Muslim reformism in Daghestan

*Islamic politics and Muslim education after the Russian Revolution*

Sahakyan, N.

**Publication date**
2021

**Document Version**
Other version

**License**
Other

**Link to publication**

**Citation for published version (APA):**

**General rights**
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Introduction

The main goal of this dissertation is to analyze the Daghestani reformists discourse over the visions of Daghestan’s future which took place between the February Revolution and the repressions of the Daghestani intellectuals between 1917 and 1929 and to follow their statebuilding agendas in the context of the revolutions of 1917 and the subsequent Sovietization of the North Caucasus. My investigation has two interconnected dimensions: the cooperative relations between the reformist-minded part of the Daghestani ‘ulamā’ (plural of ‘ālim, scholar of Islam) and the Bolsheviks, on one hand, and between the reformists and the other ‘ulamā’, on the other. My focus is on the discourse of the Daghestani ‘ulamā’ about state-building and community-constructing processes in post-revolutionary Daghestan. Important in this context is also the analysis of texts about Muslim education and linguistic issues, in particular regarding which language should be the idiom of education.

In the context of the Soviet Union’s Muslim-majority regions (the Caucasus, Volga-Ural region and Central Asia), the question of how socialism was established in a Muslim country with a highly traditionalist population guided by conservative religious elites has always been approached from the viewpoint of the Soviet center and based on Russian sources preserved in central archives. What emerged was the success story of the Bolsheviks: they won the Civil War and eliminated all political opponents. In the 1920s they still used the services of Muslim educational reformists (often called Jadīds in the historiography), from whose ranks many educators and politicians came during the USSR’s early
years. But by the 1930s there were enough Soviet-educated cadres to dispense of these reformists; thus, many of them were incarcerated, exiled or killed. This tradition of scholarship has nothing to say about how the local scholarly elites saw the Bolsheviks, how they made sense of the new political environment after the collapse of the empire or how they tried to implement their agendas to establish a state capable of development.

**Transimperial political discourses**

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ideas about the necessity of change in the state model were spreading in different regions of the Muslim world, such as the in the Ottoman, Russian and British Empires. The intellectuals in these different regions interpreted these ideas through the prism of local particularities of cultural and political life and integrated them into their local communities while taking into consideration these communities’ specific characters.²

Sandwiched between the Ottoman, Iranian and Russian Empires, Daghestani intellectuals participated in these discussions as they unfolded both inside Russia and in the Middle East. This participation can likely be explained by the historical ties between Daghestan and the countries of the Middle East as well as by the supremacy of the Arabic written tradition in Daghestan, which maintained popularity among religious elites right up to the early Soviet period.³ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Egypt became the epicenter of the cultural movement known as *al-Nahḍa*—literally “rising up,” but usually glossed as “renaissance” or “awakening.” As Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss noticed, “*an-Nahḍa* was neither a unified process nor a stable actor-category nor can it be traced back to a single, incontestable moment of inception.”⁴ This uncertain bedrock of cultural self-reflection spread not only to Ottoman-ruled Arabic-speaking regions but also outside the Ottoman Empire, reaching the Muslim regions of the Russian Empire as well as India. In these places reform impulses from abroad strengthened indigenous critiques

---

of traditional Muslim culture. The idea of reforms in Islamic education, as a part of an-Nahḍa, as well as the counter-ideas emerging with the spread of an-Nahḍa reached a peak in the second half of the nineteenth century amidst European colonization. As Charlene Tan states, Muslim “reforms of religious educational systems and institutions are underpinned by two distinctive ideas: that the acquisition of knowledge is both a lifelong pursuit and a religious duty for Muslims, and that there must be a correlation between knowledge and action for the welfare of the Muslim community and humanity in general.”

In the context of reforms in Islamic education, Charlene Tan speaks about significant changes that had far-reaching repercussions. The first, as he states, “was the introduction of secular laws that were supported by foreign state apparatuses, modes of administration, law and social institutions.” As for the second change, it “was the introduction of a “modern” Western-type education. Such an education was marked by the promotion of the language of the colonial powers (such as English, French or Dutch), limited enrolment of a select number of locals at European schools, and dual nature of the colonial school system. In concert with the promotion of secularism, secular education was introduced where it aimed principally at the development of the rational life of every individual, premised on a form of reality that is restricted to sensual experience, scientific procedure or processes of logic.”

Daghestani scholars were actively engaged in these developments of the Middle East. They were in constant contact with Muslim scholars from Shāfiʿi centres in Syria, Egypt, Yemen and Najd through the second decade of the twentieth century. The ideas of the Egyptian reformists Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839–1897), Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935), whose works were popular in Daghestan and often quoted in manuscripts as well as in the press, exerted a substantial influence on the Daghestani reformation discourse. Besides this influence through books and periodicals, influence was also exerted through personal networks with Egyptian reformists.

Among the Daghestani scholars participating heavily in this discourse was ʿAlī Kaiaev (al-Ghumūqī, 1878-1943). Born in 1878 in the Lak village of

6 Ibid., 4.
7 Ibid., 5.
Kazi Kumukh, ‘Alī Kaiaev studied in several Daghestani madrasas, the type of Islamic school commonly found in Daghestan through the end of the 1920s.\(^8\) One of the decisive points in his life became his travel from Astrakhan to Cairo in 1905 to study at the famous al-Azhar university. He stayed in Egypt for only two years. In Cairo he grew close to one of the major Muslim reformists, Rashīd Riḍā, and contributed to his journal *al-Manār* (“The Lighthouse,” 1898–1935).\(^9\) Being in Egypt, he was highly influenced by the reformist ideas of Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā.

Returning to Daghestan, ‘Alī Kaiaev became an editor of *Jarīdat Dāghistān* (“Daghestan Newspaper”). This Arabic-language newspaper came into existence on 7 January 1913. At first, the tsarist administration financed the project because it wanted to use an Arabic-language platform to bring official news to the attention of people in the Daghestan region. Thus, the newspaper was designed to publish translations from the newspaper *Daghestanskie oblastnye vedomosti* (“Daghestani regional news”) published in Russian, a language unpopular among the Daghestanis. Unlike Russian, Arabic had been the language of Daghestani elites for centuries. After a year of publishing, the Tsarist administration cut its financial support since the newspaper turned out to be unprofitable and did not live up to the hopes placed on it by the regional military administration. From 1914 onward the newspaper was published at the personal expense of Badawi Saidov and Magomed (Muḥammad)-Mirza Mavraev (1878-1964), giving even more room to the reformists to spread their ideas. Even before that, though the *Jarīdat Dāghistān* was publishing the official orders of the imperial administration, it had already become an outlet of the Muslim reformists of Daghestan.

The journal’s de facto editor and its most active contributor was ‘Alī Kaiaev, who was involved in the newspaper starting in 1913. Together with his Egyptian trip, this period of ‘Alī Kaiaev’s life was crucial for his ideological formation. If in Egypt he became familiar with reformist ideas, after his return to Daghestan he found a platform to spread those ideas and became an influential figure in the region.

---


Another possible pipe through which reformist ideas reached Daghestan were the Tatar Muslims of Inner Russia. The Russian Empire’s Muslim reformism emerged among the Turkic nations, mainly among the Crimean and Volga Tatars. The Crimean Tatar İsmail Gasprinskii (Gaspirali, 1851–1914) is considered the founder of Jadidism (from ʿuṣūl-i jadīd, “new method”). İsmail Gasprinskii developed a new system of teaching the Arabic script, in which he emphasized the phonetic values of the letters instead of their Arabic names and the Arabic compositions that had previously been the basis of learning how to read and write. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this method spread to the other Islamic regions of the Russian Empire, including Daghestan.

The Tatar Jadīd connection to the North Caucasus is clearly visible in the person of another major protagonist of Daghestani reformism, Abū Sufyān Akaev (al-Ghazānishī, 1872-1931). Before his travel to Cairo (1905), Abū Sufyān Akaev accompanied Magomed-Mirza Mavraev on a trip to the Crimea in order to become familiar with typesetting in Gasprinskii’s famous printing house. In his Autobiography, Akaev describes how the experience of Jadid-schools reached Daghestan. The Autobiography also reports on his visit to Central Asia and the Middle East in search of a way to develop Daghestan.

This dissertation investigates the confluence of these Muslim reformist trends in the work of Daghestani scholars and investigates the Daghestani reformists as a group of individuals brought together by Egyptian and Tatar influences but even more so by their opposition to the traditional environment of Islamic scholarship in Daghestan and eventually by their relationship with the Bolsheviks.

Researching Daghestani ‘ulamā’
There are several different narratives in the existing historiography of the Daghestani ‘ulamā’. These narratives are sometimes intertwined.

11 Ibid.
The Soviet narrative. The Soviet narrative has two sub-narratives. The first one deals with the ‘ulamā’ who were against the Bolsheviks such as Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii (al-Ḥuzī, 1859-1925) and ‘Alī Ḥajjī Akushinskii (al-Aqūshī, 1847-1930). This narrative portrays these ‘ulamā’ as stagnant elements of the society who did not understand the demands of the new time. This image portraying the ‘ulamā’ as counterrevolutionaries and irrelevant for the new times was developed in the history books dedicated to the Sovietization of Daghestan, some of which are discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. The Soviet historiography distinguishes between the powerful Muslim scholars who fought against Bolshevik rule and the intellectuals who sided with the Bolsheviks, adopting their ideology and terminology.

The second sub-narrative of Soviet historiography deals with the ‘ulamā’ who had been cooperating with the Soviet state and were included in the Soviet system during the 1920s. Many of these ‘ulamā’, including ‘Alī Kaiaev and Abū Sufyān Akaev, were later repressed by the Soviets. This meant that research on their lives and works was made impossible or at least was not supported. It was only in the late Soviet period that some Daghestani historians started to review the lives and works of these reformists, and they were still constrained by ideological limitations. One of these rare works was the book *Ali Kaiaev: Life, scientific and socio-political views* written by Magomed Abdulaev and Yusup Medzhidov in 1968 and dedicated to ‘Alī Kaiaev. In this book the authors represent Kaiaev as an intellectual who sought progress and reform; however, Abdulaev and Medzhidov fail to characterize this reform as Islamic; rather they stress the discussions of rational sciences on the pages of *Jarīdat Dāghistān* to argue that Kaiaev’s understanding of progress was similar to that of the Bolsheviks. Talking about Kaiaev’s life after the February Revolution, the authors portray him as a politically active revolutionary who, as a result of his activities, gained enemies in the person of Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii and his adherent Uzun Ḥajjī Saltinskii (al-Salṭī, 1848-1920). Written under the dominance of Soviet ideology, this book portrays ‘Alī Kaiaev as a Bolshevik. Evaluating Kaiaev’s life and heritage through the Marxist-Leninist methodology, the authors claim that ‘Alī Kaiaev, “despite the barriers built by the old

14 Ibid., 17-27.
15 Ibid., 29-30.
intelligentsia and the traditional Arab-language education system,” succeeded in overcoming them and recognized “the value of the ideological and political bases of Marxism and the socialist character of the Soviet government.”16 In 1993, after the collapse of the USSR, Abdulaev and Medzhidov published a second book dedicated to Kaiaev. The value of this work is, perhaps, increased by the inclusion of a final section where the authors placed Russian translations of ‘Ali Kaiaev’s works.17 Nevertheless, they dealt with his heritage selectively and published only those works which strengthened their argument on the ideological trajectories of Kaiaev as a Marxist-Leninist. In other words, these early studies are largely written from the perspective of how the Jadīds paved the way for socialism.

**The post-Soviet person-oriented Daghestani narrative.** While since the late 1960s it was possible to conduct research and publish books on ‘Alī Kaiaev and Abū Sufyān Akæv, other ‘ulamā’ such as Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii, the Daghestani shaykh of the Naqshbandiya ṭariqa (brotherhood), Uzun Ḥajjī Saltinskii and ‘Alī Ḥajjī (1847-1930), continued to be regarded as enemies of the working people and remained silenced. Some aspects of these figures’ life were discussed already in post-Soviet Daghestan. The Daghestani historian Khadzhi Murad Donogo authored the first huge volume on the life of Gotsinskii.18 Unlike the Soviet historiography, he portrayed Gotsinskii as a brilliant scholar and a freedom fighter for Daghestan. The same narrative of highly educated scholars of Islam acting for the future progress of Daghestan was developed in the post-Soviet works dedicated to Uzun Ḥajjī19 and Akushinskii.20

Also, reformist scholars such as Abū Sufyān Akæv, repressed by the Soviets and ignored by Soviet historiography, received new attention. Already in 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first collection of articles was published dedicated to the 120th anniversary of Abū Sufyān Akæv.21

---

16 Ibid., 181.
years later, in 2012, the second collection of articles was published. These two collections contain not only articles discussing different aspects of the works of Akaev but also translations of Akaev’s works originally written in Turkic or Arabic, including his autobiography as well as articles from periodicals. This pioneering work on the life and work of Akaev was done by Gasan M.-R. Orazaev and was based mostly on Akaev’s Turkic-language heritage. Next to these, the lives of Muḥammad-Qādī Dibirov (al-Qarākhī, 1875-1929) and Mavraev also received the attention of Daghestani historians. A step forward was made by Imanutdin Sulaev, who investigated religious leaders’ relations with the state. Sulaev’s research relying on original documents focuses on the Sufi leadership rather than the ‘ulamā’ in general.

These studies are often motivated by the desire to prove the existence of the vernacular literature of Daghestan as well as by the post-Soviet nationalism that appeared at the end of the twentieth century. One of the characteristics of these works is the desire of their authors to create positive images of the individual personalities discussed, a feature already inherent in the Western Sovietology school (as will be discussed in the first chapter). This scholarship in many cases identifies “the Jadids as modernists, or as engaging with ‘modernity’ in a positive way.” In the case of Daghestani scholarship, this positive image-making works not only in the case of the reformists but also regarding anti-Jadīd religious and political leaders. They are all represented as part of a national and ethnic heritage that Daghestanis should be proud of. This positive image-making inherently lacks any critical analyses of these individuals. In this thesis, I try to deal with these individuals in the context of their time and

26 The same positive image was also created for the Bolshevik leaders of Daghestan. For instance, for the Makhach Dakhadaev. See, Gadzhiev, Abdulatip. Makhch Dakhadaev – vydaiushchiisia revoliutsioner Dagestana. Makhachkala: Epoka, 2017.
in view of their relationships, and to discuss their competing or overlapping agendas without evaluating their standpoints positively or negatively. Thus, I pay attention not only to the role and standpoint of the reformists but also to the agendas of their allies and foes, such as the traditional ‘ulamā’ of Daghestan, some of whom came to an agreement with the reformists and the Bolsheviks against the rest of the traditional ‘ulamā’.

This characteristic has its consequences not only in historiography but also in the perceptions of the Daghestani reader. During one of my trips to Daghestan, I was working in the Central State Archive of Daghestan, where the employees were very kind to me. Sitting around a tea table, I was replying to their questions about the personalities covered in my thesis. When discussing two individuals—Kaiaev and Gotsinskii—I casually mentioned they were enemies and produced texts criticizing each other. As a proof of my words I showed them the Russian translation of a poem by Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii where he criticized and even insulted Kaiaev. I noticed the pain on the face of a Lak woman employee of the archive who only could pronounce the words, “Why did he [the Avar Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii] write these words?” The historiography had created a positive image of Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii as a Muslim who struggled for the better future of all Daghestanis. On the other hand, the same Daghestani historiography also created a positive image of Kaiaev, who was a Lak in origin, and who, on his own terms, struggled for the future prosperous Daghestan. In creating two separate positive images of Daghestanis acting at the beginning of the twentieth century, this historiography failed to bring Kaiaev and Gotsinskii into connection and to demonstrate their ideological and political confrontation.

The Jadīd narrative: The next strong narrative developed in the historiography is the Jadīd narrative. Having ties with both the Soviet and the post-Soviet narratives, this Jadīd narrative celebrates only those Muslim scholars who “with their enthusiastic embrace of modern science and education” launched a new discourse among the Russian Muslims.  

---


This narrative of trend-setter Jadīds was also developed in Daghestan, and historians began portraying this group of scholars as innovators.29 The main thing distinguishing this narrative from the post-Soviet Daghestani narrative is the fact that the Jadid narrative represents only the reform-minded scholars in a positive light while the Daghestani post-Soviet narrative also presents the opponents of these reformists positively.

Recently, scholars began to question the use of the term Jadidism. While this question is an inherent part of the historiography of the Muslims of Russia in general, it is also vital in the case of Daghestan. Given the overall similarities and differences between the Egyptian reformists and the Daghestani reformists, on the one hand, and the Jadīds of the Central Asia and Volga-Ural and the Daghestani reformists on the other, the question arises as to whether we should see the Daghestani reformists as a strain of Jadīds.

There are several reasons why it is difficult to simply subsume Daghestani reformists under the same label as Tatar and other modernists of Jadidism. Among these reasons is the question of the self-identification of the scholars with Jadīds. “Unlike many ‘-isms,’ Jadidism is not just a category invented by historians; it is based on terms found in indigenous sources from at least as far back as the early twentieth century (for example, the Uzbek phrase jādīd chilik harakatî, “Jadidism movement”).”30 Thus, I found it important to consider whether the scholar considered himself a Jadīd or not. As Daghestani sources demonstrate, among the reformists of Daghestan it was Abū Sufyān Akaev who spoke about the importance of implementing the new-method schools in Daghestan while talking about his trip to Central Asia in his Autobiography. Akaev’s description of his intention for the trip demonstrates that the desired exchange of experience was related to schooling and not Jadidism in general. ʿAlī Kaiaev, by comparison, never mentioned the term “Jadīd” in his writing and did not identify himself with Jadidism.

Another significant difference was found in the ethnic contexts of the Jadīds of the Volga-Ural region and Daghestan. Ideas about a pan-Turkic Muslim nation and the predominance of the Turkic language in the educational process, as well

as the integration of the Jadīds into imperial political and social institutions, characterized the Jadīds of the Volga-Ural region. These ideas were not central for the reformists of Daghestan. Giving an overall characterization of the Daghestani reformism, Michael Kemper and Shamil Shikhaliev, among other distinctive features, make especial mention of its multiethnic environment and the increased role played by the language issue.\textsuperscript{31} This distinguishes the development of Daghestani Jadidism, as it was named by Kemper and Shikhaliev, from that of the Turkic-speaking Volga Tatars and Bashkirs in Central Russia.\textsuperscript{32} Even Abū Sufyān Akaev, himself a Kumyk, and thus a “Turkic-speaker,” did not give any priority to Turkic bonds, in the sense of pan-Turkism; rather, he subordinated that feature of his people to “Muslimness” and being “a Daghestani.”

Involvement in political discussions are another characteristic feature of the Daghestani reformists. However, detecting the political nature of particular debates is not always easy. Shamil Shikhaiev states that “political issues rarely arose in the discourse of Daghestani reformists and their opponents. On the whole, discussion focused on specific problems that were tied to the system of Muslim law, dogmatics and questions of education and science.” He argues that the debates among the reformists took place “in a kind of political vacuum.”\textsuperscript{33} While the schooling or language issues indeed dominated their discourse, my research demonstrates that political issues were not ignored at all. The political meanings are often camouflaged by the religious terminology and images employed. For instance, while talking about freedom, the reformists rarely discussed it in the sense of freedom vis-à-vis God but instead were concerned about the political dimension; when talking about language, they meant its role in the future of Daghestan; and when justifying their cooperation with the Bolsheviks, they characterized the Soviet system as in accordance with the Islamic model of consensus. These issues were political, while the arguments and language were religious.

Although Egyptian reformism also influenced Tatar Jadidism heavily, especially in the early twentieth century, there are some nuances related

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{33} Shikhaliev, Shamil. “Muslim Reformism in Dagestan (1900-1930),” State, Religion and Church. 1, no. 3 (2018): 41-44.
to the notion of *tajdid*, i.e., “renewal” in the Daghestani context. Ingeborg Baldauf noticed that Gasprinskii did not apply the typical religious terminology of *tajdid* [“renewal”], which would have centered on the term *al-īṣlāḥ* [“religious reform, repair of damage accumulated over time”]. The key idea of *īṣlāḥ* is repairing and restoration, a replacement of decayed particles with solid and healthy ones in order to re-establish the previous righteous conditions prevalent during the Golden Age of Islam, which came to an end with the Prophet and the *al-salaf al-ṣālih*—the pious ancestors, i.e., the first three generations of Islam, whose exemplary method of understanding and implementing the Qur’an and Sunna all Muslims are called to follow. Citing Edward J. Lazzerini, Ingeborg Baldauf states that proponents of “*īṣlah* are regressive rather than progressive since they postulate the superiority of the past and attempt to revive it. Gasprinskii’s worldview, however, was a progressive one. He was striving for a future for the Muslim community that would not only be better than their present condition but also better than that of any bygone age.”34 As Shamil Shikhaliev argued, the idea of the Dagestani reformists, like in Egyptian reformism, “did not lie in the building of a principally new society, but were based on a return to the golden age of Islam, when in the areas of science and education Muslim civilization rapidly developed and was ahead of the rest of the world.”35 As in the case of the Egyptian journal *al-Manār*, the Daghestani reformists also translate “reformation” with the term *al-īṣlāḥ*. Daghestanis use these terms in the same context that the Egyptian reformists used them. Additionally, the Dagestani reformists in their polemical works used the special term *jadīd* or *Ḥizb al-Jadīd*—“the party or group of *jadīd*.” However, in the Dagestani Arabic language tradition this term refers exclusively to those who supported the ideas of absolute *ījtihād*.36 Consequently, Daghestani reformists evaluated their activities as “restoration” or “renewal” and never as the “creation of the new” to which the “Tatar” term *jadīd* can be related. It is no accident that polemical works against *ījtihād* (“the exercise of rational faculties in pursuit of

36 Ibid.
dynamic codes of law”) describe *ijtihād* as *jadīd*, “new.” Those inclined to the absolute *ijtihād* often were accused of *bid’a*, i.e., of bringing “unacceptable” innovations into religion. This means that Jadidism had another meaning in the Daghestani discourse. Moreover, despite the influence of Jadidism on the sphere of education reforms, the Dagestani written tradition does not refer to advocates of this field as Jadīds.\(^{37}\)

Finally, the term “reformist” has its shortcomings as well. These shortcomings are due especially to the absence of a coherent movement. This circumstance was also observed in the case of Jadidism.\(^ {38}\) Like in the case of Jadidism, what might be called “reformism” or “Daghestani reformism” “was not a coherent political or cultural “movement” but, rather, a set of cultural practices enmeshed in a derivative discourse of Islamic reformism.”\(^ {39}\) Analyzing the possible groupings of Daghestani scholars of Islam, Shamil Shikhaliev states that there were three types of reformists: 1) reformists who proposed reforming only the Islamic educational system while supporting the tradition of the *Shāfi‘i* legal school; 2) reformists who advocated an expansion of the framework of the *Shāfi‘i* legal school in addition to the reform of education and 3) reformists who proposed reform of the system of Islamic education, criticized the legal schools and called for independent judgement in matters of Islamic law beyond the framework of the legal schools.\(^ {40}\) This division demonstrates that Shikhaliev sees the sphere of education as a shared sphere among different types of reformists. This is indeed a very useful categorization. Nevertheless, there is another prime characteristic which also unites different types of reformists. This is their purist approach, i.e., the idea they had of *true Islam*. The development of this idea can be followed through the reformist newspapers and journals published during the 1910s and 1920s.

This purist approach is known in modern Islamic studies as Salafism or

---

37 Shamil Shikhaliev analyzes the works of the Dagestani theologian ‘Abd al-Hāfīz Omarov in this respect, noticing that Omarov, like other Dagestani authors, uses the term *jadīd* exclusively for adherents of absolute *ijtihād*. Shikhaliev, Shamil. “Muslim Reformism in Dagestan (1900-1930),” *State, Religion and Church*. 1, no. 3 (2018): 38-39.


Salafiya (from al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ). Expressed in simple words, the Salafi doctrine is expressed in its basic tenet: a strict belief in the unity of God (tawḥīd), which excludes the association of any partners to God (shirk) and rejects unlawful innovations (sing. *bidʿa*) that have no root in the Prophet’s example. The need for Islamic renewal or reform in order to modernize and update the religious law is the main thesis of the Salafiya. To implement these reforms, the Salafiya proposed to marry “an Islamic trend that called for going back to the early sources of Islam (i.e. the Qur’an and the Hadith) shunning harmful innovations (*bidʿa*) that came later, and the modern Western trend of thought.” In this understanding, it is a modernist movement accepting Western ideas but only within the general Islamic cultural framework.

In Egypt and Syria, the names of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (1855-1902) and Rashīd Riḍā were connected with the early development of the Salafiya. In Cairo in 1898, Riḍā created *al-Manār*, the most influential organ of the Salafiya. Henri Lauzière in his recent contribution, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century*, calls ʿAbduh, Riḍā and their followers modernist or balanced (*muʿtadil*) Salafis. In his article “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” Quintan Wiktorowicz differentiates between three major factions in the Salafi community: the purists, the *politicos* and the *jihadis*. “The purists,” as Wiktorowicz states, “emphasize a focus on nonviolent methods of propagation, purification, and education. They view politics as a diversion that encourages deviancy. *Politicos*, in contrast, emphasize the application of the Salafi creed to the political arena, which they view as particularly important because it dramatically impacts social justice and the right of God alone to legislate. *Jihadis* take a more militant position and argue that the current context calls for violence and revolution. All three factions share a common creed but offer different explanations of the contemporary world and its concomitant problems, and so they propose

43 Ibid., 55.
different solutions. The splits are about contextual analysis, not belief.” 45 The Manarists/Salafis, as they are called by Mahmoud Haddad, acquiesced in or, rather, called for the separation of religion and politics. 46 

This separating approach was not followed among Daghestani scholars. In the context of Daghestani reformism, the discussion of some Salafi approaches would be best described as a combination of the first two groups, i.e., the purists and the políticos. Here we see the emergence of the phenomenon which Daghestani scholars called “politician-scholars” (ahl al-siyāsa min al-‘ulamā’), which in their understanding combined a) non-violent methods in the purification of religion, b) education of society and c) participation in state-building and governance. Contrary to the categories proposed by Wiktorowicz, according to which purists accept “politics as a diversion that encourages deviancy,” in the case of Daghestan the purists were also políticos. In Daghestan, scholars such as ‘Alī Kaiaev, Abū Sufyān Akaev and Muḥammad-Qādī Dibirov were representatives of those ahl al-siyāsa min al-‘ulamā’ who had enough authority to explain issues related to religion as well as to be involved in the implementation of state-building in accordance with the Sharī’a. Consequently, my analysis identifies three core elements inherent to the Daghestani reformist scholars of Islam: educational and other reforms, the Salafi creed, and political engagement. From these three components, the political engagement and reformist inclination would become the platform where the vision of the Daghestani reformists and that of the Bolsheviks overlapped, creating the possibility for a shared rhetoric and cooperation. In different phases of the revolutionary developments, certain aspects of their agenda also overlapped with the agenda of other (non-reformist) scholars, making it sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to draw clear lines between the reformists and the other scholars.

Based on these core elements, as well as the similarities and differences with the Jadīds of Russia, the question arises as to what we should call these Daghestani scholars of Islam. Throughout this thesis, I will use the neutral term “reformist,” hoping to come back to this question again after investigating the sources.

**New approaches in the historiography.** To date there are only a few in-depth studies of the discourse between the ‘*ulamā’* during the period under discussion in Dagestan. Among them are articles and books by Michael Kemper, Shamil Shikhaliev and Amir Navruzov. Without focusing on individual personalities, Amir Navruzov discusses the topics that were hotly debated in the Arab-language press of Dagestan, such as the newspaper *Jarīdat Dāghistān* and the journal *Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq*.

In 2018, Shamil Shikhaliev and Amir Navruzov authored a book on Kaiaev and the *Naqshbandī-Shādhili* shaykh Sayfallāh Bashlarov (al-Nitsovkrī, 1853-1919). The book shed a bright light on his life and works. This book also contains many original Arabic-language documents and their translations. Another significant contribution to the study of reformism in Dagestan is the article “Qadimism and Jadidism in Twentieth-Century Dagestan” by Michael Kemper and Shamil Shikhaliev. Having educational methods for teaching Arabic and Islam as their focus, the authors’ observations challenge the widespread assumption that Jadidism was an overall success story. The article by Kemper and Shikhaliev uses non-Jadīd sources to investigate reformism in Dagestan and applies this approach in order not to reproduce the narratives of Jadidism.

Recent works have improved the situation to some extent, opening broader scopes for analysis of the discussions of the ‘*ulamā’* and the context in which they were acting. Still, our knowledge of how Dagestani Muslim intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were linked to the Islamic discourses of other Muslim regions of Russia and the Middle East is in its infancy. Furthermore, no research has been done on rhetorical similarities and shared agendas between the ‘*ulamā’* of Dagestan and the Bolsheviks, or on an ideological confrontation between the two.

In this thesis, I seek to contextualize the works of the Dagestani ‘*ulamā’* in several dimensions—the local Dagestani, the Islamic (Muslim regions of

---


Russia and the Middle East) and that of Soviet Russia. My hope is to discuss the works produced by the Daghestani ‘ulamā’ but move that discussion away from a single-minded focus on its specification and uniqueness as well as avoid being trapped by any of the above-mentioned narratives. Rather, I seek to show the connections and ties across a larger geographical space and balance the local and the global in the themes that I examine to show how the Daghestani scholars of Islam made use of these connections. For this purpose, I place the works and life trajectories of the Daghestani ‘ulamā’ within the larger context of various currents and focus on the discourse of progress and visions for a future state, looking not only at works by the reform-minded scholars but also at those who can be labelled as traditionalists or those in between.

I use the word ‘ulamā’ as an umbrella term covering Muslim scholars of different religious and political orientations, such as various reform-minded scholars and Sufi authorities whether they supported the Bolsheviks or spoke out against them. Using this broad context and including individuals with their own agendas, I demonstrate that religious and political priorities were being pushed forward not only by the reformists but also by others. In this not-only-reformist context the overlapping political agendas and religious standpoints become more visible. The processes of cooperation and confrontation between the ‘ulamā’ and the Bolsheviks, as well as between the ‘ulamā’ themselves are the key topics of my research. In this complex field of Daghestani, Russian and broader Islamic entanglements, there are several overall issues that this thesis illuminates.

The Research Questions
This thesis grounds its discussion of the visions that the Daghestani ‘ulamā’ had for the future of Daghestan, the question of religious authority and the question of political leadership in that context in an analysis of unpublished treatises and the contributions they made to the periodicals of time.

There are three main groups of questions this thesis seeks to answer. The first group of questions relates to religious authority and political leadership in the post-imperial period. In the years after the February Revolution, the disappearance of imperial limitations in Daghestan allowed for the religious figures to engage in significant political activities. To gain leadership, each one of these religious authorities emphasized his own religious viewpoint as the only true guide for creating a prosperous future for Daghestan. This group
included questions such as the following: *How did the ‘ulamā’ substantiate their role in politics? What religious and political concepts were decisive in their agendas? Which state models were backed by these religious authorities? And what was the linkage between a state model and the potential influence of the ‘ulamā’?*

The second group of questions deals with the reaction of the ‘ulamā’ to the 1917 February Revolution and its consequences in Daghestan. This group included the following kinds of questions: *What did the collapse of the autocracy mean for the Daghestani scholars of Islam? How did that influence the attitude towards jihād against Russia? What was the role of the Bolsheviks in Daghestan of 1917? How did the shared platform between the Bolsheviks and certain ‘ulamā’ come into being?*

The third and last group of questions which, however, is not the primary focus of this thesis, touches upon the larger context of ideas in transition. Long before the 1917 revolutions in Russia, ideas about the necessity of reforms and ideal models of possible states and educated society were already “travelling” around circuits of Muslim scholars in the Ottoman and Russian Empires. On local levels, the ‘ulamā’ were adapting them to their local environment and making use of them. Related to this issue of idea transmission are the following questions: *How did the local historical and cultural constraints shape the perception of these “travelling” ideas among the Daghestani ‘ulamā’? Why did the ‘ulamā’ of Daghestan accept certain ideas received from the Middle East and the Muslim regions of Russia while others were ignored or denied? What role did language have on the perception of the Daghestani receiver?*

My overall aim is to reveal the main patterns of the development of discourse over the future of Daghestan among the ‘ulamā’ from the period when there was an absence of a central power in Russia after the 1917 revolutions through the period of the Sovietization of the country and to identify the main ambitions and aims of the Daghestani ‘ulamā’. I identify what ideas were significant to the Daghestani context and how the local situation helped to generate the agendas of ‘ulamā’.

**Sources: Contextualizing the Materials from State and Private Archives**

My work is based on the rich sources kept in the Central State Archive of the Republic of Daghestan; the fonds of the Institute of History, Archaeology and
Ethnography of the Daghestan Federative Research Center, Russian Academy of Sciences; private archives discovered in villages of Daghestan, such as the Archive of ‘Alī Kaiaev; and the Central Historical Archive of Georgia. The sources that I found in these archives were periodicals published between 1913 and 1928 and manuscripts in the Arabic and Turkic (Kumyk) languages as well as in Russian. A small part of these sources is Soviet-era state documentation while a significant portion of my sources is comprised of historical documents (mainly unpublished) written by the Daghestani scholars between the 1910s and 1930s. Whereas the periodicals cast light on day-to-day historical developments in revolutionary Daghestan, the manuscripts written by the Daghestani ‘ulamā’ provide the keys for understanding the religious and political developments of those days as seen through the eyes of the scholars themselves. These manuscripts consist of historical treatises on the 1917 revolutions in Daghestan, memoirs of the reformists about the world surrounding them, protocols of discussions of political and religious issues that the ‘ulamā’ encountered and of other materials. Notably, there are several prominent examples of autobiographical writing that enable us to investigate the individual dimension of the revolutionary events, rarely ever taken seriously by the existing scholarship. Among these autobiographical writings are the memoirs of Kaiaev⁵⁰ about the events of 1917 and the autobiography of Akaev.⁵¹ Both works remained far out of the reach of censors and so give us an opportunity to look at the world as really seen through the authors’ eyes. Additionally, they are a significant source for helping us to understand how the ‘ulamā’ positioned themselves.

To collect these sources, I regularly visited Daghestan and Georgia between 2016 and 2020. During my research trips, I had a chance to study and collect a broad array of texts composed by Daghestani ‘ulama’, some of which will be presented here for the first time. For instance, Kaiaev’s Memoirs of the 1917 Revolutions were discovered by Shamil Shikhalsiyev and myself in the private archive of Kaiaev and have never been studied before.


Methodology
My work is a counterpoint to the existing historiography on Daghestan between 1917 and 1929. This thesis prioritizes the local sources in Arabic that were produced by competing camps within the Islamic elite.

The discourse of the Muslim ‘ulamā’ in Daghestan have mostly come down to us in manuscript form. Furthermore, the largest part of these manuscripts was kept in private archives in different villages of Daghestan and did not become accessible until recently. These sources present a formidable challenge in terms of archeography—that is to say, they need to be deciphered, understood and compared. Oftentimes political or educational issues were expressed in the classical genres of the Islamic tradition, including commentaries referring to earlier works and various forms of poetry. More straightforward are the available educational projects composed in systematic manners.

My methodology takes into consideration these problems by operating in a snowball manner. I started with the published texts in Arabic-language journals like Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq and Jarīdat Dāghistān. My perusal of these issues gave me an overview of the major authors who contributed to the debates about Islam, Islamic education and Islamic law as well as a sense of their standpoints in the question about which languages should be promoted in Daghestan—local vernaculars, Arabic or Russian. I also determined the educational backgrounds of these authors, their networks and their contacts with colleagues in Russia, Azerbaijan and the Middle East. The research suggests that informal contacts between individuals, like, for example, the relationship between Rashīd Riḍā and ‘Alī Kaiaev, were indeed significant.

In the case of the journals, I investigate them not only as written texts but also take into consideration the special environment they created for their editors-in-chief (‘Alī Kaiaev and Abū Sufyān Akaev were editing Jarīdat Dāghistān and Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq, respectively.). These periodicals were not only vital for spreading ideas but also for obtaining news and new ideas. Regularly receiving telegrams and article submissions covering a wide range of topics related to events in places as far apart as Europe and Japan, these scholars found themselves at the center of events happening all over the world: education change, ongoing war, frontiers, religious debates, etc. As editors, they had the power to decide which news was more important and which should not be published. In the other words, they had a large impact on the discourses of Daghestan.
The next step was linking the publications to the available manuscript sources. The latter are scattered over various collections (often not catalogued, incorrectly catalogued or not dated). Here, more actors come into the picture along with more interpretations, or variants of interpretations.

My work with individual texts develops in three steps: I analyze each document in isolation, then connect it to other writings by the same author and bring the documents into engagement with the writings of the author’s opponents. During my analysis I pay special attention to the linguistic forms (language use, translation of concepts, change of meanings during the translation, adaptation of variants and the spread of terminology from published to manuscript works and back). I am interested in how Islamic terms were employed to explain the political events of post-revolutionary Daghestan. I detect how Russian terms appear as calques or are represented by Arabic equivalents (soviet, “council,” can be sufiāṭī as well as shurā; “revolution” can be revoliutsiia or inqilāb). Here the preference for the Russian terminology can imply a political stance. Additionally, I am trying to follow the socio-political scenarios hidden behind these terms.

Structure of this thesis
My dissertation first presents the historical and historiographical background of Daghestan between 1917 and 1929, that is to say, the context in which the ʿulamāʾ were acting and later evaluations of this context. It then turns to the three main spheres of the discourse developed by the ʿulamāʾ: the question of state model, of education system, and of religious authority within the new Soviet system.

In the first chapter I provide a general analysis of the political situation in Daghestan after the February Revolution. By covering the time frame between 1917 and 1929, this chapter provides the reader with the necessary historical and historiographical background. Throughout the chapter I discuss the key political events and persons and attach a brief overview of existing scholarship to situate my own research. On the basis of available primary sources from Daghestan, I de-Bolshevize the history of the Russian Revolutions of 1917 in Daghestan by liberating it from the Red/White dichotomy and establishing Daghestani Muslim leaders as agents in their own right. I examine the political constellations that formed around such figures as Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii, Uzun Ḥajjī Saltinskii and ʿAlī Ḥajjī Akushinskii and the rhetoric that they employed.
Furthermore, I demonstrate the interplay of various forces with the outbreak of the February Revolution. I conclude that the confrontation between the two political camps led by Akushinskii and Gotsinskii respectively resulted in the political failure of both, enabling the Bolsheviks to get power in Daghestan despite their anti-religious reputation. Later, as my research shows, the idea of Sharī'a justice that was significant between 1917 and 1919 lost its popularity after that and the Bolshevization of the revolutionary language took place. I demonstrate how the Sovietization of Daghestan resulted in the gradual reduction of the social field of Islamic law.

While the first chapter provides the reader with background information and serves as a reference for the entire thesis, the second chapter focuses on the discourse of the ‘ulamāʾ over a desired state model which would protect the freedom gained by the revolution. Hence, I begin with a discussion of the phenomenon of “revolution” and the evolution of the concept of freedom actualized by the revolution along with the role of “the imamate” in that concept. Then, I focus on the polemics about the re-establishment of the imamate among the Daghestani ‘ulamāʾ. I also highlight the elements around which these religious polemics evolved, including the role of the Ottoman Sultan as the formal leader of all Muslims, the personal qualities of Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii and the impact of Imām Shamīl’s political heritage on Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii’s career. Sources demonstrate that the arguments of both supporters and opponents of the imamate were well-grounded in the religious debate but what truly mattered was politics. The character of these debates, i.e., the combination of theological and purely political reasoning, demonstrates the complexity of practical steps and the variety of tactical agreements that dominated in the North Caucasus. The February Revolution was conceptualized by the ‘ulamāʾ as an event of political and cultural liberation. However, the political dominance of the Bolsheviks left no room for the previous Muslim liberation paradigm; the ‘ulamāʾ were forced to elaborate a language of compatibility between Islam and socialism.

The third chapter is divided into two main education-related topics that the Daghestani intellectuals discussed heatedly. In this chapter, first I discuss the question of the school system. My research demonstrates that education served as the main shared platform for reformists and Bolsheviks. Their confrontation with the Muslim traditionalists on the aspects of education
made the reformists build bridges towards the socialists and emphasize the rational sciences and new schools. However, I argue that despite the shared rhetoric, the actual goals of the reformists and Bolsheviks greatly differed. Most prominently, the reformists did consider the rational sciences an essential means for progress but at the same time did not negate the role of religious subjects. For them, a combination of rational and religious sciences was an ideal combination. On the contrary, the Bolsheviks considered religion to be an old-fashioned framework that needed to be replaced by the concept of “scientific atheism.” The second main part of the chapter discusses the role of language in the projects for the future. At the turn of the century, language became a key national and religious marker in multi-language Daghestan, as the promotion of vernaculars served as a powerful platform for state-building. The imperial administration understood this very well and hence tried to promote the spread of Russian in the region. After the outbreak of the revolution, in Daghestan the competing projects had their own visions concerning which language should be dominant. I argue that there were several models envisaged by Daghestani intellectuals: a) an Islamic state ruled by an imām, a Muslim theocratic leader, that should have Arabic as the main language of instruction in schools; b) a semi-secular government (independent or autonomous) with the Daghestani vernacular languages as the main languages of instruction and Arabic as the language of religion; and c) a subject of Russia with Russian as the dominant language. In this chapter, I demonstrate a direct link between the choice of political project and the preferred language of instruction.

The fourth and final chapter of my thesis is devoted to the reformists’ project of representing themselves as a religious authority speaking from the standpoint of the pure religion in spite of their interpretations overlapping with Soviet foreign and domestic politics. For this purpose, I examine the journal Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq. Before analyzing the main topics of the journal, I delve into the question of how the reformists became a part of the Soviet system and what their role in this new situation was. In the 1920s, the reformists in Daghestan had to show that they were the religious force that was empowered to make religious decisions and show what true Islam was. This reformist aspiration overlapped with the Soviet policy towards the musdukhovenstvo (the Bolshevik term for “Islamic spiritual cadres”) in the 1920s. Whereas some Sufi leaders denounced any cooperation with the Bolsheviks, others saw the potential for common ground with the new regime. It is in this context that the journal Bayān
al-Ḥaqā’iq was established. From the very beginning, the authors emphasized their authority in pure Islam, on one hand, and their loyalty to the Soviets, on the other. The rhetoric of the journal, as it turned out, while sharing some of the ideas of the Soviet State, such as anti-colonialism, remained within the Islamic debates over pure Islam. Moreover, this “orthodox” position opened the door to criticize Muslims other than reformists and placed the Daghestani reformists at the center of intra-Islamic debates.