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5 Muslim EuRossocentrism

Ismail Gasprinskii's 'Russian Islam' (1881)

Michael Kemper

Abstract

What is the historical relation between the Tatar Muslims and the Russian Empire that they live in? These were the central questions that the Crimean Tatar Ismail Gasprinskii (1851-1914) posed in his 1881 essay 'Russian Muslimhood'. Gasprinskii later became famous as the pioneer of Muslim educational reform and Tatar journalism in Russia; for many Russian, Soviet and Western authors he was a political 'pan-Islamist' oriented towards the Ottoman Empire. However, in his 1881 essay Gasprinskii posed as a Russian patriot. He projected a vision of the future of Russia's Tatars that would draw them closer to the Russians – yet not by Russification but by a shared Europeanization. Using a language of 'Orientalism', Gasprinskii's aim was to convince Russian administrators that Russia's Muslims were not a threat to the tsarist empire but an asset.

Keywords: Imperial Russia, Islam, Tatars, Europeanization, Jadidism, Golden Horde

In the history of Islam in late imperial Russia, the Crimean Tatar Ismail Gasprinskii (Gaspıralı, 1851-1914) is a towering figure; he is seen as the founding father of Muslim cultural reform in Russia (Jadidism).¹ Gasprinskii had a strong impact on Muslim intellectuals, in particular, among the Volga Tatars, who saw in him the pioneer of modern education among Russia's Muslims. In Russian, Soviet, Tatar and Western historiography, Gasprinskii is mostly associated with the aim of uniting all Turkic Muslims of Russia, under the famous slogan 'unity in language, thinking, and action' (in Turkish: *dilde,*

1 On Jadidism, see Khalid, *The Politics*; Dudoignon, 'Djadidisme'.

fikirde, işde birlik). In his journalism and his novels he developed a ‘common’ Turkic literary language supposedly understandable to all Muslim Turks of Russia.² For friends and critics, Gasprinskii stood at the cradle of political pan-Turkism in Russia but also prepared the ground for the emergence of particular national movements, including of the Crimean Tatars and the Volga (Kazan) Tatars.

The present chapter is about Gasprinskii’s Russian-language essay ‘Russian Muslimhood: Thoughts, Annotations and Observations’ (1881).³ One of his first publications, Gasprinskii’s essay is not at all a pan-Turkist pamphlet. Rather, it discusses the situation of Tatar Muslims between Islam and Europe. Even more, the text is completely focused on the Russian context, and distances Russia’s Muslims from the Turks of the Ottoman Empire. In what follows I will explore how Gasprinskii navigates between Islam, Europe and Russia (*Rossia*) – hence the catchword in the title of this chapter. In conclusion I discuss what each of these cultural and political points of orientation meant for him, and how they served his argument.

As the occasion for writing this essay Gasprinskii chose the imperial celebration, in 1880, of the fifth centenary of the Battle of Kulikovo (1380), in which Muscovy beat the Khan of the Golden Horde and thereby liberated itself from the Tatar/Muslim overlordship that had started with the Mongol occupation of Kiev in 1240. Against the background of the historical relations between Russians and Tatars, in his 1881 essay Gasprinskii for the first time gave a systematic outline of his thoughts on a future Muslim school reform, and also suggested establishing a Muslim newspaper in Russia. For these projects he needed permission from the Russian authorities as well as financial support; the text ends with an estimation of the costs of his experimental school project and a forecast of the impact that it would have.

Gasprinskii’s essay in many ways resembled a grant application in today’s academia. When we scholars apply for grants, we design strategies and employ rhetorical devices that we believe will entice the donor to identify with our project. Importantly, the format of grant applications requires a

2 Ertürk, ‘An Uncanny Turkic’.

3 Gasprinskii, *Russkoe musul'manstvo: Mysli, zametki i nabliudeniia musul'manina*, 45 pages. This text was first published as a sequel in issues 43 to 47 of *Tavrida* in 1881, under the pseudonym ‘Gench Molla’ (‘a young Muslim teacher/imam’). This 1881 essay has been republished several times in Russian and translated into Turkish. A slightly abridged German translation of Gasprinskii’s essay is supposed to appear soon in *Frankfurter Zeitschrift für Islamisch-theologische Studien*. Two similar essays by Gasprinskii, from 1896 and 1901, respectively, have been translated into English. See Gasprinskii, ‘Russo-Oriental Relations: Thoughts, Notes, and Desires’, and Gasprinskii, ‘Ġadidism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’.

considerable reduction of complexity; at the same time we are urged to link our proposals to the 'big questions' of our time and to established academic fashions, that is, to overarching discourses. Equally important are our publication strategies, as well as the 'valorization', as the Dutch say – the promise that our work will have societal impact.

I argue that this was also the recipe that Gasprinskii followed, back in 1881. However, Gasprinskii was free to choose his own format; he embedded his grant application in a lengthy piece of historical philosophy, with a number of ethnographic excursions and many personal notes and anecdotes. In this *mélange*, his central strategy was to sell his Muslim educational reform as a contribution to Russia's national interests, and in fact to state security. However, a second central element of his text is his constant reference to Europe; in the light of Russia's difficult relationship with the West, I argue that the image of Europe in Gasprinskii's text is purposefully ambiguous.⁴ Finally, the essay also provides a new presentation of the third element in the equation, namely 'Russian Islam', a term that he shaped to encompass all Muslims of Russia but clearly with the Tatars as their vanguard. In what follows I will discuss Gasprinskii's 1881 work as an entanglement of established discourses on Russia, Europe, Islam and the Tatars, as a mosaic that in fact created the ground for something new – the discourse of Jadidism. But first a few more words on the author himself.

Gasprinskii between Islam, Two Empires and Europe

Gasprinskii was a Crimean Tatar member of the Russian nobility; he inherited this status from his father, who had served the tsar's viceroy of the Caucasus, Prince M.S. Vorontsov, as a translator.⁵ After having received a traditional Muslim education in Bakhchisarai, the young Ismail studied at a Russian school in Akmechet' (today Simferopol'), equally on the Crimean peninsula. He then continued his education at Russian military schools in Voronezh and, from 1864 to 1867,⁶ in Moscow. Aghast at the negative

4 For a discussion of Gasprinskii's conscious employment of Orientalist notions, see Hofmeister, 'Ein Krimtatare'.

5 If not indicated otherwise, the following account on Gasprinskii's life follows Lazzerini, *Ismail Bey Gasprinskii and Muslim Modernism in Russia, 1878-1914* (based above all on Gasprinskii's own writings as well as on the Tatar-Turkish émigré historiography). See also Noack, *Muslimischer Nationalismus*, 144-178 and *passim*.

6 'Svidetel'stvo. 23 dekabria 1880 g.' [a document of the Ninth Moscow Military Gymnasium testifying about Gasprinskii's enrolment], in Răximov, *Ismäğiy! Gasprinskiy*, 163.

views on Islam and Muslims that he encountered there, Gasprinskii tried to escape to the Ottoman Empire, supposedly to serve in the Ottoman army; however, the Russian authorities in the port city of Odessa held him back. In the following years he served as a teacher of the Russian language at a Muslim secondary school (the Zinjirli *madrasa*) and at another school on primary level (the Dereköy *maktab*). Reportedly, at these schools he criticized the traditional teaching methods and did not shy away from conflicts with his superiors.

From 1872 to 1874 we find Gasprinskii in Paris, where he sojourned in circles of intellectuals from Russia; it is said that in the French capital, he jobbed for an advertisement company, and for a while received financial support from the Russian writer Ivan Turgenev. He went to Marseilles and eventually to Istanbul, where he wanted to enrol at an Ottoman war college; while waiting for admission he travelled in Anatolia and made contacts with Ottoman journalists, educators and administrators. It seems that under pressure of the Russian authorities, he was sent back to the Crimea, where he again taught Russian at the Zinjirli *madrasa*.

At this point Gasprinskii's career took a surprising turn: he became mayor of the city of Bakhchisarai, an office that he held from 1879 to at least 1883.⁷ We must assume that he now enjoyed a certain degree of patronage in influential Russian circles. It is from his office in the municipality that he first applied, in 1879/1880, for permission to acquire a printing press, as he wrote, 'to print administrative regulations, business cards, and price lists'.⁸ He then started applying for permission to issue a first regular 'Muslim' newspaper, in the Crimean Tatar language; as these applications were regularly rejected, the only thing he could do was to print one-time leaflets in the Tatar/Turkic language, under ever-changing titles.⁹

We must keep in mind that Gasprinskii's career started in the liberal era of Tsar Alexander II, who abolished serfdom and introduced various administrative and judicial reforms. The period saw a flowering of liberal

7 'Raport politsmeistera g. Bakhchisaraiia Tavricheskomu gubernatoru. 28 marta 1883 g.' [a police report on Gasprinskii], in Răximov, *Ismäg'yl' Gasprinskii*, 174.

8 'Svidetel'stvo-prisiaga I. Gasprinskogo. 10 marta 1879 g.' [Gasprinskii's oath that he would use the typographical equipment in a lawful manner], in Răximov, *Ismäg'yl' Gasprinskii*, 168.

9 Among these titles were *Tonguch* (First-born child), *Shafaq* (Horizon), *Qamar* (Moon), *Yoldiz* (Star), *Könäsh* (Sun), *Haqiqat* (Truth). His *Mir'at-i-jadid* (The new mirror) and *Salnama-i Turki* (Turkic calendar) took the form of almanacs with short essays on historical, geographical and medical topics. The newspaper project first came under the Russian title *Zakon* (Law), reflecting its role as an official herald. One such official herald in a Turkic language had already been established in Tashkent, in 1870. Private Muslim newspapers also came up in Russia's South Caucasus but were short-lived.

Europhile discourse in competition with Slavophilism/pan-Slavism, the Populist (Narodniki) movement, Russian Orthodox nationalism, and radical left movements. After Alexander II's assassination in 1881, the political climate again changed to repressive modes of governance. In particular, Russian administrative and national discourses developed a growing 'imperial paranoia'¹⁰ about what was then called pan-Islamism – the idea that all Muslims naturally aspire to a global Islamic state – and pan-Turkism – the fear that Russia's Muslims are naturally a fifth column of the Ottoman Empire (against which Russia had waged a successful war in 1878-1879). Muslim intellectuals inspired by the idea of 'progress' were treated with suspicion in particular.

It is against this background that Gasprinskii published 'Russian Muslimhood' in 1881, in which he brought his quest for a Tatar newspaper and a new system of Muslim education to a broader educated public. If we regard Gasprinskii's essay as a grant application, we must conclude that it was unsuccessful in so far as it did not generate the direct state funding for a new type of Muslim school. However, it must have contributed to opening the doors: after numerous petitions to governors and ministers, in 1883 Gasprinskii eventually *did* obtain permission to establish a Muslim newspaper, the first of its kind, which must be seen as the second turning point in his career. This permission came in the context of another public ceremony, namely the centenary of Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 1783. Symbolically called *Tarjuman/Perevodchik* (The translator), this project became the earliest Tatar newspaper in European Russia, and also the one with the longest life span (lasting until 1918). *Tarjuman* was an instrument for Gasprinskii's self-promotion, but also became a platform for other aspiring Muslim journalists; it had a considerable circulation in Russia, and it was also read in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire. In the first decades, the *Tarjuman* offered each article both in Russian and in Tatar (in Arabic script); in 1905 (when the government was compelled to also allow other Tatar journals and newspapers to be published), Gasprinskii dropped the Russian content, and *Tarjuman* transformed from a being a 'translator' of Russian information to a daily, with the name *Tarjuman-i ahval-i zaman*, that is, 'The interpreter of contemporary events'.¹¹

One year after the start of *Tarjuman*, in 1884, Gasprinskii also must have received clearance to start his experimental school project, based on a Muslim primary school (*maktab*), in his hometown Bakhchisarai. It

¹⁰ Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims*, 195-216.

¹¹ Lazzerini, 'Ismail Bey Gasprinskii's'.

seems here the major innovation was that Gasprinskii taught basic literacy in Tatar (in Arabic script) by the phonetic method, that is, by confronting pupils from early on with letter combinations and whole words; this yielded quicker results than the traditional method of teaching Arabic letters first in isolation, and by their Arabic names, which distorts their phonetic values.¹² Gasprinskii also introduced secular subjects, for which he and others produced easily understandable textbooks; these replaced the bulky Islamic tradition of learning by studying commentaries and glosses on medieval texts, many of which were in Arabic. His approach was copied by other Muslim teachers, who soon began to visit him in Bakhchisarai to learn from his experience.

Gasprinskii's 'new method' (*usul-i jadid*) gave the name to the Jadid movement of Muslim educational reform and cultural modernism. It soon branched out in various directions, including into Islamic theology, for influential Islamic scholars and Sufi masters (of the Naqshbandiyya and Shadhiliyya brotherhoods) understood the advantages of Gasprinskii's pedagogy,¹³ and Tatar/Muslim journalism, which continued to expand.¹⁴ While many schools continued using the 'old' model of education, new Jadid schools (on both *maktab* and *madrasa* levels) sprang up in the Muslim neighbourhoods of cities such as Kazan, Ufa and Orenburg (in the Volga-Urals) as well as in Russia's Central Asia, and eventually also in the North Caucasus. For the rest of his life, Gasprinskii travelled far and wide in Russia, the Caucasus, Central Asia and also in Ottoman Turkey to lobby for his programme, to win subscribers, and to organize financial support.

Due to Gasprinskii's relations to circles in the Ottoman Empire, James H. Meyer counts him among a group of 'trans-imperial Muslims', that is, cultural and political activists from Russia who navigated between the two empires, and most of whom ended up staying in Turkey.¹⁵ But Gasprinskii remained focused on Russia, which he never left for good. As Christian Noack observed, when after 1905 Muslim intellectuals with Jadid educational backgrounds began to assertively demand political forms of Muslim cultural or national autonomy in Russia, Gasprinskii cautioned them to not confront the Russian authorities by politicizing the movement for cultural reform.¹⁶

12 For the longevity of Jadid and *Qadim* teaching methods, see Kemper and Shikhaliev, 'Qadimism'.

13 Shikhaliev and Kemper, 'Sayfallāh-Qāḍī Bashlarov'.

14 Garipova, 'The Protectors'.

15 Meyer, *Turks across Empires*, esp. 36-42.

16 Noack, *Muslimischer Nationalismus*, 242.

There is thus good reason to assume that his 1881 journal articles on 'Russian Islam', and their reprint in book form, had a positive impact on the authorities, and inclined them to at least tolerate an incipient Muslim journalism among the Tatars. While his book was heavily criticized in Russian Orthodox circles,¹⁷ Gasprinskii's project was supported by Vasilii D. Smirnov (1846-1922), an eminent Turkologist and historian of the Crimean Khanate who also served as imperial censor of Muslim publications in Russia; like Gasprinskii, Smirnov detested the traditional Islamic system of education.¹⁸ If we regard his 1881 book as a grant application, we have to assume that Gasprinskii took a calculated risk: he must have known that his ideas provoked opposition from both Russian Orthodox missionaries and traditional Islamic educators, but he put his faith in Russian administrators and Orientalists, and on a Russian educated public; these circles would be likely to understand Gasprinskii's projects as befitting Russia's broader interests. Let us therefore have a look at how Gasprinskii sold his agenda in 'Russian Muslimhood'.

'Russian Muslimhood' and *Sblizhenie*

By the time of writing, the Russian Empire encompassed perhaps some thirteen million Muslims, among them the Tatars and Bashkirs in the Volga-Urals (conquered by Russia in the second half of the sixteenth century), the Kazakhs and Noghays in the Steppes, the Tatars of the Crimea (annexed in 1783), Azeris in the South Caucasus (incorporated in the early nineteenth century), the Chechens, Daghestani peoples and other communities of the North Caucasus (pacified by 1863), and the Uzbeks, Kirgiz, Turkmen, Tajiks and other peoples of Central Asia (the conquest of which was in full swing, and ended in 1895). While most Muslims of Russia spoke languages belonging to the Turkic family, the various communities maintained a wide spectrum of Islamic traditions and orientations.

In the light of this Islamic diversity in Russia it might be surprising that Gasprinskii spoke of one *Russkoe musul'manstvo*, one 'Russian muslimhood' or 'Russian Islam'. This term is not meant to construct a 'Russian Islam', in the sense of Russifying the religion of Islam (as we observe today, when Muslim authorities in Russia try to construct a domesticated 'Russian Islam',¹⁹ or

17 Lazzerini, *Ismail Bey Gasprinskii*, 44; Noack, *Muslimischer Nationalismus*, 215.

18 Lazzerini, *Ismail Bey Gasprinskii*, 15-16.

19 Mukhetdinov, *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo*.

when Muslim intellectuals in Bosnia and the EU design their forms of 'Euro-Islam').²⁰ Rather, Gasprinskii used this term as an ethnographic reality, as the communities that happen to live under Russian rule.

For Gasprinskii, Russia's Muslims formed a historical community because Providence brought them under imperial rule.²¹ Here his agenda was most clearly linked to imperial discourses; writing in 1881, he even expressed his expectation that Russia would soon conquer more Tatar/Muslim lands, namely Eastern Turkistan (present-day Xinjiang, in China); in his view, this would bring about a beneficial unification of all Turko-Tatars in a common Russian realm.²² Not without provocation he added that in the future, Russia would become 'a major Muslim state', without having to compromise her identity as a Christian empire.²³

Although he acknowledged that 'Russia's Muslimhood' emerged as a product of Russia's imperial expansion, Gasprinskii emphasized that they were about to become a historical actor in their own right. The central problem, as he phrased it, was that Russia had no coherent policy on its Muslim subjects; sometimes it expelled them, or supported their emigration (as in the case of the Crimean Tatars), but most of the time the authorities simply ignored the Muslim populations. The result was a continued Muslim ignorance and self-isolation:

Russian Muslimhood [*Russkoe musul'manstvo*] is not aware of the interests of the Russian state, does not feel them; it is almost completely ignorant of [Russia's] pain and delight; it does not understand the overall endeavours of the Russian state, its ideas. As it does not know Russian; it is remote from the Russian national idea [*russkaia mysl'*] and from Russian literature. [This state of affairs] isolates [Russia's Muslims] completely from the general course of human culture [*obshchechelovecheskaia kul'tura*]. Russian Muslimhood is vegetating in the narrow, suffocating atmosphere of its old concepts and prejudices, as if it was cut off from the rest of mankind, and it has no other worry than to hunt after its daily piece of bread; it has no other ideal than what the belly tells it.²⁴

Gasprinskii maintained that for the enlightenment of Muslims, 'Islam [*islamizm*] is no hindering factor at all', since Islam commands obedience

20 Bougarel, 'Bosnian Islam'.

21 Gasprinskii, *Russkoe musul'manstvo*, 7, 13.

22 Ibid., 3-4.

23 Ibid., 4. All translations of quotations are by the author except when noted otherwise.

24 Ibid., 8.

to any government.²⁵ This statement might have surprised many readers who still remembered the long jihad that Shamil, Imam of Daghestan and Chechnya (1834-1859), waged against the Russian intrusion in the North Caucasus.²⁶ For Gasprinskii, the threat of Islam came not from its potential to organize military resistance; rather, it emanated from the ignorance that was fostered by the traditional Muslim communal system and tolerated by the state. As he argued, any mosque community in Russia was a 'miniature state' with its own laws, customs, and social order, and almost impenetrable for the Russian administration. As the authority of the community elders was based on the Quran, the Muslim communal system of his days was maintained by 'the spirit of Islamism'. The imams were elected by the mosque community, and any male Muslim with some basic knowledge could perform the task of leading the prayer. Mosque schools were maintained by Islamic donations and *waqfs* (pious foundations), and thus self-sufficient. Raised in this system, Muslim children were immune to external stimuli. The state might at one point close down these schools, or even the mosques, or put a ban on Islamic book printing (which flowered in Kazan since the early nineteenth century); but this would have little impact on Muslim life, since Muslims can pray anywhere, and books continue to be produced and circulated in manuscript form.²⁷

In order to break up this stagnant world, Gasprinskii argued for what we would today call an affirmative action policy towards Muslims. Enforced Russification would not work, as the author explained with the example of Poland, where repressive policies only enhanced resilience and resistance.²⁸ A reorientation of Muslims from Mecca to St Petersburg could only be realized through educational efforts in their native language, on Muslim terms. However, the few state-supported Russian-Tatar schools that existed in Russia (and also the Zinjirli *madrasa* where Gasprinskii taught the Russian language to Crimean Tatar pupils) were not only unattractive but also highly ineffective: they just concentrated on the teaching of the empire's official language and did nothing for the intellectual formation of the Muslim pupils.²⁹

To get out of this impasse, Gasprinskii proposed to drop the tedious emphasis on Russian language teaching and instead to concentrate on the

25 Ibid., 21, 22.

26 Gammer, *Muslim Resistance*.

27 Gasprinskii, *Russkoe musul'manstvo*, 25-27.

28 Ibid., 16-19.

29 Ibid., 34.

transmission of a broad array of modern subjects. If the Muslim youth of Russia had access to quality education in their native Tatar language, they would learn to appreciate the achievements of modern European civilization, and thereby also understand the benefits of living in Russia. In the terminology of our days, what he proposed was an indigenous programme for Muslim integration in a non-Muslim majority society. This integration Gasprinskii conceived of as *sblizhenie*, 'drawing together', bringing two elements close to each other.³⁰ As Meyer reminds us, 'tsarist officials often employed the term [*sblizhenie*] as a polite way of discussing assimilation', in particular of Russia's Jews.³¹ Gasprinskii however defined it as a mutual and even ethical (*nравstvennoe*) rapprochement; his *sblizhenie* required action from both 'Russia's Muslimhood' and the state.

Gasprinskii argued that the best instrument for achieving this *sblizhenie* were the existing Muslim schools of the secondary level, the *madrasas*, as they already enjoyed great respect among Russia's Muslims. Here he spoke as a practitioner, as a pedagogue. Traditionally, these *madrasas* were the realm of Islamic scholars and students who followed an age-old curriculum of Islamic law, theology, and Arabic. Gasprinskii argues that if some of these Islamic schools were reformed according to modern pedagogy, and equipped with well-prepared teachers who had Tatar textbooks at their disposal, then they would quickly spread modern knowledge among the Muslim communities. Quite naturally Russia's Muslims would then also start learning Russian. Revamping traditional Islamic seminaries into modern schools would of course mean that religious subjects were reduced in scope, and replaced by mathematics, history, 'knowledge of the fatherland' (*otechestvovedenie*) and other subjects.³² Only knowledge would bring about a unification (*edinenie*) of Tatars with the Russian Slavic world (*s russkim slavianstvom*).³³

Europe: A Model and a Threat

What Gasprinskii proposed was a self-civilizing project of Tatars embedded in the discourse of European progress (as rightly noted by historian Mustafa Tuna),³⁴ but also of Russia's civilizing mission. So far Russia had denied

³⁰ Ibid., 12, 14, 22, 43.

³¹ Meyer, *Turks across Empires*, 411-119.

³² Gasprinskii, *Russkoe musul'manstvo*, 34.

³³ Ibid., 37.

³⁴ Tuna, *Imperial Russia's Muslims*, 146-154.

Muslims access to progress: 'How deplorable it is that Russian rule does not lead the Muslims to progress and civilization [*progress i tsivilizatsiia*], and that it is not able to blow new life, new ideas and new goals into the Russian-Tatar dead body.'³⁵

This progress and civilization radiated from Europe:

Isn't it astonishing that the Muslim societies in many Asian centres, such as Constantinople, Cairo, Damascus and Tunis, are running ahead of Russia's Muslims in all respects? *There one experiences Europe, a vitalization of the spiritual and moral life*; it is there that one hears new ideas and ambitions that are not Asiatic at all; and this all while the state of [Muslims in] Bakhchisarai, Kazan, Kasimov and in other regions [of Russia] resembles more the material and spiritual images from the times of Ivan the Terrible, Yermak and Choban-Giray, with the muffled atmosphere of immobility and stagnation.³⁶

Here the Muslims of Russia are juxtaposed not directly to Europe but to Europeanized Muslims in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa. Note that while Gasprinskii's Europe is exemplified in the spread of science and technology, the latter bring about 'a vitalization of the spiritual and moral life'.

But Europe also suffers from a Eurocentric superiority complex that Muslims must not copy:

I myself could observe that Arabs or Indians have a hard time in the educated societies of Paris and London, in spite of the refined politeness that they encounter there – or perhaps exactly because of it. The sons of Asia feel the artificiality, strained attitude and insulting indulgence that they are met with. This is what I was told by many Arabs of Algerian origin who are in service in Paris or conduct trade operations there. The same pride of their own tribe, and the same high opinion of themselves, I also observed among the Turks; in them these traits are even more prominent because they lack European courtesy.³⁷

What we see here is a classification of groups according to racial/national ('tribal', in Gasprinskii's terminology) categories, with a clear moral yardstick. His 'sons of Asia' encompass all 'non-Europeans', including Arab Muslims

35 Gasprinskii, *Russkoe musul'manstvo*, 8-9.

36 *Ibid.*, 8; emphasis added.

37 *Ibid.*, 9-10.

from North Africa and the Tatars of European Russia. Gasprinskii used any opportunity to demonstrate that his loyalty belonged to the Russian Empire, not to the Ottomans: it is the Turks to whom he accorded the lowest position, for they just copied European haughtiness and lost their Asian sincerity. When confronted with Europeans, Asians must not lose their religious principles, and therefore their natural morality:

Due to the simplicity and patriarchal structure of his way of life, and due to the purity of the religious-moral principles that he has been taught since childhood, the Muslim is alien to all cunning and hypocrisy, which he detests; he is an honest man. A Muslim with solid education enriches these good qualities of the common man with a broad, humane perspective on things. [European] sciences and knowledge must not shake his Muslim principles and sympathies; then they will freshen his views and make them humane [*gumaniziruiut*], and eliminate his prejudices and superstition.³⁸

With his assertion that 'the Muslim' is honest and not hypocritical, Gasprinskii defined Russia's Muslims in opposition to another isolated religious minority in Russia – the Jews, who since the mid-nineteenth century became stigmatized as having a 'sly intellect, hidden morals, and perfidious heart'.³⁹ As the Muslim/Asian is uneducated – naïve, perhaps dumb, but of good morals – he needs Europeanization through 'science and knowledge' to become a full human being; Europe *is* 'humanization'. This education must, however, be based on the Asians' continued adherence to their original morality, and to Islam. As Gasprinskii reminded his readers, some Muslims

have taken over the external splendour of Europeaness [*vneshnii losk evropeizma*], but without a solid scientific basis. Unfortunately, these persons are mostly lost for a beneficial and active life. They lost the good qualities of their own tribe and embraced the bad characteristics of another. In their youth most of them have no high values, and serve Bacchus and Venus; as adults they turn into hypocrites who do their best to conceal the sins of their youth by fighting against any innovation, and against the light of true knowledge and progress. This deplorable type of Muslim I encountered in our lands, among Russia's Muslims, but also among Arabs and in particular among the Turks.⁴⁰

38 Ibid., 38.

39 Avrutin, 'Racial Categories', 21.

40 Gasprinskii, *Russkoe musul'manstvo*, 38.

Europeanization can thus also be a smokescreen to cover debauchery and a misplaced feeling of superiority.

The Russians, as Gasprinskii was quick to add, lack this European self-centredness. In his mind, they display a relaxed attitude towards their non-Russian, non-Christian compatriots: 'The Russian man, whether he belongs to the simple class or to the intelligentsia, regards all who live with him under the same [Russian] law as his own people, and he does not profess any narrow love for his own tribe.'⁴¹ With this natural openness and sincerity, the Russians are obviously closer to Russia's Muslims than to Europeans, as he explained with the example of how Russia in 1880 celebrated the memory of the Kulikovo victory over the Tatars: unlike the Germans and the French who 'light much powder' and 'organize many symbolical processions and *Fackelzüge* [*fakel'tsugov*]' when they celebrate national holidays, the Russian man just 'limits himself to a strong and cordial handshake, to a prayer in the chapel; or he takes down his hat and crosses himself'.⁴²

What Gasprinskii emphasizes here is that Russian national character has maintained a strong primordial connection to the Orthodox faith, not dissimilar to how Gasprinskii describes the place of Islam in the life of Russia's Muslims. Russians and Muslims are also in a similar position when encountering Europe: 'Educated Muslims [from Russia] who had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with various European societies, behave [in their encounter with Europeans] just like Russians.'⁴³

Taking the commemoration of the Battle of Kulikovo as the patriotic starting point of his essay also allowed Gasprinskii to draw historical parallels:

It is widely known that this day [of 1380] symbolizes the turning point from which began the rebirth of Russia [*Rus'*] and the gradual decay of Tatar rule. [...] In general, people say: Tatar rule brought Russia immeasurable plight, and it led to the standstill of [Russian] civilization for several centuries. That is absolutely true; but I believe that the long rule of such a powerful tribe [as the Tatars] over Russia could easily have led to Russia's complete annihilation. Examples for such processes we see in the western frontier regions of the Slavic community [*slavianstvo*] [that is, where Slavic populations are being assimilated by Germans].⁴⁴ Indeed,

41 Ibid., 9.

42 Ibid., 11.

43 Ibid., 10.

44 That the Germanization of the Poznan area is meant is clear from another reflection on page 18 of *Russkoe musul'manstvo*.

as rulers the Tatars levied taxes; as children of Asia they also once in a while abducted beautiful girls. But beyond that they did not touch the everyday life and the religious sphere of Russia. I am not a historian, and I might be wrong, but I get the impression that when speaking about the Tatars one must also consider that [Tatar] rule perhaps protected Russia against even more powerful foreign influences; perhaps it was this specific character of [Tatar] overlordship that enabled Russia to develop the idea of her unity – an idea that for the first time appeared on the battlefield of Kulikovo.⁴⁵

Of course, the pernicious foreign influences against which the Tatars shielded Muscovy must have come from the West, from late medieval and Renaissance Europe, and in particular from Germany and Poland. This historical reflection allowed Gasprinskii to turn the tables, and to present a surprising new argument for his grant application:

If we, as Tatars, have in this respect been beneficial to Russia, then we can today apply the old Russian saying that 'A debt is good when it is being paid back.' But we wish that the debt be paid back not in the old Asiatic coin but in the new, European coin, that is, by the spread of European sciences and knowledge among the Muslims of Russia, and not just by ruling and raising taxes. True, until recently the Russians themselves were [Europe's] apprentices, but today they can be our teachers and educators.⁴⁶

Here Europeanness is again measured in knowledge and modern sciences – that is, not in inborn qualities of the 'tribes'. This kind of 'Europe' can be everywhere, and becomes an item that can be traded by education:

Light, give us light, o our elder brothers! Otherwise we suffocate, we fall apart and even infect those around us. We, the Muslims, are still children, therefore please act towards us as reasonable pedagogues would do; talk to us in a manner that we understand, not in a way that makes us speechless. Once we have learned to understand you, once we have, in our *maktabs*, acquired the fruits of your sciences and your knowledge, once we familiarized ourselves, through our Tatar books, with our homeland Russia, then,

45 Gasprinskii, *Russkoe musul'manstvo*, 11-12.

46 *Ibid.*, 12.

be assured, we will want to fill your gymnasiums and universities, in order to work at your side on the field of life and of science.⁴⁷

This kind of self-abasement might not be a good strategy for a contemporary grant application; in Gasprinskii's case, it served the goal of appealing to the responsibility of Russians for the weak and ignorant children that Providence has put at their feet, as their 'minor brothers'. Remarkably, here we also find an implicit threat scenario: if Russia does not 'guide' its Muslims to civilization, other subjects of the tsar – 'those around us' – might be 'infected' by the implosion of Russia's agonizing Muslim society.

European Muslims in Russia?

Remains to be asked how Gasprinskii explicated the final goal of the modernization programme that he propagated. Would Tatar/Muslim journalism and modern education not lead to the emancipation of Muslims from Russia, to European Muslims with a horizon stretching far beyond the empire, and with an own public sphere (today we would say: a strong civil society) that escapes Russian control? In order to dispel such fears Gasprinskii presented the Tatars of the utmost western parts of the Russian Empire as his model:

A year ago we visited some provinces of Lithuania, *in order to study the influence that European culture had on Asians*; there we observed the life of Lithuanian Tatars in the countryside and in cities. We should keep in mind that the Lithuanian Muslims descend from the hordes of Tatar cavalymen [*ulany*] whom the Lithuanian princes took into service for the fight against Poland, as courageous horsemen and faithful guardsmen. They were granted tax privileges and obtained the right to marry Lithuanian women. [...] As the wives of these Tatar settlers knew no Tatar at all, the first generation of the Lithuanian Tatar women started to speak more in the language of the country, that is, Lithuanian, than they spoke Tatar; after a few generations the Tatar language was no longer in use, and the Lithuanian language became the national language [*natsional'nyi iazyk*] of the Tatars.⁴⁸

47 Ibid., 35.

48 Ibid., 27-28; emphasis added.

Remarkably, this is one of the very few references to the concept of 'nation' (*natsiia*) in the whole essay; usually Gasprinskii employs the archaic 'tribe' (*plemia*), obviously because it sounds less threatening to imperial ears. The Lithuanian Tatars thus accepted a European language as their 'national language', but they fully preserved their Islamic faith:

They have the same mosques, the same rituals as all other Muslims. It is correct that they have no *maktabs* and no *madrasas*, but they have mobile schools – in the person of the *hojas* [*khodzha*], who move from place to place in order to teach the rules of Islam. Each Tatar family possesses the necessary religious books, in which the Arabic text is translated into the Polish-Lithuanian language. [...] My journey to Lithuania convinced me that Islam [*islamizm*] is almost invincible, and that apostasy occurs among the Lithuanian Tatars as rarely as it does for example among the Tatars of the Crimea.⁴⁹

Gasprinskii emphasized that the Lithuanian Tatars enjoyed a high level of education, and that many of them served in civil or military offices: 'Muslim self-isolation [*zatvornichestvo*] does not exist among them.'

Obviously, women played a crucial role in this 'domestication' of Tatar Muslim warriors:

Of course the Lithuanian women who married Tatars had to defend their freedom, but thanks to beneficial circumstances they managed to prevent the emergence of 'harems' [*garemy*]. Today it is difficult to find out whether a woman is a Muslim or an autochthonous [*korennaiia*] Polish or Lithuanian; only their names – Fatyma, Aisha, Meriem, Zelikha and so forth – reveal their Muslim origin. The Lithuanian Tatar men have Russian-Polish given names while their family names – like Akhmatovich, Asanovich and Selimovich – are of Tatar origin.⁵⁰

Presenting the Lithuanian Tatars as a direct model for all Muslims of Russia, Gasprinskii again switches into the mode of a grant application:

The Lithuanian Tatars are the best Tatars of Russia; they stand at the forefront of Russia's Muslimhood in terms of culture and education. It would be very desirable to employ them for work among the other Muslims

49 Ibid., 28.

50 Ibid., 29.

of Russia. For this service one could give them some privileges, in order to ease their work; for I believe that their cultural life would make a good example for many other Muslims.⁵¹

A Muslim minority whose Islam is reduced to the ritual, whose military prowess is fully at the disposal of the state, and who are completely integrated into non-Muslim society, even to the point of having abandoned their own language, and having accepted European names – Gasprinskii must have thought that this prospect would appeal to any Russian administrator. The example of the Lithuanian Tatars (who in fact spoke local Lithuanian, Polish or Belarusian idioms)⁵² is meant to prove that a far-reaching transformation of Muslim communities was indeed possible – and that Gasprinskii's grant project is perfectly feasible.

If Russia understands the potential of her Muslims, she can drag them out of their ignorance, their 'dusted worldview' (*zatkhloe mirovozzrenie*), and guide them towards a new role in the world:

I would not spill one single drop of ink for these observations if I had even a moment's doubt about the shining future of my Fatherland and its Muslimhood. The civilization was born in the farthest East, and step by step it has spread to the West; but now, so it seems, it has taken a new course to the East, and it appears to me that the Russians and Russia's Muslims are predestined to act as the best transmitters of this civilization. [...] If it was the Romans and the Arabs who carried civilization into the West, then it is very possible that today Providence [*Providenie*] has decided to make the Russians and Tatars the carriers of Western civilization into the East.⁵³

With access to European ideas and modern knowledge, Russia can awaken her apathetic Muslims to new life, with the result that the Muslim community will 'become human' (*ochelovechitsia*) again and identify with Russia. Needless to say, his own role Gasprinskii sees as the facilitator of this awakening.

Gasprinskii's essay is so much tailored to Russian interests that only in the very end of his essay he seemed to realize that his projects also required the support of Russia's Muslims. In a few sentences he now addressed his

51 Ibid.

52 Suter, *Alfurkan Tatarski*; Akiner, *Religious Language*.

53 Gasprinskii, *Russkoe musul'manstvo*, 30-31.

co-religionists; but he did so in a language that conformed to Russian expectations of how Muslims should be mobilized for establishing modern Muslim schools – namely through primitive references to Islam:

O brothers, [...] our religion teaches that there are three ways to do good: through work, through the word, and through donations – all three ways are pleasing to God [*ugodno Bogu*] and noble. [...] I hope that in this holy undertaking [*v etom sviatom dele*] the educated muftis of the Crimea and of Kazan will offer you the necessary support. [...] This, O brothers, will be honest and pious, and sooner or later the people will bless your names, keeping in mind the holy saying of the great Ali that ‘the ink of the scholar deserves as much respect as the blood of the martyr’.⁵⁴

Conclusion: Combining Russo-, Euro-, Islamo- and Tatarocentrism

Gasprinskii’s 1881 essay is one of the earliest elaborate reflections about Europeanization composed by a Muslim author. At the same time ‘Russian Muslimhood’ is above all *Russocentric*: it comes as an impressive firework of grand patriotic narratives, and as a Muslim variation of Russia’s civilizing mission in the East. Gasprinskii emphasized (1) the historical entanglement of Russia and Islam, and the ensuing commonalities between Russians and Muslims; (2) the loyalty but passivity and self-isolation of Muslims; (3) the progress of Russia as coming through a careful Europeanization, the essence of which is the spread of science and knowledge. Gasprinskii furthermore argued (4) that this Europeanization could easily be coupled with authentic Islam, which he reduced to morality and ritual. Such a Europeanization would bring about a new spiritual and moral life, but it could also have negative effects (if it lacks the scientific approach and destroys Asian/ Islamic morality).

Gasprinskii carefully designed his proposal as a contribution to several grand trends of Russian thought at the time; at face value, his project is very Russocentric. Gasprinskii fed into various imperial and colonial discourses, and presented himself as the ideal spokesperson of his fellow Muslims (who, he implied, were just waiting for deliverance from their misery), and as a loyal subject of the tsar who will increase administrative efficiency (as a loyal Muslim newspaper would improve the state’s outreach). Another goal

54 Ibid., 44-45.

of his project was enhancing Russian state security by pre-empting Muslim solidarity with outside powers and averting a Muslim meltdown at home. There is even a concrete model that he proposed – the assimilated Lithuanian Tatars. Elements that spoke to Slavophiles – especially Gasprinskii's flattering notes about the Russian national character, Russian religiosity, and about Russia's historical mission as an imperial power – he easily combined with the goals of Russia's Westernizers, namely Russia's modernization in terms of education, administration, public life and literature. The grandeur of Russia would be augmented by affirmative action policies towards her Muslims; once enlightened, the Tatars would radiate Russia's splendour further to the East. At the same time his programme was meant to give Muslims the voice that they so far lacked – as subordinates, or subalterns, but in their native language and in native institutions.

Staunchly situated in the Russian context, and predicated upon Russian interests, Gasprinskii's essay can also be read as an argument for Europeanization. But 'Europe' is reduced to a scientific attitude, to the production and dissemination of superior knowledge. As such, it is completely uncoupled from the cultural centres of Europe that he mentioned, such as Paris and London. In Gasprinskii's eyes, the Russians accepted Europeanization only recently, but without losing their original moral compass; therefore, they were ideally suited to pass Europeanization on to their Muslims, with the help of Muslim intermediaries such as Gasprinskii himself. This Russo-Muslim Europeanization would only strengthen Russia's uniqueness, in conformity with her geopolitical interests; and it would block an alternative Europeanization emanating from Istanbul.

In that sense, Gasprinskii's Eurocentrism is in fact a kind of Eurocentrifugism, a movement of European qualities away from Europe; the Jadids that followed him developed not only modern education and journalism but also charitable associations, a modern literature and theatre, the elaboration of ethnic nationalisms in historiography, and the struggle for the emancipation of women, all in their native languages and sponsored by a Muslim entrepreneurial class. After the October Revolution, the Muslims of Russia obtained ethno-national 'autonomous' republics such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, in the Bolshevik variant of European ideas about political representation.

As Gasprinskii warned, with the Europeanization of Muslims and the break-up of their communal self-isolation comes the danger of moral corruption. Here Gasprinskii's antidote was the preservation of communal coherence through Islamic morality, but also the promotion of a 'tribal' historical identity that can be racial (Turkic) or national (Tatar) at the

same time. In fact, in his historical reflections he introduced an element of nativism that emancipated the Tatars from Russia, and Asia from Europe: employing European modes of historical reflection, he characterized Tatar rule as something beneficial for Russia – with Europe/the West depicted as a threat to Russia's integrity. The idea of a Tatar/Golden Horde 'service' to Russia would be further pronounced by the Eurasianists of the 1920s, and by the neo-Eurasianists of our day. One could therefore regard Gasprinskii as a pioneer of 'Muslim Eurasianism' in Russia.⁵⁵

Equally complex was Gasprinskii's conception of Islam in Russia, his navigating between religious and ethnic/national essentialisms. While pretending to speak for Russia's Muslims as a whole, it is clear that Russia's 'movement to the East' was supposed to be led by the Tatars; other Muslim nationalities of the Russian Empire are not even mentioned in his essay.⁵⁶ Likewise, Gasprinskii had very little to say about the various forms of Islam that existed in the empire; in this respect his essay resembled the writings of Russian historians and administrators whom he reproached for 'ignoring' Islam and Muslims in Russia. While repeating that the religion of Islam does not pose a political threat to Russia, Gasprinskii directed his enlightenment programme against the Islamocentrism that he observed among Russia's Muslim communities, in education, communal self-administration, and in the construction of communal authority – while still employing Islam as a factor not only of moral but also of communal identity.

This brings us to the conclusion that Gasprinskii's programmatic text is in the first place an overconfident claim to intellectual authority in Russia's Muslim society, hurled against the Islamic scholars and imams who so far dominated Muslim education, cultural life, and communal representation. In this sense it makes sense that when addressing Muslims, on the last pages of his essay, the author suddenly switched to the pedagogical language of a teacher. Just like he used Russian arguments against Russification policies, Gasprinskii employed Islamic symbols against the dominance of Muslim authorities. The essay was thereby a double provocation – with ambiguous references to Europeanization to underpin his claim that change was inevitable.

Gasprinskii's 'Russian Muslimhood: Thoughts, Annotations and Observations' (1881) is therefore also a founding document of Jadidism and a starting point for the intra-Muslim competition between Jadids and Muslim

55 Sibgatullina and Kemper, 'Between Salafism'.

56 This Tatarocentrism is most prominent in Gasprinskii's later writings on Central Asia. See Hofmeister, 'Ein Krimtatare'; Lazzzerini, 'From Bakhchisarai'.

traditionalists. This competition would shape the cultural history of Russia's Islam in the five subsequent decades – up to the full-scale elimination of the Islamic infrastructure, of the traditional imams and also of the Jadids, by Stalin's terror machine. As scholars have noted, historians have in general been much more sympathetic towards the Jadids, who wrote in an easily accessible language and in concepts familiar to us, than towards the 'traditionalists', who continued to write in Arabic and in the terms of classical Islamic discourse.⁵⁷ Seen as a grant application, we understand why Gasprinskii combined so many essentialist clichés about Russia, Europe and Islam – with considerable success.

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57 DeWeese, 'It was a Dark'.

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