Muslim reformism in Daghestan

Islamic politics and Muslim education after the Russian Revolution

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The Visions of Daghestan’s Future in Debates on Education and on the Language of Instruction

3.1. Introduction

Inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917, Daghestani intellectuals sought to implement their visions of the future state. Education and language were central in these debates. In their programs, both the issue of the educational system and the question of which language was to be used for instruction were seen in relation to the concepts of freedom and of a prosperous future as discussed in the previous chapter of the thesis; only an educated society can value and protect freedom. The idea of development through education was a platform, creating a rhetoric that united Daghestani intellectuals of various shades and colors. This shared vocabulary was one of the preconditions that made the reformers allies of the Bolsheviks. The reformers attacked the traditional Arabic-language system of education in Daghestan that had developed over the centuries since the start of the Islamization of the region in the seventh century. However, they did not aim at the complete elimination of Arabic from the schools. While the reformists and the Bolsheviks shared the rhetoric of progress through education, their final goals completely differed,

301 Several paragraphs of this chapter were published in my article on the language issues in Daghestan. See Sahakyan, Naira. "Language debate and visions of the future in revolutionary Dagestan," Caucasus Survey 6, n. 2 (2018): 147-162.
transforming the reformists from allies of the Soviets into an anti-Soviet force that at the end of the 1920s had already become the target of government attacks. At the same time, there was also some common ground between the reformers and the supporters of the traditional education system. In particular, this concerned the role of religion. Both groups emphasized the significance of religion and Islamic subjects in schools, and both pretended to be the major religious authorities and the guardians of religion. Nevertheless, despite the matching rhetoric in their vocabularies, their definitions of what “pure” Islam meant widely differed.

To understand the Daghestani intellectuals’ approach toward the role of education and language in the context of their visions for the future, in this chapter, I will discuss articles in periodicals and other sources produced by these competing sides shortly before and right after the February Revolution.

3.2. Islamic education in Daghestan and visions of the future
3.2.1. The ‘rise and fall’ of Islamic education in Daghestan

With the establishment of Arab rule in Derbent by the mid-eighth century, the building of mosques became necessary. The first huge mosque in Derbent and some other smaller mosques were built in 733. In Daghestan, like elsewhere, mosques were not only the place for worship but also for education.³⁰² The first Islamic school that we know of appeared in the eleventh century in the southern village of Tsakhur.³⁰³ Developing over the centuries, the network of Islamic schools was widespread in Daghestan right up to the 1920s when the Soviets launched their policy of eradicating the religious system of education. This traditional Islamic system of schooling had two fundamental institutions: the maktab, as an elementary school, and the madrasa, the Muslim institution of higher learning par excellence.³⁰⁴

In Daghestan, madrasa education was highly person-oriented. The primary purpose of these institutions was the teaching of al-ʿulūm al-islāmiyya (Islamic sciences) such as ʿIlm al-kalām (Islamic theology) and fiqh (Islamic

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³⁰³ Ibid.
jurisprudence). Through the process of learning these subjects the pupils gradually became familiar with the Arabic language. As M. Kemper and Sh. Shikhaliev highlight, “there was no discipline of teaching ‘Arabic language’ as a distinct discipline—and no textbooks for learning Arabic, as an instrument for then studying Arabic-language works in the religious disciplines. Rather, the pupil was thrown directly into reading the Qur’an, without any propaedeutic preparation for reading the Arabic script or for understanding the Arabic language.” Still, *madrasa* education was highly systematic with a sequence of textbooks building upon each other.

Many historians from and outside Daghestan have left us with accounts of Daghestani Islamic education. Their interpretations were however colored by the political demands and expectations of the tsarist, Bolshevik and reformist narratives. In accordance with these narratives, Islamic education in Daghestan had a first-class system and was of high quality. However, on the eve of the 1917 revolutions, this education had already lost its greatness and the reformers were those who understood that and tried to fix the situation by creating a new school system. However, they faced the opposition of the old-minded ‘ulamā’.

There are several gaps and misperceptions in this narrative of the Daghestani Islamic education. In his article on Islamic education in the North Caucasus, Akhmet Yarlykapov presents that widespread narrative, saying that “from the second quarter of the nineteenth century, these teaching methods and the range of subjects taught in *madrasas* began to cause a growing feeling of dissatisfaction among leading Muslim scholars who realized the need to reform the system of Islamic education that was becoming obsolete.” Going further, Yarlykapov emphasizes the role of the “enlighteners” such as Abū Sufyān Akaev who “understood that for reforming the system of education he had to make a lot of effort.” In his response to Yarlykapov’s article, Gregorii Kochak casts doubts on the “past greatness.” This mainstream view that

307 Ibid., 16.
308 Ibid., 16.
traditional education was in crisis has been very much shaped by Jadid arguments.\textsuperscript{310}

Vladimir Bobrovnikov later joined this discussion, trying to answer the questions that Kochak addressed to Yarlykapov. Commenting on the idea of “past greatness” portrayed by Yarlykapov and challenged by Kochak, Bobrovnikov writes, “there is an idea that the Muslim school, as it had developed by the 10th century, did not change from this way until the 19th century and then it suddenly became obsolete and has been slowly dying since then. A tribute to this cliche was given by both the author of the article and his opponent [i.e., Yarlykapov and Kochak]. I just cannot agree with this point of view. Even a superficial acquaintance with the sources shows that the madrasas of the North Caucasus have experienced many ups and downs over their nearly millennium-long existence.”\textsuperscript{311} Allen Frank, in turn, emphasizes the importance of traditional religious educational institutions for educational and social purposes in Muslim society. Using the example of one maktab primer widely spread among Turkmens, he argues that “literacy was far more prevalent among Central Asian Muslims before the Soviet era than has been previously thought.”\textsuperscript{312} Further, Bobrovnikov also discusses another cliche—the assumed crisis of pre-revolutionary Muslim schools of the North Caucasus. The harsh criticisms hurled at the Daghestani maktab system—composed in the Russian language but also in Arabic—emphasized the absence of subjects such as arithmetic and Russian language, and highlighted that these schools fostered “fanaticism” and “hate towards everything Russian.”\textsuperscript{313} Bobrovnikov argues that Russian critics failed to “understand anything in the program of secondary and higher Islamic education.”\textsuperscript{314}

I completely agree with Bobrovnikov concerning the “ups and downs” of

Islamic education in Daghestan. With regard to his second claim, however, I believe this was a case not solely of the naïve failure of those Russian critics to understand the Islamic system of education. Rather, the tsarist administration planned actions to reduce the influence of the Muslim authorities by subverting Muslim schools and introducing Russian language and culture. This was a part of imperial nation-building as implemented not only in the Russian Empire.\textsuperscript{315} The colonial and orientalist discourse of the “backward system” authorized colonial powers like Russia to “develop” these backward regions. Russian-language newspapers and journals published with support of the tsarist administration demonstrate this very rhetoric. In some cases, we see how the reformers used this tsarist rhetoric as well. As an example, the article “Muslim clergy and public schools” by Aleksei Cherniaevskii published in the newspaper \textit{Kavkaz} (September 1893) reads, “theological schools (madrasas) and elementary schools attached to mosques (maktabs) still remain in the same conditions, and not only did the teaching of the Russian language not penetrate them, but, as far as is known, even the phonetic method of teaching literacy (zvukovoi metod prepodovaniia gramoty [i.e., Ismail Gasprinskii’s \textit{usul-i savtiyya}], which greatly helps children with acquiring literacy and greatly reduces the time [for learning how to read when compared with] the old dull spelling method (pritupliaiushchem bukvennom sposobe).\textsuperscript{316}” Aleksei Cherniaevskii was an imperial official working in the schools of Azerbaijan and Georgia. He authored the first part of the textbook \textit{Vətən dili} using the phonetic method. Remarkably, here a Russian pedagogue positions himself as a proponent of the Jadid methods. Furthermore, attacking Muslim scholars who supported the traditional/“unreformed” Islamic system of education, Cherniaevskii claimed “Muslim clergy” often were “ignorant in the matter of teaching and upbringing.”\textsuperscript{317} As we see, the tsarist and the reformist discourses interacted and reinforced each other. The claims that there were no secular subjects in \textit{madrasas}, and the call for including them in the school program, as well as for a new organization of the school system, were also articulated by some tsarist officials; for instance, the same Aleksei Cherniaevskii wanted

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\textsuperscript{317} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
to see these subjects added into the school programs alongside the religious subjects. Cherniaevskii here speaks from the viewpoint of tsarist Russia, stressing the importance of the Russian language. The Daghestani reformers, meanwhile, while stressing the necessity of the same reforms, did not give any importance to the Russian language.

This difference notwithstanding, the colonial discourse portrayed only the reformers as bearers of enlightenment. This “mythical crisis” of traditional education, as Bobrovnikov called it, in nineteenth-century Daghestan is challenged by the support that these “traditional” Islamic schools continued to receive from most of the local Muslim communities. Furthermore, there were only a few Daghestani reformers and they emerged relatively late, if compared to the Crimea and the Volga-Urals; and, overall, the introduction of Gasprinskii’s “new method movement” was not a quick success. All of these points, Bobrovnikov argues, testify that the traditional Muslim school did not yet exhaust all its resources for further development; and, indeed, the traditional system continued to change until the violent abolition of any Islamic educational institutions in Soviet times.

One of the significant points of the reformist discourse was education reforms. The backwardness of this system was considered the major problem in Muslim society. Thus, the reformists stated that this stagnant system should be transformed into a new one which would meet all demands of the new era. As Soviet and post-Soviet historiography concentrates all of its attention on the reformers, their real influence in Daghestan has probably been overestimated. While we now have reliable sources, good evidence and some studies that allow us to trace the Muslim reformist challenge of traditional madrasa education in urban regions, there is no evidence of a community-wide rejection of the authority of madrasa education. On the contrary, the number of madrasas continued to increase steadily even after the 1917 revolution. There were reasons for this, of course. Muslim schools were less formalized and more

320 Ibid.
flexible than Christian parish schools and seminaries, and they did not depend on a central ecclesiastic authority. If there was a centralized system financed by the former government, the new government could easily establish a new state school system in the basis of that old system. But since the former Islamic system was decentralized and was financed by the Daghestanis themselves, it took the new government a long time to develop a secular state school system in Muslim areas of Russia.323

Furthermore, the people of Daghestan were defending the use of waqf resources for the madrasas, obstructing the Bolsheviks’ attempts to centralize these foundations and redirect them to other purposes. This is demonstrated by a letter (dated 10 March 1922) that ‘Alī Kaiaev received from Osman Osmanov, the chairman of the Daghestani Sharīʿa management. In that letter Osmanov mentions that in one of the villages where there are some resources, the inhabitants insist “on using them [only] to spread the religious sciences by activities of the madrasa.”324 This very fact suggests that at the time of the Russian Empire’s collapse, many Daghestanis understood freedom to include their liberty to continue the support of traditional education without interference from the government. Thus, what we see when we move past the widespread narrative is that there were several competing approaches to reform the education system, and every side was trying to represent itself as the only rightful and most trusted party to reach that developed future.

3.2.2. Competing projects to modernize the education system in Daghestan

The competing projects over the education system had already emerged in Daghestan at the end of the nineteenth century, but their most active competition began after the revolution in 1917. These projects were interconnected with the visions of the future that different sides were seeking to reach.

To explore the phenomenon of slavery down through history and to demonstrate the fluidity of that concept, Dr. Jonathan Brown offered to hitch a ride in the Tardis (a fictional time machine and spacecraft from the British

science fiction television series *Doctor Who*), and travel across space and time, visualizing varieties of the scenarios engaging this phenomenon. What if we borrow this trick to visualize the developed and prosperous future of Daghestan as it was envisioned by the Daghestani intellectuals and at the same time use real sources depicting these futures?

The first future we will visit would be the world completely in accordance with the divine law where everyone seeks to serve God; every individual is in a condition that includes a feeling of awe. The divine presence fills the receiver’s heart. The state is fully in line with the *Sharīʿa*; everyone studies Islamic sciences and lives according to God’s law.

To visualize the second future, let me first recount a short episode from the life of the Daghestani publisher and intellectual Magomed Mirza Mavraev. Shortly before the Russian Revolution of 1917, he travelled to the mountainous villages of Daghestan in the company of a government official. The only extraordinary thing in their travel was the means of transport—the car. This steel-made cart impressed the mountaineers who used the araba, a cart drawn by horses or oxen. Some of them even asked, “Why can’t we create such ingenious devices? Muslims will never be able to fashion the objects that the infidels have fabricated with their devilish tricks.” As a reply, Mavraev said: “God endowed the infidels (that is, not those who are His Muslim slaves) with the ability to create such wonderful objects because we do not study. If we studied, we would be able to create objects as clever as those that the infidels create.” Having this view of prosperity and progress, the Daghestani reform-minded intellectuals envisioned a Daghestani future with technological developments and other European and Russian means. Accordingly, the second future which we might visit with our Tardis would be a technically prosperous Daghestan with huge factories and cars that are driven by the Daghestani Muslims.

Finally, let us direct our Tardis to our third possible future. This Daghestan

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has a communist society structured upon the idea of common ownership where there is no room for “land hunger,” “patriarchal-tribal mode of life” or “religious fanaticism.”

These three futures were envisioned by Daghestani intellectuals of different sides: supporters of traditional education (many of whom were Sufi shaykhs), the reform-minded intellectuals and the Bolsheviks. Adeeb Khalid conceived of the history of this period as “a struggle between two competing visions of modernity, those of Bolshevism and of Jadidism.” Nevertheless, I would like to add another vision of modernity—the modernity of those who came to be called traditionalists. At first glance, the phrase “modernity of traditionalists” seems paradoxical; however, an analysis of the sources demonstrates that this group had its own vision of change. Furthermore, in many cases, they were inclined to use the same tools to reach the goal they put in front of themselves. However, as one can assume, there were also differences which made these different visions unique. Central among these differences were the models of education that were understood as the way to implement that vision and to nurture the generations which would value the envisioned future and eventually live in it.

Envisioning these futures, during the first post-revolutionary years competing forces developed projects related to the education system in the North Caucasus. Depending on the backgrounds and ideological inclinations of the individual authors, these projects differed significantly. Already in May 1917, during the First Congress of the Mountaineers of the North Caucasus, the left Socialist-Revolutionary Said Gabiev (1882-1963) called for the establishment of a national secular school system with the national languages for the idioms of instruction. In accordance with this project, there should be elementary schools and higher elementary schools, each of which with four years of education. Both types should be obligatory and free of charge. The language of these schools was to be the native languages of the region, and from the third year of the maktab Arabic and Russian would also be taught, Turkish being studied starting in the first year of madrasa education. Among

other subjects, *Sharīʿa* law (*zakon Bozhii*) should be an obligatory subject. In the case of *madrasas*, it would be mandatory to establish departments for agriculture, crafts and industrial knowledge.330

Gabiev’s project demonstrates which kind of knowledge he considered vital. For this Socialist-Revolutionary the main features of these schools were their secularity and national character. The core of this project was to educate a citizen who had enough knowledge for his religious obligations, knew the dominant language of the state inside of which Daghestan would be and possessed technical knowledge of certain industrial fields.

While Gabiev’s secularization plan was never realized, in 1918-1919 the *Sharīʿa* Administration of the Mountain Republic prepared for the reorganization of Muslim schools in the region. The model of Al-Azhar, the famous religious Islamic education institute in Cairo was put at the center of this project.331 In this project the dominant fields of knowledge were not the secular subjects and national languages but the Islamic sciences and Arabic.

‘Abd al-Baṣīr Mustafaev, one of the deputies of the First Congress, was among the creators of that project. Mustafaev was against both Gotsinskii’s imamate and the socialists’ projects. His influence was quite high; after the failure of Gotsinskii’s attempts to become imam, Mustafaev and ‘Alī Ḥajjī Akushinskii were the main figures who desired to implement the *Sharīʿa* law in every sphere of life in Daghestan. Thus, if we describe Mustafaev’s political agenda, one might say that he had a lot in common with ‘Alī Ḥajjī Akushinskii, in particular their opposition to Gotsinskii’s imamate. Nevertheless, there is a key difference as well; whereas ‘Alī Ḥajjī Akushinskii decided to cooperate with the Bolsheviks, ‘Abd al-Baṣīr Mustafaev (like Gostinskii) was inclined to cooperate with Denikin against the Bolsheviks.

Between 1918 and May 1919, Mustafaev, officially acting as a deputy of

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331 The model of Egypt and particularly al-Azhar impacted both the traditionalists and reformers. That depended on the situation of the al-Azhar itself. As Mustafa Tuna noticed, when the Russian Muslim students who went to the Ottoman territories or Egypt studied in seemingly conventional institutions of Islamic education, like the madrasas of Medina or al-Azhar in Cairo, they could still be influenced by the modernist scholars at them. Tuna, Mustafa. “Madrasa Reform as a Secularizing Process: A View from the Late Russian Empire”. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53, no. 3 (2011): 540-570.
shaykh al-Islam ‘Alī Ḥajjī, wrote an open letter to the Muslims of Daghestan in which he described the project of Islamic education in details.332 This project describes a four-level education system from elementary school to university. In accordance with that project, every village in Daghestan must have a madrasa where students would study Arabic religious sciences (al-ʿulūm al-ʿarabīya al-dīnīya). Before madrasa, pupils learn at maktabs where they receive Qur’ān classes. After these maktabs and madrasas, the most gifted students can go to high schools (al-madāris al-ʿāliya) where they study Sharī’a sciences (al-ʿulūm al-sharʿīya). Finally, this project meant the establishment of a university in Temir Khan Shura directed by the Shaykh al-Islam. Students at this university would study tafsīr, usūl al-dīn, fiqh and other religious sciences. A diploma from this university would give graduates the right to hold religious positions such as qāḍī (judge of the Sharī’a court). According to the historian of Jadidism in Central Asia Adeeb Khalid, “the madrasa was the site for the reproduction of one class of professionals, those concerned with various aspects of Islamic law.” 333 The traditional scholars of Islam perceived madrasa as an educational environment for a new generation of scholars of Islam.334 Mustafaev’s project pursued that same goal. The whole system was concentrated on the transmission of the kind of religious knowledge that was vital to reach the vision that these religious leaders had in their minds.

As we see, in this project there was nothing on the non-Islamic sciences or languages other than Arabic. The highest purpose of this four-level education was to educate religious scholars. What we see from this example is that the ‘ulamā’ who can be classified as traditionalists—like Mustafaev—had their own reform projects for the traditional Islamic situation.335 Echoing reformists’ imageries of “backward traditionalists,” historians often describe the bearers of traditional education as obscurantists who were unable to comprehend or respond to modern changes and who opposed the improvement of Muslim


334 Ibid.

335 The vital role of ‘ulama’ in the religious upbringing of faithful young individuals was also demonstrated in Agnès Kefeli’s monograph. See Kefeli, Agnès Nilüfer. Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015.
societies. However, projects such as that of Mustafaev show the desire to further develop the existing system. Several scholars have attempted to eliminate the negative stereotypes circulating about traditionalist ‘ulamā’. Rozaliya Garipova, for instance, in her article on traditional Muslim scholars of the Volga-Ural region, demonstrates that while these traditional ‘ulamā’ were portrayed as reactionary and backward, many of them were modern religious scholars who used modern print technologies and addressed modern issues. However, the Volunteer Army’s conquest of Daghestan in 1919 prevented the implementation of Mustafaev’s extensive project.

While Gabiev’s socialist project of educational reform and Mustafaev’s traditionalist reform project were highly formalized and presented as concrete programs, the ideas of Daghestani reformers remained rather fluid and in the realm of public debate. The reformers expressed their ideas on the education system in numerous articles in the press of the time. Abū Sufyān Akaev, for instance, suggested using a bilingual system of instruction: in Kumyk (for the Kumyks) and other vernaculars for the various nations of Daghestan, on the one hand, and in Arabic, on the other. Abū Sufyān’s project reserved for Arabic only a religious function. He distinguished between two types of education—secular and religious. Before choosing between these two ways, pupils should graduate from a maktab. After this elementary school, those who “want to become engineers will be able to enter university, where an advanced course of secular subjects is taught in Kumyk [for Kumyks], and those who after completing the course of religious subjects want to get the diplomas of a qāḍī, mu’allim or muftī are free to enter a madrasa and to continue education there. In the madrasa all religious subjects are to be mastered in Arabic.” Nevertheless, one should note that all pupils would first have to go through the maktab education with its religious subjects, even those not interested in the religious sciences. Unlike Mustafaev’s project which included only religious education, Akaev divided the education after the maktab level into two branches: religious and secular.

One may notice that Akaev’s project was something between the projects of Gabiev and Mustafaev. Thus, an overlapping rhetoric with both the traditionalists...

and the socialists was understandable. As Garipova argues, “for the reformers, the priority was reforming the society while for the traditional ‘ulamā’ it was preserving and protecting religion and Muslim community.” 338 As she states, “the ‘ulamā’ attempted to reclaim the madrasa as a traditional Islamic religious institution and to protect the integrity of traditional madrasa education.” 339 Danielle Ross brings up the issue of the disagreement over the purpose of the madrasa as an institution and suggests that it was, for reformers, a means to transform existing society, whereas, the ‘ulamā’ and peasants “viewed the madrasa as a means by which a young man could attain higher social status for himself and his family within the Muslim community.” 340

These projects, as one can notice, are looking forward to a worldly future, one that was open, novel, reachable or constructible even if they stressed the role of religion. “They were seeing the present as a possible preparation for a future and the past either as something to leave behind or as a heap of ruins, the pieces of which might be used for building a new future.”341 Consequently, this modernity can be intertwined with elements of tradition. This means, as David-Fox insists, that there are no direct roads to modernity and that modernity never arises suddenly, out of nowhere; on the contrary, modernities (in the plural) appear as they develop and interact over geographical boundaries.342 The problem of portraying modernity as something that emerged suddenly has also been discussed by others. For instance, Daniele Ross connects it with the elective vision of modernity.343

Having the idea of connection between the traditions and modernities in our minds and coming back to our three projects of modernizing the education system, we can see that all of them were somehow intertwined with traditions.

339 Ibid., 140-141.
The main difference between those projects was the percentage of rejection of the elements of tradition. Additionally, in saying that there are many traditions just as there are many modernities, a given modernity always relates to one particular tradition. While the socialists’ brand of modernization was basing itself on a European tradition, the modernizations of the reformers and the traditionalists were oriented towards the Islamic tradition (more broadly defined). Thus, we see religion having a great value in their projects. Here we should underpin the interplay between particular traditions and general and globally relevant modern social imaginaries.344

While in this past-oriented chronological sense we see the reformers and the traditionalists closer to each other rather than closer to the Bolsheviks, in the matter of a future-oriented chronology, we see the reformers and the Bolsheviks closer to each other rather than to the traditionalists. Nevertheless, all those similarities are about the present, i.e., about the process of modernization; when modernity is reached those differences become more visible.

Göran Therborn’s theory of entangled modernities allows us to consider all projects in interaction. The entanglement of modernities forms a more complicated picture of post-revolutionary Daghestan. The existence of these three different projects of modernization for the education system demonstrates that the idea of modernizing was carried not only by the reformers. However, I believe this modernization process could be discussed on a higher level than these projects were. The desire of all groups to implement changes reminds us that the idea of a “stagnant situation” was a shared narrative of a supra-group level. The proposed ways and tools for realizing the change were unique for every group.

Obviously, there were some master narratives of the necessity for change, but different groups had their own ideas about the realization of those changes. This brings us back to Therborn, who in his programmatic paper on entangled modernities suggested “the ‘grand narratives’ of modernity.”345 He discerns several major “master narratives.”346 Drawing upon his mechanism

346 Ibid., 299-300.
to map modernity, I believe that the reformers’ modernity was a small part of Russia’s Muslim modernity which, in its turn, was part of Islamic modernity, on the one hand, and Russian imperial or, later, Soviet modernity, on the other. Nevertheless, while sharing similarities in the frames of these master narratives, Daghestan had its unique sub-narratives of modernity. In their turn, every group had its own narrative subordinated to that Daghestani sub-narrative. The main character of the regional narrative of modernity in 1917 was connected to the idea of revolution. However, the perception of revolution differed from group to group, which led to the formation of multiple group narratives which were not isolated from each other. Moreover, they were not even fully elaborated but were in the process of formation and change. Thus, while we are researching the questions related to the modernity of the reformers or the traditionalists or the Bolsheviks, it is necessary to deal with a multi-dimensional image and to take into consideration the whole system rather than its separate parts.

Thus, while agreeing with Garipova and Ross, I would like to stress that the picture was more complicated. First, there was no group that shared nothing with the others. All sides of post-revolutionary Daghestan’s political arena were intertwined and entangled. Alongside the tradition-oriented and reform-minded intellectuals, the Bolsheviks and many others who were not part of any of the groups, were acting and changing the situation. While Muslim religious leaders, reform-minded, traditional or somewhere in-between, desired to use that education system for the purpose of their envisioned future and also for gaining authority, the Bolsheviks (as before them the tsarist administration) made steps towards infiltrating madrasas, understanding that through the educational system they could gain authority among Muslims. To reach their goals, these projects were fighting for influence over the region, and that fight was often accompanied through the denunciation of other groups. Consequently, the image of “backward traditionalists” also should be discussed in this context.

3.2.3. The creation of the image of “backward traditionalists”
To implement these projects, the competing sides had to demonstrate that their ideas were the most appropriate for the future developed Daghestan. Additionally, the biggest possible problem that the socialists and the reformers faced was the strong position of the traditional education system and its
influence over the people of Daghestan. Consequently, discrediting this system and denouncing its effectivity became one of the main rhetorical practices that the reformers and Bolsheviks used. Moreover, the easiest way of doing that was claiming that the traditionalists were “incompatible” with the new demands of the time. The rhetoric of progress was a means for various parties to bolster their claims to authority over Muslims. As Danielle Ross argues in her recent book, “the concept of ‘modernity’ became a new weapon in pre-existing struggles over social authority within Russia’s Muslim communities.”

The discourse of progress through school reforms was the sphere where the rhetoric of reformists and Bolsheviks overlapped. The reformers had already been elaborating their program of school reforms before 1917. These reforms were the main topic of the newspaper Jarīdat Dāghistān. Still, these reformist ideas had had little impact on the overall situation before the turmoil of 1917. The freedom given by the revolution pushed the reformers to reassess their education reforms, putting them at the core of their political agenda of Daghestan’s future.

At the same time as the reformers were grounding their program in the new situation of freedom, the socialists were elaborating similar ideas. In 1918, the Commissariat of Enlightenment, known by the acronym Narkompros, in its first policy statements envisaged a single secular “polytechnical” school, which would be attended by all children aged eight to seventeen. The whole school system, from kindergarten to university, was to be “a single unbroken ladder: All children must enter the same type of school and begin their education on the same footing.” Several notions of this statement, such as obligatory schooling, fixed schedules and separate grades, were acceptable for Daghestani reformers and were part of their own projects. Like in the case of the Bolsheviks who presented themselves at variance with the old and ineffective tsarist system, the reformists presented their program as the only correct way to overcome the old traditional system.

Like the Bolsheviks, the reformers also attacked specific characteristics of the existing educational system. In his article “The situation of Dagestani and their backwardness compared to others,” as early as in 1913 ʿAlī Kaiaev insists that other nations living within the Russian Empire such as Jews, Armenians and Georgians were developed because of their approach to the education system. For Dagestani it is time to wake up and respond to the demands of time. “This will help bring us out of poverty and ignorance (jahl ).”

Muḥammad-Qādī Dibirov, in his turn, stated that they can face those demands of modern times only by introducing proper methods in the schools, for the existing methods did not work correctly. In the article “The roots of education,” Muḥammad-Qādī Dibirov claimed that education should be started from the easy tasks and then gradually move to more complex tasks. This would prevent students from “losing the will to study, and from wasting their time.” A gradual development of the curriculum would make pupils understand what they study, and they would realise why they were to perform a given task. Dibirov suggested using the experience of European teachers who “at the beginning teach the boys several subjects in their languages. They read [the texts] to them, and [the pupils] understand. They teach them syntax and morphology.” While Dibirov emphasized this as a problem of the existing schools which should be fixed, it should be noted that traditional Islamic education in Dagestan also maintained a gradual program from easy to complex topics, in which the study materials built on each other. The author is correct however in arguing that madrasa materials were not specifically designed to speak to children and adolescents of various lifetimes.

The reformers used these circumstances to create the image of a backward and stagnant system of education that needed to be replaced by a new system more fitting to the new needs. Dibirov claims that it lied in the nature of Muslim teachers “to reject of everything new” (fī ṭibīṭhim min inkār kull jadīd).

Dibirov claimed that “the progress, culture, physical and moral health of the nation (millat)” depended on three central circles: a) ʿulamāʾ (“scholars”), b) ʿurafāʾ (“intellectuals”) and c) udabāʾ (“literati”). In this triangle, the function of

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the ‘ulamāʾ is to protect the traditions from false ideas and to explain the pillars and obligations of the religion. The function of the ‘urafāʾ is to create the basis of national civilization (taʾsīs li-l-madanīya al-millīya) and to spread modern science and art among the population. Finally, the udabāʾ should provide moral education and spread the national literature among the populace in the language they can understand easily.\textsuperscript{353}

Dibirov connects the development of the state with the functionality of these groups; nations that do not rely on these three groups cannot be “healthy.” Accordingly, all contemporary misery goes back to the deficiencies of these groups: “the ‘ulamāʾ remain far away from the rational sciences, the urafāʾ, and udabāʾ cut their ties with science and forget their tribe and family.” He is sure, “they do not accept the fact that the times have changed and are continuing to teach their children what they know.” Dibirov claims that the knowledge of the ‘ulamāʾ was outdated and, therefore, the modern times were characterized by the huge amount of new information that the old teachers did not know. He was certain that the backwardness of Daghestan did not reflect a deficiency of the Daghestani nations or of their religion; “Allah gave the intellect to all human beings, and the Sharīʿa leads mankind to the sciences.”\textsuperscript{354} In contrast to the Bolsheviks, the reformers—just like the supporters of traditional education—continued to consider Islamic education as one of the pillars of society.

One characteristic element that both the reformers and the Bolsheviks valued was the introduction of a coordinated timetable for the schools. In Daghestani traditional schools there was no clearly defined schedule for opening and closing the school year. Most schools simply opened in late fall or winter when the mountaineers had completed their outdoor work and had free time to study. New pupils could join the class even in the middle of the year since the programs were highly individual and flexible. Every pupil had his own schedule. One child might finish the reading of the Qur’an in three months, another one in three years. As M. Kemper and Sh. Shikhaliev claim, “according to Akaev, pupils in old-method schools were made familiar with the Arabic alphabet by the Arabic name of its letters (alīf-bāʾ-ṯāʾ-ṯāʾ-ḥāʾ-ẓīm etc.), not by its phonetic values (a-b-t-th-j), which seriously hampered the learning process...

\textsuperscript{353} al-Qarākhī, Muḥammad. “Uṣūl al-taʾlīm.”
\textsuperscript{354} al-Qarākhī, Muḥammad. “Uṣūl al-taʾlīm.”
Furthermore, these schools had no separation into classes of different levels (the teacher addressing every pupil individually, according to his level), no fixation of a course program and no limit on how many years one would stay with a teacher.\textsuperscript{355}

As Adeeb Khalid argues, “the habitus” reproduced in the maktabs, and especially the madrasas, cultivated a certain relation to texts and to the world beyond them that provided the framework for life.\textsuperscript{356} As Garipova demonstrates, the traditional ‘ulamā’ claimed that the change of the traditional learning “habitus” would affect the learning and the analysis of religious texts. This claim was directly connected with the custom of munāzara (“peer learning”).\textsuperscript{357} Garipova uses “peer learning” as a translation for munāzara, following Dale F. Eickelman’s work The Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable.\textsuperscript{358} Nevertheless, the practice was more about debates among students, which were training for later “real” polemics beyond school. A division of madrasas into grades where pupils of different ages would be separated would put an end to this practice. Additionally, there was more practical reason as well: traditional schools were too small to be divided into grades. That is, modernization directly threatened the old schools by outsizing them.

This aspect of traditional education was completely ignored by the reformers, who interpreted these schools as outdated and impractical. Hence, when the Soviets offered the same reform, the reformists found fertile ground to implement their project too. For instance, the eighteenth paragraph of the Narkompros’s declaration forbids punishment in school. This topic was one of the critical aspects of the reformists’ discourse; they used to present the traditional school as a stage of violence.\textsuperscript{359} As evidence for this claim, ʿAlī Kaiaev refers to Ibn Khaldūn’s Muqaddima, from which he published

the chapter entitled “Severity to students does them harm.” In that section Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) argues that “severe punishment in the course of instruction does harm to the student, especially to little children, because it belongs among (the things that make for a) bad habit. [...] They lose the quality that goes with a social and political organization and makes people human, namely, (the desire to) protect and defend themselves and their homes, and they become dependent on others.”\textsuperscript{360}

Presenting the traditional system in a disadvantageous light, the reformers claimed that vices such as smoking and drinking, and even crimes such as theft, had their roots in the wrong upbringing of generations of Daghestanis. ‘Alī Kaiaev even claimed that these phenomena were so widespread and deeply rooted that the parents had started to be proud of their children’s use of violence. These parents considered violence as a sign of courage and masculinity. This misunderstanding reviled the problems of the value system and made the organization of a correct education extremely important.\textsuperscript{361} In contrast to the reformists' generalizations of violence in school, the traditional ‘ulamā’ saw their madrasas as places where devout and pious generations of new religious scholars were being educated.

Another sphere of debates was the question of rational science. While discussing the three different approaches towards a modernization of the education system, we saw that both the reformers and the Bolsheviks emphasized the importance of modern science as school subjects, while the supporters of the traditional system highlighted the vital role of religious subjects. This late antiquity debate over the necessity of non-religious or non-Islamic subjects first emerged after the start of the translation movement which took place in Baghdad from the mid-eighth to the late tenth century; it re-surfaced in different parts of the Islamic world throughout the subsequent centuries.\textsuperscript{362}


\textsuperscript{361} Ibid.

The Daghestani reformers claimed that the traditional schools were ineffective since at those schools students studied only religious sciences, ignoring that the “new time” demanded the knowledge of rational sciences as well. 'Alī Kaiaev insisted that “today some people claim that rational sciences ('ulūm 'aqliya) such as arithmetic, geometry, geography and medicine are from the sciences of kuffār (infidels), saying that the sciences of Muslims are fiqh of the four madhhabs, at-tafsīr, al-ḥadīth”. He held that this pernicious claim was the main reason for “the takeover of ignorance.”

The reformers’ discourse on rational sciences, published in the periodicals of the time, had several components. First, the reformers claimed that there were no rational sciences in traditional schools and that the traditionalists consider these sciences to be banned by Shari‘a. 'Alī Kaiaev harshly criticized those teachers who “thought that studying these subjects is amoral.” Another problem, seen by the reformers, was the “absence” of textbooks for these subjects, which made it impossible to teach them in the schools. 'Alī Kaiaev, who in several numbers of Jarīdat Dāghistān emphasized the role of geography, astronomy, physics and other sciences as the guarantee of progress, could rightfully claim to be one of the first authors of textbooks for these sciences. Kaiaev authored Lak language works such as The story of the past (1910) and his Treatise on the new astronomy (1913). Both works were published at the Islamic printing house of Mavraev in Temir Khan Shura.

Next to 'Alī Kaiaev, speaking about the difficulties of spreading subjects like mathematics and geography, Akăev writes in his Autobiography:

> Obviously, the simple Daghestani folk, not accustomed to book culture, will not suddenly buy and read books in which such sciences as mathematics or geography are discussed. So, from time to time it was necessary to write books which were easy to read for their education. [Some of my] books, such as The collection of prayers and Muslim life, were written for these reasons.

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364 al-Ghumūqī, 'Alī. “Inqirāḍ al-‘ilm wa al-‘ulamā’.”
The reformers opened another round of this discussion in the first years of Bolshevik rule on the pages of the journal Bayân al-Ḥaqāʾiq ("Exposing the Truth"). In his article entitled “Sharīʿa and the state schools,” Akaev makes detailed observations of how the rational sciences (al-funūn al-ʿaqliyya) were taught in the state-run schools. According to him, these sciences—philosophy, astronomy, history, geography, medicine, arithmetic and geometry—are not only permissible but also obligatory because their study is the individual and collective religious duty of all Muslims (fard al-ʿayn and fard al-kifāya, respectively). By referring to famous scholars and poets, he stated that these subjects do not contradict the Sharīʿa and Islam. For Akaev, “philosophy (ḥikma) is the individual duty of every Muslim, and astronomy is the duty of the entire society.” He described these sciences as a way to achieve the truth since “they promote the development of an agile mind.” He claimed that the studying of these sciences gave Muslims an opportunity to know what came before them and to prepare a flourishing future.

It should be emphasized, however, that these claims of the reformers were exaggerated. In fact, there were many traditional school programs which included rational sciences. Moreover, textbooks for these sciences also existed in Daghestan. For instance, in the manuscript collection of Magomed-Said Saidov there were many manuscripts on mathematics, history and astronomy written at the beginning of the nineteenth century. To make their own narrative and program more appealing, the reformists chose to ignore the circulation of such works, arguing for the complete absence of rational sciences in the madrasas. Ross argues likewise, adding that in the nineteenth century teachers of madrasas also taught subjects such as geography and

367 Bayân al-Ḥaqāʾiq was published between 1925 and 1928 in Buynaksk, Daghestan. It was a reformist journal, established with permission of the Soviet government of Daghestan and edited by al-Ghazānishī. The main analysis of the journal’s goals and covered topics will follow in the next chapter of this thesis.
369 Ibid.
371 The whole list of these manuscripts on non-Islamic topics see Katalog Arabskikh rukopisei (Kollektsiiia M.-S.-Saidova), edited by Shikhsaidov, Amri, and Omarov, Khalatta. Makhachkala, 2005. P. 144-212.
This allowed the reformers to claim the notion of “being new” for their own programs. Mūsā al-Sunbātā al-Ghumūqī, one of the contributors to *Jarīdat Dāghistān*, listed several sciences that he found were needed and emphasized that these were innovations to Daghestan. In particular, he wrote that the people of Daghestan needed “sciences such as arithmetic, geometry, geography, new natural philosophy, new chemistry and new astronomy.” He refrained from explaining what he meant by “new natural philosophy, new chemistry, new astronomy” and how they differed from the chemistry and astronomy taught at *madrasas* before that.

When we see all these projects proposed by various groups and actors, it seems that they were a veneer, an overlay, on top of a traditional society that was not changing rapidly.

What is remarkable is that all three groups, including the Bolsheviks, stressed the importance of religion. All three camps were seeking to link their specific ideas with an ideal image of Islamic society which they thought was acceptable for the whole of Daghestani society. The main problem here, however, is that this ideal model was imaginary and differed not only from group to group but even from person to person. Consequently, the tools they wanted to use and the political domains and conceptual arrays they had in their minds also differed. In the context of entangled modernities, when these links overlap, we see similarities between different projects. Nevertheless, since the imagined ideal society differed from group to group the final goal also differed even if the means for reaching that imagined ideal society were similar.

3.3. Language debate and visions for the future in Daghestan

3.3.1. A divine language for religious society: The debates around the role of Arabic in the future of Daghestan

At the turn of the century, language became a key national and religious marker in Daghestan, and the promotion of certain languages served as a powerful platform for propagandizing specific visions for the future. As Frederick Hertz notes, “all nations regard it [language] as a symbol of their independence and

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honor, as the supreme expression of their personality, and they esteem its exclusive domination within their national territory more highly than obvious spiritual and material advantages.” The imperial administration understood very well the political weight of languages, which is why the Russian state also sought to consolidate its power by linguistic means.

The Caucasus presents a linguistic diversity matched by few other areas in the world of comparable size. This “mountain of tongues” (jabal al-alsun), as the tenth-century geographer al-Masʿūdī (896–956) referred to the Caucasus, denoting a multitude of languages of the region, harbors approximately fifty languages belonging to different language families. In this Caucasian polyglossia, Daghestan is in itself a mosaic of more than three dozen indigenous languages spoken by the Daghestani ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Avars, Kumyks, Dargins, Laks, Lezgins and Azeris. Arabic as the language of the Daghestani elite and religion dominated over the national tongues in the local written tradition. Mass printing in vernaculars was launched only at the end of the nineteenth century.

The language debate among the Daghestani intellectuals—reformers, traditionalists and socialists—had to do with the more complex issue of the envisioned futures; the various camps considered language as a vital precondition for; and, at the same time, the result of the concept of freedom. Competing programs had their visions about which language should be dominant in the education system. While education was a wide and general field where these Daghestani project-makers were actively trying to realize their ideas, language was the most vital and palpable link connecting the respective project with both the existing society and the envisioned one.

As Haeri observed, “Among Muslims, the revelation of the Qur’an, and the recognition of its language as the Word of God (kalām Allāh), turned

every religious scholar into a linguist and made the mastery of the divine language the single most important prerequisite for intellectual and artistic accomplishments.” In Daghestan, where Arabic has a long history as the language of intellectual elites, proficiency in this language was equivalent to education. The settlement of Arabs in Daghestan and gradual Islamization had promoted Arabic in the North Caucasus.

However, starting from the end of the nineteenth century the dominance of Arabic was challenged by the introduction of national languages in education. I would argue that the struggle for the dominance of Arabic can be linked to the political concept of the imamate, i.e., the state structure based on the Islamic legal regulations and headed by a Muslim ruler. As discussed in the first chapter, many religious leaders supported both the imamate as the future political model for Daghestan and Arabic as the main language of instruction at schools. For example, Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii was among the staunch supporters of Arabic, considering it as indispensable for the defenders of the re-establishment of the imamate. In this model of the future, every aspect of life had to be regulated by the main sources of Islam—the language of which was Arabic. This stance is clear from an article of Murtaḍā al-Kudālī published in *Jarīdat Dāghistān*. In it he emphasizes that “the Holy Qurʾan, collections of the prophetic traditions, and the whole religious literature had been written in this language.” The author celebrated Arabic as a vital tool for regulating life in the country according to Islamic law. Murtaḍā al-Kudālī states that the works on *Shāfiʿi* jurisprudence authored by al-Nawawī (1234-1277) and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (1372-1449) are key sources for solving those problems, and only Arabic gives access to these works.

By emphasizing the importance of the works penned by the medieval *Shāfiʿi* scholars, Murtaḍā al-Kudālī demonstrated his negative attitude towards the

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380 Though the editor and main contributors of *Jarīdat Dāghistān* were reformists, there were also other contributors who cannot be classified as reformists. Among them was Murtaḍā al-Kudālī. It is very little that we know about him. We know that he was one of the teachers of Kaiaev. Probably, that is the reason why his article was published in the newspaper.
supporters of *ijtihād* as independent reasoning\(^{382}\) and presented himself as a strict follower of the *Shāfi‘i* legal school. Murtaḍā al-Kudālī was sure that a reading of the main corpus of Islamic literature “belongs to the communal duties to maintain the sciences of the *Sharī‘a*” (*min furūḍ al-kifāya al-qiyām bi-‘ulūm al-shar‘*). For him, only the knowledge of the Islamic literature is necessary for the giving of judgments and of *fatwas* (*bi ḥaythu yāsliḥu li-l-qadā‘ wa-l-iftā‘*) and, consequently, for implementing the Will of God.\(^{383}\) This legal element was also an inherent part of the discourse of the traditionalist Muslim scholars of the Volga-Ural region.\(^{384}\)

But then al-Kudālī clearly left the consensus with the traditionalists. Writing in July of 1917, he argued that the second language in education after Arabic should be Russian since Muslims lived “under their [i.e., Russian] protection and obedience” (*taḥta himyāyatihim wa-tā‘atihim*), but the dominant language should be Arabic.\(^{385}\) This is a pragmatic and clear political statement at a time of societal turmoil. Although the author underscores the importance of Russian, he ignores the Russian legal system and stresses the importance of the Islamic one. It is difficult if not impossible to place figures like Murtaḍā al-Kudālī into any of the three major groups.

Besides figures like al-Kudālī and those supporting the imamate, the Daghestani socialists also supported Arabic, but their support raised doubts among their contemporaries. At first, the public image of socialists was seen to be as in opposition to Islam, but to gain support in the region they had to appeal to the religious leaders. Their support of Arabic in the schools was one of the compromises that we can detect between the socialists and traditional religious leaders such as ‘Alī Ḥājjī Akushinskii.

In early 1917 the socialist group in Daghestan was not strong enough to openly develop its agenda. The socialists’ newspapers were in Russian and, thus, had little impact in Daghestan. For this reason, they were often

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383 Murtaḍā Al-Kudālī. “Mas’alat lughat al-ta‘līm.”
385 Murtaḍā, Al-Kudālī. “Mas’alat lughat al-ta‘līm.”
trying to attract reputable figures of the time and obtain their support. As discussed in Chapter I, they managed to find common ground with ʿAli Ḥājjī Akushinskii. These political moves were negatively perceived by other actors. Muhammad Qādi Dibirov, in his History of Daghestan: Events after the Revolution, originally written after 1924 in the Kumyk language, describes the meetings, congresses and other events that took place in Daghestan between February 1917 and the defeat of Gotsinskii’s uprising in March 1921. Dibirov considered the socialist language policy fraudulent and suspected it of motives other than simply defending Islam. In June 1917, a member of the Central Committee of the Union of Mountaineers, Nurmammad Shahsuvarov (1883-1958, later Minister of Education of the Mountain Republic of the Northern Caucasus), opened three-month Turkic language pedagogical courses in Temir Khan Shura to train “national teachers.” According to Dibirov, “this was a start for the nationalization of schools and the spread of these cultural and educational centers in Daghestan.” Writing in the mid-1920s, Dibirov believed that the whole Bolshevik policy of national languages was already in place before the Bolsheviks came to power. For Dibirov, himself an Avar, these pedagogical courses were the centers of national culture and their closure was regarded as violation of national rights. Since the socialists and a group of religious authorities sought to keep only Arabic schools, Dibirov considered such plans dangerous and suggested replacing Arabic with Turkic, insisting that because Turkic surrounds the Daghestani peoples and is spoken in most of the districts of Daghestan, this language therefore promotes the unification of Daghestani nationalities. As he claimed, the Daghestani socialists did not want to see the Turkic language in Daghestan as the language of instruction and tried to close these courses. They told the

388 Dibirov, Muḥammad. Daghistan tarikhi. IIAE DFITs RAN, FVR, FMS. O. 1, D. 2 (in Kumyk language); Dibirov, Muḥammad. Istoriia Dagestana (Sobytiia posle revoliutsii), IIAE DFITs RAN, f. 2, O. 1, D. 256 (Russian translation by Temirbolat Baibolatov, 1958).
389 I use the term Kumyk language not anachronistically, accepting the similarity of the present-day literary Kumyk and the early twentieth-century Turkic texts in Dagestan, but with a reference to the usage of contemporaries, who regarded the newspapers and their manuscript works as written in the “Kumyk language”.
390 Dibirov, Muḥammad. Daghistan tarikhi, 42-44; Muḥammad Dibirov. Istoriia Dagestana (Sobytiia posle revoliutsii), 10-12.
people, “In Daghestan, the training should be conducted in Arabic since our Qur’an and Shari‘a are written in Arabic.”391

Trying to undermine the visions of the traditional ‘ulamā’ and the socialists, Dibirov also insisted that “next to socialists, the Daghestani ‘ulamā’ opposed the opening of courses in the Turkic language because they relied on their “poor” knowledge of Arabic and dreamed of controlling the secular affairs.

The socialists were aware that it is impossible to teach in Arabic. Their tactics had as the primary goal the introduction of the Russian language in Daghestan. They could not state that openly, and the recognition of Arabic was just a step towards future linguistic Russification. Socialists tried to convince religious scholars and Sufis to take their side. ‘Alī Ḥājjī willingly took the side of the socialists and announced that in Daghestan education in Arabic was a necessity and that teaching in the Turkic language, especially for religious topics, violates the Islamic law.392

Muḥammad Qāḍī Dibirov politicized the language issue by de-emphasizing the religious significance of Arabic. For obvious reasons, his accusation towards religious scholars of their having poor knowledge of Arabic cannot be taken at face value. Clearly, Dibirov tried to delegitimize the supporters of Arabic as people who do not even master the language of their choice, namely Arabic. In a way, this position can be seen as a national opposition to a religiously colored articulation of the language issue.

For the socialists of 1917, language was a tool in their policy to clear their names as an anti-Islamic group. Thus, they supported Arabic since it was backed by the Islamic religious leaders like ‘Alī Ḥājjī. Unlike the reformists and the supporters of an imamate, for the socialists, language was not a marker of identity in the context of the envisioned future, at least in 1917. However, its role was inherent since Arabic was a tool to clear the path through that traditional society to the envisioned future. After the creation of the Soviet Union in 1922, the Soviets made a clear emphasis on the national character of peripheral regions to bind them strongly with the center and eradicate the local concepts of space and religious identities, a policy that was carried out around the country.393 In Daghestan, on 29 June 1923, the Soviets accepted

391 Ibid.
392 Ibid.
the Kumyk language as a state language of the Daghestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Nevertheless, the script was changed from Arabic to Latin in 1929 and from Latin to Cyrillic in 1938. By this the Bolsheviks cut the Kumyk language from the Muslim cultural environment. During the next Soviet decades, Russian language dominated, leaving no room for the competitive political projects associated either with Arabic learning or with the local national movements. However, the tradition related to the Arabic continued to exist throughout the whole Soviet history in private circles. Authors of Arabic-language works refrained from introducing their works to the public; especially during Stalin’s regime, the state’s anti-Islamic and anti-religious policies meant that the discovery of an Arabic manuscript could result in its owner’s execution.

3.3.4. National languages on the reformers’ vision of the future
The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a period of a rapid rise in the importance of national languages caused by the political development of nationalism, which became one of the most significant political and social forces in history. As Anthony Smith argued, “the large-scale mass-democratic nationalisms of the earlier nineteenth century were later joined by a host of small-scale mini-nationalisms led by intellectuals who appealed to language and cultural differences.” Here I analyze the sources written by the supporters of vernacular and Turkic languages without separation since not only was Turkic the dominant language outside Dagestan (in the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim regions of Russia) but Kumyk was one of the indigenous languages of Dagestan. In other words, supporters of Turkic could either be in favor of Turkification as part of the Ottoman influence or call for the nationalization and support of native languages.

Before 1917, both Arabic and Turkish were already linked to the Arab and Turkish nationalist movements and were easily problematized by the

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supporters of Daghestani vernaculars. In his article called *al-Ta’līm bi-l-‘arabīya am bi-l-turkīya* (“Education in Arabic or Turkic?”), Kūrdī Zākū Zādeh from the Lak village of Kumukh claimed that education in primary schools should be conducted in the native languages and in Turkic in the high schools. To justify his point of view, Kūrdī Zākū Zādeh explained the significance of the Turkic language for Daghestan. He listed five arguments in its support: 1) The Turkic language was the most widespread in Daghestan and many people knew it; 2) This language was easy to study (some Arab scholars even calling it the easiest language in the world); 3) Daghestanis were surrounded by the Turkic nations with whom the Daghestani people maintained strong ties; 4) Turkic was dominant among the Muslims of Inner Russia; and 5) Turkic was the official language of the only Islamic State, i.e., the Ottoman Empire.\(^3\)

These notions are remarkable because they stress the inter-regional communication of Daghestani Muslims\(^4\) and their loyalty to the Ottoman state headed by the caliph. Kūrdī Zākū Zādeh also feared that if the Daghestanis stopped studying the Turkic language, the Russian language would spread in their schools, Russian customs would become dominant in Daghestan and the Daghestanis would forget the Muslim culture and manners and eventually become Russians. Obviously, Kūrdī Zākū Zādeh regarded the Turkic language not as a local tongue, but as the official language of the Ottoman state, the symbol of Islam.

Another article penned by Abū Sufyān Akaev advances the opposite scenario depicting the Turkic language as being a local language of the Daghestani population. Abū Sufyān loomed large in the sphere of education and participated in the establishment of the first national printing house “Islāmīya” in Daghestan (1903). In 1917, Abū Sufyān published his article entitled *Til Mas’alasi* (“The Language Issue”) in *Musāwāt*, the first Kumyk-language magazine:

Thank God, for almost three to four months now, freedom of religion has been given to all people of Russia. Now we can define for ourselves what we will read or write, and we can use the language we desire. If we make a wrong choice, consequences can be very bad. It is clear, however,

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that we will not choose the Russian language. The Russian language, although it is very rich and there are plenty of books published in it, is not "ours," neither in a religious sense nor in terms of the alphabet.  

Prominently, Akaev delineates Russian and the languages of Islam, that is to say, those which are culturally associated with Islamic tradition. Next to Arabic, the Daghestani vernaculars, Turkic among them, were counted as the languages of Islam. It remains an open question where Akaev picked up this notion of Islamic languages, but it seems that the concept goes back to an early Orientalist vision of languages that carry the values of Muslim culture, for instance, Barthélemy d’Herbelot’s trilingual approach which considered there to be three languages of Islamic high culture, Arabic, Persian and Turkish, which are connected by fate not origin. Despite this fact, Akaev authored dictionaries with several languages among which was also the Russian language but in Arabic script.

While talking about languages, Akaev also mentions the problem of which language to choose from among the different Turkic languages:

Our native tongue is Turkic while the language of religion is Arabic. We have to choose between them: Turkic or Arabic? If Turkic, we have to decide if it is the language we speak here or the one spoken in Istanbul? Or shall we turn to Azerbaijani or Kazan Turkic?

Here it is noteworthy that Kumyk was native to Abū Sufyān. That is why his article deals with the Kumyk language. He suggested the Avars and other ethnic groups should make their own choice. This shows that for Abū Sufyān, Turkic was a part of a vernacularization process, not Turkification. Hence, after raising the question of Turkic languages, Abū Sufyān states that “among the dialects of the Turkic language, Kumyk is the purist; other dialects—Kazan, Azerbaijani and even Istanbul Turkic—received many loanwords from Persian, Arabic and Russian.”

After his arguments about the importance of vernaculars, Abū Sufyān turns to Arabic, highlighting its importance in keeping the religion away from spoiling. Abū Sufyān also speaks about “empty fears,” insisting that studying

403 Ibid.
Turkic or Kumyk will never hurt Arabic. He insists that when he says, “Let us study in Kumyk,” that means that they will “learn at least something in Kumyk and not depend entirely on Arabic. It does not mean that we deny or reject Arabic altogether.”

While Kumyk was native to Akaev, another prominent historian of Daghestan, the Lak ‘Alī Kaiaev, perceived the promotion of Turkic as Turkification. In his article called *Siyasātāni mukhtalifatāni* (”Two Different Policies”) ‘Alī Kaiaev discusses the importance of vernacularization and the dangers of the Turkic and Russian languages. Kaiaev claims that before the revolution both the Russian and Turkic languages were tools in the hands of the Russian and Ottoman Empires to Russify and Turkify Daghestan (*tatrīk ahl Dāghistān*). For this purpose, as Kaiaev put it, the Russian imperial administration opened primary (al-*makātib al-mubtadi‘iya*) and secondary (al-*makātib al-mutawassīta*) schools, which were nothing but “the deadly venom, which deprives a man of his national and religious foundations.”

Going further, the author calls Russian the language of unbelievers (*kuffār*). ‘Alī Kaiaev, like Akaev, sees the Russian language as the language of the tsar and a “Trojan horse” sent by the Russian state. His article from 22 July 1917 was full of the most malignant insinuations about the danger hidden in the spread of Turkic. For him both policies—Russian and Turkish—had the same goals and impact, i.e., they sought to deprive Daghestanis of their national identity and enforce assimilation. ‘Alī Kaiaev sees the Ottomans not as the protectors of Islam and keepers of the caliphate, but as “disciples of Genghis Khan and Hulagu Khan,” i.e., the enemies of Islam. The author highlights that Turkic is not in great demand among Daghestanis since they had been Muslims even before the Turks converted to Islam. Here we see that the position of Kaiaev in the caliphate debate, i.e., his denial of the Ottomans’ primacy in the Muslim world, resulted in strong support for the local Daghestani tongues.

Kaiaev insists that the benefit of national languages is more vital than that of a shared language (*lugha ‘āmma mushtarika bayna al-jamī‘*) even if it is the

404 Ibid.
406 Ibid.
Turkish language, “the language of our Muslim neighbors, the language of science and enlightenment (lugha jirāninā al-muslimīn wa-l-ʿulūm wa-l-maʿārif).” 408 After emphasizing the role of a national language in saving the overall Daghestani identity, Kaiaev accepts Arabic as the most suitable second language “for the study of Arabic scholarship and religion, while other subjects can be studied in other languages.” 409 Here we see how the idea of civic nationalism emerges in the texts of the Daghestani reformists; the Daghestani national languages were the means for that civic nationalism unifying a multi-ethnic country.

What is Kaiaev’s stand? First, as did other supporters of vernaculars, he promoted a unique Daghestani identity. Like Akaev, he also highlighted the difference between Daghestani nations, on the one hand, and Russians and Turks, on the other. Hence, Kaiaev posits an equality between Turkic and Russian considering both as the languages of “others”; thereby, he separates Daghestan from both the Russian and the Turkic worlds. Turkification was seen as a new wave of imperial policy but now from the side of the Ottomans.

Given the fears of Turkification, the supporters of vernaculars made a clear distinction between Ottoman Turkish and Kumyk, the latter being acceptable. Kumyk was functioning as a native language for one of the Daghestani indigenous ethnic groups and, moreover, this dialect of Turkic was a spoken lingua franca across the northern Caucasus. Kumyk was in common use as a literary language in the lowlands. 410 Supporters of this claim considered Arabic only as the language of religion.

In the end, the promotion of vernaculars was a link that the reformers tried to activate for the realization of their vision of future. In their “Daghestaniness,” the dominant marker was these national languages. At the same time, they supported Arabic as well but subordinated it to the national languages, thereby distinguishing themselves from the supporters of the traditional education system.

3.3.5. Russian language and the Unitarists
The strong links between Arabic and vernaculars, on the one hand, and Islam and nation-building, on the other, left only the role of assimilator to the Cyrillic

409 Ibid.
Russian. Timothy K. Blauvelt and Anton Vacharadze claim that in the Caucasus, “the imperial lingua franca was a desired commodity, one that gave significant opportunities for success and advancement for all classes among the national minorities, and one that they themselves valued and demanded from the educational system.” They also remark that “the demand for improvement in Russian instruction in the Caucasus came as much from below as from above.”

This claim is true for the South Caucasus with separate Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani linguistic spheres (and respective state policies) and where Russian served as an imperial language. As for Dagestan, the state policies were the same for all the multiple languages in the region, and it was Arabic and Turkic rather than Russian that served as the means for inter-ethnic communication. Russian officials understood this situation and tried to use Arabic for their goals. In 1914 the government launched the journal *Jarīdat Dāghistān*, planned as an Arabic translation of *Dagestanskie oblastnie vedomosti* ("Daghestan regional news"), the official newspaper of the tsarist administration. This Arabic newspaper can be considered a state project, but in the end the government stopped funding it, realizing that the audience was limited to local scholarly elites. The Russians also tried to improve the position of Russian in the region by opening schools and even forcefully trying to make Russian the language of legal courts. This policy created much anxiety among the locals, but Russian had both supporters and opponents.

A rare example of a supportive position can be found on the pages of *Jarīdat Dāghistān*. An anonymous author (using the double Arabic letter ‘ayn as a signature) replies to Kūrdī Zākū Zādeh’s article analyzed above. The author claims that Turkic was not the most popular in Dagestan, since in some regions, such as Gunib, Kazikumukh, Andi and Dargi, only

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412 On 3rd June 1837 Tsarist administration made the publication of *Guberskie vedomosti* (Regional reports) mandatory for all guberniias of the Empire. The main purpose of the administration was an increasing of the centre’s influence. The Tsarist administration turned to “printed word to have an impact on the society” (vozdeistviya na obshestvo pri pomoshchi pechatnogo slova) as Boris Glinsky, a Russian publicist and politician put it at the end of 19th century. Boris Glinsky. "Russkaia periodicheskaia pechat’ v provintsii." *Istorichesky Vestnik LXXI* (1898), 292-233.


vernaculars like Avar and Dargi were shared by different ethnic groups. The author then agreed with Zākū Zādeh that spoken Turkic is easy but not the literary language with its loanwords from Persian, Arabic and even some Western tongues. Here the author arrives at the defense of Russian stating that “Russian is the language of all nations of the country and many of these nations, such as the Tatars, have an excellent command of it. Daghestan needs the Russian language, not Turkic.”

The author emphasizes the already existing ties within the Russian state, where the knowledge of the imperial language is mandatory and binds peripheral territories to the metropolis. In my assessment, what is found here is a unitarist view that promotes the idea of one “Muslim nation” within the Russian state. The existing ties with the outside world, particularly with the larger Muslim world, are downplayed here.

Fierce rejection of the Russian language, on the contrary, was mainstream on the pages of the press. There were many authors who brought up the arguments against “Russification.” One of these statements, Kaiaev’s article “On Freedom” by ‘Alī Kaiaev, was already introduced in the second chapter. Here, I would like to analyze it from the perspective of the language issue. The author clearly links the language choice with the national freedom which was violated during the imperial period. In the same article, we also see a double victimization of Daghestanis: they do not realize their loss of identity and they believe in the usefulness of the new Russian schools while those who are aware of the situation are unable to change anything.

Similarly, Abū Sufyān sought to demonstrate that the collapse of the Empire and the victory of the revolution gave them a new chance:

After religion, there is nothing more important than language. A nation that does not have problems with the language will always be superior. On the contrary, a nation which cannot avoid these problems will stay behind. Just three or four months ago, in the Russian Empire,

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417 The original of the article was published on the 6th issue of Lak-language newspaper Channah Tsuku from September 23, 1917.
there was no chance of raising the question of our language. Moreover, the Russians when possible would impose their language on us, make us forget our native tongue. At schools and madrasas such important subjects as geography, history and other secular subjects were only allowed to be taught in Russian. The purpose of such a policy was to Russify us and tear us away from our roots. I am sure that the nation (millet) without its language (tīl) and national clothes will lose along with them both religion and faith.419

Learning Russian is here identified with tsarist policy, and when the tsarist regime collapsed, the Daghestanis decided to choose a different language, not Russian. These accusations seem to be a rhetorical device in the hands of the reformists. The empire was barely controlling the traditional education system; hence, the abovementioned subjects could have been taught in Arabic. The idea of freedom, which was under discussion in the second chapter, strongly relates to the language policy. Education in the Russian language, associated with autocracy, resembled the absence of freedom, and was unacceptable for the reformers. In this question they agreed with the traditional ‘ulamā’ who were also against the Russian language as a language of instruction. National languages in the schools symbolized the collapse of oppression and the victory of freedom.

Another aspect of this debate has to do with those who studied at Russian schools. For instance, Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii argued that those who studied in Russian schools do not respect the Shari‘a.420 According to Gotsinskii, national friendship is only possible with the preservation of separate national educations. Therefore, the Russian schools were notorious as centers of cultural assimilation. Muḥammad Qāḍī Dibirov in his History also states that the Daghestanis rejected the socialists and demanded their society be organized in accordance with the Shari‘a. “In this process scholars and Sufis played an important role. That means all power is concentrated in the hands of the scholars. Moreover, there were many of those who wanted the persons educated in Russian to be completely removed from authority.”421 It seems that for the Daghestani people the students “educated in Russian” formed a separate

420 Dibirov, Muḥammad. Daghistan tarikhī, 59-64; Muḥammad Dibirov. Istoriia Dagestana (Sobitiia posle revoliutsii), 24-26.
421 Ibid., 20.
group. Once the tsarist state had gone, it was easy to accuse these students as traitors. This separation was upheld by the supporters of Arabic and vernacular tongues. The situation around the Russian language was mainly dependent on the heritage of the tsarist policy, which had created an atmosphere of profound hostility.

3.4. Conclusion
The Russian Revolution of 1917 in Daghestan created an unprecedented euphoria of freedom and opportunities for the whole intellectual cohort of the region. In the discourse of the Daghestani reformists, that long-waited freedom was a very fragile phenomenon which needed to be protected. The protectors of that freedom and justice could be only an educated society who knew the value of freedom. Consequently, the education system needed to guarantee that that freedom would not be eliminated. What emerged were several competing projects the implementation of which would be the success of a certain vision of the future. While the tools and vocabulary used sometimes overlapped, the final goals of these actors differed. For instance, despite their shared rhetoric, the main goals of the reformists and the Bolsheviks diverged. While the Bolsheviks wanted to establish schools free from religion, the Islamic heritage was the rationale for the reformists’ new ideas, new methods and rational subjects.

There were three different visions of how the future of Daghestan should be. These were the visions of the Daghestani reformists, of the traditionalists and of the Bolsheviks. Each vision had its own understanding of the kind of school which would become a place where relevant members of the future desired society would be educated.

The overall rhetoric of these camps was quite similar. All discussed groups were deploying the language of “duty” in their arguments showing that the right language choice is their duty before Allah, society and country. However, even though they were using similar terminology, their aims were located in different ideological systems. Also, the Muslim scholars of revolutionary Daghestan were speaking of the same fears, be that the loss of national identity or religion. Identity plays a key role in this discourse and hence religion and national markers come to the forefront.

While pushing forward their visions and agendas, the sides used to refer to the significance of language. In the discussion of the imamate as the future
state structure, religion was the dominant factor. To defend religion and to organize life in the future state accordingly, the main duty was to preserve the key positions of the Arab language education, one of the vital tools of acquiring knowledge. On the one hand, Arabic in Daghestan was largely defended as the sacred language in which the Qur’an was originally revealed. Consequently, Islamic discourse was mainly articulated in the Arabic language as the language of scholarly debate and high education and prestige. On the other hand, Arabic was protected for more practical reasons, i.e., to create a future state model that would be based fully on the legal system described in religious literature.

As for the project of freedom, the premise was that it would endow each Daghestani ethnic group with a native language of instruction. This model, which “stands for a political-institutional approach that respects and protects multiple but complementary sociocultural identities,” is sometimes called the “state-nation.” As the authors of the theory claim, the “state-nation” recognizes and supports “more than one cultural identity (particularly recognition of more than one official language), even more than one cultural nation, all within a framework of some common polity-wide symbols.” The works of the reformists promote this idea, i.e., to give the Daghestani ethnic groups the right to use their mother tongue, to identify themselves, on one hand, with their ethnic groups, such as Avar, Kumyk, and Dargi. This was an expression of civic nationalism. On the other hand, these were also envisaged within a sense of belonging to the supra-level group of Daghestanis. In this model, the lingua francas—Arabic and Turkic—are not dominant, but they are important as bridges between the ethnic groups.

Finally, the debate around Russian demonstrates that for the advocates of this stand, being part of a great empire was central. Consequently, Russian was turned into a tool for demonstrating loyalty and keeping communication with the metropolis. Nevertheless, the negative experience of the tsarist times with regard to cultural assimilation left almost no room for the support of this language among the local population.

423 Ibid., 8.