

Features of Development of Modern Islamic Discourse among Muslims of the Volga-Ural Region

Leila I. Almazova¹

¹ Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kazan, Russia

Correspondence: Leila I. Almazova, Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, 420008, Kazan, Kremlyovskaya Street, 18, Russia. E-mail: leila_almazova@mail.ru

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Abstract

The relevance of the research topic is determined by the resurgence of fundamentalist movements in the Islamic Ummah, which causes concern among a certain part of the scientific community. For a long time the latter believed that secularism is the natural path of the evolution of society. The aim of the article is to examine the ideological processes among Muslims in the Islamic context in the Volga and Ural regions. The analysis of the available scientific literature in relation with in-depth interviews with representatives of various trends in the region has made up the methodology of the study. The research offers a brief description of the main directions of development of Islamic ideology: traditionalism, fundamentalism, jihad and others; their specific implementation is presented in intellectual development of Muslims of the Volga and Ural regions. The study of Muslim ideological trends among Tatars and Bashkirs of the Russian Federation demonstrates the similarity of processes with international Islamic movements. It is recommended to cultivate a pluralistic approach to religious beliefs and views in society, as the imposition of the only formal "correct" version of religion by state structures leads to social confrontation and then to the marginalization and radicalization of certain groups of Muslims.

Keywords: Muslim community, Islam among the Tatars, Islamic traditionalism, fundamentalism, Salafism, Jadidism, ijihad

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the Muslim community in the region has undergone significant changes: if on the wave of religious revival Tatars and Bashkirs completely filled the mosque on Fridays, then various historical, cultural, social, economic and psychological factors brought about changes in the body of mosque attendants. At a sufficiently high level of religiosity in society (79-80% of the respondents of ethnic Muslims in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan declared themselves as believers (Musina, 2009), only 4-7% are practicing Muslims. If in the middle of the 90s the majority of mosque attendants were elderly people of 60 years and above, now most of the worshippers are young people between 18 and 35 years. Similar trends started to be observed as part of the Muslim clergy, which is now noticeably "younger".

In describing the views of different Tatarstan Muslim religious leaders the question of how to refer to Muslims who have certain views raises before the investigators. The difficulty lies also in the fact that even among the members of one flow there are very different views on some issues of doctrine and worship. Foreign researchers distinguish the following areas among the Islamic movements:

Neo-traditionalism / traditionalism, which is characterized, above all, by the fact that it values the local tradition more than radical or contemporary ones, and even finds non-Islamic values to be more important (Shepherd, 1987). Proponents of this movement criticized those who deny the ancient adaptation ways of Islam development, as religion always exists in a specific local cultural paradigm. They appreciate the depth and complexity of the Islamic tradition, the wisdom of Sufi sheikhs. El Fadl prefers to call them moderate (El Fadl, 2005), contrasting them to purists; while some just call them supporters of traditional Islam (Kurzman, 1998), not distinguishing between traditionalists and modern supporters of preservation of historic heritage as an integral part of the Islamic religion.

Fundamentalism is described as an intellectual direction that involves deducing the political decisions of the

eternal divine text (Choueiri, 1990). It also displays a negative attitude toward Western secularism and re-asserts Islamic political institutions and ideas (Milton-Edwards, 2005). Adeb Khalid also uses the term Islamism in relation to those who are disillusioned with the modernist reform, which, according to them, put the Muslims in a dead end road of imitation to the West. The output is seen not in bringing Islam into line with the modern world and building the modern world on true Islamic values. Meanwhile, there are those among the fundamentalists who believe that the objective should be achieved through the conquest of political power and after the accession of the Islamic state; and those who believe that this can be achieved by personal piety, which should lead to positive changes in society at large. Among the most prominent leaders of Islamism A.Halid points out Hasan al-Bannu (1906-1949), Sayyid Qut (1906-1967), Abu Ala al-Mawdudi (1903-1979). Representatives of the direction are called puritans by El Fadl, (2005), Muhammad Shahrur gives another name - literalists (Shahrour, 2007), others use the concept of revivalist Islam, Wahhabism (Kurzman, 1998), Salafism, and so on.

Jihad, as a movement, is characterized by the fact that its proponents do not have any other purpose than the conquest of power and the establishment of the rule of Sharia as the basic law. This area is represented by groups of al-Qaeda, Hamas and their branches in different countries. Such terms as Islamic terrorism and Islamic radicalism are also used.

Liberal Islam tries to give an Islamic coloring to Western values, believing that the social and political concepts of the West are not the actual Western phenomenon, they are originally inherent in Islam, and therefore should only be restored after centuries of neglect. Proponents of this trend argue for the separation of religion from the state, to protect the former from the latter, they deny any form of violence in the name of religion, recognize pluralism of opinions (Knysh, 2011, 457). Among the adherents of liberal Islam scientists, the names of Muhammad Al-Naim, Abdulkadir Soroush, Rashid Ghannouchi, Fazlur Rahman et al (Kurzman, 2003) are more often called. Some researchers tend to call this trend reformism (Bayoumi, 2010); but the term can be referred to fundamentalists as well, since they also offer to reform the religion bringing it back to its original "cleanliness".

2. Methodological Framework

Since the publication of the book by Edward Said's "Orientalism" in 1977, the Society of Orientalists reviews its approach to the study of non-European cultures. Meanwhile, in the literature there still appear "successful" attempts to explain what is happening in Muslim societies by references to the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition, or some fundamental principles inherent in Islam and not peculiar to Christianity and Judaism (Gellner, 1984, Lewis, 2002). It should be noted that scientists who study Islam, more and more come to the conclusion that "the key question is not what the Qur'an actually says, but which Muslims say what the Qur'an says. Islam is important as a discourse and practice of Muslims" (Roy, 2002). If we approach the question of studying the Islamic discourse in modern Tatarstan from this point of view, we can see that with the only use of this approach it is possible to explore the presence of multiple interpretations of Islam, even within a small Republic.

This article is based on field research conducted in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in 2009-2012. It surveyed more than forty respondents, most of the religious leaders in the region. In addition, the works of contemporary Muslim authors were used.

3. Results

As noted earlier, in the Volga-Ural region there is the same set of ideologies which is practiced in other countries and regions of residence of modern Muslims. In historiography those who seek to develop local Tatarstan Islam are called to be advocates of "traditional" (Batra, 2014) or "official" Islam (Yakupov, 2006). Their opponents are those who are not included in the category of traditional religious establishment, that is, representatives of different ideologies: the fundamentalists or those who are blamed for spreading the Wahhabi ideology (they are often referred to as the Salafists); some thinkers and also representatives of various Sufi groups. Among the leaders, the following ideologists of traditional Islam in the region should be called: the acting mufti of the Muslim religious board of the Republic of Bashkortostan Nurmuhamet Nigmatullin, the former mufti of the Muslim religious board of the Republic of Tatarstan Ildus Fayzov (got a local religious education), Gabdulhak Samatov (Samatov, 2006) (in 2009 graduated from Mir-Arab, in Bukhara) Valiulla Yakupov (Yakupov, 2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2011) (shot by a representative of the radical wing of Islam in 2012, local religious education), Rustam Batrov (Batrov, 2007) (Moscow Islamic Institute), Ildar Malakhov (Malakhov 2008) (graduated from Mir-Arab Islamic school in Bukhara and Al-Azhar University in Cairo) and several others. The sphere of influence of traditionalism is clearly considered to be the older generation of Muslims, as well as some young people, especially those loyal to the older generation of graduates from local and foreign educational institutions, who have found their place in the structures of the Muslim religious boards and their respective subordinate authorities. Their opponents, the so-called fundamentalists have their own point of view on a number of religious

issues. In general, the local fundamentalist discourse is quite versatile: the idea of returning to Islam purity of the early centuries, consequently, the interpretation of the divine attributes in the spirit of Ibn Taymiyyah, the condemnation of the innovations in the field of religion (visits to the "holy places", Mawlid and so on), negative attitude to Sufism and Kalam, commitment to the language of interethnic communication in the sermon conduct (in the Russian context - Russian). Among the representatives of this trend, especially in the late 20th - the early 21st centuries, there were supporters of the movement "Hizb ut-Tahrir" and "Jamaat-e-Islami", but after the ban of these parties in the Russian Federation, they went underground and we can learn more about them only through police reports. A significant part of the fundamentalists is quite loyal to the government, but the latter is suspicious of the adherents to the "pure" Islam, though prefers not to act directly, but with the hands of the official Muslim clergy. They are excluded from mosque management. Thus, Shaukat Abubakerov was removed from the leadership of the community of the mosque Anilyar in Kazan, or Ishmurat Khaibullin was forced to leave the post of the imam of the Muslim organization "Falaq" in Ufa. Due to different kinds of persecution, their leaders tend not to publicize their views among the general public, which significantly differs from that of the mid 90s Islamists, when the bearded men dressed in medieval Pakistani fashion recruited supporters, like other non-traditional religious organizations in the streets of towns and villages. Meanwhile, in the course of the field work we were able to establish fruitful contacts with representatives of the moderate fundamentalist / Salafi – Ishmurat Khaibullin (he studied at the University of al-Azhar), Ramil Bikbaev (Islamic University of Mecca), Shavkat Abubakerov (local education, training courses in the World Islamic League of Mecca) and a number of other prayer leaders close to these circles (Kamal El Zant (Zant, 2007)), Ramil Yunusov (Yunusov, 2011)). The sphere of influence of this movement is, above all, young people, immigrants from the Muslim republics of the CIS and foreign countries, which is unusual for a local version of Islam. Muslim converts among the Russian and other historically non-Muslim peoples also often choose Salafi version of Islam, the prayer which is usually led in Russian.

There are also a few representatives of jihadist groups, as demonstrated by the terrorist attacks in 2010 (terrorists in Tatarstan: shoot to kill, 2010) and in 2012 (the Mufti of Tatarstan was wounded, his deputy killed in 2012).

In turn, liberal Islam is represented by such figures as Raphael Khakimov (Khakimov, 2004, 2010), Aidar Khairutdinov (Khairutdinov, 2006, 2007), Ayrat Bakhtiarov (Bakhtiarov, 2007) (their concept is close to that of New Age Islam). Despite the great interest that Western scholars and the press take in this phenomenon, the influence of Islam on a liberal Muslim community is minimal. This is due to several reasons: none of the Russian thinkers has religious education; all of them, one way or another, are secular scholars in the humanities and not members of the Muslim community in the traditional sense, that is, do not go to the mosque regularly, so obviously, we should not overestimate the role of this area in the formation of modern Islamic discourse in the region.

Thus, the most influential groups in the Volga and Ural regions should be considered to be supporters of the so-called "traditional" Islam and the followers of fundamentalism. Major claims between the two groups can be divided into four groups: a) dogmatic contradictions; b) differences in the approaches to the fiqh; c) ritual differences; c) ethical inconsistency.

The area of dogma appears to be a special abstract theological discourse, but in modern Islam, as well as centuries earlier, it acquires clear political overtones, because it determines what school and accordingly, the believers of what country are to be guided, or more broadly, what center of power belongs to this or that area. That is why the debate on a number of issues and proceedings in many small, seemingly inconsequential, details is often so violent.

Thus, the central point of disagreement in the interpretation of dogma is the problem of the divine attributes. Valiullah Hazrat wrote on behalf of official Islam: "... a person can even fit in his behavior stereotype general Muslim piety, but in fact doesn't worship Allah; he worships Wahhabi trinity consisting of bodily Wahhabi deity sitting on a throne, which is fixed in the sky" (Yakupov, 2011). Thus, traditionally Salafists are charged with anthropomorphism. When one of the leaders of Salafism was asked: "Did you perceive God physically localized in the sky?", the answer was: "This is complete nonsense about the corporeality of God, words of falsehood. Salafist aquida suggests understanding Allah as he was understood by his prophet and the Salafists (early Muslims). The fundamental difference in the understanding of the attributes is the hand, the sight of Allah and His claim to the throne. For us it is clear that Allah hears and sees, but not as we do, His knowledge is also different from ours. If Allah says in the Qur'an that He created Adam with own two hands (both hands right), so it is necessary to adopt and without likening God to man and not changing anything that is written in the Qur'an, without interpreting. Sufis replace the hand of Allah by His mercy, and say - what's wrong? Then all have to rewrite the Qur'an" (Field data, Ufa, 2011); "The problem with these people is that from the beginning they have

been assimilated, they found a way out of it through the cancellation. We say that it is impossible to infinitely cancel - it is necessary to say as it is, even if it is not clear how "(Field data, Kazan, 2011). The problem started because of the interpretation of civilizational clashes of the world of Islam with other civilizations and cultures, bringing the Muslims to use logical methods and the methods of proof, and the school of Kalam appeared. Salafists deny the importance of interpretations achieved in the Kalam framework in relation to Allah and His attributes.

In general, we can say that the actual charges of anthropomorphism from traditionalists in general is unfounded, they only represent different approaches to understanding the Sacred Text: Salafists offer to abandon the later evolution of Islam in the interpretation of dogma, presented as if it was not; traditionalists accept this evolution and perceive the same problem attributes through the prism of historical development. In fact, both approaches have a right to exist, as the final decision about the "truth" of religion is not achievable in principle.

The second level of the differences between the fundamentalists and traditionalists refers to the problems of fiqh. Traditionalists accused the Salafis of the use of their unreliable Hadith reports, which do not differ significantly (Hadith Munkar, in particular); fundamentalists, in turn, accuse the traditionalists of an "overall specificity and generalization of partial", such as the explanation of dancing Sufis saying that, when Ali Abu Talib got some joyful message, he began to dance; so dance is respectively sanctioned by the most respected follower of the prophet. Besides the issue of decision making in fiqh, Salafists advocate unification of schools of thought, as in their opinion, it is a natural process of fiqh evolution.

Respondents from the Salafi suggested that schools of Islamic law emerged due to the lack of communication in the past, and now you can always call or contact via the Internet with any part of the world; so, unification of fiqh is imminent. In turn, the traditionalists say about the wisdom of ancestors who have chosen the Hanafi School of law: "For centuries, our people have walked on the Abu Hanifa madhhab, who considered essential not only the formal aspect of theology, although it was also important, but its content as well. Now we have to be trained that first of all we should blindly comply with certain formal criteria" (Batra, 2011). The Salafists criticize the traditionalists for selection of samples of what they believe Hanafi. The opponent of Salafism gave the example that Abu Hanifa had an extremely negative attitude towards those who shaved their beard and so looked like a woman, and even prohibited to communicate with such people. Nowhere in the books of Abu Hanifa it is written about the necessity of celebrating Mawlid and sending funeral feasts in honor of the deceased on 3rd, 7th, 40th days after their death. At this point, we have to go to the next level of discrepancy between the Salafists and traditionalists which is one of the levels of Muslim rites.

There are also mutual claims that have already become commonplace accusation of traditionalists in introducing innovations into the religion (*bid'ah*), such as aforementioned commemoration Mawlid, the use of amulets, the Sufi practice of *zikr*, *sama*, *Rabita*, the practice of healing the sick and so forth. With regard to all these, there is a clear Salafi adherence to "the principle of sharia, which says that everything is forbidden to be worshipped except that which is allowed, but in the worldly life everything is allowed except what is prohibited." Accordingly, the conviction of traditionalists, that Quran majlis or other forms of rituals are for the spiritual benefit of people, met hard canonical resistance. In turn, traditionalists refer to the fact that in the Hanafi fiqh, local customs (*adat*) are permitted to be used, if they do not contradict the Qur'an and Sunnah (Field data, Kazan, 2011). At the same time, the rites of remembrance of the dead, celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and others are seen, in fact, not as the canonical acts of worship (*'ibadat*), but as additional activities, during which the Qur'an is recited, preaching activity is carried out. Accordingly, all these serve to spread and strengthen Islam.

In turn, the traditionalists condemn Salafist manner of reading the prayer, such as, uttering loud Amen after the Fatiha (Marat Adzitarov: "When you stand next to them, after the word "daaliin" one hears how they take a deep breath and yell so that the glass in the Mosque rattle"), a habit to straddle while performing the prayer, wiggling index finger while pronouncing the text of the prayer (one of our seniors got so angry that he even broke a finger of his neighbor for it (Field data, Ufa, 2011)). Salafists reply that during their study abroad, insignificant differences in reading namaz in mosques, where many attendants are people from different countries, did not completely interfere with religious worship and intolerance manifested by local Muslims, at least it seems strange to happen in the mosque where people come to reach union with God (Field data, Ufa, 2011).

Another problem associated with the performance of rituals in the mosque, is the problem of Friday prayer language. Traditionalists favor the preservation and maintenance of national identity, "and although about 80% of male worshippers in the Nizhny Novgorod mosque are not the Tatars, but immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus, and all attendants speak Russian, we perform the Friday prayer both in Tatar and in Russian, so

that they should know who's at home "(Field data, Nizhny Novgorod, 2010). Most mosques in Tatarstan lead the prayer only in the Tatar language. Salafists also say that we should use the language that is understandable to most believers, "If the prayer takes place in a Tatar or Bashkir village, it is useless and harmful to lead it in Russian, no one will listen to it in Russian, but in the cities in order to bring the truth of Islam to more people it is appropriate to perform the prayer in Russian"(Field data, Ufa, 2011). Salafists are against cultivation of a sense of national pride, "there is no sense to say that a person is better because he is a Tatar or a Bashkir" (Field data, Ufa, 2011).

Mutual claims in the field of ethics make the last group of differences. Both parties are blaming each other for ignorance: "Many of the Muftis have very little knowledge of Islam, the muftis were people who just know how to read Arabic" (Field data, Ufa, 2011) vs «We all have learned for many years, whereas they adopted Islam half a year ago and now this six-month Muslim is teaching others and leads the prayer "(Field data, Ufa, 2011). There are accusations of collaboration with certain Russian or foreign power structures: "yes-men of the authorities" (Field data, Ufa, 2011) vs «All allies among the Muslim countries sharply increased their Muslim network structures to create groups within the Russian sympathizers" (Yakupov, 2011).

The traditionalists are irritated by the Salafist manner of wearing clothes, use the Arabic counterpart in place of the usual Tatar / Bashkir and Russian greetings, thanks formulas (barakallahu fikum), good wishes, and others. This is considered as "ostentatious" (Field data, Ufa, 2011), which has little in common with the acquisition of the true faith.

Salafists, for their part, criticize the practice of shaving the beard, the individual color preferences in clothing (for example, entirely red), recommend women to completely cover their faces by a hijab, arguing that in this way men feel more relaxed, and their thoughts are not diverted to women at all. In addition, the Salafists forbid playing all instruments except drums, chants, not on religious themes and dances.

4. Discussions

Issues, which found its consideration in this article, can be divided into two parts: the study of Islamic movements abroad and the study of the phenomenon of Russian Muslims (including the Muslim peoples of the Volga and Ural region).

One of the most famous scientists who dealt with the impact of globalization on the world Muslim Ummah was Olivier Roy. In 2004 he published the book «Globalized Islam: In search of New Ummah". No less important questions are put in their works by such scientists as Adeeb Khalid (2007), Charles Kurtzman (1998), John Esposito (1997), Dale Eykelman (1996), James Piscator (1996) and others. While analysing their works it is very interesting to review the implementation of particular universal laws of Muslim community development within the framework of local Islamic ideas and the struggle of various ideologies among Muslims of the Volga-Ural region. From a rather large circle of Tatarstan scientists, who devoted their works to the aforesaid problems, such authors as R.Muhametshin (2005), A.Ahunov (2013), D.Shagaviev (2014), R.Safiullina (2014), G.Guzelbaeva (2014) should be noted. The expert community of the Republic is trying to understand the situation, doing research among representatives of radical movements in order to clarify the number and severity of supporters of various groups to society.

Meanwhile, questions of spreading transnational Islamic ideologies, causes of informal leadership formation among modern Muslims, the fall of the authority of formal institutions of the Islamic clergy, remain undetermined.

5. Conclusions

Tendencies of development of the Islamic community in the Volga-Ural region are very similar to global processes. Whereas in the early 20th century, the most influential group opposing official traditionalism was Reformation modernism, in the early 21st century, fundamentalist movements in a more or less rigid form are gaining sympathy of a large part of the believers. The reasons for this may be the following: the adherents of the Reformation modernism (M.Abdo, R.Rida, M.Ikbal) believed that gradual progress and assimilation of modern science and Western technology while preserving Islamic principles in their latest interpretation, will gradually remove the issue of the Islamic world backwardness from Europe and America. However, global processes throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries have shown that the way out of the crisis is much more difficult. Underdevelopment is still not resolved, despite the assimilation of the achievements of Western science. Many Muslims are more concerned about the threat of the loss of Islamic identity, rather than the economic backwardness of their countries. In this regard, the division of society into a stranger activates a sense of identity; in this case that of Islam. It is the Salafi interpretation of Islam that offers tougher distancing from "strangers", as

opposed to liberal interpretations of Islam or local traditionalism, accustomed to operate in multi-religious, multicultural society.

A notable factor is that if the main set of ideological trends, anyway, is present in almost every part of the world where Muslims live, the state policy in relation to these groups is very, very different, ranging from the support of various forms of fundamentalism in the Gulf to their strict prohibition, as in most countries of Central Asia. The popularity of various Islamic movements is often inversely proportional to the state religious policy: the more the government supports one direction, the less popular it becomes among the population, and vice versa.

The struggle of ideologies is to some extent the struggle of geopolitical preferences. Local traditions, intertwined with Bukhara educational standards is the lot of conservatives. Cairo, Mecca and Medina are the places from where the spread of new renovation ideas take place. Attempts of the Mufti prohibition and control of students leaving abroad after the 90s of the 20th century are, as a rule, not effective due to the open borders between Russia and the Muslim countries. The only method of control is the removal of graduates of foreign schools from the positions in the religious structures. However, this is often not effective, as there is always the opportunity for the leaders to influence the Muslim community through personal contacts. Only thanks to the law enforcement agencies pursuing officially unrecognized leaders of the Muslims and their supporters, neo-traditionalism yet formally retains control of the Muslim community. The murder of the Deputy Mufti Yakupov Valiullah, most brilliant leader of modern Tatar neo-traditionalism in July 2011, and an attempt at mufti Ildus Fayzov indicate serious shortcomings in the area of state religious policy and the need for its revision.

In such cases, there may be two options: 1) stricter measures against Islamist circles, which may result in a more sophisticated underground work, and at the same time promoting their teachings; and 2) a more differentiated approach to dissent in matters of religion, support a variety of forces, providing grounds for the expression of the range of views for those movements that are in the field of Russian law.

In a democracy, the most effective way to combat radicalism in religion should be a broad public awareness campaign and openness in the sphere of state-confessional relations. And most importantly, a society should be built on the basis of justice, equality, and fraternity, there should be no corruption, authorities must adhere to the laws, and then the advocates of radical transformation of the world based on religious laws will have fewer arguments for recruiting members to their ranks.

6. Recommendations

This article may be recommended for researchers studying the development of modern Islam, Muslim societies and Islamic religious ideologies, as well as all those who are interested in the problems of religious revival in the modern world.

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