Post-Soviet jihadism

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Publication date
2018

Document Version
Final published version

License
Other

Citation for published version (APA):
Post-Soviet Jihadism

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Post-Soviet Jihadism

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex
ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op dinsdag 20 november 2018, te 10.00 uur

door
Danis Makhmutovich Garaev

geboren te Kazan, Sovjet Unie
Promotiecommissie:

Promotor: Prof. dr. M. Kemper, Universiteit van Amsterdam
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This work is part of the research programme "The Russian Language of Islam" with project number PR-12-78, which is partly financed by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).
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Introduction

Jihad (Arab.) is a commitment to the spread of Islam and securing its victory. Originally, jihad meant a war for religion ([Arab.,] ghazawat), prescribed by the Qur’an. Those who stood out in jihad are called ghazi, while those who perished are shahids, i.e. martyrs. According to Muslim belief, after their death the martyrs obtain a guaranteed place in paradise. Initially [i.e., in the 7th and 8th centuries], calls for jihad promoted the political and religious unity of the Arab tribes. In the Arab Caliphate, and later in the Ottoman sultanate and other Muslim feudal states, jihad was used for purposes of aggression [against other states] and for suppressing popular movements [in the Muslim realm]. After the October Revolution, counter-revolutionaries in Daghestan, Chechnya and Central Asia called for jihad against Soviet power. [But] already since the ninth and the tenth centuries, the concept of a spiritual jihad was promoted, encompassing a self-perfection on the path to Allah and differentiating between four types of jihad, namely the jihad of sword, of the heart, of the tongue, and of the hand. Sometimes jihad became a means of the popular struggle against the [European] colonizers (for example, in nineteenth-century Sudan, in Libya, Iraq, Iran, and Oman). In our days some religious figures explain jihad as the struggle for the progress of Muslim nations.¹

This is how jihad was defined in the 1985 Moscow edition of the Atheist Dictionary. This booklet was meant to provide basic knowledge of Islam to Soviet ideological workers, in particular in the context of the Afghan war. What we find here is a secularized interpretation that marginalizes the Islamic discourse, that is, the Islamic legal discussion on the definition and functions of jihad.² Such a Marxist understanding of jihad reveals the heritage of Soviet Orientalist discourses on Islam. In this view, Muslim resistance in Russia, against the Soviet authorities, must be seen as a counter-revolutionary activity headed by feudal oppressors, while jihad in the Middle East and North Africa camouflaged the struggle of the working masses for the liberation from European colonialism. Ultimately, this view originated in the early Soviet discourses on Islam of the 1930s, which resulted in the Stalinist assertion that

Islam is a feudal religion supporting the oppression of progress, and in later reformulations that allowed for a more positive engagement with Islam when it suits Soviet foreign interests. Clearly, this Soviet definition of jihad as a reactionary ideology, elaborated upon in the context of the USSR's war against mujahidin in Afghanistan, has little to do with the religious concepts found in the works of Islamic authors. Jihad is shown here as a global political phenomenon that has different functions in colonial settings and in socialist contexts.

This particular late Soviet understanding of jihad, and its post-Soviet transformations, is emblematic for the central quest presented in this dissertation. How are we to explain the advent of Muslim military resistance on the ruins of the Soviet empire, in a setting where the future jihadists were socialized in thoroughly Soviet, secular ways, and shaped by an understanding of Islam that they derived from Russian-language literature – like the encyclopedia for atheists from which I quoted above?

The primary goal of my dissertation is to analyze the intellectual environment that gave birth to the propaganda of jihad in post-Soviet Russia. This approach transcends the narrow realm of Islamic studies, and requires an engagement with post-Soviet cultural, literary, and political phenomena, including broader trends that at first sight have nothing to do with Islam. In particular I am interested in the methods and tools appropriated by the ideologists of jihad, i.e. the individuals who publicly articulated and actively propagated the ideas of military struggle under the banner of Islamic military resistance. This propaganda expressed itself in a body of texts that I scrutinize in my thesis, as well as in a plethora of interviews that these ideologists gave at various points to the Russian media. Here the proponents of jihad elaborated their arguments in manners that allow us to draw conclusions on their sources of inspiration. My analysis of these sources thereby has the ambition to provide a characterization of the particular nature and commonalities of a broad post-Soviet Jihadi movement in the years up to ca. 2010. In this introduction, I will introduce the topics, symbols and semantic fields covered by the Jihadist propaganda.

The central argument of this thesis is that the discourses of jihadism in Russia's North Caucasus, and their offshoots in other parts of the Russian Federation, are not just reflections of jihadi ideologies that came from abroad. I thereby provide an alternative reading to the

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mainstream explanation of jihad in Russia that we find in Russian as well as Western literature on this topic. Rather, the trajectories of Islamic activists that this thesis analyzes reveal the primacy of a distinctly post-Soviet background. Reflections of jihad came into being in a period of extreme instability in the region when old securities were eroding and new paradigms were coming up, in a complex interplay.

I argue that the post-Soviet manifestations of jihadi ideology emphasize not an embedding in global discourses but in regional (and even sub-regional) specifics: calls to jihad were dressed in the histories of particular Muslim minorities and their ethnic identities. There is thus a persistent tension between the understanding of jihadism as a common duty of the global umma, of every Muslim in the world, and particular reference points to historical identities. In this field of tension, regional jihad differs markedly from the global branding of jihad.

At the same time, in this thesis I also transgress the regional embedding by offering an extra dimension that has so far gone almost unnoticed. I argue that post-Soviet jihadism in the North Caucasus is a phenomenon that is best understood when placed in the broader cultural environment in which it emerged – namely, in relation to particular post-Soviet trends of making arguments that has shaped the public discourse not only in the North Caucasus but in the whole of Russia, and beyond. Many of these symbols, discursive tools, interpretational frameworks and dissemination strategies are shaped by the immediate Soviet past as well as by the broader trends in post-Soviet society and culture. From this perspective, the chapters of this dissertation transcend the boundaries not only of the North Caucasus but also of religion; I demonstrate that jihadism is part of a broader post-Soviet bricolage, with Islam being one potent paradigm next to many others. Next to ideological texts that reveal the well-known patterns of Soviet/Marxist thinking, the present work also studies how Russian academic writings on Islam, sometimes very similar in spirit to the atheist dictionary cited above, shape jihadist thinking; and in one chapter I go into post-Soviet popular culture to explain the attraction of jihadi songs.

**The Regional Embedding of Global Jihad**

Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, we have been used to regard jihadist atrocities as local emanations of one and the same global phenomenon. In fact, jihadi

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5 This is chapter 7 “Timur Mutsuraeva: Russophone Jihad Songs as a Post-Soviet Phenomenon”.
activities – whether they occur in Europe and Russia, in Iraq and Syria, in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, but also in Israel, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India – all use the same instruments of terrorism: targeted assassinations of policemen and army officers, the killing of innocent civilians by mass shootings and bomb attacks (often by assailants who thereby commit suicide), as well as a “highjacking industry”, either for achieving ransom or for enslaving men and women. Among the most outrageous crimes committed by jihadists are the use of airplanes and trucks to kill large groups of people; but equally appalling is the public execution of individual prisoners. In the Russian context, jihadists like Shamil Basaev are held responsible not only for targeted attacks but also for the hostage-taking of schools, hospitals and theaters in Russian cities, with each action leaving hundreds of innocent people dead.

We are also used to understand global jihadi activity as organized by extended networks and cells, with sophisticated communication to remain secret. Through the internet and mobile phones, individuals that have so far not been associated with jihadism can suddenly reveal themselves, by murderous acts commissioned by a group or movement that is located at a distance of thousands of miles.


Equally, we are accustomed to understand global jihadism as a transnational phenomenon. Islamicism seems to ignore national identities; the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has been a conscious attempt to extinguish the borders of the Arab national states that had resulted from the carving-up of the Ottoman Empire. The trans-locality of jihadism is furthermore emphasized by travelling jihadists: Arab “volunteers” who started their jihadi career in their lands of origin moved to Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, Kashmir, and other places, to relocate again once their military endeavor failed. This mobility also feeds from labor migration to Europe, or within the Muslim world. After the defeat of ISIS, Europe fears the “return” of native European Muslims who underwent military training and jihadi employment in Syria and Iraq.

Finally, we are used to regard jihadism as an ideology against the West; citizens of the United states, Israel, and EU are among the prime targets of jihadism, next to many others. At the same time most victims of jihadism are locals – ordinary Shii pilgrims who visit a shrine in Iraq at the moment it explodes; Sunnis, Alawis or Orthodox Christians who die in the Syrian war. Equally horrific is the targeted terror – including sexual violence – against locals.

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national or religious minorities, such as the Hazaras in Afghanistan\textsuperscript{24} and the Yezidis in Iraq.\textsuperscript{25} And there are also cases when jihadi groups fight each other, as reportedly in Syria, where two Sunni organizations that both originated in al-Qaida – ISIS and the so-called Nusra Front – are engaged in a war against each other.\textsuperscript{26}

While radical Islam and jihadist practice are thus definitely a global phenomenon, the ideological justification of jihad is often enrooted in thoroughly local or regional contexts. This embedding can be understood as a process of acculturation; broader ideologies need to be adapted to concrete circumstances to produce a powerful tool for mobilizing people to take up weapons. Central to this thesis is therefore the assumption that any apology of jihad has the goal of convincing a real or imagined audience of its legitimacy, necessity, and practicability; and this legitimacy is produced by portraying jihad not as something alien, “imported” from other countries, but as an instrument that is available in the ethnic and regional identities, and that corresponds to the interests of post-Soviet society. These apologies of jihad come in a language and in symbols that are accessible to these audiences; this is what I call the post-Soviet acculturation of jihad. In the first place, this acculturation includes references to the regional history of Islam – in particular, earlier experiences when Russian/Soviet oppression was successfully countered by resistance under the banner of Islam. These historical reference points in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history of the respective region provide important anchor points; they counterbalance the abstract character of jihad for the global umma. Furthermore, this historical argumentation in place of religious arguments also circumvents the problem that after 70 years of Soviet education and urbanization, the level of religious education, and arguably of belief, was low in most "Muslim" parts of the former USSR. This regional or local embedding also eases the tension between the overarching religious identity that jihadists claim to maintain, and the ethno-national identity of the society or community to which jihadism is supposed to appeal. As my thesis will explain, this produces a wide diversity of contents that ideologists proposed to fill the empty vessel of jihadism.


It is a truism that Islam is not a monolith. The variety of Islamic movements in the contemporary world ranges from traditional scholarship within the accepted frameworks of the Islamic schools of law and theology, over reformist theology, Sufi (mystical) movements, to pious movements that mobilize the lay Muslim for purposes of community-building, education, or piety. Also, there is an abundance of ways how Islam has been mobilized by individual states, and how it is introduced into government and administration. Prominent examples include Saudi Arabia (with its Wahhabi establishment of Islamic preachers and scholars), the Islamic Republic of Iran (with a highest Islamic authority standing above government and parliament), Turkey (with the Diyanet, in practice a ministry of Islam), and Bosnia (with a Mufti – the Reis-ul-ulema – presiding over the Islamic Community), but also Pakistan and Indonesia, to name but a few. In contemporary Russia, Islamic life is organized by some 80 local, regional and central Muftiates (“Spiritual Administrations of Muslims”), which often compete with each other for Islamic authority, but which ultimately all depend on recognition and money flows from the Kremlin. Also in Russia, specific interpretations of Islam are promoted as “traditional” to the nation/region in question, and thereby justified as worthy of state support; and vice versa, in all countries mentioned above, the central Islamic establishments usually support the policies of the state, whether the latter understands itself as religious or as secular.

Radical jihadism, in its regional, national, or local manifestations, thereby engages not only with the common Islamic tradition but also with the ways how Islam is identified on the spot. Radicalism is shaped by, and part of, the domestic political discourse, and directly challenges the Islamic establishment in the country of origin. Here the prime example is Osama Bin Laden, the Saudi-born organizer of internationalist terrorism who saw the toppling of the

Saudi government as his ultimate goal.\(^{35}\) This fight against what is portrayed as a manifestation of “unbelief” in a given “Muslim” country is situated into a broader geopolitical entanglement, especially if the regional regime is supported by an outside force. The intervention of non-Muslim superpowers thereby plays a significant role in elevating regional or ethnic conflicts to the level of global jihad. To take an example, when in 1978 the USSR invaded Afghanistan to support a failing socialist regime, the local opposition forces turned into \textit{mujahidin},\(^{36}\) and with the help of al-Qaida and others their struggle turned into the prime example of global Islamic militancy. Yet after the Soviet troops left Afghanistan a decade later,\(^{37}\) the various warlord regimes (including the Taliban) again relapsed into factions that emphasized the ethnic, regional, and ‘traditional’ notions of Pashtu Islam.\(^{38}\) Similar processes towards internationalization, followed by a return to regional and national interpretations of Islam, apply to the Bosnian case, where international \textit{mujahidin} played a role in one phase of the atrocious war but were subsequently severely curtailed, and marginalized by the Bosniak government.\(^{39}\)

In recent years we have seen the “franchising” of al-Qaida, with Islamist groups that emerged in particular regions (such as Libya, Mali and Nigeria) “joining” the broader conglomerate of ISIS as its new and distant “fronts”. In how far these groups are indeed connected to any center is a matter of speculation; what is obvious is that they draw their strength, and recruit the bulk of their fighters, from the particular communities where they are active. There is thus good reason for stressing the regional, sub-regional, and even local foundations for jihadism. My case study on the North Caucasus jihadists and their adepts in other parts of Russia will argue that the rhetoric of global jihad is insignificant if compared to the successful establishment of regional jihadi groups; and once this regional/local jihad is defeated, also the internationalist cover dissipates quickly.


The importance of local embeddedness in jihadi organizations is not new. The prime case is the struggle for the so-called liberation of Palestine,\textsuperscript{40} which figures prominently on the agenda of almost any Islamic movement, whether Sunni or Shii. But also jihadi hot spots like Kashmir,\textsuperscript{41} Afghanistan and the bordering areas of Pakistan,\textsuperscript{42} are maintained not only by geopolitical thinking (“Islam against the West”) but by local identities, including traditional societies that represent customary arrangements between tribal cultures and Islam, and that cannot easily be subsumed under the well-known global categories such as “Salafism” or “Wahhabism”. Even ISIS, famous for its absorption of foreign fighters, has an abundance of local and regional elements,\textsuperscript{43} not the least through the Sunni tribes in Iraq that supported it.\textsuperscript{44} The attempt to establish an Islamic state through violence must appeal to local and regional constituencies if it is meant to be durable. Islamism and jihadism must give space to distinct pre-existing identities.

As this thesis will demonstrate, the North Caucasus region (with its sub-regions of Chechnya, Dagestan, and Kabardino-Balkaria, next to others) has seen the production of a huge corpus of Islamist writings in which the global aspiration for an Islamic state, and for jihad as the only logical way towards it, has been coupled with a strong regional embedding. In fact, the North Caucasus appears as a microcosm in which several of the general and global tendencies found their reflection. In Chechnya, in the first half of the 1990s the sub-regional national separatist movement started to toy with jihadi rhetoric as a tool for military recruitment and motivation, and it is exactly this period that saw the basis of how jihad was to be enrooted in local traditions. The Chechen separatism then underwent a thorough process of Islamization, also by integrating foreign ideologists, and turned into a full-fledged jihadist movement that, in addition to the Russian forces, silenced the secular nationalists of the first hour.\textsuperscript{45} And when after a second Russian invasion, this jihadist movement was defeated by the early 2000s, Chechen concepts of jihadism spread to the neighboring republics like Dagestan and


\textsuperscript{44} “Sunni tribes in Iraq’s Anbar province pledge support to ISIL”, \textit{Aljazeera} (04.06.2015) \url{http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/6/4/sunni-tribes-in-anbar-iraq-pledge-support-to-isil.html} (last accessed 22 February 2018).

\textsuperscript{45} J. Hughes, \textit{Chechnya from Nationalism to Jihad} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
Kabardino-Balkaria, where they met with pre-existing trends of radical Islamism. Eventually, this new conglomerate renounced the fight for a national republic of the Chechens but declared, in 2007, the establishment of an Islamic state, the so-called Caucasus Emirate, that was supposed to transcend all national and ethnic boundaries and unite the whole region in a radical interpretation of Islam. It was jihadists from the neighboring republics that pressured the Chechen jihadists to make this move. As we will see, with the continuing anti-terrorist operations conducted by the Chechen and Russian Federal forces, jihadi fighters from the North Caucasus and other parts of Russia eventually turned into travelling mujahidin active in many other places of the world, including Afghanistan and, most recently, Syria. Again, the push towards global jihad comes first with the success and then with the failure of jihad at home.

‘Glocal’ Jihad in the North Caucasus

Paradoxically, also the scholars who argue for the global character of Islamism and jihadism usually start from local or regional perspectives. To take an example, in Gilles Kepel's monograph on “the trail of political Islam”, Islamism becomes a global phenomenon through the accumulation of several regional cases and their interactions and mutual influences. The regional embedding allows for the study of internal dynamics within Islamic military resistance movements, as for instance in Laurent Bonnefoy's work in the jihadist movement in Yemen. However, most studies still describe regional peculiarities in the light of an assumed global jihadist ideology.

This is also true for scholarship on jihadism in the North Caucasus. Domitilla Sagramoso explained the jihadist radicalization of the North Caucasian resistance with the impact of global Salafi jihadism, which supposedly found its way to the region through students trained in Arab countries. A similar stand is taken by Roland Dannreuther, who emphasizes

the integration of North Caucasus jihadists in transnational jihad.50 Similarly, Ben Rich and Dara Conduit point out that the Chechen resistance was exposed to the foreign Salafist framing.51 Both Sagramoso and Dannreuther do admit that the resistance emerged out of local social and political constellations, but this is just seen as the feeding ground for full-fledged international jihad. This approach is also central in Yossef Bodansky's work, who portrays Chechnya simply as “al-Qaeda's training ground”.52

One approach to tackle the interaction between the global and the local is jihadist language – a field that is taken less into consideration by political scientists but prominent in the works of scholars trained in Islamic Studies and Islamic history. Alexander Knysh, a professor of Islamic studies at the University of Michigan who received his training in Islamic and Arabic studies in Leningrad in the 1980s, pioneered this field by analyzing the articulation of Islamic terminology and Arabic loan words in the propaganda of the “Caucasus Emirate”, on the basis of the materials published on the North-Caucasus jihadist website Kavkazcenter.com, and in the speeches of some of the ideologues of this movement, such as Doku Umarov, Anzor Astemirov and Movladi Udugov.53 From this perspective, the ideology of jihadists in the Caucasus can be brought into connection with ideas first formulated systematically in the works of the Egyptian radical Islamist Sayyid Qutb (executed 1966), or of the Pakistani Abul A’la Maududi (d. 1979).

Of course, numerous similarities can be drawn between North Caucasus jihadists and protagonists of extremism elsewhere. To take an example, the ideologists of the “Caucasus Emirate” performed a break with the idea of fighting for a national state of the Chechens, and instead opted to integrate their project into the global struggle for the liberation of the Muslim community around the world. The leaders of the “Caucasus Emirate” opposed not only Russia, the federal power, but also the remaining secular Chechen nationalists. Another feature shared with global jihadis was the fierce rejection of all forms of government perceived as “Western” in nature, and the critique of Sufi groups (as propagandists of “idolatry”) who cooperated with the Russian authorities. Knysh points out that in addition to

the theme of global jihad, the North Caucasus jihadists also introduced Arab and Islamic terminology, which also brings them closer to foreign jihadists.

Modifying Knysh's point, Michael Kemper drew attention to the limited scope of Islamic terms used in the texts of terrorists, which largely serve as mere markers of the militants' discourse. A grounding in Islamic sciences was not a prerequisite in the jihadist discourse. Kemper also identified a clear influence of the Russian journalist tradition and Soviet military songs from the Second World war on the jihadist discourse in contemporary Russia. The discursive platforms of the well-known Islamists from the North Caucasus – including Umarov, Astemirov, and Udugov – will be analyzed in the first part of the present dissertation, where I juxtapose Knysh's argument by a discussion of the regional and post-Soviet frames of references, and modes of expressions, that we find in these men's jihadist writings.

North Caucasian jihadism as part of the global jihadist movement is also the central approach of the volume *Russia's Homegrown Insurgency: Jihad in the North Caucasus*, edited by Stephen S. Blank. The contributors to this volume stress the ideological similarity of North Caucasus jihadism with the international jihadist movement. For Gordon Hahn – a long-time observer of Russia's jihadist scene at the Monterey Institute for International Studies – the ideology of the “Caucasus Emirate” is similar to the Salafi “theo-ideology” advanced by al-Qaida and other groups in the global jihadi revolutionary alliance. Hahn believes that the key elements of this theo-ideology are such Islamic concepts as *tawhid* (monotheism), *takfir* (accusation of unbelief), *jihad*, and martyrdom. Gordon Hahn also describes in detail the educational, political and military ties between the leaders and ideologues of the Caucasus Emirate and the various international jihadist organizations, al-Qaida being the largest of

59 Ibid., 7.
them. Hahn also briefly mentions Said Buriatskii, in his opinion the most efficient propagandist of the Caucasus Emirate. Since Buriatskii was a convert from Buriatia, Hahn cautions that the popularity of jihadism cannot directly be reduced to a result of bad governance in the North Caucasus region; in many articles and in some monographs, he emphasizes the all-Russian dimension of North Caucasus jihadism. My thesis shares this approach; yet while Hahn largely employs a dissemination model (jihad is imported to the North Caucasus and from there radiates into other regions of Russia), my approach is to study post-Soviet jihadism as a trend that feeds from common discourses and social developments pre-existent in all regions. In addition, it should be mentioned that Hahn's approach – and that of most other observers – is predicated upon security issues, whereas my interest is with the intellectual genealogy of jihadi expressions.

However, not all authors emphasized the external sources of the ideology of North Caucasus terrorists. For example, Georgi M. Derluguian from Northwestern University (Chicago), in a 1999 article pointed out that during the first half of the 1990s, the ideology of the rebels preserved features reminiscent of socialist thinking. Derluguian compared the image of the well-known Chechen militant Shamil Basaev with that of the leader of the Cuban revolution, Che Guevara (1928-1967). In his 2005 monograph Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus, on the trajectory of the Kabardinian activist (and one-time chairman of a Pan-Caucasian organization flirting with Islamism) Musa Shanibov, Derluguian equally emphasized the significance of pre-war Soviet education and socialization of native post-soviet intelectuals, also including the ideologist of jihad Zelimkhan Yandarbiev (1952-2004). The present thesis follows this biographical approach, in order to reconstruct the context in which jihadist propaganda appeared and unfolded.

In 2011, Dmitry Shlapentokh of Indiana University identified a clear influence of Russian cultural and political traditions on Russia's jihadist movement that had so far largely gone unnoticed. Shlapentokh suggested that Russian jihadism underwent a transformation,
whereby Russian Marxism, Eurasianism and even messianic thought were influential in the first phase of the military conflict in the Caucasus, while the foreign ideas found spread only at the later stage. Shlapentokh thereby undertook a radical departure from the generalized discussions of global terrorism. His observation largely coincides with the overall argument of my thesis, in which I develop his argument further by differentiating between the various toolkits available for jihadists to enroot their ideology in post-Soviet society and culture, and by widening our discussion of the ideological strands from which the jihadists feed.

My work also follows Shlapentokh in his argument that the actual Islamization of Russian jihadism took place only on the later stage; in what follows I will exemplify this by making a differentiation between a first generation of Soviet-educated jihadi ideologists (mostly discussed in part I of this thesis) and a younger generation that had enjoyed conventional or even academic Islamic education (analyzed in part II). Building on Shlapentokh's argumentation, I add emphasis on the fact that right after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian jihadism also built upon the legacy of Soviet Orientalism and the whole range of available ideologies current in the Russian society of those days. Only later, these ideas and concepts were brought closer to the standards of the global Islamic discourse. Still, striking is that also in later jihadist writings, references to the rich Arabic-language tradition of jihadi writing is very scarce.

Another aspect of Soviet and post-Soviet influence on Russian jihadism was observed by Vladimir Bobrovnikov, a senior scholar at the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences who specializes in the history of the North Caucasus. Bobrovnikov noted that the genre of Islamic polemical documentary has been heavily influenced by the Islamic missionary tradition on the one hand and by the Soviet anti-Western and anti-Semitic connotations from the Cold War era. Moreover, the influence of (post-)Soviet popular culture is evident in the internet clips on Muslim “martyrs” such as Said Buriatskii, a central protagonist in chapter 6 of this thesis.

The Prague-based political scientists Emil Souleimanov and Ondrej Ditrych are also among those experts who have critically examined the global character of jihad in the North Caucasus. Contrary to the usual emphasis on the external factors, these authors consider the

possible role of traditional blood revenge in the motivations of young jihadists in Chechnya, those who lost close relatives in the military campaigns. However, this viewpoint also implies that there are certain national traditions that continue to define the human behavior of the mountaineers. As Vladimir Bobrovnikov has demonstrated, little is left of traditional society in the Caucasus, especially after all the modernist experiments of the Soviet era.68

Some of the internal factors in the formation of jihadism in the Caucasus have been studied by Irina Starodubrovskaià.69 Here – as well as in the studies of many other scholars – the emphasis is put on social and economic factors that drive the Muslim youth into jihadi organizations.

Also Ahmet Yarlykapov, a scholar from the region working at a major diplomatic university in Moscow, even argues that the militants in the region did not fight for the establishment of “a global caliphate” because they had no idea about what such a caliphate would stand for.70 In his studies on the politicization and radicalization of the Muslim youth, Yarlykapov hesitates to characterize the resistance either as “Salafi” or “Wahhabi”, for these terms do not appear as meaningful designations. I also share this view, since I believe that at least before the Russian jihadists discovered the global dimension of terrorism, the ideological weight of Salafism in their texts accounts to a minimum. Salafism (understood as a movement that emphasizes and idealizes the community of the first Muslim generations, al-salaf al-salih) or Islamic fundamentalism (as an approach that advocates the direct recourse to the Qur'an and the Sunna, as the two major source bodies of Islam, bypassing or rejecting the later traditions of theology, law and Sufism) are little helpful in a discourse that is rather eclectic in its use of sources. This is especially obvious if we compare the contemporary output of jihadists with the sophisticated legal discourse on jihad in the North Caucasus Arabic manuscripts composed in late Tsarist and Soviet Russia.71 Of course, “fundamentalist” approaches can be identified in almost any Muslim society, next to “traditionalist” attachment to particular schools of theology and law, and to Sufi brotherhoods. But the contemporary jihadists, while rejecting the “traditionalists” cooperating with the state, do not necessarily promote only

69 See: Istoki konflikta na Severnom Kavkaze, ed. Irina Starodubrovskaià and Denis Sokolov (Moscow: “Delo”, 2013), 277.
distinctly “fundamentalist” approaches. In my dissertation I demonstrate the flexibility in the argumentation of jihadists, and the individual character of the various projects they propose.

In this regard the observations of Adeeb Khalid are relevant. Khalid, professor at Carleton College and a leading expert on the history of modern Central Asia, argues that like al-Qaida and Hamas, also the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and several groups in Pakistan have in fact no obvious political agenda beyond taking control.\textsuperscript{72} Their ideological output does not provide a clear idea about which version of Islam they want to become dominant, at the expense of which others.\textsuperscript{73} According to Adeeb Khalid, expressions of Islam in the region are strongly shaped by the seventy years of Soviet power in Central Asia.

The Post-Soviet Embedding

Jihadists produce a growing body of jihadi writings, in which they set out their goals, strategies and methods, negotiate their hierarchies, discuss legal and theological issues of jihad, and denounce other interpretations of Islam. My research project started with the task of identifying the ways how “foreign” Islamic elements are brought into the Russian-language discourse of jihad, and how local activists employ the theological and legal apparatus of the Islamic tradition. I was therefore actively searching for “Arabism”, that is, the variant of Islamic Russian that integrates Islamic concepts, in particular through the introduction and codification of Arabic loanwords.\textsuperscript{74} Within our joint research group (“The Russian Language of Islam”, funded by the Dutch Scientific Organisation), the phenomenon of “Russism” -- that is, the enrooting of Islam in the Russian language and in Russian historical and cultural symbols – has been the central topic of another PhD project, conducted by Gulnaz Sibgatullina, who has been examining the language of Russia’s official Muftiates and of the Orthodox Church.\textsuperscript{75} This division of tasks was designed with the expectation that jihadists stress the difference to Russian culture, avoid references to Russian symbols, and therefore integrate Arabic (“alien”) elements, in forms that appear to be undiluted by the symbols and


\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 16.


expressions of their Russian and Muslim pro-Kremlin opponents. Paradoxically, in the course of my work I realized that also the jihadists embed their discourse in frameworks derived from Russian culture, and shaped by Soviet experience and education.

In whatever languages they use, jihadist manifestos employ a basic lexicon of Islam. Also in the North Caucasus, the rulers whom jihadists want to topple are described as *taghut*, “idol worshippers”; whoever does not subscribe to the jihadi ideology is accused of being a *kafir*, “unbeliever”, or at least a *munafiq*, “hypocrite”. But I soon found that the Russian jihadi texts that I studied employed only a very limited pool of such loanwords and concepts; and in fact, the authors are usually quick to explain them in plain Russian. From this I concluded that there are other mechanisms at work than just the adaptation of ready-made concepts from abroad.

The study of how jihadism is “enrooted” therefore entails an engagement with local cultures, and with local historiographies; in this thesis, this boils down to an analysis of how jihadists reference the nineteenth-century jihad in the North Caucasus, and in particular the Imamate of Imam Shamil (1797-1871, r. 1834-1859) in Daghestan and Chechnya. This historical jihad provides many opportunities to construct continuities, through which contemporary jihad is given legitimacy.

However, I also soon found out that this construction of historical legitimacy is conducted in very particular ways – namely in discursive forms that place the jihadi discourse into the fold of general post-Soviet discourses. With other words, my analysis of jihadism develops along a vertical/chronological axis that brings us into regional history, but also along a horizontal axis that requires us to situate jihadi rhetoric into broader trends of thought not only in the Caucasus but also in Russia. My horizontal axis leads us primarily not to the South, to the Middle East, but it makes us turn to the North, to Russia. In the course of this thesis, I pay particular attention to reflections of Russian culture and history, to Soviet modernity, and to post-Soviet trauma. It is in this approach that my work fundamentally differs from the existing studies of jihad and Islamism in the Caucasus. I transcend the conventional framework also by arguing that the emanations of jihadi rhetoric from the North Caucasus have a palpable appeal to non-Muslims, including Russian Orthodox Christians as well as radical left- and right-wing nationalists. North Caucasus Jihadism, seen from this perspective, is also part of a broader framework that I broadly define as “post-Soviet”. 
The Post-Soviet Context: In Search of New Ideologies

The Russian/post-Soviet background of Russia’s jihadists has so far largely escaped scholarly attention; jihadi thinking is usually depicted as just being a copy of what is offered on the market of global jihadism. It is certainly true that influences from the Middle East have increased in the course of 2000s (with the expansion of the Islamic internet and Islamic education). However, the distinctly “Russian” and post-Soviet components are still persistent; so much that even Russian intellectuals have begun to perceive the Russian Islamic “scene”, including the jihadists, as no longer completely alien to the Russian intellectual tradition.

In this part, I would like to identify those phenomena of post-Soviet cultural and intellectual life that might have shaped the ideology of Russian-language propaganda. The key historical factor here was the period of Perestroika and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In a famous article, David Chioni Moore attempted to widen the boundaries of postcolonial studies by integrating the former Soviet Union into discussion. This attempt caused a debate among the historians of the former Socialist realm on how to relate the post-Soviet to the post-colonial, and how to employ post-colonial theory to the societies that once were part of the USSR. Madina Tlostanova has provided a critique of Moore’s view by arguing that Russian scholars themselves did not elaborate a post-Soviet conceptual thinking that could match up with the creative approaches developed by scholars reflecting on the post-colonial situation in former colonies of the West.

This lack of a critical tradition of post-Soviet post-colonialism from within meant that post-colonial positions remained the field of post-Soviet authors writing from nationalist positions – while in the western/English-speaking discourse, postcolonial theory had leftist origins, and was anti-nationalist in spirit. Postcolonial thinking, inspired by the works of such left-leaning intellectuals as Michel Foucault, Frantz Omar Fanon, Jacques Derrida, Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha, focused on the critique of inequality, cultural colonialism and capitalism. As Vera Tolz has recently demonstrated, at least partially this western critique of colonialism had its intellectuals roots in the early Soviet anti-imperialist rhetoric, articulated

79 Sirotina, Giunter, “Mezhdunarodnaia konferentsia”.
by Orientalists and their “native” co-workers in the national peripheries. It is therefore not entirely surprising that the nationalist discourses of the post-Soviet realm – whether arguing from Russian, Uzbek or Chechen positions -- largely employ anti-imperialist arguments familiar from previous decades. As Shoshana Keller observed in her study of textbooks in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, the form of Soviet historical narratives largely remained the same and were simply filled by other contents.

To be sure, various national historiographies challenged the established Soviet historical framework. In particular, nationalists attacked the colonial hierarchies between the imperial center and its national peripheries. Some of these national histories received official recognition, while others, formulated by intellectuals alien to Moscow and local elites, remained marginalized. These processes were accompanied by the construction of new traditions, “realms of memory” and symbols of nations. This has much in common with how nationalists behaved in other regions of the world: it is crucial to enroot nation on a given territory. After the fall of the Soviet Union national movements emerged in most of the former national republics. In Russia, there were many such movements: Russian, Tatar, Chechen, Chuvash, Yakut, Avar and other national movements insisted that each nation has the right to self-determination and to create new state entities on behalf of the nation. If, in the case of Russian nationalism, one of the versions of this self-determination was the slogan “Russia for Russians!”, nationalist movements of other peoples of Russia voiced the ambition to create sovereign national republics - Tatarstan, Daghestan, Chechnya, Bashkortostan and many others within the Russian Federation. Some nationalist movements in the post-Soviet space led to deadly wars, such as in Chechnya, Nagorny Karabakh and Trans-Dniester. In others cases, such as Tatarstan or Bashkortostan, nationalist movements accompanied the

82 See: Natsional’nye istorii v sovetskom i postsovetskom gosudarstvakh, pod redaksiei Karl Aimermakher i Gennadii Bordiugov (Moscow: Fond Fridrikha Naumanna, AIRO-XX, 2003).
83 In terms of Michel Foucault or Thomas Abercrombie the intellectual product of the latter are a counter-memory: T. Abercrombie, Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History Among an Andean People (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Language. Counter-memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault, edited by Donald F. Bouchard (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1977).
political struggle between the elites of these republics and the federal center in Moscow, pressuring both.\(^{87}\)

In the early 1990s national republics of Russia started to declare their sovereignty with a hope to get more independence from Russia.\(^{88}\) In parallel, Islam re-entered the public space, and each national movement strove to develop also its religious wing. All this led to the rapid growth of the number of local, regional and “central” muftiates.\(^{89}\) This fragmentation of the national and religious field has been accompanied by the creation of national historical narratives from new positions.

Nationalists reinterpreted the past of the people on behalf of whom they spoke and constructed mythologies to legitimize their projects.\(^{90}\) The different versions of the past in the post-Soviet context engendered what is now called “wars of memory”.\(^{91}\) Debates about the past were of course directly related to the current political agenda and inserted into the then-contemporary ideological debate about how to respond to the political challenges that followed from the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In addition to the particularistic national/ethnic historiographies, many broader ideological projects gained ground in post-Soviet Russia, such as Neo-Eurasianism, the concept of a “Russian word” transgressing the boundaries of the Russian Federation, Pan-Slavism, monarchism, \textit{rodnovery} (Slavic neopaganism) and political Orthodoxy.\(^{92}\) These encompassing...
ideological trends can be understood as attempts to fill the ideological niche left vacant by Communism, and as new versions for restoring the greatness of the Russian state. By constructing historical myths and deconstructing the ideology of their opponents, ideologists of the abovementioned projects employ various pseudo-scientific or quasi-scientific theories to reinforce their arguments.  

The great fascination with conspiracy and quasi-scientific theories produced a new genre – folk-history – that flourished in Russia in the mid-1990s. Here amateur historians challenged the science of history by approaches that appealed to a broad public. In post-Soviet Turkmenistan, such approaches that prioritize mythology over scholarly analysis even became state dogma, and were enforced by school curricula.

The popularity of these works was an indirect result of Soviet policy toward the humanities and social sciences. The firm state control in this area of knowledge censored all works and ideas that did not follow the official Marxist-Leninist ideology, and pushed such alternative histories underground. After the end of Soviet ideological control, the Russian society obtained access to all kinds of 'alternative' literature, and lost faith also in the control mechanisms provided by the guild of historians. The rejection of Marxist paradigms and the debunking of Soviet myths during the Perestroika and the post-Soviet eras resulted in a widespread mistrust to humanities at large. As Russian journalist Stanislav Dmitrievskii once wrote, many Soviet citizens asked:

> If almost everything we had been taught by historians about Soviet power turned out to be untrue, then maybe most of what they covered in school is also a falsehood: now we could think that Tutankhamun, Ancient Rome, or Ivan the Terrible might have never existed.

In consequence, works stating the most unconventional and even scandalous content, but still pretending to argue from a scientific point of view, attracted significant popularity.

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93 One of such pseudo-scientific approaches, for example, the theory of passionarity of Lev Gumilev.
96 D. Volodikhin, “Fenomen folk-histori”.
99 Stanislav Dmitrievskii, “Kuda idut mastera folk-khistory? Chast’ 1”.
Here we should mention the observation of the Russian-American historian and linguist Mark Lipovetsky, who argued that the post-Soviet liberal movement was shaped by the special discourse of engineering-technical workers (ITR-discourse). The fact that democratic transformations in Russia were designed and implemented mainly by the scientific and technical intelligentsia, who sometimes took a skeptical view of the humanities, added to the popularity of works that revised many provisions of the historical sciences.

If we want to employ the terminology of French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, the new large projects in post-Soviet Russia can be called meta-narratives. These large projects seem to function as ersatz-ideologies that are meant to unite the people and give them great goals. While Lyotard wrote about the failure of such large projects in the Western world, the post-Soviet society was strongly shaped by popular ideologies competing with each other, each seeking to establish a unifying belief system in opposition to postmodern diversity. The state authority either used one or the other ideology depending on the situation, or ignored or even banned some of them.

Disappointment with the Soviet ideological system and disorientation on the new market of political and religious ideas also provoked a counter-trend, namely a new quest for sincerity, which scholars of Russian literature understand as a bulwark against the encroaching postmodern situation. This “new sincerity” movement expresses dissatisfaction with postmodernist irony, with the feeling that every idea is just an “imitation”, and with the perception that “everything is relative”. This sincerity is meant to bring about a return to real humanity, and to bring texts closer to the actual living situation of the reader, to “reality”. “New sincerity” is not an ideological trend, but a widely-shared rejection of the postmodern relativity game.

The paradox of the post-Soviet situation is that, in the end, this struggle for large ideological projects as well as for sincerity and honesty is itself part of the post-industrial pluralization

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100 M. Lipovetsky, “The Poetics of ITR Discourse: in the 1960s and Today”.
where the ideological field is a market for a huge number of large projects. In that situation, the average person or even the state authority can either easily change their ideological preferences moving from one ideology to another or even combine different ideas – for example, by considering oneself an Orthodox atheist or a left-wing Islamist. This ambiguity, in particular, of the contemporary Russian political system is also expressed by political scientists who emphasize the ambiguities in the Russian political system, be that Richard Sakwa’s concept of a “Dual State” (in which the constitutional order is constantly undermined by the actual practice of the prerogative regime), or Oksana Shevel’s claim that the Russian federation’s nationality policy is “purposefully ambiguous”, with civic and ethnic concepts maintained in parallel.

It is against this background of experiences of ambiguity, relativity, fluidity, and of the search for “sincerity”, that I analyze the output of jihadi ideologists. I argue that the broad array of ideological constructs and of (pseudo-) scientific approaches feeds into the discourse on jihad, and results in a surprising scope of possible combinations. These jihadi products can easily be related back to the broader phenomena of which they form part.

**Method and Design of the Thesis**

The methodological toolkit of this thesis is pretty conventional. I attempt at tracing the genealogy of Islamist thinking over roughly fifteen years – for the North Caucasus, particular troubling years, with two major wars and continuing waves of violence – by analyzing the arguments that Islamists made in their propaganda: in journal articles, books, blogs, video productions, and even songs. This analysis is accompanied by the study of the available “literature” on the subject. I put this term into quotation marks because on most of the protagonists, there is almost no academic literature to speak of; rather, what we have at our disposal are news reports, opinion pieces, and interviews, all of which provide some background information. These items need to be read with caution; authors might not disclose their sources, and many news items are tainted by political views. To put it bluntly, most of what has been written on Russia’s jihadism is in one way or another partisan, and must be linked back to the position of the author in the broader field. One major source that any expert

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and observer uses is the propaganda industry of the Islamists themselves, the most well-known digital archive being the accumulated items at kavkazcenter.org, the news agency of the so-called “Caucasus Emirate” terrorist organization, and similar sites. Naturally, also the official Russian sources on jihadism need to be read with caution; and finally, the writings of Russian and Western scholars need to be understood as products of an environment that equally operates under certain political pressures, from positions shaped by the Sovietological Cold War tradition of scholarship, and with a limited access to reliable information.

Given these limitations, the ambition of this thesis cannot be to give a trustful record of the emergence and development of jihadism. The purpose of this work is to not collect facts; rather, my thesis has the goal to delineate, and then to characterize, a discourse of propaganda. Propaganda is here defined in broad terms, as a systematic and conscious manipulation of selected images and narratives that are supposed to have an effect on a target audience, in issues of power relations. As to the techniques of propaganda dissemination, the period under investigation marks a shift from the use of pamphlets and books to the active use of electronic media.

My arguments about images, symbolical languages, perceptions, and specific reference points come out of the texts of the protagonists, in the form that the latter shaped their public appearances. In other words, I study jihadism as a text corpus, with an eye to how constructs are shaped by a broader post-Soviet condition.

I concentrated on what methods protagonists of jihadism have employed, what made their texts understandable and comprehensible to a potential audience. Intertextuality therefore has central stage. I tried to identify the ideas and the concepts, texts and references that informed and united this jihadist discourse. Equally, my goal is not to classify the protagonists of jihadism into externally-imposed categories, such as “Salafism” or “Wahhabism”; rather, my analysis starts with the actual reference points mentioned in the texts. I thereby follow Norman Fairclough, who pointed out that any text relies on the elements and discourses of previous texts. Equally, Louise Phillips and Marianne Jorgensen established that one cannot avoid using words and phrases that were formerly used by others. The object of discourse analysis is the interaction of different texts. My focus on intertextuality allows me to uncover

the intellectual roots of this ideology, to discover the sources that supplied the jihadist propaganda in the post-Soviet North Caucasus with ammunition.

To reconstruct the context in which ideas were formed and spread I follow the life paths of the jihadist writers. I start from assumption that jihadists who participated in the military actions could easily use the texts of like-minded jihadists in the region and beyond. Special attention is to be paid to the non-Muslim sources of inspiration, from the Russian literary tradition and the cultural sphere more broadly defined. In the end I hope to arrive at a general qualification of the interconnectedness and flexibility that characterized the jihadist writing in Russia.

A text analysis is always based on a selection process: which Islamists/jihadists should be studied, and which of their statements should my analysis focus on? To arrive a representative picture I selected authors active in different stages of the confrontation in the North Caucasus, and personalities with various educational and professional experiences. Eventually, my corpus covers most of the best-known jihadist/terrorists, in addition to some others whose work is less-known in the West, but who represent additional facets of legitimizing and “enrooting” jihad.

The first task that I set myself has been to investigate these divergent paths, to document the individual trajectories (as expressed in the available materials), and to analyze the writings produced by jihadists against these personal backgrounds; each chapter is therefore composed of sections that trace individual lives that culminated in jihad (and in almost all cases, to the death also of the protagonist). These chapters are organized chronologically; I start with the famous ideologists of the Chechen separatist movements and their embrace of Islam as an overarching ideology, and then move on to neighboring Daghestan, where we observe a similar fusion of Islamic and non-Islamic elements into a powerful discourse of jihadism. Two more cases deal with Islamic ideologists who were born and raised not in the North Caucasus but in other parts of the Russian Federation.

At the same time these individual sketches are organized in a manner that is supposed to systematically enlarge our understanding of the strategies, reference points, symbolic languages, and technicalities of the Russophone jihadist discourse propaganda. All chapters thereby contribute to the tentative elaboration of a common but distinct profile of jihadism in Russia, which I present in the Conclusion of this thesis.
In the first part of this study the reader will find some well-known names, in particular the first president of Ichkeria, Dzhokhar Dudaev (1944-1996); his successor Zelimkhan Yandarbiev (1952-2004); as well as Movladi Udugov (b. 1962), the creator of Kavkazcenter, and Shamil Basaev (1965-2006), who for many years was Russia's most-wanted terrorist. These men all belonged to what I call the first generation of Chechen Islamists; individually and as a group, they shaped the emergence of a modern discourse that enrooted jihad in Chechnya and the North Caucasus. These are the most well-known figures of the movement in their time, and they all were avid writers who experimented with practical and theoretical justifications of jihad. These jihadi ideologists of the first generation are dealt with in the three chapters that form the first part of this thesis.

The second part of the present work mainly focuses on a younger cohort of actors that, I argue, brought about important changes and innovations in the discourse of the propaganda of jihad. For neighboring Daghestan, my analysis starts with Nadirshakh Khachilaev (1958-2003), who – like Dudaev, Udugov and other Chechens of the first generation oscillated between politics and militancy. The chapters of this second part of the book then analyze in more detail the life and works of Iasin Rasulov (1975-2006), who received notorious fame as the ideologist of the Daghestani “Sharia” movement; Anzor Astemirov (1976-2010), leader of the Kabardino-Balkarian jama'at (Islamic community), and subsequently Sharia judge of the “Caucasus Emirate”; Said Buriatskii (Aleksandr Tikhomirov, 1982-2010), probably the most prominent speaker of the Caucasus Emirate; as well as the jihadi singer/songwriter Timur Mutsuraev (b. 1976), who still has a significant fan community in Russia. The final chapter presents Airat Vakhitov (b. 1977), a Tatar Islamist whose jihadist career brought him to Chechnya, Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, and Turkey; Vakhitov is also the only person whom I had the occasion to interview. All of these men gained utmost prominence in Russia, by their writings and their actions. They all actively participated in military actions and contributed to the spread of violent ideologies.

Finally, a last statement of caution is in place. Unlike the dominant discourse on jihadism from the security viewpoint, the approach taken in this thesis might be seen as a dangerously slippery path leading to a romanticization of jihad warrior culture. Such romanticism is absolutely not in place – we are talking about terrorists. To include jihadi literature into the field of Russian or post-Soviet political and popular culture may not render these texts harmless.
Part I: The Chechen Genealogy of Russian Jihadism

In 1990, the National Congress of the Chechen People (NCChP) was established which set the goal of having Chechnya either gain the status of USSR union republic, or secede from the USSR as an independent Chechen state.

The Chechen Republic Nokhchicho was proclaimed at the second session of the NCChP on June 8, 1991. The management of the NCChP toppled the Soviet leadership of the Chechen Republic and seized all the Soviet Army weapons that remained in the Republic.

While not being recognized by the international community as of 1991, this Republic was not controlled by the Russian authorities. Not only did Chechnya have such trappings of an independent state like a flag, emblem and anthem, but also a president, government, parliament, all not subordinate to the Russian authorities, and its own constitution according to which Chechnya was called “an independent and secular state”. Former General of the Soviet Air Force Dzhokhar Dudaev headed Chechnya.

Introduction

The history of Russian-language jihadist ideology begins in the mid-1990s, when future jihadist leaders started to create a body of texts, in which jihad stood central.

Since I am interested in the ideological origins of Russian jihadism, I consider it important to understand what intellectual tradition influenced the ideology when the confrontation in the North Caucasus began. In this chapter, I will focus on analyzing the views of ideologists and leaders of the unrecognized Chechen republic of Ichkeria in the 1990s. The main focus will be on texts and statements by Zelimkhan Yandarbiev and Movladi Udugov, who triggered the so-called Islamic turn of the Chechen resistance of the 1990s. Equally important is the ideological contribution by the first president of Ichkeria, Dzhokhar Dudaev, who was the leader of Chechen resistance in the First Chechen War (1994-1996) and under whose guidance the Chechen Muftiate declared jihad to Russia in 1995. Particular attention will be paid to the terms used by Yandarbiev and Udugov, to the authors, examples and ideas they...

refer to. In addition, I am interested in the biographies of these leaders and ideologists, in particular, what kind of education they received, and to their career experience in the Soviet pre-war period. Focusing on the texts and biographies of these ideologists will allow us to better understand the historical and ideological context in which Russian-language jihadism was born.
Despite the fact that jihad is an Islamic concept, the roots of Russian-language jihadist ideology trace back far beyond the Islamic field. A striking example is the work of Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, one of the first ideologists of Chechen fighters, who in the mid-1990s supported the so-called Islamist turn of the North Caucasus resistance. In this chapter, I suggest to look not only at the way he justified jihad, but also at other unifying ideological constructions, that Yandarbiev promoted before he began to promulgate jihad. In this chapter, I will trace the progress of his views from nationalism to the search for ideas, with more encompassing ideologies that would potentially unite the whole region of the North Caucasus, in particular, his experimenting with what he called the idea of Caucasianness. I am equally interested in how he interpreted Eurasianess and Europeanness, his analysis of the Russian and Chechen societies and the specific features of the way he interpreted global jihad.

Yandarbiev (born in 1952 in Vydrika, Kazakhstan) belongs to the generation of Chechen leaders who were born during the Chechens' Central Asian exile, into which Stalin had forced the whole Chechen and Ingush populations in 1944.109 Yet he also belongs to those who after

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return, in spite of all resentments on both sides, made a considerable career in the Soviet system; this successful integration into late-Soviet professional elites Yandarbiev shared with Dzhokhar Dudaev\(^{110}\) (born in 1944 in Chechnya, shortly before the deportation of his nation) and Aslan Maskhadov\(^{111}\) (b. 1951 in Karaganda, Kazakhstan), who both made respectable careers in the Soviet Army.

Also Yandarbiev first completed his army service but then went on to study at the Faculty of Philology of the Chechen-Ingush State University, from which he graduated in 1981. By that time he must have joined the Party; in 1985-1987, Yandarbiev was already the chairman of the Fiction section in the Propaganda Committee of the Writers' Union of the USSR. Here he might have gained his first experience in ideological work. In 1986, he was appointed chief editor of the children's magazine *Raduga* (“Rainbow”), which made him more familiar with practical editing and distribution techniques. In 1987, he took Higher Literary Courses at the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow.

These specialized literary courses were organized since 1953 for writers and poets from different regions of the Soviet Union who already had higher education. The famous Soviet writers Chingiz Aitmatov (1928-2008), Viktor Astaf’ev (1924-2001) and Oles Honchar (1918-1995) studied at these courses.\(^{112}\)

As Perestroika unfolded Yandarbiev got involved in the political and social life of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, becoming (in 1989) the chairman of the political organization of the Chechen society *Bart* (“Consent”) as well as the leader of the Vainakh Democratic Party (in 1990).

He was a close associate of Chechnya/Ichkeria's first president Dzhokhar Dudaev, and after the latter's violent death in 1996 became his interim successor as president (1996-1997). Shortly after the Khasaviurt agreements in August 1996 that provided for the exit of Russian soldiers from Chechnya, and for Russian payments for reconstruction, Yandarbiev signed a decree on the dismantling of secular courts in Chechnya, and on their replacement by Shari’a

\(^{110}\) Dzhokhar Dudaev (1944 – 1996) was a Soviet Air Force general and Chechen leader, the first President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, a breakaway state in the North Caucasus. For more about Dudaev, see chapter 2, “‘Russism’ and the Islamization of the Chechen Resistance: Dzhokhar Dudaev”.

\(^{111}\) Aslan Maskhadov (1951-2005) was a leader of the Chechen independence movement and the third President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

At the same time Yandarbiev invited the most popular radical Salafi preacher in the North Caucasus, Muhammad Bagautdin (Kebedov, b. 1945), from Daghestan to Chechnya. Apparently Yandarbiev expected from Bagautdin support for the Islamisation of Chechen society.

In 1997, after he lost the presidential election, he ceded the president’s place to Aslan Maskhadov, a former colonel of the Russian army. Yandarbiev struck up a friendship with famous field commanders Salman Raduev and Shamil Basaev, who represented the radical wing of Chechen fighters. Yandarbiev was considered as one of the ideologists of the Islamic invasion into Dagestan in August 1999 which led to the Second Chechen War.

Yandarbiev criticized Aslan Maskhadov for his mildness in relations with Russia. The president of Ichkeria then appointed Yandarbiev as Ichkeria’s plenipotentiary representative in Muslim countries. For several years he lived in the Middle East, particularly in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, and strove to get political support for Ichkeria from the states of this region. On February 13, 2004, Yandarbiev was killed in a car bomb attack in the capital of Qatar.


Yandarbiev was not only a political leader but also published several works on the Chechen and the Islamic resistance; these include such books as “Checheniia: the battle for freedom” (Checheniia – bitva za svobodu, 1996), “Jihad and the problems of the modern world” (Dzhikhad i problemy sovremennogo mira, 2000), as well as “Whose Caliphate?” (Chei Khalifat?, 2001). Equally, he published a series of poetry collections. All of these works are

113 J. Hughes, Chechnya from Nationalism to Jihad, 99-100; The process of the Islamization of law in Chechenia was prepared under Dudaev: V. Bobrovnikov, “Shariatskie sudy i pravovoi pluralism v sovetskom Dagestane,” in: Etnografcheskoe obozrenie, 3 (2001), 77-91.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
composed in the Russian language; written over the span of several years, they provide some insight into the development of his thought in this crucial period.

Yandarbiev’s “Chechenia: the battle for freedom” was published in Lviv (Ukraine) in 1996, and accompanied with a foreword by Ukrainian journalist Marya Bazelyuk. In this work Yandarbiev collected his articles and texts that he had published from 1990 to 1996. These texts describe the history behind the formation of the Chechen political resistance and the military rebellion in the North Caucasus, and also reflect his attitude to a variety of issues that were relevant for the North Caucasus at the time. These texts show the evolution of Zelimkhan Yandarbiev’s views, and demonstrate his experimenting with different ways of radical ideological rhetoric for expressing the protest that gained momentum in the North Caucasus since the early 1990s. The Islamist and jihadist framework was only one of several options, but it turned out to be the most effective in its practical implementation.

The book starts with the following passage from a poem called “Jihad in Chechenia” (Dzhikhad v Chechenii), which was written, apparently in the first half of the 1990s, by the Chechen poet Alvadi Shaikhiev120 (b. 1947):

There is jihad in Chechenia.  
Year after year  
My every day becomes  
a shahid ...  
Rusnia is like a Goliath, but my people  
Appear to me like a militant David.  
And David defeated Goliath  
A fact clearly confirmed  
by the Qur’an ...  
Rusnia shall not suppress my Chechnya  
Nor shall they ever shackle it up in their evil designs!121

Since an epigraph is designed to lay the groundwork for the perception of the subsequent text, it is important to note that Yandarbiev chose a jihadist motive for a book that described the events of the first half of the 1990s, that is, when jihad was not yet dominant in the Chechen


121 “V Chechenii – Dzhikhad // Iz goda v god // Moi kazhdyi den’ stanovitsia Shakhidom... // Rusnia kak Goliaf, a moi narod // Mne viditsia vojnistvennym Davidom // A Goliafa pobediil David // Chto chetko podtverzdaetsia Koranom... // Rusne moiu Chechniu ne zadavit’ // I ne skovat’ svoim kovarnym planom!”.
resistance. In fact, 1996 was the very year of the turn to jihad in the armed resistance, under Yandarbiev’s leadership. I therefore argue that in his 1996 book Yandarbiev depicted the first stage of the Chechen resistance already from the jihadist point of view that he adopted only at the end of that very stage.

In that poem, key words are Islamic -- *jihad, shahid,* and the Qur’an; these terms help Yandarbiev to emphasize the Islamic spirit of the Chechen resistance to Russia. *Rusnia* is a disparaging term for *Rossiia.* The epigraph also introduces the unconventional form “Checheniia”, which Yandarbiev employs throughout the book in place of the common Russian form *Chechnia.* He might have felt that Chechen society perceived *Chechnia* as an offensive abbreviation of *Checheniia.* In fact, this matter was once fervently discussed on a Chechen youth Internet forum, where the initiator of the discussion argued that “referring to Checheniia as Chechnia is like calling Ossetia Osetnia, Ingushetia - Ingushnia, Yakutia – Yakutnia, and Russia – Rusnia”.122 The same Internet forum also had people saying that no one less than Dzhokhar Dudaev said that it was grammatically more accurate to say *Checheniia* or *Chechenistan,* as this sounded more noble.123

The metaphor about Goliath and David is noteworthy. The well-known biblical legend has it that Goliath was a great Philistine warrior, a giant clad in heavy military armor; still, he was slain by David, a young man with a pile of rubble and a sling for throwing stones. Obviously, Yandarbiev and other ideologists among the Chechen rebels saw Chechnya in an unequal battle, all on its own against an overwhelming enemy. This framing indicates that in the mid-1990s, Yandarbiev portrayed the Chechens’ fight as a jihad between a small Chechen people and the great Russian empire – that is, not in any broader global framework.

The epigraph that Yandarbiev chose for his collected articles is not only religious; rather it reflects the mixed ideology of the Chechen armed resistance of the 1990s. Yandarbiev resorted to nationalist rhetoric at the beginning of the 1990s, but he also was in quest of other forms of ideological opposition to Moscow. Even when he turned to Islamic terms and arguments, the way he used them was quite superficial. The language he employed, the authorities he referred to, as well as his logic of speech, is inscribed in the post-Soviet context. This will be illustrated below.

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122 Unfortunately, at the moment the page is unavailable. Initially, the page was located at: [http://www.d1alac.com/forum/showthread.php?t=31035](http://www.d1alac.com/forum/showthread.php?t=31035).

123 Chechenistan is a neologism that has no historical tradition of usage; it seems to indicate aspirations for the same kind of sovereignty that was achieved by Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and other --stans (and also Tatarstan gained considerable autonomy in the early 1990s).
Between Nationalism and Regionalism

In the early 1990s, when Yandarbiev was the leader of the Vainakh Democratic Party, he acted as a Chechen national leader and used nationalist arguments to urge Chechens to political unity. At that time, he criticized the Soviet regime as being colonial, and accused Moscow of barring the Chechen people from the global decolonization processes.

In his 1991 article “The essence and aspects of national unity” (included in his 1996 volume) Yandarbiev sought to prove that there was a large gap between the Soviet power and the interests of the Chechen and other peoples of the USSR. One of his key witnesses here was the Soviet dissident writer Aleksander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), who, in his artistic and historical work “The Gulag Archipelago”, argued that the Soviet regime was not accepted by the spirit of the people (dukh naroda). According to Yandarbiev, the deportation of Chechens to Central Asia as well as the painful enforcement of communist rule in the North Caucasus in the 1920s and 1930s made the Chechens divide things into “ours” and “not ours (theirs), state-owned, perceived as nobody’s”. This view of failed Soviet nationality and development policies in Chechnya largely coincides with the perspective that most outside observers and historians adhere to; especially the period of enforced exile (1944-1957) torpedoed any Soviet attempt at educating a loyal national elite.

Solzhenitsyn was not the only author of relevance in the post-Soviet period whom Yandarbiev referred to. His other point of reference was Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov (1908-1997), a Chechen politician who escaped from Bolshevik Russia to the US and made a career as a staunchly anti-Soviet political scientist, known for his monograph on the structure of the Communist Party apparatus. Starting in the late 1980s, Avtorkhanov's writings (which were banned in the USSR) began circulating also in Chechnya and beyond. Yandarbiev referred to him when justifying his thesis that the departments of the CPSU in the national republics of

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126 Ibid., 91.
127 Ibid., 96.
the USSR did not fight for the rights and interests of the peoples that they formally represented.\textsuperscript{132} He also quoted the Italian journalist, historian and socialist Giuseppe Boffa (1923-1998)\textsuperscript{133} who was equally considered anti-Soviet, and whose book “The History of the Soviet Union”\textsuperscript{134} appeared in Russian translation when Perestroika had come. Yandarbiev used Boffa’s work to prove that the establishment and development of Soviet power brought the country into political and economic crisis; all this taken together forces people to fight for their rights and change the “social environment in which they have to act.”\textsuperscript{135}

To conclude, with his abundant quoting of formerly banned authors, with his sharp criticism of Soviet politics, and with his call for active participation in the political life of the Soviet Union, Yandarbiev’s 1991 article appears as a typical product of the Perestroika era. Despite the nationalist rhetoric of the early 1990s, Zelimkhan Yandarbiev attempted to find a wider ideological platform for resistance to Moscow.

The Soviet imprint is also legible in Yandarbiev’s ideas about an all-Caucasian political integration. He outlined this idea in more detail in 1990 in an article with the self-explanatory title of “Caucasianness” (\textit{Kavkazskost’}).\textsuperscript{136} By that time he was already chairman of the political organization of the Chechen society \textit{Bart} (“Consent”) and leader of the Vainakh Democratic Party.

Yandarbiev criticized the views of the Bolsheviks, for whom the national problems in the USSR resulted from the struggle of the half-savage peoples of the Caucasus against communist ideals. In his mind’s eye, this resistance was the natural outcome of the Bolsheviks’ forcing the Caucasian peoples into the Russians’ system of historical development. Revolutions and the modern way of life alienated the Chechens.

Despite the fact that Yandarbiev claimed he did not believe in the Stalinist-Leninist dogmas of the inevitable merging of nations,\textsuperscript{137} he referred to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s (d. 1831) “Philosophy of the Spirit” to prove that there was one such community: the Caucasian race, which would serve as the basis of the Caucasian community. In the view of the German

\begin{footnotesize}
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    \item Z. Yandarbiev, “Sut’ i aspekty natsional’nogo edinstva”, 96-97.
    \item Ibid., 98.
    \item Ibid., 94.
    \item Ibid., 70.
    \item Ibid., 100.
\end{itemize}
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idealist philosopher, the history of this race was the very history of the Caucasus. Hegel thus supported Yandarbiev’s argument that it was the Caucasian race whose human spirit reached self-determination and ensured the progress of world history. Needless to say, Hegel’s works (in Marxist interpretations) belonged to the classical curriculum of Soviet higher education. The term “Caucasian race”, which Hegel uses in this book, seems to be borrowed from Friedrich Blumenbach, German biologist and anthropologist of the 18th century, who believed that the ancestral home of modern Europeans was the Caucasus – hence the usage (still common in the United States) to classify citizens of white European ancestry as “Caucasians”. Accordingly, there can be no doubt that when Hegel wrote about “Caucasians” he actually meant “Europeans”, not people living in the Caucasus. Whether by mistake or consciously, Yandarbiev took Hegel by the letter to support his own call for uniting the Caucasus.

In addition to the term “Caucasian race” (Кавказская раса), Yandarbiev employed the term “Caucasianness” (Кавказскость) as the major quality of the peoples of the region; for him, this term comprises collective and personal independence and the concentrated expression of the spirit of freedom. Yandarbiev wrote that Caucasianness is the result of the fact that “Europe and Asia, the West and the East, had an ethnic clash in the Caucasus”. That is why the Russian Empire – which Yandarbiev equally described as Eurasian in character – understood the significance of owning the Caucasus, and did everything to prevent the peoples of the region from uniting against Russia, including by fueling inter-ethnic conflicts.

Yandarbiev politicized the concept of Caucasianness as he considered it the basis for uniting all nations into a single Caucasian state:

Any further actions should be aimed at establishing the political, economic and cultural structures of this unity. One should identify the factors contributing to unity and the factors that ruin that unity. Particular attention should be paid to the religious factor as it can be unifying and dividing. But since the empire uses [the religious factor] for pitting the Muslims against the Christians, [emphasizing religion] does not mean that one religion should be prioritized [over another]; rather, it is the potential of religions that has to be merged, and this can only be achieved through the idea of Caucasianness.

I am a Caucasian (kavkazets). That is the position of any patriot of Caucasian nationality these days, and this defines their political priorities, their slogans and ideological support. Caucasianess is our nationality in our struggle for national liberation. After we have liberated the Caucasus, we shall go back to being Azerbaijanis, Abkhazians, Georgians, Armenians, Ossetians, Abaza [i.e., Abkhaz], Ingushs and Chechens, the peoples of Daghestan and even Cossacks. Either [this will happen this way] or we will never get there. The alternative of Caucasianness are the assimilated, faceless masses of the peoples of the communist empire. I choose CAUCASIANNESS.  

With hindsight, one cannot be but astonished by Yandarbiev’s call for the unification of all Caucasian peoples regardless of their religious affiliation, and by his argument for the equality of the religions that the Caucasus nations adhere to. A few years after this statement, he became known as a strong protagonist of Chechen particularistic nationalism (even excluding the formerly “fraternal” Ingush, who split from Checheno-Ingushetia in 1992), and then as a fervent Islamist. In the 1990s Yandarbiev called for exploiting the potential of these religions to create an all-Caucasian unity, what he proposed was not a religious state. One could not call this idea completely secular either, but the role he ascribed to religions was still secondary to the fundamental Caucasian identity. The internal contradictions of this construction are apparent; on the one hand he described the all-Caucasian community as a race, and thus “biologized” the national identity concept (in a way that had been absolutely taboo in Soviet times). On the other hand, what he proposed in practice was a nation as co-citizenship of people from different nationalities living within a single political entity that would be the Caucasus State. Throughout the article, Yandarbiev’s Caucasianness remains ambivalent: in the beginning of the article, he said that Caucasianness was simply a quality (or feature); near the end of his paper he called it a nationality (natsional’nost’) to which all peoples living in the Caucasus, even the Russian Cossacks, belonged. It seems that Yandarbiev was just looking for a broader ideological platform for resistance against Moscow; what counted for him was the potential for political mobilization. Yandarbiev's argumentation reflected the popular discussions about the possibilities of consolidating the peoples of the Caucasus, which in 1989 resulted in the establishment of a

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platform that called itself the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus.\textsuperscript{141} Valerii Tishkov (director of the Institute of Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (between 1989 and 2015), and in 1992 minister for nationalities in Yeltsin's government) claims that Yandarbiev was one of the foremost ideologists of this Confederation.\textsuperscript{142} In Yandarbiev's article, the very existence of the call, and its emotional power, was more important than conceptual clarity. To give an example, he does not clarify the role of the economy, politics and culture that he claims are so important uniting factors; nor does he say anything specific about the role of Islam and Christianity. Obviously, any deeper reflection would just complicate the matter. Equally avoided is any reflection on the long-standing antagonisms between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis, or between the Ingush and the Ossetians – conflicts that turned into open warfare while Yandarbiev formulated his unity project.\textsuperscript{143}

In many respects this article is reminiscent of the Soviet ideological clichés that Yandarbiev claims to debunk. In particular, his argument that the true development of peoples was only possible through a larger supranational political entity reminds of Soviet internationalism, and of the Soviet Union as a multi-ethnic project that safeguards development, promotes internal peace and stability, and defends its national entities from external threats. Equally similar to Soviet logics and language is the insistence on the external enemy who has used all kinds of tricks to divide and split the peoples, with the goal to destroy that unity, provoking interethnic and interreligious conflicts among these nations in order to colonize them. Equally Soviet is that Yandarbiev's insistence of the power of religion is not accompanied by any attempt to understand the attraction of religion, that is, religion as a faith system; Soviet political scientists at that time largely saw religion (and in particular Islam) as an empty bucket that can be filled with any political ideology, from which they drew the conclusion that also the USSR can use the religious factor in its foreign policy (for example with regard to Iran and

\textsuperscript{141} About the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus: G. Derluguian, \textit{Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus} \textsuperscript{”}.

\textsuperscript{142} V. Tishkov, \textit{Obshchestvo v vooruzhennom konflikte (etnografiia chechenskoi voiny)} (Moscow: Nauka, 2001), 466.

\textsuperscript{143} On the complex conflicts in both the South and the North Caucasus, for example, see: F. Coene, \textit{The Caucasus - An Introduction} (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); J. Rau, \textit{The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan} (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Köster, 2008).
Afghanistan). Hence while the goal was new and anti-Soviet, it was expressed in the general Soviet paradigms.

At the same time one can say that regardless of the fact that Yandarbiev was a representative of a national movement at that time, from the very start of his political activism outside of the Soviet apparatus he continued to be interested in supra-national projects that are wider, geographically and ideologically, than particularistic ethno-nationalism. It is also against this background that we have to assess the fact that six years later, he adopted another platform to unite the peoples of the Caucasus – internationalist Islamism, which, by the mid-1990s, had the advantage that its ideological foundation had already been developed by others, and just needed to be adapted to the realities of the Caucasus.

**Images of Russia: Eurasianness of Russia versus Chechen Europeanness**

In the same year of 1990 Yandarbiev also experimented with Eurasianism – another concept that is simply posed next to the others. The concept of Eurasianism goes back to the famous Eurasianists-in-exile of the early 20th century, as well as to Lev Gumilev's theory of passionarity (on which the reader will find more in the chapter 6 on Said Buriatskii). In contemporary Russia, Eurasianism is firmly linked to the name of Aleksandr Dugin (b. 1962), the well-known Russian philosopher whose intellectual career started with occultism and fascism. Many other intellectuals and public ideologists have jumped on this train and popularized Eurasianism in various forms; the result is that it has become a mainstream trend in the Russian discourse on geopolitics and national identity. At the same time also Turkish and Muslim thinkers have embraced Eurasianism, and gave it their coloring and contents. In Kazakhstan, Eurasianism is almost a state dogma, and stands for the country's intermediate function between East and West.

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147 On early Eurasianism, Lev Gumilev, Aleksandr Dugin, Turkish and Kazakhstani Eurasianism, see: *Between Europe and Asia: The Origins, Theories and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism*, edited by Mark Bassin, Sergey Glebov and Marlene Laruelle (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015); M. Laruelle, *Russian
Yandarbiev's experiments with Eurasianess (evraziistvo) are somewhat special. In 1990 he published an article “Eurasianess, or thoughts on the occasion of...” (equally republished in his “Chechenia - the battle for freedom”), in which Yandarbiev tries to build bridges between the Islamic values of the Chechens and European liberal values in opposition to Russian Eurasianess. The paradox here is that while in his article on Caucasianness – from the same year – he glorifies the coming together of Europe and Asia in the Caucasus, in this article on Eurasianess he argues that the same conversion of the two continents is what characterizes Russia in strongly negative terms.

In this text on Eurasianism, Yandarbiev’s argumentation resembles the one that is used by the so-called Westerners and liberals in Russia which around those years – the late 1980s and the early 1990s – were gaining political ground and then came to reshape Russia and its economy. In this piece, Yandarbiev goes far into history, contending that since the time of the Tatar-Mongol rule, Russia’s Eurasian character has been its major problem. He illustrates this with the example of Peter the Great, whom he presents as the strongest fighter against the Eurasian essence of Russia, but who, paradoxically, only managed to transform Russia in a European manner by in fact perpetuating what Yandarbiev calls “Asiatic despotism” (aziatskaia despotiia). With this term Yandarbiev in fact borrows from a famous debate among historians, in which the concept of “Asiatic/Oriental despotism” was based on the conviction that Oriental societies were characterized by large-scale irrigation economies that required a strong centralized government, and that stifled the development of society. Also Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels flirted with this idea (which was however difficult to combine with their linear model of socio-economic stages); the concept had been dropped under Stalin, but reappeared in Soviet academic debates in the 1970s. With other words, here again Yandarbiev’s conceptual framework is clearly shaped by Soviet debates of the time when he went through Communist Party education.

In Yandarbiev's eyes, this Russian Eurasianness is a socio-political anachronism, which has affected the way of life, the economic system, the structures of state and of the political

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149 Z. Yandarbiev, “Evroaziatskost’”, 103.
process, and more broadly the nature of power in Russia. According to him, this anachronism has become permanent, regardless of the changing ideological and political platforms that might have prevailed at different periods in the history of the country. To reinforce his argument, Yandarbiev again refers to Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov's book “The Empire of the Kremlin” (*Imperia Kremlia*), where he stated that the Russian people endures the loss of its freedom with great patience, but that this cannot justify the fact that the Russians put other nations in chains. Yandarbiev fully endorses this view on Russian suffering and Russia's repression of other nations in its political orbit.152

From this position Yandarbiev makes the surprising claim that the Chechen people is fundamentally different from the Russians, and that the Chechens are, in fact, closer to European values than to the Russian-Eurasian system of coordinates.

Yandarbiev presents these European values with quotes from the famous Austrian economist, philosopher and Nobel laureate for economics, Friedrich Hayek; the latter's work, *Road to Serfdom*,153 was available to him in a Russian translation that appeared in 1990 in the Soviet journal “Problems of Philosophy”.154 Hayek described individualism as the basis of modern Western society, and held that the roots of this individualism lie in Christianity and ancient philosophy. Commenting on the position of Hayek, Yandarbiev writes that the Qur’an also preaches the idea of individualism, by reflecting on the interaction between individual and collective freedoms; unfortunately he does not tell his readers which specific Suras he had in mind. On this vague basis he claims that individualism is also one of the main traits of the Chechens.155 Accordingly, Yandarbiev argues that the Soviet socialist system is alien to the Chechen people, for socialism, as implied by Hayek, is a special case of collectivism.156

Another bridge between European and Chechen values Yandarbiev identifies in the notion of tolerance. He again refers to Friedrich Hayek, in particular, who claimed that Western civilization is built on respect for the human individual, which is expressed in tolerance for other people's views and inclinations. It was the word “tolerance” (*tolerantnost’*) that attracted Yandarbiev’s attention, because, in his opinion, this quality is characteristic for the Chechens:

155 Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, “Evroaziatskost’”, 104.
156 Ibid., 104.
To complete the parallel we shall add that in the nature of the Chechen people the individual has always been balanced by tolerance, or rather, patience (sobar), which was compared with the majesty of a mountain.\textsuperscript{157}

Yandarbiev tries to equate the Islamic/Arabic term \textit{sabr} (patience), which entered the Chechen language as \textit{sobar}, and the word “tolerance”, in spite of the obvious difference in the meaning of these concepts. \textit{Sabr} usually refers to patience and endurance in performing the religious duties, and in accepting life’s hardships as God-given. Yandarbiev does not even try to demonstrate how this religious concept relates to tolerance (of other opinions, world views and life styles) in the European sense. It is furthermore noteworthy that he renders the term not in its Arabic spelling but in the Chechen variant (not \textit{sabr} but \textit{sobar}), which firmly ties the concept more to the regional context (and to the “majesty of mountains” in the quote above) rather than to the Islamic context. It should be added that in North Caucasus languages (but also in Tatar), the Soviet usage of previously Islamic vocabulary at times took on secular notions that, in daily and written usage, de-emphasized the religious connotations (another example being \textit{ijtihad}, which is originally a technical term of Islamic law but over time assumed the neutral connotation of “striving hard”). But in the late Soviet years these terms re-entered public discourse in their original, religious meanings.

While the comparison of the Chechen / Islamic \textit{sobar} / \textit{sabr} with European tolerance is an obvious simplification, and a substitution of concepts, this example is a good illustration of Yandarbiev’s strategy to identify common Chechen and European values in opposition to what he considers to be Russian values. Against the background of the obvious crisis (and then collapse) of the USSR, Yandarbiev’s rhetoric – like that of many other leaders of national movements of the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods – appeared to be very pro-Western, and thus in marked contradistinction to the Soviet propaganda that saw anything western as inimical. Yandarbiev thus fortifies certain images of Russia, the Soviet Union, the Chechens, and the West.

As in previous articles Yandarbiev seeks to legitimize his conclusions by reference to well-known academics, philosophers and intellectuals, that is to authorities who are relevant not only for the entire Soviet / Russian context but also internationally. Even though historian Abrurakhman Avtorkhanov was a Chechen, he primarily published in his capacity as Western Sovietologist, and as such his works had been banned in the USSR. That is, in Yandarbiev’s

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 104.
text we find Soviet stereotypes in direct form (such as “Asiatic despotism”) as well as with inverted values, from minus to plus.

Equally Soviet in Yandarbiev’s texts of the beginning of the 1990s is his appeal to scientific knowledge as a supposedly objective criterion for evaluating historical and political processes. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Georg Hegel and Friedrich Hayek embed his own views in a single chain of outstanding and respected thinkers of other nationalities. This contrasts markedly with the fact that he nowhere refers to Chechen scholars from Chechnya, or to Islamic authorities. And even when he discussed the issue of Chechnya and the Chechens, he tried to incorporate this topic into a broader Caucasian or even European context. Islamic topics he addressed only tangentially, without specific emphasis. The underlying strategy is, in my opinion, to link the particular Chechen case, and his search for a Chechen ideology, to some kind of a global ideological (today we would say: geopolitical) project. We saw that with his proposal of an all-Caucasian political project across national and religious boundaries, which – from hindsight – remained ephemeral because it did not take roots; in those years of experimenting, however, it was one of the possible opportunities, and Yandarbiev had no qualms about placing all options before the reader in one book. Against this background it will not come as a surprise that a few years later, in the mid-1990s, Yandarbiev easily embraced Islamist-jihadist ideas, because they gave him a ready-made and rather clear and precise ideological basis not only for a union of the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus, but also for more global ambitions.

The Soviet Style of the Global Jihad

Yandarbiev's attempt to link up with global ideologies is in a way logical. He was a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; during the training at the Higher Literature courses in Moscow, he communicated with writers and intellectuals from different republics of the Soviet Union, and accordingly, during his entire career he was under the clear or hidden influence of Communist ideology, which certainly trained its followers to think big, to design global objectives, and to believe in universalistic categories. Therefore, it seems understandable that, with the failure of this system becoming apparent, Yandarbiev still tends to transgress ethnic and even national boundaries in his writings. In the mid-1990s Yandarbiev finds such a new ideological base in the form of Islamist jihadism. It was during
this time that he starts to employ military and jihadi rhetoric, to write about the protection of Muslim interests all over the world, and to push for the Islamist turn in the Chechen armed resistance.

If in his book of 1996 Yandarbiev used an epigraph that equates “jihad” with the national struggle of the Chechen people, in his later writings and speeches this “jihad” is less tinged with ethnic colors. Yandarbiev talks about issues that are more global. In 2000 Yandarbiev released his book “Jihad and the problems of the modern world”;\(^{158}\) in which he offers his understanding of jihad and justifies the jihadist struggle.

In the best Soviet tradition, Yandarbiev talks about a bipolar world, with the difference that on the one side the Christian world, whose interests are defended by the United Nations, NATO and other international organizations plus Western governments, and on the other the Muslim world, which, in his opinion, does not have such obvious defenders.

According to him, in the Cold era it was the USSR, as the leader of the socialist camp, that ensured a bipolarity in international affairs; after the collapse of the Soviet Union, this role is taken over by the Muslim world. As the latter has great political and economic potential, the Christian countries identify the Muslim world as their new enemy. Next to the Muslim world, also representatives of other religions find themselves in political, economic and technological dependence of the Western world; they serve as a bargaining chip for the Western world in the fight against Islam and will be destroyed once the Islamic world has fallen. Therefore, it is the potential of the Islamic world that makes it the leader of this second pool of countries offended by the West. It is easy to identify the Soviet style of propaganda in these constructions, since the USSR used to portray itself as the leader of the World's anti-colonial movements.\(^{159}\) Such a messianic role of protecting the weak against “the powerful of this world”, as Yandarbiev wrote, legitimates his call for jihad:

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Mankind has no other way out of the impasse imposed by 'the powerful of this world' except by returning under the law of its Creator. And the way to do this is through jihad, one of whose components is the Chechen-Russian war – jihad in Chechnya (Ichkeria).\(^\text{160}\)

If in his earlier texts Yandarbiev's major aim was to discursively distance the Chechens from Russian and Soviet society, and to characterize the Chechens as adherents of a value system that they share with other societies – whether all-Caucasian or European – in the second half of the 1990s he imagines the Chechens as the vanguard of the Islamic world community, the umma. He does so by placing the Chechen-Russian conflict (which had flared up again in 1999, with Russia's second invasion) into a large international confrontation between the two religions.

Yandarbiev lists a number of contemporary hot spots and wars, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the war in Afghanistan, as well as the conflicts in East Timor and Kashmir, to which he relates the Chechen-Russian confrontation. In his view, these hot spots resulted from the anti-Islamic policy of the Western Christian countries led by the United States. With the conflict in Chechnya, Russia has become a part of the anti-Islamic coalition, “the powerful of this world”; in fact, so Yandarbiev, Russia has become a part of Western colonialism.\(^\text{161}\)

It should be noted that by jihad, Yandarbiev a priori means a military confrontation, which should not only give victory to Muslims but also bring happiness to all mankind.\(^\text{162}\) Despite the eschatological nuances that he now constructs, Yandarbiev talks about jihad in the first place from a political perspective, and not in theological terms.

This turn to emphasizing the global struggle between the umma and the Western world can be partially explained by biographical facts from the life of Yandarbiev. If before the release of his first book “Chechenia - the battle for freedom” he participated in real battles on the side of the Chechen fighters during the First Chechen War (in January 1995 he was leading the defense of the central part of Grozny city), after the Islamization of the state system of Chechnya, which reached an active phase under his leadership, Yandarbiev focused more on international relations. In 1999 President Aslan Maskhadov appointed Yandarbiev as Ichkeria's authorized representative in certain Muslim countries, and in this function Yandarbiev achieved, in January 2000, that Afghanistan's Taliban government officially

\(^{160}\) Z. Yandarbiev, *Dzhikhad i problemy sovremennogo mira* (archive version), 2.
\(^{161}\) Ibid., 1.
\(^{162}\) Ibid., 1.
recognized the sovereignty of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. Yandarbiev now had no illusions with the Western countries as potential allies of Chechen independence, and based all his hopes on Muslim states.

Yet even now, Yandarbiev did not use any specific Islamic vocabulary, nor did he quote any Muslim sources. He built his main argument for the necessity of jihad on the idea of justice, which was violated by the Western powers. As he put it, the Western democracy and economy ensured the triumph of the Western world but thereby created a system that will destroy this world in the future. Again, the borrowings from popular Marxist thinking (for which capitalism was its own grave-digger) are obvious.

Yandarbiev supplies his argument with eschatological and apocalyptic images: in particular, he writes about “the craziness of progress” because of which people have become powerless in the face of a looming scientific, technical or economic disaster. Any failure of this system, in his opinion, will quickly destroy Western civilization, and people will be looking for a new support – which is available only in the “One and Only Creator – Allah”. Recognizing the superiority of the “power of the Creator” on Earth is a necessary condition for establishing justice and freedom of all mankind and every person, according to Yandarbiev. In his opinion, accepting the power of Allah will give people the triumph of justice and freedom, and is possible only through jihad.

From this global perspective, the confrontation in Chechnya is one of the stages in the struggle for the future of mankind. The Chechens in their confrontation with Moscow are not fighting for themselves, but for all Muslims, and even for members of other religions that are exploited by the West, and, ultimately, for the happiness and freedom of all people.

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163 Elena Suponina, “Zelimkhan Yandarbiev: Islamskii fundamentalizm bezopasen”.
164 In fact, several observers explained Chechnya's turn to jihadism by the lack of Western support for the Chechen cause; in the mid- and late 1990s, NATO was primarily active in former Yugoslavia, and the international attack on Serbia and Montenegro in 1999 preceded the second Russian invasion of Chechnya by just a couple of months. See, for examples: M. McCuige, “Why Did We Bomb Belgrade,” in: International Affairs, 76, 1 (2000), 1-23.
165 Z. Yandarbiev, Dzhikhad i problemy sovremennogo mira (archive version), 2.
167 Z. Yandarbiev, Dzhikhad i problemy sovremennogo mira (archive version), 2.
Chapter 2:
“Russism” and the Islamization of the Chechen Resistance: Dzhokhar Dudaev and Shamil Basaev

In this part, I will analyze the contribution of the first president of the Chechen republic of Ichkeria, Dzhokhar Dudaev (1944-1996), to the ideology of the North Caucasian jihadists. Dudaev was the political leader of the Chechen national movement of the early 1990s, a symbol of the Chechen struggle and an important figure on the post-Soviet political field.

In addition to the fact that Dudaev was the head of Ichkeria republic and organized the military resistance to Moscow, he also made his special contribution to the ideology of the North Caucasian militants. This contribution was highly appreciated by such like-minded people as Shamil Basaev (1965-2006) and Aslan Maskhadov (1951-2005), who after the death of Dudaev continued the military confrontation with Moscow under the banner of jihad.

By analyzing the role of Dudaev in the Islamization of the Chechen confrontation, I will move to the issue of Dudaev’s definition of the term Russism, which was proposed by Dudaev to characterize Russian foreign and internal policy, and to the issue of how this term was claimed not only by subsequent generations of jihadists, but also in the post-Soviet political culture.
Legitimization of Dudaev's Rule: Jihad and Sharia

Dzhokhar Dudaev was born in Chechnya in 1944. Almost immediately after his birth, his family together with the entire Chechen people was deported to Kazakhstan. In 1957, when the Chechens returned to their homeland, the family of Dudaev settled in the city of Grozny. It was in Grozny that Dudaev graduated from high school, and after spending a year attending the physics and mathematics faculty of the North Ossetian Pedagogical Institute, he moved to Tambov, where he entered the Tambov Higher Military Aviation School of Pilots named after M. Raskova.\textsuperscript{168} He studied there from 1962 to 1966. Having graduated from the Institute summa cum laude, Dudaev joined the Communist party of the Soviet Union. In 1974 he graduated from the command faculty of the Gagarin Air Force Academy (Moscow).\textsuperscript{169} He had a very successful career in the Soviet Army. A devout Communist, Dudaev was engaged in political work with his personnel,\textsuperscript{170} was involved in the military operation in Afghanistan, commanded a military garrison in Tartu, Estonian SSR in 1989-1991, and was promoted to the rank of USSR Air Force General.\textsuperscript{171}

During Perestroika times, Dudaev decided to join the intensified national liberation movement of the Chechen people and became the main leader of the struggle.

On 27 October 1991, with the Soviet government of Chechnya overthrown, Dzhokhar Dudaev was elected President of the Republic.\textsuperscript{172} On 1 November 1991, he issued his first decree declaring Chechnya an independent state, but as expected Moscow did not recognize the independence of Chechnya.\textsuperscript{173}

There is a broad consensus among researchers that in the early years of independent Chechnya, the Islamic factor played no decisive role.\textsuperscript{174} The Sovereignty Declaration and the first Constitution contained no references to Islam.\textsuperscript{175} However, quite soon the role of Islam

\textsuperscript{169} “Dudaev Dzhogar Musaevich”, (2016).
\textsuperscript{171} “Dudaev Dzhogar Musaevich”.
\textsuperscript{172} A.V. Cherkasov, O.P. Orlov, “Khronika vooruzhennogo konfliktka”, Memorial http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/chechen/itogi/sp90.htm (last accessed 15 April 2017).
\textsuperscript{173} A.V. Cherkasov, O.P. Orlov, “Khronika vooruzhennogo konfliktka”.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 334.
gained dramatic momentum in the ideology of the leaders of Chechnya. In particular, Czech researcher Emil Souleimanov\textsuperscript{176} cites the words of Dzhokhar Dudaev, who declared:

Russia ... has forced us to take the path of Islam although we were not well prepared to accept the Islamic values.

By the middle of the 1990s, Chechnya declared jihad against Russia. Various sources\textsuperscript{177} state this was done either in 1994 at the order of Chechen mufti Said Akhmed Aslabekov (Muhammad Husein Aslabekov), or in 1995, by his successor mufti Akhmad Kadyrov, father of the current head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov. In particular, there is a video of 1996 in which Akhmad Kadyrov calls people to jihad,\textsuperscript{178} and an interview in which he says that he called people to jihad in 1995-1996.\textsuperscript{179} In the 2000s, Akhmad Kadyrov sided with the Federal center in Moscow and became the first President of Chechnya recognized by Russia. In 2004, Akhmad Kadyrov was killed in a terrorist attack orchestrated by Shamil Basaev. Regardless of whoever actually declared jihad against Russia first, in 2003 Akhmad Kadyrov himself admitted that he had declared jihad against Russia upon becoming mufti:

In April 1995, a Congress of the Chechen people in Shatoi took place. There in the name of Allah I called upon everyone to start military action. Together with the people I made a vow not to spare myself or my body and fight till the bitter end. This is how I embraced jihad.\textsuperscript{180}

Recounting the story of the Chechen war to Russian readers in this 2003 interview, Kadyrov equated the concepts of “jihad” and “military action”, thereby following the common public stereotype that jihad is armed struggle. However in Islam the word jihad, which translates from Arabic as “effort”, has two primary versions; one being “greater jihad”, that is the struggle with one’s own vices, and the other being the “lesser jihad” denoting an armed resistance to aggressors. Kadyrov made no reservations, and even while already on the side of Russia, he still referred to his fight in the middle of the 1990s as jihad. Just as Islam served as a source of legitimization for Mufti Kadyrov in Chechen society in 1990s, so did Islam and


public fears about jihad support Kadyrov's consolidation of power within the Russian legal field in the 2000s, when he had moved to the side of Moscow, as a guarantee that the history of the 1990s would not repeat itself.

Therefore, his statement that he was one of the leaders of the jihad in Chechnya is a sort of a message to Russian society and government that he once had been an important person in the confrontation between Grozny and Moscow. And the Russian's fear of the war being rekindled again could be Kadyrov's bargaining chip in his relations with Moscow.

Kadyrov also emphasized his own major role by indicating that the proposal to appoint him to the office of mufti in March 1995 at a Congress attended by all military leaders of the Chechen forces: Shamil Basaev, Zelimkhan Yandarbiev and Aslan Maskhadov. Apparently, in April 1995, the Congress of the Chechen people simply accepted the resolution of the Chechen military elite. It is also important to note that the mufti of Chechnya was elected in the course of the Chechen Congress and not at a meeting of religious leaders as was customary in all other national republics of the former USSR. Obviously, already in 1994-1995 the leaders of the Chechen militants felt it was of importance to legitimize their struggle through Islam.

It is important to mention here that in the spring of the same year of 1995, in an interview with Estonian journalists, Dzhokhar Dudaev, the President of Chechnya, announced that the Chechen people had appealed to the government of the Republic with a proposal to switch over to Sharia courts. Dudaev explained that desire of the people by the fact that because of the war, law enforcement, judicial and educational activities were totally paralyzed in Chechnya. On top of that, Dudaev announced that secular subjects as mathematics and physics would be soon taught on par with Islam.

All this put together calls into question the thesis that the Islamic factor was very weak at the initial stage of the Chechen conflict. Rather, the transition to Sharia courts and the introduction of a Muslim component in secondary education was already envisaged in the course of the first Chechen war under Dudaev but did not materialize because he was killed in 1996. The paralysis of the state power institutions, in fact, was caused not only by war, but stemmed from corruption, economic crisis and ideological collapse. At the beginning of the

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182 Ibid.
1990s, Chechnya lost confidence in the then-existent state institutions. Overcoming a systemic crisis of that nature called for a new ethical and moral cornerstone that would change the rules of the game. By contrast, in the other national republics of the former USSR, the sovereignty declarations were coupled with a preservation of the Soviet legacy in the form of the state apparatus, political institutions and administrative borders, and with the preservation of the old ruling elite whose members easily switched from Communist slogans to nationalist ones.\textsuperscript{183}

However, what made the political elite of Chechnya back in the 1990s stand out was that it replaced the previous Soviet leadership of the Chechen Republic. The new leaders did not come from among the Chechen political bosses of the Soviet period, and when they had seized power in the Republic, opposed and expelled the former leadership of Soviet Chechnya. Prior to the early 1990s the new leaders of Ichkeria lived in other parts of the Soviet Union and had ample experience of Soviet socialization outside the framework of national and ethnic boundaries; but in relation to Chechnya, they were outsiders.

Therefore, the combination of these two factors (distrust towards the old state institutions, and the new Chechen elite “genetically” not related to the Soviet leadership) contributed to the fact that Chechnya stumbled into a revolutionary war which ended in horrific bloodshed.

With these two factors it is no surprise that during the first Russo-Chechen war the quest for a new ideological basis led Dzhokhar Dudaev and the rest of the leaders of Chechnya to strengthen the role of the Islamic factor as an alternative ethical and moral basis for their state-building project and its military defense.

Another factor which contributed to the mainstreaming of the Islamic component in the ideology of the Chechen resistance was the peculiarity of the historical memory of the Chechen people. According to Emil Souleimanov, the outbreak of the Russian-Chechen war of 1994-1996 served as a powerful incentive to reinforce the ethnic identity of the Chechens. This led to the Islamization of national identity as in the Chechen historical mythology, in which war against external threat is traditionally equated with war under the banner of

ghazawat (jihad), as an Islamic resistance to an external threat.\textsuperscript{184} Suleymanov argued that romantic images of the anti-colonial jihads of the 18th-19th centuries were still vivid.\textsuperscript{185}

As I will show below, the historical legacy not only of Chechnya but that of the entire North Caucasus has been used by the ideologists and leaders of jihadist resistance in the region on multiple occasions. However, local historical mythology is only one of many sources used by North Caucasian jihadists for creating their own ideology.

**Dudaev’s “Russism”: Definition and Pre-Revolutionary Roots**

In spite of the fact that the declaration of jihad was accompanied by the intensification of the Islamic component in the ideology of the Chechen resistance, Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudaev, in his famous interview of 1995 outlined the first steps in the Islamization of the state administration of the Republic. But he described his enemy not in religious terms. For example, he did not touch on the war of Muslims against infidels or the subject of monotheism (*tawhid*) as opposed to idolatry (*taghut*). Rather, when defining the ideological foundation of Russia, Dzhokhar Dudaev employed the term *rusizm* (“Russism”).\textsuperscript{186} This term he apparently borrowed from the works of the well-known Russian revolutionary and philosopher Aleksandr Herzen (1812-1870); another source might have been the works of Konstantin Leont’ev (1831-1891), a famous Russian conservative philosopher and diplomat, who in his later years became an Orthodox monk. Leont’ev used the term *Velikorussism*\textsuperscript{187} or *Russism*\textsuperscript{188} as a positive designation for the new ideology that would come after the Russian conquest of Constantinople (Istanbul), while Herzen used the term in a negative connotation. However, Leont’ev was not as popular in the Soviet and post-Soviet historiography as Herzen was, and therefore in general did not have much influence before his new rise to prominence in the 2000s. I therefore assume that Dudaev was more familiar with the ideas of Herzen.

Herzen was a renowned oppositional thinker who steadily lashed out at the official ideology of the Russian Empire. In particular, in his famous memoir “My Past and Thoughts” (*Byloe i

\textsuperscript{184} Emil Suleymanov, “Islam kak integriruushchaia i raz’ediniaushchaia sila v chechenskom obschestve”.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{187} K. Leont’ev, *Vostok, Rossiia i Slavianstvo. Sbornik statei. Tom 1*. (Moscow: 1885), 93.

dumy, 1868), he used the terms Slavinizm and Russitsizm (which in some of his more recent editions appears in the form Russizm). The term Russism is used today by those authors who refer to both Herzen and Dudaev.

In Herzen's books, Slavinizm and Russitsizm/Russizm denote the most extreme nationalist trend in Russia at the time. As he wrote,

Slavinism or Russicism not as a theory or a doctrine but as the hurt feeling of the people, in the form of a dark memory and a safe instinct, as a counteraction to foreign influence, has existed since Peter I. shaved off the first beard.

According to Herzen, the Slavophiles were of the opinion that Russia had its own special way before the time of Peter's reforms and that Russia had to go back to that special way:

The way out, - said the Slavs – is to renounce the St. Petersburg period and return to the people with whom we have been divided by foreign education, foreign government. We need to go back to our old values!

Herzen employs the term Russism/Russicism in describing the views of the Slavophiles, but he meant it not ideologically. Rather, Herzen sought to paint a certain psychological portrait of his opponents as rejecting everything foreign. If Slavophilism was an ideological doctrine, then Russism should be treated as a psychological trait of those who carry this ideology.

Herzen opposed both the official ideology of the Russian Empire and the Slavophiles. This position of the revolutionary philosopher made his name popular in Soviet Russia. In particular, his memoirs “My past and thoughts” was published in large editions in the Soviet

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191 Slavinizm, ili rusitsizm, ne kak teoriia, ne kak uchenie, a kak oskorbленное народное чувство, как тенное воспоминание и верный инстинкт. Как противудействие исключительное иностранным влиятельному существоval so vremenii obritiia pervoi borody Petrom I (A.I. Gertsen, Byloe i dumy, in: Gertsen A.I., Sobranie sochinenii, Vol. 4 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1956), 135).
192 “Vykhod za nami, - govorili slaviane, - vykhod v otrechenii ot peterburgskogo perioda, v vozvrashchении k narodu, s kotorym nas razobshchilo inostrannoe obrazovanie, inostrannoe pravitel’stvo, vorotimsia k prezniim nравam!”.
Union from 1946 to 1987, 26 times at least.\textsuperscript{193} For example, the 1969 edition had a circulation of 300,000 copies.\textsuperscript{194} Streets were named after him, and the Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) Pedagogical University is named after Aleksandr Herzen.

Dzhokhar Dudaev does not mention Aleksandr Herzen in his interview, but one can assume that the Soviet General, a former member of the Communist party of the USSR, and graduate from a higher military aviation school was familiar with the works of Herzen.

Dudaev became a promoter of Herzen's term and developed his idea in a more radical form. In his famous 1995 interview,\textsuperscript{195} he defined Russism as follows:

\begin{quote}
Russism is worse than fascism, nazism, racism and all misanthropic ideologies promoted to the highest rank of state policy of Russia...

… Russism destroys entire peoples by sweeping them from the face of the earth. It chose the most helpless victims. Throughout the history of Russia it has picked the most helpless victim for full physical destruction. But also for an effective intimidation of the world: here we are, so strong and powerful and here is what we, insidious, evil, rapturous, are capable of doing.\textsuperscript{196}
\end{quote}

The comparisons with fascism and Nazism demonstrate that unlike Herzen, Dudaev perceived Russism more as ideology. Determining Russism as “the highest rank of state policy of Russia”, Dudaev did not compare Russism with communism. At the same time, Dudaev did not furnish a clear definition of what Russism was. Rather, it was through examples that he showed that, in his opinion, it was a policy of international self-affirmation through the invasion of neighboring regions and countries so as to subjugate them in an act of imperial aggression. Besides, Dudaev viewed Russism as some quality inherent to the Russian policy at all times.

Dudaev pointed out that Russism used tactics of terror. This is why the Chechens, in his view, had the right to resort to terror against the aggressor.\textsuperscript{197} And this, he said, would happen – there were hundreds of thousands of men who knew how to fight, and who had lost their home, work and the right to life due to the policies of Russia.

\textsuperscript{194} A. Gertsen, \textit{Byloe i dumy} (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1969), 924.
\textsuperscript{195} “Vzgliad iz 2014: Dudaev pro Rossiiu (1995 god).”
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
While there was some ambiguity in Dudaev’s statements when he was defining Russism as both the state ideology of modern Russia and some quality characteristic of the Russian policy at all times, it is thanks to Dudaev that the term has acquired special popularity in the former Soviet Union.

Dudaev is not particularly known for sophisticated programmatic texts, but he contributed to the post-Soviet language by putting Herzen's Russism into a new historical context.

This term became fashionable especially among politicians and journalists opposed to the Russian government. At the same time, it should be noted that this term later also became popular, as I will demonstrate below, among some influential Russian nationalists.

Above all, however, the term Russism permeated the jargon of leaders and ideologists of the Chechen rebels after Dzhokhar Dudaev was killed by a Russian missile in April 1996. Shamil Basaev (1965-2006) was the most prominent of those who would again employ the term.

**Shamil Basaev: Russism, Jihad and Equal Society**

Shamil Basaev is one of the most well-known Chechen rebels and terrorists in Russia. He was a field commander of great influence and briefly acted as Prime Minister (1998) and Vice President (2006) of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. He was known as a terrorist-jihadist with solid ties to the Middle East and one of the organizers of major terrorist attacks in the Russian Federation.¹⁹⁸

Shamil Basaev was born in 1965 in the Chechen-Ingush Soviet Socialist Republic. Some media outlets say that Basaev was named Shamil in honor of Imam Shamil (1797-1871),¹⁹⁹ the legendary leader of the North Caucasian resistance of the 19 century. It is rather difficult to confirm or deny this information. To a large degree, this looks like a conscious construction of his own history on the part of Shamil Basaev, who thus tried to establish a symbolic link

¹⁹⁸ Shamil Basaev was accountable for the largest and most brutal terrorist attacks of the late 1990s and the first half of 2000s. Associated with him is the explosion of residential houses in Buinaksk and Moscow in 1999 that took the lives of about 300 people, the hostage-taking attack on in Moscow’s “Nord-OST” theater in 2002, which left 117 people dead, the assassination of Akhmad Kadyrov, the President of Chechnya, in 2004, and the most gruesome and heinous capturing of a secondary school in the city of Beslan in 2004, leading to 333 people dead, most of them children. In addition to the aforementioned attacks, Shamil Basaev was the mastermind behind numerous attacks on the Interior Ministry and Russian army officers in Chechnya, Daghestan and Ingushetia. These crimes gave Shamil Basaev the status of number one terrorist in Russia.

between himself and the personification of the Caucasian resistance of the 19 century. But Shamil is also simply a popular name in North Caucasus.

Having graduated from high school, Basaev served in the Soviet Army (1983-1985), and then several times tried to enter the law faculty of Moscow State University. There is no clear data on what kind of education he received. In particular, there is information that in 1987, he entered the Moscow Institute of Land Engineers, but a year later, he dropped out for poor progress. From 1989 to 1991, he studied at an Islamic institute in Istanbul, but at which Institute exactly he enrolled we do not know.

In an interview with the BBC, Basaev claimed that his name always made him feel like a revolutionary; a portrait of revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara (1928-1967) always hung in his room in the Moscow student dormitory. In an interview, Basaev said that faith in God prevented him from being a Communist in the Soviet years, but he did believe in the ideals of communism, because the Communists were the most honest, brave and principled people in all the books and films of the Soviet era. In the Soviet Union Communist Che Guevara was one of the most recognizable symbols of revolutionary struggle.

Shamil Basaev was killed on July 10, 2006 in the village of Ekazhevo in the Ingush Republic of Russia as part of a special operation led by the FSB. However, his name still catches the attention of those who research the war in the North Caucasus. Basaev is of interest not only as one of the biggest militants and terrorists, but also as a man who left behind an textual heritage which is also an important source for studying the history of post-Soviet jihadism and terrorism.

In particular, Basaev was famous for his series of letters to Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, as well as a collection of teachings called “Book of a Mujahid” (Kniga Mudzhakhida).

One of the most famous letters of Basaev addressing Vladimir Putin is dated 2001. In this letter, he also referred to the topic of Russism that Dzhokhar Dudaev had touched upon and used this term to describe Russian society and the politics of the Russian state:

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Your great Russian dream is to pull everyone right into the crap you are yourselves neck-deep in. This is what Russism is.

In this letter, Basaev described Russia, including the non-Russian peoples subject to the Russian authorities, as an enslaved, ignorant and aggressive society. To him, the aggressiveness of the Russian people explains the wars led by the Russian authorities in the North Caucasus.

A starkly different picture Basaev painted for the reader when he described Chechen society. He presented a utopian description of a free society of equal people where justice reigned. Basaev contended that before the Russian conquest the level of education and culture in Chechen society was significantly above the average Russian level. He also pointed out that in addition to their own freedom, the Chechens had always valued the freedom of others; they therefore welcomed Russians who escaped from their government in search of liberty and accepted them into their society. This idealized image of Chechen society was void of slavery and theft, but was full of “free spirit”, “free life” where people “lived in a free society of equals, providing bread for the whole Caucasus by mere bread through peaceful and creative labor.” Basaev’s ideal society had no exploiting capitalists but just equal honest people engaged in physical labor.

It should be mentioned here that the peasant society was also idealized by the first Russian terrorists, members of the “Narodnaia Volia”, who killed Emperor Aleksandr II in 1881. They claimed that their terror protected this peasant society. Similarly, Russian Socialists-Revolutionaries, Bolsheviks and anarchists defended their ideas of justice and equality through mass acts of terrorism.

In this respect, Shamil Basaev’s ways are not original, although in his methods his terror was much more radical. He describes his ideal society of equality by opposing it to the enslaving force of Russism and he declared jihad in the name of his high ideals. In the letter quoted above, after describing the free Chechen society and enumerating the Russian crimes against the Chechen people over the last two centuries, Basaev said, “We are proud that we are Mujahids seeking every possibility to live and die in jihad”.202

202 “DOCUMENT. Otkrytoe pis’mo-vyzov Shamilia Basaeva”.
Basaev started his letter with customary Islamic basmala (“In the name of Allah the compassionate, the Merciful! Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds”), adding “who created us Muslims and blessed with jihad on His straight Way”. He also called upon Vladimir Putin to convert to Islam. And towards the end of the text he calls himself and his associates Mujahids, who seek to live and die in jihad. Between the Islamic beginning and end of the text, Basaev however does not dwell upon anything Islamic at all. The Chechen society of justice, equality and brotherhood is not explained by the Islamic nature of the Chechen culture. Rather, Basaev spoke about freedom and equality as universal categories, which may have been contrasted with Russism, but still may be clear to a Russian reader who wants to be “inwardly free from slavery.” I do not maintain that Basaev consciously used this technique. Rather, it can be assumed that he referred to the categories with which he was obviously familiar.

Shamil Basaev used the terminology of Dzhokhar Dudaev, by reproducing utopian patterns of the Russian revolutionaries; but he added flavor to them in the form of Muslim terminology. The same utopia is now becoming Islamic with religion replacing the discredited ideals of communism or socialism. Nonetheless, the example of Shamil Basaev illustrates that the content of the ideology of North Caucasian jihadists came from a variety of sources, among them the legendary history of anti-colonial resistance in the North Caucasus, the Russian revolutionary philosophy, the world revolutionary struggle and the Islamic call. In this *bricolage*, the names of Imam Shamil and Ernesto Che Guevara, the legacy of Aleksandr Herzen and utopian socialist scenarios are all meeting in the call for jihad. The leaders and ideologists behind the North Caucasus militants quite easily re-structured the local Caucasian historical heritage by combining it with Western, Russian and Soviet influences.

Another interesting combination of Western and Muslim influences was Basaev’s “Book of a Mujahid” written in 2004. This work was Basaev’s remake of “Manual of the Warrior of Light” by world-famous Brazilian writer Paolo Coelho. Basaev re-wrote Coelho’s book in two weeks embroidering the text with verses from the Qur’an.

Shamil Basaev pointed out that he struggled with Russism and Russian imperialism but not with the Russian people. The use of the term “imperialism” is also important because it stems

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from the Soviet ideological vocabulary wherein the policy of the capitalist countries of the West was termed imperialism.

But for Basaev, things had turned upside-down: Russia is now part of the imperialist world while Chechen society appears as a socialist utopia as an alternative to the imperialist world.

In this regard, it is very important to note that Basaev refused to refer to himself as a separatist or terrorist. For him only Russia's actions qualified as terrorism, against which he struggled as a freedom fighter.\textsuperscript{204} His ambitions were not limited to Chechnya but also encompassed the North Caucasus as well as the territory of inner Russia. This is why Basaev stated that he would not want for Russia to recognize the independence of Chechnya, “because should it happen, we will have to recognize Russia, a colonial empire, within its present borders”.\textsuperscript{205} Apparently, he understood that even if Chechnya gained independence, the confrontation with Russia would continue, including in other republics of the North Caucasus. The quote above once again nicely illustrates his working with paradoxes - as he saw it, the issue was not about the recognition of Chechenya but of Russia - a state whose 'recognition' was not doubted by any power in the world.

In this connection, he really cannot be called a separatist. Basaev not only refused to recognize Russia’s control of the republics of the North Caucasus, but also of Tatarstan,\textsuperscript{206} a large republic with a significant Muslim population located far from the borders of the North Caucasus in the center of the European part of Russia. Basaev thought in terms wider than the borders of Chechnya and the North Caucasus. His unwillingness to have Chechnya’s independence recognized by Russia says that his ultimate goal was to change the essence of Russia through the refusal of Russism (perhaps in favor of Islam). In this respect, it is important to mention that Dzhokhar Dudaev, the first President of Chechnya, expressed a similar thought in his famous interview where he explained his understanding of Russism:\textsuperscript{207}

\begin{quote}
I say sincerely that we need to continue the war with Russia. Either we go up in flames, with Russia burning along with us, or we will work together to get out of this situation.
\end{quote}

Any way out of this situation without Russia changing the essence of its policy was clearly inappropriate for Dudaev and Basaev. In my mind, this approach of two of the most important figures of the first half of the North Caucasian confrontation was of paramount significance.

\textsuperscript{204} Sh. Basaev: “Nikto ne mozhet zapretit’ mne”.
\textsuperscript{205} “Shamil’ Basaev: Vrag Rossii nomer”.
\textsuperscript{206} “Shamil’ Basaev: Vrag Rossii nomer”.
\textsuperscript{207} “Dzhohar Dudaev. Germenchuk 1995”.
for the further development of the jihadist movement in the North Caucasus, since they denoted that their struggle was not limited to the borders of Chechnya. The search for broader models of solidarity with the peoples of the Caucasus and the rest of Russia ultimately led to the rejection of Chechen nationalism in favor of a broader ideological model. This broad model was the Islamic model.

**Russism: From Russian Jihadism to Russian Nationalism**

Going back to the promotion of the term Russism, it merits mention that the main propaganda outlet of the North Caucasian jihadists, the website Kavkazcenter.com, even had a regular column called Russism; between 2003 and 2016, about 150 articles and news reports came out with the tag of Russism. Their authors quite often used the term referring to Dzhokhar Dudaev and sometimes to Shamil Basaev. Among them was the former President of Chechnya Aslan Maskhadov (1951-2005), who headed Chechnya from 1997 to 2005. In one of his interviews taken in 2004, Maskhadov identified Russism as the main enemy of Chechnya. Following Dzhokhar Dudaev’s definition, Maskhadov called Russism a kind of fascism, but only more brutal than fascism and existent for a longer time – over 200 years.

Another well-known jihadist, who was one of the closest supporters of Shamil Basaev during intrusion of his detachments in Dagestan, the Daghestanian Magomet Tagaev, who will be

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208 See: “Rusizm”, Kavkazcenter, [http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/search/all/all/%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BC](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/search/all/all/%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BC) (last accessed 14 April 2017).


discussed in more detail below (in chapter 3), in 2000 published the book “Vechnyi Zov ili Moi Kavkaz” (“Eternal Call, or My Caucasus”), in which the main goal of the struggle of the Caucasian peoples in both the 19th and 20th centuries was the resistance to Russism.212

The term Russism once again gained a certain relevance during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. On April 14, 2014 the Russian journalist Oleg Panfilov (who opposed the Russian government and who had lived in Georgia since 2009), wrote an article titled “Russism has come to Crimea”213 for the Crimean office of Radio Svoboda (Radio Liberty). In this article, he made references to Herzen, Dudaev and Basaev as the people who introduced the term Russism into the Russian language, and he suggested that the annexation of Crimea was a result of Russia’s aggressive policy.

Similarly, Russian journalist Yevgeny Ikhlov published an article titled “Russism”214. While referring to Herzen, Ikhlov pointed that Dzhokhar Dudaev resurrected the term “Russism”. Ikhlov employs the term Russism in connection with the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation. He describes Russism as an isolationist Imperial-nationalist ideology aimed at ensuring the retention of Vladimir Putin’s power.215

Ever since the relations between Russia and Ukraine aggravated over Crimea’s accession to Russia in early 2014 and the events in Eastern Ukraine, many Ukrainian authors used the word Russism and its English-style derivative (Рашизм) to refer to the ideology of Russia. For instance, Ukrainian composer Boris Sevastyanov wrote a song called “Rashism – Orthodox fascism”, which has scored tens of thousands of views on Youtube.216 In the Ukrainian context, the term rashism (рашизм) is more widespread then rusizm, but still oftentimes the two are used as synonyms.217 In a play of words, the term is meant to link

213 Oleg Panfilov, “V Krym prishel rusizm”.
216 See: “Rashizm”, Mizugadro http://mizugadro.mydns.jp/t/index.php/%D0%A0%D0%B0%D1%88%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BC#cite_ref-24 (last accessed 15 April 2017).
Russia to both *racism* and *fascism*. These authors often mention the name of Dudaev and sometimes that of Basaev in their discourse.

Some representatives of Russian nationalism have also resorted to this term but used it to their advantage. Unlike jihadist ideologists from the North Caucasus, Russian opposition figures and Ukrainian journalists for Russian nationalists this term carries positive connotations. For example, the term Russism has been embraced by well-known Russian nationalist Egor Kholmogorov (born in 1975) who used to be the chief editor of the conservative information-analytical portal “Russian Explorer” and who also came into prominence for having minted the term “Russkaia Vesna” (“Russian Spring”). In his article “Russism. Choosing Putin”, Kholmogorov indicates that the essence of the term Russism comes down to three components: “Russia is above all. Russia is a state of Russians. The Lord is with Russia and the Russians”. Kholmogorov does not mention the name of revolutionary Aleksandr Herzen. Yet, he refers to a Russian conservative philosopher and diplomat of the 19th century, Konstantin Leontiev (1831-1891) who also employed the term Russism. In essence, the meaning that Kholmogorov attaches to Russism is the same as the definition ascribed to it by those critical of this term, namely an extreme version of Russian Imperial nationalism. Another even more radical interpretation of the term Russism is used by Aleksandr Ivanov-Suharevsky (born in 1950), the leader of the far-right National People's Party, editor-in-chief of the newspaper “I'm Russian”, who as early as in 1997 used this term together with racist notions; he claimed that through Russism the Russians would create a “A white Empire from Ocean to Ocean.”

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219 “Russian Spring”, a phrase used to describe the events in Eastern Ukraine that took place in 2014-2016, is an obvious replicate of the term “Arab Spring”.
Chapter 3:
Movladi Udugov and the Style of the First Generation of Jihadists

Udugov belonged to the first generation of Chechen militants who made the way from the national Chechen movement to the Islamist call for jihad. Therefore, in this part I will analyze texts in which Movladi Udugov explained and substantiated the need for jihad and Islamic resistance, and I will also try to find out what makes his style quite typical for the first post-Soviet generation of jihadist ideologists. In this part I will also briefly mention two other ideologists such as Dalkhan Khozaev (1961-2000) and Magomet Tagaev (born in 1948), who are less known than Udugov himself, Dzhokhar Dudaev and Zalimkhan Yandarbiev. Moving from Udugov to less known personalities will strengthen my argument that North Caucasian jihadists made strong references to historical narratives from the North Caucasus, to justify the current confrontation with Moscow.

Movladi Udugov (b. 1962)

(Foto: http://www.aif.ru/society/history/teni_proshlogo_chto_stalo_s_liderami_nezavisimoy_ichkerii)
Biography of Movladi Udugov

Movladi Udugov was born on 9 February 1962 in Grozny, the Soviet capital of Chechnya. He graduated from the economic faculty of the Chechen-Ingush State University in the same city. There are unconfirmed reports that in 1979 he unsuccessfully tried to enter the Journalism Faculty of Moscow State University, and that for some time he studied at the Journalism Faculty of the Leningrad (St. Petersburg) University. In his student years, he joined the Komsomol (Communist Youth Union) and worked for the Chechen newspaper called “Krasnoe Znamia” (Red flag). There are reports by independent sources that he was not accepted into the Communist Party for his nationalistic statements. The journal Orientir of which he became editor in 1988 was one year later closed down by the Chechen authorities.

It was in post-Soviet times that Movladi Udugov gained recognition as a significant political figure in the North Caucasus. In particular, he was an active member of the Public-Political Associations “Kavkaz” and “Barr” which were headed by Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, the future President of Chechnya and one of the masterminds behind the Islamization of the Chechen resistance in the second half of the 1990s.

Movladi Udugov became a member of the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the National Congress of the Chechen People. It was in this organization that he demonstrated himself as a skilled head of the Information Committee. At the same times he worked for a local TV station. He came closer to power largely due to the fact that in the fall of 1991, he gave an opportunity to Dudaev, who by that time had become the leader of the national Chechen movement and had opposed the Soviet government of Chechnya, to speak on local

223 “Udugov Movladi Saidarbievich”, Russian Wikipedia (2016) https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A3%D0%B4%D1%83%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2_.%D0%9C%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8_%D0%A1%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87#cite_note-2 (last accessed 20 January 2017).
226 “Udugov Movladi Saidarbievich”, Wikipedia.
227 Udugov Movladi Saidarbievich, Kavkazskiy Uzel.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid.
television. This made it possible for him to take high positions in the government under Dudaev and to become one of the most prominent ideologists of the armed resistance in the North Caucasus. In the mid-1990s, he supported the so-called Islamist-Jihadist turn of the military resistance in the North Caucasus. The website Kavkaz Center that he created in 1999 remains the leading mouthpiece of propaganda for the North Caucasus jihadists.

Udugov’s Criticism of Nationalism, Western Values and the “Russian Way”

Movladi Udugov himself was not only the organizer of the propaganda for the jihadists, but also an active publicist and ideologist. Both on his own behalf and that of the “Islamic Strategic Studies Centre” which he headed, Udugov actively published materials supporting the jihadist movement.

The texts that he published on his own behalf cannot be called examples of classical Salafi debates. For example, he has little interest in such classical topics of Salafi debates as the issue of *bid’a* (novation) or *madhhabs* (a school of thought within Islamic jurisprudence). In addition, the language he employed features but few specific Islamic expressions and Arabisms. Despite the fact that Udugov was one of the most influential ideologists behind all Jihadist movements in the North Caucasus who justified the so-called Islamist turn of the Chechen resistance in the second half of the 1990s, he cannot be classified as a theologian. While Udugov quite often quoted from the Qur’an, he did not engage in such classical Islamic theological topics as *fiqh* (law), ‘*aqida* (religious belief), *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur’an), *kalam* (Islamic philosophy) or the science of hadith. Sometimes he does address the subject of religious belief, but only to convey once again that the only legitimate source of power is not the people (as in democracy, which he criticized), but God. Through this statement, Udugov in most of his texts justifies the need for the establishment of Sharia law. This gives one reason to say that he was mostly interested in subjects of political nature. For example, in

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230 Ibid.

one of his big interviews, he says that “Islam is an ideology in the first place”. Therefore, Udugov writes about Islam in the context of current political issues.

As Udugov rejected the Chechen national liberation struggle, and was in favor of the all-Caucasian resistance under the banner of Islam. Accordingly, his texts show quite a lot of criticism toward those whom he called Chechen nationalists. However, the rejection of nationalism as the driving force for armed resistance in favor of Jihadism, a more global phenomena as it would seem, did not make Movladi Udugov embrace the globalized discourse of Jihadism. Nor is it accurate to say that he increasingly engaged with the issues of Jihadists from the Middle East or Europe. Even in 2008, Movladi Udugov stated in a big interview for Prague Watchdog that the main enemy of the Jihadists in the North Caucasus was Russia. International issues generally concerned Udugov only in connection with the interests of the Jihadists in the North Caucasus, for example, when speaking on the subject of their disputes with the supporters of Moscow and the Chechen nationalists who live in Europe. Udugov criticizes Western ideas of democracy and liberalism (to which his Chechen opponents from nationalists movement appeal) and lashed out at the policies of the OSCE, the UN and the European Union, accusing them of double standards. Udugov points to the fact that Western laws and treaties based on these laws are easily violated by the same Western countries. He contends that the secular Constitution of the Chechen Republic of Dudaev’s time did not make it a successful state, nor did the Khasavyurt Accord of 1996 concluded between Chechnya and Russia save Chechnya from a new invasion of Russian troops. Therefore, it is his view that the peoples of the Caucasus should unite on a different legal platform – Sharia, which is divine in origin.

As Movladi Udugov focused on the issue of ensuring an all-Caucasian unity, for him the subject of the worldwide Caliphate was more on the sidelines. Above all he is concerned not by international issues but by Caucasian and Russian ones. In addition, the turn from nationalism to a Muslim justification for the military resistance is not accompanied by a refutation of all local historical mythology in favor of the general Islamic one. Quite on the contrary Udugov is immersed in the local Caucasian and Russian cultural contexts. For instance, to justify the military struggle for all-Caucasian unity on the basis of Sharia, Udugov

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233 Ibid.

234 Movladi Udugov, “Vse, chto ne sootvetstvyet”.
refers to local historical material. He often reiterated the claim that the all-Caucasus Islamic State that he calls for stands in the tradition of the Caucasian resistance to the Russian Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries. In particular, he cites names such as Sheikh Mansur (1760-1794), Imam Shamil (1797-1871), and Sheikh Uzun-Hajji (1848-1920).

Udugov repeatedly stressed that the restoration of Sharia law is just a return to that way of life of the people of the North Caucasus before the Russian conquest. He justifies the struggle of his supporters by the desire to rebuild “our lost Islamic State”. However, he is quoted as saying that their goal is not to only create an enclave within the North Caucasus but to move on to the territory of the rest of Russia. This would include Tatarstan, Bashkortostan (Russian Federation republics which are traditionally home to many Muslims), but also Buryatia, Tyumen, Vladivostok and Moscow where, according to him, many Russians have converted to Islam and sworn their allegiance to Doku Umarov, the leader of the “Caucasus Emirate”.

His ambitions extend to the entire territory of Russia. He calls on all Russians to abandon the “false ideas, composed in the past and being written today” and to embrace Islam. Udugov argues that today ethnically Russian Muslims join the jihad, so Sharia must become Russia's alternative to the search for a special “Russian way”.

As we can see, the rhetoric of Movladi Udugov can be called expansionist rather than separatist. After all, his proclaimed goal is to first unite the North Caucasus under the Sharia law, and then the whole of Russia. Therefore he seeks to defeat Russia on the ideological level, for example, by accusing Moscow of conscious myth-making. In particular, he criticizes the myth of “Slavic brotherhood” established in the USSR following the Second World War, which was created by order of Stalin, Udugov opines. Udugov argues that the 325th anniversary of the Pereyaslav Council (Pereiaslavskaia Rada) celebrated in 1947 which

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236 Movladi Udugov, “Lozung momenta – deistvie».
237 Movladi Udugov, “Vse, chto ne soootvetstvyet».
238 “My vziali v ruki oruzhie”.
240 Movladi Udugov, “Priznaki nadvigauscheisia”. 
symbolized this “Slavic brotherhood”, in fact, aimed to make the Ukrainians forget “the Holodomor (famine) brought about by the Bolsheviks” and forget the “normal life under the German occupation”.\(^{241}\) Obviously, in this way Movladi Udugov takes the side of Ukrainian nationalism.

In 2014, Udugov again used the Russian-Ukrainian conflict for his goals, by calling for more decisive action against Russia.\(^{242}\) Udugov is ready to support pro-European Ukraine despite the fact that he fiercely criticized the EU, NATO, and OSCE as well as western democratic and liberal ideas in his articles and interviews. The fact that a Jihadist ideologist sides with Ukraine in a Russian-Ukrainian conflict confirms that his main enemy is Russia, and that he takes any opportunity to link up with Russian enemies. In addition, it shows that the internal agenda of jihadists from the North Caucasus is more important than global Islamism with its broader civilizational construction.

**Communism, Bolsheviks and the History of Islam**

According to Udugov Russia can only be defeated once it converts to Islam as the only path that will make it a great country again. In this respect, Udugov can be put in the same league with provocative Russian intellectuals such as Aleksandr Dugin and Aleksandr Prokhanov (b. 1938),\(^{243}\) who seek ways to revive the greatness of Russia after the collapse of the USSR. But for Udugov, the first stage of this path is to establish Sharia law in the North Caucasus. In this context, it is interesting to note that in describing the ways of the struggle for Sharia, Udugov draws historical analogies from the Soviet past. For example, in 2005-2006, together with his “Islamic Strategic Studies Centre”, he published a large work called “The thoughts of a Mujahid”\(^{244}\) in which Udugov claimed that Muslims in their struggle for power should learn


\(^{242}\) Movladi Udugov, “V ‘real politik’ ne vozbranietsia”.

\(^{243}\) Aleksandr Prokhanov is a Russian writer and a conservative ideologist. He is the editor-in-chief of newspaper “Zavtra” (Tomorrow), that combines ultranationalist and communist views.

from the strategy of the Bolsheviks.\textsuperscript{245} First and foremost, the Muslims should keep away from democratic systems alien to them as the Bolsheviks did back in the day.

Udugov believes that communism and the Muslim religion have some obvious general principles. In his opinion, central in the ideology of Bolsheviks, as in Islam are ideas of self-sacrifice and social justice.

Besides, the Bolsheviks used methods of state organization similar to the way Muslims did. For example, he compared the Bolshevik councils (“Soviets”) as the foundation of the new Soviet state to the Islamic deliberative principle of Shura (Arabic for “council”) as the basis of Islamic rule. Udugov does see a lot of obvious events in the history of Islam similar to those in the history of Bolshevism. In his opinion, the Communists established their power by using the Islamic historical experience.\textsuperscript{246}

Udugov wrote that the Bolsheviks, just like the Muslims, had their holy book – the “Capital” by Karl Marx. Much like in Islam, communism was based on the idea of a holy war for their faith which allowed it to spread across the world in one generation. Udugov points out similar stories that are obvious in his opinion in the formation of the Soviet Union and in the history of the Islam. For example, at the outset of their struggle, the Bolsheviks, just like the first Muslims, had to go through an exodus. In the case of the Bolsheviks, this exodus was from the Russian Empire to Europe. However, due to the fact that they, much like the early Muslims, had a strong core of organization, total and uncompromising ideology and determination and belief in propaganda, they managed to emerge victoriously. Udugov argues that the Bolsheviks merely borrowed from the Islamic experience and therefore modern Muslims just need to remember their history to win.

Udugov says that the power of the Bolsheviks was able to hold only for 70 years because of a false ideological foundation. However, as the world needs a force that will confront the West, Udugov puts forward a new project which should replace the USSR – the Islamic Caliphate.

In his article “The thoughts of a Mujahid”, Movladi Udugov refers to Karl Marx, Anatolii Lunacharskii, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn while not quoting any Muslim authors. Besides, as noted above, the language employed by Udugov was not replete with Arab or any other

\textsuperscript{245} “Razmyshleniia modzhakheda (Chast’ 3)”, Kavkazcenter (2006)
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid.
specific Islamic terminology. Like many post-Soviet authors, he excoriated the Western political values and institutions, proposing a special path for Russia, which, in his opinion, had to become a Sharia country.

In my opinion, the example of Movladi Udugov is quite common for post-Soviet Russian Jihadists. This is especially true of the first generation of jihadist who socialized in the late Soviet era. For the most part, they, like Movladi Udugov, had no foreign Muslim education and generally did not speak the Arabic language. At the same time, they had a rather serious Soviet socialization experience: Soviet education, quite a successful career sometimes and, as a consequence, a Soviet intellectual background. It left a quite a stark mark on how they developed their insurgent ideology and justified jihad. In the 1990s, the ranks of North Caucasian fighters were representatives of the Soviet humanitarian intelligentsia; their background shaped the discourse on jihad.

This group also included less well-known jihadist intellectuals such as Dalkhan Khozhaev (1961-2000) and Magomet Tagaev. Khozhaev, who was a graduate of the historical faculty of the Chechen-Ingush State University and worked at a local history museum in the Soviet years, became a field commander and headed the Department of Archives of Chechnya under the government of Dudaev during the first Chechen war. In 1998, Dalkhan Khozhaev released a book called “The Chechens in the Russian-Caucasian war” in which he collected the biographies of famous Chechens who supported the all-Caucasian resistance under Imam Shamil and his predecessors between 1817-1864. Thus, Khozhaev wrote the story of famous Chechen warriors as part of the general history of the North Caucasian resistance to Moscow. This historical parallel coming from a field commander had special significance for the ideology of the Chechen and other North Caucasian militants in the 1990s. For example, Daghestani Jihadist Magomet Tagaev pursued a similar justification. He was part of the generation of Soviet dissidents, and had been sentenced to five years of imprisonment under article 70 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR for anti-Soviet agitation in 1969. In the post-Soviet years, Tagaev became a political activist, getting involved in the Caucasian Confederation led by Zelimkhan Yandarbiev. In 1996, while at the Congress of this movement, he was even proclaimed commander of the so-called “Daghestani Insurgent Army of Imam Shamil”, and participated in the military invasion of Daghestan in 1999 in the

group of militants led by Shamil Basaev. After the release of his books called “Our struggle and insurgent army of the Imam” (*Nasha bor'ba i povstancheskaia armiia Imama*) (1994), “Gazavat” (*Gazavat*) (1997) and “Eternal Call, or My Caucasus” (*Vechnyi Zov ili Moi Kavkaz*) (2000), Tagaev became one of the prominent jihadist ideologists in the North Caucasus. The historical reference to the name of Imam Shamil in the name of the “army” headed by Tagaev is no accident and clearly points to the claim to regional continuity.

After all, Imam Shamil (1797-1871) was the third and most legendary Imam of Chechnya and Daghestan (1834-1859), that is, the leader of the North Caucasian resistance against the Russian Empire during the Caucasian War (1817-1864).

In the North Caucasus, the jihadists clearly emphasize local historical rooting more than participation in global movement. At the same time, it should be noted that this historical memory is constructed in Russian, and not in the languages of the peoples of the North Caucasus. All this together leads to the conclusion that this phenomenon is best understood in the context of the cultural and ideological heritage of the USSR, and as part of broad post-Soviet discourses about the Soviet legacy.
Conclusion to Part I

In the early 1990s, before and after the declaration of the independence of the Chechen republic of Ichkeria, the nationalist appeal was the most strong and eminent, just like it was in other republics of the former Soviet Union. However, it was not the only one, and quickly began to shift towards Islamic rhetoric.

Looking at the example of Yandarbiev, we can see that the shift from Soviet ideology to Caucasianess, and further on to Chechen nationalism and eventually to Islamism, must be explained by the particular promise that each of them offered, in Yandarbiev's eyes, at a particular moment; they could overlap or exclude each other in different constellations, and they could be activated and adapted for various audiences. In this respect Yandarbiev ideological journey through various ideologies can be compared to the multiplexity of ideological statements that we find in the writings of the Muslim intellectuals in late Tsarist and early Soviet Russia, as has been demonstrated by James H. Meyer; individuals such as the prominent Jadid from Shusha in the South Caucasus, Ahmed Agha-oghlu (1869-1939), could almost simultaneously present themselves as speakers for a Persian, Turkic, Muslim, Caucasian, or national (in his Agha-oghlu's case, Azerbaijani) political and cultural community, depending on whom they wanted to reach out to.248 And also in their thinking, racist elements could stand next to cultural, civic, and religious identities; and relations with the Russian authorities were often very complex. Yandarbiev stood in this tradition of experimenting with ideologies and identities.

In the texts of Yandarbiev and Udugov, we observe the influence of Soviet and post-Soviet cultural and intellectual trends. This is understandable, given their Soviet education and their lack of any Islamic education or of Arabic language training. The genealogy of their thinking as reconstructed by an analysis of the sources that they used, and by the arguments that they prioritized, is supported by almost a complete absence of Islamic sources in their texts. The final paradox is, then, that from all the different and conflicting ideas that Yandarbiev and Udugov experimented with, it is exactly the one that they were least familiar with – radical Islam – that they helped implement – in very Soviet forms and expressions.

Dudaev's and Basaev's use of the term Rusism, shows that the intellectual roots of North Caucasian jihad leaders go even deeper - to the revolutionary ideas of Tsarist Russia. These ideas were transmitted through the Soviet educational experience.

In their endeavor to define and implement a new big ideology, the ideologists of the Chechen fighters unconsciously follow a general post-Soviet ideological trend that is obvious when Russian intellectuals promote their big projects – be that Eurasianism, monarchism, or Orthodox nationalism.

I agree with Emil Souleimanov who argued that the peculiarity of the Chechen self-consciousness is that the war against external (primarily Russian) aggression is associated with the war under the banner of the gazavat; the war for “national honor” inevitably acquired a revolutionary-Islamic character because of the romanticized images of the liberation war of the 18-19th centuries under the banner of Islam. Thus, in the confrontation with Moscow, the Chechen historical memory in a way predetermined the Islamic turn, the transformation of a war for the Republic of Ichkeria into a jihad with broader goals. This process started without the active participation of foreign ideologists. This explains why the ideological elite of Chechen militants, when justifying jihad, first of all appeal not to general Islamic history or to any foreign Muslim authorities. Educated in the Soviet educational and ideological environment, they mobilize both the regional North Caucasus Islamic legacy and the All-Russian/Soviet heritage. This turn reflected the life experience of these people, and the post-Soviet context in which these events took place. Justifying jihad, they used historical symbols, but also the style of presentation and the language that was best known to them. In this sense, Russia's ideology of military jihad proves to be a product of internal Russian intellectual processes and crises, conditioned by the collapse of the Soviet communist ideological narrative. It is obvious that the Soviet ideological matrix has a noticeable effect on how the leaders and ideologists of the Chechen fighters talked about jihad.

All this makes North Caucasus propaganda of jihad quite flexible; it can appeal to distinctly Chechen but also to wider Caucasian, Russian/Soviet and global Islamic symbols. The use and emphasis of particular symbols depends on the respective context, and on the author's estimation as to which of them has the highest mobilization potential.
Part II:

Beyond Chechnya: Enrooting Jihad in Culture

The start of the second Russian campaign against Chechnya in August 1999 coincided with the increased activity of the Islamist resistance in neighboring Daghestan. In that year two events linked the Islamic movement in Daghestan to the Islamized national resistance in Chechnya. One of these was the incursion of Chechen militants into Daghestan's mountaineous border area, the Tsumada and Botlikh districts (that have an Avar-speaking Muslim population); this Islamist expedition started on 2 August 1999 and was repulsed by 14 September; for Moscow, this particular invasion was the official pretext for launching a full-fledged military campaign against Grozny. Exactly at the same time, from 29 August to 13 September, the federal forces also attacked, and destroyed, the so-called “Kadar Zone” in the Dargin area of central Daghestan, that is, not in direct vicinity to Chechnya. The Kadar Zone comprised three villages – Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar; in August 1998 the local Muslims had declared their area to be an independent Islamic community, an Islamic enclave beyond the control of the secular Republic of Daghestan. Life was regulated by a Sharia court; police officers, official imams and other personalities loyal to Makhachkala had been driven out of the area. By late 1999, the Federal forces had managed to expel the militants from the Kadar Zone, many of which escaped to Chechnya (from where, we must assume, some of them had arrived in 1998). According to local reports, the reestablishment of state control in Kadar was prepared by heavy artillery shelling.

Under President Putin, Moscow quickly regained control over most parts of Chechnya; yet officially, it was only in 2009 that Moscow officially declared its military campaign in Chechnya to be terminated. In Daghestan, the violence continued ever since, by a regular series of assassinations, kidnappings, and bomb attacks. Also in Kabardino-Balkaria, neighboring Chechnya and Ingushetia to the west, the militant jihadi underground continued to expand, with major atrocities (including the temporary “capture” of its capital, Nalchik, in 2005).249 Especially suicide-bombings became a regular device for spreading terror.250

Eventually, the continuing Islamization of the resistance resulted in the formation of the Caucasus Emirate (Emirat Kavkaz), as a virtual unit supposed to unite all of the Caucasus (including its south), and even with aspirations to include the Volga region. It was Doku Umarov, then the “underground president” of the now defunct Chechnya/Ingushetia, who proclaimed the Caucasus Emirate, on 7 October 2007. Kavkazcenter, the Islamist media holding of Udugov that now operated as the emirate's mouthpiece, published a stream of Islamist statements on the ideology of the new “state”, and of the continuing fight against the Russian forces. Some of these documents make it clear that the idea of switching from a national agenda, for rescuing “independent Ichkeria”, to a supranational Islamist state project had been in the air for a while, with some Chechen warlords (like Shamil Basaev) and also Kabardino-Balkarian underground leaders (like Anzor Astemirov) pressing Umarov to make this crucial step.

In spite of its virtual character – it had no “liberated zones”, and its institutions (courts, consulting bodies/shuras) were just represented by individual militant leaders who were constantly on the move – the Caucasus Emirate became Russia's major jihadist organization, and its activists continued to commit terrorist attacks, including in Russian cities. The activities of the Caucasus Emirate (or, more concretely, of its regional “branches” in Daghestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, and Chechnya, all of which maintained a large degree of independence) ebbed down with the start of the war in Syria: a large number of the North Caucasus militants decided to join the ranks of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s Islamic group which had developed out of al-Qaida, but then broke with al-Qaida’s leader al-Zawahiri in a struggle about military strategies, and personal ambitions; other North Caucasus striders joined Jabhat al-Nusra, which had – like the Caucasus Emirate – maintained its loyalty to al-Qaida, and was on the ground engaged in fights not only against the Asad regime but also against ISIS. In the North Caucasus, this internal Islamist competition further weakened Doku Umarov's authority; after his violent death in 2013 his function as leader of the Caucasus Emirate passed on to other militant activists, who, however, were killed by the federal forces in quick succession. Russia's full-blown military intervention in Syria (since 2015) is also targeting those emigré jihadists from Russia's Caucasus.

While the first part of the present dissertation was dedicated to the contribution of members of
the Chechen political and Islamist elite to the development of Russophone jihadism, this
second part will discuss intellectuals, singers, scholars and writers who originate from beyond
Chechnya – in particular from Dagestan but also from Russia (Siberia and the Volga-Urals). The focus is again on cultural and ideological roots of jihadism in Russia. One feature
that unites all protagonists of this second part is that all of them were not only ideologists,
composers of programmatic texts, and producers of cultural manifestations promoting jihad,
but also active participants in military – from our perspective, criminal and terrorist –
activities.

This circle of ideologists entered the public discourse mainly in the late 1990s and the first
decade of the new millennium. As most of them were born in the 1970s and 1980s, they
witnessed the Soviet time, but their coming to maturity fell into the Perestroika and the post-
Soviet period. On the one hand, they were less exposed to the influence of Soviet ideological
patterns; on the other, they were greatly influenced by those cultural and intellectual trends of
the post-Soviet period which redefined the Soviet legacy.

The five chapters that follow center on Iasin Rasulov (1975-2006), the ideologist of the
Dagestan “Sharia” movement; Anzor Astemirov (1976-2010), the leader of the Kabardino-
Balkarian jamaat and Shariah judge of the “Caucasus Emirate”; Nadirshakh Khachilaev
(1958-2003), one of the ideologists of the Dagestani Islamists; Said Buriatskii (Aleksandr
Tikhomirov) (1982-2010), one of the brightest speakers and ideologists of the “Caucasus
Emirate”; as well as Airat Vakhitov (Salman Bulgarskii) (b. 1977), a former militant and
famous Russian Islamist intellectual, and Abuzagir Mantaev (1975-2005), who before he
joined the militants wrote and defended a PhD thesis in Moscow on the problem of
Wahhabism. The musical side of jihad is illuminated with the example of the famous jihadist
bard Timur Mutsuraev (b. 1976).

With Timur Mutsuraev’s exception, these jihadists were not from Chechnya; and also
Mutsuraev belongs into this circle as he is representing the same broader trend of enculturated
jihadists that differ markedly from the first generation of ideologists whose work I analyzed in
the first part of the present study. I argue that the younger generation that will be discussed
here formed a cultural scene of jihadists that found sympathizers even beyond the North
Caucasus; this part therefore also comprises an analysis of the perception of each of the
protagonists.
I furthermore argue that the incursion of Islamist militants from Chechnya into Daghestan triggered the formation of a common cultural platform for jihadists in the whole region. Evidence for this is found in the texts of the protagonists, and particularly in the symbolism that they mobilize.
Chapter 4:

From Ichkeria to the Caucasus Emirate

The 1999 Incursion into Daghestan as a Symbolic Struggle: from the Islamic Caucasus to Socialist Cuba

Starting in the mid-1990s, Muslims from Russia who were dissatisfied with the Russian politics started to move to the North Caucasus, where they hoped to establish a society governed by the rules of Islam. In Daghestan, the leader of this group of travelling Islamists, and of their local hosts, became Bagautdin Kebedov (Baha'addin Muhammad al-Daghistani, b. 1945), who maintained close contacts to the Chechen militants such as Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, Shamil Basaev and Amir ibn al-Khattab (1969-2002). In a 1997 interview that he gave to the Moscow-based Orientalist and Arabist Mikhail Roshchin, Kebedov argued that the government of the republic of Daghestan is practicing shirk (unbelief). Calling himself an adherent of an Islamic state, Kebedov argued that Daghestan, which continued to be ruled by Moscow, is not home to a Muslim society – in contrast to (at that time) independent Ichkeria.

In Chechnya, Kebedov headed a group of Daghestani militants who, in March 1998, began to prepare an incursion into Daghestan. In this context they established, in the spring of 1998, an organ that was named the “Islamic Shura of Daghestan”, with shura being the Arabic word for 'council'. This Shura was meant to elaborate an ideological platform for planned incursion into Daghestan. The key position of “minister for information and the press” of the Islamic Shura of Daghestan was conferred upon a former Soviet dissident, the Daghestani (Avar) Magomet Tagaev.

In April 1998, Daghestani and Chechen militants also founded the so-called “Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Daghestan”, the leadership of which was in the hands of the field commander Shamil Basaev. Under the umbrella of this “Congress” operated the infamous “Islamic Peace-making Brigade” (Islamskaia mirotvorecheskaia brigada) of the (by

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253 Mikhail Roshchin, “Fundamentalizm v Dagestane i Chechne”.
254 Ibid.
256 “Magomed Tagaev”, Encyclopedia Terroristica.
citizenship, Jordanian) jihadist warrior Khattab. It was Basaev and Khattab who directed, together with the militants organized by Kebedov, the incursion into Daghestan in August 1999. Reportedly, on 7 August Basaev and Khattab led some 2000 fighters into the neighboring republic; these units comprised both Chechens and Daghestanis, in addition to some foreigners. Khattab and Basaev were quick to proclaim the establishment of an “independent Islamic republic of Daghestan”, and declared war against Russia as well as against the government of Daghestan. Obviously they hoped that the local population would welcome them, and join their efforts.

However, the local population surprised them by their forceful resistance. The federal army units on the spot were supported by armed locals, in particular by volunteers of an Avar organization that bore the name “Imam Shamil Popular Front of Daghestan”, under the leadership of a representative of the government of Daghestan, Gadzhi Makhachev (1951-2013). Especially the Botlikh and Novolaksk regions of Daghestan saw heavy fighting during August and the first half of September. By 24 August 1999, the federal forces had pressed Basaev back into Chechnya, but on 5 September Basaev and Khattab's militants appeared again on Daghestani territory. On 7 September the federal forces and the local volunteers stopped the militants' attack some 5 kilometers from the important city of Khasaviurt; and on 15 September Igor' Sergeev, Russia's minister of defense, announced that the territory of Daghestan had been cleaned from the militants coming from Chechnya.

While the incursion ended in failure, it had been thoroughly prepared not only militarily but also ideologically. Interesting are the official “names” that the Islamists from Chechnya gave to their operations. The first of these, which started with the attack of the Botlikh region on 7 August and continued until 23 August, was titled “Operation Imam Gazi-Mukhammad”; the second, into the Novolaksk region from 5 to 14 September, was referred to as “Imam Gamzat-bek”. These were the names of the first two of the three Daghestani jihad leaders (imams), Ghazi-Muhammad (imam ca. 1828-1832) and Hamzat-Bek (imam 1832-1834); both were of the Avar nationality, that is, of the same nationality as the Muslim populations in the targeted

259 Narodnyi front Daghestana imeni imama Shamilia.
260 “Vtorzhenie boevikov v Dagestan”.
261 Ibid.
262 Ibid.
areas of Daghestan. This propaganda practice demonstrates that in spite of the fact that the operations were led mainly by Chechens, and included foreigners, the militants paid considerable attention to giving it a Daghestani image. Striking is that the military groups from the Daghestani villages that defended their homes against the incursion from Chechnya equally mobilized the historical heritage of jihad – their organization was named after the third jihadi imam, Imam Shamil (1797-1871; imam 1834-1859). Later in this thesis, in chapter 6, we will return to the images of the nineteenth-century jihad against Russia among contemporary, and to the continuities that jihadists construct. For the time being it should be mentioned that this heritage is quite complex; first, all three imams were Daghestanis but all attempted to incorporate Chechnya into their imamate; second, all three fought against Russia, not only the first two (Ghazi-Muhammad and Hamzat Bek) but also Shamil. While Ghazi Muhammad died on the battlefield, and Hamzat was killed by another Avar in a blood feud, Shamil eventually capitulated, and was then transferred to inner Russia, where he was given an audience with the Tsar and then enjoyed a luxurious kind of house arrest until he was allowed to emigrate to Medina, where he passed away. The violent conflict between groups that name themselves after imams of the same movement is of course curious; it might be explained by the fact that Shamil has been associated, more than the other two, with Avar nationalism, and also with Sufism; the Chechen brigades therefore picked the 'less tainted' figures (Hamzat-Bek had no Sufi links; Ghazi Muhammad did have a Sufi mentor but emphasized that he fought for the implementation of Islamic law, not for Sufis structures).264

What these historical links already demonstrate is that the Islamization of the Chechen separatist movement, and then of the broader resistance in the North Caucasus, occurred not only under the influence of globalized jihadism (as personified, in the events discussed above, by the Arab field commander Khattab); rather, the jihad unfolded also by employing references to regional historical memories as well as to common overarching North Caucasian features – in addition to references to the Russian and Soviet cultural heritage, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

My argument about the historical embeddedness of the jihadist discourse is also supported by the fact that right after the start of the incursion into Daghestan, the “Islamic Shura of Daghestan” issued and spread a “Declaration on the Re-establishment of the Islamic State

264 For the historical personalities and their images, see M. Gammer, Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan (London: Frank Cass, 1994), and the literature used in chapter 5.
Daghestan”, 265 which emphasized that the war against the “unbelievers” is a duty to all Muslims in Daghestan.266 Like the references to the jihadi leaders of the 19th century, also the expression “re-establishment” pinpoints the attempt to construct a historical continuity with the jihadi imams of the past – and the conviction, on the side of the militants, that back then Daghestan’s Muslims lived according to Islamic law. This conception of the Great Caucasus War of the 19th century as a war for implementing sharia is a red thread going through many texts of post-Soviet ideologists of jihad.

However, the peculiarity of the North Caucasian struggle under the banner of the jihad in the post-Soviet period was that both its ordinary participants and ideologists (particularly the ideologists of the first generation of militants), were people with a rich Soviet past.

An example is the above-mentioned “minister of information” Magomet Tagaev, who after the defeat of the attack, in 2000, published a book under the title “Eternal Call, or My Caucasus” (Vechnyi Soz, ili Moi Kavkaz),267 from which I already quoted in my discussion of the use of the term “rusizm” for justifying military action against Russia. In this book Tagaev described the leaders of the attack on Daghestan, Shamal Basaev and Amir Khattab, by comparing them to the leaders of the Cuban revolution, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara:

In this question there should be no dissent among us: if in the Caucasus liberation war Shamal Basaev is Fidel Castro, then Khattab is Che Guevara. While the Cubans could not preserve Che Guevara from being betrayed by Russia, we will preserve Khattab like the apple of our eye. Che Guevara was no Cuban and was betrayed by the Russians, with the result that also today, relations between Cuba and 'Russia' [sic!] are not fully normal, the Russians being by their nature traitors and cynical liers.

Such a quote demonstrates that for the North Caucasus jihadists, references to own historical models were not enough to back their own legitimacy, leading to a search for additional, and broader, platforms. These could even be taken from beyond Islam, in the history of the socialist revolutionary movement. To Tagaev, the former Soviet dissident, and probably also to his target audience, references to Guevara and Castro were not only familiar but also carried a positive value. Obviously, in the quote above, Khattab is equaled to the Argentinian

265 “Vtorzhenie boevikov v Dagestan”.
267 M. Tagaev, “Vechnyi Zov Ili Moi Kavkaz”.
Che Guevara simply due to the fact that Khattab was a foreigner in the Caucasus, while Basaev and Fidel Castro fought in their homelands.

These comparisons demonstrate that North Caucasus jihadism had many dimensions. On the one hand, the prominent role of foreign fighters emphasizes the global embeddedness; on the other, the references to regional history embodies the importance of particularistic identities; and finally, references to elements from the Soviet legacy demonstrate the thoroughly post-Soviet character of the movement. Needless to say, all these expressions and narratives are phrased in the Russian language.

I argue that in almost each major event and development of the North Caucasus jihadi movement up to the mid-2000s we find prominent personalities who combine these contradictory layers in their statements and writings. As we are now turning to jihadi thinkers from beyond Chechnya, my first case study here is Nadirshakh Khachilaev (1958-2003), who is regarded as one of the leaders of the Islamic enclave of the “Kadar Zone”, and who played an important role in the spread of military jihadi thinking in Daghestan and beyond.

The Kadar Zone and Nadirshakh Khachilaev: the USSR and Imam Shamil in the Justification of Jihad

Daghestan: Nadirshakh Khachilaev

In the mid-1990s, the Islamic community (jama'at) around the local mosque of the village of Karamakhi (Buinaksk region, Daghestan) – later the center of the so-called Kadar Zone – started to preach the idea of a “pure” Islam, against other interpretations of Islam that the activists regarded as “wrong”. From all over Daghestan, young men moved to the area. Sources claim that from the 5,000 inhabitants of Karamakhi, some 250 belonged to this radical movement.

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269 Mikhail Roshchin, “Fundamentalizm v Dagestane i Chechne”.
Between May and August 1998 the radicals evicted the representatives of the local administration and the police, arguing that from now on public order will be enforced by the Muslims resident in Karamakhi.271

At the same time they built up relations with militants in Chechnya. Already in 1997, representatives of the Kadar Zone community participated in the promulgation of Shamil Basaev as amir (leader) of the “Army for the Liberation of the North Caucasus” (Armiia osvobozhdenia Severnogo Kavkaza), with Amir Khattab as his first deputy.272 This army, apparently, was specially created for the invasion of Dagestan. Their incursion into the Novolakskii raion of Daghestan, in September 1999, was formally linked to the intention to defend the villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhhi from government pressure273 (even though the incursion never came close to the Lak area of the Kadar Zone, leading to the assumption that the actual incursion was also intended as a movement to deflect the attention of the Russian forces, away from the Kadar Zone).

In August 1998, blockposts with green flags were set up at the entrance of the villages, with the Russian text “You are entering territory where the laws of the sharia are in force” (Vy v’e兹haete na territoriiu gde deistviut zakony shariata).274

The radicals in the Zone prepared themselves in anticipation of a major attack of the Federal forces. Training camps for militants, established on the territory of the villages, combined Islamic education with military training.275

The military confrontation started on 29 August 1999, with an assault of the Federal forces; it took them two weeks to fight down the resistance. The fighting ended on 12 September; most militants left Karamakhi, while some dozens of them had been killed.276

According to Gennadii Troshev, general of the Russian forces, one of the commanders of the separatists was Nadirshakh Khachilaev (1958–2003). Troshchev saw in Khachilaev also the leader of Daghestan’s so-called Wahhabis, and reported that Khachilaev, together with

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272 Mikhail Roshchin, “Fundamentalizm v Dagestane i Chechne”.
273 Ibid.
274 “Rodina voyny”.
275 Mikhail Roshchin, “Fundamentalizm v Dagestane i Chechne”.
276 “Rodina voyny”.

Movladi Udugov and Shamil Basaev, belonged to the leaders of the so-called “Caucasian House of the Liberation of Chechnya and Daghestan”.277


Nadirshakh Khachilaev had graduated from the Literary Institute in Moscow, in 1987. Like Yandarbiev and others, he thus belongs to the first generation of jihadists from the North Caucasus who had enjoyed a philological training. After his military service in the Soviet army, Khachilaev lived in Leningrad and Moscow, starting his career as a writer.278 Already while studying at the Literary Institute in Moscow, Khachilaev wrote the novel “The Chronicle of Survival” in the Lak language279 about the life of people in the North Caucasus during the crisis and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was translated into Russian by Russian philologist and writer Igor Volgin (b. 1942)280 in 1995. However, in 2001 Khachilaev

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277 Gennadiy Troshev, “Moia voyna. Chechenskii dnevnik okopnogo genera
da”.
278 “Khachilaev Nadirshakh Mugadovich”, Wikipedia (2017) [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A5%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B5%D0%B2-%D0%9D%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%80%D1%88%D0%B0%D1%85-%D0%9C%D1%83%D0%B3-%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87#cite_note-autogenerated2-8](Last accessed on 30 April 2017).
279 Lak is a language of the Caucasian group (next to Avar, Lezgi, Chechen and Georgian), spoken by the Lak people in the Russian autonomous republic of Daghestan.
280 Igor Volgin (b. 1942) is a Soviet and Russian writer and historian, poet, specialist in literature. In particular, he is known as an expert on Fedor Dostoevskii and the history of Russian literature.
argued that Volgin in fact just translated his diary entries and made of these diary entries a novel, giving them a plot that the original did not have.  

Khachilaev was one of the most popular Daghestani politicians of the 1990s. In 1998, Khachilaev even became deputy in the Russian State Duma and gained recognition for facilitating the release from captivity of Russian soldiers, through his connections among the Chechen fighters.

Khachilaev thus operated between the state structures and the militants, and it seems he demanded a lot of liberty from the state organs. In May 1998, the Daghestani police stopped Khachilaev's car when he was returning from Chechnya – according to his own sayings, from a mission to liberate hostages. The situation escalated into a shoot-out between his armed body guard and the police. On the next day, on 21 May 1998, Khachilaev's supporters protested the police conduct by organizing a meeting on a central square in Makhachkala, and eventually by seizing the building of the State Council of Daghestan Makhachkala. After this, Khachilaev went into hiding in Chechnya and in the village of Karamakhi, in the Kadar Zone. Khachilaev lost his rank as a deputy of the State Duma and was sentenced to a year and a half in prison, but as he assisted in the liberation of Russian soldiers he was soon amnestied, which raised his popularity.

In 1999 Khachilaev published a Russian-language work, “Guidebook to the global resurrection of Muslims: Our Path to Ghazawat”, which represents a remarkable example of legitimizing jihad in the post-Soviet North Caucasus. This Russian-language booklet is another interesting example of the bricolage character of jihad ideologies in the post-Soviet era. In his “Guidebook” – seemingly designed as a prolegomena to some larger Program that did not come forth -- Khachilaev attacked the Western concept of democracy as the power of the people, and countered it by celebrating shari'a as the embodiment of God's will. In Khachilaev's mind, the contemporary situation was shaped by a war of the West against the Islamic world; therefore Muslims have to turn to jihad. Departing from the well-known traditional Islamic concept that jihad falls into a “greater jihad” (against one's soul) and a

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283 “Khachilaev Nadirshakh Mugadovich”.
284 Rukovodstvo k programme vsemirnogo vosstanija musul'man: Nash put' k gazavatu.
“smaller jihad” that encompasses military action, Khachilaev divided jihad into three categories: the “highest jihad” (vysshii dzhikhad) as the struggle against the self, against one's vices and against unbelief; the “Great [bol'shoi] jihad” as the systematic study and dissemination of knowledge; and the “classical” [klassicheskii] jihad as the military war against unbelief. This third version, according to Khachilaev, was the most important and highest stage (stupen’) of jihad.²⁸⁶

According to Khachilaev, the West – in the form of NATO and other organizations – wages war against the Muslim world, and it is for that reason that NATO expanded eastwards. The West swallowed the states of the former Warsaw Pact, including Russia, which had previously been hindering NATO from expansion. It is necessary to say that Khachilaev wrote this text after the first major NATO advance to the East took place in 1999, when this organization included Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary.²⁸⁷ For the author, the role of opposing the West has now been taken over to the Muslim world. Khachilaev thus follows Yandarbiev's reasoning, who equally held that Islam has taken over the function of the now defunct USSR. The Shari'a state that Khachilaev pursues is thus an alternative to the Soviet model; and he proclaims that the Muslims of the North Caucasus are currently leaving Russia, a country that “is bogged down in false values”. At the same time he argues that the Muslims must help liberate the Russians, for the latter find themselves under “the rule of Pharao”²²⁸⁸ (using the widespread imagery that identifies a ruler as anti-religious, self-indulgent, and ruthless).

This messianistic pathos of Islam substituting the USSR was not the only reference to Soviet contexts in Khachilaev's program. In particular, Khachilaev held that the Communists built the Soviet system by following the model of Islam:

the ideational leaders of the Communists attempted to inculcate [the population with] the Islamic morality (islamskaia moral’) of the healthy nations, with the collective life and labor that characterizes the Islamic life of the community and the jama’a (islamskii obschchinnii i dzhamaatskii obraz kollektivnoi zhizni i truda). But they did so in their own name, ignoring and excluding the belief in Allah.²²⁹

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 15.
²²⁸ Ibid., 33.
²²⁹ Ibid., 35.
Khachilaev concedes that the Soviet power achieved some success; however, they could not bring the system to perfection because they lacked the most important – belief in the Creator.

Such statements reflect the influence of the Chechen ideologist Movladi Udugov, who equally argued that the Soviet system successfully copied Muslim methods. Also Udugov and Yandarbiev cherished rhetoric of a bipolar world, with Islam growing into the niche freed by the collapse of the USSR. This bipolarity concept, with war between the two elements being inevitable, is of course part and parcel of the Islamist and jihadist discourse ever since, but here it takes the course of Soviet propaganda. Obviously, it is the Soviet education of the Chechen and Daghestani Islamists of the elder generation that made it natural for them to make references to the Soviet past, and that not only in a negative sense but by highlighting continuities with Islam. This continuity, and in particular the absurd allegation that the Bolsheviks copied from Islam, is used for arguing that Islam is the natural successor of the USSR in countering the aggressive West. Paradoxically, with this construction Khachilaev is not far from Western political scientists who observed that with the end of the USSR, the new fundamental geopolitical struggle is between Islam and the West, in a conflict of cultures and religions.290

While Khachilaev's framework is thus of a global nature, in his booklet he also zooms in on subjects of the North Caucasus. In particular, he tries to demonstrate the continuities with the jihad of the 19th century, and cherishes the image of Imam Shamil. Khachilaev characterizes Imam Shamil as both a “fundamental Muslim” (fundamental’nyi Muslim) and a reformer (reformator).291 The term “fundamental Muslim” seems to imply Shamil's closeness to what in the 1990s was still largely called “fundamentalism”, that is, Salafism; Khachilaev emphasizes that Shamil based his rulings on the Quran and the hadith. He also argues that Shamil did not follow the opinions of the Sufi shaykhs. For Khachilaev, Shamil was a “reformer” because he established a new state – the Imamate, with shari’a as its foundation. This reliance on the subjection to Allah’s will, and the maintenance of the correct belief (’aqida) resulted naturally in a struggle against the local mullas and scholars of Islam, for in Khachilaev’s opinion, these did not obey Allah but the local and Tsarist administrations.292

291 N. Khachilaev, Rukovodstvo k Programme Vsemirnogo Vosstanija Musul’m'an, 29.
292 Ibid., 29.
Khachilaev pinpoints the similarity between the time of Shamil and the contemporary post-Soviet era, and therefore concludes that today the time has come for another reformation (reformatorstvo). Khachilaev does not deny that Shamil and his followers were members of the Sufi brotherhood (tarikat), but he stresses that in the first place they were “fundamental Muslims”, with Sufism relegated to a secondary place.

In order to preserve the heroic image of Shamil, Khachilaev introduces an interesting reinterpretation of Shamil's surrender in 1859. He argues that when sieged by Tsarist forces in his last stronghold in Gunib, Shamil only surrendered because the Russian officers promised that he would be allowed to perform the hajj to Mecca; Shamil thus stopped resistance in the conviction that he would soon be guided into exile in the Holy Lands, not into captivity. However, according to Khachilaev, the Russians betrayed Shamil, and instead brought him, via Kiev, to St. Petersburg, and eventually into house arrest near Kaluga. Only in 1869 was Shamil given permission to move to the Hijaz; he died in Medina in 1871.

The importance that Khachilaev accords to the image of Shamil reveals the centrality of the historical heritage of regional jihad in the construction of jihadist ideology in the North Caucasus. In this light it is noteworthy that the title of Khachilaev's publication carries a great deal of ambiguity: While the booklet is presented as a programmatic guideline for “the worldwide insurrection of Muslims”, the subtitle, “Our Path to Ghazawat”, is a direct reference to regional jihad, which in the 19th century, and in popular parlance all through Soviet and post-Soviet literature, comes under the name of ghazawat, not jihad. Curiously, in the text itself Khachilaev consistently avoids the term ghazawat, employing jihad in its stead; the two are thus treated as synonymous. In addition, the fact that the book is meant to reflect “our path” to jihad emphasizes that jihad comes “from within ourselves”, from the regional history, out of the personal experience – and not from abroad.

Next to the term jihad, Khachilaev uses Arabic loanwords; one example is farz (Arabic fard, “duty”), especially as jihadi ideology argues that jihad is a duty, on the same level as the general and accepted “personal duties” of any Muslim (like prayer and fasting). Equally prominent is adzhal (Arabic, ajal), meaning “appointed time” but also “death”, equally

293 Ibid., 29-30.
294 Ibid., 33-34.
underlining the urgency of the struggle for Islam. But the frequency of his use of loanwords is very low, and each time he provides a Russian translation in a footnote.

The call for a purification of Islam and for the establishment of a shari'a state, as well as the critique of Western institutions, policies, and values (like democracy) is typical for the jihadi discourse. Problematic is always whether Russia, or here the USSR, have always been part of the West. The critique of Soviet atheism is an element that all texts share, but it comes coupled with the claim that the ideology of the USSR was strongly shaped by Islamic elements, and that the Islamic world rightfully took over leadership of the opposition to the West when the Soviet Union perished.

Two Generations of Khachilaev's Supporters

In Daghestan, Nadir Khachilaev had the image of being an upright character, bold and “his own man”. His frequent use of extra-legal means – including violence – naturally also brought him close to the image of a “bandit” (of which there were many in the 1990s); but for those who sympathized with him, this banditry was probably shaped by the image of the abrek, the “noble bandit” of the North Caucasus who, because of his uprightness, was exiled from his home community, suffered persecution, and was therefore forced to defend himself, and to engage in banditry.296

Several Muslim intellectuals, both of the elderly and the young generation, felt attracted by him. In 2003, Khizri Il'iasov (b. 1960) published a book on him, simply entitled “Nadir Khachilaev”; this publication included articles about Khachilaev from the late 1990s and early 2000s, as well as interviews with him.297 It is important to note that Il'iasov was a philologist from Dagestan, who, like Khachilaev in Soviet times, graduated from the Literary Institute in Moscow and was an activist of the Lak national movement, too.298

In order to explain the “phenomenon” of Khachilaev, Il'iasov starts his book with references to the theory of passionarity as developed by the Soviet dissident historian and anthropologist

296 On abrek in the North Caucasus, see: V. Bobrovnikov, Musul'anye Severnogo Kavkaza: obychai, parvo, nasilie (Ocherki po istorii i etnografii Nagornogo Dagestanata) (Moscow: Vostochaia literatura, 2002).
Lev Gumilev. The author briefly describes Gumilev's theory of passionarity, in particular his assumption of cosmic influences that raise in some persons the potential to achieve heroic actions. For Il'iasov, Khachilaev belonged to these passionaric personalities who are able to change the course of history. As we will see below, this passionarity discourse became a standard element in post-Soviet Islamist literature, a kind of bridge between religion and science.

More striking is that Il'asov compares Gumilev's methods of understanding the world with the views of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh Osho (1931-1990), a famous Indian mystic. Il'iasov quotes this Bhagwan with his alleged statement that it is in wartime that man feels most intensely “that he lives”. It should be noted that the movement of Rajneesh (who is regarded as the founder of Neo-Hinduism) was banned in the USSR, and his views became popular only with the end of Soviet restrictions. Today this personality is very popular in the Russian internet; the followers who frequent the social sites that disseminate his views run into the hundred thousands.

But Khachilaev also appealed to the youth, and thereby seems to have triggered new searches for paradigms that justify jihad. One of his followers was the young Abuzagir Mantaev (1975-2005); Mantaev stands out because with him we meet the first personality who used academic historical scholarship for explaining and justifying jihad. Mantaev had graduated from the historical faculty of Dagestan University with honors, and studied Arabic in Egypt during one year. It was at the Moscow Diplomatic Academy that Mantaev defended his PhD, in political sciences, in 2002; his theses bore the title “Wahhabism and the political situation in Dagestan”.

Mantaev came from a fairly well-known family in Dagestan – his grandmother was a renowned poetess in Dagestan, and other family members served as officers with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and FSB. Mantaev spoke several languages. In particular, it is pointed out that he was the only expert on the old Provençal language in Dagestan. Famous Russian journalist Orkhan Dzhemal was quoted as saying that Mantaev “could read Chrétien

299 Ibid., 4.
300 Ibid., 4.
de Troyes, a troubadour, in the original”. In addition, it is known that in the early 1990s, Mantaev tried to play professional soccer in the club “Anzhi” from the city of Makhachkala.

His 2002 PhD thesis builds on Arabic and Russian sources to examine the role of “Wahhabism” in the public-political life of post-Soviet Daghestan, but he also analyzed the history of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia. When dwelling upon the Islamic movement in contemporary Daghestan, Mantaev argued that the term “Wahhabism” is misleading, and suggested to speak of “Salafism” instead. As to the conflict between Salafism and Sufism in Daghestan, Mantaev gives a fairly impartial assessment to all the trends. He adopts the stance of an observer seeking to give a critical opinion of both of them.

Paradoxically, Mantaev employs the term “Wahhabism” (without quotation marks, as a reality) also for the contemporary Salafi movements. Hereby he followed the terminology of the Russian media, in spite of the fact that the Salafists themselves reject this term. In Daghestan and other republics in the North Caucasus, the term Wahhabism is used by the representatives of the official Muftiates and those of the state to refer not only to Salafis and the so-called “Lesnye” (those militants who went into hiding in the woods), but sometimes also as an umbrella for any people and groups who disagree with the state policy that, in the religious field, is formulated and implemented by the Daghestani Mufti.

Despite all this, Mantaev used this term as the cornerstone of his research. He did not seek to criticize how the term is used by Russian authorities and various media.

Therefore, in his dissertation Mantaev still acted as an outside observer of the movement that he would soon join. However, even back then Mantaev was already a practicing Muslim who was familiar with the Salafi movement from his study in Egypt.

After defending his thesis in 2002, Mantaev returned to Makhachkala, where he became an aide to Nadirshakh Khachilaev. Abuzagir Mantaev joined Khachilaev when the latter was engaged in fierce criticism of the leadership of the Daghestani Mufti for the fact that the

305 A. Mantaev, Vakhkhabizm i politicheskaia situatsia v Dagestane, 15.
power was concentrated in the hands of one group – the supporters of Sufi Sheikh Said Chirkawi (Chirkeevskii/Chirkeiskii, 1937-2012). In 2003, Khachilaev was killed by an unknown assassin, and Mantaev decided to leave Daghestan and return to Moscow out of fear for his life.

Mantaev returned to Moscow, where he taught and worked in the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of European Russia as head of the Youth Department. Some sources say that when Mantaev returned to Moscow he already held rather radical views. In Moscow, however, he did not stay long. Mantaev returned to Daghestan and joined the ranks of the militants of the movement “Shari'a”, at that time headed by Muslim (Rasul) Makasharipov. Mantaev was killed on 9 October 2005; in 2007 the Daghestani Shari'a group joined the Caucasus Emirate.

It is quite likely that meeting Khachilaev served as a turning point for Mantaev. Perhaps the reason why Mantaev grew close to Khachilaev and developed respect for this man was the fact, among other things, that much like Mantaev, Khachilaev was not only an activist but also an intellectual with a rich educational luggage. Khachilaev epitomized the Muslim leader of a post-Soviet format who combined Islamic authority with solid secular education.

Apparently, the killing of Khachilaev triggered Mantaev's decision to join the military confrontation with the state that he might have first wanted to serve as a diplomat.

**The Proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate by Doku Umarov**

On October 7 2007, the well-known Chechen militant Doku Umarov (1964-2013) proclaimed the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate State which was supposed to unite the Northern Caucasus into a single Islamic state. Prior to that, Umarov had functioned as underground President of Ichkeria, a position that he assumed on 17 June 2006 after the death of his predecessor Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev (1966-2006).

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306 I. Fal’kovskii, “Abuzagir Mantaev”.
After graduating from high school, he studied engineering in the Oil Institute in Grozny.\(^{307}\) Having graduated from the institute, Umarov worked on various construction sites in the USSR.

Reportedly, in Soviet times, he was put in jail for reckless homicide,\(^{308}\) but the circumstance remain unclear. Equally disputed is why and when he was released from prison.

He then went to Siberia, where he worked for commercial structures and got engaged in racketeering. In 1992, the Russian authorities accused him of murder.\(^{309}\) After that, he fled to Chechnya, where he got engaged in the military struggle for the independence of Chechnya. He became one of the most infamous insurgents and terrorists by having orchestrated numerous terrorist attacks and murders. Obviously he was part of the “hostage industry”: the abduction of persons for ransom. It is believed that he organized such terrorist attacks as the explosion of the Nevskii Express in 2009, the bombings in the Moscow subway in March

\(^{307}\) “Umarov Doku Hamatovich”, Wikipedia (2007) [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A3%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2_%D0%94%D0%BE%D0%BA%D1%83_%D0%A5%D0%B0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87#cite_note-rian-15] (last accessed 30 April 2017).
\(^{309}\) Ibid.
2010 and the explosion at Domodedovo airport in January 2011. These attacks claimed the lives of more than 100 people and left over 300 persons injured.

Umarov was another driving force in the so-called Islamist turn of the Chechen struggle. The turning point was his declaration of the “Caucasus Emirate” in 2007.

Doku Umarov pointed out that the proclamation of an Islamic State had been of concern for many Chechen fighters for several years; both Aslan Maskhadov and his successor as president of Ichkeria Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev had considered this step but ultimately delayed the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate. Doku Umarov claimed that many militants, like Shamil Basaev and Khamzat Gelaev, did not want to fight for Ichkeria but for Sharia and the Islamic state. Khamzat Gelaev even expressed doubts that the fight for Ichkeria could be called jihad.

Umarov accused those Chechen politicians who escaped to the West (such as Akhmed Zakaev) and some local militants that the flag of Ichkeria became a feeding trough for them. As he claimed, Muslim youth never heard of Ichkeria and were not committed to jihad under its banner.

As Chechen leaders were still pondering on this question, the leader of jihadists in Kabardino-Balkaria Ansor (Saifullah) Astemirov planned to declare the Emirate, if the Chechens failed to do so. Umarov writes that Daghestanis and Ingush would give the oath of allegiance (bay’a) to Astemirov. Umarov was thereby forced to proclaim Emirate, in order to not lose support in Chechnya’s neighboring republics - at least this is how he explained the decision.

In many regards, the emergence of this new organization marked the appearance of a new generation of jihadists. Those were people born in the late Soviet times who socialized in the post-Soviet era.

The end of one epoch and the beginning of another generates new opportunities. In particular, the revival of religion stirred interest in Islam. Among the new supporters of the Caucasus Emirate and others Russian jihadists who grew adult after the collapse of the Soviet Union

311 Akhmed Zakaev (born 1959) is a former Deputy Prime Minister, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the unrecognised Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI). During the First Chechen war Zakayev took part in the battles for Grozny. Since 2002 lives in Great Britain.
312 Doku Umarov, “Shamil’ sprosil menia: Kogda ty stanesh’ Amirom, ty ob’iavish Imarat?”.
313 M. Kemper, “Jihadism: The Discourse of the Caucasus Emirate”.
there were many who not only had no higher education, or, like Doku Umarov, had a criminal past. Yet some representatives of the new generation had obtained an Islamic education in the 1990s. Among them is Anzor Astemirov.

Anzor Astemirov: from Civic Activism to the Islamization of Jihadist Propaganda

Anzor Astemirov (Amir Saifullah) was born on 3 December 1976, presumably in the Ukrainian city of Kremenchuk. It is believed that Astemirov belonged to a Kabardinian noble family, which in the 1930s had moved to Ukraine for fear of reprisals. Presumably, in the 1980s the Astemirovs family returned to Kabardino-Balkaria.\textsuperscript{314}

One of the brightest and most prominent ideologues of jihadism in the North Caucasus, Astemirov belonged to the very few radicals who had a more or less systematic training in the Islamic sciences abroad. In the early 1990s Astemirov had studied for several years in Saudi Arabia, in the University of Muhammad bin Saud (Riyadh).\textsuperscript{315} In 1993 he participated in the opening of the Islamic center of Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria.

The head of the center was Musa (Arthur) Mukazhev (1966-2009), a well-known Islamic leader in Kabardino-Balkaria. He had taken courses in Islamic studies at the muftiat of the republic and at the Kabardino-Balkarian Islamic Institute, and also took an Arabic language course in Jordan.\textsuperscript{316} Anzor Astemirov became deputy head of this center.

Despite the fact that initially the Islamic center had a good relationship with the muftiat, soon the leaders of the Centre went into opposition against Kabardino-Balkarian muftiate (and thus with the republican government). This happened against the background of the growing popularity of the leaders of the Islamic center Mukazhev and Astemirov.

Due to problems with the state and the local muftiat, the members of the center became rapidly radicalized. As a result, they established the so-called Kabardino-Balkar Jamaat (Islamic community) on the basis of the Center. Mukazhev became the head of the Jamaat, and Astemirov became his deputy.

\textsuperscript{315}Ibid.
In 2002 an Institute of Islamic studies was established in Nalchik, which was intended to improve relations between the opposition-minded Muslim youth and the official muftiat. Musa Mukazhev and Anzor Astemirov became deputy heads of the Institute. Astemirov was responsible for the scientific direction of the organization. Initially, the Institute sought to take part in academic life: Anzor Astemirov even went to Moscow to take part in round tables and scientific conferences organized by Islamic scholars and Orientalists. In particular, in June 2003, in Moscow, he participated in the roundtable “The Rights of National Minorities in Russia: Illusions and Reality”, organized by the Soros Foundation.

However, the attempt to establish cooperation with the authorities was not successful and Anzor Astemirov defected to the militants. On 13 October 2005 Astemirov was one of those who led the militant attack on the city of Nalchik. On this day, militants attacked the offices of Russian law enforcement agencies (the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, the army) in Nalchik. The aim of the terrorists was to capture the city. As a result of the attack, several dozen military and civilians were killed. The attempt was unsuccessful, but the fact that Astemirov took up arms meant his full switch to the underground.

In this underground Astemirov became very popular due to his erudition in the Islamic disciplines.

317 “Astemirov Anzor El’darovich”.
318 Ibid.
In September 2007, the President of the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria Doku Umarov appointed Astemirov head of the Supreme Sharia court of the Republic. When in October 2007 Umarov proclaimed the establishment of the “Caucasus Emirate”, Astemirov received the title of Supreme Qadi (judge) of the organization.321

In his message on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate in 2011, Umarov claimed that Astemirov was the person capable of uniting many peoples of the North Caucasus, who previously did not want to fight under the banner of the Republic of Ichkeria.322

Apparently, in addition to his good Islamic education, it was important that Astemirov was not an ethnic Chechen. As mentioned above, Umarov wrote that the other peoples of the North Caucasus did not want to fight under the flag of Ichkeria. However, they could swear allegiance to Astemirov.

Astemirov was not just one of the leaders of the jihadists in the North Caucasus in the 2000s, but also one of the ideologists of this movement. He led sermons, wrote articles and gave interviews. It is obvious that Astemirov particularly worried about two topics: jihad and ethnic history of the North Caucasian peoples.

Anzor Astemirov’s texts and speeches were the most Islamized. His status as Sharia judge and, most importantly, his Saudi education made itself felt. The Russian language of his texts included Arabic loanwords and he frequently referred to the classical Islamic scholars, such as Ahmad Ibn-Taymiyya323 and Nasiruddin al-Albani.324

His main work on justification of jihad, “Jihad against apostates”325, is a rather a political text where Astemirov indicated the main enemies of the Muslims/jihadists against which it was necessary to wage an armed struggle. In this text, Astemirov argued that the first step is to fight the internal or closest enemies: those who retreated from Islam. Moreover, Astemirov criticizes those Muslims who think that modern Muslims lack the power to fight the infidels and that therefore it is impossible to commit jihad under modern conditions. In particular,

321 “Astemirov Anzor El’darovich”.
322 Doku Umarov, “Shamil’ sprosil menia: Kogda ty stanesh’ Amirom, ty ob’iavish Imarat?!”.
323 Ahmad Ibn-Taymiyya (1263 - 1328) was a medieval Sunni Muslim theologian, jurisconsult, logician, and reformer. It is considered one of the predecessors of the Salafi school.
324 Nasiruddin al-Albani (1914 - 1999) was an Albanian Islamic scholar who specialised in the fields of hadith and fiqh. One of the authoritative Salafi theologians of the 20th century.
Astemirov opposes the so-called Madkhalits, and, in particular, the founder of this Salafi-minded movement, Rabee al-Madkhali (b. 1931), who, in his opinion, calls upon Muslims to obey rulers even if they govern not according to the laws of Allah, but the laws of *taghut* (idolatry). Astemirov builds his argument on Sharia sources – he quotes the Qur’an, Hadith and Muslim scholars.

The peculiarity of the language of Astemirov both in this text and in others, is that despite the fact that there are a lot of Arabic words, each time he used the Arabic word, he immediately gave Russian translation in brackets; or vice versa: he used the Russian word, and in brackets indicated the Arabic/Islamic equivalent. In fact, the texts of Astemirov are a tutorial on the translation of Arabic Islamic terminology into the Russian language. Apparently, he wanted to remain legitimate as an Islamic leader, therefore, he used special religious terms, but he also wanted to be understandable for the Russian-speaking audience, so he always translated each Arabic word that he employed. Astemirov was thus well aware of the low level of Islamic education of potential jihadists. He was one of the first bright and visible jihadi leader in the North Caucasus, who used Arabic vocabulary so intensely.
This chapter enlarges the discussion about Russian jihadism by introducing the historical perspective: jihad has a long history in the North Caucasus. How do the jihadists of the 1990s and 2000s evaluate their predecessors of the 19th century, when three consecutive imams united significant areas of Dagestan and Chechnya in a jihad state that resisted the Russian colonization of the area? While Western observers are quick in drawing comparisons (e.g. between Shamil Basaev and his famous namesake, the jihadi imam Shamil, who ruled over the jihad state from 1834 to 1859), there are also a number of crucial differences. In particular, the jihad movement of the first half of the 19th century is generally portrayed as “Muridism”, that is, having the Sufi brotherhood of the Naqshbandiyya khalidiyya as its backbone. Modern jihad, in contrast, is depicted as Salafi in nature, and thus as anti-Sufi; and in fact, today the Naqshbandiyya khalidiyya (in the form of its Mahmudiyya branch) is a backbone of the Russian state, and dominates the Muftiate of Dagestan. Similarly, the Chechen Islamic institutions are in the hands of another brotherhood, the Qadiriyya, in the form of its various Kunta-Hajji groups (wirds). Contemporary Salafis and Jihadists therefore reject the Sufi Islamic authorities and accuse them of apostasy.

But how do jihadists themselves reflect on the history of jihadism in the area? Do they see Imam Shamil and his associates as their forerunners, or do they share the Muridism paradigm according to which the historical jihad was Sufi-oriented – which would form an obstacle to embracing it as a model? This question is directly linked to the Russian and North Caucasian tradition of research on Shamil and his Imamate, and thus to Dagestan and Chechnya’s academic environment; and it must also be seen against the background of the image of “traditional” (home-grown, historical, legitimate) Islam that the contemporary North Caucasus muftiates project.

In what follows I trace these questions with the emergence of a second generation of Islamic radicals born in the 1970s. They differed strongly from their jihad predecessors in several respects. First, they had gone through professional Islamic education. Second, several of them had work experience at official Islamic institutions before they radicalized; and third, they had a thorough interest in Islamic history of the Caucasus region and beyond; two of them even enrolled in PhD projects at academic state institutes; these are Abuzagir Mantaev (1975-2005), who completed a PhD dissertation on 2002 at the Diplomatic Academy in Moscow,
and Iasin Rasulov (1975-2006), who in the late 1990s and early 2000s carried out a PhD project at the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography in Makhachkala. These newcomers also introduced a different use of the Russian language into the jihadi discourse.

This chapter argues that there is a link between an academic understanding of Islam, and of Islamic history in the region, and the decision to go out for jihad; while writing his PhD thesis in the Daghestani institute for historical research, Rasulov developed a certain historical understanding of Islam in Daghestan that made him decide it is time to go into the woods and join the jihadi groups. As I will show below, the delicateness of the issue lies in the fact that his understanding of the historical jihad, of the first half of the 19th century, is largely shared by a number of Western and Russian historians. This chapter is therefore largely based on the argument that there is a historical continuity of jihad against Russia in the North Caucasus, while at the same time arguing that the ways how this continuity is understood and expressed are very post-Soviet.

In addition, this case will expand my argument that contemporary jihadism in Russia is very “Russian” in its expression; while becoming one of the prominent figures of the North Caucasus jihadism and being a jihadist ideologist of the “Sharia” group, Rasulov rarely used Islamic arguments and references to the shari’a in his texts about jihad. Rasulov adds a special variant to my thesis in so far as he consciously accepted the findings of several
outstanding Russian orientalists and historians of Islam in the Caucasus and even embraced Russian stereotypes about Islam in the region, and even made them his own – with an inversion of the values attached to these stereotypes.

Rasulov’s Intellectual Path to Jihadism

Iasin Rasulov (whose real first name was not Iasin but Makhach) was born in 1975 into a family of Daghestani high school teachers in Makhachkala. He was of Avar origins but, as his friends say, did not speak Avar but used Russian as his native language.

Rasulov first studied at a college of physics and mathematics, and then moved to learning construction at a technical college. It can be assumed that he wanted to become construction engineer. It is not known why he changed his mind, however after he graduated from college he enrolled in the mid-1990s at the Imam Shafii Islamic Institute in Makhachkala, which has been dominated by the Naqshbandiyya group around Shaykh Said-Afandi Chirkeevskii (b. 1937, assassinated by a female suicide bomber in 2012), at that time the undisputed master of the Daghestani Naqshbandiyya Mahmudiyya, under whose informal authority also Daghestan’s muftiate operated. While studying at this Islamic institution, he also attended the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Daghestan State University, from which he graduated in 1998; taken together, from these two institutions – one religious, one secular -- he learned Arabic, English and French. After graduating from Daghestan State University in the mid-1990s, Rasulov entered a PhD program in the Department of Oriental Studies of the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography of the Daghestan Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, where he also worked as a laboratory assistant and a translator; there he started writing a thesis on the history of Islam in Daghestan. As some of the current employees of the Institute told me, they still have memories of him as a calm and intellectual personality.

Starting from the late 1990s Rasulov also worked as a journalist and TV presenter for Daghestani television, on which he aired religious themes; he wrote for the Novoe Delo newspaper (“The New Business”) and for the website Chernovik (“Draft”); and he was a member of the editorial board of the magazine “Islamic Civilization”.

\[326\] Interview with person who knew Rasulov but wants to remain anonymous; Vienna, 2.10.2015; in the following indicated as ‘Interview №1’.
In the early 2000s, several former students of Daghestan State University and the Imam Shafii Islamic Institute formed a small group which met regularly to read Islamic literature and discuss issues and topics relevant to the Islamic community. They were mainly young journalists and scientists from Daghestani urban families, like Rasulov. What set them apart was their knowledge of several European languages next to Russian and Arabic, and the fact that they read a huge amount of non-religious literature, wore European clothes, and shared Muslim reformist views. Iasin Rasulov belonged to this group’s more prominent members. Another remarkable member was Abuzagir Mantaev. As briefly discussed above Mantaev left science for the public sphere, and from there he moved to the side of the radicals. Iasin Rasulov followed a similar trajectory, and for the rest of this chapter I will zoom in on him.

Public Activity and Radicalization

In the early 2000s, Iasin Rasulov launched his personal website, Yaseen.ru. It was called “The Site the of Muslim Intelligentsia” and became the main discussion forum of young Muslims of Daghestan. Iasin Rasulov published on this website different articles on religious themes, including his Russian translation of Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s book called “Islam: Modern Fatwas on Issues of Women and the Family” (Fatawa Mu’asira fi Shu’un al-Mar’a wa al-Usrah), which was published in Algeria in 1987.

The fact that Rasulov used the term “Intelligentsia” for his website might seem astounding. This term was used in the Soviet Union, and is still used in Russia, for people who work in intellectual or creative professions; it is thus a specifically Russian/Soviet coinage, and does not correspond one-to-one to the Western term “intellectual”. Despite the fact that initially the website was described as a place for intellectual discussions, by the mid-2000s radical debates appeared in the “Forum” section, and in 2005 the authorities blocked the site.

327 Interview №1.
328 Interview №1.
329 Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926) is an Egyptian Islamic theologian based in Doha, Qatar, and chairman of the International Union of Muslim Scholars. A very prominent media mufti, Qaradawi is also an important spokesperson of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood; his position he characterizes as wasatiyya, “the middle way”. Qaradawi is particularly involved in the formulation of fiqh al-agilliyyat “Islamic law for Muslims in minority situations”), especially in Europe; he also chairs the Council for Fatwa and Research in Dublin. See Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, edited by Bettina Graf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen (London: Hurst, 2009).
331 Articles by Iasin Rasulov on the site of “New Time” are no longer accessible.
In 2002 Rasulov began publishing a number of articles in Novoe Delo in which he criticized the policies of the Daghestani Muftiate (the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Daghestan, DUMRD), as well as the practice of the Daghestani police officers against some Muslim groups. In 2004 he continued writing along similar lines in Chernovik. This brought him under repeated criticism from DUMRD representatives, and he received numerous threats from official structures. As a result, in 2005 he joined the terrorist group “Sharia”, which operated as the Daghestani branch of Doku Umarov’s Caucasus Emirate.

This change of orientation towards guerrilla warfare was accompanied by the online publication of an online book, entitled Jihad in the North Caucasus: Supporters and Opponents (2005), in which Rasulov justified the contemporary jihadist movement by historical arguments. Together with the leader of the “Sharia” group of Daghestan, Murad Lakhiialov, he also issued a video-appeal in which he explained the need for jihad in modern Russia.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) in Daghestan, between March and July 2005 Rasulov was involved in a number of attacks at MIA co-workers, members of the prosecution office and against police. In April 2006 he was killed in the course of a shootout with Ministry of Internal Affairs officers when the latter stormed a house in Makhachkala. At that time Iasin was known as the ‘Emir of Makhachkala’.

Critique of the Muftiate and of Daghestan’s Religious Policies

While building his own version of the past, Rasulov found himself in the midst of the Russian intellectual tradition. Rasulov appeared to be quite a Russian intellectual in his language and in his quest to prove continuity with the legendary past of the region. Constructing this continuity turned out to be a game where historical facts were solidified by academic

333 Interview №1.
334 “Dzhamaat Shariat”, Wikipedia (2017) https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%94%D0%B6%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%B0%D1%82_%D0%A8%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B0%D1%82 (last accessed 16 September 2016).
scholarship, and mixed with manipulations that allowed him to guide the reader in the way that he saw fit.

In what follows I will discuss Rasulev’s major arguments that he published on the online Chernovik website, in order to demonstrate that many of his arguments belong into the field of academic discourse. I also demonstrate that in his online book of 2005 he uses a thoroughly academic style; his major points of reference are respected Russian academics and even famous prose writers.

When Iasin Rasulov began to work as a publicist in the early 2000s, he soon became a popular figure in the Daghestani public sphere. His series of articles on the site Chernovik in 2004 drew a particularly vivacious public reaction. In response to his publications, Gadzhimusa Ichalov and Magomed Khadzhiev, chief editors of the Assalam and Nurul Islam websites, both closely associated to the DUMRD, published articles criticizing Rasulov. The main debate focused on themes such as the possibility of cooperation between Muslim organizations and secular authorities as well as security forces, the problem of nationalism and religious extremism, the true meaning of the term ‘alim (Islamic scholar), the influence of Sufi orders on the work of DUMRD, and the problem of “Wahhabism”, which in Russia is the umbrella term for Islamic radicalism and terrorism.

The peculiarity of Rasulov’s rhetoric stems from the fact that in his responses to opponents he claimed to follow a “science-based” position, which, as he wrote, was the only position acceptable to him in “the rational and pragmatic world of the 21st century”.337 Rasulov imagined the audience for these debates to be “pragmatic” and urged his opponents to respect their readers’ intelligence, that is, to not stultify people by fabricated arguments.

His first article “Why are policemen killed in Daghestan?”338 was published April 16, 2004. Here Rasulov raised the issue of cooperation between Muslim organizations and secular authorities. In his opinion, the roots of the high rates of assassinations of Daghestani policemen were to be sought in the erroneous policies of the Daghestani Muftiate and of the local branch of the Ministry of the Interior. Rasulov harshly criticized both, accusing the security forces of cooperating with DUMRD and of interfering in religious affairs. In his

opinion, the security forces played the roles of a “Holy Inquisition” and of “religious guardsmen”, helping DUMRD in its fight against ideological opponents.

In addition, Rasulov traced a direct link between the influence of Sufi orders on the work of DUMRD and the problem of Wahhabism. Rasulov aired his dissatisfaction with the fact that DUMRD was controlled by a single religious and ethnic group, headed by the Naqshbandiyya Mahmudiyya Sufi Shaykh Said-Afandi Chirkeevskii, who brought only ethnic Avars into leading religious functions. According to Rasulov, the DUMRD and Dagestan’s Interior Ministry labelled anyone who did not support Said-Afandi’s group as “Wahhabis”.

Rasulov went on to criticize the secular authorities, and particularly the Parliament of Dagestan, for adopting the so-called “law banning Wahhabism”. This law, adopted after the invasion of the Botlikh and Tsumada district area of Dagestan by militants from Chechnya in September 1999, was, to Rasulov, a prime example of the intrusion of secular power into the religious sphere. He wrote that the law was used by DUMRD to prosecute their political and ideological opponents, with the support of the Ministry of Interior of Dagestan. This policy, accompanied by the torture, brutality and blackmail employed by the security forces, was, according to Rasulov, the real reason for the radicalization of the Dagestani youth. He wrote that their desire for revenge drove many of them into anti-governmental fighting groups, who carried out acts of violence against Dagestani policemen. This view, we must add, is shared by many human rights activists, who repeatedly accused the Russian and Dagestani forces of using wholesale violence which then contributes to the alienation of citizens.

On the side of DUMRD Magomed Gadzhiev, the chief editor of Nurul Islam, directly responded to Iasin Rasulov’s accusations. In his article “Caution, Poisened ‘Noodles’ from an Advocate of Wahhabism”, Gadzhiev accused Rasulov of posing unsubstantiated arguments. He called Rasulov a Wahhabi and a “scribbler”, a “graduate” who thought himself smarter than the Parliament of Dagestan which issued the official ban on Wahhabism. It should be noted that the law is in fact extremely vague as to what “Wahhabism” actually is; and this

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vagueness allows for using it also against individuals and groups who have no affinities whatsoever with the Wahhabism that is state doctrine in Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{342}

In response, Rasulov reported that the murids (Sufi disciples and followers) of Said-Afandi tried to blackmail and intimidate him. Despite this, in a new article entitled “And who are the judges?”,\textsuperscript{343} he continued to accuse DUMRD of Avar nationalism. According to Rasulov, the representatives of the Daghestani Muftiate accused even some Sufi jama’ats of Wahhabism, on the same undeclared grounds, namely that their leaders were not of the Avar nationality.

On a side note, the other major Sufi group in Daghestan, next to Said-Afandi’s Naqshbandiyya khalidiyya mahmudiyya, is a second branch of the Naqshbandiyya, referred to as the Naqshbandiyya khalidiyya; it is especially popular among ethnic Kumyks who reside in Daghestan's coastal strip, piedmont as well as in the northern plains. Said-Afandi’s Mahmudiyya tried to gain support among the Kumyks of these areas by initiating them not into the Mahmudiyya, which remains the privilege of Avars, but into the Shadhiliyya brotherhood, which is in Daghestan headed by masters who also belong to the Mahmudiyya. The two differ in their rituals. Until his death in 2012, Said-Afandi kept his Shadhiliyya groups separate from his Mahmudiyya groups; in this “consortium”, the Mahmudiyya occupies the higher position.\textsuperscript{344} So there is some veracity in Rasulov’s accusations: Said-Afandi maintained his monopoly on the resources connected to Islam in Daghestan (the DUMRD, the imamships in the major mosques, the control over the madrasas and Islamic institutes, as well as the distribution of hajj tickets) within his Avar closer circle. DUMRD mufti Abdullaev in office since 1998 is a close student of Said-Afandi.

Rasulov’s criticism centered on the level of training of the religious leaders in DUMRD. To begin with, he accused them of a poor education, including low skills in the Russian language. Secondly, in Rasulov’s view, a much more serious shortcoming of DUMRD employees was their deficient religious training; DUMRD authorities do not deserve to be called “scholars”


Rasulov stated that in a modern, “scientific Islamic world, there [wa]s no abstract-sacramental notion of ‘alim or theologian’. He insisted that in order to deserve the status of ‘alim one needed to pass through all the stages of a scientific career, and to complete doctoral studies. As there were no doctors or professors among the DUMRD staff, none of them had the right to bear the title of ‘alim. Rasulov argued they could, at best, be called “people who read al-Shafii’s books of Islamic law”. Behind this accusation was the conflict between traditionalists, who profess loyalty to the schools of Islamic law (in Daghestan, of the Shafii madhhab), and the claim of independent scholars of Salafi inclinations who argue that the medieval judgments of any of the accepted schools of Sunni law are to be rejected because they are human products, and as such full of errors; Salafis either reject the traditional schools, arguing instead for a direct return to the fundamental sources of Islam (the Qur’an and the Sunna of the Prophet), or they argue that school traditions can only be accepted if they stand the test of checking them with the fundamental sources. Curiously, Rasulov went further by arguing that a modern ‘alim must have academic degrees; implicitly he thereby negated the traditional concept of what an ‘alim is, namely a private scholar of the Islamic disciplines.

Rasulov claimed that after the adoption of the “law banning Wahhabism”, it was DUMRD that had the privilege of deciding who was a Wahhabi and who not. The fact that all DUMRD employees were followers of Sheikh Said-Afandi made them biased. To demonstrate the state’s erroneous relation to Islam, Rasulev refers to the fact that individual courts in Russia put a ban on a huge amount of Islamic literature, which even included recent Qur’an translations, but also writings of Shamil Aliautdinov, Russia’s most popular preacher and author of best-selling books on Islamic life-style and ethic. Aliautdinov is an imam in Moscow who is associated with DUMRF, the Mufiate of the Russian Federation in Moscow, one of the two major umbrella muftiates in central Russia; I am not aware of any bans on his works, but his positions are indeed not linked to Sufism but focus on the reception of Islam by the individual believer, in forms that his opponents can portray as Salafi-minded.

DUMRD supporters naturally disagreed with Rasulov’s definition of an ‘alim; in fact, what Rasulov had demanded is that Islamic scholars be produced in the same way as secular scientists, namely by PhD diploma; note that at that time, Rasulov himself sat on a PhD track.

Gadzhimusa Ichalov, chief editor of the most influential Muslim newspaper in Daghestan and

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345 Iasin Rasulov, “A sud’i kto?”.
346 Ibid.
affiliated with DUMRD, responded by an article entitled “Arrogance is a feature of Iblis”, that is, of the Devil. Ichalov wrote that renowned imams such as the famous eponyms of the four Sunni schools of Islamic law -- Abu Hanifa (d. 767), al-Shafi‘i (d. 820), Malik (d. 795), Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 820) – but also the celebrated al-Ghazali (d. 1111) as well as the popular Shafi‘i jurist al-Nawawi (d. 1277), had no modern academic degrees, but were still celebrated as renowned ‘ulama [plural of ‘alim]. According to Ichalov, the key feature of an ‘alim was not so much his erudition but his deep piety. Furthermore, he argued that in the North Caucasus Islamic University, where DUMRD employees were educated, the curriculum included both religious and secular subjects. Rasulov was therefore accused of arrogance and self-conceit in his judgments.

Rasulov responded that the dispute should focus on the issue, not on his own personality. In his next article, “The Mirror of Caucasian destiny”, Rasulov again admonished his opponents to take “a science-based position” for this is what the a modern pragmatic public would expect. Continuing the discussion about the meaning of the term ‘alim, Rasulov expanded his claim by stating that the founding-fathers of the major Sunni school of Islamic law that Ichalov referred to in fact do not deserve the “abstract-sacramental” title of ‘alim. In his opinion, these men (including Shafii, the namesake of the Shafii school that is dominant in Dagestan) were merely faqih (jurisprudents) and muhaddiths [experts on the traditions that have come down from Muhammad, the hadith]. That is, Rasulov refers to them by their respective scholarly field in which they were active. With this turn of argumentation he left it in the open whether there was anyone among the well-known Islamic authorities of the past who would deserve the title of ‘alim. It almost seems as if his understanding of ‘alim was a project of the future. Furthermore, he argued that it was incorrect to compare DUMRD employees with figures such as Abu Hanifa and al-Shafii: calling DUMRD employees ‘ulama was, according to Rasulov, explainable only in light of the low level of Islamic education in Dagestan as a whole. Rasulov added that this is also true for his respondent Ichalov: one could become chief editor of a Muslim newspaper without even knowing Arabic. That is, Rasulov now responded to Ichalov’s personal attacks in terms that were no less personal and insulting.

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The main subject of the controversy, however, was for Rasulov the topic of Islamic resistance. In his view, it was Islam which constituted the major force in organizing resistance to the Russian invasion in the North Caucasus in the 19th century. Against this Islamic resistance, the Russian imperial powers, the Soviets, and today the Russian leadership always supported loyal representatives of the Muslim community in the region.

Rasulov proposed this argument in a framework that was not shaped by shari’a arguments but by references to democracy and human rights:

> Will post-perestroika Russia, in an epoch of democratic principles and ideals of freedom of speech and thought, of the rights of individuals and nations […], be able to deal with the armed Islamic opposition, or will it use the very same methods which did not help the Tsarist and Soviet totalitarian regimes?

Rasulov was convinced that Russia would not be able to suppress the Islamic resistance merely by using force, as the inefficiency of this method has already been proven historically. Significant was also the fact that he characterized the Tsarist and Soviet regimes as totalitarian, while describing modern Russia as a country led by democratic principles. With this positive, essentially liberal view on present-day Russia, Rasulov envisioned a peaceful outcome of the conflicts in the North Caucasus. Throughout the article he called for “new, democratic and civilized ways of solving problems”.

While he did not elaborate as how this could be achieved, his argument centered on the state's non-interference in Islamic affairs and on the expectation - naive or not - that in return for this secularism, the Salafis would have no reason to continue their acts of violence. In his discussions on the Chernovik website he first developed one of his main discursive techniques – references to well-known Russian academic authorities. To back his position, he mentioned and quoted from Russian specialists like Leonid Siukiiainen (Russia’s foremost academic specialist on Islamic law, who around that time started to voice the idea that the Russian Constitution might provide room for experiments with the integration of Islamic law in family-related issues), the famous ethnographer Sergei Arutiunov and political scientist

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350 Leonid Siukiiainen (b. 1945) works at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. His ideas on the compatibility of Islamic law and the Constitution he voiced in contributions such as “O pravovoi prirode shariata i ego vzamodeistvii s evropeiskim pravom”, Gumer (http://www.gumer.info/bogosloj_Buks/Islam/syk/prav_prir.php) (last accessed 3 October 2017).
351 Sergei Arutiunov (b. 1932) - Russian ethnographer, social anthropologist, historian. Head of the Department of the Caucasian peoples in the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Professor of Moscow State University. Arutiunov, an Armenian by birth, began his scientific career as a specialist of Japan, but in the 1980s he switched to studying the Caucasus. In the 1970s Arutiunov together with his colleague Nikolai Cheboksarov (1907-1980) created the so-called information concept of ethnos in
Aleksandr Tsipko. Rasulov wrote that these researchers believed the military conflicts in the North Caucasus can be solved by the introduction of sharia justice into Russian legislation, or by the creation of jama’at associations in which sharia courts could be implemented.

Rasulov embraced this argumentation of the scholars and claimed that this was an issue of “legal pluralism – where one or more legal systems were adjacent in the same social field.” While he did not refer to the Russian Arabist and historical anthropologist Vladimir Bobrovnikov (b. 1964), the formulation of this sentence betrays familiarity with Bobrovnikov’s exposition of the relation between customary law, Islamic law, and Russian imperial law in the Northern Caucasus of the 19th century; Bobrovnikov (a senior researcher at Russia’s central Orientology institution, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow) introduced to Russia the concept of legal pluralism as a social field, as developed by Sally Engle Merry.

Next to linking the subject to the Russian academic discourse, Rasulov also tried to give his own interpretation of Islamic history and relations between the Islamic community and Russian authorities in the North Caucasus. In his view, the modern conflict in the North Caucasus should be viewed against the background of the historical past. According to Rasulov, such events as the invasion to the territory of Dagestan by the so-called “Islamic Army of the Caucasus” under Shamil Basaev and Amir Khattab in 1999, the subsequent elimination of the Shari’a enclave in Dagestan’s Kadar zone (which the “Islamic Jamaat of Dagestan” had managed to establish around 1996) by the Russian military, and in general the Russian authorities’ fight against the Wahhabis are the direct continuation of the historical tradition of conflict between Russian authorities and the “Islamic armed opposition” in the North Caucasus.

Rasulov further elaborated on the relations between Islam and the Russian authorities over the past two or three hundred years in his book-form manuscript of 2005 that he did not publish in a public journal but on the website “Kavkaz Center”, the main informational mouthpiece of

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352 Aleksandr Tsipko (b. 1941) is a specialist in Russia’s social philosophy and political science; he is senior researcher at the Institute for International Economy and Political Studies.
353 Iasin Rasulov, “Zerkalo kavkazskoi sud’by”.
354 V. Bobrovnikov, Musul’iane Severnogo Kavkaza: obychai, parvo, nasilie, 103-110.
356 Editorial, “Vtorzenie boevikov v Dagestan (1999)”.
357 Ibid.
the North Caucasian jihadists. However, the ideas that Rasulov expounded in that historical
treatise of 2005 obviously go back to his polemic exchange with Ichalov on the webpages of
Chernovik.

Gadzhimusa Ichalov had published an article entitled “Islam, Russia and the vital interest of
the United States in the Caucasus”.358 The title should not come as a surprise; in
contemporary Russia, it is common sense to link the emergence of Islamic terrorism,
including in Russia, with the sinister activities of the United States in the Middle East and
beyond. In this piece, Ichalov drew on the history of Islam in Daghestan, but instead of
acknowledging any continuities of armed resistance he emphasized – as is equally common in
the official discourse of all Russian mufitates – the peaceful character of Islam in the region.
In this discourse, the nineteenth-century resistance is usually regarded as a noble and
legitimate struggle for the freedom of the Daghestani nationalities, against an oppressive
foreign power; but then this discourse also legitimates Russia’s conquest of the region from
hindsight, namely by arguing that Russia brought civilization, peace and development to the
Caucasus. Ichalov argued along similar lines. In order to disassociate the defensive war of the
three historical Imams (of which Shamil was the third) from the current Islamic violence,
Ichalov used different terms for the militancy motivated by radical Islam; in particular,
Ichalov did not use the term *jihad* to refer to the resistance movement in the North Caucasus
in the 19th century, terming it rather a *ghazavat* led by Sufi leaders. He thereby followed
Russian custom, for in Russia also the historical literature since the 19th century uses to refer
to Shamil’s jihad movement not under the term *jihad* but as *ghazavat*;359 this choice of words
implies a positive evaluation of this jihad of the past, without supporting jihad in the present.
Furthermore, the difference to the present violence motivated by Islam is provided by
Ichalov’s emphasis of the Sufi component in the historical *ghazawat*, and in the history of
Daghestan through the last centuries. This claim that Daghestani Islam has traditionally been
shaped by Sufism is in Daghestan the basis for constructing a regional variety of the
“traditional Islam” paradigm that is officially demanded by the Kremlin, and continues to be a

https://chernovik.net/content/respublika/islam-rossiya-i-zhiznenny-interesy-ssha-na-kavkaze (last accessed 19
September 2017).

359 This terminology choice seems to go back to the self-designation of the warriors of the time. Also the Arabic
literature of the jihad period, written by Shamil’s companions, regularly discusses the Islamic resistance as *ghazawat*,
“raids”, and not as *jihad*; this has historical reasons (Daghestani communities regularly conducted raids into neighboring regions, for making booty; this military designation was simply continued in the jihad era of Shamil, and then made its way into Russian literature). On this issue see M. Kemper, *Herrschaft, Recht und
Islam in Daghestan. Von den Khanaten und Gemeindebünden zum ḥiḥād-Staat* (Wiesbaden: Reichert-
Verlag: Caucasian Studies vol. 7, 2005).
characteristic feature of the official historical narrative in the North Caucasus. However, it leaves out of consideration the fact that next to influential Sufis, Daghestani history also brought forward many Islamic authorities who were critical of Sufism; and it should be noted that the Naqshbandiyya brotherhood, in the form of the Khalidiyya branch, arrived in the North Caucasus only in the 1820s. Any argument about a powerful Sufism in Daghestan before that time is difficult to support by textual sources, although individual Sufi shaykhs certainly existed.

Another feature of the official discourse that Ichalov maintained was his denial of the existence of internal causes that sparked the contemporary religious conflict in Daghestan. When expanding upon what were, to him, the real sources of the conflicts, Ichalov pointed to the “hegemonic aspirations of the United States and the Zionists who are behind them”. Conspiracy theories of this type are widely spread in Russia, and in the official discourse, also all forms of “Wahhabism” (Salafism) are usually described as intrusions from beyond Russia. Ichalov argues that by contrast, in the 19th century Shamil’s troops included no foreign mercenaries – another attempt at rejecting any similarities or connections between the historical resistance movement and the modern jihadist resistance.

From this polemical exchange we can deduct that in 2004, Iasin Rasulov’s public argumentation was founded on what one may consider a liberal point of view, and a critique of the Russian official discourse on terrorism as just a foreign intrusion. The major causes of the problem, as opposed to just its symptoms, he identified in the persecution of dissidents, and in the extreme pressure exerted by law enforcement agencies upon Muslims who did not support the policies of the Daghestan muftiate; his discourse thereby resembled that of moderate Salafis in other countries who equally embrace Western terminology when critiquing the governments and state-supported religious apparatus in their respective countries of origin. Rasulov saw the improvement of the secular and religious educational background of Muslim religious leaders as a major necessity, and also called for terminating the monopoly of one ethnic and religious group on the DUMRD, which, in theory, was meant to represent all of Daghestan’s Muslims. What was necessary, in his mind, was a transition from armed struggle to open religious debate. Rasulov tended towards advocating Muslim reformist views because he believed it was necessary to study Muslim thought in its

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361 Gadzhimurat Ichalov, “Islam, Rossiia i zhiznennye interesy SCHA na Kavkaze”.
contemporary form, rather than relying solely on Sufi authorities that project simplified images of the past.

However, his ideas on the past and present of the jihadist movement were met with stiff resistance because they contradicted the official conception of traditional Islam in Daghestan as well as the historical narratives associated with it. Rasulov thus exposed the inflexibility of the Islamic establishment, and their unwillingness to participate in a public debate on their exclusivist policies and eventually, to give up their privileges; Rasulov’s arguments thereby appear to have demonstrated that the Sufi organization that controls Daghestan’s Islamic institutions prefers to rely on state support, both financially and militarily, instead of winning over any opponents in debate, as Shikhaliev and Kemper argue in their analysis of anti-Wahhabi literature produced by the Mahmudiyya shaykhs and their functionaries.362

Rasulov’s View of the North Caucasian Jihad Movement (2005)

“Muridism”

After having published his last article in Chernovik in September 2004, Iasin Rasulov abandoned the public sphere. In 2005 he joined the “Sharia” group, an anti-government combat group, which later, in 2007 would became part of the “Caucasus Emirate” jihadist organization.

At the same time Rasulov decided to expound his own, fully developed idea of the history of Russian-Muslim relations in the North Caucasus. His entry into jihadism was therefore accompanied by the publication of a 78-page online monograph entitled Jihad in the North Caucasus: Supporters and Opponents, in the Russian language. The book was posted on the “Caucasus Emirate” website, kavkazcenter.com.363 In this piece, Iasin Rasolov attempted to explain the “Caucasian and Chechen problem” through the study of a shari’a-minded and jihadist movement in the North Caucasus from the late 17th century to the early 21st century.

363 The full text of the book is no longer available (http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/islam/jihad_in_ncaucasus/), however, the “foreword” can still be found on the website (http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2006/11/12/48277/iasin-rasulov-dzhikhad-na-severnom-kavkaze.shtml) (last accessed 3 October 2017) dated November, 12, 2006. In addition, the full version of the article can be found on another website called Vilaiat Dagestan that promotes military action: http://vd.ag/wp-content/uploads/Knigi/896.pdf (last accessed 3 October 2017).
This paper amounted to a justification for jihadist military activity through appeals to the memory of purported historical facts.

Rasulov’s paper was executed in accordance with the academic tradition of using subscript references and of formulating research objectives and questions, with plenty of links to well-known Russian and Soviet scholars such as Vladimir Bobrovnikov, Leonid Siukiiainen and Andrei Zdravomyslov, in addition to the relevant historical literature and archival materials. It is thus an interesting attempt of a scientific justification of jihadism in the North Caucasus today.

The work consists of three chapters, plus a foreword, an afterword, and appendixes. The first chapter, “Jihad in the period of imperial power”, is devoted to the design and implementation of the annexation of the Caucasus to the Russian Empire, the history of the jihadist resistance to this annexation, the role of Sufism and Wahhabism in this resistance, as well as arguments of Muslim opponents and supporters of jihad against the Russian Empire. The second chapter bears the title “Jihad in the Soviet period”; the third, “Jihad in the period of post-perestroika Russia”. Both deal with the same topics as the first, but in different historical periods. In the appendix to his book, Rasulov published his own translation of the work of Imam Ghazi Muhammad, entitled “Proving the apostasy of judges who render judgment by adat” (Bāhir al-burhān li-irtidād ‘urafā’ Dāġistān), probably composed in the late 1820s.

The first Imam Ghazi Muhammad started jihad around 1828, and legitimized his decision by this treatise. As Kemper has shown a few years before Rasulov wrote his account, this treatise was completely focusing on the rejection of Daghestani customary law, and on the demand to introduce shari’a instead. The jihad that Ghazi Muhammad started was therefore directed at the Muslim village elders in his native Avar mountain region, because these elders administered the customary law that Ghazi Muhammad depicted as an expression of unbelief, kufr/shirk. Ghazi Muhammad’s jihad thus started as a fight against his fellow Avar Muslims, and only turned into a war against the Russians when the latter supporter the local Daghestani rulers against the Imam’s attacks. Rasulov’s Russian translation of the Arabic text was a respectable scholarly achievement; no Russian or Daghestani historian before him had

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364 Andrei Zdravomyslov (1928-2009) is a Russian sociologist, specialist in sociology of conflict, theory of power and national relations, history of sociology.
attempted to produce a full translation of the available Arabic manuscript text. With this edition, Rasulov of course cemented his claim that the Islamic establishment is not able to work with Arabic texts of the very tradition that they claim to represent, since in Daghestan, Ghazi Muhammad is largely portrayed as a shaykh of the Naqshbandiyya khalidiyya brotherhood. Yet one of Rasulov’s goals was to demonstrate that the role of Sufism in the jihad has been greatly exaggerated.

Rasulov summed up the opponents’ arguments in four main points: 1) that jihad against the Russians caused discord (fitna) and senseless bloodshed; 2) that jihad contradicted tariqa (the sufi path), which calls for humility, patience, and the need to compromise with the enemy; 3) that jihad was contrary to shari’a, because shari’a prohibits waging war against a more powerful enemy if this leads to excessive losses on the Muslim side; and 4) that jihad against the Russian state was not justified because the latter did not forbid the worship and serving of Allah. Rasulov believed that these were the positions of the Sufis loyal to Russian authority. To confirm this point of view he quoted the well-known Daghestani Islamic scholar and poet Hasan al-Alqadari (1834-1910), with a statement to the effect that there were many Sufis in the North Caucasus who were respected by the authorities. It is essential for Rasulov to prove the noninvolvement of the Sufis in the militant resistance the 19th century. In particular, one paragraph that describes the role of the sufism in the jihad movement begins with an epigraph quoting Ghazi Muhammad: “Tariqa turns decent men into women, therefore we do not need it”. This saying is not found in the treatise that Rasulov translated; Rasulov probably took it from historical narratives.

In order to show that Sufism could not have been the catalyst of jihad in the North Caucasus Rasulov quoted Vladimir Bobrovnikov, who stated that the activities of Ghazi Muhammad as head of the Imamate had no connection to Sufi practices, and instead, that the latter had come to the idea of creating the Imamate and of declaring ghazavat against the will of his direct Sufi master (murshid), Jamaladdin al-Ghazimuthuqi. Note that also Kemper came to this
conclusion: as he argues, Ghazi Muhammad and his associates were motivated by the goal to implement Islamic law, and their links to Sufism were never dominating their agenda. This is indeed clear from the treatise that Rasulov translated.\textsuperscript{369}

The issue raised by Iasin Rasulov is indeed being actively discussed in the contemporary historiography of the jihad movement of Ghazi Muhammad and Shamil. Russian and Western researchers have traditionally stressed the political role of Sufi movements in the nineteenth-century North Caucasus jihad; to take an example, Anna Zelkina (London) saw the Naqshbandiyya as the backbone of the jihad, and Ghazi Muhammad and Shamil as shaykhs of this brotherhood. In this she followed in the footsteps of the Israeli historian Moshe Gammer.\textsuperscript{370} But next to Bobrovnikov and Kemper, also the Russian-American specialist of Sufi studies Aleksandr Knysh (Michigan) expressed his doubts about how serious Sufism had been linked to the North Caucasus jihadism in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{371}

Kemper pointed out that only some Daghestani Sufis of the Khalidiyya advocated jihad (or relocation [\textit{hijra}] to the Ottoman Empire, in case of failure of jihad).\textsuperscript{372} He has also argued that despite the fact that supporters of the two famous jihad leaders were called \textit{murids} (a Sufi term that means a ‘obedient follower’ [of the Sufi path]), Imam Shamil and Ghazi Muhammad in fact were never acting as Sufi shaykhs in their own right, that is, they never educated \textit{murids} or gave them Sufi licenses, \textit{ijazas}. They both were political leaders, and the term \textit{murids} for their followers and warriors was devoid of Sufi meaning.\textsuperscript{373} Unlike Rasulov, however, Kemper does not deny that some prominent Sufi shaykhs of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century did support Shamil and his jihad – they just played no military role. From this perspective, the Sufi brotherhood was split on this issue.

\textit{“Wahhabism”}

Rasulov’s main point lies in the fact that the resistance to Russian Tsarist military authorities in the North Caucasus, the struggle against the Bolshevik government in the 1920s, and the military conflict in Chechnya and Daghestan in the post-Soviet era are all part of the same,

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\item \textsuperscript{370} Anna Zelkina, \textit{In Quest for God and Freedom: The Sufi Response to the Russian Advance in the North Caucasus} (London: Hurst & Company, 2000); M. Gammer, \textit{Muslim Resistance to the Tsar}, 452.
\item \textsuperscript{372} M. Kemper, “Khalidiyya Networks in Daghestan and the Question of Jihad”, 42-44.
\item \textsuperscript{373} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
anticolonial movement. Rasulov referred repeatedly to the anti-colonial nature of jihadism in his work; to him, this phenomenon had worldwide significance. In particular, he contends that the eighteenth-century radical preacher movement of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) was of an anticolonial nature, and that it later fueled similar Muslim anticolonial movements in Indonesia and, eventually, in the North Caucasus.

Rasulov’s construction of a link to Wahhabism is vague and, from the point of view of the historian, weak. One of his witnesses is Bammat Gaidar (1889-1965), a Daghestani politician who briefly served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the pre-Bolshevik Mountain Republic of the Northern Caucasus which existed in 1917-1918. Gaidar defined Wahhabism as a “divine gift” for invigorating the Muslim community. Furthermore, he refers to the Daghestani historian Sheriban Pashaeva,374 who supposedly stated that the movement of ‘Abd al-Wahhab greatly affected the eighteenth-century Muslim resistance in the North Caucasus, particularly with regards to the movements of Sheikh Mansur, and later those of Ghazi Muhammad and Imam Shamil in the 19th century.

But Rasulov was clearly aware of the vagueness of this connection, and used the term “Wahhabism” only in quotation marks; referring again to Bammat, he claims that the term was coined by the British.375 Still, Rasulov saw “Wahhabism” as an inspiration for “anticolonial jihad” in various Muslim countries, and pointed out in particular that the North Caucasus jihad presented the same ideological features as the movement of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. Central was the call for pure Islam from the first days of the hijra and the establishment of a shari’a state, and the fight against “un-Islamic innovations”, including the local customary law (’adat), but also music and dancing. Muslims who opposed jihad were seen as legitimate victims of jihad.

But at the same time Rasulov also sought to prove that Salafist ideas emerged in the North Caucasus as early as the end of the 17th century, that is, before Wahhabism emerged in Arabia. Here his key witness is the Salafism of Daghestani scholar Muhammad al-Quduqi (1652-1717), a disciple of the Yemeni scholar Salih al-Yamani. Rasulov argued that al-

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Quduqi greatly impacted the leaders of the 19th century jihad in the North Caucasus. As Rasulov emphasized, Ghazi Muhammad, in his book “Proving the apostasy of judges who render judgment by adat” (Bāhir al-burhān li-irtidād `urafā` Dāġistān), referred to Quduqi but made no mention of Sufi ideas and teachings. The core idea of Ghazi Muhammad’s text was takfir – the accusation of lack of faith directed at Muslims who did not judge by shari’a but rather, by ‘adat. Rasulov wrote that according to Ghazi Muhammad, such Muslims were kafirs, regardless of their piety in other matters, given that judging by ‘adat was tantamount to idol (taghut) worship.

In conclusion, his use of the term “Wahhabism” is somewhat striking: while there have been some attempts by historians to compare the thinking of Tatar or Daghestani Islamic thinkers of the 19th century with Wahhabism, there is no indication that any of them was deeply influenced by the teaching of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, the preacher to whom Wahhabism, as we know it from present-day Saudi Arabia (where it amounts to state religion), goes back. When placing the jihad of Ghazi Muhammad and Shamil into the context of Wahhabism, Rasulov seems to employ the broad and vague definition of “Wahhabism” that today dominates the Russian discourse on terrorism, with “Wahhabism” as a *pars pro toto* for all radical and militant trends that their proponents defend by references to the Islamic tradition. In public discourse, “Wahhabism” thereby became a pejorative term, and is often used synonymously with Salafism or radicalism. Rasulov’s use of the term in the Russian popular terminology is therefore consciously ahistorical, and contrasts markedly with the sophisticated analysis of terms that he offers elsewhere in his book. That Rasulov identified Shamil’s jihad with historical Wahhabism, or that he himself had particular affiliations with Saudi-style Wahhabism, is very improbable.

It should be noted that also Rasulov’s classification of original Wahhabism (without quotation marks) as an anti-colonial movement is difficult to sustain; rather, the Wahhabi-Saudi alliance that came into being in 1744 was directed above all against Muslim Arab tribes who did not subscribe to ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s rigorist interpretation of Islam, as well as against the cosmopolitan culture of the Hijazi cities Mecca and Medina (plus, eventually, the Shi’is of the


Arab Peninsula and Iraq). The European colonial powers were not in open conflict with the Wahhabi state; if it was “anticolonial”, then one would have to refer to Ottoman and Egyptian rule (that is, formally Muslim) colonialism.

Overall, however, Rasulov’s historical argumentation is rather impressive in its accuracy; one might speculate that its academic arguments reflect the general discussions in the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography where Rasulov worked on his PhD dissertation, and where leading Daghestani Arabists write on the same issues of Islamic historiography, and produce Russian translations of Arabic-language historical writings from Daghestan. In this context it is noticeable that Rasulov, in his book and also in his translation of Gahzi Muhammad’s treatise against customary law, addressed as many readers as possible. For this reason he tried to adapt Arabic words and expressions, rendering them in a simplified Cyrillic transcription. Moreover, Rasulov highlighted in bold those Qur’an quotations that Ghazi Muhammad built into his treatise which Rasulov considered to be important for his argument.

**Rasulov’s Colonial and Orientalist Rhetoric**

To confirm his argument Rasulov uses different discursive techniques. In particular, he draws on an abundance of material from Orientalist literature and historical literature, including Pushkin’s *Journey to Erzerum* and the memoirs of Russian generals who fought in the Caucasus, but also Slavophiles and Orthodox missionaries who published on the Russian conquest of the Caucasus.379

Striking is that Rasulov did not criticize these Russian sources, most of which aggrandized the Russian conquest; rather, he used them at face value to substantiate his own points. To start with, Rasulov did not criticize Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837) for having presented the image of cruel and warmongering North Caucasians in his works; instead, Rasulov gives these characteristics a positive twist, by accepting them as an illustration of the resilience and courage of the North Caucasian peoples. Despite the anti-colonial character of his text, Rasulov’s work cannot be regarded simply as an example of a post-colonial reaction, because

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379 For Russian Orientalism, its cultural manifestations in literature and academic scholarship, see the pioneering work by David Schimmelpenning van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
it does not criticize Orientalism. Rather, Rasulov’s work in a sense unites the Orientalist perspective with the radical anti-colonial discourse.

To Rasulov, the nineteenth-century invasion of the North Caucasus had three motives: geostrategic, colonial and religious-missionary, as he argued with references to opinions of various Russian researchers about these matters. Among these we find the famous Russian military historian and Slavophile of the 19th century, General Rostislav Fadeev (1824-1883), Russian and Soviet historian and researcher of the Caucasus Nikolai Pokrovskii (1897-1946), as well as writer and journalist Iakov Gordin (born 1935). Rasulov opened this paragraph with an epigraph quoting Russian Emperor Nicholas I (1796-1855), who called for “subjugating the mountain people or exterminating those who disobey”.

The first paragraph of the first chapter begins with an epigraph from the narrative poem “The Prisoner of the Caucasus” by Aleksandr Pushkin. Pushkin composed the poem in 1820-1821, as he travelled through the Caucasus and Crimea. Rasulov chose a passage in which the poet sings the praises of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, and particularly of General Aleksei Ermolov (1777-1861), who led the Russian army to victory in the first stage of the Caucasian war from 1817 to 1827, and who is famous for the brutality that he applied, in particular the burning down of villages to pacify the resisting Muslim communities. Exactly this violence is expressed in Pushkin’s characterization of that man: “Humble yourself, Caucasus: Ermolov is coming! And the scorching war cry will be silenced as nothing is impossible for a Russian man”. Later in the book Pushkin is quoted again, in particular, his words about the need to dispatch missionaries to preach the Gospel to the Muslim of the Caucasus. As in the previous case, Rasulov quotes Pushkin not to criticize the poet, but to illustrate that military confrontation has a cultural background.

As mentioned above, Rasulov employed epigraphs as a discursive technique geared towards directing the reader towards a particular perception of the text that follows. Pushkin’s quote precedes a paragraph in which Rasulov explains the motives behind the Russian Empire’s

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381 Rasulov also referred to various Russian researchers, poets and journalists in the following section, describing the methods employed in the annexation. Among these were extracts from the memoirs of General Pavel Tsitsianov (1754-1806), the “Conquest of the Caucasus” by Russian publisher Alvin Caspari (1836-1913), the work of sociologist Andrei Zdravomyslov (1928-2009), Soviet historian Georgii Dzidzaria (1914-1989); Rasulov also quoted French geographer and anarchist Élisée Reclus (1830-1905), who described the ethnic makeup of the Western Caucasus in the mid-19th century.
383 Ibid., 8.
invasion of the North Caucasus. Rasulov thus chose those particular passages which would best illustrate the Russian imperial mentality, bent on brutally enslaving the region.

The choice of Pushkin, furthermore, is far from coincidental: Pushkin is by and far deemed the greatest Russian poet of all time, one who fathered the modern Russian language, one of the greatest symbols of Russian culture. By picking Pushkin, the heart of Russian culture, Rasulov emphasized the depth of the confrontation between Russia and the North Caucasus, and that it was not merely of a military nature but steeped in cultural and ideological overtones.

Rasulov also quoted from Pushkin’s “Journey to Erzerum” in the section on the beginning of jihad in the North Caucasus. The epigraph consists of an Orientalist description of an incident in which a Circassian shot a Russian soldier simply for the purpose of offloading his gun – a narrative that in Pushkin’s work exemplifies the mountaineers’ disdain for Russian soldiers. In this quote, Pushkin offered the following description of North Caucasian people: “daggers and swords are their bodies’ joints. A baby starts to wield them before it starts to lisp. For them murder is merely a bodily motion…”. It is my argument that Rasulov did not attempt to refute this militant image of the violent Circassian that Pushkin here depicts. Rather, by using this quote, it seems Rasulov wanted to give poetic emphasis to the will and determination of the Caucasians to resist the Russians with arms.384

The Post-Soviet Frame of Rasulov’s Jihadist Discourse

Each of the fourteen sections of Rasulov's book – all with the exception of the foreword and the afterword – is headed by an epigraph, meant to set a certain tone for the reader's perception of the text that follows.

Such frequent use of epigraphs is more typical for literary or journalistic texts, and thus contrasts with the scientific tone that Rasulov maintains. Despite his contention, at the beginning of the book, that his book was “an objective study”, his use of epigraphs can be read as a way to manipulate the emotions of the reader, placing each part of the text in a certain light.

Another interesting matter is his choice of sources for these epigraphs: Rasulov quotes the Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin and Emperor Nikolai I (1796-1855) along with Daghestani

384 Ibid.,12.
political figures such as Imam Ghazi Muhammad (1795-1832) and the aforementioned Gaidar Bammat (1889-1965), North Caucasian writers and theologians, as well as the Qur’an and historical documents. Equally referred to is the highly controversial Israeli anti-Zionist publicist Israel Shamir, who was also published, for example, by Movladi Udugov on his famous jihadist website “Kavkaz Center”.  

Whereas the quotes in the epigraphs are meant to stimulate a certain perception of the text, and to define the main idea Rasulov wants to present, the quotes in the main body of the text are used to solidify his arguments throughout.

It bears mentioning that among the eminent figures referred to by Rasulov, there are virtually no Islamic thinkers – rather, he consistently drew from the views of Soviet and Russian scientists and writers. Even more striking is that the main ideological framework for his entire work is created by referring to the renowned Soviet writer of Kyrgyz-Tatar origin, Chingiz Aitmatov (1928-2008), and particularly to the latter’s remarks on the historical process.

It is with references to Aitmatov that Rasulov formulated the main problem of his work: historical memory, which permeates the book and is one of its key concepts. In the foreword, Rasulov quoted an extensive passage from Aitmatov’s novel, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (1980). This quote tells the legend of the *mankurts*, medieval slaves in Central Asia who, according to the myth, had their memories erased by their rulers to ensure full loyalty to their master. Following this thought, Rasulov claimed that it was only historical memory which prevented man from being turned into a *mankurt*:

> ... Man should not allow himself to be turned into a *mankurt*, he must know his *true past*. No one can know the truth about what is happening in the Caucasus these days without the context of *historical memory*[^386] (*istoricheskaia pamiat’*). Only by returning and remembering all [historical events] we will see the true root of the Caucasian problem. We will never understand a single fragment of the ongoing Chechen war if we look at it apart from the two hundred years of Russian–Caucasian conflict.

In this foreword, Rasulov repeatedly used terms like historical memory and historical amnesia. He repeatedly employed the *mankurt* metaphor, and the latter reappears also in the conclusion of the book, with another quote from Aitmatov’s novel. In Russian literature, the struggle against the reduction of human being to the state of *mankurt* constitutes one of the most widely-used rhetorical ploys, and the expression is particularly popular among


[^386]: Emphasis mine.
contemporary nationalists who propagate certain historical narratives and interpretations of the past to counter what they claim is a totalitarian control of memory in their contemporary state and society. Similarly also Rasulov puts himself in opposition to an official state ideology, that, as he believes, does not allow people to learn the “true” history of the North Caucasus.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the forming or re-forming of independent states with national ideologies, the subject of historical memory acquired special significance. The 1990s were shaped by a competition between national histories amounting to a veritable “war of memories.” This term was proposed by the Russian historian and anthropologist Viktor Shnirel’man, whose work focuses on the clash of different variants of the historical past by different ethnic elites in the post-Soviet space.

Viktor Shnirel’man wrote that the image of the *mankurt* created by Aitmatov had gained extraordinary popularity in late and post-Soviet language, and in works of different ideologists, writers and historians - and, as we have seen, these were the formative years of Rasulov’s education. Shnirel’man also draws a parallel between the *mankurt* image and the ideas of Lev Gumilev (1912-1992), a highly influential thinker in and after the late socialist period. Gumilev's appeal on Russia’s post-Soviet jihadists is discussed below in the chapter on Said Buriatskii. Gumilev had conjured images such as that of the “chimera” and of the “mestizo,” people who had lost the skills and knowledge of their ancestors. Some journalists and writers consider both Chingiz Aitmatov and Lev Gumilev as “Eurasian” authors – a broad characterization for politicians and writers from the former Soviet Union, and particularly from Central Asia, who legitimize agendas ranging from nationalist to neo-imperialist.

Thus Iasin Rasulov’s use of Aitmatov’s *mankurt* topos, and his extensive quote from the latter’s *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* (which takes up almost a third of the


Foreword of *Jihad in the North Caucasus*), shows Rasulov to be very much a product of this time and context.

The fact that Rasulov pleaded with his readers to not be *mankurts* and to learn, instead, the *true history* implies, *a priori*, that there was a “false history” that Rasulov opposed. In his foreword he described his intention as linking *historical memory* to “what is happening in the North Caucasus now”.

At the beginning of the book, Rasulov raised research issues in the academic style. In particular, he was interested in what made Islam the ideology of resistance against the Russian authorities, how the need for jihad has been justified in the Caucasus, and which arguments have been raised against it. He also sought to determine the role of Wahhabism and Sufism in the historical process. Rasulov unequivocally promoted his work, thus, as scientific research, as “an objective, scientific point of view”.

Only towards the end of his book, in the third chapter, does Rasulov draw the contemporary implications of his historical research. The Afterword thereby develops into a political argument against his immediate enemies: the representatives of the Dagestani Muftiate, or those close to the ideology of the Russian state, and its concept of “traditional Islam”. Here Rasulov criticizes the view that Salafism and Wahhabism had been alien to North Caucasian history, as well as the widespread view that “traditional Islam” expressed itself in Dagestan in the form of Sufi brotherhoods. Against this perception he maintains that Salafism began to spread in the region already in the late 17th century, and that it is therefore reasonable to speak of an indigenous Salafist tradition in the North Caucasus. Note that similar attempts at arguing that Salafism is the real “traditionalism” in Russia have been undertaken by Islamic authorities in Eastern Tatarstan, as Alfrid Bustanov has shown.390 The official dogma of “traditionalism” is thereby put upside down.

But Rasulov goes further, and argues that the whole idea of having one “traditional” Islam that opposes one or several “non-traditional” Isams is erroneous:

> [the construction of a ‘traditional Islam’ is] nothing but the product of a political order, the whole purpose of which is to make the adversaries of the Russian authorities [appear as]

followers of an “alien”, “non-traditional” Islam, while making the supporters of the Russian authorities the followers of “our”, “traditional” Islam.\footnote{Iasin Rasulov, “Dzhikhad na Severnom Kavkaze: storonniki i protivniki”, 59.}

Again, many Western observers would agree with Rasulov. The concept of “traditional Islam” came to be widely used in Russia starting from the late 1990s. In 2001, in the wake of the September 11 attacks in New York, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Muslim religious leaders and encouraged them to follow the “traditional Islam”,\footnote{The concept of “traditional Islam” is difficult to pin down in terms of dogmatic contents. In my opinion, the key characteristics of “traditional” Islam in Russia are (1) the popularization of a secularized historical and cultural heritage of Russia’s Muslim nations; (2) a professed loyalty to the Russian government; and (3) rejecting foreign Muslim influence. For more details see the author's article: D. Garaev, “Islamic Teaching Institutions in the Russian Federation: the Case of Tatarstan,” in: \textit{Aufbruch zu neuen Ufern. Aufgaben, Problemlagen und Profile einer Islamischen Religionspädagogik im europäischen Kontext}, edited by Yaşar Sarıkaya and Franz-Josef Bäumer, (Munster – New York: Waxmann, 2017), 197-206. See also A. Bustanov, M. Kemper, “Valiulla Iakupov’s Tatar Islamic Traditionalism,” in: \textit{Asiatische Studien – Études Asiatiques}, LXVII, 3 (2013), 809-835.} which is “a religion of peace that has nothing to do with international terrorism”.\footnote{“Vecherom Vladimir Putin vstretilsia s dukhovnymi liderami musul'man Rossii”, Ofitsial’nyi sait “Pervyi kanal” (2001) \url{http://www.1tv.ru/news/crime/108282} (last accessed 20 January 2016).} In the course of the 2000s, Russia witnessed the establishment of various foundations and special government programs to finance such a “traditional Islam”.\footnote{For example, to this end, the Russian Presidential Administration established the “Foundation for the Support of Islamic Culture, Science and Education”; See “Ustav nekommercheskoi blagotvoritel'noi organizatsii”, \textit{Fond podderzhki islamskoi kultury, nauki i obrazovaniya} (2006) \url{http://www.islamfund.ru/ustav.html} (last accessed 20 January 2016).} At the same time the very contents of what the concept was supposed to mean remained vague; as some specialists argued, “traditional Islam” means patriotic and loyal to the Kremlin,\footnote{K. Kovalskaya, “The Traditional and the Non-Traditional”, 75.} with the latter not being interested in how this loyalty is expressed in Islamic terms. Some claim that “traditional Islam” is meant to be “depoliticized”, but of course the opposite is true – as already the demand to construct such a traditional Islam comes from the Kremlin.\footnote{K. Kovalskaya, “The Traditional and the Non-Traditional”, 75.} Furthermore, it mythologized the past to suit the current political agenda. As is well-known, many traditions that seem old or pretend to be old,
often turn out to be quite recent and often invented; and borrowing from the conceptual apparatus of the British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm,\(^3\) one can say that “Islamic traditionalism” in Russia is the invention of a tradition to foster Muslim loyalty to the federal authorities.

While the invention of “traditional Islam” is an example of history construction by a state elite, Iasin Rasulov’s suggestion of a different version of history represents an example of “counter-history”, or “counter-memory”, to employ Michel Foucault’s terminology.\(^4\) Rasulov explicitly stated, at the beginning of his work, that memory was what he intended to elaborate.

**Continuity with Soviet Dichotomies**

Rasulov also refers to the history of North Caucasus resistance against Soviet regime in the 1920s to 1940s, which in his view was equally a manifestation of jihad. By closing this gap, Rasulov is able to demonstrate a direct and uninterrupted line from the Caucasus War of the 19th century to the military operations in Chechnya and Daghestan in post-Soviet Russia.

Rasulov’s main argument in favor of a direct link between the war in the North Caucasus in the 19th century and Caucasian resistance against the Soviet state, is that the arguments of opponents of the Soviet regime are similar to the arguments of opponents of Tsarist power: Muslims should be free from any authority other than Allah, so jihad against the Soviet government was needed to establish an Islamic state based on sharia. And indeed, also the 1920s saw several attempts at establishing states based on sharia law in Daghestan and Chechnya.\(^5\)

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\(^3\) E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 322.


\(^5\) The Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus (1918-1919), the North Caucasian Emirate (1919-1920) and the Mountain Soviet Republic (1920-1924). Representative figures of this were, in Rasulov’s understanding, Sheikh Uzun Haji of Salta (the head of the North Caucasus Emirate 1919-1920), Said Bey, the grandson of Imam Shamil (Bey led a revolt against the Soviet authorities in 1921), and the Imam of Daghestan and Chechnya Nazhmuddin Hajji, from the village of Gotsob (Gotsinskii) (who led an uprising in 1922-1925).
According to Rasulov, not all North Caucasus Muslim leaders supported the Islamic resistance to Soviet rule, however. The Muslim clergy loyal to Soviet authority argued in favor of the division of powers into “earthly” and “spiritual”. 400

Russians in the 19th century called their supporters among Muslim authorities “Muslim clergy” (musul’manskoe dakhovenstvo). Rasulov criticized this Russian terminology exactly because it assumes the separation of power into “spiritual” and “secular” realms. Rasulov believed that the term “clergy” is imposed on Muslims, and every time he used it himself, he put it in quotation marks.

However the Soviet government deceived the North Caucasian Muslims: at the end of the 1920s, according to Rasulov, the Soviet government executed the loyal Muslim “clergy”, sending their children and wives to the Gulag, seizing their property and persecuting Islam in the region. In his opinion, the names of those who openly opposed the Soviet regime would be enshrined in the history of the people of the North Caucasus as freedom fighters, while those who refrained from resistance, would be remembered as “the waste of Bolshevik propaganda”.

Islamic resistance resumed in the 1930s and ‘40s, in protest against collectivization, the shutdown of mosques, the public burnings of the Qur’an, and the Bolshevik practice of depriving religious leaders and other groups of Caucasian society of their civil and electoral rights. Rasulov stated that Stalin just carried out Emperor Nikolai I’s call to “subjugate the mountain people or exterminate those who disobey”. Rasulov points out that this was intended as punishment for previous resistance was the mass deportation of Caucasian peoples in 1944. 401

As in the context of the 19th century, Rasulov insisted on the split between the Sufis and the Salafis: the Sufi were proponents of the Soviet regime while the Salafis were against it.

However, here Rasulov's claim is not based on sound evidence. As early as in 1983, French historian Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay pointed out that in 1929 the adherents of the Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya tariqas fought side by side against Soviet power. 402 The idea that the Sufi tariqas in the North Caucasus were ideologically opposed to the Soviet power in

400 In particular, the Resolution of the Congress of the Clergy and the Sheikhs of Mountain Dagestan of November 1923, in which Islamic authorities called upon Muslims to obey the Soviet government, as submission to such a government was taught by the covenants of Prophet Muhammad, who all his life fought against the khans and the rich.

401 Iasin Rasulov, “Dzhikhad na Severnom Kavkaze: storonniki i protivniki”, 43.

the post-Stalinist period was expressed by Lemercier-Quelquejay in a joint article with her teacher, French Orientalist and sovietologist Alexandre Bennigsen. Modern research into this matter also confirms the idea that the Soviet power relied not on Sufi tariqas, but rather on their opponents. For instance, Kazakh researcher Ashirbek Muminov showed that early Soviet power even relied on Islamic movements which criticized not only Sufism, but also the Hanafi tradition quite in the spirit of modern Salafism.

As Michael Kemper and Alfrid Bustanov have argued, Soviet historiography by and large had an ambivalent relationship to the shari’a-minded Tatar and Daghestani scholars of the previous centuries. While Soviet ideology saw Islam as a harmful “remnant of the past”, a few critics of the Sufi and scholastic tradition in the modern era were regarded positively; in Daghestan, this group included Muhammad al-Quduqi, one of Rasulov’s major witnesses for a homegrown Salafi tradition in the North Caucasus as seen above. Al-Quduqi’s call for ijtihad and for replacing customary law by Islamic law could be read as a critique of Islam in toto; starting in the 1960s, Daghestani historians began to regard references to ijtihad as token of a progressive mindset, and Islam became reduced to cultural heritage. From this perspective, Rasulov’s claim that the Soviet system privileged the Sufis is not entirely correct; even in the Soviet Muftiate in Buinaksk, the Muftis often turned to reformist arguments in order to conform to the demands of the state, for instance by incriminating Sufis and the practice of shrine visitation in Daghestan. Whether Rasulov was aware of this Soviet preference for Salafi views is not clear; at any event he was silent about it, for it did not fit into his continuity argument – that Sufism was always obedient to the anti-Islamic state while salafism resisted it.

Rasulov’s final chapter, “Jihad in Russia's period of perestroika”, is devoted to the present confrontation between the North Caucasian jihadists and the Russian authorities. Its epigraph is an extract from the book Masters of Discourse: Israeli-American Terrorism written by Israel Shamir (b. 1947), on the brutality with which the Russian army destroyed the city of Grozny (in 1994–96). From this observation Shamir concluded that Chechnya was not part of Russia since “one never wreaks that much havoc on one’s own people”. It is worth noting that

405 M. Kemper, “Ijtihad into Philosophy”.
the controversial Shamir, who converted to Orthodoxy and is a leftist, is a much-despised figure in Israel, known to consistently criticize the country’s policies and those of the US and “the West” in general, whilst supporting the policies of Vladimir Putin. Rasulov chose only to mention the part of the book in which Shamir denounced the actions of the Russian military, in line with his tendency to focus solely on the relations between the North Caucasus and Russia.

Rasulov described the history of the Chechen resistance of the 1990s, and particularly the role played by the Daghestani Salafi preachers Bagautdin Magomedov (Kebedov) and Akhmad-Qadi Akhtaev, who supported the Chechen politicians Dzhokhar Dudaev and Zelimkhan Yandarbiev. Rasulov maintained that the Islamic factor played a significant role from the very outset of the Chechen conflict; he thus opposes the dominant view, also shared by most Western scholars, that Chechen separatism started as a purely secular nationalist project, with Islam only becoming important in the second half of the 1990s, when, after the expulsion of the Russian forces, Ichkeria became a failed state due to the increasing power of the Islamist warlords in the country. Rasulov often referred to the 2002 dissertation of his friend Abuzagir Mantaev, entitled “Wahhabism and the Political Situation in Daghestan”, which studies the presence of foreign Salafi groups (jama’ats) in Dudaev’s army, and also describes Bagautdin Magomedov’s role in demonstrating the need for jihad against the Russian government.

Rasulov refers to the Russian expert on Islamic law, Leonid Siukiiainen, to prove that Yandarbiev in 1996 proclaimed the introduction of the Sharia law in order to establish a legal system that would be respected, and that had the potential to combat the violence washing over Chechnya. Rasulov then goes on to describe, briefly, the second phase of the Chechen war and Shamil Basaev’s military group’s invasion of Daghestan.

In closing, Rasulov stated his opinion that the idea of the foreignness of Salafism or “Wahhabism” to the Muslims in the Northern Caucasus was misguided, and that, rather, one would have to admit that in the early 1990s there was in fact a revival of Salafism native to

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408 Iasin Rasulov, “Dzhikhad na Severnom Kavkaze: storonniki i protivniki”, 53.

409 A. Mantaev, Vakhkhabizm i politicheskaja situatsija v Dagestane.

410 Leonid Siukiiainen, “O pravvoi prirode shariata i ego vzamodeistvi s evropeiskim pravom”.
the region. Rasulov claimed that to regard *tariqa* was the traditional version of Islam in Daghestan was false:

> We have witnessed that Salafism has a history that has spanned three hundred years in Daghestan, as it has been spreading in the North Caucasus since the 17th century. Given that the dissemination of Islam in Daghestan ended in the 18th century one can say with utmost certitude that Salafism or “Wahhabism” are traditional.

Rasulov quoted Daghestani mufti Akhmad-Hajji Abdullaev, an Avar from the Mahmudiyya branch of the Naqshbandiya khalidiyya *tariqa*, who allegedly said that he was “praying for the Russian soldiers, for a united Russia, and a prosperous Daghestan”. To Rasulov, this statement was similar to what Sufi leaders in Daghestan said at the beginning of Soviet rule. He also pointed out that the modern representatives of the Sufi brotherhood, just like their predecessors of the 1920s, supported secularism and held that Russia gave enough liberty to Islam by allowing the Islamic prayer, fasting and the hajj. These passages bear resemblance to Rasulov’s arguments in the polemical exchange published on the *Chernovik* website. In his opinion, the aggressive policy of the representatives of *tariqa* and the Muftiate were the main cause of the radicalization of North Caucasian youth.

At the same time Rasulov avoided any anti-Western rhetoric – obviously because linking all evils to the West was the strategy that his opponents employed.

In his afterword, Rasulov wrote that, according to the Islamic principle of *tawhid*, Allah created man to be free, and that man shouldn’t worship anyone but Allah. For Rasulov this worship is expressed also in power, which, too, cannot be divided between man and Allah. Rasulov pointed out that such a division of power was polytheism. Following this reasoning it was therefore the monotheistic principle which spurred Ghazi Muhammad and the imams of the North Caucasus to declare jihad against the Russia – they could not tolerate the division of power between the secular and the religious realms as advocated by the opponents of jihad. He added:

> ... acceptable ways to solve [the problem] must be identified by the conscientious part of the public. Not those who can be called a community of mankurts, ‘who do not take off the hat of slavery, day or night, even sleeping with it on’, but those who can berighteously called a community of free and brave people truly concerned about their own people and ready to fulfill the historic mission which awaits its heroes.

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Here, in the Afterword, he does not hide his political stance any longer, and also all pretenses of democracy are gone. He accuses his opponents as actually violating the Muslim principle of *tawhid* and eventually formulates a full justification for the contemporary jihad. Unlike the *mankurts*, so Rasulov, the jihadists were free people.

An Open Call for Jihad

In 2006, a joint video address featuring Iasin Rasulov and Murad Lakhiialov, leader of the jihadist group “Jamaat Shariat” was posted on the Internet. This was the first and only video of Rasulov since he joined the jihadist resistance. In it, Lakhiialov called Rasulov “our intellectual leader” (*ideinyi lider*) who turns the souls of those kafirs [infidels] inside out. The two were taped riding a car in Makhachkala, Rasulov holding a machine gun, with a bag of explosives lying between them.412

The video is both an address to Muslims and a kind of reportage from the front – evidenced not only by the weapons in the scene but also by Lakhiialov’s statement that they were driving into the city to track down enemies from among law enforcement officers.

The address, lasting about 15 minutes, has Iasin Rasulov speaking of the need for jihad in the North Caucasus, calling on his viewers to take part in the fight against Russian authorities. Significantly, Rasulov repeated Ghazi Muhammad’s statement that conducting the prayer (*namaz*), fasting, and the hajj do not yet make a person a Muslim. A true Muslim, Rasulov insisted, was obliged to pursue jihad against those who oppose *shari’a* law.

> You think you are Muslim, you pray, fast, but it is all in vain, because you (Muslims) have a duty to perform. One cannot escape it just as one cannot elude prayers, fasting… same thing! Open any book of any author and you’ll see them say: ‘When kafirs invade the territory of Muslims, jihad becomes *fard ‘ayn*!’ [that is, an Islamic obligation for the individual Muslim, not just for the community as a whole; D.G.].413


413 On the issue whether jihad is an individual duty or just an obligation for the community (which would have to provide enough soldiers for any given jihad task, but by far not everyone) see e.g. R. Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam: A Reader* (Princeton, 1996).
Now, think about your own self! You are a man walking around your city overrun by kafirs who have subverted the Sharia laws by enforcing ones of their own, and you live under this rule still calling yourselves Muslims...

Rasulov rejected the arguments of those who believed resistance to Russia was futile due to the weakness of the Muslims in the North Caucasus. He insisted that there were plenty of opportunities: members of the Sharia movement could hide in the woods, rent apartments in the cities, houses in the villages. By Rasulov’s reckoning, willing Muslims could find ways to live in today’s Daghestan in conformity with sharia law and wage jihad against Russia. They did not have to leave their country. It was, in Rasulov’s mind, not a matter of geography but a matter of psychology:

We just have to get out of this system, disentangle ourselves from the power of the Kufr [unbelief] and be free. That’s it!.

Rasulov called on his viewers not to be disheartened by the fact that jihadists in Russia were outnumbered by their opponents: he recounted stories from Islamic mythology in which small groups of Muslim soldiers defeated their more numerous enemies. Then he took up a Kalashnikov and cried:

Grab an automatic gun and go; you see that bomb? Commit acts! Do things! Wage jihad in Allah's way, nobody will stand in your way!

Rasulov insisted one should not be afraid of death, because death is predetermined by Allah. One had to wage jihad to “feel one’s faith to the fullest”, to express “how much one loved Allah”. Rasulov then went on to criticize those Muslims who were observing the events in the North Caucasus from a safe distance: they would have to answer for their hypocrisy on Judgment Day.

In this clip, almost every message is punctuated with quotes from the Qur’an and the hadith; Rasulov thus conformed to the conventional jihadi way of argumentation, and parted from the academic style he used in his previous publications, where quotes from Islamic sources are rare. Another new element in his speech is the embrace of the variant of the criminal jargon that jihadists often employ; those who did not wage jihad he dubbed “housewives”, and the secular authorities and the police he disparagingly referred to as musor (rubbish) who, without punishment, rape Muslim women, men and children. Rasulov called upon Muslim accomplices of the state to stop using Islamic arguments (dalils) for their lack of resistance,
and to honestly confess their cowardice. If these people did not discontinue their anti-jihadist propaganda, Rasulov concluded, he and his associates would turn on them as well.

One might speculate as to whether Rasulov went to the “forest” because of the pressure exerted by the state and his Islamic opponents, or whether it was the terrorists themselves who forced him to go into the underground.
Chapter 6:

Jihad as Passionarity: Said Buriatskii and Lev Gumilev

One of the most well-known representatives of jihad in Russia’s North Caucasus was Said Buriatskii (1982-2010), a convert to Islam with a mixed Russian-Buryat family background. Buriatskii has been a central personality in many Western and Russian accounts of the jihad movement in the Northern Caucasus, largely from a security perspective. While most observers classify Buriatskii (and other jihadists, like Shamil Basaev, 1965-2006) merely as a propagandist of radical Islamic teachings imported from the Middle East, I argue that Buriatskii is better understood as a post-Soviet phenomenon, and as a mediator: his many videos, messages and texts are a translation of Islamic thinking into a specifically Russian discourse (“Russian” in the sense of rossiiskii – i.e. pertaining to the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Federation). I argue that Buriatskii’s texts – all in the Russian language – are framed in a way that makes them distinctly Russian, especially through a multitude of references to Russian literature and to Russian (Soviet) anthropological models. Buriatskii’s approach to how he justifies jihad fits into the cultural and ideological tendencies of the post-Soviet period.

In what follows, I will provide a brief sketch of Buriatskii’s trajectory to media jihadism, to then discuss how he has been taken up as a positive example of emulation by some non-Muslim authors, including Russian anti-fascist oppositional writers. This raises the question of what constituted Buriatskii’s appeal, and which media strategies he employed to raise sympathy among Muslims and non-Muslims. I will then analyze one particular text in which Buriatskii explains the concept of istishhad (the Arabic term for “searching for shahada”, that is, going out to fight on Allah’s path and seeking martyrdom). In this text Buriatskii employed not only the traditional Islamic rhetoric about God’s reward for a fighter who died in the field but also typical Russian and Soviet topoi. Against this background, Buriatskii’s violent death

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in 2010, at the hands of the Russian security services, only completed his self-declared mission of martyrdom.

Conversion: Finding the Straight Path in a Mixed Environment

Said Buriatskii (or Abu Sa'ad Sa'id al-Buryati) was born on 10 February 1982 in Ulan-Ude (Buriatiia, Siberia) as Aleksandr Tikhomirov. Reportedly, his father was of mixed Kazakh and Buryat origin; his mother, who raised Aleksandr, is Russian. There are several narratives, published online, on how Aleksandr Tikhomirov discovered Islam and became Said Buriatskii. His mother claims that he embraced Islam at the age of 17, after he read a Russian translation of the Qur'an.416 Other sources claim he converted at the age of 15.417

After Aleksandr/Said finished the local school, probably in 1999, the imam of the central mosque in Irkutsk convinced him to pursue Islamic studies at the Rasul' Akram Madrasa in Moscow; this Islamic school was founded with support from Nafigulla Ashirov, an officially recognized Mufti of Siberia (who is also a co-founder of the Council of Russia's Muftis

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headed by Mufti Ravil' Gainutdin, chairman of what is now called the Muslim Spiritual
Administration of the Russian Federation). In the 1990s, when the Islamic administrations in
Russia still enjoyed financial and technical aid from Middle Eastern countries, the Rasul'
Akram Madrasa also obtained support from Iran, and had, reportedly, Shi’i elements in its
program. Said left this madrasa before it was closed down in 2002 (after allegations that it
fostered extremism);418 he then went on to study at the staunchly Sunni Al' Furkan Madrasa in
Buguruslan (Orenburg region), which was run by teachers from Medina (Saudi Arabia). This
was one of the largest and most popular Salafi schools in post-Soviet Russia. He graduated in
2002, and was included in a group of Al' Furkan graduates who were sent to further their
studies in Egypt, reportedly under the guidance of Muhammad Yusri, a functionary in an
Egyptian Islamic foundation. Al' Furkan was closed down in 2004, also on allegations of
spreading extremist propaganda.

Buriatskii studied in Egypt for one year, or maybe even three. Formally he was enrolled at the
famous al-Azhar University, but we must assume that he mostly took courses from private
teachers. The Russian Wikipedia site claims he studied with several famous Islamic TV
preachers,419 but this is unconfirmed. Rinat Kazakhstani (Zainullin), a well-known Salafi-
minded Tatar preacher from Kazakhstan who is probably some five years Buriatskii’s senior,
claims that Buriatskii took Arabic language lessons from himself and from his younger
brother at al-Azhar University.420 Reportedly the Egyptian secret service forced Buriatskii to
leave the country. According to his mother, Said returned to Moscow in 2003, but then he left
for Kuwait the following year;421 other sources say he went directly to Kuwait, and perhaps to
Saudi Arabia.422

In 2005 or 2006 Said worked as a translator of Arabic for the Islamic publishing house Umma
in Moscow. Umma is directed by the ethnic Chechen Aslambek Ezhaev, an Islamic activist
with public Salafi credentials who is however not in opposition to Gainutdin's Muftiate in
Moscow. Said also worked for islamnews.ru, one of the major Islamic information agencies in

418 “Rasul Akram”, Izdatel'skii dom Medina (2010)
http://islamist.ru/%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%8C-
%D0%B0%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC/ (last accessed 23 June 2015).
https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A1%D0%B0%D8%B4_%D0%91%D1%83%D1%80%D1%8F-
D1%82%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9 (last accessed 10 December 2017).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewIm3_JB24w (last accessed 10 December 2017).
421 Umm Said, “Pis’mo materi Saida Buriatskogo rossiiskim SMI”.
Russia, at that time well-known for its Salafi positions. It is in those years that Said Buriatskii published his first video sermons and lectures, mainly on musulmanin.com, a site run by Umma. Many of his items were of educational content, more in the style of lectures than of classical sermons; they dealt with narratives about the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, on standard topics like the pilgrimage to Mecca, the afterlife, faith, and fasting. Musulmanin.com also posted products of many other Salafi preachers, including Kamal al-Zand (an Arab from Kazan), the Azerbaijani Elmir Kuliev, Abu Iakhia Krimskii, Muhammad Karachai, the Daghestani Magomed Bahautdin (Kebedov), and Rinat Kazakhstani. In 2007 Buriatskii went on hajj.

This brief overview of Buriatskii's early career demonstrates that Buriatskii obtained his Islamic knowledge from a very fragmented and volatile system of private Islamic education; under Putin most of these schools, agencies, publishing houses, and sites were either closed down or forced to remain within political parameters acceptable to the Russian state. Buriatskii’s wanderings brought him into contact with various other Islamic activists, from many regions of the former USSR, who were all busy with establishing a name for themselves by developing a public stance. And Salafism was almost mainstream. Interestingly, while the rather peripheral Buguruslan madrasa was the only place where he enjoyed education for a longer period, it was in Moscow that he found the infrastructure and the media to gain fame among a larger audience. Kazakhstani, in one of his attacks on Buriatskii, calls musulmanin.com the “star factory” (fabrika zvezd) of Russia's Salafi scene – hinting at the commercial implications of the nascent Russian Islamic media industry, and at the provenance of the donations which keep the site alive.423

Furthermore, it seems Buriatskii did not attach himself to one specific group or teacher. Rather, his education was a mixture of what he got where he studied, and perhaps what he read for himself, and what he accepted from video and internet sites from around the Muslim world. His lectures generally do not reveal concrete references to individual Islamic authorities, political or spiritual. Buriatskii was nobody's disciple; he was, in fact, as much a product of the all-Russian Islamic scene as he was influenced by Islamic groups from the Middle East.

423 Rinat Kazakhstani, “Said Buriatskii i dzhikhad. Chast’ 1”.
In the spring of 2008, Buriatskii attached himself to the Caucasus Emirate. As he himself explained, he had not been thinking about joining the jihadists until he received a written invitation by a certain Muhamnad (1961-2010), an Arab-origin deputy of the Caucasus Emirate's military amir (leader). Buriatskii then performed an oath of allegiance (Arabic: bay‘a) to Doku Umarov (1964-2013), the former underground president of the defunct Republic of Ichkeria (Chechnya) who in 2007 proclaimed the Caucasus Emirate, with himself as amir/leader. In May 2008 Buriatskii traveled to the Caucasus (or to wherever Umarov was hiding at that time), and soon became one of his major propagandists. Before his move to the Caucasus Buriatskii had not issued any calls to jihad, but after his meeting with Umarov he began to publish sermons, speeches and video reports on the Emirate's major website. He also saw himself in charge of Riyadh al-salihin (Russian: Riaaz-us-salikhin), a terrorist unit that Shamil Basaev had established in 2001.

How much Buriatskii actually participated in actual terrorist attacks is very difficult to ascertain; Russian media linked him to a number of bomb attacks, including the explosion in the Nevskii Ekexpress train near St. Petersburg in 2009. From Buriatskii's own video blogs and messages it is obvious that he participated in violent actions in the North Caucasus; we also see him reporting from training camps, and from meeting places of jihadists groups, wearing a military uniform and carrying guns. In his videos, Buriatskii employs a specially trained voice and speaks in a harsh tone, with impressive facial expressions. These military aesthetics convey the image of a faithful hero – he does not only speak about jihad, he lives it.

Conflicting Images of Buriatskii

After his death in 2010 some Russian non-Muslim journalists started to acknowledge Buriatskii's popularity among parts of Russia's youth. One of these journalists is Vladimir Golyshev, who has a theological background and was involved in organizational work for the Russian Orthodox Church and in pro-Kremlin PR, but who, in 2005, began to be seen as opposed to the Russian government. In October 2011 Golyshev published a heroic article on Buriatskii, entitled “The man with the knapsack: Said Buriatskii as a living rejection of the

425 “Vladimir Golyshev”, Entsiklopediya kul'tury i iskusstva zhurnala “Kontrabanda” (2012) http://wiki.kbanda.ru/wiki/%D0%92%D0%BB%D0%B0%D4%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80_%D0%93%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%8B%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%B2 (last accessed 10 December 2017).
spirit of the zero years” 426 (published in Gleb Pavlovskii’s internet journal Russkii Zhurnal, which can be characterized as targeting an intellectual audience with dissident inclinations).

In Golyshev’s view, Buriatskii was “sincere” (iskrennyi) and “real” (nastoiashchii), and he called him a “real martyr” (nastoiashchii muchennik). Golyshhev saw in Buriatskii a new Che Guevara; 427 and he compared Buriatskii to the colorful Russian film actor Ivan Okhlobystin. Okhlobystin is a clergyman of the Russian Orthodox Church (“a glamor priest with tattoos”, in Golyshhev’s words) who became popular as an actor in modern re-makes of Dostoevskii’s Idiot, and who in 2011 talked in the Russian media about his ambitions to run as candidate for the 2012 presidential elections.

This is how Golyshhev explained his interest in Buriatskii:

> Even for me, as a Christian who is far removed from the details of Islamic theology, one thing was clear: [with Buriatskii] something authentic burst into the world of simulacrums 428 (v mir simuliakrov vorvalos’ nechto podlinnoe). And this world was shaken. 429

Said Buriatskii was thus constructed as a genuine fighter against postmodern reality, something that also non-Muslim intellectuals could look up to. In Golyshhev’s view, Buriatskii was a martyr: “He came to Chechnya not to fight but to die”.

It must be noted that this article was published in Russkii zhurnal’s section “Personalities of the 2000s” (Litsa nulevykh), implying that Buriatskii deserves a place among the most prominent personalities of that epoch; there he stands next to influential journalists such as Oleg Kashin, Sergei Dorenko, Mikhail Leont’ev and Il’ia Oskolkov-Tsentsiper. Some but not all of these are considered as belonging to the opposition.

Buriatskii was equally taken up by Il’ia Fal’kovskii, a public intellectual involved in a broader movement of Russian anti-fascists, opponents of the Putin government and of globalization. After Buriatskii’s death, Fal’kovskii produced (together with Aleksandr Litoi) a book under

427 Also Iuliia Latynina, a very influential and confrontational Russian journalist and book author widely known for her independent and libertarian stances, compared Buriatskii to Che Guevara (Iuliia Latynina, “Konets Saida Buriatskogo”, Al’fa (5.05.2010) http://www.alphagroup.ru/press-service/news/959 (last accessed on 10 December 2017). The first to note similarities between Guevara and North Caucasus jihadists (here: Shamil Basaev) was sociologist Georgi Derlugian (G. Derlugian, “Che Guevars in Turbans: the Twisted Lineage of Islamic Fundamentalism in Chechnya and Dagestan”).
428 Simulacrum is an important postmodern term, used by such French post-structuralists as Georges Bataille, Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard. This term means a simulation or copy of something that has no archetype in reality.
429 Golyshhev, “Chelovek s riukzakom: Said Buriatskii – kak zhivoe otritsanie dukha nulevykh”.
the title “Civil war has already begun” in which he explored the biographies of nine Russian terrorists, ranging from Islamists (Buriatskii, Anzor Astemirov and Iasin Rasulov) to Russian radical nationalists (like Nikita Tikhonov). Fal’kovskii also gave an account of two “partisan” groups, including the “Far Eastern Partisans” (Primorskie partizany). Again, the religious divide (Islam – non-Islam) is bridged to describe a common phenomenon.

Fal’kovskii (now using the Islamized pseudonym Il’ias Fal’kaev) published his Buriatskii chapter also on the site of the artistic art group “Pop-Grafika”. Here as well, the context makes the difference: in the same section Falkaev also published his interview with Dmitrii Prigov (a writer who is regarded as a pioneer of the “new sincerity” movement that I briefly discussed in the Introduction of this dissertation), and an article on the poet Timur Kibirov (another widely acknowledged representative of that “new sincerity” in art).

Falkaev/Fal'kovskii makes a direct link between Buriatskii and “sincerity”:

Said, whose sincerity caused no doubts even among his enemies, became a martyr who was killed for his faith. For the radicals his glory will only get stronger over the years.

In these accounts, Fal'kovskii compares Buriatskii to Russian terrorists of the late 19th century such as Boris Savinkov and Mariia Spiridonova. According to Fal'kovskii, what Buriatskii has in common with these is his attitude of self-sacrifice (samopozhertvovanie).

Needless to say, positive images of Buiratskii are above all abundant on websites of the Islamic militants. The emphasis on sincerity is most compelling in a document published by his mother, entitled “Letter of the mother of Said Buriatskii to the Russian media”, which was published on the radical Islamist websites Kavkaz Center and Hunafa.com in March 2010. In this peculiar modern hagiography, Buriatskii's mother (“Umm Said”, “mother of Said”) portrays her son in the most positive hues, claiming that already as a school boy he had a deep knowledge of literature and history, and that he regularly used the public library (the family was not wealthy enough to purchase books); she describes his conversion resulting from his

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431 Ibid., 178.
434 I’ias Fal’kaev, “Voin dzhikhada Said Buriatskii”.
435 Boris Savinkov (1879-1925) was a revolutionary terrorist, a Russian politician, one of the leaders of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, head of the military organization of SR Party, member of the White movement. Savinkov was also a writer of prose and a publicist. Mariia Spiridonova (1884-1941), a Russian terrorist, was one of the heads of the left SR Party.
“sincere and pure” (iskrennye i chistye) motivations, from a spiritual search. She herself embraced Islam two years before Aleksandr, purportedly after reading the work of an Orthodox Christian author, Aleksandr Men’s “Human son” (Syn chelovecheskii). Aleksandr Men’ was killed in 1990 by unknown assailants; the Orthodox missionary Daniil Sysoev (himself assassinated in 2009) called him a “heretic”. Umm Said’s link to Islam, however, might also have resulted from the influence of her second husband, an ethnic Chechen. However that may have been, what is important here is that conversion to Islam in the 1990s must be seen in the context of a broader search for a religious truth, one in which the borders between the traditional confessions were initially not of primary importance for the individual – leading to configurations that would seem paradoxical today.

Going against such hagiographical accounts, a thoroughly negative view on Buriatskii is given by Rinat Kazakhstani, a Tatar Salafi preacher from Kazakhstan. Kazakhstani came to adhere to “Madkhalism” (named after a certain Rabi‘ al-Madkhali [b. 1931], former head of the Sunnah Studies Department at Islamic University of Medina), a Salafi school that professes loyalty to the existing state authorities. There is a network of Madkhalis in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Crimea; they distinguish themselves by not opposing the incumbent regimes, be that Nazarbaev, Putin, or Aliev’s. Kazakhstani rejects the call to jihad in the present situation, and thus attacked Buriatskii. In Kazakhstani’s opinion, Doku Umarov has in fact declared the whole Chechen nation to be unbelievers, since the population largely supports the current Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. According to Kazakhstani, Buriatskii followed Umarov in this act of takfir.

Rinat Kazakhstani also claimed that Buriatskii had a weak theological preparation. During his study year in Egypt, Buriatskii “preferred to learn the [Arabic] language, instead of our lessons of ‘aqida [Islamic dogma] and of other books [that Kazakhstani and his brother Nail’ taught to the students from Buguraslan]. In this way he stayed in Egypt for eight months.” For Kazakhstani, the only thing Buriatskii was good in was retelling the stories of others; he “had no knowledge whatsoever”. Buriatskii immediately responded to this accusation, conceding

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436 Umm Said, “Pis’mo materi Saida Buriatskogo rossiiskim SMI”.
439 Rinat Kazakhstani, “Said Buriatskii i dzhikhad. Chast’ 1”.
that he never claimed to be an Islamic scholar (‘alim), and that he did not claim he was able to
give fatwas (expert opinions on matters of Islamic law).440

This is a frank statement; and indeed, academic scholars of Islamic theology would probably
find Buriatskii’s opus too trivial to study in earnest. Obviously Buriatskii saw himself not as a
theologian but as a Muslim Russian public intellectual who uses his erudition in secular
humanities to justify the jihadist movement.

*Istishhad*, Sacrifice, and the Theory of Passionarity

In his internet publications, Buriatskii displays a mix of historical, ideological and religious
elements; this can best be demonstrated with a text he published in December 2009 on
*kavkazcenter.com*, the major web portal of the Caucasus Emirate. In his programmatic text
entitled “*Istishhad: between truth and lie*”, Buriatskii gives an account of the Islamists' 
motivation for sacrificing their lives on the path of Allah.441 The text is addressing not only
insiders, and not only Muslims, but “everybody whose brain has not already been washed by
television”. The main question Buriatskii discusses is why some people decide to become
martyrs (Russian: *smertnik*/*shakhidy*, Arabic: *shahid*, pl. *shuhada’*).

In the first part of the text Buriatskii discusses a number of historical examples, beginning
with the Prophet himself (who in 628 at Hudaybiyya received his followers' oath to fight and
if necessary die for Islam).442 The tradition of *istishhad*, “readiness/longing to die as a
martyr”, thus goes back to the very founder of Islam. Buriatskii also discusses the Shi’i
Isma’ilis of the medieval period (who were denounced as Hashshashiyin, “hashish-consuming
killers” – hence the English term “Assassins”). In Buriatskii’s Sunni eyes however their
readiness to die for their faith was a “degradation” of the istishhad principle, because their
fight went against the “whole Muslim world”. Buriatskii argues that the image of the
Hashshashiyin/Assassins is guiding Russian journalists when they portray the motivations of
contemporary suicide bombers in the North Caucasus as being a result of brainwashing,

hypnosis, and drugs. The purpose of Buriatskii’s article is to show that there is no manipulation, but conviction and sincerity.

While the radical Shi’i sects of the medieval period are thus described as an aberration, Buriatskii makes positive reference to Christian cases of self-sacrifice. He refers to a historical incident (in 286 CE) when the Tenth Theban Legion refused to participate in the persecution of Christians. To punish this disobedience, Roman Emperor Traian gave the command to execute every tenth soldier of the Legion. Buriatskii claims that the Emperor had to revoke this order when he saw how many volunteers were willing to be martyred. According to Buriatskii, it was this willingness to sacrifice their own lives that eventually brought the Christians to power in the Roman Empire.443

Yet Buriatskii’s most important non-Muslim point of reference in this programmatic text is the famous Russian historian and anthropologist Lev N. Gumilev (1912-1992), from whose work Buriatskii borrows the concept of “passionarity” (passionarnost’) – a concept that in its highest form leads to istishhad. Buriatskii claimed he read Gumilev already in his youth:

At one point I studied the works of L.N. Gumilev, the famous historian; already in my youth I learned about the concept of passionarnost’ that he introduced into the historical sciences, and that he saw as an instrument for systematizing history. Here we will not review other versions of that historical approach [to come to an overall understanding of historical development], and we will not look at the ‘civilizational’ approach of [Arnold] Toynbee, the conception of Jean-Baptiste Vico, of [Oswald] Spengler, and not even of the great historian of Islam Ibn Khaldun. I have always been interested in [Gumilev's] idea of ‘passionarity’, and in the theory according to which the emergence of ethnoses is directly connected to that phenomenon. [Gumilev] understood this term [passionarity] as the general striving of a people (narod), of an ethnos, to reach its major goal, [and for this goal] people were ready to perform great deeds. In his opinion, [passionarity] was the reason why ethnoses could emerge, seemingly out of nothing; and a reduction in the level of passionarity led to the disappearance of an ethnos. The main thing here is that [Gumilev developed a matrix] on which he indicated the highest level of passionarity [under the term] P6; this peak Gumilev understood as self-sacrifice (samopozhertvovanie), as a readiness to make sacrifices (zhetvennost’) to fulfill a given task. If we look at this from a neutral position we will understand that Gumilev was right – because not

443 Said Buriatskii, “Istishkhad: mezhdu pravdoi i lozh’iu”.
only states but also whole peoples (narody) rose only when persons were ready to sacrifice their lives for a certain idea.

He then turns to Islam:

When the companions of Allah’s Prophet, although they were just a few people, attacked the thousands of soldiers of the Byzantine and Persians armies, it was very normal to die on the Path of Allah; and this passionarity became the fundament of the Caliphate. And when the Muslims delved in luxury, and when the death on the Path of Allah was already regarded as [merely] suicide, from this moment the curve of passionarity went down.

But we cannot ignore the fact that the sacrifice was primarily inherent in followers of religions, rather than nationalists who [merely] cared for the creation of the state. And there are no other world religions except Islam and Christianity where sacrifice would manifest itself so massively.  

What we see here is that Buriatskii turns to the Soviet/Russian academic discourse of anthropology, from which he borrows concepts like “passionarity”, “ethnos”, and “sacrifice”. As Alfrid Bustanov and Michael Kemper have shown, within the Russian Islamic discourse there is one strong trend that embraces academic concepts and jargon; the two authors speak of a specific “academic” version of the Russian Islamic discourse, and of the of Russian Islamic sociolect that these scholars postulate. While Bustanov and Kemper studied this “academic Islamic language” with regard to borrowings from mainstream Soviet Marxist as well as from post-modern Western academic parlance, Buriatskii chose to draw from the repertoire of a Russian academic whom one could best classify as a non-Marxist dissident, as a charismatic figure who stood against mainstream Soviet interpretations, and who, for this, suffered from Soviet repression. Obviously, Gumilev’s approach suited Buriatskii better than those of the European cultural conservatives he mentioned (like Oswald Spengler [1880-1931], who predicted “the decline of Europe”), and even more than that of the Arab historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldun (d. 1405), who in the Muslim world is celebrated as a pioneer of Islamic sociology. All of these share, in one way or another, Gumilev’s conception of historical cycles to explain the origin, rise and fall of civilizations and states; but while for the

444 Ibid.  
445 A. Bustanov, M. Kemper, “The Russian Orthodox and Islamic Languages”.  
Islamic scholar and diplomat Ibn Khaldun, the fates of peoples are the expression of Allah’s will, Gumilev does not mention God at all.

Buriatskii is quick to note that Gumilev had a wrong idea about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, which was “unsubstantiated and unfounded”, and which “gave Gumilev a reputation of an irrational person”. Buriatskii thus defends the conceptual edifice of an outspoken critic of Islam, trying to dissociate Gumilev’s particular errors about Islam from the validity of his grand overarching theory. And it should be noted that Buriatskii’s respect for Lev Gumilev is not only reflected in this article: he also mentioned Gumilev positively in other publications, and used Gumilev’s theory in press releases on behalf of the “Caucasus Emirate”.

Why Gumilev?

We must assume that Gumilev was chosen as a major point of reference because his theory of ethnoses would appeal to a broad Russian-speaking audience.

Gumilev did not give a clear-cut definition of his “passionarity” concept, focusing rather on its postulated impact. As he noted in his “Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere of the Earth” (written in the 1970s but published only in 1989), “self-sacrifice for others, for the sake of the fatherland is called patriotism, and it cannot be explained by any [material] benefit [that the bearers of self-sacrifice would attain].” This concept includes martyrdom for one's belief (vera), as he claimed in one of his public lectures in the 1980s. While Gumilev’s books became popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s, we must assume that today Gumilev’s lectures on Youtube are even more important than his academic writings.

One of the factors which contributed to Gumilev’s popularity in late Soviet and early post-Soviet Russia was that he had been subjected to state repression. The son of the famous poet Anna Akhmatova and the Russian poet and literary critic Nikolai Gumilev who was executed in 1921, Lev N. Gumilev spent the years 1938-43 and 1949-56 in Soviet labor camps; he was

447 Said Buriatskii, “Istishkhad: mezhdu pravdoi i lozh’iu”.
450 L. Gumilev, Etnogenez i biosfera Zemli (Moscow: ACT Izdatel'stvo, 2004), 341.
451 Ibid., 471.
accused and sentenced for “counter-revolutionary anti-Soviet agitation”. In between and after his release he fought his way back into academic life, and eventually obtained prestigious teaching positions at the Leningrad State University. His theory of passionarity (which, reportedly, he developed in prison) made him an enfant terrible; while many attested to his charismatic aura, his scientific work (e.g. his dissertations on the Turkic kaganate and the Khazars) was heavily criticized for its alleged amateurism, and for the lack of evidence presented for his grand theories.\textsuperscript{452} Russian historians and ethnologists called his works pseudoscientific.\textsuperscript{453} In particular his theory of passionarity was met with much criticism,\textsuperscript{454} many argued that Gumilev exaggerated the natural factor in ethnic history,\textsuperscript{455} and his vague “space factor” – a cosmic energy of sorts that evoked the passionate impulse in man – received a lot of flak from the scientific community. Some reviewers called Gumilev a dabbler in astrophysics.\textsuperscript{456} Others accused Gumilev of anti-Semitism, and believed that his research was a fertile ground for extreme right-wing views. Some maintained that his research supported the idea of “cultural incompatibility” among nations,\textsuperscript{457} and eventually justified the violence and war committed by so-called passionarianists.\textsuperscript{458}

One could argue, though, that with his claim to explain the history of Eurasia’s peoples with the help of physics and biology,\textsuperscript{459} Gumilev appealed to a late Soviet society that believed in the exact sciences, and in the power of man to shape his environment. After all, it was the technocrats and engineers who rose to prominence in the Perestroika years, and who carried out democratic reforms in post-Soviet Russia. According to the American historian and linguist Mark Lipovetsky, the scientific and technical intelligentsia that emerged in the “Thaw” era became the bearers of a liberal post-Soviet movement. The cultural discourse of engineers and technical workers, according to Lipovetsky, was shaped by essentialism.\textsuperscript{460}

\textsuperscript{454} A. Ianov, “Uchenie Gumileva”.
\textsuperscript{459} A. Titov, Lev Gumilev, Ethnogenesis and Eurasianism.
This cultural essentialism, paired with scientific language, we also find back in the works of Lev Gumilev. At the same time Gumilev did not deny the existence of God and the power of religion, and he considered himself an Orthodox Christian.

Against the background of the increasing role of religion in post-Soviet society, this certainly added to his popularity.

Already in the late 1980s Gumilev began to be referred to positively by conservative Russian-Eurasian writers such as Dmitrii Balashov (1927-2000) and Vadim Kozhinov (1930-2001). For them, Lev Gumilev was a major figure in the conservative tradition of Russian nationalists who rejected Westernization, and who emphasized the positive impact of the Mongol nomadic traditions on the Russian soul. Gumilev was thereby linked back to the early Eurasianists in exile, like George Vernadskii and Peter Savitskii. As Shnirelmann and Panarin note, Gumilev used the ideas of Eurasianists to construct his theory of ethnogenesis, according to which “ethnicity” is a biological entity, embedded in a natural environment and brought to its historical blossoming by those bearers of passionarity within the species.

By borrowing from Gumilev, Said Buriatskii thus used an ideological edifice that was formally scientific but ultimately built more on charisma and enigma. Gumilev’s public standing was that of a giant, of a strong representative of sincerity in thought and action; and if many of Gumilev’s theories were highly controversial, this was no particular shortcoming in a period when all other accepted theories had just collapsed, including those of his critics.

Yet when Buriatskii began to quote Gumilev in 2008, the public perception of Gumilev had changed dramatically: by that time Gumilev had come to be embraced by a new generation of intellectuals who in one way or another defended imperial positions. Since the 2000s Eurasianism is no longer a dissident trend but close to the ideology of the current holders of power. To these belongs, in the first place, the renowned Aleksandr Dugin, but also various representatives from the intellectual elite of national republics within the Russian Federation, including in Tatarstan. Gumilev’s image had changed from that of a non-conformist to that of a proponent of strong state-building. Paradoxically, Eurasianism came to supply academic aura to the very imperial and national positions which Buriatskii opposed so vehemently.

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463 Ibid., 230.
while at the same time seeing himself as a contributor to the building of yet another type of state, the Caucasus Emirate.

The idea of passionarity was for Buriatskii thus a convenient (pseudo-) scientific explanatory model to substantiate the actions and motivations of jihadists in the North Caucasus through transcendental principles. Islam thus becomes an archetype for the theory of passionarity – and passionarity was meant to explain the rise of the Caucasus Emirate:

If we look at *istishhad* only from a historical perspective, we will see that this [recent] outbreak of passionarity [in the activities of jihadists] reaches another peak, and this is where the Caucasus Emirate started.\(^\text{467}\)

At the same time the passionarity discourse allowed Buriatskii to build bridges to Christianity, for only in Christianity and in Islam has the phenomenon of self-sacrifice manifested itself so massively, in the words of Buriatskii. This emphasis of shared passionarity was obviously meant to speak to a Russian Orthodox audience; it stands against the background, though not mentioned explicitly here, that in history, Islam has a general respect for the other “book religions”, those that have their origins in the revelations of the Prophets.

We can thus say that Said Buriatskii performs the role of a translator – he transforms the language of Muslim terms and symbols (which are so abundant in most Islamist texts) into a language that any Russian reader or viewer would be familiar with; and his appeal is vague enough to resonate not only with Muslims and convinced jihadists but also with listeners who identify with Orthodox Christianity, and also with those who share Gumilev’s scientific mode of demonstration without subscribing to any religious confession.

**Back to Jihad**

In the second part of the same article Buriatskii dwells on the heroism of Caucasus Emirate jihadists in more detail, and specifically on the truthfulness of suicide bombers. Here he switches back from the academic discourse on history to the style of a direct participant, speaking from the position of an authoritative eye-witness:

Their eyes are not empty, their pupils are not dilated by drugs, these people do not look like stupid hypnotized zombies. (...) These people no longer lived in our dimension. Here my words

\(^\text{467}\) Said Buriatskii, “*Istishkhad: mezhdu pravdoi i lozhi’iu*“.
seem unbelievable to those kafirs, who consider me the “ideologist” of suicide-bombers, who think that my sermons force people to get into istishhad. (…) The decision to get into istishhad comes from the depths of the soul, where the person wishes to meet with Allah, and He gives him this opportunity.

Buriatskii is ambiguous about his own role in motivating suicide bombers. On the one hand, he claims that:

those who are willing to go to istishhad have come to that decision themselves. Of course, I agree that in some way they had been influenced by da'wat [Arabic da'wa, “propaganda”, “missionary work”] and the works of scholars, but the final decision is always taken by the person himself.

On the other hand, however, he also states that:

I can only promise to kafirs that as long as I am alive, I will do everything possible to ensure that the ranks of “Riyad-us-Salihin” keep expanding, and new waves of mujahidin keep getting into istishhad.\textsuperscript{468}

This different perspective also involves a switch in language. While in the first part of the article Buriatskii only sporadically used terminology of Arabic origins (and thus remained within the jargon of “academism”, according to the Bustanov-Kemper typology), towards the end of the message his vocabulary is full of Arabic terms, especially munafiqin (“hypocrites”), kafir (“unbeliever”), da’wa (“propaganda”), du’a (“invocation”), and Riyad-us-Salihin. “Passionarity” is replaced by “Allah”, “martyr” becomes “mujahidin”, and “sacrifice” turns into “istishhad”.\textsuperscript{469} Thus within one and the same text, Buriatskii performed an act of code-switching, from the “academic” style of Islamo-Russian to what Bustanov and Kemper have classified as “Arabism”.\textsuperscript{470} Yet also here it is striking that his Arabic-origin vocabulary remains limited to a dozen of standard terms: in the whole text (comprising of 3,680 words) he used only fifteen Islamo-Arabic terms, which are, however, mentioned no less than 78 times altogether, throughout the article. Thus, “Arabism” here is a device to mark a text as distinctly Islamic, while refraining from making the text too difficult for the non-

\textsuperscript{468} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{469} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{470} A. Bustanov, M. Kemper, “The Russian Orthodox and Islamic Languages”. 269.
initiated.\textsuperscript{471} That Buriatskii took care to speak in plain language for the widest possible audience is also reflected in the Russian equivalents he used for Arabic loanwords: for example, the term *smertnik* (suicide-bomber) is used eleven times, considerably more than its Arabic equivalent *shahid* (4 instances). The Arabo-Islamic repertoire is thus consciously introduced in doses, to fill the passionarity concept with Islamic contents without making it too difficult to understand.

**Conclusion**

Regardless of the fact that Said Buriatskii was known as one of the most famous jihadist speakers in Russia in the late 2000s, his videos and articles from the North Caucasus show that he acted more like a public intellectual, well inserted in the post-Soviet cultural context.

To justify the movement of jihadism and prove the sincerity of jihadist suicide-bombers, Buriatskii did not focus on Islamic arguments only but used concepts and ideas which were very popular in post-Soviet Russia. This is particularly prominent in his references to the theory of passionarity elaborated by Soviet dissident ethnographer Lev Gumilev. Buriatskii’s discourse thereby integrated key terms from Soviet anthropology (like “ethnicity” and *passionarnost’*), as well as codes and topoi that came to play an important role in contemporary Russian culture (“sincerity”, “sacrifice”, “devotion”). By linking these to a moderate use of Islamic terminology, Buriatskii’s texts remained comprehensible also to a non-Muslim readership.

Said Buriatskii’s enthusiasm for Gumilev’s ideas demonstrates how much he was a product of his time. After the collapse of the USSR, writers who had been banned or marginalized by the Soviet authorities became immensely popular among a wide swath of Russian-speaking readers. The former political prisoner Lev Gumilev was one of these new icons, although professional ethnographers and historians continued to criticize him heavily.

But while Gumilev became popular among Eurasianists of all shades in Russia and Kazakhstan, he remained a marginal and exotic figure in the international arena. Curiously, Said Buriatskii enjoyed a similar fate: with the rise of Salafism he was highly demanded by

\[\textsuperscript{471}\text{ The terms most used are: istishhad (27 times), kafirs (16), mujahidin (13), jihad (5), shahid (4 mentions), murtadd (3), intifada (2).}\]
the Russian market, but he had very little ideological fame abroad. Like Gumilev, also Buriatskii remained an exclusively Russian ideological phenomenon.

Obviously, the ideological and socio-economic crisis of the post-Soviet period created a demand for new images of heroes, and thus for thinkers and authors who revived values such as sincerity, honesty, and self-sacrifice. Both Said Buriatskii and Lev Gumilev inscribed themselves in this trend. Their logic was characterized by cultural essentialism and the positivistic belief in the arguments of natural and exact sciences, which are arguably still a mainstream feature of Russian post-Soviet society, from the Far East to the North Caucasus. It is against this background that we can understand how Lev Gumilev posthumously found grateful adepts among Muslim radicals like Buriatskii, and how Said Buriatskii himself (after his violent death in March 2010) gained appreciation among Russian non-Muslim intellectuals.

The Russian character of “Russian jihadism” has so far been consistently overlooked in current research. This neglect leads to an overestimation of the foreign roots of Russia's radical Islam. In fact, the easy juxtaposition of “traditional/Russian” Islam versus “Salafi/foreign” Islam is a convenient instrument for the authorities – but also for most radicals! – to stress the alterity of their discourse, and to mark the righteousness of their struggle. It is thus remarkable that precisely a prominent representative of the Caucasus Emirate's PR apparatus transcended these easy dichotomies. Soviet-raised converts to Islam play an important role in this process of Russian-Islamic hybridization; cultural and scholarly references to Russian culture thereby accompany the choice to use of the Russian language for Islamist propaganda.
Chapter 7:

Timur Mutsuraev: Russophone Jihad Songs as a Post-Soviet Phenomenon

Russophone jihadism goes far beyond programmatic writings and statements – it also produced particular forms of popular culture. In this chapter I will study this phenomenon with the example of Timur Mutsuraev, a popular Chechen singer and composer who called himself “the singer of Jihad”. After a brief sketch on what we know about his biography I will discuss Mutsuraev's work against the background of the particular Soviet/Russian tradition of bards, that is, singer-songwriters who, starting in the late 1960s, became extremely popular as representatives of honesty and authenticity. In the second part of this chapter I analyze the lyrics of some of Mutsuraev's songs, and argue that the key concept in many of his productions is trauma. Parts three and four demonstrate that Mutsuraev strongly appealed also to Russians, including the religious Orthodox, nationalists, liberals, as well as leftists. In the conclusion I try to address Mutsuraev's reasons for using the Russian language, and for designing his oeuvre in such a way that it remains open for multiple appropriations.

Timur Mutsuraev (b. 1976) participated in military operations and supported the Chechen military resistance from the mid-1990s up to the early 2000s. His songs -- all in the Russian language -- cover such diverse topics as jihad, Chechen resistance, fighting for the highest ideals, the history of Islam, and Chechen history. He recorded a total of nine albums; these were released between 1995 and 2001. As a result, Mutsuraev became very popular not only in the North Caucasus, but also beyond.

Timur Mutsuraev was born in the Soviet Chechnya. He went through secondary school, and first embarked upon a career as a sportsman; in 1991 he became Karate champion of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Republic. In late 1994 he joined the Chechen military resistance, took part in actual fights, and in one of them was heavily wounded.

In 1995 he recorded his first album “Welcome to Hell” (*Dobro pozhalovat’ v Ad*). The secret of Mutsuraev’s popularity was probably his natural talent combined with the aura of authenticity that resulted from the fact that he participated in the war that he was singing about. He came from below, not from the elite, and sang songs written by himself and other militants, including his friend Aslan Yarichev.473 This allowed him to become the voice of the North Caucasian militants of the 1990s. Mutsuraev not only recorded and released his albums on tapes, but he also gave life concerts in Chechnya.474

When the active part of the second Chechen war was over, Mutsuraev left the Chechen republic. Some sources report that after this departure he stayed in Turkey, Azerbaijan, and then visited Ukraine.475 In 2008 he returned to Chechnya but made no attempts to revive his music career. Apparently, he managed to come to an understanding with the President of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov about his own security. At the end of the 2000s, his refusal to support armed resistance earned him much criticism from representatives of the “Caucasus Emirate”.


As late as 14 April 2010, a Russian court banned some of Timur Mutsuraev's songs, with the argumentation that they were extremist in character. This list included his popular songs such as “Paradise under the shadow of saber” (Rai pod ten'iu sablia) (1997) and “Jerusalem” (1998). According to the Russian Center for Information and Analysis (SOVA), which specializes in human rights issues, the Russian court aimed at banning around one hundred songs recorded by Mutsuraev but in the end the list of banned songs included only 20 songs. However, most of Mutsuraev’s songs, including those that are now prohibited by federal law, are still available online and enjoy much popularity not only among Muslims, but also among a wider range of Russian-speaking listeners.

Mutsuraev in the Soviet Bard Tradition

As the Russian scholar Aleksandr Ovrutskii already observed, Timur Mutsuraev performed his songs in the typical Soviet “bard” style. The Russian/Soviet “author's song” (avtorskaia pesnia) or bard song, is composed and performed by a non-professional author; in the Soviet Union this genre became an independent music style and gained much popularity, especially with singers such as Vladimir Vysotskii (1938-1980) and Bulat Okudzhava (1924-1997). Paradoxically, with these roots Mutsuraev links back to Soviet-era alternative claims to authenticity in popular music, and even in the tradition of Soviet soldiers who fought in Afghanistan against the mujahidin.

According to Mutsuraev himself, his music was influenced by other non-Muslim sources, including Western as well as Russian Rock. He said he learned how to play the guitar after

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477 Ibid.
481 Vladimir Vysotskii (1938 - 1980) was a Russian/Soviet singer-songwriter and poet who greatly influenced Soviet and Russian culture. He became widely known for his singing style and for his lyrics, which featured social and political commentary.
482 Bulat Okudzhava (1924 - 1997) was a Soviet and Russian poet, writer, musician and singer-songwriter of Georgian-Armenian ancestry. He was one of the founders of the Soviet genre of “author’s song” or “guitar song”.
listening to Metallica’s single “One”. Mutsuraev’s song “The city lives” -- about the fight against Russians -- is reportedly based on the song Muraveinik (“The small ant”) written by the Russian alternative pop idol Viktor Tsoi;\textsuperscript{485} likewise, his “What is Grozny city” is a remake of the song Osen’ (“Autumn”) with which the Russian band DDT became extremely popular.\textsuperscript{486}

Despite the fact that he calls himself “the singer of Jihad”, Timur Mutsuraev did not receive any religious education, nor did he study Arabic. Mutsuraev started to engage with music while studying at a Soviet school, and the general background of late Soviet popular culture shaped his style. Against the backdrop of the war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), “military author's songs” performed by Soviet war veterans were widely spread.

It is difficult to find traces of Salafist influences in his songs – he refers to none of the traditional Northern Caucasus Salafi topics regarding the return to pure Islam in opposition to Sufism. Nor do Mutsuraev’s lyrics include any discussion of issues of belief (’aqida), the strict definition of which is a constantly recurring topos in the discourse of the militants. His language is not overburdened with Islamic or Arabic terminology. Rather, Mutsuraev’s style resembles military songs, and as they are accompanied by Russian lyrics, they are comprehensible to a wide audience.

Mutsuraev became a singer of the Chechen resistance at a time when the resistance in this Republic was still considered as a national liberation struggle; that is, before the Islamist turn of Chechen militants to the idea of global jihad in the second half of the 1990s.

His popularity became even higher after the Islamic turn of the confrontation. His songs were distributed on audio cassettes throughout the North Caucasus and further. His songs are a striking example of Russian romantic song, typical of that period of transition and disarray, the period of a general crisis of values and of the attempts to find solutions.

\textsuperscript{484} Metallica is an American heavy metal band based in San Rafael, California. The band was formed in 1981 in Los Angeles. Metallica is considered one of the most famous and influential groups in the history of Rock music.

\textsuperscript{485} Viktor Tsoi (1962-1990) was a Soviet rock singer and songwriter who co-founded the Rock band “Kino”, one of the most popular and influential bands in the history of Russian music.

\textsuperscript{486} DDT is a popular Russian rock band founded by its lead singer and the only remaining original member, Yurii Shevchuk, in Ufa (Bashkir ASSR, RSFSR) in 1980. DDT is one of the most prolific Russian rock bands of the post-Soviet period.
Post-Soviet Trauma

An analysis of Mutsuraev’s lyrics reveals that the topic of trauma is crucial for his songs. In the North Caucasus, the collapse of the USSR led to a bloody war, the destruction of all cities in Chechnya, and a humanitarian catastrophe, and Mutsuraev’s songs reflect all these events. He often addresses the memory of recent tragedies. For example, in songs such as *Bamut* (1996), *Samashki* (1996), “Shamil leads the detachment” (*Shamil vedet otriat*) (1996) and “Serzhen-Yurt” (1996), he refers to specific events of the first war in Chechnya; in songs like “Grozny city” (*Gorod Groznyi*) (1995) and “What is Grozny” (*Chto takoe Groznyi*) (1997), he recalls the tragic post-Soviet history of the city.

A few key topics he refers to in most of his songs, including the call for military jihad and its justification; historical facts; national Chechen mythology; and the fight for one’s ideals. Remarkably, love poetry stands in his oeuvre next to religious verses.

All these themes are interwoven at different stages of his work. Albums released from 1995 to 1997 already contained Islamic themes, but they were more diverse in content. The Islamic-jihadist and generally religious content prevails in the albums that he released from 1998 to 2000; this is expressed in the titles of the albums “You are a Muslim” (*Ty musul’manin*) (1998), “Jerusalem” (1998), “The Great Jihad” (*Velikii dzhikhad*) (1999), “The thousand mujahidin” (*Tysiach muddakhidov*) (2000). The songs about Islam, jihad, revolutionary struggle, faith and religious values in these albums correspond to the fact that since 1998, that is, in the second phase of the military confrontation in Chechnya, the role of Islam started to grow noticeably in the ideology of the North Caucasian militants.

And if in the first period of his work Mutsuraev appealed foremost to the Chechens, including the fighters of the Chechen resistance, in the second half of his creative work he speaks not only to Muslims, but also to a broader Russian-speaking public, especially where he referred to religious themes common to Christians and Muslims. Examples are the song “Solomon” (1998), as well as references to the topics of life and death in “The candles were extinguished” (*Pogasli svechi*) (1998), “Life and death” (*Zhizn’ i smert*) (1998), “I'll leave” (*Ia uidu*) (1998), which can be close to any Russian-speaking listener. However, the division into two periods must be considered conditional, since a large number of Mutsuraev’s songs are devoted to abstract themes such as the complicated nature of life, justice, the hardship of struggle, the importance of friendship, the inevitability of death, pain and harrowing memories.
The central theme of all his songs, however, is that of trauma, both collective and personal. This, in my opinion, places Mutsurauiev in the Russian post-Soviet cultural context, where historical trauma and grief have come to be essential elements, as reflected in the language and texts of many other Russian writers, intellectuals and cultural figures.\textsuperscript{487}

In some cases the theme of trauma is illustrated by concrete historical examples, as is the case with the song “Samashki” (1996), which is dedicated to the events of 1995 when Russian federal troops killed a large number of civilians while searching for militants hiding in the Chechen village of Samashki:\textsuperscript{488}

Samashki, Samashki, the clouds are burning,
Samashki, Samashki, in the arms of fire,
Let the heart weep, but we will never forgive,
Samashki, Samashki, we will take revenge for all the pain\textsuperscript{489} (Samashki, 1996)

Similarly, the song “Bamut” deals with the military confrontation between Russian and Chechen troops in the area of the village of Bamut, also in 1995.\textsuperscript{490}

Through such a detailed description of tragic events of the post-Soviet wars on the territory of Chechnya, Mutsurauiev contributed to the formation of all-Chechen unity, with these tragedies as some kind of general trauma. On the other hand, he seeks to bring the war closer to the person who listens to his songs. The events of the war bring the listener of Timur Mutsurauiev to the geopolitical issues of confrontation between Islam and the West, Chechnya and Russia.


\textsuperscript{488} On April 7-8, 1995, in the village of Samashki, on the border of Chechnya and Ingushetia, a battle took place between Russian troops and Chechen fighters. In the end, a large number of Samashki settlers were killed. A large number of victims attracted attention of international organizations. In particular, according to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), the total number of victims exceeds 100 people. See: “The Situation of Human Rights in the Republic of Chechnya of the Russian Federation”, Human Rights Library http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/commission/country52/1996_13.htm (last accessed 30 September 2015).

\textsuperscript{489} My translation. The original is: "Samashki, Samashki, goriat oblaka // Samashki, Samashki, v ob’iatakh ognia // Pust’ serdtse rydaet, no my ne prostim // Samashki, Samashki, my za vse otomstiv”.

\textsuperscript{490} On March 10, 1995, long and fierce fighting began for Bamut village, in which many Russian and Chechen fighters died. However, there is no exact data on the number of deaths.
And these songs ring as veritable eye-witness reports straight from the North Caucasus. Mutsuraev strives to overcome his traumatic experience through the promise of active struggle for revenge; precisely the word “revenge” appears as a motivation for armed struggle. The description of traumatic experiences, which gives his struggle a special meaning, is the leitmotif in Mutsuraev’s entire creative work of the initial period. Later the theme of jihad dominated his songs, but again built on the desire for revenge. Revenge explains the jihadist rhetoric and becomes the meaning of life for him and his generation of Chechen fighters.

Beyond his call for military action, Mutsuraev uses other ways to express trauma. “Grozny city” (Gorod Groznyi) is filled with nostalgia for the formerly prosperous capital, and sadness caused by its destruction in the war. But the song also expresses the hope of a brighter future:

I know, though your face is gloomed and austere,
City of Grozny, you will be born again from the ashes!
I believe, you will be blooming ever more,
City of Grozny, you are a city of broken dreams. (“Grozny City”, 1995).491

The destruction of Grozny is one of the most vivid demonstrations of the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the war in Chechnya can be considered symbolic for the difficulties that ensued. Islamist Mutsuraev warmly recalls Grozny city in the Soviet period:

I know that this city raised us with love,
It gave us the best moments of our lives. (“Grozny City”).492

Timur Mutsuraev gives Grozny anthropomorphic features, allowing the city to “raise” people and “give” them happiness. It is perhaps surprising to discover such lines in the songs of a “jihad singer”, because they could be read as a delegation of God’s qualities to the city of Grozny. In fact, his work reveals many plots that can be interpreted as contradicting a strict understanding of Islamic rules. In particular, the song “Reconquista” (about the struggle of Muslim jihadists against the infidels) includes the following lyrics:

We rejected the mendacious chimeras,
And now we seek divine purity,

491 Znaiu ia, khor’ lik tvoi omrachennyi i surov // Gorod Groznyi, ty iz pepla vozrodish’sia vnov’! // Veriu ia, ty budesh’ luchshe prezhnego tsvesti // Gorod Groznyi, gorod grez neshyvsheista mechy”.
492 “Znaiu, gorod s malykh let s liub’iu nas rastil // V zhizni luchshie mgnoventia vsem nam podaril”.

Although so often the true faith
Was nailed to the cross ("Reconquista", 2001).493

In this case, Mutsuraev obviously refers to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ – which is at odds with the Muslim point of view on the life story of Jesus, because according to the Islamic tradition, Jesus was not crucified.494

Here Mutsuraev takes quite a poetic license to form a beautiful, artistic phrase which would resonate among a wide range of Russian-speaking listeners. It should be added that in some songs Mutsuraev doesn’t even touch upon Muslim subjects at all. For instance, love poetry, as exemplified in songs such as “Do not call me” (Ne zovi ty menia) (1998) and “Darling green eyes” (Milye zelennye glaza) (1997-2000), are largely standard elaborations on secular themes of love and separation, without mentioning any particular Muslim or Caucasian matters. However, these songs as well reflect a traumatic experience (as in, for instance, a beloved one’s act of betrayal in favor of a rich man).

Nevertheless, Mutsuraev’s most important songs are those which are meant to rouse the spirit of people fighting for their ideals. They include songs calling to jihad, and to resistance. Injury and trauma, and their consequences, can be overcome through struggle:

We were born in the era of evil:
When Truth and Precepts are forgotten.
But we have a Destiny
To gain victory in the battle! (“The gardens are waiting for us”/ Sady nas zhdut, 2000).495

On the one hand, Mutsuraev has such famous songs dedicated to jihad as “Jerusalem” (1998), “Paradise under the shadow of sabers” (Rai pod ten’iu sabel’) (1997), ”The Great Jihad” (Velikii Dzhikhad) (1999), where he calls listeners to an active struggle for restoring justice and against unbelief, dominated by disdain for fear of death. On the other hand, songs as “Pain” (Bol’) (1996), “It hurts, I'm tired” (Mne bol’no, ia ustal) (1996) do not connect the topic of injury to a call for action:

493 “I my otrinuv lzhivye khimery // K bozhestvenoi stremimsia chistote // Khotia tak chasto istinnaia vera //Raspitaiu byvala na kreste”.
495 “My rozhdeny v epokhu zla // Zabyty Istiny, zavety // No nam predpisana Sud’ba // V boiu dobyt’ ee pobedy”.
All the past is gone and turned into legend,
But it left a bitter trace,
The time of bitterness has passed,
But there is still no peace, and longing is still in our hearts... (“Pain”/ Bol’, 1998).496

His songs became popular even outside the North Caucasus. They did not contain deep theological justifications of jihad – rather, for the singer-songwriter, jihad is a way to resist evil. The need for jihad is justified as a defense of faith, of values, of the Motherland. Jihad in Mutsuraev’s songs is an act of strong will, of striving for high ideals, and of protecting loved ones.

Nationalist and Orthodox Receptions

While some of Timur Mutsuraev’s songs are banned from the Russian Internet (Ru.net), there are thousands of sites where his songs are posted, and on Youtube some of these have been viewed about one million times. These amateur clips are usually accompanied by war footage – clips and photos, including Islamist propaganda.

Thanks to the internet, there is considerable evidence that Mutsuraev’s songs appealed not only to Muslims; and as we will see below, his reception by various groups and communities differs in tonality but is strikingly similar in the sense that Mutsuraev’s appeal goes far beyond Islam – in fact, the “Islamic factor” in his songs can easily be neglected, or overheard. Actually, the first non-Muslims who seem to have come under his spell might have been Russian soldiers in the North Caucasus in the 1990s.497 We may assume that they shared the emotion of trauma, and that they found their own situation similar to that of the poet – with all the absurdities of the war, the devastation they saw around them, and the human quest for faith.

But Mutsuraev also entered Russian high culture, which was certainly another gateway to non-Muslim followers. The famed Russian director Aleksei Balabanov’s film “War”, on the Chechen conflict, opens with Timur Mutsuraev’s “Jerusalem”, which is dedicated to jihad for

496 “V byl’, vse proshdsh e ushlo // No ostaviv gor’kii sled // Vremia gorechii proshlo // No pokoia vse zhe net, v serdtse vse ravno toska…”.
the liberation of Jerusalem from the so-called power of evil (having in mind apparently the West and Israel). Some of Mutsuraev’s songs have been remixed into electronic dance compositions, and renowned rapper Konstantin Bes included a cover of Mutsuraev’s “Candles went out” (1998) in his 2013 album “MiR”.

At the same time Mutsuraev also entered youth culture, and radical circles. Mutsuraev has become one of the most popular singers among the supporters of the Ukrainian nationalist “Right Sector”. The famous Belarussian ultra-nationalist rapper Daniel Lyashuk (who upon his conversion to Islam accepted the name of Daniyal Al-Takbir, and went to Ukraine to participate in “jihad against Russia”) has posted numerous songs by Mutsuraev on his social network homepages.

This popularity also triggered the first serious reflections on Mutsuraev as a cultural phenomenon. The well-known Russian music critic Mikhail Kazinik dedicated an article to Mutsuraev, which he published on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the first Chechen war. Kazinik calls him one of the most important cultural phenomena of the war. The piece appeared in a famous Russian liberal online news source, “Meduza”, which shows that Mutsuraev also made an impact in liberal circles.

Songs by Timur Mutsuraev have gained popularity equally among Orthodox Christians. Statements by several members of the ROC testify to the fact that the Orthodox community has come to admit the significance of Mutsuraev's songs and lyrics.

In a video blog of the popular Orthodox author, preacher and missionary Hieromonk Makarii (Mark Simonovich Markish, b. 1954), one of his female readers admitted that she listens to Timur Mutsuraev’s songs. In her own words, despite the fact that Mutsuraev sings about Islam and the war in Chechnya, these songs “reflect a view of life which can be considered as Christian”. In this regard, she wanted to know from Makarii whether listening to Mutsuraev's songs was harmful to her Christian faith. In his response, the hieromonk did not express any negative attitude towards these songs; in his opinion, people can listen to Mutsuraev's songs just as well as people can listen to music composed by Bach and Haydn without any fear of being misled to Lutheranism or Catholicism. That Makarii decided to remain neutral on the...
subject – which in fact is an endorsement, given that we are dealing here with a jihadist’s music – seems to reflect the popularity that Mutsuraev enjoys also among Christians, who understand his lyrics as a broader religious message that reflects concerns and traumatic emotions which they share.

Similarly, the Orthodox information portal “Conversations on the porch” (Besedy na paperty) issued a long article on the matter, authored by an Orthodox blogger who goes by the nickname ‘Shmule’. This blogger writes that he first became acquainted with the songs of Timur Mutsuraev while watching Aleksei Balabanov’s movie “War”. The blogger describes Mutsuraev as a representative of the “lost generation” (poterianno pokolenie) – people born between 1973 and 1978 – whose formative years fell into the turbulent 1990s, and who, according to him, were betrayed by the authorities. To ‘Shmule’, Mutsuraev is part of a comprehensible and familiar context:

   The poet, who has fought for freedom, Islam and Allah, as Remarque once did, as many of our veterans fought in local wars, the poet tries to find solace and relief in combat, friendship, love and religion.

It is no coincidence that ‘Shmule’ first calls Mutsuraev a representative of the “lost generation” and then compares him with German writer Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970), as Remarque was one of the most prominent representatives of the “lost generation” of European and American writers. These were those who at a young age were called up to the front lines of the First World War (1914-1918), whose fates were largely broken by this war, and who wrote about the war. Next to Erich Remarque, such writers were, for example, the Englishman Richard Aldington (1892-1962), the American Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) and the American Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940).

Ernest Hemingway in his novel “The Holiday Which is Always With You”, writes that this expression was first used by another American writer, Gertrude Stein (1874-1946), who was the unofficial leader of the circle of “lost generation” writers. Thus, Timur Mutsuraev is placed in a context which has nothing in common with Islam or religion. For Shmule, the typological and biographical similarities between Mutsuraev and Remarque are more

important, as both of them faced the horrors of war while they were still young, and both devoted much of their work to this topic.

Religious borders are further blurred by Shmule’s placing of Mutsuraev into the all-Soviet generation born in the 1970s, implying that the problems that Mutsuraev struggled with, and the ways he coped with them, did not differ from those of his peers in any other part of the (post-)Soviet area.

But also the particular religious side of Mutsuraev is not restricted to Islam. Shmule provides his own interpretation of Mutsuraev's lyrics and draws parallels between Islam and Christianity, and between Russian and Muslim cultures, acknowledging that Muslims and Russians experience many problems in same ways. In particular, he compares Muslim regret for the loss of the caliphate to the Russians’ mourning over the extinction of Holy Russia and the fading of the Russian religious spirit – ‘Shmule's' discussion of Mutsuraev thereby conveys not only a religious but also an implicitly monarchist perspective.

Furthermore, ‘Shmule’ reflects on linguistic issues, namely when he tries to ‘translate’ Mutsuraev’s Islamic expressions into Orthodox language: Mutsuraev’s statement that after the fall of the caliphate, “God's grace has left us [Muslims]” is commented by the author of the article in the following way: “[this expression] is reverend diminishing (oskudesha prepodobnyi) in Muslim transcription”, a term from Psalm 11, 2 which, in Orthodox terminology, refers to the idea that after a period of lost grace and glory, the number of saints started to decrease.

‘Shmule’ also compares Mutsuraev to the famous Orthodox bard and poet Hieromonk Roman (b. 1954), who is considered one of the most famous contemporary Orthodox singers. According to the Orthodox blogger, both singers show their pessimistic attitude towards contemporary realities. In addition, the author notes that just as Orthodox Christians criticize the Orthodox clergy for their close relations with secular authorities, and for their love of worldly blessings, so does Mutsuraev criticize the Muslim clergy (for which 'Shmule' employs the Orthodox term dukhovenstvo) for the same reasons. According to the author, the religious clergy’s mistakes – their turning away from the true faith – led to the emergence of such phenomena as “Wahhabi” extremism, on the one hand, and Orthodox “zealots” (revniteli), on the other, of which he explicitly mentions the diomidovtsy. This name refers to

the followers of Diomid Dziuban (Sergei Ivanovich Dziuban, b. 1961), a former bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church who now leads the small non-canonical religious group “Holy Governing Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church” that accuses the ROC leaders of having departed from the purity of the Orthodox dogma.\footnote{Mikhail Moshkin, “Uvol'nenie i anafema”, Vremia novostei (2008) http://www.vremya.ru/2008/185/51/214236.html (last accessed 28 September 2017).}

‘Shmule’ believes that the lyrics of Mutsuraev’s songs contain simple and sound principles, such as to entertain only heavenly thoughts, to not commit any sins, and to pray to the Lord, which are significant also for Orthodox sensitivities. The blogger emphasizes that Mutsuraev’s songs express the willingness to die for one’s faith, and to take action for the sake of justice and resistance against evil.

It is clear that ‘Shmule’s’ praise and admiration for Mutsuraev’s spirit is in fact an admonition towards his fellow Orthodox Christians who, in his eyes, lack spiritual strength; this weakness is contrasted to Muslim strength, and thus also to the fear of a “Muslim Renaissance” (Musul’manskoje Vozrozhdenie).

Not surprisingly, also the well-known Orthodox theologian Andrei Kuraev (b. 1963) has discovered the topic of Mutsuraev’s songs.\footnote{“Timur Mutsuraev”, Forum missionerskogo portala diakona Andreia Kuraeva (2007) http://kuraev.ru/smil/index.php?topic=70656.msg702485#msg702485, (last accessed 11 September 2015). The forum was deleted. However, the content of this discussion about Mutsuraev has been moved to the orthodox missionary site “Pravoslavnoe kafe Missioner”. You can see the content of this discussion on page of this site: “Timur Mutsuraev”, Pravoslavnoe kafe Missioner (07.09.2007) http://orthodoxy.cafe/index.php?topic=70656.0 (last accessed 09 February 2018).} Kuraev, who is generally regarded as a “liberal” theologian (and who in 2014 was removed from his teaching post at the Moscow Theological Academy), authored many publications about the role of religion in popular culture, and particularly in films. He is also a very active blogger and often appears in Russian mainstream and liberal media.

One of the readers of Kuraev’s Internet Forum (Kuraev.ru) invited other participants to evaluate the songs of Timur Mutsuraev. According to the author of this post, Mutsuraev’s songs are “good, even though they are Muslim”. He also wonders if there are any Orthodox singers and songwriters who produce good songs about Orthodoxy that could match Mutsuraev’s output in quality.\footnote{Ibid.} In the ensuing discussion, the participants of the Internet Forum compared Timur Mutsuraev with popular Russian Rock musician Yurii Shevchuk (b. 1957) and Orthodox bard Aleksandr Nepomniashchii (1968-2007). Both singers are of
significant importance for post-Soviet music. While Shevchuk still enjoys wide popularity in Russia, the Orthodox singer Aleksandr Nepomniashchii occupied a more specific place in the Russian and Soviet counterculture. Some Forum participants expressed their conviction that these Russian musicians are equal in stature to Mutsuraev, but others argued that to the contrary, Orthodox Christians do not have singers of the same level. Some of his fans expressed regret that Mutsuraev belongs to another religion, admitting the uniqueness of his songs.508

Also the Orthodox singers themselves got involved in this debate. In particular, the above-mentioned Aleksandr Nepomniashchii felt obliged to publish a post on his own site in which he warned that those of his followers who praise Mutsuraev’s songs on his web page, will be removed from his friend-list.509

On the Internet, many more Russian Orthodox Christians admit that they listen to Mutsuraev, that they view him as a sincere and courageous singer.

These debates also go into Mutsuraev’s biography. For example, on the Orthodox site Azbuka very (“The Faith ABC”), one reader reminds us that Mutsuraev supported Chechen militants and fought side-by-side with them against Russian armed forces.510 Curiously, the reader here tries to justify Mutsuraev, saying that Russian forces bombed civilians as well, which is why many Chechens were pushed to fight against Russian troops. Important for the author of this post is that Mutsuraev’s values are close to Orthodox ones; in particular, the author liked the fact that the jihadist singer addressed the topic of repentance (pokaianie) - an important matter for Orthodoxy, as repentance is considered one of the seven Orthodox sacraments and is expressed in the confession of one’s sins before God.

Timur Mutsuraev’s songs have been viewed over three million times on Youtube. Curiously, there are also some examples on Youtube where – as far as identifiable -- Russian men and women make new remixes for Mutsuraev’s songs (including songs about jihad), which attract over 10,000 views. The video for Mutsuraev’s song “Solomon” was even uploaded on Youtube with in the background featuring an eighteenth-century Orthodox icon of King

508 Ibid.
Solomon (from the Kizhi churchyard of the Church of the Transfiguration). This video has garnered more than 150,000 views and has been commented on by over 100 users.

It should be added that I have not found any Orthodox bard being discussed on Muslim forums, or of Muslims trying to find Islamic counterparts for Orthodox singers.

Apparently, Mutsuraev's musical style, the content of his songs are the topics and words he used, are familiar and comprehensible to Orthodox Russian-speaking audiences. Mutsuraev speaks in a language which is understandable and relevant to post-Soviet Russian discourse, the latter being characterized by a particular urge for sincerity, truthfulness, the emotive power of partnership and friendship, the fight for high ideals, and faith.

**Leftist Readings of Mutsuraev: Honesty and the “Murids of the Red Revolution”**

Jihadist Timur Mutsuraev also finds respondents and sympathizers among his other potential opponents: Russian-speaking left-wing activists.

One case in point is Meanna, one of the brightest Russian political hip-hop performers of the late 2000s, and a member of several Marxist groups. During an interview for the communist portal Rabkor.ru she admitted that her every-day playlist includes three main performers: Timur Mutsuraev, Yanka Diagileva and the Rock band *Nautilus Pompilius*. Yanka Diagileva (1966-1991) and *Nautilus Pompilius* are iconic representatives of Russian Rock of the late 1980s and 1990s, and both tended towards underground and non-conformist styles. Timur Mutsuraev is thus included in a range of performers that were important for Russian late- and post-Soviet culture.

The name of Timur Mutsuraev is even mentioned in Meanna’s song “Me and my circumstances”:

> I start my detection, I dig all the papers,
> listening to the anthem of past interests,
> listening to the music of Mutsuraev, Diagileva, Manson.
> They teach me
> to deny, to fight, to hate;

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in general, they do not teach anything good. (*Ia i moi obstoiate’stva*, 2009).\(^{512}\)

Here Timur Mutsuraev is even put into one line with the (in)famous American Rock musician Marilyn Manson, well known for his outrageous and iconoclastic behavior. This clearly puts Mutsuraev into a non-Muslim context; Meanna does not mention Islam and the war in Chechnya at all. An uninitiated audience might overlook the fact that the song is about Russia's main jihadist singer.

All performers that Meanna refers to are famous for the provocations that they hurled at what they detested: Yanka Diagileva and Nautilus Pompilius challenged the late Soviet political system, and Marilyn Manson provoked the American political establishment. In a similar way, Meanna sees in the songs of Timur Mutsuraev the motifs of struggle and negation, which are close to her as a hip-hop performer with strong socialist convictions.

In the interview that Meanna gave me via the internet, she explained the reasons for her enthusiasm for Mutsuraev's songs in the following way:\(^{513}\)

> Actually, I did not accept his music that easily. At the beginning, his manner of performing and the foreign culture [in which Mutsuraev couches his message] provoked my strong rejection. However, my friends from the political organization advised me: 'listen properly to these songs, and you will see the real meaning.' [...] I was given Mutsuraev’s song “Solomon”, as an example of his lyric poetry. For five years, he became my favorite singer. To be precise, I really like the sentimentality of his lyrics, I can hear resentment and anger, dedication and the attitude of self-sacrifice, and the firmness in the decisions he made. His songs represent an act of free and firm will. I think these emotions can be felt not only in war, but also during peacetime.

Here Meanna did not even spell out Mutsuraev's Islamic message, choosing instead to address the specificity of his message as an expression of “foreign culture”. For Meanna, Timur Mutsuraev stands outside the Islamic system, in his songs she hears what is important for her. Noteworthy is also that she was introduced to Mutsuraev's work through her friends from the “political organization”, which is, as she told me, the left-wing radical Trotskyist movement

\(^{512}\) *Ia podaiu v rozysk, ia podnimaiu bumagi // Pod ginn proshlykh interesov// Pod muzyku Mutsuraeva, Diagilevoi, Mensona // Oni menia uchat // Otritsat’, borot’sia, nenavidet’ // V suschem // Nichemu khoroshemy.*

\(^{513}\) Interview with Meanna by Internet (September 2015) - ‘Interview №2’.
Vpered. This points to the fact that Mutsuraev’s songs are quite popular among Russian left-wing activists, though Meanna states:

I can speak only for our Trotskyist group. Yes, all my friends were listening to Mutsuraev in 2008-2010, considering his songs as an example of the fight against oppression.

Another interesting example is that of a left-wing journalist from Ukraine, Andriy Manchuk, who in 2003 wrote a long laudatory article on the songs of Mutsuraev. In 2006 this article (entitled “Songs of the Prophets”) was published on the Russian site Kommunist.ru (which is currently not functioning), as well as on a number of other resources. In Manchuk’s eyes, Mutsuraev is sincere, honest and uncorrupted. In the songs of the jihadist poet Manchuk finds heroism, readiness to make sacrifices, and a desperate urge to fight.

For Manchuk, the Islamist language of Mutsuraev is merely symbolic, with social and political implications:

The melodious Islamism of Mutsuraev is metaphorical. It is derived from the current Chechen reality, and therefore can be easily disclosed in its images. His constant call for paradise – for its magical gardens, streams and virgins – can be clearly interpreted as referring to the city, the entrance of which is decorated with the words “Welcome to hell”. Mutsuraev’s paradise is the former city of Grozny [as it was] in peaceful Chechnya, the “city of dreams” – with its parks, the Sunzha river (before it was polluted by military garbage), with the people of those years and their relationships, impossible and unearthly (nezemnye) in the land now crippled by war. In the rising despair of Mutsuraev’s songs we can see a powerless love for the city, which remains elusive like a mythical heavenly garden; in these songs we can hear longing for many people who were killed during this decade of war.

Thus, according to Manchuk, Mutsuraev’s rhetoric of Islamism just reflects the form taken by the Chechen national rebellion. This is the rhetoric which tells the trauma of the Chechen people, and Mutsuraev tries to sing about it in an honest and sincere way.

The left-wing author sees Mutsuraev's Islamism as his personal reflection of injuries suffered from the collapse of the former Soviet state. This traumatic experience becomes a unifying

514 Andrei Manchuk, “Pesni Prorokov”.
factor for both a Ukrainian Communist and a Chechen Islamist. Despite the difference of their ideological languages, they are close to each other. Manchuk attempts to demonstrate this closeness with a deliberate play on words:

Strong tectonic shifts in public relations will keep happening, and it is very likely that Mutsuraev’s songs will be the forerunner of the murids of another, red revolution, which will return to Chechnya on the wings of new songs.

Here Manchuk consciously appropriates the Islamic term murid (Arabic, “the disciple who strives [to emulate his Sufi shaykh]”), in order to depict his own movement as one of “red murids”. The term murid rarely appears in Mutsuraev’s lyrics; we must therefore assume that Manchuk borrowed it from the popular discourse on Chechnya which largely identifies Chechen Muslims with Sufi followers and thus jihad with “Muridism”. Thus Manchuk demonstrates once again that he interprets the Islam of Mutsuraev only as a strong but exchangeable vessel for protest and resistance, which in Chechnya naturally takes the form of muridism. However, as discovered in the preceding chapter on Rasulov, the Salafi-minded groups that came to dominate the Chechen Islamic resistance (and to which Mutsuraev referred himself) present themselves as staunch opponents of the Sufi brotherhood, and thus also of the concept of muridism; Manchuk's coinage of “red murids” is therefore in many ways an ahistorical (or “Orientalist”) conflation. At the same time it is also an interesting attempt at linking the contemporary forms of jihad in the Caucasus with their nineteenth-century predecessors like Imam Shamil, whose jihad movement went into history under the name of “Muridism”.

According to Manchuk, it was the honesty of Mutsuraev’s songs that made the Russian authorities issue legal bans on his music, and that at the same time became the main reason for the popularity of this singer. Manchuk compared the power of Mutsuraev's work to the impact of the well-known bards from the late Soviet era. And just like some Orthodox commenters argued that there is no Christian singer of Mutsuraev's caliber, so also Manchuk acknowledges that the modern left-wing movement of the CIS countries has no performers of the same persuasiveness.
**Why Russian?**

My overview of Mutsuraev's techniques and the reception that he found in various camps should not preclude us from returning briefly to his role for the Islamic cells in the North Caucasus. The fact that almost all of his songs are performed in Russian is another evidence for the fact that also these radical groups are Russian-speaking; Mutsuraev used Russian because, we may assume, it was the Russian bard tradition that stood at the basis of his music. He could have used Chechen (in fact, there is a Chechen song by Mutsuraev on YouTube,515 and he also gave interviews in Chechen),516 but he did not – because the Russian language did not at all alienate him from the young jihadists, who in many cases equally thought and wrote in Russian.

In the jihadist camps, Mutsuraev's music is probably listened to in alternation with the more conventional Russian-language jihad songs that imitate Arabic Qur'an recitations;517 these melodious recitations, we may assume, are a new phenomenon in Russia, and might still sound very odd to many ears. Also, these “Quranic” songs about jihad do not allow for the huge variety of secular themes that Mutsuraev could easily integrate in his bard-style songs. While the Soviet/post-Soviet bard genre adds to Mutsuraev's image of authenticity, an imitation of Arabic Qur’an melodies would sound like a mere copying of something imported from the Arabic world.

How is Mutsuraev received by North Caucasus Muslims beyond Chechnya? While Mutsuraev does not use the term *murid* in his lyrics, it should be noted that several of his songs have historical settings that go back to the Great Caucasus War of the 19th century. Examples are his songs “An Avar village”(*Avarske selo*) – the Daghestani Avar mountains border Chechnya -- as well as *Gunib*, named after the mountain village in Daghestan where Imam Shamil made his last heroic stance but finally decided to surrender to the Russian forces. The respective video clips are accompanied by images of Imam Shamil in action; they thus constitute a Daghestani acculturation of Mutsuraev's songs, most probably by his Daghestani admirers (who, we assume, produced and uploaded these clips). This transfer of Mutsuraev's

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IscZ-eVZY5c (last accessed 12 January 2018).
516 “Timur Mutsuraev videoobraschene – 2008 g.”, YouTube (2016)
songs into a broader North Caucasus setting transcends the Chechen nationalist message that is equally identifiable in his songs. Finally, a further study of the jihad-inspired music on the web would probably reveal that Mutsuraev’s style has been developed further by other performers linked to the Caucasus; in some cases, it seems, the bard style merged with elements of the traditional Lezginka – equally performed in Mutsuraev’s style of playing the guitar in a camp of camouflaged soldiers.\footnote{For example, the song “Vstavaite, Kavkaza syny!” by Khamzat Khankarov: “Vstavaite, Kavkaza syny!”,\textit{ YouTube} (2013) \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQH4ij8-PEo} (last accessed 10 September 2015).}

Mutsuraev found admirers among Russian soldiers, liberal as well as ultra-pious wings of the Orthodox Christian community, professionals from the cultural scene in contemporary Russia, as well as among Russian and Ukrainian nationalists and the radical leftist scene. They are all united in their quest for truthfulness in a world that they regard as corrupted, and against which they revolt – whether with arms or with prayers words and songs. For them, Mutsuraev’s lyrics encapsulate their own traumatic experiences of the collapse of their former state, the change of society, the breakdown of personal values, and the ongoing military conflicts. Against this chaos, representatives of all shades and colors find in Mutsuraev a sincere and honest singer to whom they can relate. It almost becomes meaningless that Mutsuraev himself couched this message in a particular Islamic framework.
Chapter 8:

Airat Vakhitov (Salman Bulgarskii): Passionarity, Justice and Sacrifice

From the Volga to Chechnya and Gunatanamo: Vakhitov's Jihadi Trajectory

On 28 June 2016 a major terrorist attack which killed 45 people was carried out at Istanbul’s Ataturk airport. As the Turkish special services claimed, the terrorist act had been organized by ISIS members who were citizens of Russia and Central Asian countries. A few days later “Interfax” – one of the largest Russian news agencies – circulated information that Russian Airat Vakhitov alias Salman Bulgarskii was suspected of involvement in the terrorist attack, and detained by the Turkish secret services.519 Friends of Vakhitov countered these accusations on their Islamic website, arguing that the Turkish authorities detained Vakhitov not because of suspicion of involvement in the terrorist attack, but due to visa problems.520 However, on 14 July 2016 the US Treasury Department imposed financial sanctions against Airat Vakhitov.521 According to the US State Department522 Airat Vakhitov was involved in terrorist activity in Syria, where he fought in the ranks of the “Jaish al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar”, which the US State Department considers a terrorist group (SDGTs - Specially Designated Global Terrorist);523 also according to US State Department he was involved in recruiting fighters to travel to Syria. August 9, 2016 Airat Vakhitov’s name was added to a similar EU sanctions list.524

523 SDGTs are legal entities and individuals who, in the opinion of the Office for the Control of Foreign Assets (OFAC), have committed or are likely to commit an act of terrorism. In addition, such individuals and legal entities include those who help the activities of terrorist organizations. See: “Specially Designated Global Terrorist”, Wikipedia (2017) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Specially_Designated_Global_Terrorist (last accessed 20 August 2017).
In many respects, Vakhitov stands out from the other Russophone jihadists that I have discussed so far. First, Vakhitov has arguably the longest record of jihadi activities from all the characters studied in this thesis; and second, he is still alive and was, until recently, open to interviews. In the 1990s Vakhitov fought on the side of the Chechen rebels, and later he joined the armed units of Islamists in Tajikistan, from where he went to Afghanistan to join the ranks of the “Taliban” movement. The Taliban put him into their prisons, for reasons to be discussed below; this is where the US apprehended him. In 2003-2004 he was detained by the US in their special prison at Guantanamo Bay.\(^525\) After his release he returned to Russia, where he was first welcomed by Geidar Dzhemal, a prominent public personality whose Islamist ideology has been portrayed as a mix of Shi‘i, Salafi, fascist and Eurasianist elements;\(^526\) Vakhitov supposedly joined Dzhemal’s Moscow-based “Islamic Committee of Russia”. It should be noted that Dzhemal (in the 1980s) had himself a history of involvement in jihad in Tajikistan, and entertained good relations to Chechen Islamists. Dzhemal’s son,


Orkhan Dzhemal (b. 1966), is a well-known Moscow journalist, and one of our public sources on Vakhitov’s activities after his return from Guantanamo.\(^{527}\) In line with the image that Geidar Dzhemal constructed for his “Islamic Committee”, Vakhitov started present himself as a speaker for human rights of Muslims (especially against what is seen as US crimes), and abjured from jihad. However, in 2011 Vakhitov emigrated to Turkey.

In December 2015, a long article\(^{528}\) about Airat Vakhitov was published on the website of “Open Russia” non-governmental organization, the leader of which is a well-known Russian businessman and opposition figure Mikhail Khodorkovsky. The author, a Russian opposition journalist Ilya Vasiunin met with Airat Vakhitov and conducted a long interview. Vakhitov talks in this interview about his path from jihadism to moderate Islamism, and he criticized the methods and goals of ISIS. Meanwhile, some Russian journalists and bloggers argued that Airat Vakhitov was a secret ISIS recruiter who was responsible for the Russian direction.\(^{529}\)

Two months before the publication of the “Open Russia” article on Vakhitov, in late October 2015, I also had a chance to meet with Airat Vakhitov and conducted a long interview with him (over seven hours, partly with my voice recorder on). Our rendezvous took place in a crowded café on the roof of a large shopping mall in the center of the Turkish city of Antalya, where he lived at the time. At that time, Russian-Turkish relations were on a very good level; one month later they broke down after a Turkish F-16 fighter plane shot down a Russian Su-24, that was carrying out a military operation in northern Syria. Vakhitov’s residence in Turkey might have been affected by these ups and downs of official relations.

According to Vakhitov, at the time of my interview with him he participated in the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians of the cities of northern Syria, who were most affected by clashes between anti-Asad rebels and government troops; and that is why he knows about the situation in the Middle East conflict from within. But, of course, this was not the only topic that we touched on in the course of nearly seven hours’ dialogue, much of which was recorded. The main focus of our conversation dealt with contemporary jihadism in Russia. Airat Vakhitov opinion about this phenomenon is shaped by his experience as a former member of the jihadist movement in the North Caucasus and in Central Asia. Already since


his release from Guantanamo, Airat Vakhitov published about his experience and views in the Russian-speaking information space.

Vakhitov’s long combat jihadist biography allows us to study how a Russophone Islamist adapted to various contexts, as well as how his Islamist ideology changed over time, and how he himself explained these changes. It should be noted that I am aware that the interview he gave me (and others) is part of his conscious construction of a public image. His information must not be taken at face value – all the more since we have little external information that would confirm or challenge his own account. My goal is therefore not to discern the truth, and neither, of course, to provide Vakhitov (or whoever might be his superior) with a propaganda platform. Rather, my approach is to study his accounts as a purposeful construction of an Islamist identity that, in some ways, brings together several of the threads that have been woven in the preceding chapters.

At the same time Vakhitov’s accounts add one new feature to our analysis, an aspect that I have not yet touched upon so far. This is the question in how far Islamism (and nationalism) feeds from a youth culture of street crime. We have seen above that Doku Umarov was a racketeer and – reportedly – even a murderer before he joined the Chechen Islamic movement. Likewise, it is well known that in cities like Makhachkala (Daghestan), the Islamic underground is involved in extortion practices, allegedly to raise money for the jihad. But the border between crime and jihad is fluent, and sometimes it is difficult which part of this combination is dominant --- all the more since jihadism itself is of course a criminal act. Equally known is that many of the European “jihad travelers” to Syria and Iraq came from a youth environment characterized by petty crime; their turn to Islamism, and jihadism, is sometimes understood as a form of redemption for past delinquency, or as a new phase of their criminal activities in which crimes against “non-believers” can now conveniently be justified by jihad. As will be discussed below, Vakhitov is a good case to study this linkage from within, as he is open about his own trajectory from a violent youth culture to Islam.

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At the time of my interview with him he was not under prosecution in Russia, which implies that he must have had to some kind of accommodation with the Russian authorities. Neither was he searched in Turkey.

**Historical Identities: Bulgharism or Tatarism as the Foundation for Tatar Islamism?**

Airat Vakhitov is an ethnic Tatar. He was born on January 4, 1977 in the city of Naberezhnye Chelny in the Republic of Tatarstan. Tatarstan is a Volga republic in the European part of Russia; 53 percent of the population of this republic are Tatars - a people of Turkic origin, most of whom consider themselves Muslims. Tatarstan is a very important political and economic region of Russia, as it is rich in oil resources and has developed industry as well as scientific and cultural centers. In the early 1990s, against the backdrop of the collapse of the USSR, the Tatar national movement intensified, making Tatarstan one of the leaders among the national republics within Russia that pushed for sovereignty. The Tatar national movement was active not only in Tatarstan’s capital Kazan but also in Naberezhnye Chelny, the second most important and largest city of Tatarstan.

The city of Naberezhnye Chelny was formed in the 1970s around the “KAMAZ” factory, one of the largest factories producing trucks in the USSR; by the beginning of the 1990s it was the unofficial center of Tatar nationalism. Against the backdrop of the economic and social crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, industrial cities such as Naberezhnye Chelny experienced serious difficulties; the downturn of industrial production not only put workers on the street, and reduced the income of those who still had work; the whole city infrastructure had been depending on the factory, meaning that also hospitals, schools, kindergartens and the maintenance of roads lost their budgets. Perhaps that was why not only Tatar nationalists, but also representatives of Russian nationalist organizations were remarkably active here. Naberezhnye Chelny also became regarded as a hotbed of Salafism.

The activity of Muslim fundamentalists in the city centered around the local Salafist madrassa called *Yoldyz*; reportedly, many of its graduates joined the Chechen Resistance. One of these graduates was Airat Vakhitov; he fought in Chechnya and then, after the re-establishment of Russian control in the North Caucasus, emigrated to Afghanistan. There he

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533 For example, Denis Saitakov (1978), suspected of organizing buildings bombings in Moscow in September 1999.
joined the “Bulgar Jama’at” group, which fought on the side of the Taliban; it consisted mainly of people from Tatarstan and neighboring regions. Vakhitov became known as Salman Bulgarskii.

The fact that this combat jama’at and Airat Vakhitov himself emphasized the “Volga-Bulgarian” identity in their names is striking. The nisba al-Bulghari was common in the traditional Arabic-language historiography of the 10th to 19th centuries, as well as in Arabic works on the geography of Central Eurasia and Russia. It came from the Volga-Bulgarians, who, between the 8th and the 13th centuries, maintained the Turkic Muslim Khanate of Volga Bulgaria, with its centers in Biliar and Bulgar (the latter, now a village in the Republic of Tatarstan, still being a famous pilgrimage site with various mausolea and, more recently, with a state-sponsored Bulgar Academy that is supposed to train Russia’s future imams). At the peak of its power, Volga Bulgaria was much larger than the modern Tatarstan, also including some territories of the predecessors of present-day Kazakhs, as well as Finno-Ugric and Slavic communities; linguists argue that from the present-day Turkic languages in the region, the Chuvash language (state language in today’s Chuvashia) is the closest to the language employed on the tombstones and other inscriptions of the Volga Bulgarian sites. Historically, the “Bulghar identity” is thus superethnic in nature. As Allen Frank has demonstrated, up until the early 20th century Volga Tatar and Bashkir Islamic scholars and Sufis used to refer to themselves by the nisba (Arabic geographical name indicating one’s home area) al-Bulghari; the Bulghar identity was a common regional marker of Islam, based on the memory of the Bulgar state (European Russia’s Islamic center before the Mongol invasion), and on a common Muslim scholarly and intellectual space that transcended ethnic boundaries (uniting both Bashkirs and Tatars). While al-Bulghari remained a self-description of the Muslims of the region, the term “Tatar” originally had a pejorative connotation, referring to the Mongols who destroyed the Islamic centers of eastern Europe (just as much as they destroyed Russian cities). It was only in the late 19th century that important Tatar scholars of Islamic history, including the famous Shihab al-Din al-Marjani (d.

536 On the dispute between Tatar and Chuvash national historians about the Bulgarian factor, see: V. Shnirelman, Who Gets the Past?: Competition for Ancestors among Non-Russian Intellectuals in Russia (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
537 A. Frank, Islamic Historiography and ‘Bulghar’ Identity Among the Tatars and Bashkirs of Russia (Leiden: Brill, 1998).
1889), argued that the Muslim people of the Volga region should embrace the name “Tatar”, since by then, this had become the ethnonym that Russians and others used to refer to the Muslims of the Volga area. At the same time, Bashkir scholars who still used the nisba al-Bulghari started to emphasize their Bashkir genealogies (many of which go back to the Golden Horde era), and started to elaborate the Bashkir language as their national idiom. These processes of division were accelerated by Soviet nationality policies, and by the establishment of national republics such as Tataria, Bashkirta, Chuvashia and Mari-El. In result, the settlement area of Volga Tatars became split over several national republics (today there are still more Tatars living in Bashkortostan than Bashkirs), and over several Volga oblast’s, over Samara and Saratov down to Astrakhan at the Caspian Sea.

The 1990s saw the emergence of a “Neo-Bulgarist” political movement, which argued that the contemporary Tatars should embrace the ethnonym Bulghar, thereby emphasizing the pre-Mongol, and pre-Russian roots of their nation. This movement was supplied with arguments by Tatar philologists at the Institute of Literature in Kazan. At the same time the Bulghari identity was proclaimed by a small group of activists who identified with the Vaisov movement, a popular movement in the Volga region of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the latter referred themselves to the authority of Baha’ al-Din Vaisov (1810-1893), a Sufi preacher who opposed the ‘official’ Islamic scholars and the Muftiate in Ufa, and to his sons who still played a role in the early Soviet years.

In the 1990s, “Neo-Bulgarism” was opposed by the Tatar national movement – in Kazan equally driven by philologists and, more pronounced, by historians, especially at the Institute of History (the Marjani-Institute) that became the core of a newly established Tatarstan Academy of Sciences, thereby leaving the Russian Academy of Sciences, in 1991. Today “Bulgarism” is very marginal, and the republican authorities endorse an active adoption of “Tatarism”, with the celebration of a

historically legacy that comprises both the heritage of Volga-Bulgaria and that of the Golden Horde, as the regional successor to the Mongol Empire.\textsuperscript{542}

Against this background one wonders how to interpret the fact that jihadists adopt the Bulghar identity. On the one hand, this choice might have been an attempt to identify themselves by a term that is understandable to Arab jihadists, who had little consideration for the ethnic complexity of European Russia’s historically Muslim areas, and who knew the area from the classical Arabic works of history and geography. From this perspective, the adoption of references to “Volga-Bulgaria” by a jihadi group would fall into the same category as, for instance, the establishment of a virtual “Vilayat Khorasan” by ISIS, covering a huge area from Iran over Kazakhstan to the Volga-Urals.\textsuperscript{543} The point is then the assertive negation of existing national boundaries, and of ethnic differences. Just like “Khorasan”, also the “Bulghar” area as a territorial unit in jihadi “strategic studies” is meant to be multinational, with the emphasis then being laid on Islam as the uniting factor. From this follows that Airat Vakhitov, when operating in Afghanistan and getting in contact with Arab jihadi mercenaries and the Taliban, automatically adopted this very \textit{nisba} as his nickname.

This assumption is supported by the fact that Airat Vakhitov himself, like other members of the Bulgarian Jamaat, as my observation showed produced no statements on any “Bulgharist” historical mythology. They did not touch the topic of Volga Bulgaria. What is more, later in the 2000s Airat Vakhitov decided to use as his information platform a Russian site with a name that refers to the Golden Horde, namely “Orda1313.info” (“Horde1313”) run by anonymous editors; there he published his programmatic articles. The proclaimed purpose of this site was to promote the idea of an Islamic Revolution in Northern Eurasia. The name of this resource refers to 1313, when the Golden Horde state, led by Uzbek Khan, officially embraced Islam. For a large part of the post-Soviet intelligentsia of the Turkic peoples, primarily for the Tatars and Bashkirs, the image of the Golden Horde is a historical model of the state power of their Muslim ancestors.

From this we can conclude that for the international (Middle Eastern and Afghan) contexts, Airat Vakhitov accepted the “Volga-Bulgarian” ascription, whereas to the Russian-speaking audience of a site that has Tatar national historiography as the basis for its Islamist ideological

\textsuperscript{542} V. Shnirel’man “Ot konfessional’nogo k etnicheskomu: bulgarskaya ideia v natsional’nom samosoznanii kazanskikh tatar v XX veke,”, in: \textit{Vestnik Evrazii}, 1-2, 4-5 (1998), 149.

project, he embraced the Golden Horde heritage and shunned any link to the “Neo-Bulgarism” discourse that, by the time of his return, had already been marginalized and discredited. Thus, in this matter Airat Vakhitov was guided by rational choice.

However, it should be noted that the theme of the Tatar national identity is relevant to him. In his conversation with me, Vakhitov said that in the early 1990s, he sympathized with the Tatar national movement, but was not involved in this movement simply due to his young age. Nevertheless, even in 2015, despite the fact that by that time he had not lived continuously in Tatarstan for over 15 years, Vakhitov communicated with his Tatar wife and children, who also lived with him in Turkey, only in the Tatar language. During our conversation, his wife called him several times, and he talked to her only in the Tatar language. Vakhitov pointed out to me that it was important he wanted his children to preserve the Tatar language, despite the fact that they had to live away from home.

The Yoldyz Madrasa as a Bridge to Daghestan and Chechnya

In the early 1990s Vakhitov was involved in another mass phenomenon for the late Soviet and post-Soviet period: youth organized crime. In his extensive 2011 interview for the “Badr TV” channel, which was published on Youtube, Airat Vakhitov says that in the 1990s he was an active member of youth gangs, involved in fights “for asphalt” (“za asfal’”) that is for zones of control in city districts. Participation in these gangs was accompanied by alcohol and drugs abuse, as well as frequent injuries and fractures. His exit from this environment Vakhitov linked to Islam. As he reported, on a day when Vakhitov was involved in one of these big fights between gangs, where Vakhitov took part, his grandmother passed away. Vakhitov says that in her will she had noted that she prayed to Allah to guide her grandson on the path of Islam. Thirty days after her death Vakhitov enrolled at the Yoldyz (“Star”) madrassa.

The image of his pious Muslim grandmother as a representative of the older generation is central in Vakhitov’s narrative about his youth before his “Muslim life”. He thereby emphasizes his family’s Muslim background, making clear he is not a neophyte; the embrace of Islam does not mark a break but rather some kind of “natural” continuation in his family history.

545 Ibid.
Vakhitov explained his choice of the madrassa *Yoldyz* by the fact that there were very few Muslim schools available in the first half of the 1990s in Russia; and this madrassa had, in his view, qualified professionals with the Muslim education taught there. This was, in his opinion, the reason for the popularity of the madrasa, where students from all over the country came to study. While studying at the *Yoldyz* madrasa Vakhitov also went for training to Turkey, where he studied the Quran and the Turkish language.\(^{546}\)

It was presumably in 1995 that Vakhitov graduated from the *Yoldyz* madrasa. In the period up to 1999, Vakhitov first taught at one of the mosques in Tatarstan for half a year, then traveled several times to participate in the fighting in the North Caucasus. According to Vakhitov, at that time it was possible to move freely between Tatarstan and the North Caucasus, in spite of the fighting and political disturbances in Chechnya and beyond. He claims to have also studied in Saudi Arabia, in the city of Medina,\(^ {547}\) for about a year. For two years he apparently served as imam at the “Tauba” mosque in Naberezhnye Chelny, which had the reputation of being a Salafi center.\(^ {548}\) Local media reported that, in the period when Airat Vakhitov was working there, some fifty residents had been sent, right from the mosque, to the war in Chechnya.\(^ {549}\)

In the course of our conversation Vakhitov told me that he began to make his first visits to Chechnya in 1996 – that is, still during the first Russia-Chechen war.\(^ {550}\) Tatar nationalists are known to have supported the Chechen rebels in their struggle against Moscow, and Vakhitov’s attitude to the Russian military action in Chechnya was extremely negative. Vakhitov told me that information about the war reached him through Russian opposition television channels, the media, as well as through the Internet that had just appeared; this flow of reports inspired him to take part in the first war. He thus de-emphasized the possible role of local recruiters. It was in the first fighting in the North Caucasus, according to Vakhitov, where he was formed as a personality.\(^ {551}\)

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\(^{546}\) Ibid.

\(^{547}\) Ibid.


\(^{550}\) Interview with Airat Vakhitov (October 2015, Antalya, Turkey). In the following indicated as ‘Interview №3’.

\(^{551}\) Interview №3.
His involvement in Chechnya came through Daghestan. In early 1996, Vakhitov first went to Daghestan to meet the well-known Salaf preacher Bagautdin Muhammad ad-Daghestani (Kebedov), whose role in the 1999 “Chechen incursion” into Daghestan I reported above.\textsuperscript{552} Vakhitov said that Kebedov had been very popular among Muslims at the time in the post-Soviet space. Already as a madrasa student in Naberezhnye Chelny, Vakhitov and his friends watched Kebedov’s lectures, read his books about namaz and considered him a Muslim authority. In Daghestan Vakhitov joined a group of Muslims who took private lessons from Kebedov and his followers, for about six months.\textsuperscript{554} After that he went to Chechnya, where he joined the Chechen resistance fighters.

As he claims, during the first year of his participation in the war on the side of Chechen separatists he often went home to Tatarstan as well as to other regions of Russia. The purpose of his visits was to organize the relocation of Chechen children to educational institutions in Central Russia, away from hot spots, so that they could wait out the war there.\textsuperscript{555} In addition, Vakhitov participated in the resettlement of Chechen refugees; this, he said, was without the permission of the Russian government. His participation in hostilities was combined not only with the organization of what he calls humanitarian aid, but also shaped his work as imam of the “Tauba” mosque in Naberezhnye Chelny. According to him, “there was such a mess in the country at that time” that displacements across the front lines was quite easy, and natural.\textsuperscript{556} Despite the fact that by that time Vakhitov was only about 20 years old, he often met with the acting Chechen President Zelimkhan Yandarbiev and Chechen mufti Akhmad Kadyrov\textsuperscript{557} (who at that time was on the side of the insurgents, but later became the Kremlin’s head of the Chechen Republic). According to Vakhitov, he communicated with Akhmad Kadyrov, because at the time the latter also frequently visited Tatarstan to deal with the resettlement of Chechen refugees.\textsuperscript{558} According to what he told me, Vakhitov took active part in the fighting, being assigned to various detachments, including the unti of the famous warlord Amir Ibn al-

\textsuperscript{552} Bagautdin Muhammad ad-Daghestani (b.1945) is known as one of the most famous so-called Salafi preachers in the North Caucasus, an Avar by nationality. He began his activity in the Soviet years, when he organized illegal groups for the study of Islam. In the post-Soviet period, he participated in the first Chechen war (1994-1996) on the side of Chechen fighters and took part in organizing the invasion of militants from Chechnya to Daghestan in 1999. After the failure of the invasion, he fled abroad.

\textsuperscript{553} “Doroga v Guantanamo”.

\textsuperscript{554} “Doroga v Guantanamo”.

\textsuperscript{555} Interview №3.

\textsuperscript{556} Interview №3.

\textsuperscript{557} Interview №3.

\textsuperscript{558} Interview №3.
Khattab; and he added that with the good level of spoken Arabic that he had acquired, Vakhitov also functioned as a translator for Khattab.559

Airat Vakhitov claims that he became a convinced Salafi not at the Yoldyz madrasa; rather, he argues that the other way around, his experience of “Russian lawlessness in Chechnya” and his involvement in the hostilities put him on the path of Salafi jihadism.560 Accordingly, Vakhitov’s turn towards ideas of jihadism and Salafism happened, apparently, in the North Caucasus, not before 1996. Given the standing of Kebedov among the Yoldyz students, this claim must of course be doubted. Yet for Vakhitov, the Yoldyz madrasa had not been Salafi at the time when he studied there; its teachers from Egypt, had Ikhwanî (Muslim Brotherhood) convictions,561 and were not promoting the ideas of a military Islamic resistance. Moreover, before the arrival of these teachers, the Yoldyz madrasa, which always was led by the famous Tatar preacher Idris Galiautdinov, in his opinion, had been traditionalist in nature.562

Obviously, Vakhitov did not include Ikhwan movement into the Salafi camp, nor did he define the “traditionalism” represented by Galiautdinov. In a recent study, Alfrid Bustanov characterized the Tatar Islamic networks in the area of Naberezhnye Chelny as “moderate Salafi”; on the basis of Galiautdinov’s publications – he still produced booklets and pamphlets as late as 2014 – Galiautdinov and his followers stood for a Salafi trend that defied globalism, and that cherished the Tatar heritage of Islamic thought; as Bustanov argues, by portraying famous Tatar scholars of the late 19th and early 20th century as Salafis – including the well-known historian, moralist and the Soviet Mufti Rizaeddin ibn Fakhreddin (Fakhreddinov, d. 1936) --, Galiautdin and his disciples “Tatarized” Salafism, and portrayed what Bustanov calls “moderate” (here: non-jihadist) Salafism as the Islam that is “traditional” to Russia.563 Vakhitov argues that at the time when he studied there, Yoldyz activities for the Chechen

559 Interview №3.
560 Interview №3.
561 Scholars characterize the Ikhwan al-muslimun (Muslim brothers) party as representatives of political Islam, who urged their supporters to participate in the political institutions of secular states, including elections, and were opposed to violent methods of struggle (S. Pahwa, “Secularizing Islamism and Islamizing Democracy: The Political and Ideational Evolution of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers 1984–2012,” in: Mediterranean Politics, 2, 18 (2018), 189-206). They regard themselves as opponents of Salafist jihadism; but also in Egypt, political violence emerged in the form of offshoots from the Muslim Brothers (C. S. Rinehart, “Volatile Breeding Grounds: The Radicalization of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood,” in: Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 32, 11 (2009), 953-988).
562 “Doroga v Guantanamo”.
563 A. Bustanov, “The Language of Moderate Salafism in Eastern Tatarstan”.
republic were purely charitable in nature; between the two Chechen wars, in 1996 to 1999, *Yoldyz* employees and students just helped Chechnya with humanitarian aid.564

This discourse shows parallels to the argumentation, portrayed in chapter 5 above, of the young Daghestani historians-turned-jihadists, like Mantaev and Rasulov: also for them, the true Islam of their respective region has been misrepresented by official (in the Daghestani case, Sufi) “traditionalism”; the real traditionalism, both for these Daghestani ideologists and for the group from Naberezhnye Chelny, was a Salafi-minded interpretation of Islam, to which contemporary Muslims can return without compromising their ethnic and regional identities. Apparently, Vakhitov went a step further by disassociating the *Yoldyz* madrasa completely from Salafism; from his perspective, it seems, Salafism is by definition identical with jihadism; one cannot harbor Salafi ideas without getting actively involved in resistance. It should be added that Galiautdinov was forced out of the Yoldyz in 2001, and that more recently, he also left Russia.

Vakhitov claims that he only encountered Salafi ideas when he got involved in the fighting in Chechnya. Vakhitov not only participated in the fighting and organized the evacuation of Chechen refugees to European Russia, but also took part in raids on local alcohol stores, and in sharia patrols.565 According to him, these activities of foreign fighters was not appreciated by the Chechen population, and also not by a significant part of the Chechen separatists. This led to a split among the insurgents.566 In particular, such measures triggered the division of the Chechen resistance into a Salafi and a Sufi camp.

**Vakhitov’s Hijra**

By September 1997, Vakhitov had officially been appointed imam of the *Tauba* mosque - one of the largest mosques in the city of Naberezhnye Chelny; and he was considered a famous preacher. According to Vakhitov, those were “the most liberal years in the history of Russia, when you could say what you thought, and such time is not likely to return soon”.567 Working as imam, Vakhitov, used the podium and the microphone to share the knowledge that he had

564 Interview №3.
565 Interview №3.
566 Interview №3.
567 “Doroga v Guantanamo”.
received in the *Yoldyz* madrassa, from Kebedov in Daghestan, and in Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{568} He does not indicate which ideas he propagated among the parishioners of the mosque. The fact that at that time he took part in the fighting in the North Caucasus implies that the call to join the jihad in the North Caucasus occupied a special place in his propaganda.

Vakhitov was arrested in Naberezhnye Chelny in September 1999, three months prior to the elections to the State Duma of the Russian Federation. According to Vakhitov, his arrest triggered protests among Tatar nationalists, who staged rallies at the FSB building, demanding the release of Airat Vakhitov.\textsuperscript{569} Indeed, on 14 December 1999, five days before parliamentary elections, Vakhitov was released. His early release Vakhitov explained by the fact that for the federal government, which did not yet have a strong position in Tatarstan, the arrest of a popular preacher in the city was unprofitable on the eve of important elections.\textsuperscript{570} However, according to Vakhitov, the criminal case against him was not dropped. As he argues, his fears were confirmed, because on the second day after the parliamentary elections armed police came to his mother's house to arrest Vakhitov again, but did not find him there.\textsuperscript{571}

Realizing the precariousness of his position, Vakhitov decided to leave Russia and move to Tajikistan. According to him, the proposal to leave for Tajikistan came from Irek Khamidullin,\textsuperscript{572} another militant of Tatar origin who eventually ended up in the US Guantanamo prison for participating in the “Taliban” movement. A number of media refer to Irek Khamidullin as one of the organizers of the “Bulgar Jama’at”, as one foreigners’ group that became part of the “Taliban” movement.\textsuperscript{573}

According to Vakhitov, Irek Khamidullin told him that the Russian authorities would not allow him to live quietly in the country anyway, so it would be better for them both to move to Central Asia.\textsuperscript{574} Khamidullin argued that in Russia, he would always have been subjected to humiliation and harassment.\textsuperscript{575}

\textsuperscript{568} “Doroga v Guantanamo”.
\textsuperscript{569} “Doroga v Guantanamo”.
\textsuperscript{570} “Doroga v Guantanamo”.
\textsuperscript{571} “Doroga v Guantanamo”.
\textsuperscript{572} Interview №3.
\textsuperscript{574} Interview №3.
\textsuperscript{575} “Doroga v Guantanamo”.
To me, Vakhitov described his move to Tajikistan as his personal *hijra*. Historically, the *hijra* refers to the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from pagan Mecca to Yathrib, later renamed by him to Medina, in the year 622; in modern Islamist parlance, the term comprises the exodus from the area of unbelief to the Dar al-Islam – from where they would return victorious at one point in the future. Also today, foreign “travelers of jihad” describe their journey from Europe or Russia to Syria or Iraq as their *hijra*.

In Tajikistan Airat Vakhitov received military training in the camps of local Islamists, after which he joined the “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” (IMU) and met with its leader Juma Namangani. At the time, detachments of the “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” operating in Tajikistan were forced to leave to Afghanistan. Also Airat Vakhitov made this transfer.

While many Russian sources indicate that in Afghanistan, Airat Vakhitov was involved in active fighting as member of the “Bulghar Jama’at”, Vakhitov himself claimed that he did not participate in military operations in Afghanistan.

The leader of the “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” in Afghanistan was Tohir Yuldashev. According to Vakhitov, Yuldashev did not trust the Tatars of Russia, because he considered them agents of Russia’s special services. As a result, Airat Vakhitov was arrested and sent to Kabul, where the IMU maintained its own prisons. According to his own accounts, Vakhitov was accused of being an FSB general and spent a year in a solitary confinement, where he was repeatedly tortured by IMU members. There he was between 1999 and 2002.

Vakhitov claimed that the tortures were so cruel, and the conditions of detention so harsh, that he even tried to commit suicide. According to him, Taliban leaders found out about the

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576 Interview №3.
577 See: Adam Hoffman, “From Hijra to Terror: The Islamic State’s Threat to France”, *Moshe Dayan Center (MDC)* (2016) [https://dayan.org/content/hijra-terror-islamic-state%E2%80%99s-threat-france](https://dayan.org/content/hijra-terror-islamic-state%E2%80%99s-threat-france) (last accessed 20 February 2018).
579 Interview №3.
581 “Doroga v Guantanamo”.
brutal torture practice against the innocent people in the prisons of “The Islamic movement of Uzbekistan” on the territory of Afghanistan and took Vakhitov from the prison of the IMU. Eventually Vakhitov was transferred to a Taliban prison in Kandahar. The Taliban had no claims against Vakhitov, as there was no evidence that he worked for Russian intelligence services. In the Kandahar prison he enjoyed quite a lot of freedom; he was given a teacher of the Persian language, so that he was able to learn that language; he also studied Pashto, English, and read books on Islam. According to him, it was a very fruitful time for him.

After September 11, 2001, the US forces invaded in Afghanistan; in 2003 the Americans took the prison where Vakhitov was kept. Vakhitov was first placed in US custody in Kandahar, and six months later sent to the Guantanamo, as he was thought to harbor ties with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

Vakhitov claims that he was again subject to numerous tortures and pressure. At Guantanamo the international agreement on the maintenance of prisoners was not followed, and Vakhitov later reported that the guards desecrated the Quran and hindered in praying. At the same time Vakhitov confirmed that the conditions there were much better than in prisons in Afghanistan.

Despite the fact that the US government could not prove Airat Vakhitov's involvement in the fighting on the side of the “Taliban movement”, he was released only in 2003

**Return to Russia and US Sanctions**

In early 2004 Vakhitov was transferred to Russia, where he was jailed for a short period and then released. In the mid-2000s Vakhitov became a noticeable Muslim public speaker. He gave numerous interviews to the Russian media, which were interested in Vakhitov's rich biography; and he was popular in the Muslim community of Russia.

28 June 2004 Airat Vakhitov held a press-conference in Moscow where he spoke about the tortures in Guantanamo. In the Russian capital he also participated in the “Islamic

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584 “Na vsei planete mertvyi”.
585 “Doroga v Guantanamo”.
586 “Na vsei planete myortvyi”.
587 “Doroga v Guantanamo”.
Committee” of the popular Islamic public figure and philosopher Geidar Dzhemal. According to the authoritative Russian newspaper “Kommersant”, in the first time after his release from Russian custody Airat Vakhitov even stayed at Geidar Dzhemal’s house for two months. Vakhitov was also planning to take part in the work of the leftist organization “Left Front”, in the creation of which Dzhemal participated.

In Moscow he engaged in human rights work: he organized an international Fund for Guantanamo prisoners, and went to London for a conference on former Guantanamo detainees, organized by the human rights organization “Amnesty international”. But in 2005 Vakhitov was again detained for two months, on suspicion of involvement in terrorist acts on the territory of Tatarstan. After being released for lack of evidence, he decided to leave Russia.

In the first years of emigration, Airat Vakhitov released several video lectures on the topic of Jihad. One of these lectures was called “39 ways to support Jihad and participate in it”, and another one was “Women's role in Jihad”. In the first lecture he talked about the fact that Muslim lands were occupied and therefore every Muslim must do everything in his power to support Jihad and to expel the aggressors. He does not name specific Muslim countries, implying that most Muslim countries are in that position. In his lecture on the role of women in Jihad, Vakhitov told a cautionary tale about Mujahids' wives and women of the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the first caliphs, who were fighting in military Jihad; they supported their husbands who were on this path or supported the Islamic resistance by donating their property. In this lecture Vakhitov called on modern Muslim women to follow the example of those women.

He informed me that since 2011 he has lived in Turkey, where he worked as a journalist and translated books. Apparently Vakhitov worked on a Russian translation, from the Arabic, of the four-volume work of an Arab Muslim theologian Ismail ibn Kathir (1300 – 1373)
“Tafseer al-Qur’an”. He claims he was engaged in this translation for several years, as it was a difficult and very time-consuming process. Vakhitov sold his work through the Internet; a special website Ibn-kaseer.com was created for this purpose.

At the same time, Vakhitov sought to participate in political life. Since 2011 he had actively supported the Syrian militant opposition which sought to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad. In our conversation, Airat Vakhitov claimed that he had traveled from Turkey to Syria solely for the purpose of delivering humanitarian aid. At the same time, some media, and the US State Department, argued that Vakhitov was a member of the “Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar” battle group, which consisted of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. This group was fighting against Syrian government forces; at the beginning of the Syrian conflict it split into two parts - one was involved in the fighting along with “Al-Nusra Front”, and the other went over to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS).

In the conversation with me Vakhitov stated that during the Syrian conflict he became disillusioned with the Salafi ideology and began to consider himself a Muslim-traditionalist who adhered to the Hanafi madhhab and Ash‘ari-Maturidi theology (‘aqida). According to him, he had been a Salafi for more than 20 years, however, the existence of ISIS changed his attitude towards Salafism. He criticized their methods and said that while in Guantanamo he realized that the 9/11 terrorist attack on the US had been wrong. Vakhitov's attitude towards Salafi jihadism changed after the emergence of ISIS. In his opinion, the methods of this organization drove the Muslims into a dead-end-street, because they led to unduly high number of human loss. At the theological level, he now argued, the Salafi ideology is based on a distortion of Islam because it takes many provisions of this religion out of context, and manipulates them.

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593 Ismail ibn Kathir (1300 – 1373) was a highly influential historian and Sunni scholar of the Shafi‘i school during the Mamluk era in Syria. An expert on tafsir (Quranic exegesis) and faqih (jurisprudence). He was taught by Ahmad Ibn-Taymiyya (1263 - 1328), who is considered one of the predecessors of the Salafi school. Ibn Kathir wrote a famous commentary on the Qur'an named Tafseer al-Qur'an al-‘Azeem.

594 Unfortunately, at the moment the page is unavailable. Initially, the page was located at: Vakhitov Airat, “Kommentarii k Velikomu Koranu”, Ibn Kasir http://www.ibn-kaseer.com/1-%D0%B2%D1%81%D1%82%D1%83%D0%BF%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5 (last accessed on 22 September 2016); Also information about the translation of the book can be found here: Salman Bulgarskii, “Tafsir Sviazhchennogo Korana al’-Khafiza ibn Kasira ad-Dimashi”, Golos Islama (06.08.2015) https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=23761 (last accessed 21 February 2018); “Tafsir Ibn Kasira. Kommentarii k Koranu”, Twirpx (11.10.2016) https://www.twirpx.com/file/122842/ (last accessed 21 February 2018).


Renouncing Salafism, Vakhitov continued, however, active advocacy and journalistic activities. He published in the media, gave interviews, and was very active on his Facebook page. In particular, he opposed Bashar al-Asad; he did not hide his sympathy for a paramilitary moderate Syrian opposition in Northern Syria, but did not mention the names of specific groups that he supported. He criticized Salafism; he wrote about the situation of Muslim activists in the North Caucasus, and promoted their suggestions and ideas on the way of Muslim self-organization.

In the summer of 2016, after the terrorist attack at Istanbul airport, Turkish authorities arrested Vakhitov, allegedly claiming that he was involved in the attack. Despite the fact that his participation in this attack has not been confirmed, sanctions against Airat Vakhitov were imposed first by the United States and then by the EU, which declared him an accomplice of terrorists.

**Explaining Jihad: “Thieves Code”, Passionarity and post-Soviet Salafism**

At the age of 39 Airat Vakhitov had a biography worthy of spy thrillers or political detectives. His biography reflected many phenomena that gained prominence the late Soviet and post-Soviet era – in particular youth organized crime, nationalism and Islamism. As an Islamist, his name would appear in regional contexts (the controversial Yoldyz madrasa and the Tauba mosque in Tatarstan), in contexts relevant to Russia’s recent history (the second Chechen campaign and the Jama’at of Kebedov in Dagestan), and in international constellations (the “Islamic movement in Uzbekistan” in Central Asia, the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Syrian conflict).

Another distinctive part of his biography is his extensive prison experience. A former bully from an industrial city on the path of Jihad, Vakhitov served in prisons of Russia, the “Islamic movement of Uzbekistan”, the Taliban, in Guantanamo Bay, and finally, at the time of writing, in Turkey. Prisons turned out to be places where he gained a significant part of his life experience, where he received new knowledge, studied foreign languages, and read books about Islam. In particular the prisons of Afghanistan became a continuation of his Islamic education, which started in the 1990s in the Tatarstani madrasa.

Not only his criminal youth but also his extensive prison history made him reflect on the role of the “gangster factor” in the development of post-Soviet jihadism. In his narrative he paid a
lot of attention to the ideological link between the bandit “thief’s code” \((\text{vorovskoi kod})^{597}\) and the Salafi movement. Telling me about the reason for the popularity of radical Islamism and, in particular, Salafi jihadism among Russia's Muslims, Airat Vakhitov pointed out the social factors that contributed to this popularity. Vakhitov regarded the criminal environment as the main social base for radical Islamism and jihadism. In his view, former members of the criminal groups were rather easily carried away by radical ideas based on Islam. Vakhitov explained that many criminals were engaged in crime not because of selfish reasons, but because of disagreement with the system and the government.

Interestingly, when describing this environment Vakhitov several times used the word “passionaries” \((\text{passionarii})\). He referred to the criminal community of the 1990s as a “passionarity” movement, which “touched on the passionaric part of society”. As discussed in the chapter on Said Buriatskii, the term “passionarity” became popular with the works of the Soviet anthropologist and historian Lev Gumilev. Said Buriatskii and Airat Vakhitov belonged approximately to the same generation and were familiar with each other. Vakhitov told me that in the mid-2000s, their ways often crossed in Moscow; as he claimed, Said Buriatskii -- by that time not yet the ideologue of the “Caucasus Emirate” -- treated Vakhitov with great respect as a former fighter and prisoner of Guantanamo.

It is important to recall that Gumilev's ideas were especially popular among the Russian Eurasians, including such well-known Russian Islamic thinker as Geidar Dzhemal.\(^{598}\) As seen above, Airat Vakhitov was well acquainted with Dzhemal, participated in his “Islamic Committee” and probably was under his influence. This influence can possibly explain Vakhitov's frequent references to “passionarity”, and thus the closeness of his language to the Eurasianists’ discourse, in all its shades and colors.

In contrast to Buriatskii, Airat Vakhitov did not mention the name of Lev Gumilev in his statements and interviews, nor does not use his approach; however, like many post-Soviet Russian intellectuals, in his speech Vakhitov rather actively uses the terminology of the famous Soviet dissident writer (who reportedly developed his passionarity paradigm in Stalin's prisons and labor camps). To describe the criminal gangs as “passionaric” of course romanticizes their image; in his opinion, these people strove for social justice and a fair

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597 “Thief’s code” is the rules and norms of behavior in the thieves' community during the times of the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet space.

society. Vakhitov recalled his conversation with an old Russian thief who claimed that they, the criminals, wanted to build an “aristocratic society of honor, integrity, and nobility”.  

According to Vakhitov, real opposition to the authorities in the Soviet Union came from “strong personalities”, in particular thieves and the criminal environment; these people were unable to find a place in the public system. In his opinion, they were opposed to the authorities because of their heightened sense of justice, but this protest they could not express politically. Vakhitov asserted that Salafism had given these people what they lacked: and the promise of Paradise in the afterlife made it easier for them to endure hardships. He argued that that just as prison inmates assert their rights through hunger strikes and self-mutilation, Muslims, being in a big prison, seek to achieve their rights through struggle. It should be added that also in our days, Russia as well as the states of Central Asia are struggling with the “Islamic underground” in their prisons, in the form of assertive subcultures that exert pressure on other inmate communities. Vakhitov goes somewhat further, as he indicates that there is even some ideological continuity between thieves/criminal ethics and Salafi ideology, which is expressed in the quest for social justice, order, and the fight against lawlessness.

**Rhetoric of Social Justice: Sacrifice and Jihadism**

Vakhitov claims that the prison experience, and the subjection to torture, taught him not to fear pain, to accept it as something temporary. Furthermore, it is in prison that he began to reflect on the idea of justice. Both are, for him, important prerequisites for the emergence of jihadism in Russia.

Vakhitov admitted that the ranks of jihadists contain not only former prisoners; but also these people see themselves as victims of injustice, and for them Jihad is the way to restore justice. Vakhitov argues that the emphasis on justice is the key to radical propagandists. To illustrate his thesis, he argues that Russia's official Tatar Muftis, like Ravil Gainutdin (Mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation, Moscow), and Kamil Samigullin (Mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan) are very remote from the ordinary believers that they proclaim to represent; Vakhitov sees them as bureaucrats, or partocrats. According

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599 Interview №3.
to Vakhitov, the youth will not listen to this official clergy, because “the gap between them is not religious, but social”. Vakhitov asks the rhetorical question: “What does Gainutdin have in common with a young Daghestani guy trying to survive in Moscow?” In his opinion there is “a huge social chasm” between Russia's Islamic elite and the simple Muslim. In his opinion, the young Muslims are appalled by the high standard of living of the official Muftis; accordingly, they are more likely to listen to “martyrs and preachers with guns”. Vakhitov argues that social stratification is the root of the popularity of jihadism.

According to Vakhitov, the destructive power of Salafi jihadism is fed by social injustice, repression and dictatorship. In his opinion, no ideology in the world can compete with Salafi jihadism in terms of mobilization power:

…the very heroic component: to die for the sake of Allah, more to die than to see the result, it's not about winning, but most importantly about sacrificing oneself.  

Vakhitov here argues that Salafi jihadism gives a person the opportunity to enjoy the path towards self-sacrifice for high ideals; whether the proclaimed immediate goal – an Islamic community or state -- can be reached during lifetime is of secondary importance. This strife for self-sacrifice corresponds neatly to Gumilev's edifices, as discussed in the context of Buriatskii's references to Gumilev. Vakhitov indicates that for people marginalized in their society, chances to restore social justice are low anyway, and they realize this. But Salafi jihadism expands the framework, allowing a person to leave life with the belief that in the afterlife, the triumph of justice is waiting for him. Ultimately, then, the militant/terrorist who wants to realize himself through actions that lead to his death embraces radical jihadist Islam for egoistic motives. In addition, according to Vakhitov, Salafism has unlimited opportunities for radicalization because “no matter how radical you are, there is always someone who is more radical.”

Conversely, according to Vakhitov, Salafi jihadism is bound to fade in societies characterized by full freedom of speech. Dictatorship breeds radicalism, Vakhitov argues, and the two are two sides of the same coin; the nexus between dictatorship and radicalism he found particularly obvious in the cases of Syria and Egypt. The main reason for this connection is that the dictatorship represses not only the perpetrators and dissenters, but also just ordinary people, who then become dissident radicals.

601 “…sama geroicheskaia sostavliauschaia: umeret' radi Allakha, bol'she umeret’, chem dazhe rezul’tat uvidet’, glavnoe ne pobeda, a glavnoe pozhertvovat' soboi”. Interview №3.
Vakhitov says that he had been a Salafi for twenty years, but with the advent of ISIS his attitude to Salafism changed for the worse. In his view, ISIS is destroying the potential of the Islamic community, turning young Muslims who are willing to fight for their religion into cannon fodder. As he claims, he came to the conviction that fighting for rights in the legal field would bring much more benefits, and prevent Muslims from moving to the Middle East and just die. And it concerns not only the Middle East: also in Russia, young Muslims who “go into the forest” will not achieve justice but only help increasing the budget of the army and police.

According to Vakhitov, understanding these factors made him reconsider his own ideological views. In his opinion, he is not alone, as after the appearance of ISIS, many Muslim intellectuals realized the dead-end path that Salafi jihadism calls for. It should be noted that he claimed to be skeptical not only about ISIS, but also about Al-Qaeda.

Interestingly, Vakhitov separates the concepts of “Jihad” and “jihadism”. He calls Jihad an integral part of Islam, which “is in the tradition, in the fiqh”, which means he retains a positive attitude towards jihad. But jihadism he disqualifies as “jihad for the sake of jihad”:

[This] is the idea of al-Qaeda: to cheguevara (chegevarit’) around the world. Che Guevara was proposed as head the Ministry of Finance, and he said: “No, I'm going to Angola”. Well, what is the purpose? Romanticizing war? Romanticizing murder and so forth?602

Vakhitov's invention of the the verb “to chegevara” (chegevarit’) brings us another parallel with the Cuban revolution, here with a negative connotation: Ernesto Che Guevara preferred to be a travelling revolutionary over starting to work productively. In this refusal Vakhitov detects a strong commonality with modern jihadism, which, in his view, has no political agenda for the future beyond the desire to fight.

According to him, this is most obvious from the phenomenon of suicide bombers, some of which Vakhitov claims he knew personally. According to him, suicide assailants varied in character: some were well educated, some were not; some were mentally ill, and some were of a healthy mind. In his opinion, the phenomenon of self-sacrifice is not new; he cites the names of Soviet heroes, like Nikolai Gastello (1907-1941) and Aleksandr Matrosov (1924-1943), who during the Second world war deliberately sacrificed their lives for the victory of their troops, and who soon became objects of propagandistic mythology. Obviously, drawing

602 Interview №3.
parallels between jihadi and Red Army practice is no contradiction to him; to Vakhitov, such parallels demonstrate that the problem of suicide bombers is not specifically an Islamic problem.

Vakhitov admits that he used to think that the leaders of the jihadists were some holy wise men who gathered on mount Sinai and made decisions, for example, to attack Manhattan or Dubrovka. However, getting to know many of them personally, he claims he realized that they were just like other people, perhaps even more stupid; and therefore he stopped trusting them.

As he claims to be disappointed in jihadist Salafism, he also claims to be revolted by the accusations hurled against him, in particular accusing him of entertaining contacts with ISIS and of recruiting fighters from the former Soviet Union for their organization. In our conversation Vakhitov rejected all such accusations. According to his statements, not only did he not recruit a single person for ISIS, but, moreover, he maintains that he dissuaded about 200 people to join the ranks of this organization. According to Vakhitov, on the way from Russia to Syria people who planned to fight on the side of ISIS often came to him in Turkey, where he managed to convince them to refrain from going further. He left it in the open whether he instead directed those travelers towards other militant groups in Syria. According to the US State Department, Vakhitov was associated with the group “Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar”.

In Russia, he indeed operated an active anti-Salafi and anti-jihadist propaganda via his Facebook page, which, unfortunately, was already removed by him. In Vakhitov's opinion, in Russia he is accused of aiding ISIS for the reason that he is not loyal to the Russian authorities.

Airat Vakhitov's language in our conversation was not rich in Arabic loan-words, even when he talked about such Muslim topics as Jihad, Sharia and Islamic state. Vakhitov rather employed symbols which are key to different ideological contexts; words like passionarity, civil society, socium are found in his language no less frequently than Islamic terms. Of course, he often provided quotes from the Quran in Arabic, but moving to the Russian, he

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603 The siege of Nord-Ost in 2002 is a hostage crisis in Moscow, when 50 Chechen rebels captured the Dubrovka Theater. On October 23, 2002, the militants took 850 people hostage, at least 170 of whom were killed.

604 It was through this site that I managed to contact him and arrange an interview.
tried to keep his speech free from Arabisms. Such Islamic/Arabic words like jihad, sharia, caliphate, shahid, which he regularly used, are by now known to almost every Russian reader.

While Vakhitov is also the only Islamist who, until recently, could still be interviewed, and who is still alive, his trajectory also puts the researcher before the dilemma of how to evaluate conversions – and here, in particular, the conversion from jihadism to a non-violent interpretation of Islam. As just seen, Vakhitov remains ambiguous on several accounts: he denies contacts with ISIS but is vague on his links to other combat organizations; he insists that he was just delivering humanitarian aid but is known as a recruiter; he rejects jihadism but cherishes jihad as part of the Islamic tradition.

Vakhitov's biography passes through the main Muslim conflicts of the post-Soviet space, and thereby also combines various phenomena that this thesis addressed in the preceding chapters. His embrace of the passionarity discourse without reference to Gumilev demonstrates how strongly this symbolism has already been enrooted in jihadi thinking. At the same time his conversion from violence entailed a critique of the self-sacrifice as a dogma, and made him more critical about the motivations for istishhad, to use Buriatskii's terminology; while Buriatskii was eager to demonstrate the nobility of suicide bombers, Vakhitov concedes that some of them were not acting out of something that we could call “free will”. Vakhitov's reflection on the self-perpetuating character of radicalization, and on the dead-end street of jihadism, are not remote from how secular scholars regard this phenomenon.

With this conscious discursive turn of a prominent jihadist the circle of biographies in this thesis comes to an end; most probably, also among present-day jihadists we find similar arguments, but perhaps also new trends in legitimizing their mission. There is good reason to assume that in Syria, in the four years of fighting by now, the Russian genealogy of post-Soviet jihadism has merged with other phenomena. It is to hope that with the near-defeat of ISIS (at the time of writing, in January 2018), in both Syria and Iraq, jihadism loses some of its attraction. However, Vakhitov's reminds us that the mobilizational force of jihadism is not depending on what can actually be reached by concerted military action; this is a grim outlook.
Conclusion of Part II

Similar to what we saw when studying Dzhokhar Dudaev’s contribution to the ideological confrontation with Moscow (in the first chapter), also the cases discussed in this chapter demonstrate that the ideological roots of jihadism originated in the post-Soviet Russian intellectual field. But we also see the reverse process, namely when the intellectual product of Russian-speaking jihadists reaches out beyond the Muslim field and influences Russian non-Muslim authors and readers, thus linking back, and even contributing, to other current post-Soviet ideological trends. We detect this reverse process also in the circumstance that the works of Buriatskii, Mutsuraev and Vakhitov, as well as their personalities, arouse interest and even positive feedback from Russian-speaking authors of very different views: from Orthodox conservatives to communists, from liberals to antiglobalists.

Was it a conscious strategy to get closer to the Russian-speaking audience? Or was it the natural result of their life experience and education they received, the books they have read and the music they listened to? I think that this "linking back" was both a natural process and a conscious strategy. Said Buriatskii, who had an Islamic education and to some extent knew the Arabic language, deliberately employs no arguments from the Sharia but looks for forms that present his views in a manner that is interesting to the larger Russian public. But the fact that his choice fell precisely on Lev Gumilev’s theory of passionarity also reveals his personal intellectual baggage. The same is true for Timur Mutsuraev: he probably did not even ask himself whether to follow Soviet author's songs, or perhaps better the Muslim anthems (nashids) that we often find in Arabic jihadi videos; the latter would not have given Mutsuraev much fame, neither among Russians not among Chechens. By the early 1990s, the author's song was definitely closer to Mutsuraev, just like it was close to a whole generation of Soviet teenagers who liked to sing songs, outdoors and accompanied by a guitar. Thus, even conscious strategies of jihadists were implemented within the frames of the social and cultural experience that they received in the late Soviet and post-Soviet times. This experience could be acquired through the Soviet/post-Soviet school, through books and newspapers of the Perestroika period or the Russian media. And this experience could also come via the post-Soviet criminal environment, in nationalist and other movements of post-socialist Russia. To a greater or lesser extent, this factor of "direct experience" is important to all of the above-mentioned authors.
As a result, not only the Tatar Airat Vakhitov and the Russian Said Buriatskii, who both were born and grew up far from the North Caucasus, but even the Chechen Timur Mutsuraev became “mediators” between the North Caucasian radicals and the Russian-speaking non-Muslim public.

To be sure, in contrast to their predecessors from the 1990s, the jihadists of the new generation had a more solid background in Islamic education. Some of them studied in Muslim educational institutions, and had a deeper knowledge of Islam and Arabic language. At the same time, also their minds were thoroughly shaped by the Russian educational and cultural experience. The way they discussed jihad issues reflects broader intellectual trends that are characteristic for the post-Soviet period.

It is remarkable that Rasulov, Mantaev and Astemirov were to some extent also connected with the Russian academic field. The appeal to science as a method of legitimizing an ideological position was commonplace in post-Soviet Russia (and perhaps a legacy of "scientific atheism"); to a large extent characteristic for secular ideological debates, this scientific appeal also affected the environment of jihadists. It is clearly visible, of course, in the writings of Iasin Rasulov.

The intellectual character of the texts produced by Iasin Rasulov, Said Buriatskii, Anzor Astemirov and Abuzagir Mantaev so far remained unnoticed in the existing historiography of the issue of jihad. But in the North Caucasus they were known as intellectuals, and their recourse methods and data of secular science, and their following of a rational logic, contributed much to their popularity and appeal.

The texts of jihadists show us not only their views and intellectual baggage; they also characterize the jihadist movement itself, that is, the potential audience of these texts. The paradoxical prestige of secular academic knowledge among jihadists allowed Rasulov to become an ideologist in their group. We might explain this rise to a central position in the jihadist circles by the fact that at that time, there were still few people who enjoyed the aura of having studied Islam thoroughly, and of knowing Arabic and having been in Egypt. In other words, the low level of religious knowledge among the ordinary militants gave Buriatskii an important advantage, even if he did not show off with that Islamic education in his messages. Even Said Buriatskii positioned himself first and foremost as a public intellectual, a master of secular knowledge. Perhaps that is why also Anzor Astemirov, who had enjoyed a serious Islamic education, always translated all Islamic and Arabic terms in his texts into Russian.
Astemirov tried to become more comprehensible and closer to his potential audience, to their Soviet and post-Soviet educational and social background.

In this context it is worth remembering that after his return from Saudi Arabia, Astemirov first tried to work in a secular academic field, as an organizer of the scientific life of the Islamic center in Nalchik. This suggests that he himself understood the importance of academic legitimacy in debates around Islam; he as well tried to position himself as an intellectual, including in a secular scientific environment.

As we can see with these examples, legitimacy through science turns out to be one of the most important components in the Russian-language jihadist ideology and propaganda. Without doubt, this appeal to scientific authority came with the practice of manipulating historical facts, in order to bolster certain ideological positions. But even this manipulation, sometimes gross, was common practice also in many other parts of the former USSR. The circumstance that Rasulov referred to the legend of mankurs, and thus to Chinghiz Aitmatov, makes him a typical post-Soviet intellectual, who aimed at contributing to the so-called post-Soviet “memory wars” by creating his own version of past.

As the radicalization of the Soviet and Russian intelligentsia during the post-Soviet era was a widespread phenomenon, it is no wonder that it also affected jihadist ideology-production, thereby turning the discourse on jihad into another interesting example of post-Soviet radicalism.
Conclusion of this thesis

The central question of this thesis has been: must jihadism in Russia's North Caucasus in the period under consideration (ca. 1990 -- 2010) be regarded as a variant of global jihadism, or is there reason to study it as a post-Soviet phenomenon? From the perspective of the Russian authorities, but also in the Russian media, and equally so in most Western popular and academic studies of Russian Islam, radicalism and jihadism on the territory of the Russian Federation are generally explained as an import from the Middle East. This view prevents us from asking in how far this jihadism shares features with phenomena that are usually characterized as emanations of particular post-Soviet conditions.

In this thesis I focused on fifteen personalities who became known as jihadists. In each case my research started with an attempt at reconstructing the respective biography, which I presented as a key to understanding the underlying motivations for a call to jihad, and for investigating the forms that this call took. Many of the protagonists arrived at radical Islamism after having tested out other ideologies, such as Communism and ethno-nationalism. For some, radicalization was a long process; for others it came only shortly after they converted to Islam. My biographical approach only rarely allowed me to single out the possible sources of influence that might have brought the protagonists to jihad, their teachers, networks and contacts. We do not have their diaries; my analysis relied, in each case, on what has been published about their lives, and what they wrote themselves, as well as on several interviews that I took during the collection of the material. These sources cannot be regarded as reliable; I circumvented this problem by focusing on the strategies how the jihadists positioned themselves, and on their own discourses. This turn, away from network analysis to intertextuality, was fruitful. No general pattern can be discerned; my thesis reconstructed various personal trajectories that correspond to the protagonists' very individual narratives about jihad and its legitimacy. Russian jihadism is, from this biographical perspective, a conglomerate of individual pathways to violence, and in its textual output, a mosaic of different projects that all reflect the peculiarities of the individual author. This diversity in itself is important to note, for it already questions the assumption of a general blueprint taken over from beyond Russia.

In the biographies of what I called the “first generation” of Russophone jihadists (comprising Yandarbiev, Udugov, Dudaev, Khachilaev), there is no evidence that they arrived at jihad
through any links to jihadists abroad. Even more, their conceptions of jihad were untainted by any in-depth knowledge of Islam. Slightly different is the second generation -- including Astemirov, Buriatskii, Vakhitov -- who indeed underwent formal Islamic education, or were even on a professional career path as Islamic preacher before they turned to jihad. But also in their programmatic statements and narratives I detected a host of non-Islamic features; and also their pathway to jihad was clearly shaped by developments of post-Soviet society; those who went abroad did so after processes of conversion in Russia.

In each chapter, the reconstruction of biographies was followed by an analysis of the major texts that these jihadists produced. Here we arrive at a similar conclusion: most of the protagonists that I studied produced legitimacies of jihad that cannot be reduced to ready-made patterns imported from beyond Russia. On the whole, Russia's most prominent jihadists were self-made men, and more so: they were consciously producing very distinct narratives of jihad. These narratives reflect, in turn, their educational background, their previous experiences, and the professions that they came from.

I argued that this self-made character of their jihadi legitimacy-production was the reason for their popularity, in the Caucasus and beyond -- exactly because the elements that they united in their jihadologies had their origin in the post-Soviet experience, and even more so, in post-Soviet culture, and were thus close to their target audience. Conversely, a mere import of Arabic standards would have had little appeal on the target audiences of the jihadists -- and were probably not even appealing to the protagonists themselves. With other words, to produce a convincing message the jihadists turned to the language and symbolism, and to the pre-existing framework of references, that they shared with the communities they claimed to speak for, and with the larger audiences they wanted to impact upon. This remains a hypothesis, for we have no opinion polls on how Muslim or non-Muslim citizens might have received the particular narratives at a given point in the 1990s and 2000s, and no draft papers that would allow us to understand how jihadis consciously edited their texts in response to the assumptions of audience design. However, there is good reason to assume that the end products -- the books, articles, programs, films and songs of the jihadists -- were indeed intended to win over an imagined or real audience. This lies in the nature of the matter: from the perspective of the jihadists, jihad is supposed to be a personal duty of every Muslim. The

media production of jihadism belongs to the field of propaganda, and propaganda has the goal to influence the opinions and decisions of other people.

From this position I focused on what I have suggested to call the cultural enrooting of jihad. In a nutshell, in order to be convincing a jihadist program has to be sold, and understood, as something that is not alien, not a break with one's past, not a treason to one's culture, but an organic addition to it, and possibly its higher stage. This is a tricky process.

On each individual level, what came first: the conviction that jihad must be fought, and then that jihad has to be legitimized by recourse to symbols and references that an assumed audience can appreciate, and therefore to be culturally enrooted to appear convincing? Or was the starting point perhaps an engagement with religion, and from their preoccupation with Islam the jihadists deducted that jihad must be fought, and "inculturation" came naturally, given that any jihadist only had his own cultural background at his disposal? Or, thirdly, are we talking about people with a political motivation or personal inclination to use violence -- for the sake of their nation, their community, their friends, or to avenge their lost family members -- and they then discovered the instrument of jihad, found it suitable for their purposes, and started ideological projects that gave their violent acts pseudo-religious legitimacy? In each biography the answer might be different, and in many cases we might find a combination of several motives. What all protagonists have in common, though, is that they used the discursive means available to them, since their youth, to formulate legitimacies of jihad, with the obvious purpose to justify the violence that they engaged in, and, presumably, to attract more followers or admirers. There is a certain vanity in jihad, perhaps a complex of inferiority that easily turns into a complex of superiority, ending in atrocities that are defended with reference to religion, sweetened by what jihadists claim is God's promise of entry into Paradise as a shahid. This is an easily available justification of terror, and it goes hand in hand with the dehumanization of the opponent, mostly via takfir.

It should be emphasized that the textual output that I studied in this thesis gives no indication that the authors were lunatics; rather, they were intellectuals who produced sophisticated edifices of arguments, and contributed to a whole range of debates. When reading their reflections on jihad one gets the impression that they were proud of their Russian education. To explain jihad, they used cultural and linguistic patterns as well as rhetoric strategies that
they had become familiar with in the Soviet and post-Soviet societies -- not patterns that they might have received from traveling jihadists from the Middle East.

Characteristic is that their texts centered on jihad, not on Islam as a religion, or on how a perfect Islamic society or the desired Islamic state should look like. It seems that these questions did not bother them much -- another argument for concluding that they were not just recipients of ready-made blueprints from elsewhere. It is therefore difficult to employ the usual qualifications, like “fundamentalism”, “(Neo-)Salafism”, or “Wahhabism”, to the jihad projects studied in this thesis. These terms to not appear in the texts, except when the authors argue against the application of these clichés to their projects (as did Mantaev and Rasulov). The aggressive insistence on jihad came with an astounding lack of ideas as to where jihad was meant to lead to; it almost appears as if jihad was conducted “for the sake of jihad”.

Central is the act of resistance; and as resistance is justified, sanctified with references to religion, we arrive at "transgressive sanctity", violence sanctified by faith. This concept was formulated by Rebecca Gould, in her recent monograph on Caucasus literatures from the 19th and early 20th centuries. The archetype of Gould’s transgressive sanctity is the figure of the Chechen abrekh, the Muslim man unjustly exiled from his village community who then acts as independently, often violently and in revenge, and to whom others ascribe a religious aura. Needless to say, the fact that this abrechestvo image was enrooted in Chechen and Daghestani folklore and literature, and in the national memories, might have contributed to the romanticization of jihad, and thus to its attraction jihadism.

But the figure of the Chechen abrekh and references to holy banditry did not appear prominently in the texts studied here. However, the corpus of North Caucasus jihadists is rich in references to historical predecessors from the nineteenth-century North Caucasus. I contend that these historical references were the most obvious strategy to enroot contemporary jihad culturally in the societies that the jihadists addressed. Central in many jihadist legitimacy projects is the figure of Imam Shamil, who organized the jihad of the Chechens and Daghestanis against Russia’s colonial rule in the first half of the 19th century. Some of the protagonists remained vague with their references to Shamil, depicting him simply as a natural model to emulate; others engaged with the literature on Shamil, and added their own interpretations (as did Khachilaev, who made Shamil a “fundamental Muslim”, a

fundamentalist, against the dominant view that Shamil was linked to a Sufi brotherhood; and after him Rasulov, who used the works of post-Soviet Orientalists to distance Shamil from Sufism). Homegrown historical models -- including the Islamic insurgencies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries -- were obviously much more powerful foils for identification than any references to foreign, let alone global, models could be.

What is the Soviet in Post-Soviet Jihad?

Paradoxically, the more my thesis on jihadism progressed the more I was confronted with the problem of how to define the "Soviet", and even more so the "post-Soviet", in their writings.

The “Soviet” background against which jihadism unfolded is particularly palpable in the careers of the first generation of jihad-defenders, which gives us clues as to how to understand their texts. First, they all had made remarkable careers in Soviet institutions. Dudaev and Maskhadov had risen through the ranks of the Soviet Army, and had been educated in military schools; we may assume that were very familiar with the ideological work of the Communist Party, and also with the classics of Marxism-Leninism. Equally, they were well-acquainted with the classics of Russian and Soviet-Russian literature, as the centrality of Herzen in Dudaev's definition of ideological “rusism” demonstrates. In their formative years, they received a high-quality mainstream Soviet education in Russian. They were also well-versed in Soviet history, and aware of Soviet attempts to link up with Islam as an instrument of propaganda -- while at the same time recognizing the dreadful anti-Islamic policies in the USSR. For the Chechens, this meant the memory of forced deportation -- several representatives of the old generation were born in Kazakhstan, in internal exile. The ambiguity of the Soviet experience -- disruption, denigration as a nation, came together with upward social mobility after the return to Chechnya.

Many jihadists of the first generation even studied at prominent centers of Soviet ideological propaganda: Nadirshakh Khachilaev, Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, and Alvadi Shaikhiev all studied at the Literary Institute in Moscow. Ironically, this institute of political literature, with its courses for minority writers, appears, from hindsight, as a cadre factory for post-Soviet jihadists. What these men learned at the Literary Institute was that literature was inherently political, and that political ideologies are best presented in literary form. Dalkhan Khozhaev even received a degree in history from the Chechen-Ingush State University, and the jihadists'
engagement with history continued in the post-Soviet era, for example with Khachilaev’s popular-literary excursions into regional history and with the academic thesis projects of Mantaev and Rasulov. Others arrived with their dissident experience, like Magomet Tagaev. Here it should be kept in mind that the very concept of "dissident" is a Soviet coinage; also these men were familiar with the Soviet patterns of ideology production, just from the opposite end. Without wanting to stretch this argument too far, we can say that the jihadists' engagement with regional history, and thus their mastering of historical sources for defining and justifying jihad, unfolded in the forms that they encountered during their Soviet and post-Soviet higher education. In this context we might want to keep in mind that the interest in historical sources, and to use them for constructing political ideologies, was not just characteristic for those jihadists; the bold revision of history had central stage in the Perestroika and early post-Soviet years.

In this respect, the jihadists' quest for the “correct” interpretation of regional history is just a part of broader attempts to reconsider the Soviet paradigms; in the period under consideration, most of these history revisions came from ethno-national corners, to upgrade the secular histories of respective nations. The role of historians in the political life of the Caucasus in that period is well-attested. In the South Caucasus, several secular post-Soviet political leaders had a background in the history and philology of their native nations. These men -- Zviad Gamsakhurdia (President of Georgia 1991-1992), Abulfaz Elchibei (President of Azerbaijan, 1992-1993), Levon Ter-Petrosyan (President of Armenia, 1991-1998), were all educated as “Orientalists”, that is, as specialists in the history of the literatures and languages of their respective (“Oriental”, in the Soviet system of academia) nations. Inexperienced with politics when they came to power, they all engaged in warfare (Gamsakhurdia drove his country into war with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Elchibei and Levon Petrosyan fought about Nagornyi Karabakh). Romantic philologists are no good politicians. But as a jihadist, your goal is not to avoid war, for the sake of your nation, but to stimulate it. With other words, the highly developed historical consciousness, often shaped by the dialectical modes of thinking borrowed from Marxism-Leninism, can be regarded as an influence on jihadi patterns of legitimacy-production. Patterns of reasoning in terms of thesis-antithesis-synthesis are clearly visible in the writings of for instance Buriatskii and Khachilaev.

Equally "Soviet", in quotation marks, are the geopolitical reflections of the jihadi authors that this thesis presents. For the representatives of the first generation, the end of the Soviet Union provided the opportunity to present the Muslim world as a proxy of the USSR, and then as its
successor for countering the destructive influence of the corrupted “West” that remained the major opponent beyond the direct enemies in the region. This includes messianistic attitudes: who, if not the (former) Soviet Muslims, would be qualified to be the vanguard of the Muslim world in countering the Western evil? Such modes of thinking can easily be substantiated with arguments about continued Western colonialism and imperialism in the Muslim world. We find these patterns of geopolitical thinking in the texts of Udugov, Yandarbiev, and Khachilaev, among others. It should be noted, however, that such references to Western oppression of the Muslim world are never going beyond a mere declaration; in their writings, “Pan-Islamic” solidarity is never more than a rhetorical foil, and never translated into global agendas.

But even those jihadists who did not have the occasion to study at Soviet or post-Soviet educational institutions, who did not come into contact with Soviet ideological work, and who did not "translate" Soviet arguments into jihadi legitimacies, were socialized with Soviet popular culture, be that through cinema, literature, or rock music. Mutsuraev, the bard of jihad, did not use any Arabic tunes to convey his message of jihad; instead, his model were Vladimir Vysotskii and Bulat Okudzhava. We must assume that the jihadists that this thesis dealt with shared artistic, aesthetic and cultural tastes with the general Russian population; accordingly, their jihadi arguments, and their search for sincerity, appealed also to a non-Muslim audience. The verses of the Chechen poet Alvadi Shaikhiev bear more traces of the Russian poetical tradition than of any Islamic heritage. Yasin Rasulov’s references to my esteemed colleague Vladimir Bobrovnikov -- as I write, a fellow at the NIAS in Amsterdam -- demonstrate that the jihadist positioned himself in the same academic universe as the writer of these lines. The popularity of the Mankurt topos -- and thus the impact of Chingiz Aitmatov’s famous novel -- permeates not only jihadi writings but also the texts of Russian, Tatar, and other nationalists.

What is Post-Soviet in Jihad?

To give a definition of what it means to be "post-Soviet" is more difficult. One argument for my claim that the jihadism of the 1990s and 2000s can best be studied as a post-Soviet phenomenon is the reception that the Muslim jihadists obtained among non-Muslim audiences. If Russian non-Muslims find their ideologies appealing, if they like their music, if they share their professed search for authenticity and "sincerity", then the jihadist literature
has a place in the broader field of post-Soviet culture. The concept of a broad post-Soviet search for sincerity, as posed by Alexei Yurchak and Ellen Rutten, I highlighted in my chapter on Said Buriatskii. Here we are constructing links between the camps of religious opponents and ideological enemies, supposing that they speak to each other in spite of the different frameworks that they proclaim to follow. But this is not as unusual as one might think at first glance; in Russia, alliances beyond seemingly opposed ideological camps often come about naturally (one would think of concerted action by the National Bolsheviks of Eduard Limonov and the Western-minded liberal opposition of former Chess champion Garri Kasparov in 2005-2008). If traditional concepts such as “left” and “right”, “liberal democratic” and “fascist” get blurred, why would it be more difficult to identify bridges between radical Muslims and Orthodox believers, for example?

There are several ways how to tackle this issue. One is to pay attention to emotions shared by Muslims and non-Muslims who went through the 1990s. In my chapter on Mutsuraev, I gave center stage to the concept of trauma. Here the war experience of the 1990s appears as a continuation of the trauma of exile that the older generation had gone through, The disorienting experience of war, deprivation, loss, is something that is shared not only among Chechens in whose homeland the war raged, but also among the Russian soldiers deployed in Chechnya. No surprise then that Mutsuraev's music was popular among Russian Army servants and veterans, who regarded his lyrics, and his music, as an authentic expression of the human experience in war.

Equally “post-Soviet” is the reference cadre of the jihadists. Lev Gumilev in the texts of Buriatskii, Pushkin in Rasulov's work, Herzen in Dudaev's philosophical treatises -- all these have been acclaimed and prominent figures in post-Soviet literature. Jihad was substantiated by Russian classical literature. Buriatskii indicates at one point that instead of Gumilev he might also have taken a Muslim writer, Ibn Khaldun, as his model for substantiating istishhad, the quest for martyrdom, but he does not go into depth with this thought; and even in that reference, Ibn Khaldun is mentioned on the same level with Oswald Spengler.

Equally characteristic for the post-Soviet era is the positive re-interpretation of the works of the dissidents of the Soviet era, and the resurrection of anti-Soviet voices, including authors who fled the USSR. In the texts studied in this thesis, we came across Solzhenitsyn and Avturkhanov as important anchor points of jihadology; and also Lev Gumilev, who spent
many years in Soviet camps, can be regarded as a dissident that turned into a hero once the ideological confinements of the USSR were gone.

**Jihadism as a Post-Soviet Phenomenon**

The popularity of themes like historical memory, trauma, sincerity and the value of sacrifice can be seen as a general reaction to the uncertainties and socio-political challenges after the fall of the Soviet empire. The whole argumentative apparatus of Russian jihadism was hence oriented foremost to the tastes, topics and styles that had currency in the broader post-Soviet situation. This explains why some prominent jihadists gained popularity not only in Muslim circles but also among the potential opponents or even targets of jihad, i.e. the Orthodox activists and left-wing intellectuals. The language and intertextuality of jihadism caught the attention of an unexpected audience. In a 'grey zone' in the religious landscape of post-Soviet Russia, ideological enemies can find a common language to discuss shared topics.

Yet the most compelling argument for classifying the jihadism of the 1990s and early 2000s as “post-Soviet” is something else. It is not just that Airat Vakhitov was a street-fighter like many Russian youngsters of his generation, and that Doku Umarov was a racketeer in Moscow; that Shamil Basaev wanted to study at a Russian university, and was frustrated when he was rejected, like so many others; that Buriatskii embarked on a spiritual path to Islam to express his protest against a Russian society in crisis, only to return to Lev Gumilev to underpin his choice for jihad; it is not just the Soviet military experience that enabled Dudaev and Maskhadov to organize a defensive war. It is not just the guitar that Mutsuraev picked up to play songs by Vysotskii. Rather, I argue that the whole phenomenon of jihadism in the post-Soviet period -- that is, the jihadi bricolage, the mosaic to which all these men contributed, with their different entry gates and their various projects to explain and justify jihad -- all of this fits into the broader paradigm of identity- and ideology production in the period under consideration.

If “Soviet Communism was Western materialism built on Russian steroids” -- as my colleague Artemy Kalinovsky once joked -- then post-Soviet jihadism is its logical successor, with a slightly different flavor. It is almost a platitude to describe the period after 1991 as a search for new ideologies to fill the void left by communist convictions, but there is some veracity in it. After the end of the securities of the Cold War era, people have been testing
new ideologies that they built from the material at hands. Ethno-nationalism is one of these new ideologies, and as we saw, not only in Chechnya but also in Dagestan (Khachilaev) and Tatarstan (Vakhitov), radical Islamism grew on the failure of national movements among the minorities. To be added is that also the scene of radical ethnic Russian converts to Islam, Islam is interpreted as the overarching ideology that is meant to raise the Russian nation to a new global, geopolitical and eschatological significance.607

In contemporary Russia, there is a constant tension between the interests of the minority nations (Chechens, Tatars, Bashkirs etc) and the central government that somehow tries to instill a civic national identity, and between those various ethno-nationalisms and Russian nationalism. At the same time Russkii Mir, the media platform for outreach to Russian speakers beyond Russia (as well as to a non-Russian world), is a state project to provide Russians with a sense of fulfillment, partly in conjunction with the interests of the Russian Orthodox Church. All parties involved search for broad ideological platforms from which to sustain their particular interests. The one major overarching ideology that gains ground, and that pretends to accommodate the various ethno-national and religious particularities over against the allegedly corrupt and corrupting West, is Eurasianism, presented in aggressive terms by Aleksandr Dugin, and in more moderate forms by the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, and in terms of economic integration and joint security policies by President Putin.

I argue that this constellation, in which new overarching recipes are designed, propagated, tested and modified, also creates favorable conditions and stimuli for radical Islamism, and ultimately for jihadi ideologies. What jihadism shares with all of these other broad ideologies is that it suffers from severe internal contradictions; all of these trends portray themselves as messianistic solutions to problems that they themselves create. They all suffer from grave internal inconsistencies.

Central in the proclamations of the jihadists that we encountered in this thesis is the idea of social justice; Islam is portrayed as the framework in which the human being finds the justice and solidarity that he or she strives for, in the face of a proclaimed oppressor. At the same time the very essence of jihadism is the killing of human beings, and the utter denigration of those who do not subscribe to this violent ideology, or who raise questions.

It is therefore no surprise that the search for intertextuality in jihadi writings leads us not to Middle Eastern radical Islamism but to other post-Soviet ideological trends. Said Buriatskii’s quest for martyrdom builds on Lev Gumilev’s passionarity concept, and thus has more in common with Dugin’s Eurasianism than with al-Qaida, the terrorist network that most observers use to situate North Caucasus jihadism. Yandarbiev's quest for a pan-Caucasian solidarity, for Chechen nationalism, and then for an overarching Islamic agenda, displays a similar flexibility in the search for a viable platform as the work of many Russian ideologists. Anti-Westernism, the perception of a military, economic and cultural threat from without, is what unites all these competing post-Soviet ideological constructs, from Neo-Communism over “conservative statism” to radical nationalism and jihadism. And they all feel free to use the same anchor points, like Solzhenitsyn and Gumilev, to enroot their message in culture. Political claims come in the disguise of civilizational choices, without giving a clear definition of the differences beyond the call for justice, values, and human dignity. Jihadism, from this angle, is just the most consequential of these quests for ideological security, by its claim to represent God's will; it absolves the terrorist from responsibility.

**Post-Colonialism?**

Are all of these -isms just expressions of one broader post-colonial trend? As I suggested in the introduction, post-colonial arguments for the emancipation of the formerly colonial subject can easily be turned into anchor points for new imperial ideologies, be that majority nationalism or Eurasianism. Just as an aggressive Russian-sponsored Eurasianism can be seen as a threat to weaker nations, so also the jihadists’ establishment of a (virtual) Caucasus Emirate, with the goal of subjecting the whole of the Caucasus (including Christian Georgia and Armenia) to “Islamic” rule, transforms anti-colonial agendas into a new imperial project.

Like the left-leaning post-colonial theorists, also the jihadi ideologists use the method of deconstructing, and of criticizing the ideology and the historical mythology of their opponents. At the same time their own writings are characterized by the invention of new mythologies, for which they draw on a huge array of sources -- from Russia, from the Caucasus region, and from beyond. It is for this reason that their ideology production is not a post-colonial reflection. If anything, jihadism is anti-colonial in its rhetoric, but not post-colonial. If post-colonial theory is a means to deconstruct the inherent fallacies also within one's own society, in the post-Soviet area similar arguments are used only to sustain new
imperial projects that deconstruct only the perceived opponent. The Russophone jihadists attack both the particular nationalisms and the other imperial projects that jihadism competes with. In this feature, jihadism again resembles the Soviet propaganda machine, but also those other post-Soviet ideologies that claim to be overarching and universal. This again makes the Russian-speaking jihadist discourse an integral part of the broader cultural and ideological landscape in the Russian Federation, and in the post-Soviet area.

**The Language of Russian Jihad**

The field of jihad studies is dominated by scholars of political and security studies, with occasional interventions by Orientalists and experts in Islam. For scholars of Slavic studies the topic remains obscure. This dissertation challenges this disciplinary logic by presenting jihad as a distinctly post-Soviet phenomenon with a deep grounding in Russian culture. I suggest to bring the discussion of jihad into the confines of Slavic studies, and I demonstrate that jihadism in the North Caucasus presents a radical case of expressing post-Soviet worldviews, values, in the form of radical ideological languages that jihadism shares with other contemporary "meta-narratives". And of course, the protagonists discussed in this thesis -- which, I argue, were central figures, and probably the most well-known representatives of jihad in their time -- spoke and wrote in Russian, making contributions to a post-Soviet Russian discourse.

The very language of Russian Islamic literature is very diverse, with a whole range of specific terminology and elaborated stylistics. Michael Kemper and Alfrid Bustanov suggested to speak of a “Russian Islamic sociolect”, with variants characterized by the use of either Arabic loan words or of the Russian (Church-Slavonic) lexicon. The texts discussed in this thesis would largely fall into the category of “Russism”, according to the Bustanov-Kemper classification: the jihadists use only a limited amount of Arabic loans, preferring instead to use Russian terms. The intention, we may assume, is to make their text production intelligible to wider audiences, including non-Muslims. One discovery of this thesis is that “Russism”, the term that Bustanov and Kemper introduced for a linguistic variant, has also been in use, in the literature of the fighters, as a pejorative term for Russia's ideological stance.

The material studied here further documented that individual authors can easily switch from “Russism” to "Arabism", as seen in Buriatskii's treatise on *istishhad* (of which the second part
suddenly introduces more Arabisms, obviously to mark this part as an *Islamic* interpretation of Gumilev’s concepts that are presented in the first part of the piece). At the same time the intellectual jihadists also use academic jargon, as seen with the example of Rasulov; his written texts fall into the category of “Academism”, while his oral presentation -- the video of his tour through Makhachkala, with a gun in his hand -- is characterized by Islamic and criminal slang. With other words, authors can switch between various codes, depending on whom they want to impress.

Striking is the lack of sophistication in Islamic legal matters. One is inclined to assume that also here, the authors respond to what they assume their audiences expect: there was perhaps no need to bring traditional Islamic arguments into the debate to prove the necessity of jihad. More appealing than dry discussions of Islamic theological or legal subtleties were borrowings from the post-Soviet “supermarket” of ideologies such as Eurasianism. Many proponents of Russian jihad also had enough training to embark upon the demanding task of scholarly work.

In most cases, the borrowings from Arabic cover a small portion of terms that are widely known also beyond the specifically Muslim domains. We can safely assume that these few terms already entered the modern Russian lexicon, mainly through the mass media. Words like jihad and caliphate function merely as Islamic markers, and are deprived of the complex semantics and multiple meanings that they had in classical and modern Islamic discourses, especially in the Arabic-language tradition of the North Caucasus that the Bolsheviks had suppressed. In the texts that I studies, there is no attempt to return to the sophisticated debates on Islamic legal concepts that Daghestani and Chechen Islamic scholars developed in teh 19th and early 20th centuries, just as there are no attempts at integrating the concepts of Sayyid Qutb, Maududi or other Islamic thinkers from the outside Muslim world.

The observation that Russian jihadists, in their Russophone textual output, do not employ is a strategy of Arabization strateg leads us to a conclusion that linguistically, jihadists share a discursive platform not with the Salafis, that is with the close-knit communities in Russia that use Arabisms in abundance, as insider codes. In other words, linguistically the jihadist discourse is characterized by an expansionist perspective -- reaching out to non-Muslims -- in opposition to the isolationist linguistic and ideological practice of Russia's Salafis and Sufis.

In fact, the language of the jihadists has more in common with of Russia's official representations of Islam, the Muftis, who also address a broader Russian audience, the
political authorities, and the mass media. A thorough Islamization of the jihadist language took place only around the mid-2000s, and in a gradual manner. This turn towards borrowings from Arabic mirrors the increasing spread of Islamic knowledge and Arabic language skills among the propagandists of jihadism. Before that, the language of Russian jihadism remained a field dominated by semi-academic, communist, criminal, nationalist, Christian Orthodox, and liberal parlances. Jihadi language use therefore turns out to be a reflection of ideological diversity.

**Understanding Jihadist Authority**

The ideological diversity of the post-Soviet situation also allows us to revisit the issue of authority-construction in the jihadist discourse. From the texts and biographies of Russian jihadists it becomes apparent that serious grounding in Islamic subjects was certainly not the main prerequisite for acquiring a powerful voice. Among the most notable jihadist ideologists there was practically no one who claimed to be a Muslim scholar, an 'alim. People with full Islamic education were rare among them. Even those who at a later stage learned Arabic and received some religious education did not put their Islamic learning at the center of their philosophy of jihad, preferring instead to discuss non-Muslim authorities and use non-Muslim arguments.

What is more, they even rarely referred to each other; the study of intertextuality in the present corpus showed that the writers mainly referred to other non-Muslim authors, or to Muslim authors from the past of the North Caucasus.

This allows us to conclude that among the post-Soviet jihadists, particular popularity was achieved by those ideologists who claimed to be intellectuals with a profound knowledge not only and not so much in religion, but in secular sciences and in Russian literature and history. Likewise, a precondition for popularity and impact was their mastery of the secular scientific language, and of the broader patterns of ideology-construction.

Secular scholarship, in other words, had greater authority than any Islamic traditional religious education. As a result, none of the jihadist authors whom I discuss wrote a piece in Arabic.
From the Islamist projects we encountered in this thesis, only one is a direct extension of an Islamist platform that emerged in the Middle East. This is the Salafi Madkhali group, who follow the line of Rabee al-Madkhali from Saudi Arabia. But al-Madkhali’s position is characterized by his opposition to jihad, and this position is shared by the major post-Soviet Madkhali that we encountered, namely the Tatar Rinat Kazakhstani; he fiercely rejected the authority claims of Said Buriatskii.

Here I must confess I could also have opted for providing more space to Arab foreign fighters in the North Caucasus, such as the famous Amir Khattab; yet it seems he only wrote in Arabic for an Arab audience; in Russia, he has not found any profound reception. I also tried to identify more protagonists from the North Caucasus who wrote in Russian but used more Arabic terminology. One of these could have been Mukhammad Bagautdin Kebedov (b. 1945), who is regarded as the father of “Wahhabism” in Daghestan, and who, with his attempts at reviving the scholarly discourse on Islam, emphasized the need to spread the Arabic language. Yet in spite of Kebedov’s centrality, the available sources on Kebedov did not allow for a full characterization of this personality; what I have from him is a textbook on the Arabic language, no programmatic statement on jihad. Consequently, Kebedov appears in this thesis only in passing, albeit at several points. The actors that did produce programmatic texts did not write in Arabic, and they were the most influential figureheads of jihad on the spot but also beyond the Caucasus, to a degree that is not matched by any other actor whose work this study does not address.

However, I do not deny the existence of a powerful trend of “Arabization” in the Islamic discourse in Chechnya, Daghestan, and Russia. Moreover, I demonstrate that this Arabization and Islamization is gradually gaining more place in the Russian jihadist rhetoric and propaganda, in most recent years through the participation of North Caucasus fighters in the ranks of the militias of ISIS and other terrorist formations in Syria. However, I argue that the mainstream interpretation of the emergence and development of North Cacausus jihadism as a foreign import has been overstretched, and resulted in the neglect of an equally powerful if not more crucial feature of this movement, namely the local and regional embedding, the longevity of the Soviet heritage, and the close relation between the radical jihadist discourse and broader post-Soviet trends in literature and political thinking. Russian jihadist discourse forms an ideological bricolage, born and developed in the post-Soviet cultural and intellectual context. The hybrid character of Russian jihadism can be explained by a rapture paradigm that stresses the losses of Muslim cultural tradition in Russia during the Soviet century. Hence the
jihadist ideologists felt free to invent Islam from a scratch, picking up the cultural elements that seemed appealing and relevant to the new generation of Muslims.
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‘Interview №2’: with Meanna by Internet (September 2015)

‘Interview №3’: with Airat Vakhitov (October 2015, Antalya, Turkey).
Appendix 1.

List of names

**Abuzagir Mantaev** (1975-2005) - Dagestan militant, Ph.D. Political science (Diplomatic Academy in Moscow), teacher of Islamic disciplines. He began his career as a scientist, left Dagestan and went to Moscow, where he defended his thesis on the problem of Wahhabism. After returning to Dagestan, he became assistant to Nadirshakh Khachilaev. After the assassination of Nadirshakh Khachilaev, he joined the militants and became a member of the Dagestani terrorist group “Shariah”.

**Airat Vakhitov** (b. 1977) is a Russian Islamic preacher, militant, journalist and human rights defender, former Guantanamo inmate and prisoner of the Taliban in Afghansitan. In the 1990s, a participant in the military operations in the North Caucasus on the side of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. In addition, he has experience of fighting in the Middle East. In 2016, arrested by the Turkish authorities, the same year he was included on the sanction list by the US State Department and the European Union as a person supporting terrorism.

**Alvadi Shaikhiev** (b. 1947) - Chechen poet and writer, journalist, member of the Writers' Union of the USSR since 1975. Editor of the first translation of the Qur'an into the Chechen language.

**Anzor Astemirov** (1976-2010) was one of the ideologists of the jihadist underground in the North Caucasus, Shariah judge of “Caucasus Emirate”, leader of the Kabardino-Balkar Jamaat, a researcher at the Islamic Science Center in Nalchik.

**Dalkhan Khozhaev** (1961-2000) was a historian, field commander and head of the Department of Archives of Chechnya in the government of Dzhokhar Dudaev. In the Soviet era, after studying at the Faculty of History in Chechen-Ingush State University, he worked in a museum of local lore. He is the author of a book dedicated to the Chechen participants of the Caucasian war of the 19th century.

**Dzhokhar Dudaev** (1944-1996) - a former Soviet general, Chechen politician, first president of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (1991-1996). Former member of the Communist Party of the USSR. In the early 1990s, he acted as the leader of the secular nationalist movement for separating Chechnya from the Russian Federation. In the mid-1990s, under the leadership of Dudaev, the gradual Islamization of the Chechen resistance began, and in 1995 the Chechen muftiate announced jihad against the Russian Federation.

**Iasin Rasulov** (1975-2006) - journalist, researcher, ideologist of the Dagestani terrorist group “Shariah”, a former graduate student of the Dagestani Academy of Sciences. Participant of a number of terrorist attacks against Russian army and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.
Khizri Il'iasov (b. 1960) - Doctor of Letters (Philology), a participant in the Lak national movement of the 1990s. Author of scholarly and artistic works on the history and modern life in the North Caucasus.

Magomet Tagaev (b. 1948) is a Soviet dissident, a writer who called for separating Dagestan from the USSR. One of the ideologists of the jihadist movement in the North Caucasus in the post-Soviet period. In 1996 he was proclaimed commander of the Dagestan Insurgent Army named after Imam Shamil, and in 1999 he participated in the invasion of militants from Chechnya into Dagestan. Author of several books about jihad, gazavat and the North Caucasus.

Movladi Udugov (b. 1962) - former press secretary of Dzhokhar Dudaev Minister of Information of Ichkeria, head of the information service of the terrorist group “Caucasus Emirate” (Imarat Kavkaz), creator and editor-in-chief of the main Russian jihadist website “Kavkaz Center”. He is considered one of the main ideologists of the jihadist movement in the North Caucasus.

Nadirshakh Khachilaev (1958-2003) - Dagestani politician, deputy of the State Duma, head of the Dagestan branch of the Union of Muslims of Russia, one of the leaders of the national movement of the Lak people. He is known for his links with the Islamist underground in Dagestan and Chechnya, he is also the author of a number of journalistic and artistic works, including those devoted to the theme of jihad.

Said Buriatskii (Aleksandr Tikhomirov, 1982-2010) was an Islamic preacher, speaker of the terrorist group “Caucasus Emirate”, one of the ideologists of the North Caucasian jihadist underground, leader of the group of suicide bombers “Caucasus Emirate”, one of the organizers of some major terrorist attacks on the territory of Russian Federation.

Shamil Basaev (1965-2006), Chechen terrorist, one of the leaders and ideologists of the separatist and Islamist movement in the North Caucasus. He participated in military operations against Russian Federation in 1991-2006 and was the organizer and executor of a number of resonant terrorist acts. The United Nations, the US State Department and the European Union classified him as a terrorist.

Timur Mutsuraev (b. 1976) is a Chechen and Islamic author and singer of songs dedicated to jihad, Islam, Chechnya and the North Caucasus. Timur Mutsuraev was a militant who fought on the side of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in the 1990s. As the most popular singer in Russia and a musician who propagandizes jihad, he received the status of a “singer of jihad”.

Zelimkhan Yandarbiev (1952-2004), Chechen terrorist, one of the ideologists of Chechen separatist and jihadist movement in Chechnya. Former member of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1996-1997 he was the second president of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. Under his leadership, in the second half of the 1990s, the so-called Islamist turn of Chechen resistance to Moscow began.
Appendix 2.
Maps

https://www.loc.gov/item/2003630847/
Ethnolinguistic groups in the Caucasus region. Foto: Library of Congress
https://www.loc.gov/item/2005626531/
Het onderwerp van mijn dissertatie is het ontstaan en de ontwikkeling van Russischtalige jihadistische ideologie in de periode vanaf het begin van de jaren ‘90 tot aan het midden van de jaren 2000. Ik analyseer het intellectuele milieu in post-Sovjet Rusland dat propaganda van het militant jihadisme voorbracht, met een bijzondere nadruk op de Noord-Kaukasus. Ik bestudeer hoe de Russischsprekende jihad-ideologen opriepen tot de jihad en hoe zij hun strijd rechtvaardigden. In het selecteren van de hoofdrolspelers, wiens teksten ik analyseer, heb ik getracht om personen op te nemen uit verschillende perioden en generaties en uit verschillende groepen binnen het jihadistisch verzet in de Noord-Kaukasus. Ook heb ik de verschillende educatieve en professionele achtergronden van de activisten meegenomen in mijn overweging, evenals de mate waarin zij bekend zijn geworden bij een breder publiek.


Het tweede deel van dit proefschrift focust met name op een jongere generatie van strijders die, zoals ik betoog, bij hebben gedragen aan belangrijke veranderingen en innovaties in het discours van de jihad. Voor de casus van Dagestan begint mijn analyse met Nadirsjach Chatsjilajev (1958-2003) die – net als Doedajev, Oedoegov en andere Tsjetsjenen van de eerste generatie – heen en weer bewoog tussen politieke en militaire activiteiten. In de hoofdstukken van het tweede gedeelte van het boek analyseer ik vervolgens in meer detail het leven en de werken van Jasin Rasoelov (1975-2006), die werkte aan een PhD dissertatie voordat hij begon als ideoloog van de Dagestaanse “Sjaria” beweging op te treden; Anzor Astjemirov (1976-2010), leider van de Kabardino-Balkarische jama’at (islamitische

In het laatste hoofdstuk wordt Ajrat Vachitov (b. 1977) besproken, een Tataarse islamist wiens jihadistische carrière hem naar Tsjetsjenië, Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay en Turkije bracht. Vachitov is tevens de enige persoon met wie ik de mogelijkheid heb gehad om een interview af te nemen. Al deze personen hebben door hun geschreven werk en hun acties een hoge mate van bekendheid verworven in Rusland. Allen hebben zij actief geparticipeerd in militaire operaties en bijgedragen aan de verspreiding van gewelddadige ideologieën.

In de afzonderlijke hoofdstukken bestudeer ik eerst het biografische tijdspad van jihadistische ideologen om de sleutelmomenten of gebeurtenissen te identificeren die hun wereldbeeld hebben vormgegeven. Vervolgens analyseer ik hun eigen geschreven werk. Deze werkwijze stelt mij in staat om op bewijs gebaseerde aannames te maken over de ideationele herkomst van hun ideologische interpretaties en om een reconstructie te maken van de intellectuele context waarin deze ideologie is ontstaan.

Het hoofdargument in deze dissertatie is dat de Russischtalige jihadistische propagandadiscours niet alleen het resultaat is van een uit het buitenland “geïmporteerde” mosliminvloed, maar in eerste instantie gevoed werd door binnenlandse post-Sovjet processen die zich ontwouwen in Ruslands culturele sferen. Mijn werk impliceert dat jihadisme in Rusland gezien moet worden als een variant op een breder post-Sovjet radicalisme dat zijn oorsprong vindt in binnenlandse intellectuele trends.

Mijn onderzoek laat zien dat niet veel in het Russischtalige discours van de jihadisten specifiek Islamitisch was. In feite kan worden vastgesteld dat post-Sovjet jihadisten met name refereren naar Russische, Sovjet en Europese auteurs die reeds populariteit hadden verworven onder Russischsprekenden in de late Sovjet periode en post-Sovjet jaren, of aan schrijvers die ooit prominent zijn geweest in officiële of semiofficiële Sovjet narratieve. Eén belangrijke niet-moslim persoonlijkheid, wiens gedachtengoed herhaaldelijk wordt opgeroepen in de jihadistische teksten, is de Russische antropoloog Lev Goemiljov die door velen wordt gezien als één van de grondleggers van het neo-Eurazianisme.
Inhoudelijk reflecteert de jihadistische ideologie, in de periode zoals bestudeerd in deze studie, de ideeën en concepten, terminologieën en stilistiek zoals we die ook vinden in teksten van niet-moslim auteurs. Dit is te verklaren met behulp van de Sovjet en post-Sovjet ervaringen en de socialisatie van de eerste generatie jihadisten. Zij misten degelijk Islamitisch onderwijs en in de regel beheersten zij de Arabische taal niet. Echter, zelfs de ideologen die Islamitisch onderwijs hadden genoten, met name de landen in het Midden-Oosten, onthullen in hun geschreven programma’s stijlfiguren, afbeeldingen, discursieve strategieën en expressies die gezien moeten worden als typisch Sovjet of post-Sovjet en gevoed werden door Russische literatuur en Russisch onderwijs.

Jihadistische propagandisten waren ook beïnvloed door niet-moslim auteurs, die populair werden in de Russische cultuur na de val van de Sovjet Unie, en zelfs door Russische tradities van muziek. Deze formerende invloed ging vooraf aan de impact die uitstraalde van jihadistische ideologen in het Midden-Oosten. Het Russische jihadistische discours ontstond en was gevormd door de erfenis van deze niet-moslim auteurs en denkers.

Mijn studie laat zien dat het Russische en Sovjet culturele veld breed en flexibel genoeg was om ook ruimte te geven aan islamitisch radicalisme. Dit roept de vraag op tot welke academische discipline de studie naar het Noord-Kaukasische jihadisme behoort. Traditioneel valt het binnen het veld van Islamitische studies en gebiedsstudies met betrekking tot de noordelijke Kaukasus. Ik betoog echter dat de studie naar eigentijdse islamitische propaganda ook relevant is voor specialisten in de Sovjet- en Russische cultuur.

Post-Soviet Jihadism

Summary

The topic of my dissertation is the emergence and development of jihadi ideology in the Russian language, from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s. I analyze the intellectual environment that gave birth to the propaganda of militant jihadism in post-Soviet Russia, with special emphasis on the North Caucasus. I study how the Russophone ideologists of Jihadism called for jihad and how they justified their fight. The selection of protagonists whose texts I analyze is guided by the attempt to cover personalities of various periods/generations, and of
various groups within the jihadi resistance in the North Caucasus. I also take into consideration the different educational and professional backgrounds of the activists, as well as their prominence and the degree to which they have become known to a broader public.

In the first part of this thesis the reader will find some well-known names, in particular the first president of independent Chechnya/Ichkeria, Dzhokhar Dudaev (1944-1996); his successor Zelimkhan Yandarbiev (1952-2004); as well as Movladi Udugov (b. 1962), the creator of Kavkazcenter, and Shamil Basaev (1965-2006), who for many years was Russia's most-wanted terrorist. These men all belonged to what I call the first generation of Chechen Islamists; individually and as a group, they shaped the emergence of a modern discourse that enrooted jihad in Chechnya and the North Caucasus. These are the most well-known figures of the movement in their time, and they all were avid writers who experimented with practical and theoretical justifications of jihad.

The second part of the present work mainly focuses on a younger cohort of actors that, I argue, brought about important changes and innovations in the discourse of jihad. For Daghestan, my analysis starts with Nadirshakh Khachilaev (1958-2003), who – like Dudaev, Udugov and other Chechens of the first generation – oscillated between politics and militancy. The chapters of this second part of the book then analyze in more detail the life and works of Iasin Rasulov (1975-2006), who worked on a PhD dissertation on the local history of Islamism before he gained notorious fame as the ideologist of the Daghestani “Sharia” movement; Anzor Astemirov (1976-2010), leader of the Kabardino-Balkarian jama'at (Islamic community), and subsequently Sharia judge of the “Caucasus Emirate”; Said Buriatskii (Aleksandr Tikhomirov, 1982-2010), probably the most prominent speaker of the Caucasus Emirate; as well as the jihadi singer/songwriter Timur Mutsuraev (b. 1976), who still has a significant fan community in Russia. The final chapter presents Airat Vakhitov (b. 1977), a Tatar Islamist whose jihadist career brought him to Chechnya, Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, and Turkey; Vakhitov is also the only person whom I had the occasion to interview. All of these men gained utmost prominence in Russia, by their writings and their actions. They all actively participated in military actions and contributed to the spread of violence.

In the individual chapters I first study the biographical trajectories of the jihadi ideologists, in order to identify the key moments or events that shaped their worldview; then I proceed to analyze their own writings. This approach allows me to make evidence-based assumptions
about the ideational roots of their ideological interpretations, and to reconstruct the intellectual context in which this ideology emerged.

The core argument of the present thesis is that the Russophone jihadi propaganda discourse resulted not only from a Muslim influence "imported" from abroad. Rather, in the first place it fed from domestic post-Soviet processes that unfolded in the cultural sphere of the country. My work implies that jihadism in Russia must be regarded as a variant of a broader post-Soviet radicalism, which had its base in domestic ideational and intellectual trends.

My research demonstrates that there was not much specifically Islamic in the Russian-language discourse of the jihadists. Rather, what could be established is that post-Soviet jihadists make references above all to particular Russian, Soviet and European authors who already obtained popularity among Russian-speakers in the late Soviet and post-Soviet eras, or to writers who had once been prominent in Soviet official or semi-official narratives. One major non-Muslim personality whose thinking is constantly evoked in jihadi texts is the Russian anthropologist Lev Gumilev, who is widely seen as one of the founding fathers of Neo-Eurasianism.

Contentwise, the jihadi ideology of the era under consideration reflects the ideas and concepts, terminologies and stylistics that we also find in the texts of those non-Muslim authors. This must be explained by the Soviet and post-Soviet experiences and socialization of the first generations of jihadists; as a rule, they lacked a proper Islamic education and did not know the Arabic language. But even the ideologists that did obtain an Islamic education, primarily in the countries of the Middle East, reveal in their programmatic writings tropes, images, discursive strategies, and expressions that must be considered as typical Soviet or post-Soviet, and that feed from Russian literature and education. Even Russian musical traditions can be found back in jihadi culture. The Russian jihadi discourse therefore emerged, and was shaped, by these non-Muslim sources.

My dissertation demonstrates that the Russian and Soviet cultural field was broad and adaptable enough to also give room to Islamic radicalism. This raises the question to which academic discipline the study of North Caucasus jihadism belongs. Traditionally it falls into the field of Islamic studies and North Caucasus area studies. I argue, however, that the study of contemporary Islamist propaganda also speaks to specialists of Soviet and Russian culture.
Моя диссертация посвящена теме зарождения и развития идеологии русскоязычной джихадистской пропаганды в период между началом 1990-х и серединой 2000-х годов.

С этой целью я анализирую интеллектуальную среду, в которой появилась пропаганда военного джихада в постсоветской России, в первую очередь на Северном Кавказе. В рамках этого анализа я изучаю как русскоязычные идеологи джихадизма призывали к джихаду и обосновывали свою борьбу. Выбор идеологов, тексты которых я изучаю, обусловлен их принадлежностью к разным этапам и группам вооруженного противостояния на Северном Кавказе, различным образовательным и профессиональным опытом, а также степенью известности широкой аудитории.

В первой части этой диссертации читатель найдет известные имена, в частности, первого президента независимой Чечни/Ичкерии Джохара Дудаева (1944-1996); его преемника Зелимхана Яндарбиева (1952-2004); а также Мовлади Удугова (1962), создателя сайта «Kavkazcenter» и Шамиля Басаева (1965-2006), который на протяжении многих лет был самым разыскиваемым террористом России. Все эти люди принадлежали к тому, что я называю первым поколением чеченских исламистов; индивидуально и как группа, они сформировали возникновение современного джихадистского дискурса в Чечне и на Северном Кавказе. Перечисленные выше лица были страстными писателями; они экспериментировали с практическими и теоретическими обоснованиями джихада.

Вторая часть настоящей работы в основном сосредоточена на младшей когорте джихадистских идеологов, которые, как я утверждаю, привели к важным изменениям и нововведениям в джихадистском дискурсе. Для Дагестана мой анализ начинается с Надиршаха Хачилаева (1958-2003), который, подобно Дудаеву, Удугову и другим чеченцам первого поколения, колебался между политикой и воинственностью. Далее в главах этой второй части книги я более подробно анализирую жизнь и работы Ясина Расулова (1975-2006), который был аспирантом и работал над диссертацией о местных корнях исламизма до того что стал идеологом дагестанского движения «Шариат»; Анзор Астемиров (1976-2010), лидер Кабардино-Балкарского джамаата (исламского сообщества), а впоследствии шариатский судья «Имарата Кавказ»; Саид Бурятский
(Александр Тихомиров, 1982 - 2010), вероятно самый известный оратор «Имарат Кавказ»; а также джихадистский певец и автор песен Тимур Муцураев (1976 г.р.), у которого все еще есть значительное сообщество поклонников в России. В заключительной главе представлен Айрат Вахитов (1977 г.р.), татарский исламист, чья «карьера» привела его в Чечню, Афганистан, Гуантанамо и Турцию; Вахитов также единственный человек, с которым у меня была возможность лично провести интервью. Все эти люди благодаря их произведениям и действиям получили довольно большую известность в России. Все они активно участвовали в военных действиях и способствовали распространению насилиственных идей.

Каждая глава диссертации построена таким образом, что сначала я изучаю биографические траектории джихадистских идеологов, чтобы выявить ключевые пункты, которые повлияли на становление их мировоззрений; затем перехожу к анализу их текстов. Такой подход позволяет мне выявить идеологические корни их идеологии и реконструировать интеллектуальный контекст в котором эта идеология появилась.

Основной аргумент диссертации заключается в том, что появление русскоязычного пропагандистского джихадистского дискурса было результатом не только мусульманского влияния из-за рубежа, но в первую очередь результатом внутренних постсоветских процессов, которые происходили в интеллектуальной и культурной сферах страны. Таким образом, на мой взгляд, джихадизм в России был примером постсоветского радикализма, который формировался на отечественной идеологической и интеллектуальной базе.

Мое исследование показало, что в русскоязычном джихадистском дискурсе этого периода, собственно говоря, специфически исламского не так уж и много. В основном, мы наблюдаем, что постсоветские джихадистские идеологии ссылаются на тех русских/советских и европейских авторов, которые либо приобрели особую популярность в русскоязычной среде в поздне- или постсоветское время, либо были важной частью еще советского официозного нарратива. Джихадистская идеология отражала идеи, терминологию и стилистику этих немусульманских авторов. Это объясняется тем, что имея богатый советский и постсоветский опыт социализации, первые поколения джихадистов не имели мусульманского образования и, как правило, не знали арабского языка. Но даже в текстах тех идеологов, которые имели исламское
образование, полученное в странах Ближнего Востока, также чувствовался сильный интеллектуальный отпечаток постсоветского времени.

Влияние немусульманских авторов, которые стали популярны в русской культуре после коллапса Советского Союза, на русскоязычных джихадистских идеологов началось заметно раньше, чем влияние на этих идеологов исламистских пропагандистов с Ближнего Востока. Таким образом, русский джихадистский дискурс формируется и даже рождается из идей и наследия этих немусульманских авторов. Одна из основных немусульманских личностей, чье мышление постоянно проявляется в джихадистских текстах – русский антрополог Лев Гумилев, который общепризнано является одним из отцов-основателей нео-евразийства.

Мое исследование показало, что поле советской и русской культуры оказывается достаточно широким для того, чтобы там нашлось место для исламского радикализма. Значимость русского советского и постсоветского культурных факторов в формировании идеологии джихадистской пропаганды, который я выявил в своем исследовании, позволяет поставить вопрос о том, к предметной области какой научной дисциплины относится изучение джихадистской идеологии на Северном Кавказе.

Традиционно тема джihadа и идеологии джихадистских движений в этом регионе в большой степени относилась к предметной области исламоведения или регионоведения Северного Кавказа. Для специалистов же по русской культуре эта тема, как правило, оказывалась за пределами научного интереса. Однако выявленная мною релевантность пропаганды постсоветского джихадизма тем процессам, которые протекали в культурной и интеллектуальной жизни российского общества, демонстрирует, что мусульманская среда Северного Кавказа является богатым и интересным полем для специалистов и по русской культуре.