: novyye vyzovy i tendentsii razvitiya v XXI veke. Sbornik nauchnykh statey* [Russian Islam in the transformational processes of today: new challenges and trends of development in the 21st century. Collection of research articles], Z.R. Khabibullina (ed.) (Ufa: Dialog, 2017), p. 116–118; Mardanov M., “Problematika religioznoy identichnosti v svetskom obshchestve sovremennogo Bashkortostana” [“The problematics of religious identity in the secular society of modern Bashkortostan”], *Ekonomika i upravleniye. Nauchno-prakticheskii zhurnal* [Economy and management. Journal of research and practice], 5 (133) (2016), p. 83–86.

The expansion of Salafism in the Republic coincided with systemic crisis in the Bashkir national movement, and Salafism was perceived as a protest against this state of affairs. Certain activists in the Bashkir ethnic organisations, the "Union of Bashkir youth"<sup>67</sup> and the "Kuk bure",<sup>68</sup> whose activities are currently suspended, became Salafis. Salafis do not consider Bashkir traditional Islam in opposition to the Islam of the Prophet Muhammad but its equal, unlike Tatar Islam.<sup>69</sup> The stereotype of a "Tatarization" of the spiritual administrations of the Republic, propagated by Bashkir historians, has also served to unite those oriented by their ethnicity and culture under the sign of Salafism. In a new reference book on the religious associations of the Republic of Bashkortostan, created at the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Bashkortostan with the participation of the Council for State-Religion Relations, one finds that "surprisingly, in a Salafism that vehemently rejects ethnic nationalism the Bashkir national factor is more pronounced than in the muftiates."<sup>70</sup> And this, even though the "Bashkir ethnic national factor" is very distinctly expressed in the muftiates. The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Bashkortostan unites a majority of the Republic's congregations from the regions with a predominantly Muslim population. According to our research, 70% of clerics in DUM RB are Bashkirs. There are also Bashkirs in the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia, where they constitute about 30% of clerics.<sup>71</sup>

Salafis are against a regionally specific Islam, and for them "traditional Islam" is Islam in the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and his righteous companions, which is the understanding of the religion the first generations of Muslims had. Salafis claim that pilgrimage to the graves of saints is prohibited, because they see it as worshipping the dead. They also consider it inadvisable to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.

Another pole of consolidation for the Bashkir intelligentsia has been the Neo-Sufi brotherhood of Haqqaniyya (Rabbaniyya). The Cypriot sheikhs Nazim Al-Haqqani and Mehmet Adil visited Bashkiria in 2013–2014 and, during their travels to various districts of the Republic, "pointed" local Muslims towards the places of burial of "*sahabs*". This started active processes of creating new places of worship, accompanied by sacralisation and mythmaking.

67 The "Union of Bashkir youth" (Bashkir: Bashkort yashtare ittifaghy) is a social organisation founded in 1990 to promote the self-actualisation of Bashkir youth in the social life of Bashkortostan and defence of their rights and freedoms.

68 "Kuk bure" (Bashkir: "sky wolf") is a social union (movement) created in 2007 to protect the ethnic, cultural, social, economic and political rights and interests of Bashkirs in the Russian Federation and the citizens of the Republic of Bashkortostan.

69 Author's fieldwork materials, Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2017.

70 *Religiozniye obyedineniya respubliky Bashkortostan. Spravochnik* (Ufa: GUP RB Ufimskiy poligrafkombinat, 2014), p. 17.

71 Khabibullina Z.R., *Musulmanskoye duhovenstvo v Respublike Bashkortostan na rubezhe XX–XXI vekov* (Ufa: Print world, 2015), p. 112.

The Haqqaniyya *tariqa* is famous in the Middle East and in South and South-East Asia and is active in the USA, UK, Germany, and, as of recently, in Russia. Of the Russian regions, it the Muslims of Bashkortostan that proved most responsive to the sheikhs' calls. On February 18, 2013, Sheikh Nazim personally appointed Sheikh Abdulrafiq, who lives some 200 km from Ufa, as his person in charge of Russia. A well-known businessman, son of an influential politician and brother of popular Russian singer Marat Safin (Sheikh Murad), he became the representative of the *tariqa* in Moscow. In reality, the *tariqa* exists mostly in cyberspace, and its members participate in its activities via online communication.

Sheikh Nazim's doctrine is characterised by syncretism, up to the point of borrowing elements of Christianity, Buddhism and New Age teachings, as well as by a flexible policy towards attracting recent converts to Islam. Such people (including people in Russia), who tend to be disappointed in Western culture and are looking for enlightenment from the East, are offered a Westernised form of Sufism with images and notions that are already familiar to the Western mind. The key elements of his preaching are: waiting for Judgement Day, opposing individualism and egoism, developing spirituality, obtaining divine energy, self-actualisation and self-improvement. The Islamic *dhikr* is turned into "Sufi meditation". Haqqaniyya sheikhs often act as uncompromising adversaries of Salafis.<sup>72</sup>

The supporters of this *tariqa* in Bashkortostan, as followers of Nazim al-Haqqani, have officially declared Naqshbandi Sufism a traditional school of Islam and accepted well-known religious figures and educators from the Volga-Urals region as their sheikhs, including "Sheikh Husain-bek, Mawlana Sheikh Abdulkhakim Kurbangaliyev, Abdulla Saidi Ishaan and Muzhahir Hadhrat, Gataulla Ishaan, Tolomguzha Ishaan, Sakhiulla Ishaan, Mawlana Sheikh Gilyazhetdin, Mawlana Sheikh Abdulgani, Shamigul Khalifa, Seyyidi Yaghafar, Muradym Ishaan, Ali Chukuri and Arifulla Kiyekov."<sup>73</sup> Others are Salawat Yulayev, Seyyidi Jafar Awliya, Sheikh Murat Kuchukov, Kilmyak-hafiz Nurushev, Kinzya-abyz Arslanov, Sheikh Zaynulla ar-Rasuli.<sup>74</sup>

To advance their ideas, the leaders of the *tariqa* use Bashkir historical subjects and Bashkir cultural sites (usually the graves of famous religious figures of the Republic); adherents with psychic powers who demonstrate '*karamats*', or miracles and supernatural phenomena; foreign preachers; anti-Salafi rhetoric; and media resources.

In the 1990s, ethnic movements' influence on the political process ran high. Ethnic organisations, which had picked up momentum during the "parade of

72 Tsibenko V.V., "Nakshbandiyskiy tarikat hakkaniya (rabbaniya) i neosmanskiy proyekt sheykha Nazima Kipriotskogo" ["The Naqshbandi Haqqaniyya (Rabbaniyya) *tariqa* and the Neo-Ottoman project of Sheikh Nazim of Cyprus"], *Islamovedeniye [Islamic Studies]*, 4 (2014), p. 97.

73 Mawlana Sutan al-Awliya Sheikh Muhammad Mehmet Adil al-Naqshbandi, *Sokhbety (besedy) v Bashkortostane [Sokhbets (conversations) in Bashkortostan]*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ufa: Bashkortostan, 2015), p. 3-4.

74 Adil al-Naqshbandi, *Sokhbety (besedy) v Bashkortostane*.

sovereignties" period, instigated confrontation between different ethnic groups at the political level. The political elites of the ethnicity-based republics of the Russian Federation were interested in drawing spiritual and ideological support from the traditional religions to strengthen their national ideologies. Each republic was trying to centralise power in the religious sphere. The ethnic factor played an important role in the disintegration of the Muslim communities of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan, as the ideologists of their national movements supported the division of *mahallahs* and their withdrawal from DUMES.

The well-regarded Bashkir national centre (BNC), "Ural", founded in 1989, supported the highest possible degree of sovereignty for Bashkortostan, as well as giving the Republic an ethnic/national character in internal policy, including all relevant professional, linguistic, cultural and economic programmes.<sup>75</sup> This proactive attitude on the part of the national movement had a major influence on the formation of a strong sense of ethnic/national identity in Bashkir society, one of whose main components is loyalty to Islam. The organisation did much to promote Islam. Under its auspices, the Qur'an<sup>76</sup> was translated into Bashkir, much other religious literature was published, various educational programmes were organised, and funds were raised for the construction of mosques.

The religious program of the BNC included developing Islam for Bashkirs and reinstating the spiritual administration of the Bashkurdistan era<sup>77</sup> (the Global Congress of Bashkirs, held in December of 1917 in Orenburg to consider the desire of Bashkir clergy for independence in the organisation of Islamic worship, had accompanied the proclamation of political autonomy with a declaration of the creation of the Bashkir Spiritual Administration (BDU). The central administration, TsDUM, had continued its work alongside the BDU. In 1936, the state closed down the BDU<sup>78</sup>). The Bashkir spiritual administration is now a symbol of the unity of the Bashkir nation and the embodiment of its people's will.<sup>79</sup>

For religious leaders, relations with the national movement played a pivotal role in the struggle for influence. The BCN initiated creation of DUM RB by electing N. Nigmatullin, an ethnic Bashkir with a religious education, to lead it. During negotiations, he was promised support in reinstating the spiritual administration. A book on

75 Valeev D.Zh., *Istoriya bashkirskoy filosofskoy i obshchestvenno-politicheskoy mysli Bashkortostana* [The history of the Bashkir philosophical, social, and political thought of Bashkortostan] (Ufa: Kitap, 2001), p. 188.

76 *Koran* (Ufa: Bashkirskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1993).

77 Bashkurdistan (Bashkortostan, Small Bashkiria) was a national-territorial autonomy proclaimed on 15 (28) November 1917 by the Bashkir regional Shuro and approved by the Constituent Congress of Bashkurdistan. An army, government, parliament, state symbols were created. It was the first self-proclaimed autonomous area in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

78 Kasimov S.F., *Natsional'no-gosudarstvennoye stroitel'stvo v Bashkortostane. XX vek* [National-state construction in Bashkortostan. 20th century], 2nd edition (Ufa: Gilem, Bashkirskaya Entsiklopediya, 2014), p. 79.

79 *100 let dabovnomu upravleniyu musul'man Respubliki Bashkortostan: istoriya i sovremennost'* (Ufa: Kitap, 2018), p. 5.

N. Nigmatullin states that the “Ural” BNC approached him multiple times with the offer to resurrect DUM RB. Influenced by these proposals, the future mufti started to pay attention to the “unequal attitude to the Muslim communities on the part of the leaders of DUMES (‘centrists’) and felt an urge to promote and strengthen the Islamic faith among the Bashkir people.” Every day, he became more and more convinced that the “Ural” members were right in what they were doing.<sup>80</sup>

A student of religion, S.B. Filatov, who studied the relations of nation and state to religion in Bashkortostan in the mid-1990s, has noted, however, that the conflict between TsDUM and DUM RB had its origins in a religious dispute and was not directly related to either the Bashkir national movement or the establishment of Bashkir sovereignty.<sup>81</sup> In Filatov’s view, the leaders of DUM RB are of a radical bent, unlike T. Tadzhuiddin, who is more focused on the values of modern civilisation, freedom and democracy, and so on so-called “Euro Islam.” Unlike TsDUM, which is trying to establish the closest possible ties with the Russian Orthodox Church, DUM RB’s contacts are generally formal and perfunctory. Tadzhuiddin has accused the leaders of DUM RB of propagating political and religious extremism and racial hatred and of having ties to Wahhabism. DUM RB has countered with accusations against Tadzhuiddin of amoral behaviour, servility toward the Russian authorities, ecumenism, and distortion of Islam’s truths.<sup>82</sup>

The participation of the Bashkir national movement in the confrontation between post-Soviet religious leaders and the search for a “Bashkir Islam” have facilitated the growth of the influence of Muslim radical reformers in the Republic, leading to increased support for a “cleansed Islam” and neo-Sufism, as represented by the followers of Nazim al-Haqqani.

## Muslims “holy places” – “traditionalism” and “non-traditionalism” in Islam

There has been practically no public discussion in the press on the issue of “traditional Islam” that covers current problems or attempt to discover the truth whether in the spiritual administrations or the unofficial Islamic movements. It is more evident in the ethnographic material. The question of traditional Islam has a very prominent place in the attitudes of the Muslim ummah of Bashkortostan to local

80 Utyabayev A., Khisamov G., *Mufti Nurmubamet khazret Nigmatullin. Dokumental'naya povest' s illyustratsiyami* [Mufti Nurmubamet hadhrat Nigmatullin. Illustrated documentary narrative] (Ufa: Profizdat, 2014), p. 218, 221.

81 Filatov S.B., “Religiya i obshchestvo v Bashkortostane” [“Religion and society in Bashkortostan”], *Religiya i obshchestvo: Ocherki religioznoy zhizni sovremennoy Rossii* [Religion and society: essays on the religious life in modern Russia] (Moscow, St. Petersburg: Letniy sad, 2002), p. 132.

82 Filatov S.B., “Religiya i obshchestvo v Bashkortostane”, p. 126–127.

holy places and related rites. Negative perception of the "holy places" has become an indicator of affiliation with the Salafi movement, as the Salafis proclaim pilgrimage to the graves of saints forbidden. They see it as worshipping the dead, which means committing an act of unbelief.

As Islam gained its foothold with the Bashkir people, a lot of ancient traditions took on new forms and became part of the Muslim worldview. This includes the tradition of honouring holy places. The main places of pilgrimage are the burial places of the "saints" or *awliya* (Arab. 'awliyā' – holy people who are under the protection of Allah). For Bashkirs, the notion of the "*awliya*" applied not only to famous religious leaders renowned for their righteousness and profound religious knowledge, but also to common people who distinguished themselves by their good deeds or supernatural abilities. People who died as martyrs were also typically considered *awliya*.<sup>83</sup>

Almost every district in Bashkiria has graves of "saints" revered by Muslims (*awliya keberelawliya ziaraty*). Most are at Islamic cemeteries, which are separate from other graveyards. It is customary to visit them on both weekdays and Islamic holidays. A visit involves reciting surahs of the Qur'an and prayers, decorating the grave, walking around it, sacrificial offerings, and almsgiving with the aim of receiving God's blessing. It is considered an act of grace and beneficial to bury ordinary people alongside the graves of saints. In many villages in the Republic, entire cemeteries have emerged around the grave of a single *awliya*.

There is currently a group of "holy" places that attract pilgrims all year round, with Muslim visitors from both Bashkortostan and other regions of the Russian Federation. These are the burial place (tomb) of Husain-bek in Chishminsky district, the burial place on the hill of Narys-tau in Miyakinsky district (mass pilgrimage was initiated and organised by the adherents of the Haqqani *tariqa* in 2014, as visiting the "grave" of Companions of the Prophet Muhammad – the father and son pair of Abd ar-Rahman ibn Zubayr<sup>84</sup> and Zubayr ibn Zait<sup>85</sup>), the grave of Muzhahir hadhrat<sup>86</sup> in Baymaksiy district, the Aushtau hill and the "Awliya" spring in Uchalinsky district, the grave of Gataulla Ishaan<sup>87</sup> in Khaybullinsky district, the

83 *Bashkiriy [Bashkirs]*, R. G. Kuzeev, E. S. Danilko (eds.) (Moscow: Nauka, 2016), p. 511.

84 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr al-Qurayshi (approx. May 624, Medina – approx. November 692, Mecca) was one of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad and a political figure of 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia who aspired to the position of caliph. Son of Zubayr ibn al-Awam and Asma' bint Abi Bakr, daughter of the first caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, Abu Bakr. Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr was nephew of Aisha, third wife of the Prophet Muhammad.

85 Son of 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr al-Qurayshi, a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad.

86 Muzhahir Wildanovich Sirazhetdinov (1882–1967), born in the village of Bakhtigareevo (Mansurovo) in Baymaksiy district of the Republic of Bashkortostan, was a Muslim religious leader who became known as an *awliya*. Repressed in 1939, vindicated on 28 June 1961.

87 Gataulla Abdmalikov (Alibaev) (1836–1914) was a religious leader, adherent of Sufism. He was educated in Istanbul (together with Zaynulla Rasulev). After returning to his homeland, he opened a *madrasah*, where he taught the doctrine of the Sufi brotherhood of the Naqshbandiyya. He also practiced folk medicine and became a renowned *awliya*.



place of burial of Sabir hadhrat<sup>88</sup> in Gafuriysky district, and the grave of mudaris Kharis Biktimirov<sup>89</sup> in Sterlibashevsky district. The best-known hieratic complexes are at the Muslim cemeteries of the villages of Raevka and Idrisovo in Alsheyevsky district, the village of Kilimovo in Buzdyaksky district, the village of Starotimoshkino in Aurgazinsky district, the village of Novyi Kainlyk in Krasnokamsky district (a place called “Kladbische svyatykh”), and the village of Chishmy in Chishminsky district (Akzirat cemetery).

Of these popular places, it is the graves of Narys-tau that stand out because of their ambiguous interpretation. The followers of the Haqqaniyya *tariqa* announced that they were the burial places of “Companions” of the Prophet Muhammad – the son and father Zubayr ibn Zait and Abd ar-Rahman ibn Zubayr. According to the archaeologists, this “holy” place is a burial mound (Ilchigulovo IV). The mound is located on the plateau of the elevated syrt or flat ridge of the Narys-tau hill, to the east of “sacred springs” that runs at its foot.<sup>90</sup> This monument was investigated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the anthropologist N. M. Maliev and in 1986 by the archaeologist G.N. Garustovich. Two constructions were discovered during excavations: one of them was empty, while underneath the other there was the burial site of a nomad from the early Islamic period (14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries). This burial site on Narys-tau is mentioned in the ancient Bashkir epic, “Idukay and Muradym”, which dates back to the late 14<sup>th</sup> – early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. It tells a story of the Golden Horde emir Edigu (Idukay),<sup>91</sup> who started his military career in Tamerlane’s<sup>92</sup> army and had to face off against the Tokhtamysh khan.<sup>93</sup> The story ends with the hero dying and being buried atop this hill.

In 2010, Sheikh Muhammad Nazim al-Haqqani, during his stay in Bashkortostan, announced that Narys-tau hill was the place of burial of two ‘*sahabs*’. The

88 Muhametsabir Abdulkhalikovich Khalikov (1854–1931), of the village of Saitbaba of Gafuriysky district in the RB, was a religious leader and educator. He studied in one of the *madrasahs* of Kargala. In 1904 (or 1890) he became imam-khatib of the 2<sup>nd</sup> congregational mosque in Saitbaba and founded a *madrasah*. Legend has it that he had the gift of prophecy, practiced folk medicine, and became a renowned *awliya*. He did the Hajj twice (in 1901 and 1905).

89 Muhammad-Haris Biktimirov (1810–1870) was a religious leader, educator and mudarris of the famous Sterlibashevo *madrasah*. He was a murid of Bukhara sheikh Ubaydalla ben Niyazkuli at-Turkmani (the son of Abu Salih Niyazkuli at-Turkmani), from whom he received his *ijaz-nama* (permission to teach *murids*). During his time, Sterlibashevo became one of the religious centres of the region.

90 Akhatov A.T., Bakhshiyev I.I., Tuzbekov A.I., “Rol’ arheologicheskikh obyektov v formirovanii novykh sakralnykh prostranstv Yuzhnogo Urala” [Role of archaeological sites in the formation of new sacral spaces of the Southern Ural], *Uralskiy istoricheskiy vestnik [Ural Historical Journal]*, 4 (2016), p. 42.

91 Edigu (Edigey) (1352–1419) was an emir of the Golden Horde in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. He founded the dynasty that ruled the Nogai Horde. His direct paternal descendants were the Russian princely families of the Urusovs and the Yusupovs.

92 Tamerlane (also known as Timur) (1336–1405) was a Central Asian Turkic-Mongolian military leader and conqueror, who played a significant role in the history of the Middle, South and Western Asia, as well as the Caucasus, Volga Region and Rus’. He was founder of the Timurid Empire (around 1370), whose capital was in Samarkand. A national hero of the Uzbek people.

93 Tokhtamysh (d. 1406) was khan of the Golden Horde in 1380–1395 and became khan of the Tyumen Khanate in 1400. A descendant of Jochi, the oldest son of Genghis Khan.

local media circulated reports of the discovery of the sahabas' supposed burial site, which prompted active construction works at the mound.<sup>94</sup> In 2011, a monument was erect on the hill under a dome-like structure. Inscribed on the monument are the names of two Companions of the Prophet – Zubayr ibn Zaid and Abd ar-Rahman ibn Zubayr. In 2012, a mosque was built at the foot of the hill to commemorate the "holy" place. The cost of construction of the entire complex was defrayed by the Charity Foundation of the first president of the Republic, M. Rakhimov "Ural". The "holy" place is being rapidly developed and considered one of the more promising tourist sites in the Republic. Further plans include turning the site into an even more attractive place for tourists, by building a hotel, a religious educational institution, and a good access road.<sup>95</sup>

The monument is currently a site of pilgrimage for representatives from various peoples and religions. Russians, Chuvash and Mari people visit the site quite frequently. Those who come here usually do so as tourists or with pleas and hopes that the Lord will heal them of some disease.<sup>96</sup> It is not too much to say, with regard to this "holy place", that there is an uncontrolled process of the sacralisation of archaeological sites going on, and that these symbols are being managed to spread the ideas of Neo-Sufism, so that we may see an ethnic consolidation of the Republic's faithful around this "Bashkir Mecca".<sup>97</sup> The "Holy places" in Bashkortostan are not an explicit part of the government's ethnic policy in this region. This reproduction of tradition was brought about by ethnic/national groups and the adherents of the Neo-Sufi *tariqas* and religious movements in order to attract new members.<sup>98</sup> The preservation of history, memory and tradition associated with local sites of public worship depends on the clergy. There are many abandoned graves of "*awliya*" in the Republic, particularly in villages whose imams take a negative attitude to visiting them or are indifferent to it. The modern Islamic clergy does not always approve of the custom of visiting holy places. A survey of religious leaders conducted in 2011 to discover the clergy's attitude on the acceptability of worshipping the "holy" places in Bashkortostan found that 44% of respondents described the rite as a harmful superstition and said Muslims were not allowed to worship these places. 25% said that visiting the "holy" places was acceptable and even necessary, but worshipping them was not allowed,

94 "Mekka v Miyakakh. Bashkiriya mozhет stat' zhemchuzhinoy religioznogo palomnichestva" ["Mecca in Miyaki. Bashkiriya may become a pearl of religious pilgrimage"], ufa.mk.ru/articles/2012/05/23/706919-mekka-v-miyakah, accessed 25 September 2019.

95 Author's fieldwork materials, Ilchigulovo, Miyakinsky district, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2014.

96 Author's fieldwork materials, Narys-tau, Miyakinsky district, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2016.

97 "Syemochnaya gruppa kanala TV3 rasskazhet zritelyam o "Bashkirskoy Mekke" ["The camera crew of the TV3 channel will tell the audience about the "Bashkir Mecca"], www.bashinform.ru/news/915434-semochnaya-gruppa-kanala-tv3-rasskazhet-zritelyam-o-bashkirskoy-mekke/, accessed 25 September 2019.

98 "Zhitel' Bashkiriі lechil patsiyentov pletkami i molitvami" ["A resident of Bashkiriya treated patients with whips and prayers"], www.ufa.kp.ru/online/news/1586581/, accessed 25 September 2019.

because a Muslim must only worship the holy places in Mecca and Medina. 19.8% expressed a positive attitude towards the phenomenon and said there was a long-standing tradition of worshipping such local Muslim sanctuaries in the Republic. 11.2% were undecided.<sup>99</sup>

The current period in the development of Islam in Bashkortostan may be characterised as one of the extensive reconstruction of old places of worship and creation of new ones, of the revival of the historical memory of the “saints” of and prominent religious leaders. Another aspect of the development of local Islamic pilgrimages is that they often serve as the basis for destructive cults, financial schemes, and the distribution of various myths, all with the “blessing” of foreign preachers (Turkish sheikhs). Archival documents show that during the Soviet years there were several places frequently visited by believers in Bashkortostan: the tombs (mausoleum) of Husain-bek and Tura-khan and the grave of Ishaan Yaghafar.<sup>100</sup> Currently there are over one hundred such places visited by several thousand people each year. New sacral objects are being created in the place of old archaeological monuments, all of which is accompanied by extensive myth-making. In 2014, the staff of the R.G. Kuzeev Institute of Ethnological Research of the Ufa Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences catalogued 113 archaeological monuments as places of pilgrimage for Muslims.<sup>101</sup> Over 70% of them are in the eastern foothills of the Uraltau range and the forest-steppe parts of the Ural Region, which has a predominantly Bashkir population.

The traditions of local pilgrimage still maintain their foothold with the Muslim population. This model of worship became a foundation for advancing the ideas of the Neo-Sufi Haqqaniyya *tariqa*. This in turn influenced the conflict between the Haqqanis and the Salafis over the debate about the “correct understanding” and fulfilment of the principles of the Islamic creed. To stabilise the pilgrim movement in Bashkiria, the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan annually organise memorial days for the first preacher of Islam in the Southern Urals, Husain-bek, which involve visiting his grave and mass prayers. In 2004, the first gathering of Muslims to commemorate Husain-bek was organised. This gathering has since become annual. It involves the participation of believers not only from Bashkortostan but from the surrounding regions as well. In 2016, a ceremonial reburial of Husain-bek’s relics took place at the request of Muslims. The relics had been removed for research purposes in 1985 by the Institute of

99 Author’s fieldwork materials, Republic of Bashkortostan, 2011. Survey of the clergy on visiting the “holy” places in the Republic of Bashkortostan.

100 Central Historical Archive of the Republic of Bashkortostan. Fund R-4732. Inv. 1. File 16. Sheet 15.

101 Akhatov A.T., Bakhshiyev I.I., Tuzbekov A.I., “Rol’ arheologicheskikh obyektov v formirovaniy novykh sakralnykh prostranstv Yuzhnogo Urala”, *Uralskiy istoricheskiy vestnik [Ural Historical Journal]*, 4 (2016), p. 36.

History, Language and Literature of the Ufa Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The reburial ceremony was attended by Grand Mufti T. Tadzhuddin, representatives of the administration, and residents.<sup>102</sup>

\*\*\*

This study has shown that the groups being examined, viz. the representatives of religious, ethnic/national and state organisations in the Republic of Bashkortostan, have their own understandings both of Islam and of "traditionalism." According to the representatives of the government bodies, "traditional Islam" is peaceful Islam, which accepts the existing state structure and coexists with other religious denominations. National movements consider "traditional Islam" Islam that accepts itself as a part of the Bashkir nation and facilitates its unity.

The faithful have an ambiguous understanding of "traditional Islam", as they are divided by different spiritual administrations and conflicting Islamic movements and groups. On the other hand, they are united by their affiliation with Sunni Islam and, more or less, with the Hanafi *madhab*. Each Islamic group's understanding of "traditional Islam" thus includes its basic ideas about the Islamic "model" and its place in Russian society.

Our survey of the religious leaders of the Republic on their understanding of "traditional Islam" showed that their views were not just divided by affiliation to one or other of the Republic's two muftiates, TsDUM and DUM RB. There proved to be no unity inside either religious organisation in how they defined the term they used so widely. A demonstrative acceptance of Sufism and loyalty to the practice of pilgrimage of Muslims to the graves of "saints" were instrumental as indicators of Islam's "non-traditionalism" in the promotion of the Haqqaniyya *tariqa* in the Republic and its adherents' construction of new sacral monuments. At the same time, this proactive attitude provoked an upsurge of fundamentalism on the part of the more radically minded part of the Muslim youth, or Salafis.

To sum up this analysis of the "traditional Islam" discourse in Bashkortostan, several factors appear to have substantially influenced the formation of ideas about "traditional Islam":

- 1) The *specific nature of religious identity*. Most of the population admit an affiliation to the Islamic faith but are not practicing believers. Islamic identity is, largely, part of ethnic identity.
- 2) The *ethnic/national factor*. Bashkir social and political organisations are trying to become the patrons of religion in the Republic and participate covertly in the activities of the spiritual administrations of Muslims.

102 "Bashkiriya: ostanki prosvetitel'ya Huseyn-beka snova zakhoronyat v ego mavzoleye" ["Bashkiria: the remains of the enlightener Hussein-bey will be buried again in his mausoleum"], [www.ufa.kp.ru/online/news/1586581/](http://www.ufa.kp.ru/online/news/1586581/), accessed 25 September 2019.

- 3) *Conflicts between Muslim groups.* There is a crisis in the official religious institutions that position themselves as adherents of “traditional Islam” but cannot unite the Muslim youth. As more young people in the Republic of Bashkortostan enter the clergy, we can trace a generational conflict here, as well as a turf war for spheres of influence between religious leaders with traditionalist views and younger more radically minded imams.

## “Tradicionalni islam” u diskursu religijskih udruženja, etničkih organizacija i vladinih struktura u Baškortostanu

### Sažetak

Općepoznati i često korišteni termin “tradicionalni islam” prvi put javio se tokom islamskog preporoda u postsovjetskoj Rusiji. Referira na vrlo važno pitanje u područjima ove zemlje s dominantno muslimanskim stanovništvom. U ovome članku analizira se diskurs o “tradicionalnom islamu” u Republici Baškortostanu, posebno u odnosu na duhovnu upravu, muslimanske pokrete i škole i etničke organizacije. Također se analiziraju različita tumačenja uobičajene religijske prakse, npr. regionalnih hodočašća, te da li se smatra da ona pripadaju “tradicionalnom” ili “netradicionalnom” islamu. Istraživanje je potvrdilo da u društvu postoje mnogostruka tumačenja “tradicionalnog islama” i da nema saglasnosti o tome kako tumačiti taj termin. Debate o “tradicionalnom” i “netradicionalnom” islamu i traženje etnički relevantnih formi religije, stoga, ostaju faktor generiranja sukoba i stvaraju uvjete za dalju fragmentaciju muslimanske zajednice u ovoj Republici.

**Ključne riječi:** Islam, tradicionalni islam, Baškortostan, država, CDUM, DUM RB, islamski pokreti, etničke organizacije, hodočašće

## ‘Traditional Islam’ in Crimean Tatar discourse and politics

---

*Elmira Muratova\**

### Abstract

This paper treats the analysis of the concept of ‘traditional Islam’ in Crimean Tatar discourse and politics. It shows how this discourse and politics were transformed under the influence of political change in Crimea in 2014. The concept of ‘traditional Islam’, which did not have a wide circulation in religious circles in post-Soviet Crimea, began to occupy an increasingly noticeable place in the rhetoric of official Islamic religious leaders, who have used it as a tool for eliminating competitors and monopolising influence in the Muslim public sphere. This concept has become closely linked to Russian official policy for combating extremism. This article uses the evolution of the concept in a particular region to illustrate the specifics of state-Islamic relations in the Russian Federation. It uses research data from interviews, focus-groups and the content-analysis of official statements by Islamic leaders.

**Key words:** ‘traditional Islam’, Crimea, Crimean Tatars, discourse, Russia

### Introduction

After the USSR’s collapse, Crimea developed as an autonomous republic under the Ukrainian state. The specifics of its religious policy were primarily determined by the Ukraine’s relatively liberal legislation in the sphere.<sup>1</sup> The liberal nature of these

\* Cand.Sc. in Political Science, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science and International Relations of the Crimean Federal University (Simferopol).

1 In Ukrainian legislation, all religions, faiths and religious organisations are equal before the law, with no special role given any of them. Nor is it mandatory to inform government bodies of the creation of a religious community. The charter of a religious community may be registered by the citizens who formed it, so long as they number no fewer than ten individuals over the age of 18. No confirmation of this religious group having existed in a given area for a given period of time is required. Finally, Ukrainian legislation does not use the term ‘extremism’. Instead, liability is incurred for concrete violations by concrete persons. See the Law of Ukraine “On freedom of conscience and religious organisations” dated 23.04.1991.

laws had a major impact on processes within the country's Muslim ummah. As a region with a large Muslim population,<sup>2</sup> Crimea demonstrated an impressive diversity of Islamic movements, practices and discourses. Official and unofficial Islamic structures used their full arsenal of resources (institutional, financial, informational, etc.) to compete for influence over Crimean Muslims. The state mostly acted as a passive onlooker, only occasionally interfering in processes inside the Muslim community. The problem of the division of Crimean Muslims into the followers of various movements were primarily an 'internal matter' for Crimean Tatar ethnic institutes and had little or no reflection within official discourse.

The situation began changing in the spring of 2014. Russia's entry into Crimea was accompanied by a change in the political and legal foundations of the Crimean people's life, as well as changes in the power balance of the peninsula's Muslim community and transformation of its discourses. After some five years of de-facto Russian control of the peninsula, one can state that its model of state-Islamic relations has been introduced into Crimea in full measure. This is evident in how government bodies communicate with official Islamic institutes, in public discourse on 'traditional vs. non-traditional' Islamic movements, and in the legal regulation of their activities. The 'struggle against extremism' launched by the Russian government has become an integral part of new Crimean realities. These processes of transformation affecting the Islamic ummah of Crimea since its status changed cast a long shadow over this study, the aim of which is to present the situation regarding the discourse of 'traditional Islam' both before and after the events of 2014.

This article was written using data from field research (both published and unpublished) by the author over the past seven years, the results of two focus group studies, *Proshloye, nastoyashcheye i budushcheye krymskikh tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma* [The past, present and future of Crimean Tatars in the discourse of the Muslim community of Crimea] (2012) and *Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskikh tatar* [Values and needs of Crimean Tatars] (2017-2019), and content analysis of materials from the Crimean mass media. In preparing this article, the author relied on works of such researchers as S. Chervonnaya,<sup>3</sup> V.

2 According to various estimates, as of 2014 there were about 250-300,000 Crimean Tatars in Crimea. According to the Ukrainian census of 2001, the population of Crimean Tatars was about 243,000 people (Osaulenko, O.G. (ed.) *Natsional'nyi sklad naselennya Ukrainy ta yogo movni oznaki za danyimi Vseukrains'kogo perepisu naselennya 2001 r.* [National composition of the population of Ukraine and their language characteristics based on the data of the 2001 Ukrainian census] (Kiev: State Committee of Statistics of Ukraine, 2003). Unofficial data of the Majlis of the Crimean Tatar People brought the figure to 300,000. In percentage terms, this is between 12% and 15% of Crimea's population.

3 Chervonnaya S.M., "Vozvrashchenie krymskotatarskogo naroda: problemy etnokul'turnogo vrozhdeniya" ["Return of the Crimean Tatar people: problems of ethnic and cultural revival"], in *Krymskotatarskoe natsional'noe dvizhenie* [Crimean Tatar national movement], 4 (1994-1997), M.N. Guboklo (ed.) (Moscow, 1997); Chervonnaya S.M., "Islamskiy faktor v natsional'nom i pravozashchitnom dvizhenii krymskikh tatar (1990-e gody)" ["Islamic factor in national and human rights movement of the Crimean Tatars (1990-s)"] in *Islam v Evrazii: sovremennyye eticheskie i esteticheskie kontseptsii sunnitskogo islama, ih*

Grigoryants,<sup>4</sup> A. Bulatov,<sup>5</sup> A. Bogomolov,<sup>6</sup> etc., who have studied various aspects of relations between the ethnic institutes of the Crimean Tatars and the representatives of the so-called 'Islamic opposition' in Crimea.

The article has three parts. The first part shows the state of Crimean Tatar discourses on 'native vs. alien' Islam in the post-Soviet period of Crimean history. The second is devoted to analysis of the discourse of 'traditional Islam' at two official religious centres of the peninsula's Muslims. Finally, the third part of the paper shows changes in the discourse and politics of Crimean Muslims since the arrival of Russia in post-Soviet Crimea.

## 'Native vs. alien' Islam in post-Soviet Crimea

The problem of 'native vs. alien' Islam was first publicly raised in Crimea's Muslim community only in the late 1990s. Before that time, Crimean Tatars' religious and political organisations and leaders were busy tackling a range of social, economic, political and legal issues connected with resettling Crimean Tatars returning from Soviet mass deportation.<sup>7</sup> The agenda included such questions as ensuring Ukrainian citizenship and plots of land for the construction of private housing, obtaining a quota in the Crimean parliament, etc. Decision-making on these questions took place in the 1990s against a background of religious revival, with the creation of Islamic communities, the restoration of old mosques and building of new ones, and the opening of Islamic educational institutions.

Substantial assistance to revitalising the religious life of Crimean Muslims was provided by Islamic countries and organisations. Their help was accepted by Crimean Tatars with gratitude and perceived as a manifestation of Islamic solidarity. Given the low level of religious literacy among Crimean Tatars, due to years of atheist propaganda and the consequences of deportation, foreign missionaries, who freely and easily quoted surahs from the Qur'an and the *hadiths*

---

*transformatsiya v massovom soznanii i vyrazhenie v iskusstve musul'manskikh narodov Rossii [Islam in Eurasia: modern ethical and aesthetic concepts of Sunni Islam, their transformation in the mass consciousness and expression in the art of the Muslim peoples of Russia]* (Moscow: Progress-Tradition, 2001), p. 304-339.

4 Grigoryants V. E., *O nekotorykh osobennostyakh protsessa vozrozhdeniya islama v Krymu (1989-2001)* [*On some features of the process of Islamic revival in Crimea (1989-2001)*] (Simferopol, 2002).

5 Bulatov A., "Vozrozhdenie islama v Krymu: sovremennost', problemy, perspektiva" ["Revival of Islam in Crimea: modernity, problems, perspective"], *Golos Kryma*, 2004, 1 January; Bulatov A., "Islam v Krymu: ot tragicheskogo proshlogo k problemam sovremennosti" ["Islam in Crimea: from the tragic past to the problems of our time"], <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/islamic/?4166>, accessed 25 September 2019.

6 Bogomolov A.V. et.al. *Islamskaya identichnost' v Ukraine [Islamic identity in Ukraine]* (Kiev: Stilos, 2006).

7 In May of 1944 the entire Crimean Tatar people was deported from Crimea on charges of collaboration and resettled in Uzbekistan, the Urals and other republics and regions of the USSR. Most Crimean Tatars were able to return to Crimea only in the late 1980s and early 1990s.



of the Prophet Muhammad, inspired unreflecting respect and authority in the minds of Crimean Tatars. In the early 1990s few in Crimea were thinking about the range of religious movements within Islam or their specific features.

The ambiguous nature of these foreign missionaries' activities only became evident some years later, by which time the adherents of all kinds of movements and groups had appeared among the Crimean Tatars. Some proceeded to criticise the religious rites and traditions of the people and contrasting themselves with the majority. The problem was quite serious by the late 1990s, as the adherents of some movements had formed relatively stable groups with their own structures, discourses and practices. They started to question the authority of the political and religious institutes of the Crimean Tatars – the Mejlis<sup>8</sup> and muftiate<sup>9</sup> – and called for their initiatives to be ignored. Adherents of the Salafi movement<sup>10</sup> and the Islamic party of *Hizb at-Tahrir*<sup>11</sup> urged Crimean Tatars to boycott elections or protest marches organised by the Mejlis and criticised the muftiate for its lack of independence and 'wrong' interpretation of Islam. They also ceased to rely on the calendar of religious events and holidays offered by DUMK. This in particular led to disagreement between Muslims over the question of when to start the Islamic holidays of *Oraza-bayram* (*Eid al-Fitr*) and *Qurban-bayram* (*Eid al-Adha*). In some mosques these celebrations started on the day determined by the Muftiate, while in others it was a day later.<sup>12</sup> All this forced the political and religious leaders of the Crimean Tatars to focus on the situation in the religious sphere and start speaking out about the unacceptability of a schism amongst Crimean Muslims and the importance of preserving their religious traditions.

The first such statement was a speech by the Mufti of DUMK Nuri Mustafaev at the II Qurultay of the Muslims of Crimea, on December 4, 1999, in Simferopol. In his summary report he drew the audience's attention to the negative influence

8 The Mejlis is a representative administrative body of the Crimean Tatars formed in 1991 during the II Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People. It consists of 33 people elected by delegates of the national congress. For a long time (1991–2013) the Mejlis was chaired by Soviet dissident Mustafa Dzhemilev. In 2013 he was replaced by Refat Chubarov. In 2016, after the arrival of Russia in Crimea, the Mejlis was included on the list of extremist organisations and prohibited in the Russian Federation.

9 The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea (DUMK), or the Crimean Muftiate, is a centralised Islamic organisation created in 1992 to coordinate processes in the religious life of Crimean Tatars. The muftiate is headed by the mufti, who is elected by the delegates of the Qurultay of the Muslims of Crimea. There have been three muftis: Seitzdzhelil Ibragimov (1992-1995), Nuri Mustafaev (1995-1999), Emirali Ablayev (since 1999).

10 The Arabic word '*salafiyya*' means return to the origins of the Islamic tradition and the example of the first Muslims – the pious predecessors (*as-salaf as-salih*). Crimean Tatars call Salafis *Wahhabis* (after the 18<sup>th</sup> century Arabian Islamic reformer Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab).

11 *Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami* (the Islamic Party of Liberation) is an international pan-Islamic political party founded in 1953 in Jerusalem by judge of the local Shariah appeal court Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani. Its declared goal is the re-establishment of a fair and just Islamic way of life and the Islamic state (Caliphate), as well as the implementation of the Islamic system in it.

12 When determining the first and last days of Ramadan fasting, the Muftiate of Crimea relies on astronomical calculations, while its opponents rely on direct observation of the Moon.

of foreign religious movements on the preservation and revival of the religious customs and traditions of Crimean Tatars.<sup>13</sup> He said that the discrepancies that had affected the beginning of Ramadan and of the *Eid al-Fitr* celebrations a year before had been the result of the activities of foreign missionaries. The mufti appealed to his brothers in faith, asking them not to forget or reject the legacy of their ancestors – traditions established in Crimea on the basis of Islam and that had played such an important role in the formation of Crimean Tatar ethnic culture and identity.<sup>14</sup>

The Chairman of the Mejlis Mustafa Dzhemilev's speech at the Qurultay was very similar in tone. He thanked all the Islamic countries that had supported the Crimean Tatar people but declared that Crimean Tatars would not be led by the nose by the representatives of religious movements and would live in accordance with the traditions of their ancestors instead. He also expressed the right of Crimean Muslims to exclude from membership any members of the Muftiate who tried to impose alien customs on Crimean Muslims or stir up religious discord.<sup>15</sup>

Over the following several years, discussion inside the Crimean Tatar community on 'alien' movements and ideologies became increasingly focused and serious. An illustrative event was a meeting of Mufti Emirali Abliev, M. Dzhemilev, and other representatives of the Mejlis with the Crimean Tatar population of the village of Plodovoe in the Bakhchysarai District, which took place on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001. At this meeting, which more than 500 villagers attended, the head of the local mejlis,<sup>16</sup> A. Abdullaev, noted:

Four years ago the first supporters of the so-called 'new movement in Islam' appeared amongst us here in the village of Plodovoe. This new movement is based on an ideology imposed on us by Arab missionaries. Its adherents consider only those who follow them to be Muslims and refer to everyone else as 'kafirs' (infidels). This movement runs contrary to our national traditions, customs and rites, established over thousands of years. These people respect no one and listen to no one except their own teachers.<sup>17</sup>

13 What is meant here by traditions are primarily the custom of collective recitation of the Qur'an (*dua*) on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup> and other days after a death, as well as the funeral (*janazah*) and matrimonial (*nikah*) rites of Crimean Tatars, all of which are criticised by Salafis for not conforming to the Islam of the 'pious predecessors' period. To this one may add the refusal of Salafis and members of Hizb at-Tahrir (Hizbs) to follow the Hanafi *madhab* when praying, which is especially obvious at Friday prayers in mosques.

14 Kerimova G., "Krymskie tatory izbrali novogo muftiya" ["Crimean Tatars have elected the new mufti"], *Avdet*, 1999, 14 December.

15 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessy vozrozhdeniya* [Islam in contemporary Crimea: indicators and problem of revival] (Simferopol: Elinio, 2008), p. 133.

16 The Mejlis system had a multi-level structure. Besides the central Mejlis (Milli Mejlis) in Simferopol, there were regional offices at the administrative centres of the Republic and local mejlises in each residential area with a compact Crimean Tatar population.

17 "Krymskie tatory dolzhny zashchitit' svoe edinstvo (informatsionnaya sluzhba Bakhchisaraiskogo regional'nogo medzhblisa)" ["Crimean Tatars must protect their unity (information service of the Bakhchysarai regional Majlis)"], *Golos Kryma*, 2001, 16 February.

Mufti Emirali Ablaev's speech at the meeting was even more emotional:

The Crimean Tatars, living far away from their homeland, dying of hunger and disease in the hovels that were all they had to live in, did not fall to their knees or demean themselves in front of anybody. They did not forget their language, their customs, or their traditions, and did not betray the national movement of the Crimean Tatars, of those who devoted their lives to reviving our nation. Today, however, there are those among us who hold emissaries from a faraway land closer and dearer than their own people, who are ready to undo and abandon everything, their ethnicity, their ancestors, their national customs and traditions.<sup>18</sup>

In his speech at the meeting, Dzhemilev called for the unity of the Crimean Tatars to be protected and a stand taken against the Arab emissaries spreading foreign ideologies. As early as March 2001 Dzhemilev held a briefing with the editors-in-chief of the Crimean Tatar mass media to organise awareness-raising activities for the media, which he supervised, in order to counter further distribution of 'Wahhabi ideas'.<sup>19</sup>

The tensions between the official Crimean Tatar structures and the representatives of 'alien' Islamic movements became so significant that discussion of them was put on the agenda of the national congress. During the first session of the IV Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People, on November 11, 2001, in Simferopol, the delegates discussed and then adopted a statement "On the revival of the religious life of the Crimean Tatars and the preservation of religious tolerance in Crimea." The statement contained a call to preserve the Islamic norms and customs that are traditional among the Crimean Tatars and have been passed "by previous generations of Muslims of Crimea," and for condemnation of the activities of the Islamic missionaries who were criticising these norms and customs.<sup>20</sup>

At following Qurultays of the Crimean Tatar People, criticism of the activities of the various Islamic movements in Crimea gained even more traction. In Dzhemilev's summary report at the third session of the IV Qurultay (September 10-12, 2004), he critically analyses the activities of the Islamic opposition in Crimea, represented by the adherents of Salafism and the *Hizb at-Tahrir* organisation. As a result, the Qurultay adopted an "Address to the Muslims of Crimea," calling for unified efforts to revive and preserve the 'true' values of Islam, values that had been "the prop and salvation of our people, during both the most glorious and the most tragic periods of our history."<sup>21</sup>

The tone and content of Dzhemilev's speech at the next and fourth session of the IV Qurultay (December 9, 2005) show the degree of the Majlis's concern

18 "Krymskie tatory dolzhny zashchitit' svoe edinstvo..."

19 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya* [Islam in contemporary Crimea: indicators and problem of revival] (Simferopol: Elinio, 2008), p. 133.

20 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya*, p. 134.

21 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya*, p.135.

over the activities of the religious opposition in Crimea. In a part of his speech entitled "Religious sects in Crimea," the Chairman of the Mejlis presented a general picture of these groups' activities, with quantitative indicators of their membership and an outline of their ideological positions and of their differences with the management of DUMK and each other. His speech contained information on the consequences of their activities in other countries, quotes from Qur'anic *surahs*, and calls for delegates to take all measures possible to combat these 'sects'.<sup>22</sup>

Dzhemilev offered a very harsh assessment of the 'religious sectarians' and their activities in a speech at the first session of the V Qurultay (December 2007), in which he listed his main objections: their declaration that the Mejlis and the Muftiate are 'infidel' structures, their rejection of ethnicities and calls for a struggle to create a 'mythical' Islamic Caliphate, their refusal to recognise the national flag and anthem, etc.<sup>23</sup> According to Dzhemilev, the activities of these supporters of 'non-traditional forms of Islam' among the Crimean Tatars were a direct strike against the national movement for the restoration of the people's rights and were intended to benefit external forces at work to stop the Crimean Tatars achieving precisely that restoration.<sup>24</sup>

After a speech by mufti Emirali Ablav at the second session of the V Qurultay (December 5, 2009), delegates adopted a resolution "On the responsibility of national self-government bodies to strengthen the spiritual unity of the Crimean Tatar people" that stresses unity as a major factor in the revival and development of the Crimean Tatar nation. The document sets out a whole range of measures for the preservation of the values of Crimean Tatar material, intellectual and spiritual culture as inherited from previous generations.<sup>25</sup>

Analysis of these statements and documents from Crimean Tatar political and religious leaders allows us to draw several conclusions. Firstly, the discourse of 'native vs. alien' Islam appeared relatively late in Crimea (compared to other regions of the post-Soviet landscape), viz. toward the end of the 1990s. By then groups of followers of various Islamic movements had already formed relatively stable communities with their own leaders, discourses and practices. Their ostentatious way of contrasting themselves to the majority of Crimean Tatars and their

22 Muratova E.S., *Islam v sovremennom Krymu: indikatory i problemy protsessa vozrozhdeniya*, p. 135-136.

23 Vystuplenie M. Dzhemileva. "Dokumenty pervoi sessii V Qurultaya (dekabr' 2007 g.)" ["Speech by M. Dzhemilev. Documents of the first session of the V Qurultay"], *Krymskotatars'ke pytannyya* [Crimean Tatar issues], 1:30 (2008), p.89.

24 "Mustafa Dzhemilev: na vyborah prezidenta podderzhim demokratov (interv'yuu)" ["Mustafa Dzhemilev: we will support democrats in the presidential election (interview)"], *Krymskotatars'ke pytannyya* [Crimean Tatar issues], 3:34 (2009), p. 6-7.

25 Postanovlenie Qurultaya krymskotatarskogo naroda 'O zadachakh organov natsional'nogo samoupravleniya po ukrepleniyu dukhovnogo edinstva krymskotatarskogo naroda' [Resolution of the Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar people 'On the tasks of national self-government bodies to strengthen the spiritual unity of the Crimean Tatar people'], *Krymskotatars'ke pytannyya* [Crimean Tatar issues], 1:35 (2010), p. 65-66.

open criticism of the policies of the Mejlis and DUMK could no longer pass unremarked by the latter two official bodies. These tensions and differences grew into open conflict and became a matter of public discussion.

Secondly, during the 1990s, the leaders of the Mejlis and DUMK did not see a critical difference between Salafis and the followers of *Hizb at-Tahrir*. Both groups were perceived as ‘alien’ to the Crimean Tatar people, as groups pursuing a policy aimed at blurring ethnic identity. The apolitical nature of the Crimean Salafis and calls from *Hizb at-Tahrir* followers to build the Caliphate were considered equally dangerous. In a situation where the leaders of the Mejlis and DUMK were using Islam as an important resource for mobilising the Crimean Tatars, they viewed such behaviour on the part of any of their people as a betrayal of national interests.

Third, even though words and expressions like ‘tradition’, ‘traditional form of Islam’, ‘national traditions’, etc. were often deployed to connote the Crimean Tatars’ ‘native’ Islam, there was no stable concept in the ethnic discourse of the period for precisely this form of Islam. Instead they used terms like ‘Crimean Islam’,<sup>26</sup> ‘Crimean Tatar Islam’, ‘our Islam’, ‘true Islam’, etc. The concept of ‘traditional Islam’ had next to no purchase. The term occasionally occurred in the works of Crimean researchers but was not yet a part of social discourse.<sup>27</sup> The general concept of ‘outsider’ Islam did not yet exist in Crimea either. The terms used to denote such forms of Islam were ‘sects’, ‘non-traditional form of Islam’, ‘new movements in Islam’, ‘Wahhabis’, etc.

Fourth, one may note the desire of the Crimean Tatar leaders to keep the discussion of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam within the Crimean Tatar community and not let it leak into the wider Crimean public sphere. This can be seen, for example, in how vehemently they reacted to statements by Crimean and Russian politicians and in the mass media about the growing popularity of radical Islamic movements among Crimean Tatars. All such statements were refuted and their authors accused of hate-mongering and aggravating the ethnic and religious situation in Crimea.<sup>28</sup>

26 See, for instance, Bulatov A., “Islam v Krymu: ot tragicheskogo proshlogo k problemam sovremennosti” [“Islam in Crimea: from the tragic past to the problems of our time”], <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/islamic/?4166>, accessed 25 September 2019.

27 See, for example, Grigoryants V.E., *O nekotorykh osobennostyakh protsessa vozrozhdeniya islama v Krymu (1989-2001)* [On some features of the process of Islamic revival in Crimea (1989-2001)] (Simferopol, 2002).

28 See, for example, “Zayavlenie Prezidiuma Medzhliisa krymskotatarskogo naroda v svyazi s provokatsiyami v possiiskoi presse, napravlennymi na razzhiganie religioznoi i natsional’noi nenavisti v Krymu ot 9 dekabrya 1999 g.” [“Statement of the Presidium of the Majlis of the Crimean Tatar People in connection with provocative acts in the Russian press aimed at inciting religious and ethnic hatred in Crimea, 9 December, 1999”], *Kryms’kotatars’ke pytannya* [Crimean Tatar issue], 6:10 (1999), p. 3-5.

## 'Traditional Islam' in the discourse of official Islamic institutions

In the post-Soviet period, two of the official Islamic institutions of Crimea were positioning themselves as successors and defenders of the Islamic traditions of the Crimean Tatars. The first was the above-mentioned DUMK, which acted in close cooperation with the Mejlis and controlled most Muslim communities and places of Islamic worship of the peninsula.<sup>29</sup> The second was the Spiritual Centre of Muslims of Crimea (DTsMK), chaired by Mufti Ridvan Veliev. DTsMK was created over opposition from the DUMK and the Mejlis and united several dozen Muslim communities. Its organisational core consists of students and followers of the mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine (DUMU), Ahmet Tamim, in Kiev, who, in turn, was an apprentice of Ethiopian sheikh 'Abdullah al-Harari al-Habashi (1910-2008).<sup>30</sup> The Sheikh's followers are often referred to as 'Habashites'.<sup>31</sup>

Relations between the two muftiates were conflict-ridden and involved mutual accusations and a struggle for influence in 2010-2014. DUMK called DTsMK "a Habashite sect" whose followers viewed supporters of their own doctrine as the only 'true' Muslims. The latter, in turn, accused DUMK of condoning radicals like 'Wahhabis' and *Hizb at-Tahrir*, who had gained a foothold in several Crimean mosques.

The ideologies of both muftiates have quite a lot in common, particularly their criticism of 'non-traditional' Islamic groups in Crimea, their disapproval of the lack of unity amongst Crimean Muslims, and their internal division into factions. Research by the present author in 2012 revealed several common points between them on these issues, both at the level of the leaders and of their supporters. As one of the leaders of DUMK noted in an interview, "even in a country with a population of a hundred million there probably aren't as many sects as we have in Crimea."<sup>32</sup> These words were echoed by the leader of DTsMK:

29 By 2014 there were about 350 Muslim communities, 300 mosques and 5 madrasahs under the jurisdiction of DUMK. See: "Muftiyat", <http://qmdi.org/muftiyat-4/>, accessed 25 September 2019.

30 In 1983 'Abdullah al-Harari took over the leadership of the Association of Islamic Charitable Projects (AICP, founded in 1930 in Lebanon), which from then on was called *Al-Abbash*. Today *Al-Abbash* is a transnational Islamic movement with branches in the South, South-East and Central Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, as well as North America. The work of *Al-Abbash* is aimed at combating political Islam and the Salafi movement. It involves Sufi discourses and practices but, according to experts, they are less pronounced in *Al-Abbash* than in other Sufi groups of Europe (See Yarosh O., Globalization of redemptive sociality: al-Abbash and Haqqaniyya transnational Sufi networks in West Asia and Central-Eastern Europe, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 10:1 (2019), p. 27-28).

31 The *Habashi nisba* means 'Ethiopian'.

32 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma [Past, present and future of the Crimean Tatars in the discourse of Muslim community of Crimea]* (Kiev: K.I.C., 2014), p. 15.

Missionaries from different countries began arriving in Crimea and presenting their own ideologies. These were representatives of Wahhabism, *Hizb at-Tahrir* and the so-called 'Muslim Brotherhood'... These people took advantage of the moment and gave our people their alien ideologies, which contradict the religion of Islam and the customs of Crimean Tatars... Our Prophet, may peace be upon Him, taught us that, if we see a violation, we need to correct it, and that is what we are trying to do...<sup>33</sup>

Representatives of both muftiates have identified reasons for the spread of 'non-traditional' movements in Crimea. The first was the religious illiteracy of the people, which was largely due to years of living in an atheistic state that repressed imams and people with religious education. The second was the 'nefarious activities' on the part of dishonest and opportunistic missionaries from abroad, who took advantage of the Crimean Tatars' naiveté to propagate their teachings.

The discourse of supporters of the official spiritual administrations has tended to deploy a strict dichotomy of 'us vs. them'. 'We' are the successors of our ancestral traditions, bearers of the Crimean Tatar language and culture. 'They' are the supporters of alien traditions, indifferent to everything ethnicity-related.

When we say one thing and they say another thing, it is hard to talk about any sort of unity. We tell them to speak Tatar, and they tell us that Tatar is an ethnic language and that the language of inter-ethnic communication is Russian. They even want to demand that we deliver the *khutbah* in Russian. This means schism, it is very bad. (DUMK)<sup>34</sup>

Currently there are quite a lot of misguided beliefs that cultivate dislike of Muslims and our traditions. They instil these misconceptions in our youths, make them think that traditions are not good, etc. And the young, not knowing the traditions of their ancestors, follow these people, because they paint wonderful pictures for them and tell them things that young people like to hear. (DTsMK)<sup>35</sup>

I am very much amazed at how these Hizbuttahririans, Habashites, Wahhabis walk from door to door. Who educates them? We have madrasahs in Kalay and Simferopol. Go there and learn, then go and unite with your people, because you have to walk together with your people. We can't be Arabs, we can't be Turks, we have to remain Crimean Tatars and be proud of our own people. (DUMK)<sup>36</sup>

The rejection of 'alien' religious ideas and the struggle against 'non-traditional' Islam were not enough to provide a common unifying platform for the representatives of

33 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma.*

34 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma.*

35 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma.*

36 Kouts N., Muratova E., *Proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushchee krymskih tatar v diskurse musul'manskogo soobshchestva Kryma.*

DUMK and DTsMK. Ideological differences given their different understandings of the essence of 'traditional' Crimean Islam and the struggle for influence over Crimean Muslims turned them into entrenched adversaries. As we will see below, this adversarial relationship, which began in 2010, continued after the change in the status of Crimea in 2014.

The ideas of some DUMK leaders on 'traditional Islam' were formed either during their religious education at theological departments in Turkish universities<sup>37</sup> or through communication with Turkish teachers involved in Islamic education in Crimea.<sup>38</sup> This is why their views are so similar to the official Turkish model of Islam.

The leaders of DUMK repeatedly emphasised the contribution of Turkish missionaries to the process of reviving Islam in post-Soviet Crimea. Their role became particularly noticeable in 2014, when Russia's arrival in Crimea meant an overwhelming majority of Turkish teachers had to leave the peninsula. At the time, general opinion on the matter was voiced by the Deputy Mufti of DUMK Ayder Ismailov:

...about 16 teachers from Turkey had to leave. For us what was important was that they had been in Crimea and helped us. For 15 years they facilitated religious education, helped to foster the traditional understanding of Islam, which complies with our traditional practices. The fact that we haven't had any terrorist acts or religion-caused violence in our region is a major achievement for these teachers from Turkey. Together with us, they taught people the form of Islam that matches our understanding, does not run counter to modern trends, and is far removed from radical ideas.<sup>39</sup>

Besides this affirmation of the importance of Turkish teachers, his statement also contains a reference to the precise image of Islam DUMK was trying to develop in Crimea. It is an Islam that conforms to the traditions of Crimean Tatars and is at the same time modern and non-radical. One may add that it is Sunni Islam of the Hanafi *madhab*, as representatives of this organisation so often stress, as well as of the Maturidi school of belief (*aqidah*):

...we decidedly do not approve of ... any divergence from the accepted understanding of Islam: the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and the traditional Hanafi *madhab*, which has been professed by the Muslims of Crimea since olden times. That means that we, as the Spiritual Administration, do not accept

37 The DUMK system has up to a dozen graduates of Turkish universities as staff members in leading positions and determining the ideological vector of this organisation.

38 Until 2014 the role of Turkish teachers as representatives of both state and private institutions in the system of Islamic education of Crimea was crucial. They coordinated the learning process within Islamic training courses and madrasahs. For more details, see: Muratova E.S., "Osnovnye tendentsii v razvitiu islamskogo obrazovaniya Kryma posle 2014 goda" ["The main trends in the development of Islamic education in Crimea after 2014"], *Islamovedenie [Islamic Studies]*, 8:3 (2017), p. 35-45.

39 "Zamuftiya Kryma: "Daite lyudyam vremya opomnit'sya!" ["Deputy Mufti of Crimea: "Give people time to recover!"], <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-432867.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.



anything that does not accord with the long-standing theological tradition of the Crimean Tatars.<sup>40</sup>

In their interviews and statements, DUMK representatives repeatedly note how important it is for Crimean Tatars to go back to their roots, which implies a need to become more pious, more devout in following such mandatory prescriptions of Islam as prayer, fasting during Ramadan, *zakat*, visiting the mosque on Fridays, etc. At the same time, it was an important part of the 'traditional Islam' discourse of DUMK to stress the need to preserve the religious traditions of the Crimean Tatars, like collective *du'a* (recitals of the Qur'an) to commemorate the birth or death of a person (on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, and other days). It is these religious traditions, which preserved the Crimean Tatars's connection to Islam during the Soviet period, that were caught in the cross-hairs of criticism from representatives of the various 'new' movements and groups, which declared them unacceptable innovations (*bid'ah*) in Islam. An important part of DUMK religious practice was celebrating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (*Mawlid*), which was, as a rule, organised in collaboration with the branch office of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), usually on a grand scale. At the same time, one may note the lukewarm attitude of DUMK to various Sufi practices (such as the *ziyarat*), which were once widespread in Crimea. While DUMK representatives accepted these practices as an important part of the people's spiritual legacy, they took no measures to revive them.

The image of 'traditional Islam' presented by the leaders of DTsMK was, in contrast, mostly formed under the influence of the transnational Sufi movement of *Al-Abbash*, whose most active advocate in the post-Soviet space has been Sheikh Ahmet Tamim. Its members accept all four Sunni *madhabs* and are followers of both the Maturidi and the Ash'ari *aqidabs*. An important part of *Al-Abbash's* ideology is the religious practice of excluding a person who has committed a blasphemy from Islam (*takfir*). Among their rituals and rites, substantial attention is paid to practices associated with Sufism (e.g. *ziyarat*). Part of their members' theological discourse is promoting and legitimating the practice of blessing by relics (*tabarruk*).<sup>41</sup>

The annual collective pilgrimage to the grave of the 'saint' Eskender, known as the Karly-Aziz, in the Bakhchysarai District of Crimea, held an important place in DTsMK leaders' activities (even before it was formalised). This *ziyarat* usually took place in May and involved recitation of the Qur'an and the *Mawlid*, as well as some relatively secular events, including an entertainment programme, sports competitions and a free lunch. DUMK and the Salafi groups were very critical of these initiatives, as they consider the performance of such activities near

40 Sharipov A., "Ayder Ismailov: Problemy musul'man Kryma reshayutsya" ["Ayder Ismailov: The problems of the Muslims of Crimea are solved"], <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-449216.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

41 Bril'ov D.V., "Teologichnyi diskurs Dukhovnogo upravlinnya musul'man Ukrainy" ["Theological discourse of the Spiritual administration of Muslims of Ukraine"], *Gileya*, 130 (2018), p. 208.

graves unacceptable.<sup>42</sup> In 2012 DUMK even attempted to interfere with this event on the grounds that they had not approved it and it would “negatively affect the unity of the peninsula’s Muslims.”<sup>43</sup> The gravestone of the Karly-Aziz was repeatedly destroyed by persons unknown.

DTsMK also regularly organised celebrations of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. The practice of *tabarruk* – blessing by the Prophet’s relics – was widespread among *Al-Abbash* adherents in Crimea. For instance, in 2013, DTsMK organised a festive event in Simferopol, where anyone interested was shown a hair from the Prophet Muhammad’s beard and a scroll with a list of names of its supposed keepers.<sup>44</sup>

To sum up, one may say that, despite a certain similarity in their discourses of ‘traditional Islam’ and their appeals to traditions and the legacy of ancestors, there remain several substantial differences between the supporters of DUMK and DTsMK. The first is the significant influence of Sufism on DTsMK ideology, which explains its emphasis on the revival of Sufi practices, once quite widespread in Crimea. A return to such practices, which were no longer popular with Crimean Tatars by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seems like an attempt to artificially re-traditionalise and archaicise religious life. Compared to such attempts, DUMK looks like an organisation propagating a more ‘modern’ project of Islam, designed to combine Crimean Tatar religiosity with their secular lifestyle.

The second difference is DTsMK’s uncompromising position compared to DUMK with regard to various ‘non-traditional’ Islamic movements. While DUMK has for some years been trying to become the spiritual centre of a majority of Crimean Tatars, regardless of their views, and has consequently pursued a relatively tolerant policy toward such movements, the rhetoric of the DTsMK leaders has been substantially more aggressive and unbending. This is motivated by the *Al-Abbash* movement’s ideology, which prioritises the struggle against ‘modernising’ movements like the Salafis, Muslim Brotherhood, and *Hizb at-Tabrir*. The ‘Habashite’ ideology is thus a Sufi reaction to the spread of political Islam, whose roots and sources of inspiration lie in Salafi religious thought.<sup>45</sup>

42 Abdullaev R., “DUM Kryma: Ocherednoi akt vandalizma svyazan s massovymi palomnichestvami” [DUM of Crimea: Another act of vandalism associated with mass pilgrimages], <http://www.islamsng.com/ukr/news/4815>, accessed 25 September 2019.

43 “Nesmotrya ni na chto ‘Karly-Aziz 2012’ sostoyalsya!” [“Despite everything ‘Karly-Aziz 2012’ took place!”], <http://islamnik.com/news/nesmotrya-ni-na-chto-karly-aziz-2012-sostoyalsya>, accessed 25 September 2019.

44 “Volos Proroka Muhammada, mir Emu, v Simferopole” [“A hair of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon Him, in Simferopol”], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dW5O7w96Zg&feature=youtu.be>, accessed 25 September 2019.

45 Bogomolov A.V. et.al. *Islamskaya identichnost' v Ukraine [Islamic identity in Ukraine]* (Kiev: Stilos, 2006), p.41.

## The situation after 2014

Russia's arrival in Crimea in the spring of 2014 caused substantial adjustments to Crimean Tatar religious life. Changes on the institutional level manifested themselves in the re-registration of DUMK under Russian legislation with a new name – the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea and Sevastopol (DUM KS). As an organisation connected with the Ukrainian muftiate, DTsMK also decided to change its name. Since 2014, it has been called the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims 'Tauride muftiate' (TsDUM TM). The change of names had little impact on the nature of the muftiates' relationship, which has remained confrontational. The level of confrontation has, however, been significantly higher than previously, particularly in 2014-2015.

The rhetoric of both muftiates' leaders underwent a certain shift, giving greater weight to the specific nature of Russian relations between Islam and the state. This was manifest, for instance, in more active use of the concept of 'traditional Islam', in ostentatious demonstrations of loyalty to the Russian state, and resentment toward 'non-traditional' Islamic groups. Particularly zealous actions in this regard were taken by the Tauride muftiate, whose leaders thought, not without reason, that the change in Crimea's status offered a long-anticipated chance to shift the balance in the Muslim community of Crimea. Actively using the rhetoric of 'struggling against extremism', the Tauride muftiate tried to eliminate DUMK, presenting it as a disloyal organisation with connection to an out-of-favour Mejlis that condoned radical movements and groups. They positioned themselves, on the other hand, as an Islamic organisation with deep roots in Crimean Tatar tradition and as a dedicated opponent of radical groups. The Tauride muftiate's mufti, Ruslan Saitvaleev, spoke of TM's intentions in a quite unequivocal way:<sup>46</sup>

One of the reasons why we got the idea to revive the Tauride muftiate is that we have a lot in common with the the Taurian Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate.<sup>47</sup> Firstly, it's cultural continuity. We follow the legal school of imam Abu Hanifa and observe our traditions, developed in accordance with Islam over centuries, such as performing *du'a*, holding *mawliids* and *iftars*. Secondly, it is ethnic and linguistic continuity. The Tauride muftiate represented the interests of all Muslims of the peninsula, most of whom were Crimean Tatars, and

<sup>46</sup> Ruslan Saitvaleev was the Deputy Chairman of DTsMK.

<sup>47</sup> The the Taurian Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate (TMDP) was created by an edict of Catherine II dated 23 January, 1794, in the Tauride Oblast'. On December 23, 1831, Emperor Nicholas I approved the 'Charter of the structure of the Tauride Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate', giving it the right to consider and make decisions about various 'spiritual affairs of Mohammedans' 'according to the rules of their faith', in particular: the order of 'divine worship', rites, addressing 'spiritual needs' and the 'conclusion and annulment of marriages'. In 1831 Muslims of the Western provinces, namely the Vilna, Volhynian, Grodno, Kovno, Courland and Minsk Governorates, were put under the jurisdiction of TMDP. TMDP ceased to exist in 1917.

we too want to represent the interests of all Muslims, including the Crimean Tatars. Thirdly, it is territorial continuity. The Tauride muftiate was based in Crimea with its seat in Simferopol, just like the present Muftiate.<sup>48</sup>

TM's plans to establish a monopoly of influence over the Crimean Muslim community were not destined to come to pass, however.<sup>49</sup> A short period of problematic relations between DUMK and the new authorities in 2014 ended with the establishment of partnership relations. Of course, this required a change in rhetoric from DUMK, with regard to both the Mejlis<sup>50</sup> and 'non-traditional' Islamic groups. While at first DUMK leaders requested that the authorities not use force against representatives of these groups because of differences in Ukrainian and Russian legislations and spoke of decapitating the groups by making their leaders leave for the Ukraine and generally of their excessive influence on Crimean Tatars, gradually the paternalistic notes in their discourse faded, eroding in the end to nothing. The following quote is from an interview with Deputy Mufti Ayder Ismailov in September 2014:

Now that new laws have just been introduced, it wouldn't be right to arrest people and put them in prison for something they did in the past or to sanction them. We need to give people time to come to their senses and mend their ways. We note that the voices of the representatives of this party in Crimea are hardly to be heard at all any more. That is, the simple existence of the prohibition is effective in itself: people are afraid and are not expressing their radical calls and shouts.<sup>51</sup>

A statement he posted on the social networking site Facebook in July 2017 takes a completely different tone. By then, relations between DUM KS and the Mejlis had grown into open conflict, and a wave of arrests of *Hizb at-Tabrir* adherents had just taken place in Crimea:

Naturally, with no support amongst the people or from religious leaders, the representatives of the Mejlis had no choice but to join forces with *Hizb at-Tabrir*, all the more so as they are unrivalled in the business of discrediting the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea. Alongside other sects, under the pretext of 'disseminating pure Islam, returning to the Islamic way of life', for twenty years in Crimea, they have shamelessly criticised the Muftiate of Crimea, antagonised

48 "V Krymu poyavilis' lyudi, kotorye iskadzhayut nashu religiyu" ["There are people in Crimea who distort our religion"], <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=interview&div=406>, accessed 25 September 2019.

49 It should be noted that not a few Russian secular and religious public figures provide ideological and administrative support to the Tauride muftiate, prominent among them the not exactly unknown 'expert on Islam' Roman Silantiev.

50 For more details, see Muratova E., "Musul'mane Kryma v novyh politicheskikh realiyah" ["Crimean Muslims in new political realities"], *Orient*, 5 (2016), p. 163-171.

51 "Zamuftiya Kryma: "Daite lyudyam vremya opomnit'sya!" ["Deputy Mufti of Crimea: "Give people time to recover!"], <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-432867.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

it in all things, and spread discord in mosques, humiliating the elderly and trying to take control of the mosques. Through these actions they were trying to destroy the Muftiate of Crimea, which was and is the only stronghold of traditional Sunni understanding of Islam in Crimea! Our Muftiate was also the only obstacle standing in the way of the spread of an alien and false ideology that leads to the rejection of our national traditions and language and to a schism, which is but a stone's throw from assimilation.<sup>52</sup>

This change in the DUM KS leaders' rhetoric did not go unnoticed by the Crimean Tatar community. Some Crimean Tatars began distancing themselves from the muftiate because of disagreement with this attitude towards their fellow countrymen and the muftiate's overzealous readiness to bow to the new authorities.<sup>53</sup> The defining moment for many people was public disclosure of a statement written in July 2016 and addressed to the head of the Crimean directorate of the Federal Security Service of Russia (FSB), in which mufti Emirali Abljev asked them to deal with "radical sects", "*Hizb at-Tabrir*" and the "Habashites", who had "sabotaged" the celebration of *Eid al-Fitr* in 12 Crimean mosques on the day "set by our Administration according to the traditional laws of Islam."<sup>54</sup> The part of the statement that followed contained the names and contact data of the "guilty" imams. Many Crimean Tatars took this statement as a denunciation.<sup>55</sup> The clear pro-government position of DUM KS even prompted some Crimean Tatars to draw an analogy between the existing muftiate and its predecessor from the period of the Russian Empire:

I understand that the leadership of DUMK are people the government has done a background check on, and I wouldn't be surprised if they were paid by the government. I think the entire structure of muftiates, or at least their leadership, gets some sort of remuneration, but that it is covered up. In any case, they get serious privileges in the form of grants. As to why they fight other religious movements so vehemently – it's because it suits the government to create socio-religious organisations under their control like the muftiate, just as they did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>56</sup>

52 The Official Page of Ayder Ismailov, <https://www.facebook.com/ayder.ismailov.5/posts/1240514696094091>, accessed 25 September 2019.

53 Author's fieldwork materials. Fokus-gruppy v ramkakh issledovaniya 'Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskikh tatar', yanvar 2017 g. [Focus groups as part of a study on 'Values and needs of Crimean Tatars', January 2017].

54 Khan I., "Donos DUM Kryma v FSB (skan dokumenta)" ["The denunciation of DUM of Crimea to FSB (scan of the document)"], <https://goloslama.com/news.php?id=30348>, accessed 25 September 2019.

55 Author's fieldwork materials. Fokus-gruppy v ramkakh issledovaniya 'Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskikh tatar', yanvar 2017 g. [Focus groups as part of a study on 'Values and needs of Crimean Tatars', January 2017].

56 Author's fieldwork materials. Interv'y u v ramkakh issledovaniya 'Tsennosti i potrebnosti krymskikh tatar', yanvar 2019 g. [Interviews as part of a study on 'Values and needs of Crimean Tatars', January 2019].

Under such conditions of constant criticism, social condemnation, and loss of respect and popularity with Crimean Tatars, the DUM KS media office was forced to issue a special statement explaining their position. Its message can be summed up in a single phrase: “they have only themselves to blame”:

In 2014 the Mufti of Crimean Muslims Hajji Emirali Ablaev made a statement on the unacceptability of criminal prosecution under Russian legislation of persons who had participated in radical religious movements during the period when Crimea was under the jurisdiction of the Ukraine... The spiritual leader of Crimean Muslims repeatedly addressed the Muslims of the Republic with an appeal for them to stay away from the ideologies of *Hizb at-Tahrir* and *Al-Abbash*, Wahhabism, and other radical movements and by no means to participate in their activities, as well as to restrain others from doing so. Unfortunately, not everyone listened to DUMK's advice. Everyone must decide for themselves.<sup>57</sup>

A common speech technique used in public condemnation of ‘non-traditional’ Islamic groups by representatives of the spiritual administrations of Crimea is invoking the concept of ‘traditional Islam’, which is widespread in Russian discourse:

In the past ten years there have been over a dozen cases of mosques falling under the influence of radical organisations, particularly Wahhabis, *Hizbs* and Habashites. The rural councils provided the local religious community land for construction. Under the law, a community must consist of more than 10 people. Where these people then became adherents of radical religious movements, they drove out the followers of traditional Islam and propagated their own ideology instead. Because the mosques were owned by the community, the sects were able to control the infrastructure.<sup>58</sup>

It is noteworthy that the discourse of ‘traditional Islam’ started to gain in popularity not only with representatives of the muftiates but also with Crimean politicians, some of whom mastered the Russian rhetoric quickly. For example, one often hears the expression from member of the State Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament) Ruslan Balbek, who, among other things, has oversight over religious issues in the life of the Crimean Tatars:

During the Ukrainian period, of 400 mosques only 5 had documents of entitlement. This gave extremist religious organisations the opportunity to participate in the struggle for houses of worship. Traditional Islam could not defend itself. The platform was accessed by destructive sects. Now all the mosques are

57 “Kto ‘podstavlyayet’ krymskikh musul'man?” [“Who ‘frames’ Crimean Muslims?”], <http://qmdi.org/index.php/ru/glavnye-novosti/2895-kto-podstavlyayet-krymskikh-musulman>, accessed 25 September 2019.

58 “My schitaem plany Sovmina peredat’ mecheti Muftiyatu pravil'nymi, – zammuftiya Kryma” [“We consider the plans of the Council of Ministers to transfer the mosques to Muftiyat correct, – deputy to the mufti of Crimea”], <http://www.dumrf.ru/regions/82/regnews/9134>, accessed 25 September 2019.

under a single canonical and legal jurisdiction. Russia has united the Muslims of Crimea and is protecting them from the influence of extremist movements.<sup>59</sup>

Just as in the Republics of the Russian Federation, the concept of ‘traditional Islam’ has become interspersed in Crimea with the general discourse of ‘fighting extremism’, as developed by government bodies, official Islamic institutions and researchers. It is as part of this struggle that the followers of two Islamic organisations, *Hizb at-Tabrir* and *Tablighi Jama‘at*, are currently being criminally prosecuted on the peninsula. About 60 Crimean Tatars have already been sentenced to prison or are currently under investigation on charges of participation in these organisations’ activities.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

The discourse of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam has been present in the Crimean Tatar community since the late 1990s. ‘Native’ Islam is associated with the surviving religious traditions of the Crimean Tatars, especially the rites that accompany key events in the life cycle – birth, marriage, funeral, etc. The main criterion differentiating ‘insider’ (native) and ‘outsider’ (alien) traditions for many Crimean Tatars is whether or not it goes back at least two generations (parents and grandparents).

The discourse of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam developed by representatives of the Islamic spiritual administrations of Crimea uses the same appeal to the legacy of the ancestors but usually less to the recent past than to a more distant one. The pre-Soviet period, when Islam’s status on the peninsula was stronger and people were more pious and devout, usually serves as the basis for such rhetoric. The revival of the Crimean Muslims’ ‘native’ Islam is seen through the preservation of customary rituals (birth-marriage-funeral) and returning to the practice of following the mandatory prescriptions of Islam (DUMK) and certain Sufi practices (DTsMK).

For Crimean Tatar political leaders, the discourse of ‘native vs. alien’ Islam has been directly connected with maintaining their influence and using Islam as a resource for political mobilisation. Any ideologies that limit the scope for using this resource have therefore been treated as a threat to the integrity of the Crimean Tatar people and undermining the defence of collective rights in various

59 “Rossiya ukrepila pozitsii traditsionnogo islama v Krymu – Bal’bek” [“Russia has strengthened the position of traditional Islam in Crimea – Balbek”], <https://www.politnavigator.net/rossiya-ukrepila-pozitsii-traditsionnogo-islama-v-krymu-balbek.html>, accessed 25 September 2019.

60 “V ramkah politicheskikh i religioznyh presledovaniy v Krymu lisheny svobody 86 chelovek” [“Within the framework of political and religious persecution in Crimea 86 people are imprisoned”]. 2019. *Crimean human rights group*. May 3. <https://crimeahrg.org/v-ramkahpoliticheskikh-i-religioznyh-presledovaniy-v-krymu-lisheny-svobody-86-chelovek/>, accessed 25 September 2019

spheres. For this reason, as the adherents of 'outsider' Islam gain in strength, so do the criticisms of and antagonism toward them. What is more, while at first the Mejlis and DUMK did not distinguish between 'outsider' Islamic movements, from the mid-2000s their main opponent came to be the *Hizb at-Tahrir* party, which advanced a political project that did not stipulate the preservation of ethnic authenticity or the institutions of Crimean Tatarhood. It was under these circumstances that the apolitical Salafis, who had by then chosen the tactic of demonstrating at least superficial loyalty to the Mejlis and DUMK, began to be treated as 'the lesser evil'.

The discourse of 'native vs. alien' Islam developed in Crimea prior to 2014 lacked certain features of the discourse as it has developed since. First was its internal nature. To begin with, this discourse was largely restricted to the Crimean Tatar community, and no actors from outside were admitted to it. This included the state. A good example was the reluctance to allow the problem of a Crimean Tatar religious disunity become a matter of public discussion, particularly when in the context of the measures taken by Mejlis leaders to counter attempts at legislative prohibition of the *Hizb at-Tahrir* party in the Ukraine.<sup>61</sup>

A second distinctive feature was the lack of any important consequences for the parties involved. The main 'punishments' were public reprimand or being disqualified from holding the position of imam at a mosque. Today accusations of 'non-traditionalism' can have much more serious consequences, even prison sentences.

The third and final peculiarity of the discourse has been the increasing use of the concept of 'traditional Islam' since 2014. Under the influence of this discourse, which is prevalent in the Russian Federation, this concept has become increasingly popular with representatives of the Crimean spiritual administrations of Muslims, politicians and the intelligentsia. Even after five years of de-facto status as part of the Russian state, this discourse is not yet the dominant one in Crimea, however.

To sum up, one may note that the events of 2014 have radically changed the lives of Crimean Muslims. The state's active involvement in the regulation of religious processes has led to a narrowing of the space of freedom and a transformation of discourses and politics. The Muslim community of Crimea is still trying to understand the new 'rules of the game', identify red lines, and work out a strategy for survival and development. It has been taking a while for Crimean

---

61 In September of 2009, the chief of the Crimean Militsiya (police forces) Hennadiy Moskal contacted the Security Services of the Ukraine with a request to ban the *Hizb at-Tahrir* movement in Ukraine. See "Moskal' trebuet ot SBU zapretit' partiuyu 'Hizb ut-Takhrir'" ["Moskal demands from the Security Service of Ukraine to ban the Hizb at-Tahrir party"], <https://sevastopol.su/news/moskal-trebuet-ot-sbu-zapretit-partiyu-hizb-ut-tahrir>, accessed 25 September 2019.



Muslims to get used to the new Russian reality, and this process has been accompanied by the shattering of customary patterns of conduct and of integration within the established system of relations between the state and religious organisations.

## “Tradicionalni islam” u diskursu i politici Krimskih Tatara

### Sažetak

U ovome radu analizira se pojam “tradicionalnog islama” u diskursu i politici Krimskih Tatara. U radu je pokazano kako su se ovaj diskurs i politika transformirali pod utjecajem političkih promjena na Krimu 2014. godine. Pojam “tradicionalnog islama”, koji nije bio toliko u opticaju u religijskim krugovima postsovjetskog Krima, počeo je zauzimati sve uočljivije mjesto u retorici državnih islamskih religijskih vođa, koji ga koriste kao oruđe za uklanjanje konkurenata i monopoliziranje utjecaja na muslimansku javnu sferu. Ovaj pojam je blisko povezan sa ruskom zvaničnom politikom borbe protiv ekstremizma. U ovome se članku, kroz analizu razvoja ovog pojma u jednoj konkretnoj regiji, ilustriraju specifična obilježja odnosa između države i islama u Ruskoj Federaciji. Korišteni su podaci iz intervjua, od fokusnih grupa i sadržajne analize zvaničnih izjava islamskih lidera.

**Ključne riječi:** “tradicionalni islam”, Krim, Krimski Tatari, diskurs, Rusija

# CONTEXT

## Uputstva autorima

---

### Tematika

*Context: Časopis za interdisciplinarnu studiju* je recenzirani, naučni časopis posvećen unapređenju interdisciplinarnih istraživanja najurgentnijih društvenih i političkih tema našeg vremena kao što su posljedice ubrzane globalizacije, pluralizam i raznolikost, ljudska prava i slobode, održivi razvoj i međureligijska susretanja. Pozivamo istraživače u humanističkim i društvenim naukama da daju doprinos boljem razumijevanju glavnih moralnih i etičkih problema kroz kreativnu razmjenu ideja, gledišta i metodologija. U nastojanju da premostimo razlike među kulturama, u ovom časopisu objavljivat ćemo i prijevode značajnih radova. *Contextu* su dobrodošli i članci i prikazi knjiga iz svih područja interdisciplinarnih istraživanja. Svi radovi za ovaj časopis moraju biti originalni i zasnovani na znatnom korištenju primarnih izvora. Uredništvo također podstiče mlađe naučnike, na počecima karijere, da dostavljaju svoje radove.

### Etički i pravni uvjeti

Podnošenje rukopisa za objavljivanje u *Contextu* podrazumijeva sljedeće:

1. Svi autori saglasni su u pogledu sadržaja rukopisa i njegovog objavljivanja u časopisu.
2. Sadržaj rukopisa je prešutno ili eksplicitno odobren od odgovornih rukovodilaca institucije u kojoj je istraživanje provedeno.
3. Rukopis nije prethodno objavljivani, ni u dijelovima ni u cijelosti, na bilo kojem jeziku, osim kao sažetak, dio javnog predavanja, magistarskog rada ili doktorske teze.
4. Rukopis nije i neće biti ponuđen za objavljivanje nijednom drugom časopisu dok se o njegovom objavljivanju razmatra u ovom časopisu.
5. Ako rad bude prihvaćen, autor pristaje da prenese autorska prava na Centar za napredne studije, pa se rukopis neće moći objaviti nigdje drugdje, ni u kom obliku, na bilo kojem jeziku, bez prethodne pismene saglasnosti izdavača.
6. Ako rad sadrži slike, grafikone ili veće dijelove teksta koji su ranije objavljeni, autor će od prethodnog vlasnika autorskih prava pribaviti pisanu dozvolu za reproduciranje ovih stavki u sadašnjem rukopisu, kako za *online*, tako i za štampano izdanje časopisa. U rukopisu će se, za sav navedeni materijal, propisno navesti kome pripadaju autorska prava.

### Dvostruko anonimna recenzija

*Context* koristi sistem dvostruko anonimne recenzije, što znači da autori rukopisa ne znaju ko su njihovi recenzenti, a recenzenti ne znaju imena autora. Stoga vas molimo da izbjegavate spominjanje svake informacije o autoru nakon naslovne strane. U slučaju da je takva informacija iz nekog razloga neophodna, molimo vas da nam na to skrenete pažnju kako bismo anonimizirali taj dio prije predavanja rukopisa recenzentu.

## Uvjeti za prijavu

Radove slati u elektronskom obliku u programu Microsoft Word. Rukopisi treba da budu napisani na engleskom ili bosanskom. U radu na engleskom, dosljedno se držati jednog pravopisa (britanskog ili američkog) u cijelom radu. Rukopis ne treba imati više od 10.000 riječi skupa s fusnotama. Di-jakritički znakovi ne smiju se koristiti u transliteraciji turskih, arapskih ili perzijskih imena i naziva.

## Struktura rukopisa

Tekst treba biti napisan dvostrukim proredom. Svi radovi treba da imaju sažetak od maksimalno 100 riječi, kao i popis od 3–10 ključnih riječi. Autori moraju dosljedno pisati velika slova. Treba izbjegavati pretjerano korištenje velikih slova. Skraćenice „vol.“, „no.“ i „pt.“ ne pišu se velikim slovom. Naslove djela i periodike po pravilu pisati italicom. Strane riječi također treba pisati italicom.

## Bibliografske jedinice u fusnotama

1. Rad iz časopisa: Ime autora, „Naslov rada u časopisu“, *Naziv časopisa*, 15:2 (1992), 142–153. [John Smith, „Article in Journal“, *Journal Name*, 15:2 (1992), 142–153].
2. Rad u uredničkoj knjizi: Ime autora, „Naslov rada u knjizi“, u *Naslov knjige*, Ime urednika (ur.) (Mjesto: Izdavač, Datum), str. 24–29. [John Smith, „Article in journal“, in *Book Name*, John Smith (ed.) (Place: Publisher, Date), p. 24–29].
3. Knjiga: Ime autora, *Naslov knjige* (Mjesto izdanja: Izdavač, Datum), str. 65–73. [John Smith, *Book Name* (Place: Publisher, Date), p. 65–73].
4. Ako je referenca iz fusnote već spomenuta u nekoj ranijoj fusnoti, u ovoj fusnoti treba navesti prezime autora i dati skraćeni naslov, npr. Prezime, *Knjiga*, str. 23. [Smith, *Book*, p. 23] ili Prezime „Članak“, str. 45. [Smith, „Article“, p. 45]. Ne koristiti op. cit.
5. Za radove koje je napisalo više od troje autora, u fusnoti će se navesti ime prvog popisanog autora i nakon toga „et al.“ ili „i dr.“ [„and others“], bez ubačene interpunkcije.
6. Za izvore sa interneta slijediti sljedeći format: Ziaudin Sardar, „Welcome to postnormal times“, <http://ziauddinsardar.com/2011/03/welcome-to-postnormal-times/>, pristupljeno 4. 12. 2014.
7. Tamo gdje je neophodno, naslove djela na jezicima koji nisu jezici rada navoditi u izvornom jeziku, a u uglastim zagradama dati prijevod naslova na jezik na kojem je rad pisan. Naslove u latiničnim pismima navoditi transliterirane, s prijevodom na jezik na kojem je rad pisan, kao gore.
8. Koristiti samo fusnote i označavati ih brojevima (a ne latiničnim slovima). Kada se u glavnom tekstu spominje referenca iz fusnote, potrebno je da broj kojim je označena prati neki interpunkcijski znak.

## Slike

Dijagrami, grafikoni, mape, nacrti i drugi crteži moraju se predati u formatiranom obliku. Mora se dati popis potpisa pod slikama označenih kao Slika 1, Slika 2, itd., uključujući odgovarajuće priznanje autorskih prava. Fotografije se dostavljaju u elektronskom formatu (JPEG ili TIFF) i moraju imati minimalno 300 dpl. Za sve ilustracije na koje postoje autorska prava autori moraju pribaviti odgovarajuće saglasnosti od njihovih vlasnika.

## Opće upute za oblikovanje rada

- Autor prvenstveno mora biti dosljedan. U cijelom radu mora se pridržavati pravopisa; organizacija rukopisa (naslovi i podnaslovi) mora biti razgovijetna.
- Ako autor nije izvorni govornik engleskog jezika, preporučuje se da verziju rukopisa na engleskom provjeri izvorni govornik.
- Navodnici: Polunavodnici (‘ ’) se koriste za isticanje riječi, pojmova ili kratkih fraza unutar teksta. Direktne citate koji sadrže manje od dvadeset i pet riječi stavljaju se pod navodnike („ “). Pod navodnike se stavljaju i naslovi članaka iz časopisa i referentnih djela. Veći dijelovi citiranog teksta

(npr. više od dva retka) pišu se u posebnom odjeljku, uvučenom s lijeva, sa po jednim praznim redom iznad i ispod odjeljka. Ove veće odjeljke, tzv. „blok-citate“, ne treba stavljati u navodnike.

### Prikazi knjiga

Prikaz obično sadrži između 800 i 1.200 riječi. Podnaslove treba svesti na minimum, a fusnote treba što rjeđe koristiti. Prikaz knjige treba biti naslovljen bibliografskom informacijom u skladu sa sljedećim pravopisom:

Ime i prezime autora, *Naslov knjige*, Sarajevo: Matica bosanska, 2014. Str. 215, ISBN ....., 25 KM.

ili

*Observing the Observer: The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities*, By Mumtaz Ahmad, Zahid Bukhari & Sulayman Nyang (eds). London: IIIT, 2012. P. xxxiii+258. ISBN 978 1 56564 580 6. €17. \$23.

Ime autora prikaza i njegovu institucionalnu pripadnost navesti na kraju rada (npr. Sarah Kovačević, Free University of Sarajevo).

### Sadržaj prikaza

Prikazi se pišu za multidisciplinarno čitateljstvo koje obuhvata naučne, političke i religijske zajednice. Na autoru je da odluči na koje će se elemente u prikazu usredotočiti, kojim redoslijedom i koliko temeljito, ali, kao putokaz može poslužiti sljedeći spisak:

- Dati *kratak pregled* glavnih ciljeva djela za koje se piše prikaz, glavnih teza i tema kojima se bavi te koju vrstu empirijskih izvora koristi. Za uredničku knjigu, sumirati glavne teme i naznačiti, samo ukoliko je to potrebno, pojedina poglavlja.
- Navesti koji je *originalni doprinos* tog djela kako konkretnom području istraživanja, tako i nauci općenito (i uporediti ga s drugim djelima, ako je potrebno).
- Ako je svrsishodno, označiti širi kontekst (npr. društvene, političke, naučne probleme ili kontroverze), kojemu ovo djelo daje doprinos i/ili njegov značaj za politiku, istraživanja i praksu.
- *Procijeniti snage i slabosti* (konstruktivno): Koliko je to djelo ispunilo svoju svrhu? Je li ono teorijski i metodološki pouzdano? Jesu li empirijski podaci tačni i dostatni? Je li dobro napisano i dobro urađeno?
- Ako je potrebno, ukazati na greške kojih čitatelji treba da budu svjesni. (Pri tome se treba čuvati klevete). Preporučiti ciljno čitateljstvo za knjigu (npr. istraživači, učenici, studenti, nastavnici, opće čitateljstvo – precizirati na kom nivou, u kom području studija i u kakvoj vrsti nastavnog plana i programa).

### Priprema: Korektura i separat

Nakon što je prihvaćen, rad se s ispravkama u PDF formatu e-mailom dostavlja autoru da provjeri ima li činjeničnih i štamparskih grešaka. Autori su odgovorni za provjeru korigiranog rada i preporučuje im se da koriste alatnu traku Comment & Markup da unesu svoje izmjene direktno na korigirani tekst. U ovoj fazi pripreme dozvoljene su samo manje izmjene. Rad s ovim izmjenama treba vratiti u najkraćem roku.

Izdavač će rad u PDF formatu besplatno dostaviti autoru za njegovu ličnu upotrebu. Autorima je dozvoljeno da postavljaju odštampane verzije svog rada u PDF formatu na vlastite web-stranice, bez naknade izdavaču.

### Saglasnost za objavljivanje i prijenos autorskih prava

Ako i kada se rad prihvati za objavljivanje, autor pristaje da se autorska prava za ovaj rad prenesu na izdavača. U tu svrhu autor treba potpisati **Saglasnost za objavljivanje** koja će mu se poslati uz prvu, lektoriranu i korigiranu verziju rukopisa.

### Kontakt

Sva pitanja mogu se poslati glavnom i odgovornom uredniku na: sekretar@cns.ba.



# CONTEXT

## Instructions for Authors

---

### Scope

*Context: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* is a peer-reviewed journal committed to the advancement of interdisciplinary research in exploration of the most pressing social and political themes of our time such as the implications of accelerated globalization, pluralism and diversity, human rights and freedoms, sustainable development, and inter-religious encounters. Researchers in humanities and social sciences are invited to contribute to a better understanding of major moral and ethical issues through creative cross-pollination of ideas, perspectives, and methodologies. *Context* welcomes articles as well as book reviews in all areas of interdisciplinary studies. All contributions to the journal must be original and need to display a substantial use of primary-source material. The editors also encourage younger scholars, in early stages of their career, to submit contributions.

### Ethical and Legal Conditions

Submission of an article for publication in *Context* implies the following:

1. All authors are in agreement about the content of the manuscript and its submission to the journal.
2. The contents of the manuscript have been tacitly or explicitly approved by the responsible authorities where the research was carried out.
3. The manuscript has not been published previously, in part or in whole, in English or any other language, except as an abstract, part of a published lecture or academic thesis.
4. The manuscript has not and will not be submitted to any other journal while still under consideration for this journal.
5. If accepted, the author agrees to transfer copyright to the Center for Advanced Studies and the manuscript will not be published elsewhere in any form, in English or any other language, without prior written consent of the Publisher.
6. If the submission includes figures, tables, or large sections of text that have been published previously, the author has obtained written permission from the original copyright owner(s) to reproduce these items in the current manuscript in both the online and print publications of the journal. All copyrighted material has been properly credited in the manuscript.

### Double-blind Peer Review

*Context* uses a double-blind peer review system, which means that manuscript author(s) do not know who the reviewers are, and that reviewers do not know the names of the author(s). Please make sure to avoid mentioning any information concerning author name beyond the first page. In case that such information is for some reason necessary, please make sure to draw our attention to that fact so we can anonymize that too before sending the manuscript to the reviewers.

### Submission Requirements

Contributions should be submitted in Microsoft Word. Manuscripts should be written in English or Bosnian. For English, the spelling (either British or American) should be consistent throughout.

Manuscripts should not normally exceed 10,000 words inclusive of footnotes. Diacriticals will not be used in transliteration of Turkish, Arabic or Persian.

### **Manuscript Structure**

The text must be formatted with 1.5-inch margins and be double-spaced. All full articles should include an abstract of max. 100 words, as well as the list of 3-10 Key words. Authors should be consistent in their use of capitalization. Overcapitalization should be avoided. The abbreviations ‘vol.’, ‘no.’ and ‘pt.’ are not normally capitalized. The titles of works and periodicals should normally be *italicized*. Foreign words should also be *italicized*.

### **Bibliographical References in Footnotes**

1. Article in journal: John Smith, “Article in journal”, *Journal Name*, 15:2 (1992), 142-53.
2. Article in edited book: John Smith, “Article in journal”, in *Book Name*, John Smith (ed.) (Place: Publisher, Date), p. 24-9.
3. Book: John Smith, *Book Name* (Place: Publisher, Date), p. 65-73.
4. If a reference in a footnote has been mentioned already in an earlier footnote, the footnote should give surname and a brief title only, e.g. Smith, *Book*, p. 23 or Smith, “Article”, p. 45. Do not use op.cit.
5. Works with more than three authors, the footnote citation should give the name of the first listed author followed by ‘et al.’ or ‘and others’ without intervening punctuation.
6. For the Internet sources the following format should be applied: Ziauddin Sardar, „Welcome to postnormal times“, <http://ziauddinsardar.com/2011/03/welcome-to-postnormal-times/>, accessed 4 December 2014.
7. Where necessary titles of works in languages other the language of the paper will be given in the original language with a translation into the language of the paper added after the title in square brackets. Titles in non-roman scripts will be given in transliteration with a translation in the language of the paper if needed, as above.
8. Use only footnotes and mark them by numbers (not roman letters). Footnote reference numbers in the main text should follow any punctuation mark(s).

### **Figures**

Diagrams, charts, maps, plans, and other line drawings must be submitted in camera-ready form. A list of captions, including the appropriate copyright acknowledgements, labelled Figure 1, Figure 2, etc. must be supplied. Photographs should be submitted in electronic format (JPEG or TIFF files) and should have a minimum of 300 Dpl. Authors should ensure that the appropriate copyright for all illustrations has been obtained from the copyright-holder.

### **General style considerations**

- Consistency should be the author’s priority. Spelling should be consistent throughout; the structure of the manuscript (heading and subheadings) should be clear.
- If author is a non-native speaker of the English language, it is highly recommended to have the English of the manuscript checked by a native speaker.
- Quotation marks: Single quotation marks ( ‘ ’ ) are used to distinguish words, concepts or short phrases under discussion. Direct quotations of fewer than twenty-five words should be enclosed in double quotation marks ( “ ” ) and run on in the text. Double quotation marks should also be used for titles of articles from journals and reference works. Larger sections of quoted text (i.e. anything over two lines): set these off from other text by adding a blank line above and below the section, and indent the block of text on the left. These larger sections, or ‘block quotations’, should not be enclosed in quotation marks.

### Book Reviews

Reviews should normally be between 800 words and 1,200 words in length. Subheadings should be kept to a minimum and footnotes used sparingly. A book review should be headed by the bibliographical information according to the following convention:

*Observing the Observer: The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities.* By Mumtaz Ahmad, Zahid Bukhari & Sulayman Nyang (eds). London: IIIT, 2012. P. xxxiii+258. ISBN 978 1 56564 580 6. €17. \$23.

The reviewer's name and institutional affiliation will be given at the end of the manuscript (eg. Sarah Kovacevic, Free University of Sarajevo).

#### *Contents of a review*

Reviews should be written for a multi-disciplinary readership that spans academic, policy, and religious communities. It is up to the individual reviewer to decide exactly what points should be covered in the review, in what order and in what depth, but as a rule of thumb, please consult the following checklist:

- Give a *brief summary* of the main objectives of the work, the main theses and topics covered, the kinds of empirical sources used. In an edited volume, summarise the main themes and refer to individual chapters only as appropriate.
- Describe the *original contribution* of the work to its particular field of study, and to scholarship in general (compare with other works as appropriate).
- If appropriate, delineate the wider *context* (e.g. social, political, scientific problems or controversies) to which this work contributes and/or its *implications* for policy, research, or practice.
- *Assess the strengths and weaknesses* (in a constructive way): How well does the work meet its purpose? Is it theoretically and methodologically sound? Are the empirical data accurate and adequate? Is it well written and well produced?
- If necessary, point out *errors* that readers should be aware of (beware of libel!).
- Recommend a *target audience* for the book (e. g. researchers, students, teachers, general readers – detailing at what level and field of study, in what kind of course curriculum).

### Production: Proofs and Offprints

Upon acceptance, a PDF of the article proofs will be sent to the author by e-mail to check carefully for factual and typographic errors. Authors are responsible for checking these proofs and are strongly urged to make use of the Comment & Markup toolbar to note their corrections directly on the proofs. At this stage in the production process only minor corrections are allowed. Proofs should be returned promptly.

A PDF file of the article will be supplied free of charge by the publisher to the corresponding author for personal use. Authors are allowed to post the pdf post-print version of their articles on their own personal websites free of charge.

### Consent to Publish and Transfer of Copyright

By submitting a manuscript, the author agrees that the copyright for the article is transferred to the publisher if and when the article is accepted for publication. For that purpose the author needs to sign the **Consent to Publish** which will be sent with the first proofs of the manuscript.

### Contact Address

All inquiries can be sent to the editor in chief at: sekretar@cns.ba.



# CONTEXT

## Sadržaj | Contents

<b>Članci i rasprave / Articles .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Introduction .....	7
In Search of 'Traditional Islam' in Tatarstan: Between National Project and Universalist Theories .....	11
<i>Leila Almazova and Azat Akhunov</i>	
Official Discourse on Islam and Islamic Discourse in Contemporary Russia .....	47
<i>Sofya Ragozina</i>	
The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam .....	65
<i>Renat Bekkin</i>	
'Traditional Islam' in the discourse of religious associations, ethnic organisations and government structures in Bashkortostan .....	91
<i>Zilya Khabibullina</i>	
'Traditional Islam' in Crimean Tatar discourse and politics .....	117
<i>Elmira Muratova</i>	
Uputstva autorima .....	137
Instructions for Authors .....	141

# CONTEXT

VOLUME 6  
NUMBER 1  
2019

■ GODINA 6  
BROJ 1  
2019.

## Sadržaj | Contents

Članci i rasprave / Articles .....	5
Introduction .....	7
In Search of ‘Traditional Islam’ in Tatarstan: Between National Project and Universalist Theories .....	11
<i>Leila Almazova and Azat Akhunov</i>	
Official Discourse on Islam and Islamic Discourse in Contemporary Russia .....	47
<i>Sofya Ragozina</i>	
The Renovationist Movement in Contemporary Russian Islam .....	65
<i>Renat Bekkin</i>	
‘Traditional Islam’ in the discourse of religious associations, ethnic organisations and government structures in Bashkortostan .....	91
<i>Zilya Khabibullina</i>	
‘Traditional Islam’ in Crimean Tatar discourse and politics .....	117
<i>Elmira Muratova</i>	
Uputstva autorima .....	137
Instructions for Authors .....	141