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Religious political technology: Damir Mukhetdinov’s ‘Russian Islam’

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ABSTRACT
This contribution introduces the concept of ‘religious political technology’ (RPT), using as a case study the strategies of Damir Mukhetdinov, deputy mufti of the Moscow-based muftiate DUMRF. RPT encompasses the construction and professional dissemination of an ideological platform that presents religion – in this case Islam – as an asset to the state and the nation. Mukhetdinov’s RPT is historically enrooted in Russia’s Islamic discourse (through references to Tatar intellectuals and theologians of the late imperial period), and presented as loyal, tolerant, peaceful and modern – and at the same time as ‘traditionalist’. His RPT is meant to appeal to mainstream trends in Russian society (including Neo-Eurasianism and Slavophile thought), to the Orthodox Church, and to the Kremlin; it also presents itself as an instrument of Russia’s foreign policy. At the same time, Mukhetdinov’s provocative statements meet strong opposition.

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Introduction

‘Political technology’ usually refers to the work of media-savvy Kremlin advisers who produce slogans and narratives that manipulate the public discourse in favour of the government, especially around crises and election times. In Russia’s hybrid political system, these public relations (PR) experts are seen as ‘grey cardinals’ who, in the service of their client/master, camouflage Russia’s well-known democratic deficit, and defend against what is perceived as harmful western interventions. Russia’s political technologists have the task to limit democracy, to ‘manage’ or obstruct the opposition, and to defend the regime; names that come to mind are Vladislav Surkov (who introduced the slogan of ‘sovereign democracy’) or Gleb Pavlovskii (‘countering the colour revolutions’) (Etkind and Shcherbak 2008; Wilson 2005). From the Kremlin’s perspective, their projects help maintain stability in a highly volatile domestic and foreign environment. Various political technologists compete for access to the state elite networks and particularly to the presidential apparatus; some also establish a public profile through self-designed think tanks, and in particular through regular media appearances.

In this contribution I raise the question of how far the field of religion is subject to political technology. This question is legitimate with regard to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC); the Moscow Patriarchate has produced a flood of politically coloured position papers and
narratives that portray the ROC as a defining element of Russian identity, and as the moral backbone of the state. But there is also an internal competition within the ROC establishment and at grassroots level: various political visions of Orthodoxy are developed at the same time (Agadjanian 2010, 2017; Curanović 2013; Sibgattullina 2017).

I argue that Islam also lends itself for political technology, with Muslim religious officials as the prominent figureheads. In the Russian Islamic discourse, competing political interpretations are embedded in the regional and ethnic histories of Islamic thought, and in the identity politics of Russia’s many Muslim ethnicities. Religious political technologists present their new paradigms as based on the ideas of Islamic scholars and intellectuals from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For this reason, a study of their projects requires an analysis of why certain historical models are selected and integrated. The emphasis of this contribution is on the relevance of theological thought in contemporary ideology construction. It is not my intention to establish whether expressions of religious belief and historical identity are sincere or just part of a political game; nor do I want to assess the potential danger for democracy, security and religion/spirituality that comes with religious political technology (RPT). Rather, this contribution contextualises such pragmatic identity projects, both vertically (in time) and horizontally (in interaction with other trends and projects). I should add that the present contribution does not discuss the religious projects of private religious activists who operate beyond the officially recognised faith organisations (on these see Bustanov and Kemper 2017).

The setting: fragmentation of Islamic authority

Russia has no undisputed Islamic authority in theological or legal matters: there is no ‘Islamic Patriarch’. The administration of Islam is spread over more than 60 ‘Spiritual Administrations of Muslims’ (DUMs, sg. Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul’mан). Most of these muftiates are only of republican/regional or local significance, but some have the ambition to represent all of Russia’s Muslims and act as umbrellas for other DUMs. One major player is still the Central Mufti in Ufa (TsDUM, headed by Talgat Tadzhuddin, b. 1948, in office since 1980). This umbrella DUM is the successor of the imperial/Soviet muftiate that was responsible for Islam in all of European Russia and Siberia. TsDUM’s major competitor is the DUM of the Russian Federation (DUMRF) in Moscow. Headed by Ravil Gainutdin (b. 1959), this muftiate was established in 1996 as an offshoot of Tadzhuddin’s TsDUM but soon went into opposition to Tadzhuddin by forming an alliance (the Council of Russia’s Muftis, Совет муфтиев России) with several regional Tatar DUMs that had emerged in the early 1990s (Tul’tskiï 2004). Prominent journalists of Russian nationalist and Orthodox convictions favour Tadzhuddin over Gainutdin, and they regularly attack the latter’s Council of Russia’s Muftis and DUMRF (Silant’ev 2013, 2015a).

In 2016, a new DUM with federal aspirations was formed in Moscow, headed by Al’bir Krganov (b. 1976) from Chuvashia, formerly a deputy to Tadzhuddin in Ufa; Krganov’s ‘DUM of the Muslims of Russia’ quickly managed to attract several local and regional DUMs previously affiliated with Tadzhuddin’s Central DUM in Ufa (Priimak 2016b).

The result of this inner-Islamic competition is that many cities host two or more competing local muftiates that ally either with Tadzhuddin, Krganov or Gainutdin. In-between are the ‘republican’ DUMs that maintain their independence from the three central players, such as the DUM of the Republic of Tatarstan (currently headed by Mufti Kamil’ Samigullin, b. 1985).
All of the above-mentioned muftis in European Russia are ethnic Tatars. With the exception of Samigullin and Krganov, they all received their Islamic education at the Soviet Mir-i Arab madrasa in Bukhara, which functioned under heavy KGB control (Tasar 2016); their level of formal Islamic education is generally regarded as limited, and to the best of my knowledge, only one of them, Gainutdin (2011, 2012) has authored major works on Islam that established him as a theologian. All claim to represent the same mainstream Sunni Islam (in the forms of Ḥanafi Islamic law and Māturīdī theology), and in their official statements all subscribe to the ‘traditionalism’ paradigm, that is, to the ROC- and Kreml-induced dogma that Russia’s Islam must be ‘traditional’ (home-grown), loyal, peaceful, tolerant and compatible with what is presented as Russia’s conservative values (Kovalskaya 2017; Stepanova 2015). To be sure, some muftis present themselves as more autonomous personalities than others; but for their ambitious mosque-construction plans as well as for their Islamic schools and universities, they all depend on funds from the Kremlin and the regional administrations.

In Russia’s North Caucasus republics, the national muftiates act independently from the Tatar muftiates of Inner Russia. Here the major personality is Chechnya’s President Ramzan Kadyrov, who uses Islam to bolster his authority through the Chechen Kunta Hajji Sufi network (Vatchagaev 2014), but who increasingly also positions himself as the spokesperson of Muslims in all of the Russian Federation (RF) (Laruelle 2017, 19–25; Ekho Moskvy 2017). In August 2016, Kadyrov had the Muftiate of Chechnya convene an international Islamic conference that resulted in a resolution (fatwā) defining what Sunni Islam is supposed to be and what it is not. In particular, the document excluded ‘Wahhabism’ (but also representatives of several Islamic international organisations) from Sunni Islam (Iusupov 2016). The fatwā was backed by upstart Mufti Krganov in Moscow, who obviously believed it was supported by the Kremlin; yet both Tadzhuddin and Gainutdin refused to attend the Grozny conference, and Gainutdin later argued that the fatwā amounts to an act of takfīr – the declaration of another Muslim as unbeliever (kāfir) – that splits Russia’s Muslim community (OnKavkaz 2016). Soon also the prominent Syrian and Egyptian delegates to the Grozny conference understood they had been used for a controversial agenda, and Islamic authorities from Saudi Arabia (where Wahhabism is regarded as the state form of Islam) heavily protested (Priimak 2016a). Meanwhile Gainutdin’s Council of Muftis took offence that the Grozny fatwā presented Sufism as the highest form of Islamic morality and disregarded the Tatar heritage of Jadidism (Islamic reformism/modernism) (Sovet muftiev Rossiï 2016a). In October 2016, Gainutdin’s muftis came up with their own fatwā against ‘pseudo-Islamic’ radicalism; this Moscow fatwā identified the actions that violate Islam (esp. pretence of exclusivity, use of violence, denigration of Muslims, intolerance towards other views) but refrained from ‘excommunicating’ individual groups or organisations (Sovet muftiev Rossiï 2016b). There is thus a fierce and unresolved competition for Islamic authority in Russia, with different historical and theological models as anchor points.

**Religious political technology**

The fragmentation of officially recognised Islamic authority is widely regarded as a problem for the organisation of Islam in Russia, and for countering radical trends; and, as the senior Muftis are approaching retirement age, one might wonder whether at one point the Kremlin will push for a unification of Russia’s Islamic bureaucracies into one unit. I argue that this situation stimulates the various players to suggest new
political platforms that present Islam not as a threat to the state but as its resource. This is what I call religious political technology (RPT). Islamic RPT comprises the production of political concepts, narratives and slogans with reference to the Islamic tradition, the history of Islam in Russia, and the place of Muslims in the RF. These RPT products are brought into the public discourse, and in particular to the attention of Kremlin authorities, with the hope that the latter will understand their usefulness and embrace them.

An Islamic RPT product has to offer solutions for several problems, and to respond to a whole range of what the technologist assumes is expected by state and society. It must appear as loyal to the elites, irrespective of whether these are Muslim, Christian or atheist. It must project itself as a stronghold against jihadism and radicalism, however the latter is defined; it must promise to prevent the Muslim youth from being radicalised. Islamic RPT in Russia operates in a secular environment but can take the political achievements of the ROC as a model; at the same time, it must not appear as too close to the church. Like the ROC, it must contain religious contenders that are stigmatised as ‘foreign’ intruders, and must be based, at least rhetorically, on one or several of Russia’s home-grown traditions of Islam. It must furthermore promise to facilitate the administration and regulation of Islam in Russia, and to establish a reliable centralised system of Islamic education that can also be presented as conforming to the regular standards of secular education. Importantly, an Islamic RPT project must convince the Kremlin and the Russian public that it is compatible with the mainstream non-Islamic view of Russia’s history and identity; and while it may shake up the established Islamic authorities, it should not appear as a threat to the ‘traditionalism’ paradigm designed by and for the ROC. Finally, it should support Russia’s foreign policies, in particular towards the Muslim world but ideally also towards the West; here again Islamic RPT can build on the experience of the ROC (Curanović 2012; Payne 2010; Stoeckl 2012). This is a tall order.

While RPT addresses non-Muslim audiences in the first place, it is built on the expectation that ultimately also the Muslim public will identify it as ‘their’ vision of Islam, and that the competing Islamic authorities will be forced to cease their opposition. Islamic RPT thus builds on the erosion of traditional scholarly authority in the twentieth century, and on the rise of Muslim intellectuals as self-declared political and religious leaders of their communities. Given the repression and marginalisation of Islamic institutions in the Soviet era, this erosion of scholarly authority has been particularly strong in Russia, and has, since the late 1980s, cleared the way for a plethora of new Islamic trends, imported from abroad or developed domestically. Islamic RPT promises to overcome this wild growth of interpretations by offering a unifying ‘middle way’ that is both inclusive (acceptable to the state, Muslims and society) and exclusive (opposing what is perceived as radical, dangerous and, from a theological position, as erroneous and unscientific). This is a recipe for conflict.

A first Islamic RPT project came in 2002–2003, under the ‘Russian Islam’ (Russkii Islam) programme, developed under the aegis of Sergei Kirienko (at that time the Russian Presidential envoy to the Volga Federal District, based in Nizhnii Novgorod). Its architect and public face was the young political scientist Sergei Gradirovskii, who at that time also started to work for Russkii Mir’s electronic resources. Gradirovskii’s aim was to foster ‘an Islam of Russian culture’ (‘ruuskokul’turnyi islam’). As Gradirovskii stated in 2002, ‘it is good that the Russian language has become a means of communication [for Russia’s Muslims, including immigrants], but even better if it becomes [their] symbol of identity: things that entered the Russian language become culturally predictable (kul’tumo predskazuemym)’. Gradirovskii thus called for an ‘Islam that has taken on a Russian form (islam priniavshii formu russkogo)’. 
The major gateway was through establishing control on Muslim education in Russia, including the production of textbooks and Islamic literature; convincing Muslims of the benefits of integration would allow the state to refrain from repressive policies (Gradirovskii 2003). While the programme itself was soon abandoned, the policy it promoted remained in place: since that time the Kremlin regulates Islam not only through enhanced control but also through generous funding, which is distributed through a Moscow-based Fund for the Support of Islamic Culture and Education.

In what follows, I discuss the major follow-up project of Gradirovskii’s ‘Russian Islam’, which has been designed and conducted by Damir Mukhetdinov, Deputy Mufti of DUMRF in Moscow. A brief discussion of how Mukhetdinov established himself as a religious political technologist in Moscow will be followed by an analysis of his programmatic essay ‘Russia’s Islam’ (Rossiiskoe musul’manstvo) (Mukhetdinov 2015a, second ed., 2016a). I explore the strategies Mukhetdinov employs to meet the assumed expectations that I suggested above.

**DUMRF’s assertive deputy**

Damir Mukhetdinov (b. 1977) embodies the generational change in Russia’s Islamic scene: he began to unfold his talents under the patronage of two established Soviet-educated Muftis but then gradually left their shadow. Born in 1977 in Nizhnii Novgorod into a wealthy Mishar-Tatar family whose ancestors worked as imams in a Tatar village of the region (Mukhetdinov 2007, 124–125), in 1993 Mukhetdinov was sent to the newly founded Nur al-Islam madrasa in Oktiabrsk, Bashkortostan. Several teachers there were Arabs who had studied at al-Azhar in Egypt, and they put a focus on modern Arabic language acquisition, to the detriment of the classical disciplines of Islamic law and theology. As Mukhetdinov claims today, he left the school in 1995 when a teacher started to spread Salafi ideas (Mukhetdinov 2016g). Later the school was closed for allegations of radicalism.

Starting in 1996, Mukhetdinov worked for Mufti Umar Idrisov (b. 1954) of the Nizhnii Novgorod region; he became head of a local madrasa, Friday preacher of the city’s main mosque (1999), and chief of staff of the Nizhnii Novgorod DUM (in 2004). In these years he saw the rise and fall of Gradirovskii’s ‘Russian Islam’ programme that was centred on Nizhnii Novgorod. In-between he enrolled at the Umm al-Qur University in Medina (Saudi Arabia), from where he supposedly graduated in 1999, and studied international relations at the University of Nizhnii Novgorod, earning him a degree in political studies in 2006.

In Nizhnii he established an Islamic publishing house, Medina, which would become one of the largest of its kind in Russia. Together with other Muslim academic historians from Nizhnii Novgorod, Kazan and Moscow, Mukhetdinov started organising religious and scholarly conferences on Islam. The DUMRF/Medina journal that he edits, Islam v sovremennom mire (‘Islam in the Modern World’, appearing since 2005, freely downloadable), has become one of Russia’s major Islamic studies outlets. Another impressive achievement is Mukhetdinov’s ongoing encyclopaedia project ‘Islam in the Russian Federation’.

In 2009, Mukhetdinov transferred to Ravil Gainutdin’s Muftiature of European Russia (DUMER, since 2014 running as DUMRF, thereby laying a claim on Islam in all of the RF). With him came Damir Khairetdinov (b. 1972), who would later become rector of DUMRF’s Moscow Islamic Institute as well as Mukhetdinov’s publishing house Medina. This transfer provided Mufti Gainutdin’s DUMRF in Moscow with the academic prestige that it so far
lacked, and – as I observed myself on several occasions – with a charismatic organiser who inspires DUMRF’s young imams. In 2011, Mukhetdinov became Mufti Gainutdin’s first deputy, in charge of organising the Muftiade’s apparatus. Here it should be mentioned that crucial positions in DUMRF are occupied by ethnic Tatars from the Mishar sub-group from the Upper Volga region and Moscow; their strained relations with the Kazan Tatar muftis of the Middle Volga and Urals therefore has ‘sub-ethnic’ overtones.

For DUMRF and its Council of Russia’s Muftis, Mukhetdinov manages relations to muftiates in other CIS republics with the goal to develop a broader Council of post-Soviet/Eurasian Muftis, and to strengthen relations with Turkey; both Mukhetdinov and Gainutdin are active in the Diyanet-led Eurasian Islamic Council (Mukhetdinov 2016f). In my conversations with him Mukhetdinov stressed that in 2014–2015 he was much involved in the Crimea, as he says in an attempt to integrate the Crimean DUM into Russia’s Islamic landscape (Mukhetdinov 2016c). All of Russia’s major muftis tried to draw Crimean Mufti Ablaev to their side (DUMER 2014; QHA 2014), but this has been a minefield given the Crimean Tatar organisations’ opposition to the annexation. Eventually the Crimean DUM fell under direct control of the Kremlin and the local Russian administration.

A major PR success for Mufti Gainutdin and his deputy Mukhetdinov was the official inauguration of the splendid Moscow Cathedral mosque in 2015; the event was attended by the presidents of both the RF and Turkey (Korrespondent.net 2015). When relations between Putin and Erdogan broke down in November 2015, Mukhetdinov and Gainutdin maintained their contacts with Ankara’s Diyanet, for which they were heavily criticised in the Russian press (e.g. Silant’ev 2015b). However, when in the summer of 2016 the official collaboration between the two countries resumed, Mukhetdinov could boast that DUMRF had facilitated this rapprochement, and had operated as Russia’s ‘special forces’ in the Muslim world (Mukhetdinov 2016e). This episode demonstrates that for RPT, times of crisis can be turned into opportunities.

In the same year, Gainutdin appointed Mukhetdinov as DUMRF muḥtasib (‘overseer’) of St. Petersburg and Leningrad oblast’, in addition to Mukhetdinov’s responsibilities in Moscow. The goal of this move was to establish a strong DUMRF foothold on the Neva, obviously with as the major prize the magnificent St. Petersburg mosque, built in the Central Asian style and inaugurated in 1913. The mosque had been run by the respected Mir-i Arab graduate Dzhabiat Ponchaev (1940–2012), who remained loyal to Tadzhuddin’s Central DUM in Ufa. In 2012 the mosque and its DUM came under the directorship of Ponchaev’s son Ravil, who fell out with Tadzhuddin but seemingly still enjoys the support of the St. Petersburg city administration (Kurchuk 2016).

Mukhetdinov now presents himself as a more dynamic public face of Islam in St. Petersburg, and established a DUMRF Islamic centre in the city. Through his links with St. Petersburg’s academic institutions he designs a ‘scientific image’ of St. Petersburg Islam; with support from the Hermitage Museum Director and Arabist Mikhail Piotrovskii, he set up a cooperation with St. Petersburg State University, where a study pathway was established to provide academic education to the graduates of DUMRF’s Moscow Islamic college (Mukhetdinov 2016d). In Moscow, Mukhetdinov even became deputy director of the Center for Arabic and Islamic Studies at Lomonosov State University.

The importance of academic links is also reflected in DUMRF’s strong promotion of Professor Taufik K. Ibragim’s concept of ‘Quranic Humanism’, a fervent argument for the
non-violent character of the Quran (Ibragim 2015). A secular specialist in the history of Islamic speculative theology (kalām), the Syrian-Russian Ibragim (b. 1947) is senior researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow. In the capital and in St. Petersburg, Mukhetdinov assembles Russian Orientalists and historians at DUMRF’s popular-academic conference series (all named after well-known Tatar Muslim cultural and religious reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the so-called Jadids), and he is also seen as the brain behind DUMRF’s bigger conventions of Islamic authorities; these are usually co-financed by Diyanet or Iranian organisations. But Mukhetdinov (2016c) also claims to be on good terms with Hilarion (Alfeev, b. 1966), Bishop of Volokolamsk and influential member of the governing council of the ROC.

Meanwhile, Mukhetdinov regularly came under fire for public statements that are regarded as targeted provocations. While still working in Nizhnii Novgorod, he criticised that Putin and other state leaders regularly attend ROC mass, with much less attention being paid to Islam (Regions.ru 2009). In 2012, Mukhetdinov – by then member of the Public Chamber – suggested that in Muslim regions like Daghestan, education should not be primarily in Russian but in native languages; as he warned, the enforcement of Russian would just estrange the youth and drive them into radicalism. As could be expected, many Muslim and non-Muslim public figures strongly rejected this argument, which they said was disrespectful to the role of Russian for maintaining a common RF identity (Regions.ru 2012). Since then, Mukhetdinov and DUMRF began to accentuate the positive role of the Russian language also for Islam in Russia, as Gulnaz Sibgatullina explains in her contribution to this collection (on Islamic language strategies, see also Brylov 2018).

With his provocations, Mukhetdinov earns a lot of critique also from Russia’s senior muftis, who feel threatened by Mukhetdinov’s ambitions. The Chechen Mufti Mirzaev publicly declared that Mukhetdinov had ‘nothing to do with true Islam’ (Mirzaev 2013). In the Presidential Administration, up to 2011 the person in charge of relations with Islamic organisations was Aleksei Grishin, who openly favoured Talgat Tadzhuddin and clashed with Ravil Gainutdin and Mukhetdinov (Asiannews 2010). With Grishin’s removal, the Kremlin seems to have taken a position of equidistance towards Russia’s major Islamic centres, thereby enlarging the space for RPT competition.

**Neo-Eurasianism**

Mukhetdinov explicated his positions in a long programmatic essay, entitled Rossiiskoe musul’manstvo (‘Russia’s Islam’; literally, ‘The Muslim Community of the Russian Federation’) (Mukhetdinov 2015a, 2016a). In this book, Mukhetdinov elaborates what he thinks are the specifics of Islam in Russia and discusses the role of Russia’s Muslim community in Russia, Eurasia and in the world. I argue that the book is an RPT position paper; it provides the foundation for his claim to Muslim leadership in cooperation with the state.

A central element of Mukhetdinov’s Rossiiskoe musul’manstvo is an embrace of Neo-Eurasianism, which the author identifies as the most influential mode of geopolitical thinking among contemporary Russia’s elites (Mukhetdinov 2016a, 27). Neo-Eurasianism assumes a historical and organic link between the East Slavic and the Turkic worlds, between Orthodox and Muslim peoples – a continental civilisation opposing the ‘Atlanticist’ West. While there are also Kazakh and other trends of Neo-Eurasianism, Mukhetdinov clearly connects with the version that mostly appeals to those who wish to
restore Russia’s glory and power in the world, which becomes a new ‘ideology of empire’ (Laruelle 2008) in the postsoviet area.

For Mukhetdinov, the new Eurasian paradigm defends traditional values, traditional multiculturalism (the peaceful coexistence of Russia’s autochthonous cultures) and moderate conservatism (5). In several historical, philosophical and geopolitical excursions, Mukhetdinov attempts to show that these three elements also define Russia’s Muslim community, which is ‘the core (jadro) of Russian conservatism’ (47). Muslims therefore have full right to be recognised as an active contributor to Neo-Eurasianism, as a foundation for Russia’s and Eurasia’s distinct identity in a multipolar world. But Neo-Eurasianism is for Mukhetdinov only a conglomerate of individual positions; this unfinished state of Neo-Eurasianism, as a ‘proto-ideology’ (5, 27), allows Muslims to contribute to its design.

According to Mukhetdinov, Muslims have to integrate their Islamic discourse into Russia’s broader public sphere; the Russian state provides opportunities for this, but Russia’s Muslims have so far been silent, or have been silenced by the mainstream intellectual elite. Already the well-known founding fathers of modern Eurasianism in the early twentieth century completely neglected the potential of Russia’s Muslims. But as Russia’s demographics have been changing – Mukhetdinov assumes that by 2030, more than 20% of Russia’s population will be Muslim (20) – the weight of Muslims and of Islam will naturally increase and give them more of a voice. The only alternatives to ‘moving in the direction of the Russian Federation’s ideological trend’ – Neo-Eurasianism – would be to copy foreign Islamic or European models, and thereby lose their own Muslim tradition and identity.

In line with this embrace of Neo-Eurasianism and the discourse of ‘traditionalism’ are Mukhetdinov’s crude attacks on the West, Europe or the ‘Euro-Atlantic zone’. The West has, in the eyes of the author, lost its spirituality, and succumbed to hedonism and ‘ultraliberalism’ (6, 59–61). With a reference to a work written by the popular Neo-Eurasianist Aleksandr Dugin, Mukhetdinov makes the Frankfurt School of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno as well as French leftists and postmodernists responsible for the decline of moral values in the West (56). Mukhetdinov’s favourite targets are western feminists, the LGBT movement, and striders for the legalisation of homosexual marriage. He depicts Europe as a ‘dictatorship of minorities’, as being on its way to making ‘unnatural sexual relations’ the norm (59). In Mukhetdinov’s view, Europe has marginalised religion and removed it from the public sphere; secularism, as practised in France or Switzerland, is an attempt to suppress religious citizens, and in particular Muslims. As he contends, the West is exporting its concepts of secularism and liberalism also to other parts of the world, in a policy of colonisation and exploitation (66).

A closer reading, however, reveals a number of ambiguities in this assault on the West. What is needed for Russia’s Muslims, according to Mukhetdinov, is a combination of traditional values and the modernisation that came from Europe. Mukhetdinov claims he understands European Christians and conservatives who are concerned about the rise of Islam in Europe; and he hopes Muslims in Europe will ultimately stop voting for leftist parties and instead establish alliances with the European conservatives (96). He even suggests that ‘Russian Islam’ be a model for conservative European Muslims. It should be noted that DUMRF recently intensified its outreach to Muslim organisations in France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Finland; to that end, Mukhetdinov also published an English translation of his book (Mukhetdinov 2016b).
Mukhetdinov is not the first to promote an Islamic form of Eurasianism; since the 1990s several Muslim leaders have flirted with Eurasianism (Shlapentokh 2008; Laruelle 2008: chs 5 and 6), including DUMRF’s opponent Mufti Talgat Tadzhuddin who once joined Dugin’s Eurasia party (Silant’ev 2008, 78–79). Islamic-Eurasian combinations were also voiced by radical Islamic intellectuals such as the controversial Muscovite Geidar Dzhemal’ (1947–2016), who called for an Islamic revolution with a Russian or Caucasian Muslim vanguard (Laruelle 2016; Sibgatullina and Kemper 2017). These projects are all, in one way or another, linked to concepts of ‘traditionalism’ (or in the case of Dzhemal’, esoteric ‘Traditionalism’ in the sense of René Guenon). What is new about Mukhetdinov’s project is that he enroots his concepts historically in Jadidism, the intellectual Tatar heritage of educational and theological reform along European models. Jadidism is usually understood as a movement that opposed the ‘traditional’ Islamic scholars of its time. In the light of the dominant ‘traditionalism’ discourse in Russia, Mukhetdinov presents these reformers as representing the real Islamic tradition, namely that of modernisation. By combining ‘traditionalism’ with ‘modernisation’, Mukhetdinov’s message is obviously meant to speak to various groups in Russia’s government.

**Neo-Jadidism**

Mukhetdinov praises a whole range of Tatar Jadid intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who sought to introduce modern European elements into the curricula of Muslim schools in Tsarist Russia, and stresses their relevance for our time: ‘As the Jadids said, the Muslim population needs help from people with a European education. Radicalism can only be defeated by universal education (proveshchenie), by modernisation, and by the development of tolerance’ (74).

One of Mukhetdinov’s key witnesses is the famous Crimean Tatar intellectual, journalist and pedagogue Ismail Gasprinskii (1851–1914), whose 1881 brochure Russkoe musul’manstvo (‘The Russian Muslimhood’) provided a blueprint for Mukhetdinov’s Rossiiskoe musul’manstvo. Back in 1881, Gasprinskii reflected on the relations between Imperial Russia and its Muslims. He argued that Russia’s Muslims were fully loyal to the Russian state and the Tsar, but that they were still completely indifferent to Russian social and political life, and ignorant of modern civilisation. According to Gasprinskii, Muslim communities were stuck in backwardness (ostalost’) and obscurantism, lived their own lives, had their independent religious authorities and structures, and cared little about the fatherland that they shared with Orthodox Christians.

Like Mukhetdinov today, Gasprinskii found that the Russians know very little about the Muslim subjects of the empire, and that the authorities have showed little interest in enlightening Russia’s Muslims. The few state-sponsored ‘Russian-native’ schools failed to familiarise Muslims with Russia – all time and energy was just wasted on language drill. An effective sblizhenie (‘rapprochement’), in the sense of drawing the Muslims closer to the Russian nation and of instilling patriotic values in them, could in Gasprinskii’s mind only be achieved by providing the full range of modern education, that is, by a curriculum that includes subjects as ‘knowledge of the fatherland’, geography, history, law and sciences, plus vocational subjects.

According to Gasprinskii’s main argument in 1881, this would only be possible by using the native languages for instruction, which for most of Russia’s Muslims were
‘Turkic’/Tatar and its local variants. If run by Muslim teachers, reformed madrasas would obtain wide acceptance among the Muslim communities. Their well-educated graduates would automatically be motivated to also learn Russian, as they could now fully understand the advantages of integration in Russia’s society at large. Gasprinskii ended with requesting a modest budget to start reforming nine madrasas in various cities, from Baku and Tashkent over the Crimea to Kazan, Ufa and Orenburg, and also made a case for permitting Islamic journalism as a means to spread up-to-date information among Muslims (Gasprinskii 1881).

Although the Tsarist government did not fund Gasprinskii’s proposals, the authorities did allow him to start a first Muslim newspaper, Tarjumān/Perevodchik which in 1883 began publishing in Turkic/Crimean Tatar, with each contribution also printed in Russian translation. Soon after, Gasprinskii established a reformed school in Bakhchisarai that offered modern subjects at the expense of religious disciplines and Arabic. His model school was soon copied by teachers from the Volga-Urals, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and Gasprinskii became the founding father of the modernist movement of Jadidism (named after the ‘new method’, uṣūl-i jādīd) that by 1917 dominated among the urban Tatar schools in Russia (Lazzerini 1973).

Like Gasprinskii in 1881, also Mukhetdinov emphasises the loyalty of Russia’s Muslims and their need for modern education and argues that the state so far has failed to understand that Russia’s Muslims are an asset, not a threat. Like his famous predecessor, Mukhetdinov addresses the Russian public in the first place, not his co-religionists. And already Gasprinskii’s brochure contained elements that with hindsight can be regarded as ‘Eurasianist’: Gasprinskii argued that the Muslim Tatars of the Golden Horde saved Russia from detrimental western influences and thereby contributed to the unification of Russia under Muscovy; he suggested that Russia had a moral obligation towards its Muslim subjects and should ‘pay back’ for past services by promoting European education among them (Gasprinskii 1881, 11–13). Mukhetdinov adds more weight to this argument by stressing the demographic growth of Russia’s Muslim population, which will by necessity transform into political weight (2016a, 78f).

At first sight it seems strange that Deputy Mufti Mukhetdinov takes the secular intellectual Gasprinskii as his historical model. For the latter, the backwardness of Russia’s Muslims was maintained by imams and Sufis; immune to modern knowledge, these Islamic elites were responsible for the educational stagnation. At the same time, Gasprinskii carefully argued that this backwardness had in principle nothing to do with Islam, which he portrayed as the religion of progress. Also Mukhetdinov emphasises the rational character of Islam, and he suggests that the entrenched Islamic establishments in Russia’s regions form an obstacle for Muslims to reach their full potential.

But Mukhetdinov has also a major religious historical anchor point, namely the radical modernist theologian Mūsā Jārallāh Bigī (Bigiev, b. ca. 1873, d. in Cairo in 1949). Bigiev criticised traditional Islam from within the Islamic discourse, and in Islamic genres. In his 1911 Tatar treatise Rahmat-i ilāhiyya burnānlarī (‘Proofs for the Divine Mercy’), Bigiev criticised the mainstream Māturidī and Ash’arī tradition of Islamic theology, and in particular their assumption that non-Muslims are condemned to eternally dwell in Hell (Bigiev 2005, 77–130). Based on Quranic statements that emphasise God’s encompassing mercy, Bigiev argued that God’s promise of salvation is valid not only for pious Muslims, and not only for ‘nominal’ Muslims, but for all mankind, because it is inconceivable that
God gives eternal punishment to people who had only a short lifetime to prove themselves. Bigiev combined this conviction with crude attacks on the traditional theologians, who in return called him an unbeliever. Bigiev himself claimed that no man has the right to conduct takfīr, that is, to exclude other Muslims from Islam. Bigiev’s theological arguments were encapsulated in a framework of scientific evolutionism; for him, the religion of any nation reflects the historical context in which it developed, and therefore any nation’s religion has to be respected (77–81).

Since the 1990s, Islamic radicals regularly proclaim takfīr of their enemies, which can amount to a death sentence, with many Islamic dignitaries and Sufi masters having been assassinated, especially in the North Caucasus (Kemper and Shikhaliev 2016). In European Russia, the most prominent victim of Islamist violence was the deputy mufti of the Tatarstan DUM, Valiulla Iakubov (Bustanov and Kemper 2013). DUMRF’s embrace of Bigiev’s insistence on the illegitimacy of takfīr is therefore a strategy against accusations from the militant jihadists, but as seen above, it is also an instrument to contain Ramzan Kadyrov’s ambitions to represent Russia’s Muslims. Mukhetdinov elevated Bigiev’s position on the all-encompassing divine mercy to one of DUMRF’s core tenets (also for the dialogue with the ROC and Judaism), and emphasises the openness and tolerance of the Islamic tradition. Such a theological platform gives DUMRF an advantage over Russia’s other Tatar muftis who so far lack a coherent intellectual exposition of their faith in historical perspective.

**Russian, Tatar, Eurasian Islam**

Given these disputes over Islamic authority, where does Mukhetdinov see the unity of Russia’s Muslim community, what makes it unique and specific? He calls it an original (samobytnaia) form of Islamic practice (Mukhetdinov 2016a, 33) that comprises different ‘cultural ecumenes’ (kul’turnye oikumeny), of which he mentions the North Caucasus, the Volga-Ural region and the Crimea (44). Yet, instead of analysing the communalities among the three ecumenes, Mukhetdinov only discusses the religious practice of the Volga Tatars (without mentioning the Bashkirs, who are equally part of his ‘Volga-Urals ecumene’). According to Mukhetdinov, the Volga Tatar practice of Islam is characterised by having accepted Islam voluntarily (which was probably true, in the tenth century); by the absence of heretic movements, and a general trend towards moderation instead of extremism. Historically, this is only partly true: the nineteenth-century Kazan Tatars also had their ‘fundamentalist’ preachers who rejected any interaction with Russians (Kemper 2015) and a Muslim movement of non-violent resistance (Usmanova 2009). Furthermore, in Mukhetdinov’s view, the Tatar Muslims hold women in high respect (in fact, the Tatars were the first Muslims to elect a women to the position of qāḍī, in 1917; Garipova 2017), and Tatars have always been promoting education. Furthermore, Mukhetdinov argues that the Tatars have a democratic mind, as reflected in the fact that local Islamic authorities used to be elected by their communities; and they maintain tolerant relations towards other faiths. Tatar Muslim culture, says Mukhetdinov, was also shaped by the Naqshbandiyya Sufi brotherhood; he argues that their ‘silent dhikr’ (Arabic: dhikr khafī, in opposition more ecstatic forms of Sufi ritual) expresses the emotional stability and restraint of the Tatars (39, not mentioning that Tatar Sufis were constantly quarrelling about the correct dhikr forms). But Tatars have so far failed to come up with
sophisticated reflections on their own culture (43) of the kind that Mukhetdinov now offers. In all these issues, Mukhetdinov avoids going into detail, obviously aware that this list of features can be questioned on many accounts.

Mukhetdinov emphasises that the Islam of the Tatars, Bashkirs or Chechens is no less ‘authentic’ than Islamic practices elsewhere and should not be regarded as secondary ramifications of a pristine Arabic culture to which all Muslims would simply have to return (32). While Islam stands above nationality, it can reach people only through their ethnic languages and cultures, which are then adapted to Islam (33–36). This authenticity needs to be protected against foreign ‘propaganda’, to ensure that Russia’s young Muslims are educated in their own traditions (33).

Based on this essentialist assumption of unity in Islamic practice, with the leading role accorded to the Tatars, Mukhetdinov finds commonalities with the other three religions that are regarded as ‘traditional’ in Russia, and therefore as historically legitimate. He claims that in Eurasia, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism have a unique style of religiosity:

The religious identity of the Eurasian tradition lies in the combination of the following characteristics: a tense and true search for God (bogoiskatel’stvo); a deep search for Truth (Istina), and an arrangement of all spheres of life on the basis of love and contemplation of the heart (serdechnaia sozertsatel’nost’); spiritual sobriety and a rejection of sentimentality; attention for the affairs of this world, a special aspiration for pan-sacrality; flexibility, love of peace and responsiveness. To a certain degree, each of these characteristics can also be found in other cultures, but in this combination and in these proportions, it seems to me, they are found only in the Eurasian space (…). (Mukhetdinov 2016a, 53)

These sympathetic characteristics, and thereby also ‘Russian Islam’, are obviously meant to appeal to Slavophile Russian readers, and it is no coincidence that Mukhetdinov repeatedly quotes from Dostoevsky and even from figures like the religious and legal philosopher Ivan A. Ilyin (1883–1954), a ‘White’ émigré, staunch monarchist and a favourite among Russian conservatives.9 Islam is portrayed as compatible with how Russians generally like to see their own national and religious identity. Neo-Eurasianism (with its Islamic component) becomes culturally ‘Russian’. In an interview with me, Mukhetdinov said he would have preferred to entitle his essay ‘Russkoe musul’manstvo’ [Russian Islam] (as Gasprinskii’s essay), instead of ‘Rossiiskoe’ [Russian’s Islam]; ‘because if we want this or not, Russian Islam is developing according to Russian parameters. […] Tolstoy, Turgenev and Dostoevsky are closer to us [Muslims] than Gaiaz Iskhaki or Gabdullah Tuqay’ (Mukhetdinov 2016g).10 But russkoe would smack of Russification, which he claims is not his intention.

As the Moscow Islamologist Igor’ Alekseev (2015, 82) observed, Mukhetdinov’s turn towards Eurasianism seems to have been triggered by Putin’s 2013 speech at the Valdai Club, in which the President propagated the Eurasian Customs Zone also in cultural terms (to be sure, without directly referencing Neo-Eurasianism) (Mukhetdinov 2013). DUMRF embraced Eurasianism fully in December 2014, when its Tenth International Muslim Forum had a strong Eurasian leitmotif; here also Mufti Gainutdin referred to the early Eurasianist school, and called Russia’s Muslims ‘the core of Russia’s conservatism’ (Gashkov 2014 and own observation).

This Islamic Neo-Eurasianism is presented as an asset to Russia’s soft power policies. In March 2015, Mukhetdinov openly criticised Russkii Mir, the Kremlin’s media holding for broadcasting political propaganda and cultural information abroad. Arguing that Russkii Mir neglects the Muslim population of the RF he suggested that Russia’s Muslims
can be called upon to contribute to a positive image of Russia abroad. *Russkii Mir* should therefore stop to only promote the ROC (Gashkov 2017).

But ultimately, drawing Muslims closer to Russia’s geopolitical agenda must also lead to more integration into the Russian domestic political structure. Mukhetdinov argues, just like many church authorities do, that the RF Constitution’s religious and ideological ‘neutrality’ should be eliminated: if the state is based on the will of the people, and if the people have certain religious worldviews, then these must be reflected in the constitution. The law against acts and statements offending the feelings of believers, promulgated in the aftermath of the Pussy Riot and Charlie Hebdo scandals, is for Mukhetdinov a good start into this direction (2016a, 67).

**Islamic reform via the Kremlin?**

Mukhetdinov depicts the contemporary Arabic world as hopelessly archaic, as unable to reform or modernise, and as an existential threat for Europe and Russia. As Russia’s Muslims are loyal to the Russian state, the state has to support the formation of a strong Russian Islam. As Mukhetdinov reminds his reader, the Orthodox Church also regards the Tsar or the state as the *katechon*, as the ‘protector/maintainer’ (*uderzhivaiushchii*, 79) before the end of the world – a concept that is also prominent in Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianism. Mukhetdinov does not conceal that his most important addressees are in the Kremlin. Sergei Kirienko, once the patron of Gradirovskii’s ‘Russian Islam’ programme, is today the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration, and Mukhetdinov might hope to win his support.

While inclusive towards a plethora of ideological trends, Mukhetdinov’s ‘Russian Islam’ is rather particularistic when it comes to Islam: it is centred on the Tatars, and more narrowly on their Jadid heritage. The Islamic ‘ecumenes’ of the North Caucasus and the Crimea remain loose threads in his composition, and Muslim labour migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus are only referred to because of their demographic weight. Mukhetdinov tries to counter opposition from the North Caucasus by including a discussion of Tatar Sufi traditions, which he, however, portrays as a rural heritage of the past, not as a viable model of spirituality for the present.

Still, Mukhetdinov understands his project as a contribution to broader reevaluations of theological questions with relevance even for the West. In a recent publication, Mufti Gainutdin – or perhaps Mukhetdinov as his speech writer – discussed the challenge of terrorism and the crisis in the Islamic world. At a conference in London, Gainutdin argued that Muslims have to ‘overcome the hadith-centricity (*khadisotsentrichnost*)’ of their legal reasoning, and that by far not all traditions of the Prophet Muhammad must be regarded as binding, or as sources for legal reasoning (Gainutdin 2016). While Islamic theology has a long history of hadith criticism, such scholarship has tended to operate from within the hadith text tradition, in particular by evaluating the veracity/probability of the transmission lines attached to statements of the Prophet; yet what is proposed here is framing hadith criticism as a debunking of the centrality of hadith in the general Islamic discourse. While in the contemporary Middle East such ideas sometimes come from isolated private intellectuals who then face reprisals and marginalisation, what we see here is that in Russia, a major muftiate takes the liberty to ventilate these reformist stances. Mukhetdinov clearly wants to escape the straitjacket of the traditional Islamic legal discourse:
All those founders of the legal schools [including Abū Ḥanīfa, d. 767, the namesake of the Ḥanafī school cherished by the Tatars], if we would today just translate their works into Russian, then the prosecutors would simply come and confiscate them, because these were men of a medieval format. (Mukhetdinov 2016g)

Mukhetdinov argues that Muslims

have to move away from the principle of the school of one man, and instead have to take the *shumūliyat-i rahmat-i ilāhiyya* [Bigiev’s all-encompassing character of Allah’s mercy] as our principle [in theology], [...] and in *fiqh* [Islamic law] the principle of Quranic Humanism. (Mukhetdinov 2016g).

Such statements make Mukhetdinov vulnerable to reproaches that he intends to forsake the accepted schools of law and theology – to which he responds that he is merely re-establishing the original flexibility of these schools.

**Conclusion: Islamic RPT**

RPT is the construction of images of a religion, and of religion’s functions and roles in society and state, in a way that corresponds to the political interests of elites in power – with the implicit or explicit understanding that the acceptance and active promotion of the given RPT project would serve state interests, in particular security and national identity-formation. As the addressed elites are heterogenous, RPT projects are successful if they link up with broader trends and ideological frameworks, which are in our case Russia’s discourse of patriotism, traditional values, educational modernisation, Europeanisation and Neo-Eurasianism, as well as Russian and Tatar nationalisms (since after all, Mukhetdinov also stands for Tatar and particularly Tatar-Mishar interests). All this must be amalgamated in a symbolic language shaped by concepts of Islamic theology and law, with references to a selection of autochthonous historical models.

Individual *religious* professionals are best suited to give RPT projects a credible theological form and core. Mukhetdinov, as a scholar of Islam with respectable secular and religious education, and as a deputy mufti in what is now probably Russia’s most prominent Islamic umbrella organisation, is in a much better position to design and promote RPT than the secular, non-Muslim political scientist Sergei Gradirovskii was in the early 2000s. While Russia’s political technologists have their think tanks, the religious political technologist has a muftiate as his major platform.

RPT projects are developed on the assumed demand of politicians or administrators related to the given field, which in our case are Kremlin bureaucrats in charge of administering Islam. RPT is promoted through newspapers, journals, books and manifestos (for the production of which Mukhetdinov has his own *Medina* publishing house), and by electronic media (including DUMRF sites, Facebook and Mukhetdinov’s personal blogs). Other important means of spreading the message are public events (in this case: DUMRF’s domestic and international conferences) and international collaborations (e.g. with *Diyanet* in Ankara), as well as through their own team (educated at DUMRF’s Islamic college and state universities). For Mukhetdinov, contacts with academic scholars (including in the West) are also a major gateway for supporting his RPT project. RPT requires a significant amount of financial resources (to which DUMRF, as a direct or indirect subsidiary of the state, has access) and logistics (for which DUMRF has built up
the capacities). It is assumed that once some success is reached, the demanding side will be ready to invest more, to see how far the RPT project carries.

Such RPT projects are consciously developed and fine-tuned, if necessary over several years; this leads to changes in course, and possibly to internal contradictions that later need to be glossed over (as we saw regarding the place of the Russian language, where Mukhetdinov first shared Gasprinskii’s call for native-language education but then dropped it). An RPT project has to remain flexible to respond to growing demands, or to changing constellations in the Kremlin, the ROC, Russia’s republics and their DUMs, and even internationally with regard to the Crimea, Turkey and the Middle East. The claim to be useful also for Russia’s foreign policies (as voiced by Mukhetdinov with regard to relations with Turkey) is another selling point.

While it is self-evident that such religious projects are ‘political’, they are also a ‘technology’, based on PR approaches as to how a message must be framed, formulated and spread. RPT projects are not a goal per se but platforms from which a broader political objective is pursued (in Mukhetdinov’s case, arguably, the political and religious emancipation of Tatar Muslims within the Russian framework, or perhaps turning DUMRF into the state’s single Islamic partner organisation). What counts is professionalism and efficiency in organisation and outreach; success is measured in public appearances, above all in access to mainstream TV, which indirectly reflects Kremlin sympathies.

As an RPT project has to cater to many particular interests, its message must remain ambiguous (as we saw with Mukhetdinov’s wavering between Europe and Neo-Eurasianism). However, RPT does not evade open conflicts with opponents; to the contrary, it is in conflict situations, under fire, that efficiency and superiority can be proven. As several such projects are developed by various actors in parallel (in our case, also by Ramzan Kadyrov’s team in Grozny), the authorities that first tolerated and then supported such a project are also free to drop any of these. This is the personal risk of the RPT entrepreneur.

Notes

1. DUMRF’s website mentions muftis and chairmen of at least 51 DUMs in European Russia, Siberia and the Crimea (that is, regional DUMs as well as their umbrella DUMs); see http://www.dumrf.ru/common/biographies/ (as visited in May 2016). While written from the perspective of DUMRF, this list also comprises DUMs of the rival Central Muslim Administration in Ufa (omitting regional DUMs of Kirovskaja oblast’, Permkskii krai and the Republic of Bashkortostan); for these see ‘Spravka o RDUM’, at http://cdum.ru/rdum/mufti/d/5400/. To be added are at least 10 DUMs for the North Caucasus republics and regions of the RF: Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Adygea/Krasnodar krai, Kalmykia, Stavropol krai and their umbrella, the Coordination Center of North Caucasus Muslims.
2. The Council of Russia’s Muftis originally also included Umar Idrisov (b. 1954), until 2008 head of the DUM of Nizhnii Novgorod; Mukaddas Bibarsov (b. 1960), head of a ‘Volga Muftiate’ in Saratov; Nafigulla Ashirov (b. 1954), Mufti of a Siberian network of DUMs; and Nurmukhamet Nigmatullin (b. 1946), Mufti of a Bashkir DUM with headquarters in Ufa.
3. Other Mir-i Arab graduates led or lead DUMs in the North Caucasus, among them former Chechen Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov as well as Shafiq Pshikhachev and Ismail Berdiev from Kabardino-Balkaria.
4. The series Islam v Rossiiskoi Federatsii includes volumes on the Nizhnii Novorod region (2007), Moscow (2008), the Central-European part of Russia (2009), St. Petersburg (2009), the Urals (2009) and the Volga area (2013).
The ‘World Forum on the Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought “Unity of Islam – Unity of Muslims”: Foundations of Dialogue’, Moscow, 18–20 October 2016, was organised by DUMRF, the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools in Qom as well as other organisations.

Unless otherwise indicated I refer to the revised 2016 edition. The first edition (Mukhetdinov 2015a) featured short reviews of the book by four scholars of Islam (Rinat Mukhametov, S. Borodai, Robert Landa and Igor Alekseev 64–87); Mukhetdinov then responded to their reviews (88–109).

Next to Gasprinskii and Bigiev (discussed below), Mukhetdinov (2016a) refers to Husayn Faizkhanov (37), Ziya Kamali (46), as well as the earlier theologians Qursawi and Marjani (whom he presents as precursors to the Jadid movement; 73). These are also the Tatar figureheads celebrated in DUMRF conference series: the ‘Faizkhanov Readings’, ‘Bigiev Readings’ (held for the first time in St. Petersburg on 28 April 2016) and the ‘Marjani Readings’ (established in Moscow on 19 October 2016).

In particular, Mukhetdinov’s discussion (2016a, 41–42) of the Sufi ‘contemplation of the heart’ (which he finds in the practice of the Tatar Naqshbandiya) leads up to Ivan Ilyin’s claim that ‘the Russian idea is the idea of the heart’ (51).

Iskhaki (1878–1954) was a prominent Tatar nationalist, and Tuqay (1886–1913) is regarded as the most famous poet of the Tatar nation.

Katehon is also the name of a Neo-Eurasian journal, in which Mukhetdinov published an abridged English version of his essay (Mukhetdinov 2015b). The same issue features Dugin.

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