

**ОТ «ХОРОШЕГО» ИСЛАМА  
К «ПРАВИЛЬНОМУ»: КАТЕГОРИИ  
И КОНЦЕПТЫ В ЯЗЫКЕ  
СОВРЕМЕННОЙ РОССИЙСКОЙ  
АНАЛИТИКИ И ИДЕОЛОГИИ**

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*В данной статье с помощью концепта «гегемонистского дискурса» Э. Лакло и Ш. Муфф и теории авторитетного дискурса, изложенной А. Юрчаком, нам удалось подробно рассмотреть некоторые закономерности складывания структуры знания об исламе в современной России, проанализировать высказывания ряда представителей различных профессиональных и социальных групп и зафиксировать некоторые языковые и дискурсивные стратегии. Интертекстуальность экспертного, политического и мусульманского дискурсов позволила говорить о появлении авторитетного исламского дискурса, существование которого, однако, возможно лишь ситуативно. Его центральным элементом является концепт «традиционного ислама», ставший одним из важнейших аспектов нашего анализа.*

**Ключевые слова:** *исламоведение, ислам в России, традиционный ислам, дискурсивные стратегии, структура знания, авторитетный дискурс, гегемонистский дискурс, идеология.*

**FROM ‘GOOD’ TO ‘RIGHT’ ISLAM:  
THE CATEGORIES AND  
CONCEPTS IN THE MODERN  
RUSSIAN ANALYTICS  
AND IDEOLOGY LANGUAGE<sup>1</sup>**

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*In this paper, we examine in detail certain patterns formed in the structure of knowledge about Islam in modern Russia, analyze statements made by a number of representatives of various professional and social groups, and pinpoint certain linguistic and discursive strategies using Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) concept of “hegemonic discourse” and a theory of authoritative discourse set forth by Yurchak (2014). The intertextuality of expert, political, and Muslim discourses suggests the emergence of an authoritative Islamic discourse, which, however, can exist only situationally. The central element of this discourse is a concept of “traditional Islam,” which is one of the most important aspects of our analysis.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic studies, Islam in Russia, traditional Islam, discursive strategies, knowledge structure, authoritative discourse, hegemonic discourse, ideology.*

In this paper, we will analyze some significant aspects of the so-called “expert discourse” on Islam within the social space of modern Russia. When we use the term “experts” in this paper, we mean a special group of public speakers who are integrated into the media space and the ideological context and who form discourses and concepts corresponding to this space and this context. The carriers of this expertise may be analysts, political scientists, philosophers, or public intellectuals. However, expert knowledge about Islam in today’s Russia is a special kind of knowledge with its own specific discourse, goals, and objectives; it is equally distant from both academic research and applied analytics<sup>2</sup>.

The range of problems faced by Islam in the modern world, and specifically in Russia, is of particular relevance and results in extremely polarized assessments of the processes and phenomena taking place in the Islamic world. The reasons for this are clear: the growth of Islamic radicalism, extremism, and terrorism; the growth of Muslim diasporas owing to both labor migration and increased refugee flows; demographic dynamics—all of this forms the ground and background for the emergence of social conflicts and conditions contributing to the manipulation of conflictogenic potential. For our country, this urgency and this aggravation increases with Russia’s involvement in the conflicts in the Middle East. In this case, the internal “Islamic factor” also begins to be viewed from the point of searching

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2. We deliberately take such areas of professional application of knowledge about Islam such as academic Islamic studies and religious studies in courts or closed political analyses out of the scope of this article, as we believe that each of them deserves to be the subject of a separate study. At the same time, one cannot help but notice that all of these spheres, including the one discussed in this article, are related to one another to a varying yet always noticeable degree.

for a “weak link,” a source of danger and unpredictability. However, the deep roots of Islam in the country prevents the discourse on Islam from being translated into the language of hate, even in a purely rhetorical sense. In this regard, the search for demarcation lines between loyalty and disloyalty, between “good” and “bad” Islam, both within the framework of reformatting historical memory and for the purposes of applied political and ideological construction, has become particularly relevant. This has been the case for the past 10-15 years in particular, which we were able to discuss at an earlier stage of this process (Alekseev, 2004). In this paper, we will try to trace the development of this trend up to present day and to identify some significant points of its associated discourse.

### **IN SEARCH OF “GOOD ISLAM”: THE RUSSIAN CONTEXT AND THE CRITIQUE OF ORIENTALISM**

A certain level of immersion in the subject of scientific research inevitably raises the question of knowledge structure, the question that predetermines the object and sometimes the methodology of this research. Foucault defines this structure by the term “episteme,” which means a special set of discursive practices that create an apparatus of knowledge production. A quick overview of contemporary studies on Islamic issues reveals an increased interest in the issues of various “-isms” (Islamism, Salafism, Wahhabism, etc.) that associated, in one way or another, with the Islamic context. Many are compelled to address this problem even when it is not their main subject matter: the search for elements of radicalism in Islam, whether in an individual region or in a particular social group, has become an integral feature of various scientific studies.

The problem of interpretation in various approaches to the study of Islam has been repeatedly explored by foreign researchers (“Islamic Studies”, 2007). A detailed review of a body of similar work should be the subject of a separate study. In this paper, we would like to analyze the structure of public knowledge about Islam and discuss the ways of representing this knowledge in modern Russia. The object of our scientific interest may seem extremely broad. However, such a formulation allows us to achieve the necessary level of conceptualization.

We proceed from the assumption that various types of discourse such as, for example, expert and Islamic (i.e., transmitted by representatives of the Muslim community) ones, are merged into a single, so-called *hegemonic* or *authoritative Islamic discourse* by a certain set of concepts and categories. The use of such terminology is determined by the chosen methodological approach, which will be discussed below. Despite the use of various language strategies and discursive practices, both representatives of the expert community and leaders of several Russian Muslim organizations support the same ideas. These ideas, in turn, form the basis of ideologemes that are retransmitted by the Russian body politic.

Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to characterize the main features of this authoritative discourse. To achieve this purpose, it is first necessary to define the unifying concepts that suggest the formation a single communication space. Then, it seems necessary to demonstrate the self-reproduction mechanisms of this authoritative discourse by means of a semantic analysis of a number of concepts (e.g., “jihad,” “sharia,” “hijab”). Finally, the last part is an attempt to understand the place of the existing structure of knowledge about Islam in the broader context of academic discussion.

## REMARKS ON METHODOLOGY

First of all, it is necessary to make a number of methodological remarks in connection with this research. As we are interested in the *process of formation of a dominant discourse*, we refer to two theories from different areas of the social sciences which supplement each other within the framework of this study.

The notions of discourse and hegemony are the focus of attention of the Belgian poststructuralists Laclau and Mouffe (2001). Their main assumption was that discourse predates social reality, and that the fixation of certain senses and meanings predetermines reality (Torfing, 1999, 85-100). The central concepts of this theory are element, moment, and articulation. Discourse is a set of “moments,” senses, and meanings taken in a specific context and in a moment in time. The process of assigning these meanings is called articulation. A space outside a discourse is called a “field of discursivity,” which contains “elements” or values that every sign currently present in a discourse (i.e., an element) could have. Thus, the continuous process of articulation results in the constant variability of a discourse: acting agents tend to turn elements into moments by articulating a new meaning. The infinitely reproduced process of articulation is also associated with its unfinished character: “[the] partiality of this fixation results from the openness of the social, which in turn leads to overcrowding of each discourse with an infinite field of discursivity” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 113). Since any sign is always overdetermined, there are many competing discourses. Therefore, a “hegemonic intervention” during which one of the discourses inevitably “wins” is inevitable (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 136).

Another theoretical assumption on which we will rely in our arguments is described in the work of Yurchak (2014), who analyzes the image of late socialism in the USSR and the causes of collapse of the Soviet system. Considering the specificity of empirical material, the theory that Yurchak used in his work can, in our opinion, also be used in the description of Islamic discourse. He addresses several theoreticians at once. Thus, one of the most important concepts for him is performativity or performative statements hailing from John Austin’s speech act theory. All statements are divided into constitutive statements, which constitute a certain reality, and performative statements, which create new facts, thus changing social reality (Yurchak, 2014, p. 39). These types of statements do not constitute a strict binary opposition; on the contrary, any phrase can be described through a different relationship between constitutive and performative components of meaning. Thus, it appears that some speech constructs have greater performative power—that is, an ability to create new facts and change reality. This is how the notion of authoritative discourse that Yurchak borrowed from the works of Bakhtin appears. The main features of this discourse are ideological bias, standardization, and repeatability. The latter, against the expectations of many, resulted not in the narrowing of meanings but, on the contrary, their expansion. There is a “performative shift” involving the uncontrolled appearance of new meanings. According to Yurchak, this is exactly what led to the destruction of the Soviet system. However, in this paper, we are interested in the mechanism of the appearance of authoritative discourse as noted by Yurchak.

## CONCEPTS OF AUTHORITATIVE ISLAMIC DISCOURSE

How are the abovementioned methodological approaches correlated with the material that is the subject matter of our analysis? In this part, we will discuss the analysis of expert and Muslim discourses in order to determine a model that can be used to articulate the key “moments” of these discourses.

A “Wahhabi threat” or any other threat related to radical Islam has become one of the most important elements of expert discourse on Islam, owing to the dominant narrative of securitization of Islamic problem as well as the historical legacy of the Chechen wars. An threat of what is called “radical Islam” supposedly of external origin is an inevitable danger to the foundations of the Russian statehood are its essential features. For this reason, expert discourse here merges with the official political one, since the idea of searching for (and identifying) an external enemy is extremely popular in the Russian body politic.

The assumption about the inevitability of this kind of threat proved to be extremely stable, largely due to the emergence of a number of experts who were able to consistently substantiate it. It is often hard to know if a particular expert is related to a particular politician. However, in practice, most decisions made by the country’s political leader since the mid-2000 have reflected the ideas of these particular representatives of the expert community. Analysis of the positions expressed by various experts makes it possible to carry out the most complete analysis of the “moment” of discourse related to the “Wahhabi (Salafi, Islamist, radical) threat” and to study various models of articulation.

One of the most-elaborated positions is that of Alexander Ignatenko (2004a) on “endogenous radicalism in Islam.” He consistently substantiates the idea that radicalism is inherent in Islam. His position appears to be the most academic, as in many of his works he refers to medieval Islamic texts. His ability to extrapolate the logic of Islamic history and apply the concepts of Islamic philosophy to reality may seem even more “innovative.” However, his type of reasoning is an instrumental language strategy—that is, it involves *simplified comparison* and *excessive metaphorization*<sup>3</sup>—rather than a unbiased study (despite the obvious academicism of the presentation). This naturally leads to conclusions based on the parameters of such metaphorization. Thus, the process of sect formation, according to Ignatenko (2004b), is “a natural way of Islamic existence”, and all Islamist organizations are a regular stage in the development of Islamic societies. Religious rhetoric is not an external element for al-Qaeda-like extremist organizations’ (forbidden in Russia) or numerous other Islamist movements’ discourse, but rather represents a certain stage in the development of Islam as such. As a proof of this assumption, Ignatenko (234-241) points out the possibility of using the methodology of a classic work by Al-Shahrastani, “The Book of Sects and Creeds,” to analyze modern Islamist movements.

In the course of such reasoning, the object of research is constructed as “endogenous” radicalism that is inherent in Islam. Hence the emphasis placed on the importance of understanding the phenomenon of Wahhabism. Ignatenko seems to agree with the opinion that is widely held in the academic community that Wahhabism is a religious and political doctrine in Islam of the 18<sup>th</sup> century associated with the name of Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab al-Tamimi, and that initially it underlay the formation of the Saudi state and remains the state ideology of Saudi Arabia to this day, albeit in a modified form. However, “whether we like it or not, in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, another meaning of the word Wahhabism as a political trend whose supporters, based on a specific and subjective interpretation of Islamic rulings, engage in activities (mainly using

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3. Paradoxically, Ignatenko himself blames all other researchers for such metaphorization: “discussions based on the use of these concepts in relation to Islam have an inner vice. This is metaphorization or, in other words, the transfer of concepts developed in a different (non-Islamic) cultural environment and intended for the conceptualization of another religion (Christianity) to Islam. As if, when discussing a camel, metaphorically calling it a ‘ship of the desert,’ we moved on to disputes over shipbuilding instead of investigating the camel itself. So, the islahist, i.e. restorative, correctional movement (what Muslims call by the Arabic word *islah* which in modern language has a meaning of a reform) began to be treated as the Reformation. I even heard ridiculous talks that Islam is six centuries ‘younger’ than Christianity and, for this reason, is ‘lagging behind’ it, so if you add six centuries to the sixteenth century (the time of the Christian Reformation), it would appear that now Islam is just getting ready for its own ‘Reformation’” (Ignatenko, 2003, 30)

violence) aimed at changing the *status quo* (primarily, but not exclusively) in Islamic countries” (Ignatenko, 2004a, p. 32). Following this logic, adoption of the law “On the Prohibition of Wahhabi and Other Extremist Activities in the Territory of the Republic of Dagestan” (later declared unconstitutional) seems more than justified in connection with what happened in Dagestan in 1999. Here we see manifestation of “hegemonic intervention” typical of the Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) theory: an alternative meaning of a sign is chosen from an infinite field of discursivity. In this case, Wahhabism is being figured as a dangerous political doctrine that has adapted to modern conditions and turned into an element of hegemonic discourse.

Other representatives of the expert community who deal with issues related to radical Islam are less academic and therefore use simpler articulation patterns: for example, signification by means of simple definitions without unnecessary reasoning. Thus, in the opinion of Yana Amelina (2013), the former head of the Center for Caucasian Studies at the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, radical Islamism is one of the most serious threats to the public order and political systems. The current state of Islam in Russia is characterized by the following features: the gradual appearance of a “single Islamist front” that unites Islamists from the North Caucasus and Volga regions; the development of an eclectic Islamist ideology; increasing orientation toward the foreign—primarily Arab— Islamic community, whose external features include the archaization of the radical part of the Russian Ummah (“Arabization,” “hijabization”); and active efforts on the part of the federal Islamist lobby to promote and popularize the ideas of Islamists across all Russian media and state structures (Amelina, 2013). The image of the “fifth column” in the form of an Islamist lobby is added to the image of a foreign enemy. The logic of the cause-and-effect relations is also of interest. For example, according to statistics, “3.3% of Ingush men and 2.3% of Ingush women named the Arabs among the desirable nationalities for marriage.” This suggests that the “gradual fundamentalization of the Ingush youth” is underway (Amelina, 2013).

The idea of equating Wahhabism to the “fifth column” is popular. Another RISS employee (at the time of writing of the cited text), Galina Khizrieva (2013), introduces the terms “national Wahhabism” (by analogy with National Socialists) and “cryptowahhabi.”

*What is the difference between the ideologies of Wahhabism and national Wahhabism? Wahhabism was a state-building ideology for the Arab Bedouin Muslims, impoverished and politically dependent. National Wahhabism is a Red-Brown ideology of Trotskyite-Fascist nature associated with the idea of exclusivity of these same Bedouins who have grown rich on oil, who bathe in luxury, who are lousy with money, and who have the most powerful Western transnational corporations among their patrons (Monomenova & Khizrieva, 2013).*

As for “cryptowahhabi,” they are people in power who profess Wahhabi views (Emelianenko, 2013). Khizrieva’s main assumption comes down to the conspiratorial idea that Wahhabism infiltrate into power structures for various purposes. On the one hand, “Islamists take root where there is oil and gas” (Emelianenko, 2013), and on the other hand, they are trying to exert maximum influence on personnel appointments and decisions made on a regional level (Ashurov, 2012).

Rais Suleimanov is one of the brightest media representatives of the expert community, and he is also a member of the National Strategy Institute (formerly also a RISS employee). Due to the radicalism of his statements (see e.g. 2014), Suleimanov has repeatedly received attention from law enforcement authorities. In most of his publications and speeches, he

has called for adopting the most stringent measures possible on Islamism in predominantly Muslim regions of Russia. He greatly exaggerates the scope of the threat, speculating about Islamist training camps and the emergence of new “Mujahidin groups” (Suleimanov, 2016), and he also points to Wahhabis infiltrating into state structures, mainly appealing to the realities of Tatarstan (Suleimanov, 2012).

Roman Silantiev, head of the Human Rights Center of the World Russian People’s Council, also advocates for active (including forceful) opposition to Wahhabi ideology (up to its statutory prohibition). He also advocates for establishing state control over new Muslim converts, since 40 out of 100 converts become terrorists (Silantiev, 2015). As for handling of the Wahhabi threat category, Russia’s Central Religious Board of Muslims and the Russian Council of Muftis are, according to expert opinion, the main vehicles of these dangerous ideas; therefore, these organizations should be recognized as terroristic (Silantiev, 2016). In 2015, Silantiev’s book entitled *The Russian Council of Muftis: History of One Fitnah* was published in order to “unmask” Ravil Gainutdin’s world-views and “show” the negative role that mufti and his Council allegedly played for the Russian national interests.

Since 2013, another image of the enemy in the form of ISIS (forbidden in Russia) has emerged in the Russian communicative space. A number of representatives of the expert community have raised warnings regarding recruitment to ISIS and have called for solving problems in the most radical way. With renewed vigor, such thoughts began to be voiced in the context of the Russian operation in Syria. In one of his numerous interviews, Satanovsky (2015) expressed the idea that can be transmitted into the domestic Russian Islamic context through the situation in the Middle East:

*We are at war with the “Islamic state” in our own territory, [and] we will also be [at war] in Central Asia. It’s only fitting that the entire civilized community smashes this so-called opposition... Does it make any difference which kind of basmachi or mujahideen to fight with if they get in the way? They won’t feel sorry for us. If it will be needed, well, all right,—for once we’ll do something good in the Middle East, instead of setting the Arabs on the Israelis.*

Thus, the danger of the Wahhabi threat becomes the most important characteristic of the element “radical Islam” that is associated with both external and internal factors as well as the need for a belligerent solution for this issue.

Another element that is intrinsically associated with radical Islam is that of an abstract positive image of “good Islam.” The search for and creation of “good” Islam to counteract the radical one is not unique to Russian reality: such active processes can be observed in many regions of the world (Bryan, 2004; “Practise True Islam”, 2016). However, it is perhaps the Russian context that most clearly demonstrates a distinct dichotomy of “good versus bad,” leaving no place for nuances. Of greater importance for the purposes of this study is that this element is employed not only by representatives of the “expert community” but also by those of the Muslim community, who become proxies and co-authors of this idea, and civil servants. By articulating the various attributions of this ‘good Islam’, it becomes possible to describe authoritative discourse as a complex of constantly reproducible meanings.

One of the most common attributions of “right Islam” is its traditionalism. According to a large number of specialists dealing with the Russian political discourse, the category of “tradition” in its broadest sense is one of the central elements in the discourse broadcast by top Russian leaders (Malinova, 2013).

What is meant by “traditional Islam” in the Russian communicative space? First of all, it means loyalty to the Russian state, which implies statutory inclusion in the Russian cultural context, and loyalty is most likely to be the main semantic element of this construct.

Many of the abovementioned experts have explained traditional Islam in exactly this way. For example, according to Suleimanov (2016), traditional Islam “above all, signifies the perception of Russia as homeland and willingness [of “traditional Muslims”] to defend it and even fight for it notwithstanding their brothers in faith oppose Russia”. Previously, Khizrieva pointed out the need for state support of traditional Islam (Nadysova & Khizrieva, 2013).

One of the first projects in which the framework for the creation of “good Islam” was planned was the “Russian Islam” project by Sergei Gradirovsky, who in the early 2000s was adviser to Sergei Kiriyenko, presidential envoy in the Volga region. According to Gradirovsky, it is more appropriate to talk of “Russian-cultural Islam,” which is integrated into the Russian cultural space and the Russian language, and serves the interests of the Russian state (Arkhangelskaya & Gradirovsky, 2002). He also put forward the idea that sermons should be conducted in Russian. However, excluding the sermons that imams read in Russian, at least in large multinational cities, regardless of any particular political strategy initiative, no further development of this project has been observed.

Nevertheless, the idea itself has not only persisted but gained momentum in several ways. First, a number of Gradirovsky’s program statements provoked a broad discussion in the Muslim community about what the “right Islam” should really be like to fit organically into Russian conditions (this obviously refers to a moderate part of the Muslim social and religious spectrum).

Secular Tatar thinkers, anxious both to find the place and role of a revived Islam in the social life of the Tatar people in Tatarstan and Russia in general and to determine their own attitude and their role in these processes in particular, were the first to begin developing new discursive formulations. These thinkers, associated with the religious and state body politic, acted primarily as ideologists of interaction between religious and state spheres, and thus their discourse had to be correlated and integrated into a more general “authoritative discourse.”

One of the most iconic narratives can be seen in the working paper of Rafael Khakimov<sup>4</sup> (2003a), “Where is our Mecca? Manifesto of Euro-Islam,” in which the author outlined his concept of modernization and the reformation of the religious and practical spheres of Islam based on the conditions for the modern development of the Tatar ethnos in the Russian context.

*We still reiterate that the Tatars are Muslims of a Hanifite type. What is the meaning of these words? Is it that we follow Abu Hanifa’s belief that the period of gestation lasts two years, or that we have found the only path to truth or have the most authentic interpretation of the Quran? Or is it that we want to introduce a historical Sharia law, which is inconceivable in a secular state? To follow any **madhhab** would mean, in plain words, nothing else but to confine the Quran. But the Holy Book is wider and deeper than all the **madhhabs** put together, and each new generation can draw new thoughts from it. This process is endless, as is the eternal wisdom of the Quran. (Khakimov, 2003a).*

4. Rafael Khakimov (b.1947) is a Russian politician and a scholar of nationalism, federalism and religious modernism. In 1991-2008 he was a state councilor of the President of Republic of Tatarstan and ideologist of Federal Treaty between Tatarstan and the Russian Federation (1994), which provided a relatively large amount of autonomy for the regional power of the Republic. Now he is a Director of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan. Khakimov’s statements as a public intellectual are often considered as a semi-official representation of Tatarstani ethno-regional administrative elite’s thoughts and ideas.



*The term 'Euroislam' denotes a modern form of Djadidism, or Neo-Djadidism. It applies rather to Islam's cultural aspect, as opposed to its ritual, leaving this practice to the discretion of the individual. Ijtihad plays a pivotal role in Euroislam. As a method of Koran interpretation, it secures the sustained progress of Muslim culture. (Khakimov, 2003b).*

Despite an explicit modernism and progressivism of Khakimov's thought, the idea of Islam as a structure-forming element of the Tatar tradition and identity, along with the need to develop this tradition in which modernism and reformism are rooted, has already been expressed here. At the same time, it is important to distinguish this from the "backward" Arab Islam that is at odds with traditions and conditions in Russia:

*We cannot be made into Saudi Arabia, and we are unlikely to become like a Christian Europe. We are what we are. A date-palm would not grow on the Russian soil. Millions of Muslims grew up in Russia with the conviction that they should live in a secular country, taking into account the dominant culture that has evolved over many centuries. Theologians from Muslim countries cannot teach us how to live, and imams who studied in Saudi Arabia and blindly obey their overseas teachers would introduce nothing but misunderstanding and discord. They will call for strict implementation of the medieval Sharia law, whereas many of its norms cannot be implemented in Russia in the first place. (Khakimov, 2003a )*

However, the ideas of Khakimov, who largely relied on his own rational progressist beliefs in a very technocratic interpretation, were not only insufficiently rooted in the tradition of Islamic thought; they were not even expressed in any relevant Islamic terms. It is not surprising that his position caused substantial objections from the Islamic religious circles, the most politically sensitive representatives of which no less than Khakimov wanted to have formalized and institutionalized national Tatar Islam, which they postulated as "good Islam". The particular positions of the parties were expressed in a discussion between Khakimov and Yakupov, the first deputy mufti of the Religious Board of the Muslims in the Republic of Tatarstan, who died tragically in 2012 ("Strife of New and Old in Islam", 2010).

Yakupov was undoubtedly both a bright Muslim ideologist and a functionary who had come a long way from being an extra-systemic activist at the turn of the 1980s-1990s to become the second person in the official Islamic hierarchy of the republic. He was also one of the creators and developers of a concept of "traditional Islam" and its associated discourse, which acquired an "authoritative" character owing to his personal efforts:

*Reliance on a prophetic Islam that is most accurately and adequately accumulated in the Hanafi madhhab will create such a level of religious understanding that, as stated in materials to the Second Congress of the Muslims of Tatarstan, it "will leave no room for various radical currents in Muslim communities and will pave the way for respect for the centuries-old traditions and their efficient use." ("Strife of New and Old in Islam", 2010)*

An attempt to formulate the concept of traditional Islam was undertaken by Ilshat Saetov, then an associate professor of Islamic Studies at Kazan Federal University:

*The environment, the ground for tradition—that is exactly what the enemies of the Islamic tradition are trying to deprive the Muslims of. For Muslims, this is primarily a political trend of "Hizbut-Tabrir," and an ideological and political one named "Wahhabis," both relevant for Tatarstan. Next, there are supporters of "rational*

*Islam*” — Neo-Mu’tazilites, Euro-Islamists, Quranists, and others. Their basic position [is that] the Islamic tradition in which Muslims are brought up is false, [and that] it is necessary to reason relying solely on one’s own mind (Euro-Islamists), on the mind and the Quran (Mu’tazilites and Quranists), or on the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet (Wahhabis), which must be carefully sifted through in case there are false Hadiths. They believe that the Lord has, roughly speaking, dropped the flash drive with the Scripture (or, in case of the Prophet, with his Sunnah) to the people, and they must live according to their own understanding of its content without taking into account any non-textual information transmitted from the Prophet. (Saetov, 2012a)

*Institutionally, the Islamic tradition has found its most vivid embodiment in the form of Sufi tariqahs, where the knowledge transfer system was entirely built on obtaining an Ijazah (permission) to teach somebody else only after years of studying in educational institutions, where the Teacher-Murshid played the main part. Of the hundreds of pupils of the Sufi madrasahs, only a few made it to the end of training, and even fewer were given the Ijazah.* (Saetov, 2012a)

Analyzing various definitions of the concept of “tradition” in both European and Muslim thought, Saetov concluded that, in Islamic discourse, this concept “corresponds to Sunnism combined with the Sufi tradition. Thus, within the framework of the Islamic discourse, ‘Ahl ul-Sunnah wal Jama’ah’ [‘Adherents to the Sunnah and the community’] are actually a traditional Islam” (Saetov, 2012b).

Saetov’s idea was supported and developed by Rustam Batrov, first deputy chairman of the Religious Board of the Muslims in the Republic of Tatarstan, who repeatedly used the formula “traditional Islam is Sunni Islam.” Batrov’s statement, in turn, coincided with the course for strengthening what the Tatarstani leadership outlined as “traditional Tatar Islam,” which has come to be understood as a Hanafi-type Sunnism based on the local Sufi tradition, as opposed to the Wahhabism/Salafism brought from abroad (Batrov, 2011, 2013; “Chairman of the Ulema Council”, 2012).

In 2007, a targeted federal program for training specialists with deep knowledge of the history and culture of Islam was launched. The purpose of this program was to unite the efforts of religious and secular high schools with a view toward fundamentally changing the quality and nature of Islamic religious education. The main goal of the project, as announced by its creators, was to develop and implement measures “to support state-loyal Muslim religious communities (mosques) to strengthen their material and financial positions for the purposes of organizing counteraction to radical elements.” (“Federal Agency Order”, 2007) The decisive argument in favor of the necessity and validity of such a project asserted that all such events would be aimed at combating extremism within the Islamic community (*Ummah*) of Russia. Thus, the project proposed that the state provide support to Muslim organizations in exchange for their loyalty (for more details, see Alekseev, 2010). Earlier, prominent representatives of the academic community had already proposed an initiative to create such a targeted program, stipulating, however, the need for greater academicism and objectivity in approach (Prozorov, 2004, 398-402). On the other hand, the abovementioned program aroused sharp criticism from analysts and experts close to the orthodox and conservative-and-patriotic circles of the Russian body politic, where it was seen as a positive form of discrimination in favor of Muslims who, in the opinion of the crit-

ics, would receive an opportunity to train religious personnel at public expense (“Decree”, 2007; Ponkin, 2009).

As for the Muslim community, their understanding of “traditional Islam” fully corresponds with the abovementioned guidelines. For example, in the “Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims” (“Sotsial’naya doktrina rossijskikh musul’man”, 2015), we can see a clear definition of traditional Islam. It is understood to mean “a new identity and integration that developed a natural all-Russian patriotism in the Muslims and allows the Russian Muslim community to remove many of the threats that occur in other non-Muslim countries owing to differences in understanding of traditions and cultures”. Emphasis is also placed on traditional family values and on the fact that “for Muslims of Russia, cultural traditions are the source of their national and religious identity”.

The vector formulated by Tatarstani ideologists and theorists was largely in line with the trend expressed at the federal level. However, there was a subtle difference: the Tatarstani ideologists, in their search for both “good” and “right” Islam, turned their attention to the so-called “qadimism” (which could be seen as a departure from Khakimov’s line)—for example, mufti Ravil Gainutdin and his first deputy Damir Muhetdinov, the highest functionaries in the Council of Muftis of Russia and the Religious Board of the Muslims of the Russian Federation, updated the discourse of “Jadidism.” Thus, it was religious reformism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries rather than an earlier tradition that has become a model of traditional Islam for the Tatars and, more broadly, for Russian Muslims in general. The concept was expressed in the greatest detail by Muhetdinov (2016) in his work “Russian Muslimism.”<sup>5</sup>

In this article, the very title of which refers to Ismail Gasprinski’s concepts of “Russian Islam” and “Russian-Eastern Agreement,” the author presented a political and ideological text set out in an academic manner in an attempt to develop a concept of “Russian Islam” in the modern context. Muhetdinov bases this concept of Russia on Putin’s Valdai speech, with references to a number of authors, from Konstantin Leontiev to Alexander Dugin and Ivan Ilyin. Eurasianists and neo-Eurasianists are also mentioned. In the author’s opinion,

*Like most citizens of the Russian Federation, Russian Muslims live in a conservative, European-style ideology that also preserves elements of local traditional cultures. History shows that Russia’s modernization invariably involves penetration of Euro-Atlantic views. Propaganda of ultra-liberal values through some mass media combined with the deepening of modernization is a real challenge for the Russian Muslims. (Muhetdinov, 2016)*

Paradoxically, the reference to Gasprinski, a moderate liberal and a modernist who promoted liberal—though not ultra-liberal—values (e.g., human rights and freedoms, political representation, gender equality, an improved relationship between the technical, social, and moral progress) and who considered these values universal for a panhuman civilization (in contrast to the antagonistic “civilizations” and “poles” of Huntington and Dugin), is combined here with an assertion that the main threat to the Russian Muslimism, as well as to the entire Russian Society, lies in the “deepening of modernization.”

5. ‘Muslimism’ stands here for Russian word *musul’manstvo*, which means rather Muslims as a social group than Islam itself as a religion. In Russian the title is *Rossiiskoe musul’manstvo* and it is obviously an allusion to the programme article by Isma’il Bey Gasprinski (1881) *Russkoe Musul’manstvo* which is often translated as ‘Russian Islam’ (see e.g. Abdirashidov, 2015), but we prefer a more precise translation given by Z.V. Togan (1960, 2012) ‘Russian Muslim community’. While the main focus of Gasprinski is not on Islam as a religion but on Muslims as the citizens of Russia, Muhetdinov goes further making an attempt to formulate a comprehensive ideology for Muslims of Russia as loyal subjects of Russian authorities.

In addition, the author claims that religious reforms are one of the main challenges faced by Russian Muslimism. At the same time, an attempt made in the article to create a “Eurasian Muslim identity” and to “build an ideological structure” is pure reformism: Muhetdinov’s argument that “tradition needs an ideology or concept” conceals an absolutely modernist approach to religion.

The author suggests “getting in line with the all-Russian ideological trend and cultivating the seeds of proper traditions on this ground” (Muhetdinov, 2016). It remains unclear how one can nurture a tradition from a trend, especially from an ideological trend. And while Muhetdinov provides some arguments in favor of compatibility between Islam and both Russian national identity and ethnic identities of Muslim peoples of Russia, for “ideology” he offers none. How an invention of modernism should provide the basis for a holy tradition is unclear. The same questions arise concerning the suggestion to “link the Muslim strategy with the common civilizational strategy, to fit the former into the latter”.

It seems that such contradictions would have been absolutely unavoidable for any attempt to fit a modernist and reformist logic of the minority into a conservative discourse of the Russian public mainstream. At the same time, the work of Muhetdinov is by far the most profound attempt to formulate an ideological development strategy for the Russian Muslims in the current political situation. Conservative and “Eurasianist” rhetoric acts here as an “authoritative discourse” and the author, mapping his place within the frameworks of this discourse, shows his loyalty to the political mainstream and, as a result, gets an opportunity to develop his own ideas.

Apparently, further development of such discourse will result in one of the components being displaced and in the unification of the discursive model. Either conservative discourse will lose its “authoritative” character and will be replaced in this capacity by a liberal-reformist one or, conversely, the reformist discourse will lose its relevance and give way to traditionalist and fundamentalist rhetoric.

However, in 2017, Muhetdinov’s position has undergone certain changes. For example, in an interview dated March 20, 2017, he notes that,

*in contrast to talking of a traditional Islam, certain forces in our state and society make attempts to construct in their own interests a certain “tradition” which in reality did not exist and currently has no social base. And these persons, in the words of Dr. Taufik Ibrahim, chairman of the Russian Association of Islamologists, mislead the authorities. Mufti Talgat Tajuddin, who raised the problem of pernicious splitting actions in Russian Islam under the guise of gracious conversations about traditional Islam, spoke about this very emphatically. I will not repeat all the points from my speech in the interview, I will only emphasize that the confusion that is currently taking place in the public discussion involving certain officials (but not in a professional discussion) around the terms of “traditional Islam,” “Islamic orthodoxy,” etc. is, first of all, used by the authorities to disguise the fact that, despite certain shifts in recent years, there has not been any real breakthrough on a federal scale with the cultivation of the Russian Muslim intellectual elite. And secondly, professional schismatics and seducers of the Russian Muslim community skillfully parasitize on the brand of “traditional Islam.” (Muhetdinov, 2017)*

These very significant observations respond a dispute unfolding in the Muslim spheres of the Internet around a number of statements made by the previously mentioned Batrov

immediately thereafter his announced resignation from the post of deputy chairman of the Religious Board of the Muslims in the Republic of Tatarstan (Baty, 2017a, 2017b; Gadzhiyev, 2017; Safiullina, 2017). In a number of articles published in Tatarstan's electronic media, Batrov called for a radical modernist program for reforming Islamic dogma and law by means of deconstructing the basics (*usul*) of the Hanafi *fiqh*.

The appeal to the rhetoric of other representatives of the Russian Muslim community reveals other discursive strategies. In doing so, Ravil Gainutdin, Head of Russia's Council of Muftis, uses Christian Orthodox terminology to describe Muslim realities. For example, Gainutdin's address on the occasion of Mawlid al-Nabi (Day of the Prophet Muhammad's birth) entitled *Rozhdestvenskoe Poslanie* ('Nativity Message')<sup>6</sup> was focused on comparing Mawlid an-Nabi and Christian Christmas.

*I try to make sure the language, the very message of Islam, is understood by our contemporaries and, therefore, I use the words and images familiar in Russian culture. In the Middle Ages, Old Slavonic 'Christmas' was the most common [term to describe] the physical coming of a person into being. Therefore, the phrase 'Nativity of Prophet Muhammad' (peace be upon him) is quite legitimate in the Russian space and retains its Islamic essence" (Gainutdin, 2015).*

By citing various surahs, Gainutdin unfolds a theological discussion concerning the similarity between the Christian and Islamic traditions associated with the celebration of the birth of Jesus and Muhammad, drawing an analogy between the Ascension and Mi'raj.

In another speech, Gainutdin (2015a) compares Christian and Islamic eschatology, and he does this to actualize the idea of Russia's special role in the international arena:

*Christian and Islamic eschatology are similar and argue that before the coming of the Messiah (Mahdi) there will be the Antichrist (Dajjal), and Katechon (the one who withholds) will play a particularly important role. Apparently, it is the modern policy of our country and our experience of interreligious harmony and cooperation that will form the core of the world's politics.*

In a description of a mosque, it is often possible to find analogies with the description of orthodox churches. For example, in one of his interviews about the cathedral mosque under construction, Gainutdin (2015b) said, "our mosque is golden-headed and fits into the ensemble of Moscow's churches". And in some reports it is possible to see phrases concerning the "sanctifying of mosques" ("Muslims Marked the First Anniversary," 2017).

Comparing the appearance of the mosque and the symbols of the Russian statehood is another way of demonstrating loyalty to the Russian authorities.

*The new look of the mosque, with its minarets similar in shape both to the Spasskaya tower of the Moscow Kremlin and to the graceful tower of Sujumbike in the white-stone Kazan Kremlin, demonstrates the irreversible commitment of our Muslims to their spiritual roots, to the Eurasian foundations of the Russian civilization and statehood. (Gainutdin, 2015c)*

Another important element of traditional Islam, *patriotism*, is also actualized here. Both the content of the concept and its articulation in a religious discourse are of interest here. First, the definition of a particular political concept is given, and then an analogue is selected from a religious or historical context. This demonstrates, on the one hand, the susceptibility

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6. In Russian *rozhdestvo* used for Nativity/Christmas is derived from *rozhdenie* which means birth.

of Islam to the categories of another discourse and, on the other hand, the similarity between the Islamic and Russian traditions of political philosophy. For example: “as for the term ‘patriotism’, it is applied in the cases where priority is given to the idea that connects and unites all citizens.” Next, the Muslim community’s familiarity with the idea of patriotism can be “explained” by reference to the Medina Constitution, which, “apart from community in religion, provides for community in citizenship and the importance of living in one common homeland.” The category of civil rights and duties is explained with reference to the “words of the Most High”.

Another element included in the semantic field of “traditional Islam” is the concept of *unity*. On the one hand, many representatives of the Muslim community frequently refer to the idea of the unity of the Muslim community in their speeches. On the other hand, no less, if not more, popular is the idea of the unity of the Muslims and the Russian civilization on the basis of the Eurasian community: “It is symbolic that a St. Petersburg native, our President, will cut the ribbon at the entrance to the Moscow Cathedral Mosque. In so doing, we will reveal our common roots as a multinational and multi-confessional unified Eurasian civilization” (Gainutdin, 2015a).

*Spirituality* is also actualized in the form of a particularly significant political value. For example, the main mosque will be able to “bring tremendous benefit to the process of strengthening the spiritual and state sovereignty of our nation” (Gainutdin, 2015c). The phrase “spiritual gene pool” (*dukhovny genofond*) is used along with *peace, stability, consensus*, as opposed to *extremism* and *radicalism* (Gainutdin, 2015b). Phrases like “spiritual roots” and “spiritual gap” also appear frequently.

The concepts of spirituality, unity, and Eurasianism lie at the heart of Muhetdinov’s above-mentioned project of “Russian Muslimism,” which is based on “Russian Eurasian civilization” and the special place the traditional Islamic culture occupies in it. From the point of view of the applied discursive strategy, what draws attention not so much the intertextuality of Islamic discourse described above, which manifests itself through an attempt to introduce the concepts from political discourse into religious discourse, as the applied method of meta-intertextuality from the fiction theory. This is a type of intertextual interaction when fiction text includes a commented “foreign” text. (Gavenko, 2010, p. 70). In our case, we are talking about a religious political text instead of an artistic one, and by “foreign” we mean a text that comes from outside of the religious context. Muhetdinov’s references to the Ivan Ilyin’s “Russian idea” who “correctly captured the basic intuition [of the revival of Russian faith and culture] but unreasonably linked it exclusively with Orthodoxy” can be an example of using this method. Further, Muhetdinov develops Ilyin’s idea in the context of Islamic spiritual traditions. Of greater importance for the purposes of our research is that Putin is known to address the ideas of this particular philosopher frequently in his speeches (“Meeting”, 2013; “Meeting”, 2014).

A newly reincarnated idea of Russia’s special path, the idea that it should “organize a separate civilizational pole” and “cultivate the seeds of its native tradition,” occupies a particular place in Muhetdinov’s arguments. In this respect, the next intertextual (for Islamic and political discourses) element related to *opposition to the West* is revealed. Following the logic of the current political situation, Muhetdinov focuses on the dangers of ultra-liberalism, which are associated with the disintegration of traditional family values, and with the “vagueness and uncertainty” of the Western values as opposed to the traditional Russian ones.

Apart from criticizing European values, the inadequacy of the philosophical foundations underlying the Western worldview is also asserted. According to Gainutdin, the idea of “man as a measure of all things” is unacceptable, as it leads to egocentrism, which in turn underlies many woes of the modern civilization (Gainutdin, 2015). He puts this concept alternatively as “me as a thing-in-itself.” Such boundless freedom drives liberalism to the extreme: “By pursuing imaginary freedom, ultra-liberals put their society on a track to a new form of slavery—slavery to instincts, illusory comfort, and slavery to the mind’s stereotypes. Aren’t these the slaves to instincts of whom God talks in the Holy Scriptures[?]” (Gainutdin, 2014). Both Gainutdin and Muhetdinov emphasize the representatives of the Frankfurt School (e.g., Marcuse, Adorno, Fromm) as philosophers who revolutionized the understanding of freedom. In Muhetdinov’s opinion, they eliminated the last barriers, originally set by the Christian foundations, on the way to an unlimited freedom driven to permissiveness.

Thus, one cannot help but notice that the concept of “traditional Islam,” which shall be understood to mean “right Islam,” becomes basically a universal discursive construction, the content of which is actually determined by what a particular author or speaker considers to be the “right Islam.” This, in turn, indicates that discussion about “traditional Islam” in the Tatar environment not only fits into the official Russian “authoritative discourse,” but is also a specific reflection and development of a broader intra-Islamic polemic concerning “orthodoxy” and “delusion,” which in turn has never been alien to obvious political connotations. One of the characteristic features of this polemic, which emerged in the first centuries of Islam, was the absence of a centralized institution that, similar to the Christian church, would determine the normative orthodoxy and its criteria. Occasionally, the state tried to take on this role (and different Muslim states could support different versions of orthodoxy), but each time, albeit with varying degrees of success, the state monopoly was challenged by the “*ulama*” community, which, according to Prozorov (2004), exhibited “a complex intertwining of religious and political views of followers from different communities and schools” (p. 21). In our case, the Russian secular state as well as state-loyal Muslim clergy and associated intellectuals attempted to take on this function. However, the latter, who by definition lacked a completely unified view, began, with varying degrees of success, to use the concept of “traditional Islam” that was recognized within the “authoritative discourse” as “good,” thereby promoting their own ideas about which “Islam” is both “good” and “right.”

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