Muslim reformism in Daghestan

*Islam*ic politics and Muslim education after the Russian Revolution

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Chapter IV
The New Scopes of the Islamic Discourse: Inner-Islamic and Soviet Trajectories of the 1920s in the Journal Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq

4.1. Introduction
After the establishment of Soviet power in Daghestan, many Daghestani reform-minded intellectuals were included in this new system, becoming parts of the newly established political, educational and cultural institutions. Having their own visions for the future, these intellectuals engaged in the implementation of their projects in the Soviet environment. As the intellectuals cooperated with the state, the Bolsheviks sanctioned the publication of Islamic journals such as Ḥaqīqāt in Tashkent424 and Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq in Buynaksk. While the journal Ḥaqīqāt was thoroughly investigated by Bakhtiyar Babadjanov, many aspects of the Daghestani journal Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq remain understudied. The Daghestani historian Amir Navruzov discusses some aspects of the journal.425 His overview of the journal helps us go more in-depth into its content and examine it in the context of broader issues such as the overlapping Soviet and reformist rhetoric, the question of Salaḥism and anti-colonial discussions. The present chapter of this thesis will show how the reformist discourse transformed after the establishment of the Soviet power.

Several initial considerations and tensions shaped this chapter’s focus. Having no ambition to trace every possible way in which the intellectuals articulated and adapted their project in the new Soviet reality, in this chapter I examine the main topics of the Daghestani intellectuals’ Sovietized discourse from the vantage point of domestic and international developments related to Islam. I seek to balance the local and global themes as discussed on the pages of Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq published between 1925 and 1928.

Based on Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq, the aim of this chapter is twofold. The first is to discuss the journal’s main topics in the context of the overlapping political views of the Soviets and the Muslim intellectuals of Daghestan. The second is to uncover the intentions of the Daghestani intellectuals to take a dominant position in the interpretation of Islam by attacking their possible Muslim competitors.

4.2. The orientations of the religious journal Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq and the “Islamic” model of the Soviet state

In September 1925, a group of Daghestani Muslim Scholars—Abū Sufyān Akæev (editor-in-chief), Yūsuf Qâdî al-Ǧungūṭî, Ḥâjjî Qâdî al-Ghazânishî, Bilâl Ḥâjjî al-Ǧungûṭî, Muṣṭafâ Qâdî al-Ghazânishî and Khîḍrî al-Ghazânîshî—who initiated the Arab-language religious journal Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq (“Explanation of Truths”). Though the authors were sure that they would publish the journal once a month, the second issue was published only in November. The situation got worse in 1926; only three issues were published in March, July and October. Also, in 1927 there were many interruptions. The journal stopped being published in 1928. Already in June 1929 the editor of the journal, Abū Sufyān Akæev, was arrested.

The title of the journal, “Explanation of Truths,” is quite characteristic for the reformists. The word ḥaqâʾiq can be translated as “truth.” The explanation of this religious truth requires extensive knowledge of the Islamic sources. Consequently, the authors of the journal represented themselves as religious authorities qualified for that respected and vital job.

426 As the names of the founders of the journal shows they were Kumyk in origin from two villages of the Buynaksk region—Jengutay and Ghazanišhe. Given the overall face of the Daghestani reformism, this is not strange since Kumyks were the core of it. The dominance of this ethnic group among the Daghestani reformists has its geographical reason: the reformism in Daghestan developed in and around the urban areas and the Kumyk regions are neighbouring them. Kemper, Michael, Shikhaliev, Shamil. “Qadimism, and Jadidism in Twentieth-Century Daghestan," Asiatische Studien - Études Asiatiques 69, no. 3 (2015): 608.
The first sentence of the journal reads:

When we were given freedom (ḥurrīya) after many years and due to that entered the new era (ʿazmina jadīda), with the permission of the Soviet government (al-Hukūma al-Shūrāwīya) we six scholars started to publish a journal which will be published once a month and is called Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq.427

This very first sentence of the journal demonstrates the same rhetoric that characterized the reformist newspaper Jarīdat Dāghistān (1913-1919)428 in the matter of perception of time and revolution and shows the continuity of some of the topics of the reformist discourse into the Soviet era. The revolution was understood as cultural freedom, and the collapse of the autocracy was perceived as the beginning of the new era. For the authors of Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq, the government’s permission to publish a religious journal was one of the signs of that new era of freedom.

The same first opening article also identifies the main orientations of the journal. Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq was meant to explain the virtues of Islam; purify the Shariʿa from innovations (bidʿa); respond to the false objections offered by some atheists and enlighten the minds of scholars and students by teaching modern truths (al-ḥaqāʾiq al-ʿaṣrīya) and new righteous ideas (al-afkār al-jadīda al-sadīda).

In my first draft of this chapter, I argued that Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq’s aims were entirely in line with Soviet politics. While writing that first draft, I had been reading literature about Soviet domestic and international politics. My presumptions about Soviet politics influenced my reading of this primary source and dictated and even distorted my interpretation of the desires of the founders of the journal, pulling me off course from my main aim to understand the vernacular approaches rather than using the metropolis’s prisms of history. Later, I corrected the angle from which I looked at the problem by including literature on reformist movements in the Islamic world as well as some individual trajectories of prominent Arab reformists such as Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935).

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428 Though some authors such as Akaev were published in both periodicals, it is not grounded to say that Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq was a continuation of newspaper Jarīdat Dāghistān. The topics related to the education was discussed in both journals; however, while Jarīdat Dāghistān was more concentrated on the content of the education programs, Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq sought to show the state schools as a way of progress. Other topics such as Sufism and Wahhabism were not discussed in Jarīdat Dāghistān (at least that critically) while they are central debates in Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq.
Looking at the orientations of Bayân al-Ḥaqāʾiq from this angle, one may notice that the journal’s language, while being acceptable for the Soviets, remains within the rhetoric of the Islamic debate over pure Islam. By aiming to offer “explanations of the virtues of Islam,” the authors saw themselves as the source of right interpretations, the result of whose efforts, as we have seen, would be a purified Islam and its defense against unbelievers. Moreover, the fourth point, “to enlighten the minds of scholars and students by teaching modern facts and new ideas,” locates the founders of the journal within the camp at the balanced Salafis; they sought renewal and reform along modern lines without undermining the strength and relevance of Islam in the modern era. To reach that renewal and victory of religion, they sought to be included in political affairs as well, which made them politically active Salafi reformists.

In his well-known journal al-Manār (“The Lighthouse”), in 1914 Rashīd Riḍā argued that the madhhab al-salaf was “nothing other than to act according to the Qur’an and the Sunna without any accretion, in the way that [the salaf] understood [Islam] at its inception.”429 It should be added however, that neither Rashīd Riḍā nor his followers used the term Salaḥīya as the slogan for their actions.

Contrary to this, the idea of a Salafi group existed in Daghestan in the second part of the 1920s. In the eighth issue of Bayân al-Ḥaqāʾiq, one article entitled “The Religious Meeting of the Republic of Adygea”430 mentions the expression Ḥizb al-salaf al-Prughrīsū (“The Group of the Progressive Salafis”). In December 1925, the Muslims of Circassia in the Soviet Republic of Adygea convened a general Muslim congress to resolve some religious issues. After the end of the congress, they wrote in Arabic what was discussed at the congress and sent that letter to the editor of Bayân al-Ḥaqāʾiq. The journal published the introductory part of that letter, as well as some issues discussed and solved at the congress. From the very beginning, this letter states:

Islam is an old religion the age of which is 1,345 years from the Hijra. From the period of its spread until today, Islam underwent various changes. During this time, innovations (bidʿa) and superstitions (al-khurafāt) were added to it although these were forbidden by Allah and his messenger.

Colonial states such as England, France, Russia and some Muslim kingdoms (mulūk) contributed to the distortion of the Words of Allah (kalimāt Allāh), as this was in the interests of the colonial states. These states wanted to weaken a group of people in order to use them for their interests. [Such a situation had already been] the case in the time before Imām al-Ghazālī, a great man widely known among the people of Egypt, Damascus, Baghdad and other Muslim cities, appeared in the fifth century. This famous imām began to oppose these distortions, refuting them with rational arguments (ādilla 'aqliyya). After the death of al-Ghazālī, his activities were continued with great zeal by his many students. On their path of spreading the truth, they encountered numerous difficulties and resistance from the rulers of these oppressive countries like Egypt and Turkey.

In this passage, the authors of this letter express two messages: the religion is in need of purification and the colonial states have benefited from that distortion of Islam. Both of these claims were inherent to the rhetoric of the balanced Salafis led by Rashīd Riḍā.

Next, the letter focuses on the situation of Islam in the Caucasus, particularly in Circassia, stating that they had received Islam at a point in time when it had already been distorted and they continued following it without understanding its distortion. The situation, as the author claims, changed when in 1907 a group of scholars from the Caucasus decided to review religion (intiqād al-dīn) in order to separate the truth from lies; these scholars went to Turkey and Egypt and became aware of the truth. The author calls them the new group.

The new group (al-firqa al-jadīda) began openly preaching the truths. However, Circassian customs (al-ʿāda), which were closely intertwined with religion, prevented them from doing so. For this reason, they stopped the public call for truth and began spreading the truth slowly. They began to spread the truth only among a certain circle of people who strove for this. However, this group of progressive salafis (Ḥizb al-salaf al-prughrīṣīst) did not achieve its goals since the old group (al-firqa al-qadīma) was supported by the tyrannical emperor (al-malik al-mustabīd).

Their identification of the action of this new group as the only reliable way shows the Daghestani reformists’ connections with the reformists of Egypt.

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431 In accordance with the Islamic calendar (at-taqwīm al-ḥijrī).
and puts the journal in the larger Salafi context beyond Daghestan. In addition to this, one also can notice that the letter carries the Soviet influence as well. Analyzing this letter in his article, “The Islamic press in early Soviet Dagestan and the journal Muslims of the Soviet Orient,” Shamil Shikhaliev argues that “the style of article writing of the last issues of Bayān al-Ḥāqā‘īq changes from Islamic topics to the Soviet ones.”

Shikhaliev builds his argument on phrases such as “colonial despotic states” (al-duwal al-isti‘mā‘īya al-isti‘bā‘ādiya). One of the cogent arguments that Shikhaliev mentions is the use of Russian loan words such as al-prughrīsīst despite the existence of their equivalent in Arabic, i.e., taqaddumī. Shikhaliev’s claim about the Soviet influence on the style of the journal is well-grounded. Still, I believe that the whole discourse of purification of religion came from the Middle Eastern Salafi and balanced reformist movements. The anti-colonial and anti-European rhetoric—which Shikhaliev identifies as a Soviet influence—was already a part of that balanced reformist rhetoric and not only a Soviet phenomenon.

Furthermore, the third point of the journal’s orientations—“a response to the false objections made by some atheists”—gives some clues about the situation in Daghestan and the level of the Soviet influence there: Daghestani Muslim scholars were aware of the spread of atheism on the territory of the collapsed Russian Empire. However, this wave of atheism was still weak and was not perceived as a state-backed policy against Islam itself. Consequently, the reformist intellectuals, by mentioning the Soviet permission to open the journal, highlighted that the reformist interpretations of Islam did not contradict the state’s policy towards religion.

Another characteristic of the journal is its image of the Soviets as a state completely in accordance with the Sharī‘a. To demonstrate that accordance, the journal’s authors emphasize several features of the Soviets such as their tolerance towards religions. Already in the first issue of the journal, Yūsuf Qādī al-Jungūtī published an article expressing gratitude to the Soviet government for backing the journal, praising the Soviets for their tolerance towards Islam.

This [the publishing of Bayān al-Ḥāqā‘īq] may indicate the falsehood of what the enemies of freedom say. They claim that the Soviet

434 The title of this article “al-Tabshīr bi-l-Majalla” can be translated as a “Good news about the journal's publication.”
government is hostile to religion. Here we see what some shaytāns of people do to their opponents by disseminating hostility between the people and the government. Indeed, they think their actions are good. As the saying goes, “A wise enemy is better than a foolish friend.”

Another key moment of the image of the Soviets created by the journal is its Islamic model. The author Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn Yūsuf Ḥajjī bin Ramaldan emphasizes the Soviets as a model of Islamic shūrā (consultation). For instance, in the article Wifāq (“Accordance”) Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn Yūsuf Ḥajjī bin Ramaldan links the Soviet model to the requirements of the Qur’an. The 38th āya of the 42nd sūra, from which the sūra’s title “al-Shūrā” derives, reads, “Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular Prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them from Sustenance.

Citing this āya, the author then explains that the shūrā is permissible in every matter to differentiate between right and wrong. In order to reveal the truth, people must do ijtihād, i.e., they must do all they can to perform consultation. While characterizing Soviet rule as being in accordance with Islam and the journal’s contributors as a dominant and authentic source of the religious decisions, the journal also opens a massive debate around specific religious questions such as tashayyukh and launches severe attacks on Sufis and Wahhabis. As we will see below, the confrontation with the atheist state is thereby redirected against Muslim opponents.

4.3. The debates over Daghestani Sufism on the pages of Bayān al-Ḥaqā’iq

Claiming to follow the only true Islam that can lead to progress and salvation, and embracing Salafism, which gave them an opportunity to use the idea of

436 Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn Yūsuf Ḥajjī bin Ramaldan (1846 -1932) also known as al-Kurikhī was from the village of Gurik, Southern Dagestan. He was a murid of Naqshbandiya shaykh Ahmad Hamdi al-Rukali (1848-1925). His private collection of manuscripts was catalogued by a group of Daghestani historians led by A. Shikhsaidov. See: Katalog arabskikh rukopisei i staropechatnykh knig. Kollektiia Diia’addina Iusuf-khadzhi al-Kurikhi (ed. A.R. Shikhsaidov). Moskva, 2011.
437 The word wifāq can also be translated as “unity.” However, given the goal of the article to demonstrate the accordance of the Soviets with the Islamic model of shūrā, I will translate the title as “Accordance.”
439 Q. 42:38
purity to bolster their authority as opponents of factionalism, the Daghestani reformers placed themselves at the center of inter-Islamic polemics. This purist attitude also provided a historically rooted anchor for an “orthodox” way to counter beliefs and behaviors that these reformists considered wrong and counterproductive. As H. Lauzière notices, “one did not need to be a Salafi in order to criticize Sufi beliefs and behaviours, but those who abided by the creed of the salaf could tap into a well of weighty arguments from the orthodox tradition.” From this position, the reformers targeted Sufis and their practices as innovations that have led the umma into its present stagnation, as the reformers saw it.

Targeting Sufism from the position of Salafism was not just a purely Daghestani phenomenon. Nearly two decades before the establishment of this Daghestani journal, the Baghdadi scholar Maḥmud Shukrī al-Ālūsī (1857-1924) claimed that heterodox Sufis “became the laughing stock of the people of abrogated religions such as the Jews and the Christians, as well as the people of philosophical sects and the materialists.” Al-Ālūsī blamed Sufi beliefs and behaviors for the decline of Muslims in an age of progress. In Egypt, Rashīd Riḍā reiterated the same concerns, decrying that Sufis were giving Islam a bad name. Riḍā even claimed that Sufis were hiding the real positive and progressive nature of Islam from the world, supporting colonialism and even collaborating with the imperialist powers due to their ignorance or duplicity.

Sufi brotherhoods—particularly the Naqshbandiyya, Shāhdiliyya and Khālidīya ṭarīqas—played a leading role in the history of Daghestan, especially during the jihād of 1818-1859. Sufi shaykhs, as we noticed before, were vital political and religious leaders in the events following the February Revolution. The support of shaykhs such as 'Alī Ḥajjī Akushinskii was invaluable for the victory of the Bolsheviks while Uzun Ḥajjī Saltinskii was one of the key enemies for the Bolsheviks. With their criticism of Sufism, the Daghestani reformists contributed to a global debate and were influenced by other reformists in the

443 Lauzière, Henri. The Making of Salafism Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century. P. 47.
444 Ibid., 48.
Middle East. By limiting the influence of the Sufis, they also hoped to gain a stronger position in Daghestan.

Nearly every issue of the journal contains an article devoted to Sufi topics. All these articles criticize different aspects of Sufism, sometimes claiming that Daghestani Sufis are nothing else but pseudo-Sufi elements forbidden by the Sharī‘a. In the first issue of Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq, the editorial board published the article “The adoration of Sufi masters from the viewpoint of Islamic law,” which starts with these statements:

It is no secret that the Sharī‘a does not command us to follow a shaykh or to join the disciples of a Sufi master (al-tashayyukh wa al-murīdiya). It is not a secret that these things are not assigned by the Sharī‘a. There is also no text in the Qur‘an and the Sunna that indicates their obligation (farḍ) or [shows that they are] recommendable.445 However, the Sharī‘a does not forbid them if they are in line with the Islamic law. This means that in the absence of a forbidding text, they are acceptable only if they do not contradict the Sharī‘a.

Tashayyukh is acceptable in the Sharī‘a, if it is free from hypocrisy, and if it serves to strengthen the spirit and to reject vicious qualities such as arrogance and greed, as well as a desire for leadership (riyāsa) and wealth. [Tashayyukh is acceptable] if it instills praiseworthy qualities such as humility, the abandonment of leadership and the rejection of greed.

Tashayyukh is not acceptable according to the Sharī‘a and is even blameworthy if it aims at acquiring worldly goods and leadership in the name of religion, or if its goal is to multiply the numbers of murīds. [...] shaykhṣ should not interfere in worldly affairs since it is not their function. [...] The management of worldly affairs is a function of scholars who are political leaders (ahl al-siyāsa min al-‘ulamā’) and wise men or [those] engaged in secular science (al-‘ulūm al-dunyāwīya).446

The main idea of the article is the argument that a shaykh has nothing to do with the secular political life and must deal with moral and spiritual affairs only. While the reformists were strengthening their position within the Soviet system, this claim was preferable for the Soviet side as well. The increasing influence of the Sufi shaykhs could not go unnoticed by the state. The Soviets

regarded Sufism with its hierarchic system as a cluster of institutions similar to the Church, potentially dangerous as an organization behind anti-Soviet uprisings. Thus, I would not be mistaken to say that from the viewpoint of the Soviets, the separation of Sufism from the state was comparable to the separation of the church from the state. From the 1920s, the discourse around Sufism and shaykhs was an inherent part of the rhetoric of the Soviet government. The Obkom of Daghestan linked the rise of Sufism with the poverty of the masses during the revolutionary turmoil, and after that the OGPU took a tougher position towards Sufism and especially towards highly respected shaykhs such as ‘Alī Ḥajjī Akushinskii.447 In accordance with the Soviet narrative, shaykhs and their murīds, realizing the futility of the armed struggle against the Bolsheviks, did everything to discredit Soviet power and thwart the Soviet measures to educate children in schools, and fiercely struggled against the Soviets’ initiatives.

When the reformists of Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq opened the discussions over Sufism, their hostility overlapped with the Soviets’ position toward the Sufis. By removing Sufis from the political field where they were a significant force, as I mentioned, the Soviets hoped to get an omnipresent dominance over political affairs and that the people would follow their words instead of those of their shaykhs. This goal was also shared by the Daghestani reformists. Many of the Daghestani shaykhs, including ‘Alī Ḥajjī and Uzun Ḥajjī, opposed the ideas expressed by the reformists, including the use of vernaculars instead of Arabic and questions related, for instance, to ihtihād and taqlīd.

The contributors to Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq attacked Sufism not out of principle, but they criticized the wealth of the shaykhs and their political role, a phenomenon inherent to the Naqshbandiya ṭarīqa in general and to Daghestani Sufis in particular. In fact, they criticized the Sufis of their time only indirectly, trying to be as general as possible and avoiding the identification of individual names.

As seen above, the anonymous author of the 1925 article in Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq insisted that only politician-scholars should deal with political affairs. The increase of the role of the secular sciences was one of the main aims of the reformists and it was also one of the spheres where the reformist rhetoric overlaps with the Soviet one. By posing as defenders of the sciences,

447 Sulaev, Imanutdin. Gosudarstvo i musul’manskoie dukhovennstvo v Dagestane, 44-45.
the reformists depicted their opponents as enemies of these sciences and of rational thinking. However, there is no documentary evidence demonstrating that the opponents of the reformists were against the rational sciences. As M. Kemper and Sh. Shikhaliev insist, in Daghestan "medieval works of mathematics, astronomy and medicine were copied, which demonstrates that these ‘secular’ sciences were transmitted as well, albeit in private, by teachers who otherwise taught the traditional religious and linguistic curriculum."\(^{448}\) In this light, the topic of the rational sciences was a rhetorical instrument of the reformists rather than an object of real debates between the reformists and their opponents.

Going further, the same author turns to the question of the power and efforts of Sufi leadership to re-establish the imamate in Daghestan: He argues that this project reveals the ignorance of the shaykhs:

Shaykhs (*mashā'ikh*), due to their ignorance of the *Sharī'at*, did not know that the *Sharī'at* forbids the establishment of the imamate. Due to their ignorance of politics they did not know that the establishment of the imamate is forbidden in this land and in these times. Therefore, their intervention did not produce anything but a *fitna* among the people.\(^{449}\)

Linking their attack on Sufism with that on the supporters of the imamate was a novel strategy in the reformists’ discourse. It is essential to notice that this article was written in 1925, at a time when the Soviets were quite strong. During the revolution and civil war the struggle to re-establish the imamate in Daghestan had unfolded in a situation where central power was weak; as we saw in the previous chapters of this thesis, at that time the reformists based their discourse against the imamate on *Shāfi‘i* literature. In 1925, the Sufis had already been marginalized by the Soviets, and it is exactly then that the reformists linked the desire of the re-establishment of the imamate to the ignorance of the Sufis. Back in 1918, the same Abū Sufyān Akaev, later the editor-in-chief of *Bayân al-Ḥaqāʾiq*, would express his position on the imamate with a well-developed religious argumentation.\(^{450}\) For instance, at the Daghestani scholars’ meeting of 1918, Abū Sufyān Akaev and ‘Ali Kaiaev had been arguing

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against the imamate by referencing a huge corpus of Shāfi’ī literature, without any mention of the Sufis or their ignorance. In the second part of the 1920s, however, Akaev’s journal targeted them directly. I assume that this shift in argumentations was also conditioned by the fact that by the second half of the 1920s, the leaders of the imamate movement were neutralized; Uzun Ĥajjî Saltinskii had passed away, Najm al-Dīn Gotsinskii’s influence was limited to some Avar villages and Akushinskii was too old to organize any confrontation while his family and supporters were under investigation by the Soviets. The shaykh was not arrested because of his age.

Accusations of spreading fitna was one of the tools in the attacks on the Sufis. Blaming Sufis for spreading fitna was not a new phenomenon. It was a part of anti-Sufi rhetoric in different parts of the Islamic world, including the Middle East and Central Asia. The word fitna in Islam is derived from an Arabic verb that means to “seduce, tempt” in order to separate the good from the bad. The term itself has various meanings, mostly referring to a feeling of disorder or unrest. It can be used to describe the difficulties faced during personal trials. 451

In the anti-Sufi discourse, the term fitna is mainly used to describe the oppression of the powerful against the weak, or to describe individuals or communities giving in to the “whispers” of Satan and falling into sin. In Islamic religious literature, the term fitna usually means “civil war” or “temptation” in the sense of Muslim factions fighting against each other: 452 For some Sufi shaykhs such as al-Qaḥī and the Daghestani reformists, the Russian Civil War was fitna. Thus, ending that war was considered the end of fitna, while those fighting against the Bolsheviks were supporting that fitna.

I encountered another unique feature of anti-Sufi discourse in an article penned by a certain ‘Abd al-Razāq bin al-Būrī al-Ḥurāqī. Here the author describes Sufis as “atheists” (al-malāḥīda al-ṣūfiyūn, atheist Sufis). The article starts with the observation that atheists were very active in their agitations:

Some of the Sufi-atheists who call themselves Sufis these days are, in reality, not Sufis; all of them are aberrant and misguided. They are soldiers of Iblis.

They transformed mosques designed for prayer and worship into places for dance and games. Their putrescent mouths preach godliness (nisk)\(^453\) and worship, but their hearts are free from faith. They are ignorant (jāhilūn) but claim that they are knowledgeable. They do not follow those who know. Verily, the dishonest scholar (al-‘ālim al-mutahattik) and the ignorant ascetic (al-jāhil al-mutanassik) constitute a fitna in both worlds.

I witnessed their conditions and secrets [i.e., how they act] and found them to be the devils of humankind (shayāṭīn al-ins) and jinns, and, indeed, the party of Satan consists of losers. How could I stop calling them shayṭāns when they do not follow the words of Allah and his Prophet? They claim that they are able to contemplate Allah the Almighty and that they know what is hidden (al-ghayb), and they prefer to visit (ziyāra) [the tomb] of their shaykhs rather than [the tomb] of the Prophet. They prefer to make a loud dhikr rather than read the Qur’an. Indeed, the viciousness of their words is very apparent and everyone having reason (kull dhū lubb) knows [this].

O, brothers, you should avoid them and run away from them like sheep run from a wolf. Indeed, attending them and sitting with them is an apparent loss (khusrān mubīn). They devour the property of orphans. They are arrogant, proud, envious and vicious. Today, they pray not for the love of the Messenger and as a charity to the poor but to satisfy their stomachs. Thus, they steal the property of the people, especially their animals.\(^454\)

The reformists perceived these two arguments—shaykhs are seeking wealth and power, and they are ignorant—as the “Achilles’ heel” of the Sufis. Then the author cites Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī (1296-1363), a Mamluk historian who studied under the Shāfi‘ī scholar Ibn al-Dhahabī, and the fourth caliph ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib concluding that “they [pseudo-shaykhs] are shayṭāns in their words and actions.”\(^455\) The author accepts that real shaykhs are very important and respected persons; however, in his eyes, there was no real shaykh in the Daghestan of his time. Those who declare themselves shaykh are but pseudo-shaykhs who desire only worldly goods and are far from morality.\(^456\)

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453 The word nisk can also be translated as “reclusion” which in Sufism is famous as zuhd. However, the author preferred using the word nisk rather than zuhd.
455 Ibid.
456 Ibid.
By targeting Sufis and their practices such as the vocal dhikr, the reformists demonstrated their loyalty to the existing holders of power. This practice was not unique for Daghestan. For example, in pre-revolutionary Central Asia, practicing the vocal dhikr became regarded as a sign of defiance against the ruler. To attack the vocal dhikr as an innovation was therefore a way to undercut political and religious opponents and at the same time show loyalty.

This discourse on Sufi shaykhs as atheists continued in the following year too. In the article by Muḥammad Ḥajjīyav al-Āwārī published in the tenth issue of the journal from November 1927, the author begins with a quote by al-Ghazālī, who stated that “the duty of a shaykh is to be a scholar of Islam (‘ālim), knowing the pests and diseases of the souls, to know the Sharī‘a sciences (’ulūm al-sharī‘a) and the tariqa,” and then concludes that the shaykhs of Daghestan in his era are only concerned with “transient worldly goods” (khutţām al-dunyā).

The author also raised the question “Where do these shaykhs and Gnostics (‘ārifūn) come from?” arguing that the slaves of Allah and respectable men disappeared and “only imitators of shaykhs (al-mutashayyikh al-mudallas)” remained. The Salafi attitude of the author is visible at the end of the article. Here, he advises people to follow the Prophet and says that it is sufficient for them to adhere to the Qur’an (al-tamassuk bi al-Qur‘ān).

The seventh issue (1927) of the journal is especially rich in articles about Sufism. Several articles such as Fī ḥaqq al-ijtihād wa-l-taṣawwuf (“On ijtihād and Sufism”) by ‘Abd Allāh Walad Qurbān ‘Alī al-Ashilṭī, Khīṭāb ilā mutashayyikhīn wa ittibā‘ihim min al-‘ulamā‘ (“Appeal to the pseudo-shaykhs and those scholars who follow them”) by Khiḍrī Akaev and Mas‘alāt al-taṣawwuf wa ḥurmatuḥu fī hadhā al-zamān (“The issue of taṣawwuf and its forbiddance in these days”)...
by Muḥammad al-Dashlaqī simultaneously criticize Sufism, claiming that Sufism and shaykhs have become fraudulent and that in the present time there is no one who would meet the requirements of honorable shaykhs such as IbnʿArabī and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī.

As an example of a real Muslim 'ālim they cite the shaykh of the Naqshbandī and Shādhilī tariqas Ḥasan Ḥilmī al-Qaḥī (1852-1937). Ḥasan Ḥilmī al-Qaḥī was an influential Sufī shaykh in Daghestan. As already mentioned, during the revolutions of 1917, Ḥasan Ḥilmī al-Qaḥī supported the Bolsheviks because he saw them as the minor evil. Despite the actions of the Bolsheviks against Islam, al-Qaḥī continued to support them or at least did not show any disobedience. In 1927, al-Qaḥī sent a letter to the editor of Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq, announcing that he decided to no longer accept Sufi murīds—step that certainly reflected the Soviet pressure on him. The reason for this announcement was that he did not feel safe anymore. In one of his letters, the shaykh wrote that “he no longer leaves home and does not receive guests because there are spies everywhere.”

However, during the years of repression, al-Qaḥī was not spared either. In July of 1937, he was arrested and sentenced to death in the same year. It remains unknown where he was buried.

The reformists saw the pacifist attitude of Hasan Ḥilmī through their claim of an absence of real shaykhdom in Daghestan at their time. However, an investigation of the Sufi leadership’s approach toward jihād explains al-Qaḥī’s actions differently. Two different—jihadi-oriented and pacifist—attitudes of Sufi shaykhs towards Russian rule had already existed in Daghestan from the times of the nineteenth century imamate. As the story goes, when Ghāzī-Muḥammad asked permission for jihād from his shaykh, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ghāzī-Ghumūqī (d. 1866), the latter refused to give his consent. Ghāzī-Muḥammad then turned to


Shaykh Muḥammad al-Yarāghī (d. 1838) for the same permission. Al-Yarāghī, a master of Jamāl al-Dīn, was angry at the Russians and did not hesitate to consent to jihād.\footnote{Kemper, Michael. “Khālidiyya Networks in Daghestan and the Question of Jihād.” \textit{Die Welt des Islams}, 42, no. 1 (2002): 44} This episode testifies that in the \textit{Naqshbandī tariqa} of Daghestan there was not a single attitude toward the question of jihād against Russians. While al-Yarāghī (possibly, for personal reasons) blessed jihād, Jamāl al-Dīn warned his disciples against pursuing it. Later, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sughūrī (Thughūrī) continued this jihadi-oriented line. Contrary to this, Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Almānī (d. 1877) opposed jihād.\footnote{Knysh, Alexander. “Contextualizing the Salaḥi – Sufi conflict (from the Northern Caucasus to Hadramawt).” \textit{Middle Eastern Studies}, 43, No. 4 (2007): 515.} After the revolution of 1917, the shaykhs of this \textit{Naqshbandiya-Maḥmūdiya} (named after its founder) followed by al-Qaḥī and his master Sayfallāh al-Nitsovkrī were inclined to cooperate with the Russians. Contrary to them, Najm al-Dīn and Uzun Ḥajjī represent ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sughūrī’s line of jihadi-oriented action against the Russians. However, there were also exceptions to this rule, with the \textit{Maḥmūdiya} shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Kuchrī (d. 1930) supporting jihād. Thus, one may argue that the political situation was decisive and not the Sufi \textit{silsila} or the orientation of the masters.

Being Salafi in creed, the Daghestani reformists attacked Sufis for both political and religious reasons. Decreasing Sufi influence in Daghestan would give them a strong position as religious authorities in the Daghestani Soviet society. Additionally, continuing the Egyptian balanced \textit{Salaḥi} line, the Daghestani reformists saw Sufi practices as innovations that hampered the development of Daghestan.

\subsection*{4.4. The “Wahhabī” stigma of the reformists and its echoes in Daghestan}

In his unpublished draft work, \textit{The History of the Revolution in Daghestan}, ʿAlī Kaiaev begins with the story of ʿAlī Ḥajjī. Describing the shaykh’s journey to Mecca and Madina, he reports:

Shaykh ʿAlī Ḥajjī al-Aqūshī, who was one of the scholars of Daghestan, met with the adherents of this old opinion\footnote{These “adherents of this old opinion” were `ulamā’ opposing the Wahhabis.} from among the scholars of al-Ḥaramayn—Mecca and Madina. Also, he pulled them into a conversation about the Wahhabis. They told him their opinion about “their [the Wahhabis] confusion and delusion.” They also added that
some Daghestanis who also visited Egypt adhere to this new path of Wahhabism. Moreover, they insisted that he [Alī Ḥajjī] reject this new path and make efforts to prevent the people of Daghestan from receiving that disease.

Shaykh Alī Ḥajjī returned from his pilgrimage to Daghestan, and he was under the impression of what he heard from the scholars of al-Ḥaramayn about the action of the Wahhabis and the spread of their teaching in different parts of the Islamic world. He saw an Arabic newspaper which was published in Daghestan at that time in which articles were printed rejecting religious innovations (bid’a) as well as superstitions (al-khurafāt) that contradict both reason and experience as well as articles that called for renewal, for educational and for religious reforms, and for independence of thinking. Furthermore, these ideas were well received by many of the scholars and those who study the sciences. Alī Ḥajjī was sure that those who wrote these articles are the ones about whom the scholars of al-Ḥaramayn told him. Moreover, he [Alī Ḥajjī] immediately began to oppose this [the newspaper] and their call.

This paragraph uncovers the confrontation between Alī Ḥajjī Akushinskii and ‘Alī Kaiaev. For Alī Ḥajjī the authors of the newspaper were Wahhabis influenced by scholars such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Buṭrus al-Bustānī. Obviously, Alī Ḥajjī did not differentiate between Wahhabism and Salafism, that is why he considered Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Buṭrus al-Bustānī to be Wahhabis. The newspaper that he meant must have been Jarīdat Dāghistān, the only Arabic-language newspaper published in Daghestan in those days. From the viewpoint of ‘Alī Kaiaev, his journal was not for but against Wahhabis. Here, the term bid’a is vital; ‘Alī Kaiaev considered the actions of Wahhabism to be bid’a, whereas from the viewpoint of Alī Ḥajjī the actions of the reformists were bid’a. This confusion has its reasons.

During the 1920s Daghestan was immersed in discussions about al-Wahhābiya (Wahhabism). Even in the Soviet era, many Daghestani authors wrote letters and theological treatises on al-Wahhābiya and criticized each other. One vivid example of this kind of debate is the polemic between Nadhir

470 Obviously, this was about ‘Alī Kaiaev.
al-Durgili and Yusuf al-Jungutat at the very end of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{472} The reformist journal Bāyān al-Ḥaqāʾiq did not remain aloof from these discussions either. Its contributors used to criticize this movement which gained new political power in the Middle East. Paradoxically, Sufi shaykhs such as ʿAlī Ḥajjī were also vigorously criticizing Wahhabism. At first glance, it may seem that this is a question on which figures such as Shaykh ʿAlī Ḥajjī and the reformist Abū Sufyān Akaev might come to an agreement. However, using the same label of al-Wahhābī, they targeted completely different groups. For ʿAlī Ḥajjī the reformists of Daghestan were the followers of Wahhabism while Akaev and other contributors to Bāyān al-Ḥaqāʾiq were denouncing as Wahhabis those who resisted their reforms and supported the colonial powers. To understand the reason for this paradox, one needs to comprehend the historical development of the Wahhābīya and its relations with other Salafi movements supporting the idea of pure Islam.

Historically, Wahhabism is one of the Islamic movements to restore the “true” Islam—a goal which was central for the reformists as well. After the flourishing Middle Ages, the Muslim empires that once stretched from Spain to Indonesia were broken up and their various parts were gradually coming under the domination of European empires. As Sean Oliver-Dee observes, “By the time that India was taken under direct British rule in 1858, Muslim thinkers in South Asia and the Middle East particularly were beginning the process of critical self-examination that began the modern Islamist movement.”\textsuperscript{473} In the early 1740s, the Najdī religious scholar Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (1703-1792) declared that Muslims had reverted to idolatry. Named after Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, the Wahhābīya puritan movement arose in Najd, at the heart of Central Arabia. Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb was sure that “people had lapsed into religious ignorance, jāhiliya, a barbaric state wherein they did not recognize their violation of the imperative to devote all worship to


God alone.\footnote{Commins, David. The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia. I. B. Tauris: London, New York. 2006. P. 3.} The main characteristic of the teaching is its strong emphasis on the principle of the oneness of Allah (tawḥīd) and rejection of everything jeopardizing that principle (for instance, the veneration of Sufi shaykhs and pilgrimage to their tombs).

The Wahhabi preachers became influential due to their political agreement with the Āl Saʻūd—what became the Saudi royal family. In the beginning, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb proposed his reforms to the chief of his birthplace ‘Uyayna. However, his severe punishment of those who were reluctant to perform communal prayers, his rigid interpretation of the Shari‘a and even his public stoning of a woman antagonized the inhabitants of his birthplace and their leader.\footnote{al-Rasheed, Madawi. A History of Saudi Arabia. Cambridge University Press. 2010. P. 16.} Forced to leave ‘Uyayna, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb headed to Dir‘iyya, desiring to convince its Saʻūdi amīr to adopt his message. For the latter, accepting a religious agenda promised an opportunity to compensate for the limitations of his rule. In 1744, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and the founder of Āl Saʻūd Muḥammad bin Saʻūd (d. 1765) established an alliance. This alliance gave an ideological impetus for the Saʻūd while simultaneously improving the position of the Wahhabis in political matters.\footnote{Bowen, Wayne H. The History of Saudi Arabia. Greenwood. 2007. P. 69} Nevertheless, during the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Egypt led by Muḥammad ‘Alī Bāshā managed to destroy this emerging state.

The age of the shattering of empires brought new opportunities for the expansion of building Saʻūdi-Wahhābī politics. The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed the disintegration of local emirates in Arabia and the rise of ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz ibn ʻAbd ar-Raḥmān Āl Saʻūd. Gaining the support of the Ikhwān—the Wahhābī tribal military forces that later became the Saudi Arabian National Guard—Ibn Saʻūd managed to recapture Riyadh in 1902.\footnote{Ibid., P. 83.} Now the Wahhābīs and Āl Saʻūd had to deal not only with the local forces but also the British and Ottoman Empires.

ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz ibn Saʻūd appeared a promising ally for Rashīd Riḍā, whose conviction about the stagnation of the fragmented Islamic world deepened especially when, by the initiative of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the National Assembly of Turkey abolished the Caliphate on 20 February 1924.
existence of the Ottoman Caliphate was one of the main arguments for those scholars of Islam who held that the establishment of caliphates in different regions, including Daghestan, was forbidden by the *Sharīʿa* since only one caliph could reign at one time. The abolition of this central Islamic institution reactivated their fight for its re-establishment. On top of that, the British Empire changed its policy related to the Middle East. Already in 1924, Britain had stopped backing the Sharīf of Mecca al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥāshimī who faced defeat by Ibn Saʿūd. Under the inspiration of Wahhabism, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn Saʿūd managed to consolidate his control over the Najd and then conquer the Hejaz.

ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn Saʿūd’s victory encapsulated Riḍā’s hopes for the rejuvenation of the Islamic community. Thus, he aimed to rid the Wahhabis of their counterproductive religious attitude so that they would gain popularity in the newly conquered Hijaz and abroad. During the last two decades of his life, Riḍā became increasingly conservative—“a transformation that culminated with his all-out campaign to rehabilitate the Wahhabis in the mid-1920s.” While scholars such as Albert Hourani intimated that Riḍā’s Syrian origins must have made him sympathetic to *Hanbalis*, which, in turn, must have made him sympathetic to Wahhabism, others have raised the possibility that a younger and more rigorist confidant could have persuaded Riḍā to change his religious views and drawn him closer to Wahhabism. Henri Lauzière contends that Riḍā tried to rehabilitate the Wahhabis “primarily for reasons of socio-political expediency—that is, more out of necessity than conviction.” As argues Lauzière, although Riḍā was hoping for the success of Ibn Saʿūd for the victory of pure Islam, he continued to regard the religious scholars of Najd with suspicion. Riḍā even facilitated the transfer of some of his closest disciples to Mecca and Medina, seeking to overcome the obstacle of the Wahhabi ʿulamāʾ there. However, the Wahhabi ʿulamāʾ influenced these disciples pushing them to adopt a more radical approach. They may have contributed, somewhat indirectly, to what

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David Commins has called “the taming of Wahhabi zeal.”483 However, all things considered, the Wahhabis had more impact on Riḍā’s disciples than vice versa.484

Throughout its history, the Wahhabi mission has been confronted by a constant barrage of criticism from Muslims. While many aspects of Wahhabi thought were inherent to Salafism as well and were accepted by the ‘ulamā’ of different sides, there were some questions around which emerged the opposition to Wahhabism. Among these questions, for instance, was the definition of a believer and an unbeliever. Sulaymān ibn Suḥaym (d. 1767), who was acting in Riyadh, was among the first to begin a polemical campaign against the mission of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, labelling him a misguided innovator in religion.485 The issue of takfīr—declaring that a person who stated to be a Muslim is an unbeliever and can legitimately be killed—would also be a major difference between the Wahhabis and the balanced reformists such as Riḍā. Those siding with Ibn Suḥaym would label the supporters of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb as Wahhabis. This label gained a negative connotation and was disliked even by the Wahhabis, who considered themselves to be muwaḥḥidūn, stressing the core principle of Wahhabism—tawḥīd. During the next two centuries, using the same idea of bid‘a and the paradigm of religious decline and revival, different groups of supporters of pure Islam would call each other Wahhabis, in a pejorative sense. Overall, the name of the Wahhabi movement turned into a rhetorical foil, as Aleksandr Knysh has demonstrated.486

Given the support of Riḍā to Wahhabis as well as the shift of some of his disciples into al-Wahhābīya, the idea that the reformists influenced by Riḍā were also Wahhabis was not entirely ungrounded. Those supporting Sulaymān ibn Suḥaym’s standpoint would call the reformists Wahhabis, drawing a line of transmission of ideas that would go from Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb to Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, from al-Afghānī to Muḥammad ʿAbduh, from ʿAbduh to Rashād Riḍā and finally from Riḍā to ‘Alī Kaiaev.

My argument is that it was this imposed association with the Wahhabis that pushed the Daghestani reformists to attack Wahhabism—in order to dissociate their names from that label. Additionally, having their own idea of

484 Lauzière, Henri. The Making of Salaĥism Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century. P. 88
pure Islam, the reformists of Daghestan had many disagreements with them, including their approach toward the education system and state-building project.

4.5. Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq’s criticism of the Wahhābiya

In the context of this shift in Riḍā’s policy, one might expect that the Daghestani reformists would also have been inclined to regard the Āl Sa‘ūd as the dynasty of an emerging caliphate (especially after the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate), or at least that they would not be hostile to them. However, Rashīd Riḍā’s influence was unable to counterbalance the Daghestani socio-political environment. The journal Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq became a platform for the reformists to attack the Wahhabis. I believe there were two main reasons for this: a.) the attacks on al-Wahhābiya would clear the name of the reformists of the Wahhabi label and b.) while for Rashīd Riḍā, Ibn Sa‘ūd was a promising leader, for the Daghestani reformists the USSR was a state satisfying the requirements of Shari‘a law and fighting the colonial powers guilty for the fragmentation of the Islamic world. Consequently, just like it was for political reasons that Rashīd Riḍā turned to the Wahhabis, a different political situation pushed Daghestani reformists to attack them. To avoid being called Wahhabis, the Daghestani reformists of Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq began actively criticizing Wahhabis, using not only religious argumentations but also anti-colonial rhetoric which overlapped with the Soviet rhetoric. Their attacks on Wahhabis were based on the same arguments that scholars elsewhere in the world brought up to criticize them, including the claims that Wahhabis caused a fitna and that they in fact cooperated with the colonial states.

Amir Navruzov claims that "based on the goals and objectives formulated on the front page of the journal Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq, the editorial board vividly responded to events taking place in the world, in particular those on the Arabian Peninsula related to such an acute issue as Wahhabism, the echoes of which reached from the Hijaz to Daghestan and were already being vigorously discussed by Daghestanis in that period.”487 Navruzov sees the journal and the topics discussed on the pages of the journal mainly stressing the events of the Islamic world to be the background of the journal’s topics. Not denying the importance of the political topics discussed in the Middle East and that they created the basis for the debate, nevertheless, I believe that it was not only

the lack of consensus among Muslims which were the reasons for discussing the topic of the caliphate; the political situation, including the international relations of the Soviets, also had their role in the formation of the reformists’ discourse during 1920s. This is especially important in the politicization of the criticism of Wahhabism.

The very first article of the journal discusses the situation in the Hijaz and the case of the Wahhabis. Written by Abū Sufyān Akaev, this article starts with the idea that the fragmentation of the Islamic world and the antagonism between different groups make it easy for countries such as England and France to interfere in the affairs of Muslim countries. As Abū Sufyān claims, this was also the case in the Hijaz when the Arabs led by the Sharīf of Mecca, Ḥusayn, struggled for the caliphate. The author blames the Wahhabis for producing fitna and describes them with these words:

This group mainly consists of Ḥanbalīs living in the east of Baghdad and they are called Wahhabis.

They are the followers of Imam Ibn Taymīya but they commit excessiveness (yartakibuna al-ifrāt) by forbidding the prayer to ask prophets [on behalf of the believers] before Allah.488

The same idea was expressed in the article “The question of divorce” by Yūsuf Qādī al-Jungūtī:

In the late twelfth century [Hijri] the Wahhabi group (al-fīrqa al-Wahhābīya) emerged and spread their misguidance (intishār ḍalālahum). They took what was said by Ibn Taymīya on divorce (ṭalāq) and other questions; they followed him and ascribed to him a lot of false opinions until they became a fitna and the worst calamity the people of Islam suffered from, by shedding Muslim blood, by plundering and other [unlawful] actions.489

Like Akaev, al-Jungūtī also links the Wahhābīya to Ibn Taymīya (1263-1328); but he uses it to explain the extremism of the Wahhābīya. The author regards this extremism as the main reason of fitna. Yet, as I mentioned above, the reformists also blamed the Sufis, those whom the Wahhabis so ferociously attacked, of fitna.

Moreover, the question of ziyāra (literally, “visitation”) was a part of the anti-Wahhabi discourse. As Akaev argued, “they forbid us to visit the graves of saints and the virtuous companions (al-awliyā‘ wa al-sāliḥīn), or even the prophet’s tomb in Medina (al-Rawḍa al-sharīfa bi-l-Madīna al-Munawwara).”

The topic of visits to shaykhs’ tombs or ziyāra is an important part of the discourse related to Wahhabism, given their hostile attitude to this practice. However, this discourse did not begin with the emergence of Wahhabism; it was an inherent part of Ḥanbalī discourse in general. The rituals associated with the ziyāra led in many instances to tension with the ‘ulamā’. The problem is related to the idea of tawḥīd, which is the central idea in Wahhabism. Those who forbid ziyāra explain it with the fear that graves—including the tomb of Prophet Muhammad—can become an idol.

Early scholars of Islam such as Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and Imām Shāfi‘ī permitted the practice of ziyāra. Their claim is based on some ḥadīths according to which graves are a means of reminding the Muslim of the hereafter. Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiya’s standpoint on this question divided the scholars into two main groups: those who state that ziyāra is important and even necessary and those who see them as idolatry and innovation.

As a proof and basis for their arguments, the scholars of the first group use a ḥadīth in which the Prophet is reported to have encouraged people to visit his own grave. For instance, the Shāфи‘ī scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī explicitly stated that travelling to visit the tomb of the Prophet was “one of the best of actions and the noblest of pious deeds with which one draws near to God, and its legitimacy is a matter of consensus” and that ban on this pilgrimage is “one of the ugliest positions that has been reported of Ibn Taymiyya.” The same position was held as well by the Ḥanafi scholar ‘Alī al-Qārī (d. 1605/6), who was sure that “Amongst the Hanbalis, Ibn Taymiyya has gone to an extreme by...
prohibiting travelling to visit the Prophet—may God bless him and grant him peace.”

Ibn Taymīya refuted these opinions, stating that all the ḥadīths cited by his opponents in support of visiting graves are either unauthentic or fabricated. According to Ibn Taymiyya, the people of innovation who first endorsed this practice were responsible for fabricating these ḥadīths.

Another disputable point among these ‘ulama’ was about which graves can be visited. A part of the scholars of the first group argued that while some mosques or graves such as al-Masjid an-Nabawī in Madina can be visited, ziyāra to other mosques are not acceptable according to the ḥadīth which reads, “Do not travel except to three mosques…” Ibn Taymīya, in his turn, introduced more limitations by prescribing the way these three mosques should be visited. According to Ibn Taymīya, the ziyāra of the Prophet should consist of a simple salutation only.

Later, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb embraced Ibn Taymīya’s stance on visiting gravesites and challenged previous Ḥanbalī scholarship even further, forbidding any ziyāra. Furthermore, the Wahhabis even used to punish Muslims who practiced ziyāra, referring to the Qur’an: “And never offer prayer for anyone of them who dies and do not stand by his grave, surely they disbelieve in Allah and His Apostle and they shall die in transgression.”

An article from 1927 in Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq by Abū Muḥammad Mas‘ūd al-Muhūkhī provides the most detailed explanation of the reformists’ standpoint on ziyāra. The author mentions three main reasons why people should visit graves. According to him, by making ziyāra visitors would be reminded of death and of life in the hereafter. They would also bring benefit to the deceased by praying for them. Finally, visiting a grave is a pious act because it is in accordance with the Sunna of the prophet Muḥammad.

Then the author turns to the question of putting buildings on the graves, stating that the construction of mosques or mausoleums on graves is forbidden.

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495 Ibid., 292.
496 Ibid.
498 Q. 19:84
As proof of his argument, the author cites ḥadīths from the Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, stressing that these ḥadīths have a good isnāḍ.

Al-Muhūkhī adds that this practice of erecting buildings on graves is what Jews and Christians do: “The Messenger of God, peace be upon him, forbade erecting buildings on graves or using graves as mosques; he did so as a warning about the similarity of Jews and Christians in glorifying the graves and taking the graves as places for feasts.”500 The author also mentions Ibn Taymīya, who said that “These mosques, which are based on the graves of the prophets, the righteous, the kings, and others, must be removed by demolition or otherwise.” However, he mentions that there is a dispute about this standpoint among the scholars.501

The Daghestani case was complicated given the widespread of Sufism and Sufi ziyāras in the country. Consequently, the Wahhabi call for prohibiting ziyāras was a very delicate question. Paradoxically, by criticizing the Wahhabis for their ban of ziyāras, the authors of Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq would involuntarily become defenders of the regional Sufi tradition and of the Sufi ritual that they otherwise rejected. The Daghestani reformists tried to avoid this paradox by stating that the Wahhabis were followers of Ibn Taymīya but that they went even further then he did in their extremism. In other words, the Daghestani reformists attacked the Wahhabis not for their rejective attitude towards ziyāra (which they shared) but for their extremism. The reformists continued to speak against the Sufi practices and performances in these places, removing the Sufi ziyāra practice from the scope of licit visitations of graves.

Al-Muhūkhī states that worship, dhikr and immolation in ziyāra are innovations which are forbidden. Those making these steps are likened to the era of the jāhiliya.502 As one can notice, the author keeps the balanced position inherent to reformist Salafis; while there are benefits of ziyāra, there are also acts related to the practice of ziyāra which are forbidden. When referring to Islamic scholars, al-Muhūkhī usually evaluates and comments on the type and reliability of the sources such as ḥadīths. However, when citing Ibn Taymīya, he does not comment on his ideas. By explaining the acceptability of ziyāra by

501 Ibid.
502 Ibid.

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famous scholars of Islam and even by Ibn Taymiya, al-Muhūkhī leaves no place for the radical viewpoint of Wahhabis.

Finally, the Daghestani reformists criticized the Wahhabis for their assumed support for colonial states. As they argued, colonial powers like Great Britain used the Wahhabists against their Muslim brothers. The religious critique of Wahhabism thereby supports the ideological/political critique of colonialism and the West. Even more, Abū Sufyān Akaev considered the West's policy of dividing the Muslim world to be the result of the Wahhabi actions:

Among different peoples, such as the British and French, there is a rule—oppression of different states. The reason for this is the *fitna* and controversy in Muslim society. This *fitna* allows Europeans to intervene in the affairs of these states, and they justify this by the pretense that they want to stop the turmoil in these countries. In this turmoil, they help one of the two sides so that the supported party eventually defeats the other. They have used this rule since times of old in relation to the Turkish state, and while until now they did not succeed in conquering the lands of the Turks, they did contribute to the fact that states such as Greece, Romania, Serbia and other countries separated from Turkey and become independent. They do not stop spreading such confusion between the residents of the Hijaz and the Turks, telling the Arabs that they are more worthy of being caliphs than Turks. “The caliph of the prophet is among you, among your tribe and not among the Turks.” Moreover, when the Turks started the war with Britain, the British inspired the Sharīf of Mecca, Ḥusayn, to speak out against the Turks. Ḥusayn was deceived by their words, declared independence and proclaimed himself caliph, relying on the support of Britain. We saw in some newspapers and letters an agreement between the British Governor McMahon and Sharīf of Mecca Ḥusayn on cooperation and mutual assistance. The Turkish government was not able to return these areas to its jurisdiction. When people learned that the British helped Ḥusayn and that he continues to do everything at their command, they began to fight against him.504


In the late Victorian (1837-1901) and Edwardian (1901-1910) eras, the British government considered the Muslims within the empire to be an internal threat while the Ottomans were considered to be allies of the British. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the situation changed. The British Empire was concerned by the decline of the Ottoman Empire, fearing that “the Sick Man of Europe” would fall under the power of forces hostile to the British.505 Another concern emerged in 1900 when the Ottoman Sultan began to build the Hijaz Railway to connect the imperial center with Mecca, the center of spiritual power. Britain accepted this as a step to enhance the caliph’s “standing within the global Islamic community, and in so doing, creating the possibility of divided loyalties within the British Imperial Muslim community.”506 However, the Young Turk Revolution (July 1908) made an end to ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II’s plan to strengthen his authority as the caliph. As Oliver-Dee claims, this new reality was also “a disappointment to the British who had been hoping that both the Caliphate and ‘Pan-Islamism’ would die with the revolution.”507 He summarizes the British policy in the region in a proverb, “If two ϐish are ϐighting, look for the Englishman.”508 Obviously, the same idea that dominates in the historiography of the Caliphate Question was also voiced by Akaev. Going further, Akaev also criticizes the policy of France, with similar allegations being made against them.509

4.6. The Congresses of Cairo and Mecca and the responses of Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq and the OGPU
At the beginning of the 1900s, the reform-minded intellectuals popularized the idea of a restoration of the Arab caliphate. The question of whether the Ottoman Sultan was the caliph of all the Muslims was under discussion from the beginning of its establishment, and not every scholar of Islam accepted him as caliph, stating that the real caliph should be a Muslim Arab from the

505 Corrigan, H. “German Turkish Relations and the Outbreak of War in 1914,” Past and Present, 36 (1967), 144–52
507 Ibid., 46.
508 Ibid., 43.
tribe of the prophet Muhammad, the al-Quraysh. Among the forefathers of those intellectuals discussing the question of the re-establishment of an Arab caliphate were 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Kawākibī, Rashīd Riḍā and İsmail Gaspıralı. Kawākibi presented his famous work *Umm al-Qurā* ("The Mother of the Cities," i.e., Mecca) as the secret protocol of an Islamic Congress convened in Mecca during the pilgrimage of 1899 to restore the Arab caliphate. In 1907, Gaspıralı took practical steps to organize that kind of congress in Cairo, but his attempts were unsuccessful. However, only two decades later, two All-Muslim congresses were organized independently from each other in Cairo and Mecca. The abolition of the Caliphate on 20 February 1924 prompted competing powers in the Middle East, including al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Hāshimī, Ibn Saʿūd and the Egyptian king Fuʿād, to announce plans to restore the caliphate on their territories. At the same time, both Britain and the USSR observed these developments closely and hoped to influence them in their favor.

An article was published in the fourth issue of *Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq* entitled "Telegram on the start of the congress in Mecca." While the title mentions only the Meccan Congress (7 June-5 July 1926), this article also covers the competing congress that took place in Cairo (13-22 May 1926).

The congresses were convened in two places: in Cairo in Egypt and Mecca. We do not see any benefits for the Muslims in the congress organized in Egypt. The fact is that Egypt is currently under British control. There is no doubt that the most important members of this assembly are those who sold their souls for the benefit of Britain and act according to British directives. Everyone knows that the British are oppressors of Muslims, the decision that will be made in Egypt will be in the interests of Britain, and there will be no benefit to Muslims in this. Britain would never have allowed such a congress to be convened if they had not hoped to capitalize on it. And since all that Britain stands for is harming and oppressing Muslims, we considered this congress useless for Muslims and ignored it.

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513 Ibid.
Bayān al-Ḥaqāʾiq’s claim that Britain initiated the Cairo Congress was grounded. When the ‘ulamāʾ of al-Azhar announced their intention to convene a Muslim Congress in Cairo, Great Britain declared that the restoration of the caliphate was a religious problem in the solution of which Britain would not interfere. However, given the British influence in Egypt, this desire to not interfere meant that the congress organizers were free to organize it without fear of hindrance.514 If Egypt’s King Fuʾād I was to become caliph, Great Britain would prefer this to any other scenario. In contrast, the Soviets supported the Meccan Congress. When the ‘ulamāʾ of al-Azhar began their organizational activities for the Cairo Congress, Muslims of different countries reacted to the news of the congress. In March 1926, the chairman of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims, Rīḍā al-Dīn bin Fakhr al-Dīn), sent a telegram to the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, Mikhail Kalinin, in which he noted:

The Muslim population of the RSFSR fully joins the protest of Indian Muslims against the convening of the Caliphate Congress in Cairo. The congress must be convened in a country outside the sphere of influence of the imperialist powers; Egypt, under the rule of England, does not satisfy this condition, where there is no guarantee for Muslims to reveal their true opinions freely. The convening of the congress in Mecca as a sacred place for all Muslims would be entirely consistent with the task facing the congress, provided this is protected from the influence of the imperialists.515

Later, the head of the Department for Agitation and Propaganda of the Communist Party, Vilgelm Knorin, received the report “On the All-Muslim Congresses in Cairo and Mecca” (produced by the Vostochnii otdel of OGPU), which stated:

After the abolition of the caliphate in Turkey, Britain intensified its activities aimed at the re-establishment of the caliphate, but one that would be under their full influence and control. The British attempts to proclaim as caliph one of their protégés in Arabia, as you know, failed,516 which forced them to transfer their activities to Egypt. A whole series of

516 The author meant al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī al-Hāshimī’s caliphate ambitions.
sources indicate that this time King Fuad of Egypt was nominated as a candidate for the caliph.

In our Union, an invitation to the Cairo Congress was received by the Central Muslim Board of Muslims in Ufa and by the individual representatives of all the Muslim regions of the Union. Muslims of the Soviet Union earlier (during the period of the abolition of the caliphate in Turkey) had the opportunity to declare their attitude to the caliphate issue in general, which determined their position regarding the caliphate congress convened in Cairo. In March 1926, the Central Spiritual Administration organized a protest against the convening of a congress in Egypt, in a country under the rule of England, where there are no guarantees for Muslims to freely reveal their true opinions.517

These three texts—Bayān al-Ḥaqā’iq’s telegram, Fakhretdinov’s letter and the secret OGPU report—share the same message, i.e., that Cairo’s congress serves the interest of Britain and is therefore harmful to Muslims. It shows that the standpoint of Bayān al-Ḥaqā’iq coincided with the standpoint of the official Soviet organs. As we saw when discussing Najm al-Dīn’s ambitions for the imamate, the reformists, and especially the editor-in-chief of Bayān al-Ḥaqā’iq, Akaev, were already actively involved in the debates around an imamate and implicitly around the caliphate. Akaev was opposed to Najm al-Dīn’s imamate, stating that only the Ottoman Sultan is the caliph. When the caliphate was abolished, Akaev already lost his key argument. This time, in 1926, he does not oppose the re-establishment of the caliphate but opposes its re-establishment under British influence. Here the Daghestani reformist borrows from Soviet rhetoric.

Another congress was held in Mecca. On 28 April 1926 Ibn Sa’ūd sent a telegraph to various Muslim rulers and scholars, inviting them to a Meccan Muslim congress:

For the service of the two holy sanctuaries and their inhabitants, to secure their future, to increase the means of comfort for pilgrims and visitors, to improve the holy lands in all respects which all the Muslims in general care for, to fulfil our promises we made and with a view of our wish to see the Muslims cooperating in serving these holy lands.518

517 “On All-Muslim Congresses in Cairo in Mecca.” Islam i sovetskoe gosudarstvo (Po materialam Vostochnogo otdela OGPU. 1926g.) Vypusk 1. (ed. by Arapov, Dmitrii, Kosach, Grigori). (M.: Izd. dom Mardzhani, 2010), p. 64-66
For Ibn Sa‘ūd this was a chance to clear his name as an intolerant sectarian. One of the key differences between the two parallel congresses was their attitude toward the caliphate issue. While there were rumors that the congress of Cairo was to elect a caliph, in spite of the fact that the caliphate question was not included in the agenda, the Meccan Congress, as we see from Ibn Sa‘ūd’s message, put the primary stress on the sacred cities and Ḥajj issues.

Possibly because of this, the overall reaction of the USSR to the congress in Mecca, including in Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq, was more positive. In fact, the political situation pushed the journal to soften their attitude toward the Wahhabis. In the same “Telegram on the Start of the Congress in Mecca,”519 the editorial of the journal says:

As for the second congress, it just convened in Mecca. Ibn Sa‘ūd, the leader of the Wahhabis played a leading role in it. This second congress is different from the first, even though the convocation of this congress was also carried out by British efforts. Despite this, we did not oppose this second congress since many famous scholars of Islam from all over the world are gathering there. We believe that this would be beneficial for Islam and for Muslims despite the intervention and cunning of the British.

As demonstrated above, the Wahhabis, alongside Sufis, were usually the target of heavy critique in Bayān al-Ḥaqā‘iq. However, here, the journal mentions that Ibn Sa‘ūd was the leader of the Wahhabis yet still states that the congress in Mecca “would be beneficial for Islam and Muslims” even if it had British support.

Similar twisting can be found in the report “On the All-Muslim Congresses in Cairo in Mecca” by the Vostochnii otdel of the OGPU. Particularly, it said:

The Meccan Congress convened on the initiative of the King of the Hijaz (Gedzhas), Ibn Saud, and was supposed to discuss issues of attracting Muslims of all countries to participate in the maintenance and development of the improvement of sacred places and the settlement of pilgrimage, i.e., the issues that really interested the entire Muslim world; it did not meet opposition (except from Persia). Almost all of the Muslim countries and spiritual organizations agreed to attend the Meccan Congress.520

It seems that the fact that the question of the restoration of the caliphate was not included in the agenda of the Meccan Congress made it acceptable for the Daghestani reformists. Additionally, a comparison of Bayân al-Ḥaqāʾiq’s article with the report of the OGPU shows how the Daghestani reformists adapted to the official Soviet position to the question.

For the USSR, the Meccan Congress was a counterbalance to the Cairo event and a stage of anti-British actions. Obviously, when the Daghestani Muslim reformists had to choose between the non-Wahhabi Egyptian congress (many participants of which were ideologically close to them) and the Meccan Congress under the leadership of Wahhabis, they chose the second one as “a lesser evil” to British imperialism.

The attitude of the Soviet leadership towards the issue of the caliphate was not unambiguously negative. The idea of a “caliphate under the indirect influence of the Comintern” even appeared in the Executive Committee of the Comintern as “a force of outstanding revolutionary significance.” It is unclear how this was imagined, as the Soviets also stated that “the caliphate is generally a reactionary factor.” Nevertheless, even a “reactionary” movement, if it was directed against Great Britain, could be interpreted as “revolutionary.” The goal was to “tear the caliphate” out of the hands of England. This would be “a victory for the Comintern in the East.”

Finally, another key moment discussed in the article published in Bayân al-Ḥaqāʾiq and the Soviet documents on the Meccan Congress was the question of the members of the Soviet delegation. On this question, Bayân al-Ḥaqāʾiq claimed:

We heard that some people who secretly monitor the activities of the journal’s editorial staff said that the editorial team allegedly did not react to the telegram received about the convocation of a congress in Mecca to elect a caliph among Muslims and that they did not want to send anyone there as a delegate. They do not know the real reason that we did not send anyone to this election and therefore we want to clarify this.

The fact that we did not send anyone there is not at all because we did not want this. The fact is that we received a telegram about the congress from the highly esteemed muftī Riḍā al-Dīn bin Fakhr al-Dīn.

However, the telegram did not reach us quickly enough but was received only three days before the start of the congress. During this time, we could not convene all our scholars in order to choose who will be our representative in Mecca. We also could not collect money in the amount of 100 rubles for a trip in such a short time, as was mentioned in the telegram. This is the reason why we did not send our delegate to this second congress.522

The Soviet secret documents and correspondence demonstrate that the members of the Soviet delegation to the Meccan Congress were carefully selected since the Soviet side charged the delegation with several political tasks. This is clear from the letter sent from 3 April 1926 by Georgii Chicherin (1872-1936), the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs in the Soviet government, to the General Consul of the USSR in the Kingdom of Hijaz, Nejd and Affiliated Areas, Karim Khakimov. In this letter, Chicherin states that “to strengthen our relations with Ibn Saud and to oppose the British plans in Arabia, the use of our Muslims by sending a delegation to Hijaz is of great importance. By sending the delegation, we pursue two main objectives: 1) counteracting the British plans for electing a caliph conforming to their interests at the all-Islamic congress; 2) ensuring the participation of our Muslims in those international Muslim institutions that can be created to control the “holy places.”523 This letter shows how vital this delegation was for the USSR.

The OGPU secret report also mentions the importance of selecting delegates carefully:

The difficulty of the tasks facing our delegation demands from us much caution when composing this delegation. In addition to the fact that this delegation is to consist of persons highly respected not only within the Soviet Union but also beyond its borders, full confidence is needed that our delegation will be able to consistently implement our plans.524

This report also says that the delegates were selected by the Muslim population. However, given the importance of these persons, one may assume

that the final decision depended on the Soviet leadership. The delegation led by the mufti Fakhretdinov did not include anyone from the North Caucasus. The reason was possibly the delay of the telegram; however, one may also suspect that no one was included in the delegation given that in 1926 the North Caucasus was considered a region where the struggle against “reactionaries” had not yet been completed.525

I presume that the Soviets took into consideration the probability of new pro-caliphate and anti-Soviet activities among Daghestani Muslims against the background of regional and international influence. Nor could they exclude the possibility of British support for anti-Soviet forces given the unfriendly relations between the USSR and Britain.526

4.7. Conclusion

With the Sovietization of Daghestan, the Bolsheviks took power into their own hands, which created a new atmosphere the Daghestani scholars of Islam had to deal with. While Gotsinskii and ‘Alī Ḥajjī Akushinskii preferred to oppose the new power (the first one with the revolt and the second one with anti-Soviet agitation among the Daghestanis), other scholars opted for coexistence or cooperation with the Bolsheviks. Akaev was among the latter. A group of scholars saw new opportunities in the created environment and sought to take a leading position among the religious scholars of Daghestan.

The journal Bayân al-Ḥaqā’iq became one of the tools to implement that vision. From the first issues and even from the title of the journal it become visible how the journal’s authors positioned themselves so as to best reap the benefits of the new order. Their choice was an “orthodox” position which


526 The years between 1924-1931 within which the journal was published are known as the period of the tensions of Anglo-Soviet relations. The events like the “Zinoviev letter” scandal shows the existing problems in the relations of these two states. The “Zinoviev Letter,” received by the British Foreign Office on October 10, 1924 and dated Moscow, September 15, 1924 was addressed to “The Central Committee, British Communist Party,” instructed the Party “to carry on a constitutional agitation for the ratification of the Anglo-Soviet Treaties; to form ‘cells’ in the Army; to attract ex-servicemen into the ranks of the Communist Party and to prepare for ‘an armed insurrection’.” The Soviet Chargé d’Affaires informed the Foreign Office that the letter was a forgery. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Soviet scandal was inevitable. Another dip in relations can be mentioned by the fact of not ratification of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement. Coates, William Peyton, Coates, Zelda K. A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations. Lawrence and Wishart; London, 1945. P. 183.
allowed them to criticize other Muslims such as Sufis and Wahhābis. In this context, the attacks on Wahhabis and Sufis appear as an instrument for claiming Islamic authority also vis-à-vis the state. The contributors of the journal had to show that they were the religious force that was empowered to make religious decisions and show what true Islam was. This aspiration overlapped with Soviet policy towards the musdukhovenstvo (Islamic spiritual leadership) of that time. The Bolshevik Party’s support of reformers was one of the temporary strategies intended to divide and undermine Islam. The reformists of Daghestan 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 the one hand, and their loyalty to the Soviets, on the other. As an argument for their loyalty and rightness, the authors of the journal portrayed the Soviet system as being in accordance with Islamic law, thereby justifying their cooperation with the regime.

In the context of desires to become the leading religious authority, the journal’s treatment of two major topics—Sufism and Wahhabism—are significant. Attacks on Sufism became a tool for undermining their opponents, whose followership among the Daghestani people was still broad. While conceding that taṣawwuf has a rightful place in Islam, the reformists blamed the Sufis of their days of supporting fitna among the Muslims. Attacks on Sufis had both political and religious motivations. The removal of the influential Sufi shaykhs from the political arena of Daghestan would increase the weight of the reformists in Daghestani society. In the context of religious argumentations, the Salafi creed of the reformists pushed them to identify Sufi practices as innovations in Islam. The journal did not attack Sufism per se but rather its manifestations in contemporary Daghestan. This, the topos of “pseudo-shaykhs,” played a central rule in that discourse. In Sufism shaykhs are carriers of baraka, a blessing power that transmits from one shaykh to another. The contributors of the journal claimed that the shaykhs of their days are not the progenies of the real shaykhs. The discourse over the pseudo-shaykhs emerged not with the journal but it has roots in the inner-Sufi confrontations. For instance, already before the revolution, Shaykh Bashlarov in one of his
letters also speaks about the pseudo-shaykhs who are dangerous.\textsuperscript{527} Akaev and others who wrote about this topic made use of this debate and placed it into the context of state-building and progress, where these “pseudo-shaykhs” become the symbols of the old, backward past which should be left behind.

The second intensively discussed topic was that of pure Islam and Wahhabism. Political and religious motivations also came together in the question of Wahhabism. However, here the situation was more complicated. Due to the link between Daghestani and Egyptian reformists, on the one hand, and the relations of Riḍā with the \textit{Wahhābī} leadership on the other, the Daghestani reformists were themselves labelled as Wahhabis. To clear their names, they launched severe attacks on Wahhabism. To do this, the reformists implemented the whole arsenal of Islamic ideas, including rhetoric about the phenomenon of \textit{fitna}, the extremism of the Wahhabis and their connections with the colonial West. This was a rhetorical foil. Several competing camps labelled each other ‘Wahhābī’ in trying to clear their names from accusations of Wahhabism and positioning themselves as an authority of the correct, pure Islam.

The criticism of Wahhabism, however, was politicized given its connection with Soviet interests in the Middle East. Nevertheless, their rhetoric was not only Islamic, and they also used the idea actively promulgated by the Soviets according to which the Wahhabis were used by colonial powers such as Great Britain against their Muslim brothers. The Soviets required an opposition to counterbalance a possible Egyptian caliphate, and the reformists also came to see the Wahhabi leader ibn Saʿūd as the “lesser evil.” Here again, we see that overlapping vocabulary of the Soviets and the reformists.