

“Я СДЕЛАЮ ТЕБЯ УСПЕШНЫМ МУСУЛЬМАНИНОМ”: ОНЛАЙН- КОУЧИНГ В РОССИИ И ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ НОВОГО ИСЛАМСКОГО БЛАГОЧЕСТИЯ

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В этой статье я рассматриваю мусульманский онлайн-коучинг в России, пытаюсь определить, как конструируются новые неолиберальные субъекты. Рассматривая кейс проекта «Триллионер» имама московской Мемориальной мечети Шамиля Аляутдинова, я выявляю специфические языковые стратегии, используемые для конструирования образа «успешного/гармоничного» мусульманина. Этот образ служит центральным мотивом в дискурсе мусульманского коучинга. Хотя проект в первую очередь направлен на финансовое благополучие, он представляет собой комплексную этическую программу, где финансовая стабильность рассматривается как естественное следствие благочестивого поведения. Онлайн-коучинг, основанный на протестантском активистском этосе, оказывается новым способом вовлечения мусульманского субъекта — «новых» модернизированных мусульман, а также имама-коуча как нового типа религиозного авторитета, — который сочетает неолиберальные ценности предпринимательства и самопомощи с исламской добродетелью. Я обсуждаю несколько факторов, которые делают этот проект весьма востребованным среди современных мусульман, исходя из аргумента культурного потребления и удобства светского перевода ислама в рамках глобальной неолиберальной повестки дня.

Ключевые слова: социология ислама, цифровая антропология, ислам в России, живая религия, цифровой ислам, лайф-коучинг.

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“I WILL MAKE YOU A SUCCESSFUL MUSLIM”: THE ROLE OF ONLINE COACHING IN SHAPING NEOLIBERAL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIA

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In this paper, I consider Muslim online coaching in Russia, trying to determine how new neo-liberal subjects are constructed. Considering the case of “Trillionaire” project by the imam of Moscow’s Memorial Mosque Shamil Alyautdinov, I identify specific linguistic strategies used to construct an image of a “successful/harmonic” Muslim. This image serves as a central motif in the discourse of Muslim coaching. While the project primarily focuses on financial well-being, it is a comprehensive ethical program, where financial stability is viewed as a natural consequence of pious behavior. Online coaching based on Protestant activist ethos turns out to be a new way to entrain the Muslim subject—the “new” modernized Muslims as well as

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imam-coach as a new type of religious authority — that combines neo-liberal values of entrepreneurship and self-help with Islamic virtue. I discuss several factors that make this project highly in demand among contemporary Muslims based on cultural consumption argument and the convenience of secular translation of Islam within the global neo-liberal agenda.

Keywords: *sociology of Islam, digital anthropology, Islam in Russia, living religion, digital Islam, life-coaching.*

The term coaching is often associated with business and practices of achieving professional goals more successfully. Recently, however, life coaching — a form of psychological training aimed at achieving harmony and self-confidence — has gained enormous popularity. The trend is also evident in the religious sphere. Numerous coaching projects incorporate secular values into religious discourses, a practice highly sought after by active practitioners of various faiths. Furthermore, the mediatization of the religious sphere has been instrumental in this shift: as coaches no longer need to interact with students in person — blogs, webinars, and online courses dedicated to achieving success and harmony within various religious frameworks are gaining prominence. How do secular and religious values relate here? How does combining religious piety and secular efficiency within the Muslim coaching project contribute to new interpretations of Islamic values? And the main question is: What is the performative effect of media on the transformation of traditional Islamic institutions?

In this paper, I examine the phenomenon of Muslim life coaches in Russia, a case study that emerged during the rise of “coaching culture” in the early 2000s. Despite its prominence, this trend has not been subject to in-depth study. By exploring the cyberspace of Muslim coaching, this paper aims to investigate how neoliberal ethics are reinterpreted within the Islamic context, shedding light on how Islamic values are transformed by being “embedded”

in a neoliberal context. Is Muslim coaching a straightforward religious adaptation of a popular secular practice, or does it present a unique form of constructing a new Muslim subjectivity? Shamil and Zilia Alyautdinov, two prominent Russian Muslim coaches, translate neoliberal business management practices into the language of Islam, thereby creating images of successful Muslims. The thematic repertoire, specific linguistic strategies, and communicative patterns (that I will consider further) suggest a comprehensive symbolic matrix for a Muslim neoliberal project, which has the potential to create a new model of Muslim subject as well as challenge traditional source of religious authority. To understand this phenomenon, I draw upon the Protestantisation of non-Christian religions thesis and explore its compatibility with Islamic tradition, focusing on how contemporary Islamic reformist discourse appropriates neoliberal values. Furthermore, I engage with the concepts of secular translation (mainly in terms of Talal Asad) and cultural consumption, which frames everyday religion in cyberspace. I suggest that the performative effect of online media, driven by specific communicative strategies, leads to the construction of “new” Muslim subjects, combining religious piety and secular neoliberal efficiency.

TRILLIONER.LIFE: NEOLIBERAL ETHICS OF MUSLIM COACHING

Coaching is a phenomenon situated at the intersection of psychology, pedagogy, leadership theory, and other fields, which aims to teach the achievement of any goals. While cultural characteristics and their impact on coaching effectiveness have been studied by specialists across disciplines, religious coaching remains less studied despite its global popularity, particularly with large Christian and Muslim networks. The origins of religious coaching can be traced back to American television evangelicals, whose popularity peaked in the 1960s and 1970s. They promised their followers material, financial, physical, and spiritual well-being. Many researchers have emphasized both the ideological content of individual leaders or organizations and the institutional features of the movement, highlighting the crucial role of the media component in the preaching of TV evangelists (for example, Carrette, King, 2005).

The practice of televised sermons later spread to the Muslim world. For example, Egypt’s Sheikh Metwalli al-Sha’rawi, through his weekly Friday broadcasts, became a prominent symbol of Egyptian popular culture in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, a large number of Islamic leaders turn to the format of televised sermons. A common thread among them is their attempt to develop different models of “moderate” Islam — they appeal to the rhetoric of human rights and freedoms, interfaith dialogue, and opposing the association of Islam with violence (for example, Tariq Al-Suwaydan, a wealthy Kuwaiti businessman, entrepreneur, and Islamic preacher). This niche is also being filled by women religious leaders, which in itself is a kind of marker of inclusion in the activist left-liberal discourse (such as Syrian humanitarian activist Rufaïda Al-Habash).

Regarding the promotion of personal well-being, the most famous figure in the Arab world is the Egyptian activist Amr Khaled. Since the late 1990s, he has hosted highly popular television programs on Egyptian satellite channels. Similar to other TV preachers, he advocates the peaceful coexistence of Western and Muslim cultures and denounces extremism; however, he also promotes individual activism and personal success. This case has been repeatedly analyzed by anthropologists and Islamic scholars, demonstrating a variety of analytical optics can be used to explain the phenomenon. Some interpretations view the “Amr Khaled phenomenon”

as a political strategy employed by Salafi Muslim revivalists to focus on piety (Wise 2003, 103). Additionally, several studies focus on regional perceptions of Amr Khaled. For example, Pandya S. (2009) examines the impact of modernity, globalization, and new forms of media such as televangelism, on the religious practices of educated Yemeni

Religious coaching, particularly Muslim coaching, is characterized by two key aspects: firstly, it involves the public acknowledgment of one's religious identity and the corresponding of oneself in public space according to that identity; secondly, it necessitates the framing of coaching topics through a religious lens. Furthermore, such projects are usually revolve around the coacher's personal brand, rather than a collective effort. This fosters an image of the coach as a model of personal development, achieved through their own work. In religious discourse, this image is further interwind with the ideals of a righteous Muslim. This combination of the secular and the religious significantly transforms and reinterprets the concept of religious piety within the community formed around the coach.

The emergence of figures who simultaneously embrace their Islamic heritage and adopt elements of neoliberal ethics raises new questions about the conceptual boundaries in studying the contemporary Islamic tradition. How can we define the boundary between the secular and the secular, especially when the secular is so readily translated into the religious sphere. The discourse of religious coaching rearticulates the problem of the separation between tradition and modernity: Does religious coaching represent a modern interpretation of traditional religious authority? How can we distinguish between Islam and New Age spiritualism? Finally, in the era of heightened online communication, how do we delineate between offline and online dimensions? Ultimately, the most important question arises: is it even productive to draw rigid boundaries when analyzing the multifaceted nature of religious coaching in contemporary Islam?

In this paper, I aim to examine the case of the two most popular Muslim coaches in the Russian-speaking segment of social media — the married couple Shamil and Zilia Alyautdinov. They draw attention for several reasons. Firstly, these figures represent a model for a new Muslim subjects within neoliberal ethics. This case, originating from a non-Muslim majority country, expands the scope of digital anthropology of Islam. It reveals how local issues in Russia intertwine with a global, Western-oriented neoliberal agenda, echoing similar trends observed in Muslim-majority countries. Secondly, this case explores the understudied medium of neoliberal religious instructions, particularly within Islamic context. The reliance on social media as a primary platform for promoting this religious coaching project introduces a novel dimension to the research, prompting questions about the intersection of online and offline spheres. Finally, Shamil Alyautdinov, in addition to his effective online presence as a coach, holds a position of authority in the religious community as the imam of a prominent Moscow mosques. Thus, this case exemplifies how new sources of authorities are emerging, blending the traditional, or offline, role of a mosque imam with the modern persona of an online coach. Below, I take a closer look at the Alyautdinovs' Instagram accounts to identify their main discursive strategies.

Shamil Alyautdinov was born in 1974 in Moscow. He received his religious education at the International Islamic Academy and the Faculty of Islamic Law in Al-Azhar, Egypt. He was appointed Imam of Moscow Memorial Mosque in 1997 and Deputy Mufti of the DUM of the Russian Federation for Religious Affairs in 2002; Head of the Scientific Theological Council of the DUM of the Russian Federation since 2007. He is the author of numerous theological and

popular works on Islam and the first theological translation of the Quran into Russian (published in 2017). In 1999, he married Zilla Alyautdinova, and they have six children together.

Shamil Alyautdinov launched the coaching project, known as *Trillionaire*, in 2012. According to the official website,

the essence of the project lies not only in material wealth (as its name implies, but also in gaining spiritual wealth, i. e., in becoming “vicar of God on earth,” as the Quran says. This is achieved by leveraging the boundless opportunities offered to every man by the Creator. This is the only project in the world that considers Muslim values (āyāt from the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) as a tool for spiritual, intellectual, physical, and material transformation in life (Trillioner).

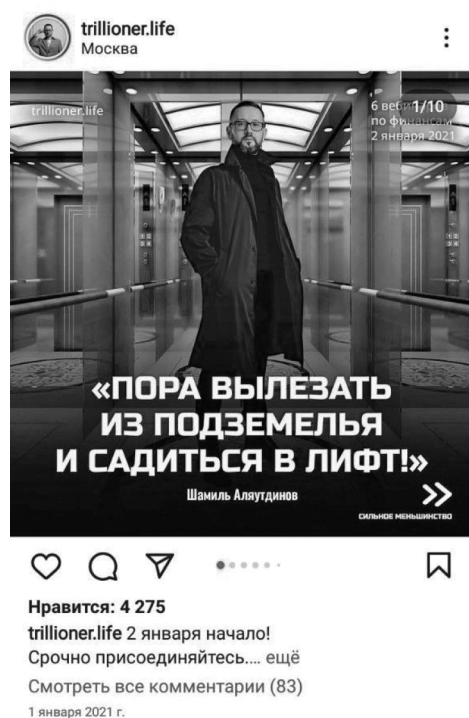
The *Trillioner* project offers paid educational products, primarily seminars and webinars. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus has recently shifted towards online offerings. As project’s name suggests — it primarily aims at achieve financial goals; however, individual webinars address broader self-improvement goals. The main platform for promotion is Instagram¹, where the *Trillioner.life* account boasts 295,000 followers as of August 2021. Since 2015–2016, Shamil Alyautdinov’s wife, Zilya, has joined the project, targeting a female audience with seminars, webinars and consultations on women’s and family issues.

While Shamil Alyautdinov identifies himself as the founder of Muslim coaching, he consistently tries to distinguish between his religious and “secular” identities in his promotional materials. For example, in a blurb for an upcoming webinar, he writes:

What I give at seminars and webinars is not religious knowledge (all religious I have for free at umma.ru²), but my valuable life experience as a father of many children, as a self-sufficient individual (money has worked for me since 2012), and as the author of books and materials that are read and studied every month by approximately 1 million users from around the world (Instagram, July 4, 2021).

The counselling presentation states: *Working on your problems or goals goes beyond the scope of the imam’s work. At consultations, Shamil Alyautdinov acts not so much as an imam but as a psychotherapist, personal coach, trainer and mentor (Konsultatsiya imam za dengi).*

However, religious discourse regularly “permeates the core of Alyautdinov’s coaching project when examining his Instagram page. While he uses the “trillioner.life” platform to promote his



Picture 1. «It’s time to get out of the dungeon and take the elevator».

1. Website forbidden in Russian Federation.

2. Another major media project by Sh. Alyautdinov collects a large amount of religious material.

Islamic projects (such as the release of new books), Alyautdinov often translate psychological and managerial concepts commonly found in coaching discourse into Islamic language. Thus, despite his efforts to distance himself from religious rhetoric, his background as an Islamic theologian and imam is a key factor in the project's popularity. The attempt to legitimize the values of individual success — often associated with Western culture — within the framework of traditional Islamic collectivism has gained appeal among Muslims. The quest to an answer the question “how to be a Muslim today” in the face of new challenges and threats has evolved into the broader inquiry of “how to be a successful Muslim,” reflecting a demand for a more modernized version of everyday Islam. In the following, I examine the content of the “trillioner. life” website to illustrate the phenomenon of the interpenetration of religious and coaching discourses into each other.

As mentioned above, finances are a key topic on this blog. Topics such as subconscious poverty and wealth, rules of saving, and similar subjects frequently appear. First of all, Alyautdinov's main argument that Islam encourages abundance and material prosperity stands out. He challenges the stereotype linking Islamic piety with poverty: “If you look at the Quranic texts through the prism of poverty... you find what you are looking for” (Instagram, July 20, 2020.). From his perspective, poverty can only be justified for those who try to resolve their psychological and material problems by relying on religion. He even claims that it is Satana who “throws you pessimistic thoughts about poverty” (Instagram, 2021, June 7). Interestingly, Alyautdinov coined the term “subconscious poverty” as a bridge between two popular, mass-oriented fields: the psychology of success and financial literacy.

Unlike traditional financial coaching projects, there is a greater emphasis on the ethical justification of basic financial behaviour. As one publication aptly stated, “Invest in values, otherwise you will invest in losses.” Beyond the specific tools and management techniques that Alyautdinov teaches in his webinars, he outlines a comprehensive ethical framework in which finance is just a small component of a larger whole. One of the main principles of this model is the value of conscious consumption. For example, he argues that Islam rejects waste and luxury and, and in many of his contributions, he explains the benefits of a rational approach to spending. He advises against spend money on expensive cars and appliances, encourages caution with loans, and advocates for a greater focus on savings.

Another fundamental attitude relates to the proactive stance of the successful Muslim. “Change yourself and the world will change around you” is the motto of many of Alyautdinov's coaching projects. In Islamic discourse, this approach revisits the long-standing debate between advocates of divine predestination and free will. Is it permissible to take additional actions to improve one's wealth if “Allah wills everything”? Does the pursuit of financial goals interfere with the divine plan, thereby violating Islamic doctrine? For Alyautdinov, action is not only the key to financial success, but also the basis of religious piety. “There is a great difference between relying on Allah, having done everything possible and even impossible, and relying on Him, ‘acting’ only in thoughts and prayers” (Instagram, October 22, 2020). Thus, creativity is thus encouraged, though activism is tempered by religious norms. Ambition and a self-demanding attitude are balanced with discipline and self-control. Within a religious context, these values and attitudes fill the category of Islamic piety with new meanings.

Finally, the focus on bodily discourse is noteworthy. A healthy body becomes an essential element of the image of a successful Muslim. In his blog, Alyautdinov pays great attention to

the topics of such as healthy diet and regular physical activity, including recommendations related to COVID-19 (Instagram, December 9, 2020). His motto, “each day is smarter, stronger, more devout, and richer!,” encapsulates his approach. For example, he shares videos of himself performing various physical exercises. Interestingly, alongside traditional Muslim foods (like dates and kist al-Hindi), the Islamic discourse on good nutrition also features products such as puer tea³ and ginger. This theme gained particular prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Alyautdinov’s blog shared a recipe for daily immunity boosting. More importantly, the focus on corporeality is closely tied to self-discipline, developed through the consistent repetition of proper practices and rhythms. “What can you do if you are tired and overworked? The most important thing is not to fall out of schedule, out of the rhythm of your day,” he advises. A similar theme appears in Zilia Alyautdinova’s blog, where she reflects on the best ways to perform *dua* (prayer) and discusses “effective timing,” when “there is a greater chance of catching a state of satisfaction” (Instagram, 2021). At the intersection of religious discourse on piety and secular discourse on efficiency, “effective prayer” — and in Alyautdinov’s blog, the “prayer of abundance” — becomes a key component of the Muslim coaching project.

A brief examination of the main themes of this blog inevitably draws an analogy with Max Weber’s (1934) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Alyautdinov convincingly argues for the compatibility of wealth and Islamic piety. At the same time, he consistently portrays a negative image of the capitalist system, associating it with “animalistic” consumption. Financial prosperity, in his view, is primarily connected to proper Muslim behavior, rather than knowledge of specific financial instruments. This approach serves both as an attempt to “modernize” Islam and as a mean of protecting Muslim identity, guarding against dissolution in “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000). So, can Shamil Alyautdinov be considered a new reformer?

IS SHAMIL ALYAUTDINOV A NEW REFORMER? PROVIDING PROTESTANTIZATION OF ISLAM

According to a broad definition, the protestantization of religion refers to the process by which various world religions are reshaped according to a Protestant model. “It is about appropriating the Protestant ethos. This ethos has two main dimensions: literally, it speaks of protest, and of a drive for reforming existing systems from within” (Niculescu 2020).

This phenomenon has been widely studied in various non-Christian contexts (Whitney 2022). Since Protestant values have proven to be most compatible with Western capitalist society, researchers have examined a different set of practices concerning the incorporation of religious practices and ideologies into liberal-democratic Western societies.

Islam holds a unique position in discussions of Protestantization: On the one hand, these discussions are influenced by the widespread framework of the clash of civilizations and the popular perception of an inherent conflict between Western and Islamic cultures, often portraying Islam as a problem. On the other hand, the colonial histories of various Islamic countries and the phenomenon of Islamic reformism, which has historical precedence, also play an important role. This intellectual movement, prominent in the 19th and early 20th centuries, united advocates of reforming Islamic tradition from within, as a response to the challenge of Western dominance. In the context of rising rhetoric linking violence with Islam post-9/11

3. Fermented tea is traditionally produced in China.

attacks and the growth of postcolonial and decolonial discourses, the concept of reformism in Islam has become highly politicized. Contemporary public figures and intellectuals engaging with new and recent history of Muslim societies often find themselves participating in reformist discourse.

In analysing the phenomenon of “Protestant Islam,” Syed Farid Alatas identifies two groups that appeal to this category: first are “existing Muslim revival movements as having Protestant-like feature”; the second call for a change in Muslim society and referencing the Protestant Reformation as a model. “The first version is represented by academic scholarship while the second is promoted by both scholars and journalists making calls for change in Muslim Society and appealing to the Protestant Reformation as a model” (Alatas 2007). However, the boundaries between these groups can often become blurred.

For example, rather emotional calls for Islamic reformation can be found among “Westernized” people from the Middle East and North Africa. Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2016), in her book *Why Does Islam Need Reformation Now?*, argues that the main adversary of Western liberals is not terrorists but the medieval version of Islam. Reza Aslan (2005) claims that the main goal of reformation is to adapt Islam to democratic principles, stating that “representative democracy is perhaps the best social and political experiment in the whole world.” A prominent authority on Muslim law, Abdullah Ahmed al-Naim (1990), is one of the brightest advocates for the liberalization of Islam, offering a comprehensive proposal for Sharia reform. His focus lies in aligning “Islamic public law” with the demands of secularism.

One of the leading theorists in the sociology of religion, Peter Berger, identified pluralism and democracy as prerequisites for Protestantization. However, in this way, Protestantization is reduced to Westernization since the norms and institutions described by Berger are embodied precisely in Western-style liberal democracies (Berger 2013). In his classic work *Weber and Islam: A Critical Study*, Bryan Turner (1974) presented a detailed critique of Weberian sociology to analyze Muslim societies. He emphasized the Orientalist character of Weber’s argument, critiquing Weber’s thesis on the militant nature of Islam (which, in Weber’s view, redirected the quest for salvation through inner asceticism toward land acquisition and imperial expansion) and on the supposed institutional incompatibility between Muslim societies and capitalism. Despite a consistent critique of Orientalism in much of his later work — something Turner sees as an extension of Weberian sociology — he does not dismiss Protestantism. For Turner, this process is an integral part of global social change: “the urbanization of the world’s population, the transformation of the family, the decline of fertility rates, rising life expectancy, the entry of women into the formal labour market, and access to basic education” (Turner 2016). Emerging forms of mobile religiosity, he argues, have an “elective affinity, referring to Weber’s Protestant Ethic Thesis, with mobile urban singles.” Protestantization, in this context, refers to the standardization of religion in different paths to modernity.

Olivier Roy explores the phenomenon of standardization in detail, viewing it more like formatting than acculturation. “Formatting means interaction: a consensus forms about shared values as religiosities converge into an eclectic seeker’s quest, a defined system with legal rights, or an institutional “churchification” as Wiccans or Muslims expect a prison or military chaplain to match that provided by the bureaucracy for their Christian or Jewish comrades” (Murphy 2011).

Is Shamil Alyautdinov a new reformer? In reality, he is crafting an image of Protestant neoliberal Islam that addresses a range of modern challenges. He offers an exhaustive program

for a modernized Islam that incorporates principles of neoliberal ethics. Roman Loimeier's (2005) analysis of Muslim communities south of the Sahara provides a framework for assessing whether Islamic phenomena align with the criteria of Protestantism. Loimeier considers various factors, including methods of disseminating religious knowledge and education level. Despite certain typological similarities with the Christian Reformation, he advocates for renewed attention to an individualistic and, in this sense, more rationalist approach to religion. This new reading of rationality, closely tied to individual religious piety, is central to Shamil Alyautdinov's project. The paradox is that while he critiques certain aspects of neoliberal ethics, he does not fully abandon them, but rather substitutes them with religious categories. For example, he denounces the "Western model of consumption" while promoting products related to traditional Islamic medicine, and he frequently offers a theological rationale for a proactive stance. Similar trends have been repeatedly described in the context of Islam's adaptation of a neoliberal framework, such as calculating piety (Rudnyckij 2010), pious neoliberalism (Atia 2013), and religious activism (Marei 2016). These strategies collectively serve to create a new archetype — the neoliberal successful Muslim.

How effective are these attempts? Tatyana Rabinovich (2018), in her research on the various practices of Muslim women in Russia, examines the impact of neoliberal discourse on her respondents' strategies in the face of contemporary economic and political change. In her dissertation, she includes a case study of women's small businesses, where respondents talk about their participation in Alyautdinov's events. However, Rabinowicz concludes that "Despite the attempts to 'think bigger' and 'reject a poor person's mentality,' as Alyautdinov advised, the women were systematically 'failing' at becoming entrepreneurial subjects. Rather than working harder and smarter, they paradoxically engaged in tea drinking, hospitality, and dreaming" (Rabinovich, 2018, 40). Rabinovich's work provides a detailed exploration of why these women have not been able to become a more successful entrepreneur. While this case study demonstrates that, regardless of how fully these principles are realized, Alyautdinov's project serves as a reference model for Muslims seeking change. Furthermore, through the active use of information technology, it has become an element of everyday experience, influencing the transformation of the image of a pious Muslim.

Cultural Consumption and Monetization of Piety: Selling the Image of Successful Businessman and Pious Muslim / Modernized Muslims and Imam-coach as New Neoliberal Subjects

However, it is not only the content of Alyautdinov's online coaching webinars that is vital for the development of the project but also the form in which he presents his message. The social media format is particularly performative, creating unique conditions for the transformation of everyday religious practices. Visually, his feed demonstrates the convergence and blending of religious and secular discourses. For example, video from mosque might be followed by an article titled *Why Save Money? What if I die tomorrow?*. Similarly, seasons greetings for Eid al-Adha, the Muslim festival marking the culmination of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, are interspersed with motivational messages like *The Secret of Happiness* and *The Trillionaire Acts*.

Conventionally, the publications in this account can be categorized into several groups: promotion of educational products, testimonials from satisfied students, brief answers to questions or recommendations (which can also be combined with webinar advertisements), "personal" content (such as exercise videos, interviews with family

members), and religious content. The last group is particularly noteworthy because it is not directly related to the objectives of the *Trillionaire* project. Nonetheless, the feed features posts about Alyautdinov's new books on religious topics, answers to religious questions (e.g., *Second or Third? Modern Polygamy*), and advertisements for products of traditional Islamic medicine. These posts are well-received and generate the significant engagement from subscribers, comparable to the response to "financial" publications. Alyautdinov addresses religious issues that resonate widely in a society where Muslims are a minority, including topics like polygamy and homosexuality. Thus, navigating the current agenda becomes an element of the image of a successful modern Muslim. Simultaneously, although most publications focus specifically on finance, the occasional religious posts underline the uniqueness of this project within a specific Islamic discourse and contribute to the long-term, development of Islamic identity.

The confusion can also be seen in the example of individual discursive strategies within specific posts. For instance, the image of Alyautdinov himself is a notable aspect. When discussing the dangers of subconscious poverty or reciting a *hadith* (a piece of data about Muhammad) that supports his thought, he consistently presents himself as a successful businessman. His attire —whether a suit, a white shirt, a plain black one, or a grey T-shirt for more personal content — and his well-defined, confident speech reinforce this image. Often his materials are deliberately evocative and provocative. A popular technique involves re-voicing from a well-known film to illustrate common problems. For example, the video *Salam Half* (Instagram, April 25, 2021) addresses the rules of greetings in Islam. It portrays a domestic conflict arising from someone allegedly replying incorrectly to a *salam*, thereby violating Islamic norms. To highlight the absurdity of such conflicts, the video reenacts a scene from the film *Django Unchained* where the characters gather for dinner at the landowner's house.

Zilia and Shamil Alyautdinov's blogs also reflect reference gender models. For example, the image of a successful Muslim is associated with stressed masculinity. Shamil Alyautdinov publishes lists of "masculine" films, features images of rugged athletes, experiments with his own image, and sometimes posts photos of himself with expensive cars (Instagram, October 17, 2021). Beyond the visual part, Alyautdinov also articulates his views on masculinity. He criticizes parents who do not adhere to traditional masculine upbringing rules, urging them to "take care of your son's psyche, steer him in the right direction" (Instagram, April 27, 2021). Zilia Alyautdinova's blog broadcasts the image of the ideal Muslim woman: modest and pious. Her role as a mother of six, managing her responsibilities without nannies or assistants, is particularly emphasized. The family clearly occupies the first place in her value hierarchy. At the same time, it also emphasizes her "activist" side: her desire to commit to professional sphere and her effort to provide a comprehensive education for her children.

Alyautdinov maximizes the immersive potential of social media interaction with his audience. Besides the visual component, his brief audio messages play a significant role in shaping his image. For example, in short monologues he delivers concise statements like "the problem is an opportunity" (Instagram, December 6, 2021) or "know what you want for the future" (Instagram, 2021, December 5). Or, on the contrary, he emphasizes the emotional sounding of film clips (Instagram, April 24, 2022) or conducts interviews with seminar participants. Both techniques help to establish boundaries. The instructive tone creates a hierarchical dynamic, positioning Alyautdinov as a sheikh with access to almost sacred knowledge. In contrast, the heightened emotionality in other content blur these boundaries, seemingly placing him back into the realm of everyday people.

The approach of coaches (not only religious coaches) is often criticized for its excessive focus on the financial well-being. This concern is particularly pronounced in religious contexts, where it questions the legitimacy of a “consumer” model of Islam that emphasizes personal enrichment and reduces religious piety to a form of commodity.

The concept of cultural consumption as a part of the neoliberal project is particularly useful in explaining Alyautdinov’s case. T. Katz-Gerro (2004) offers two reasons for the relevance of this concept from a broad sociological perspective. First, cultural consumption as means of distinguishing social groups; second, consumption becomes a central process through which social groups reproduce themselves (Katz-Gerro 2004: 12). In this case, emerges as a novel method for shaping Muslim identities in a neoliberal framework. The self-constitution of the individual is a hallmark of modernity. Dietrich Jung analyzes in detail the Western social science perspective on contemporary subjectivity and applies these theories to non-Western contexts, focusing on contemporary Muslim subjectivities. Drawing on Andreas Reckwitz’s typology, he proposes a normative model of a “Muslim professional” (Jung, Sinclair 2020: 28), which blends neoliberal economic theories and management sciences with a specific form of Islamic morality. This model offers role models for constructing modern Muslim identities. In Alyautdinov’s case, this entanglement produces at least two new Muslim actor models: modernized Muslims engaged in Alyautdinov’s projects and Alyautdinov himself representing a new form of religious authority.

Why is religious coaching effective in creating “new modernized Muslims”? It is due to the secular translation that is integrated into the discourse of cultural consumption and global neoliberal modernity. The sphere of coaching is being enriched with new culturally localized practices, while Islamic discourse absorbs values of time management and subconscious wealth, crafting new narratives around the image of a modern successful Muslim man and woman. Despite the significant influence of the dominant secular discourse on the language used by Instagram bloggers, I argue that a new type of discourse emerges from the creative and constructive appropriation of this dominant discourse. Thus, Islamic coaching — as a process of cultural translation — becomes part of the diverse Islamic discursive tradition, reflecting a new “modernized” Islam. At the same time, analyzing the discourse of Muslim coaching reveals the transformative impact of media on the institution of religious authority as a whole.

Shamil Alyautdinov embodies the role of a “new modernized Muslims.” His position as a leader who balance between religious and neoliberal ethics allows him to contribute to the institute of religious authority. As a creative entrepreneur in the neoliberal sense, he engages with religious discourse through his project despite his rejection of it (as previously noted). Examining the discussions under the Alyautdinovs’ Instagram posts, one finds that users often pose religious questions unrelated to personal growth training. For instance, questions like “I work as a hairdresser; is



Picture 2. “Take two and a half days for you”



Picture 3. “Are you ready? Make a decision!”

it a sin to change the ‘God-given’ color of my hair?” are common. This reflects Alyautdinov’s status. As an imam, people naturally his fatwas (religious edicts). However, the interaction is not one-sided, and Alyautdinov responds to these inquiries. Consequently, due to the secular translation described earlier, the Muslim coach also gains the status of a religious authority, thereby transforming and adding new meanings to the functioning of this social institution. Beyond the broader discussion of the democratization of Islamic knowledge in online space, the transformative effect of media is evident. Culturally localized Muslim coaching addresses the community’s need for a religious authority adapted to contemporary realities. The “questions to the imam/priest” format has a long history online across religious traditions, and social media has amplified this trend with its interactivity and convenience. As the mode of interaction evolves, so does the content. Today, the modern imam functions as a coach, guiding community members on how to become better Muslims.

The emergence of categories of highly individualized, economically motivated “new modernized Muslims,” as well as a new type of religious authority represented by imam-coach, risks of polarization of Islamic public space, as noted by B. Turner. Turner observed that the democratizing effect of electronic space has led to a reductionist dichotomy: the formalist conservative traditional ulema *versus* the independent, mobile and charismatic “new intellectuals.” Using the framework of Islamic modernism, this can deepen polarization by creating divisions into “right” and “wrong” Islam. Matheo Benussi (2021), analyzing the Pietist movements in Tatarstan, suggests that a concept of emancipating ethics helps to overcome binarity in the analysis of Muslim subjectivities. “Islam thus offers an ‘axis’ to which ethical effort is directed in a process that actualizes emancipating subjects and collectivities. In other words, although an ethical form of life produces friction with the mainstream and unbalances the political status quo, its primary orientation is not towards reforming or overturning the order external to it, but towards the lateral realization of a different life” (Benussi 2021: 40). While this model offers epistemological potential, its main advantage — broaden anthropological conversations on Muslim piety beyond existing fault lines — turns out to be its main limitation. The political context seems to be entirely flattened, with dichotomies labeled as unequivocally wrong. Binarities are so entrenched in both academic and public discourse about Islam that they have become a factor shaping Muslim subjectivity. The Islamic coaching project does seek to move beyond the political context. Still, the deliberate avoidance of political rhetoric challenges the binarity of “traditional” and “radical Islam,” which are often based on the distribution of political resources. Thus, apoliticality also becomes an essential feature of the new Muslim actors.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have explored Muslim online coaching in Russia, focus in on how new neoliberal subjects are constructed through the *Trillionaire* project. By analyzing materials from Instagram, I identify specific linguistic strategies used to construct image of “successful/harmonic” Muslim primarily analyzing materials from Instagram. This image is central to the discourse of Muslim coaching. Although the project primarily addresses finance, it actually constitutes a comprehensive ethical program where financial well-being only as a consequence of pious behaviour. Core values conveyed in this discourse include conscious consumption, proactive living, and maintaining a healthy body. Alyautdinov’s innovative approach lies in legitimizing attitudes associated with neoliberal ethics within the framework of contemporary Islamic tradition, leveraging his theological education and high status in the Muslim community.

Online communication plays a distinctive role in this project, generating a new form of everyday religion and new grounds for the integration of the Muslim community. The constant process of individual iterations and the recontextualization of symbols introduce new meanings and frameworks, challenging existing models of subjectivity and source of authority. Thus, online coaching emerges as a novel way to cultivate the “new” modernized Muslim — a blend of neoliberal values of entrepreneurship and self-help with Islamic virtue. This approach can be categorized as a part of Islamic reformist discourse.

While attempts to adapt Islam to contemporary challenges are not new — reminiscent of 19th-century movements addressing Western colonial domination — Alyautdinov’s innovation lies in the appropriation of the Protestant activist ethos. The dominance of neoliberal order stimulates Muslim to consume a specific set of values while simultaneously preserving their Muslim identity to avoid the trap of assimilation. Online religious coaching proves to be an ideal tool for embodying pious and successful Muslim identities from various perspectives: ideological one (the project offers a secular translation of neoliberal ethics into culturally localized Islamic practices); social (the project addresses the need for spirituality and self-improvement among individuals); and logistic (the convenience of social media facilitates engagement in daily religious practices).

The interpenetration of the virtual and the real worlds reveals the individualization of religious experience and intensifies horizontal connections, leading to the de-hierarchization of vertical structures. This phenomenon is well studied through the lenses of the mediatization of religion. However, in the case of Alyautdinov, the interplay between online and offline practices demonstrates a somehow reversed effect — reinforcing traditional hierarchies between imam and believers through new instrument of religious coaching project. This scenario introduces a new model of Muslim neoliberal subject: imam-coach. This figure effectively combines Islamic virtue with neoliberal moral values. Using the framework of active piety and religious activism, Alyautdinov creates a novel form of Islamic leadership that integrates traditional and neoliberal authority sources.

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