THE LEGACY OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN RUSSIA SINCE THE BULGHAR KINGDOM

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Abstract: This paper provides a brief review of Islamic education in Russia from the tenth century until modern times based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources. The first part of the paper examines the role of Islam in Russian history and suggests that Islam played an important role in building what today is called the Russian civilisation. It also reviews the historical, educational system in the region and indicates that the Volga-Urals region was the centre of Islamic education and civilisation in the Muslim world for at least five centuries until Tsarist Russia colonised the area in the sixteenth century. The second part of the paper briefly elaborates on the educational reforms and provides an overview of Islamic periodicals published at the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia. The final part of the paper focuses on the status of Islamic education in modern Russia and suggests that the decade of absolute religious freedom enabled the mushrooming of Islamic madrasahs and various kinds of religious literature. As this study finds, the restrictions on Islamic literature and activities mainly proliferated after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, and they affected the well-being and security of local Muslims. Thus, this paper recommends a review of the Extremism Law of 2002 in light of basic human rights for faith and education.

Keywords: *Islamic education in Russia, Islamic Civilisation in Russia, Islamic revivalism, Jadidism, Tatar periodicals, Extremist Law of 2002, the Bulghar Kingdom*

Introduction

Islamic education is a comprehensive concept. Muslims commonly interpret Islam not only as a set of religious rituals such as praying, performing a pilgrimage or fasting but also as a complete way of life. The Islamic lifestyle thus stipulates lifelong learning. Practising Muslims encounter endless challenges and questions in their daily lives, particularly those who live in Muslim-minority countries, which are firmly founded on secular values and materialistic principles. Muslims need to find appropriate solutions to various questions raised in their daily matters and also to obtain professional religious guidance. The term Islamic education is more relevant to a comprehensive system of the guidance of Muslim masses from

early childhood until the last breath. Informal types of education play a vital role in providing such lifelong learning processes. Thus, it is noteworthy to observe how the channels and methods of Islamic education underwent a profound transformation in Russia over more than one thousand years since the acceptance of Islam by the Bulghar Kingdom in 922.

This paper discusses the traditions and history of Islamic education in Russia. The case of Russia's Muslims has been chosen for study for many reasons. Firstly, the Russian Federation (RF) has the largest Muslim minority population in Europe. According to the 2010 census, the total number of citizens belonging to Muslim ethnic groups indigenous to Russia is on average 15 million.[1] In addition, Russia is a temporary home to a considerable size of labour migrants from Central Asia, many of whom are Muslim. These expatriates form a "significant portion of the approximately 10 million officially registered, and the majority of them are from largely Muslim Central Asian states, such as Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan".[2] Ethnic Russian converts are believed to amount to an estimated 100,000.[3] The Religious Diversity Index (RDI) of the PEW Research Centre reveals that Muslims in Russia make up at least 10% of the total population.[4]

Secondly, Islam in Russia cannot be classified as a result of postcolonial immigration or a manifestation of the recent acceleration of globalisation and cultural exchange. Muslims are indigenous citizens of Russia who live in their native lands. An important point worth mentioning here is that the history of Islamic civilisation in Russia is often described today within the framework of the clash of civilisations theory. A book entitled *Russia's Islamic Threat* published by Gordon M. Hahn in 2007, written as a policy recommendation for the Russian government for treating its significant Muslim population, begins with the following statement:

> Russia is experiencing the beginning of Islamist jihad. Russia's emerging jihadist movement is not limited to Chechnya. A network of terrorists is expanding throughout the North Caucasus – in particular, to the five other titular Muslim republics: Ingushetiya, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkariya, Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, and Adygeya – and could soon spread to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan and beyond. Russia's Chechen-led network of Islamo-terrorists is not only expanding but is becoming increasingly sophisticated and effective, under the influence of al Qaeda and the global jihadist movement.[5]

However, the actual history of Muslims in Russia reveals the opposite notion. Ancestors of Russia's Muslims built great Islamic civilisations in the present territory of Russia long before Russian imperialism had emerged. Thus, this

article argues that Russian soil has been a significant centre of learning, culture and civilisation, while its Muslim population is responsible for spreading knowledge and virtue to their neighbours.

Islam and Islamic Education in Russian History

Islam grew in the territory presently known as the Russian Federation since the time of the Righteous Caliphs.[6] In 654, the Muslim army took the city of Derbent (now in the republic of Dagestan, RF), which subsequently became the regional centre for Islamisation of the northeastern Caucasus.[7] In central parts of modern Russia, the upper Volga region, Islam was gradually established through trade and diplomatic relations with the Muslim world. In 922, Islam was voluntarily recognised as an official religion of the Bulghar Kingdom, the most powerful state in the region which existed from the eighth century until its invasion by the Mongols in 1236.

There was no clear evidence of the exact date when the Bulghars began to embrace Islam. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Marjani, a renowned Tatar historian and educator of the nineteenth century, believed that: "the city of Bulghar was the third most advanced city in Europe after Rome and Constantinople, and Islam entered this city either right after or at around the same time as it entered Andalusia".[8] As Ahmad Ibn Fadhlan, a personal secretary of the Abbasid delegation to the Bulghar Kingdom in 921-922, states, the Bulghar ruler Ben Salki Belekvar (r. 895-925) sent a letter to the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 908-932) requesting him to dispatch Muslim scholars who could teach Islam to the Bulghars and the skilful engineers to build beautiful mosques on the shores of Itil (the Volga River). Consequently, al-Muqtadir accepted the request and sent a group of the best scholars and skilful men under the leadership of Nazir al-Harami to the Bulghar Kingdom with a special mission.[9] In their presence, Ben Salki Belekvar declared Islam to be the official religion of his kingdom and altered his name to an Islamic one, Ja'far bin Abdullah.

Very soon after that, the Bulghar Kingdom was converted into a significant Islamic educational hub with dozens of madrasahs and famous scholars, and extensive scholarly and economic ties to the rest of the Muslim world.[10] Various Muslim travellers who visited the region in the tenth century confirmed in their travelling accounts that the inhabitants of the Bulghar Kingdom were predominantly Muslims. An anonymous author in his book entitled *Hudud al-'Alam* (The Boundaries of the World) wrote that "Bulghar is considerably not a large city on the shores of Itil. Its inhabitants are all Muslims; its army has around 20,000 horsemen. Against any non-Muslim army, despite their number,

they fight bravely and always win. It is a powerful and affluent place".[11] Al-Balkhi and Ibn Haukal from the tenth century also asserted in their works that Bulghar is the name of a country, the inhabitants of which are practising Islam, and it is also the name of a city which has a major mosque.[12]Before the coming of Islam, the Bulghars used the Runic alphabet in official and scholarly spheres. Being a literate nation facilitated the rapid acceptance of the Arabic alphabet as the writing system while their language remained Turkic with many new Arabic words used to denote religious and scholarly terms. The *mektep*s (primary schools) and madrasahs were established with a comprehensive syllabus in every town and city of the kingdom; their doors were open for locals and foreigners who were mainly from Central Asia. Along with religious sciences, the Bulghars excelled in medicine, history, pharmacology, astronomy, chemistry, mathematics and philosophy. One of the first famous scholars in the Bulghar Kingdom in the eleventh century was Burhan al-Din al-Bulghari (n.d.), who left numerous tractates on pharmacology, rhetoric and theology. The brothers Taj al-Din and Hassan ibn Yunus al-Bulghari (n.d.) were known in the Muslim world for their work called "The Best Medicine from Poisoning" (1220-1221), while Burhan al-Din Ibrahim ibn Yusuf al-Bulghari (n.d.) wrote on "The Simple Medicine".[13]

In 1242, a new state called the Golden Horde (in Tatar: *Altyn Urda*; in Mongol: *Juchi Ulusi*) was established in the region as a western province of the Chenghizid Empire as a result of the Mongol invasion of the Bulghar Kingdom and other neighbouring territories. Islam remained an official religion in the region while the Bulghar elite dominated its educational, cultural and Islamic ethos. Its new capital, Sarai, was one of the greatest cities of the medieval world with 600,000 inhabitants. Around 1332-1333, a famous traveller from North Africa, Ibn Battuta (1304-1377), visited Sarai and described it as "one of the most beautiful cities ... full of people, with the beautiful bazaars and wide streets", and having 13 congregational mosques along with "plenty of lesser mosques".[14] It was the home to numerous local and visiting scholars, poets and scientists such as Saif Sarai (d. 1396), Qutb, Mahmud al-Bulghari, Muhammad Hafiz al-Din bin Muhammad Shihab al-Din bin Yusuf (Ibn Bazzaz, d. 1424), Ibn Arabshah (d. 1450), Yusuf Jamal al-Din bin Hasan bin Mahmud (d. 1479) and 'Isam al-Din bin Abd al-Muluk al-Marghinani (n.d.).[15]

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the vast territory of the Golden Horde had gradually been dissolved into several independent khanates (or states), including the Kazan (in Tatar *Qazan*), Crimean, Astrakhan, Nughay, Kasim (in Tatar *Qasiym*) and Siberian khanates due to long-lasting internal and external conflicts. The traditional educational system and cultural life were not considerably disturbed by the appearance of new administration systems. The overwhelming majority of the population remained literate, and madrasahs in

the cities such as Kazan, Bulghar and Astrakhan continued being the significant educational and cultural centres of the Muslim communities with an intensive syllabus and renowned scholars.[16] The Kazan Kremlin alone was home to five stone mosques and the mosque Qul Sharif, with eight minarets,[17] was the most impressive among them.

A century later, the energetic and centralised Muscovite state began to bring its adjacent lands under its rule. Muslim khanates were conquered one after another and incorporated into the Russian Empire, including Kazan (1552), Astrakhan (1556) and Siberia (1598). By the end of the seventeenth century, the Russian advance reached the North Caucasus as well.

The Russian conquest caused significant detriment to the traditional Islamic educational system. The Muscovite government used a policy of systematic repression of Muslims and the destruction of Muslim civilisation within Russia's borders. To avoid any further Islamic development within the rapidly expanding Russian rule, the Muslim state archives, libraries, books and manuscripts in the newly incorporated territories were destroyed.[18] In 1593, Fyodor Ivanovich (r. 1584-1598), the last tsar of Russia from the Rurik dynasty, ordered the destruction of all mosques and religious schools in colonised territories. This policy continued for centuries. On 19th November 1742, for example, Empress Elizabeth (r. 1741–1762) issued another decree to destroy all mosques in Russia. In seven years (1738–45), 418 mosques out of 536 were demolished in the Kazan province alone. In Siberia, 98 mosques out of 133, and in Astrakhan, 25 mosques out of 40 were destroyed. Muslim charitable properties (*waqfs*) were also confiscated.[19] Although Islamic education was formally forbidden, Muslim subjects of the empire continued transmitting basic knowledge about Islam to the next generations through concealed informal ways.

The ascension of Empress Catherine, the Great (r. 1762-1796) to the throne created favourable conditions for the rise of formal Islamic education in the empire. In 1773, Catherine the Great instructed the Holy Synod to issue a *Toleration of All Faiths Edict*, which prohibited "all bishops and all priests" from "destroying mosques" and ordered them "not to interfere in Muslim questions or the building of their houses of worship".[20] In 1789, the first official Muslim institution, the Ufa Spiritual Muhammadan Assembly (in Russian *Ufimskoe Dukhovnoe Magometanskogo Zakona Sobranie*) was established in the city of Ufa. New mosques were built, and religious schools were opened in large cities such as Kazan, Ufa and Orenburg. In 1844, four madrasahs existed in Kazan alone. The number of Islamic schools in villages increased as well.[21] In 1787, upon imperial orders, the first Qur'an in its Arabic original was published at the typography of the Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg. In 1801-02, the Arabic script was passed from Saint Petersburg to Kazan, thus establishing

the illustrious tradition of Kazan Tatar book publishing. In the second half of the nineteenth century, in Kazan alone, 3,300 Tatar books were published in an overall print run of 26,864,000. There were years when the total print run of Tatar books was an estimated 2,000,000 copies. In the statistics for 1913, the number of books printed in the Tatar language amounted to 267 in a print run of 1,052,100 copies.[22] Muslim culture in the Volga-Ural basin was once again in ascendance. The well-known historian of Kazan, Karl Fuks, spent many years researching Tatar ethnography and wrote the following in 1844:

> No doubt, every visitor to Kazan will be surprised to find among the Kazan Tatars some persons much more educated than even Europeans … A Tatar, who does not know how to read and write is held in contempt by his fellows and is not respected as a citizen [...]. This nation, which has been subjugated for two hundred years and is nowadays scattered among the Russians, has been able to preserve its customs, morals and pride so amazingly, as though it had lived separately.[23]

Also, transportation, communication and trade opportunities grew fast in Russia due to the reforms of the Russian Tsar Alexander II (r. 1855-1881) on education, the government, the judiciary and the military, including his Peasant Reform of 1861. Travelling to the Near East for educational purposes became relatively easy and accessible for the higher number of the Muslim population. The number of *haji*s from the Russian Empire increased as well. In 1896 alone, 18,000 to 25,000 Muslims travelled from Russia to Arabia to perform *hajj*.[24] Consequently, Muslim subjects of the Russian Empire were able to re-establish their educational and religious ties with the rest of the Muslim world close to the end of the nineteenth century after several centuries of the restrictions and anti-Islamic propaganda imposed by the Tsarist regime.

Islamic Revivalism (*Jadidism*) in the Volga Region

The overall opening of political space due to the Russian Revolution of 1905 allowed local Muslims to engage in civil and political activities after many centuries of being deprived of basic human rights. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Muslim subjects of the Tsarist regime became the second largest religious group after dominant Orthodox Christian citizens. The Russian Imperial Census of 1897, which was the first and only census carried out by the empire, confirms that due to its thrust to dominate the world "the Russian Empire (aside from the protectorates of Bukhara and Khiva which were declared independent according to international law) had more than fourteen million

Muslims, which constituted at least eleven *per cent* of the total population".[25]

The post-revolution years of freedom produced a number of notable Muslim intellectuals such as 'Abd Rashid Ibrahimov (1857-1944), Musa Jarullah (1875–1949), Sadri Maksudi (1878–1957), Yusuf Akchura Oglu (1876–1935), Gayaz Ishaqi (1878–1954) and Mir Said Sultan-Galiev (1880–1939?) whose ideas and activities had far-reaching impacts on local as well as international communities. All-Russian Muslim Congresses were convened in several Russian cities between 1905 and 1917 to discuss the current situation and the prospects of Muslims in Russia. The *Ittifaq al-Muslimin* (Unity of Muslims) Party was established, which presented the Muslim fraction in four Russian State Dumas from 1906 to 1916.[26]

Educational development among Russia's Muslims at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries is associated with the name of Ismail Gaspralı (1851-1914), a well-known educator of Crimean Tatar origin. He introduced a new method of teaching, called *uşūl al-jadīd*, to reform Muslim elementary schools (*mektep*s). Within a short period, the number of the *mektep*s of Gaspralı increased rapidly throughout the entire empire, as well as in Turkestan and India, reaching "a total of about five thousand by 1914".[27] According to the statistics of the Russian Ministry of Education, the total number of registered *mektep*s exceeded 10,000 in 1913, while the exact amount of madrasahs that were registered with the ministry amounted to 1,085. However, the bulk of *mektep*s and madrasahs never went under the registration process. Thus, the total amount of primary and high educational institutions of Russia's Muslims at the beginning of the twentieth century was an estimated 25,000. This vivid movement of educational reform of Gaspralı soon evolved into a more comprehensive socio-political and cultural phenomenon which was defined merely as *Jadidism* in Russia (in Tatar *Jadidçelek,* meaning modernism).

The main impact of Gaspralı on educating Muslims of the empire was through his famous *Terjüman* (an *Interpreter*), a newspaper published in Old Tatar continuously at Bakhchesaray from 1883 until several years after his death. This was the "only vehicle to prepare and train Muslim writers, typesetters, proofreaders and even ordinary readers of Russia for the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Before 1905, the *Terjüman* of Gaspralı was the only newspaper for the twenty million Muslim population of Russia".[28]

Very soon, the freedom of speech and press proclaimed by the October Manifesto of 1905 resulted in a publishing boom among Muslims. Dozens of newspapers and periodicals under new titles were launched in various regions of the empire, prospering in the cities of the Volga-Urals region such as Kazan, Ufa, Astrakhan, Orenburg and Troisk. By 1907, the number of Islamic newspapers and periodicals published in Russia had reached fifty-two. Between 1905 and 1907, thirty-four new publications (twenty-one newspapers and thirteen magazines)

released only in the Tatar language mainly concentrated on educational and social issues. Afterwards, the oppressive policies of Pyotr Stolypin, the Prime Minister of the Russian Empire between 1906 and 1911, put an end to the majority of these publications. Muslims managed to launch new titles, and the famous twice-monthly *Shura* (Consultation) periodical of Rida al-Din Fahr al-Din (1859-1936) was one of the most successful among them. The *Shura* periodical began to be published in Orenburg in 1908 and continued its mission until it was closed in 1918 by the Soviet regime.

Ravil Bukharayev affirmed that the number of primary schools in the Kazan province before the October Revolution of 1917 was four times larger than the number of Russian schools in the region. The level of basic literacy among the Tatars was close to 100 *per cent*.[29] Islamic education has a long tradition on Russian soil where important educational and cultural centres of the Muslim world were located. Serge Zenkovsky acknowledged that, towards the beginning of the twentieth century, the Tatar city of Kazan, "because of its numerous educational institutions, publishing houses, and intensive intellectual life, became one of the four cultural capitals of the Muslim world".[30]

Religious components were a crucial part of the syllabus in all types of educational institutions run by Muslims until the October Revolution. From the nineteenth century, madrasahs began issuing certificates that slowly became essential to be employed at local religious and educational institutions. But informal public education was always accessible in the region to educate Muslim masses about their religious rituals and traditions until the Soviet regime entirely prohibited religious education in the 1930s. The government maintained a few selected Islamic educational institutions under its firm control to shape professional Soviet religious clerics for diplomacy and international relations with the rest of the Muslim world. Afterwards, this tactic played a significant role in creating a perception in post-Soviet Russia that Islamic education should be predominantly directed towards preparing formal religious professionals. The thirst of the masses for comprehensive religious education, however, was merely neglected. Individual attempts to offer religious education to the population were labelled as informal and mostly prohibited.

Islamic Education in Post-Soviet Russia

The revival of Islam in the immediate post-Soviet period has been characterised by the rapid growth of interest in and chaotic mass 'conversion' to Islam. The number of 'born' Muslims who belonged to relevant ethnic groups identifying themselves as 'believers' grew sharply. This was also the case among the Volga

Tatars; those who were believed to be more secular and moderately assimilated among the population. In the early 1980s, 59 *per cent* of Tatars in the Autonomous Republic of Tataria expressed indifference and only 15.7 *per cent* considered themselves 'believers'. By 1994, an astonishing 66.6 *per cent* of urban Tatars and 86 *per cent* of rural Tatars referred to themselves as 'believers', while 12 and 9.8 *per cent*, respectively, responded that they were 'wavering'.[31] These citizens with increasing Muslim identity desired to learn about Islam at least at the preliminary level, thus contributing to the rapid growth of Islamic educational institutions in Russia.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, 96 Islamic educational institutions existed across Russia including 7 Islamic universities, around 20 higher madrasahs and 70 higher educational institutions. There were more than 700 elementary Sunday schools for children and adults organised by local mosques in various towns to provide basic knowledge about Islamic belief ('*aqidah*) and religious practices.[32] The Russian Federal State Statistics Service report from January 2016 approximates 5,206 Muslim religious organisations in RF, and 80 of these are registered as educational institutions.[33] Twenty are listed as institutions of higher Islamic education such as Islamic institutes and universities with a focus on preparing professional Muslim clerics. The rest comprises colleges and madrasahs which provide mainly lower-level professional Islamic education.

A comparison between the statistics of 2000 and 2016 gives the impression that the number of Islamic educational institutions declined in the last few years in Russia. At least three reasons could explain this slow decline. Firstly, there was a decline in the demand for professional Islamic clerics (*imam*s). There was a huge demand for professionally trained *imam*s immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, there were only 179 functioning mosques in the Soviet Union. By 1998, there were already over 5,500 registered mosques in Russia, 2,000 of which were in Chechnya, 1,670 in Dagestan, around 1,000 in Tatarstan and 400 in Ingushetia.[34] Many Russian cities and small towns with significant Muslim communities succeeded in opening mosques at the beginning of the twenty-first century, thus creating a demand for professionally trained *imam*s. Subsequently, a slow decline in the need for newly graduated *imam*s could be directly related to the decrease in the necessity for new mosques.

Secondly, the figures from 2016 provide data from registered institutions only. The formation of an appropriate registration process for religious, and educational institutions in Post-Soviet Russia required time. The majority of early Islamic educational institutions in the 1990s, which played a crucial role in formulating the Islamic worldview and Muslim elite in Russia, functioned without formal registration or proper curriculum and textbooks. The decade of absolute religious freedom in the 1990s right after the collapse of the Soviet system enabled

various types of Islamic ideas and influences to flow into the country. Its Muslim population was thirsty for any kind of knowledge about Islam after many years of anti-religious propaganda. The revival of Islam attracted funding from the Middle East and Asia for new mosques, religious schools and cultural programmes.[35] Russia experienced the mushrooming of Islamic educational institutions, and foreign organisations and riches funded the translation and publication of various types of religious literature. Many of these educational formations ceased to exist right after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. This was due to the new law adopted by the government in 2002 entitled "On Fighting Extremist Activity," commonly known as the "Extremism Law." Many foreign educators left the country, and the registration process for educational institutions became complicated. Islamic activities rooted in post-Soviet Russia were soon labelled as a spread of Saudi-backed religious extremism and Wahhabism.[36] Such developments inevitably led to a decline in the number of formal Islamic educational institutions in Russia.

Thirdly, statistical data mainly provides the numbers of formal education, which is designed to prepare professional religious officials. There is another similar and significant scheme of populist education commonly known as informal education. At large, Muslims of Russia obtain a basic knowledge of their culture, tradition and religious rituals through various forms of informal learning activities such as Sunday schools or summer school programmes.

Sunday schools were the first initiatives taken by Muslim communities as a way of providing basic religious knowledge to the masses in immediate post-Soviet Russia. At present, Russia's Muslims can learn about Islam in Sunday schools often organised in mosques on Saturdays and Sundays from September to May under the initiative of communal Muslim leaders. The mosques usually offer separate courses at different times of the day for children, men and women. Learners obtain basic knowledge about the tenets of faith (*'aqidah*), Arabic grammar, the basics of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *tilawah* (the reading rules of the Qur'an). Although mosques in large cities usually obtain formal permission to organise such learning circles, small town and village mosques habitually arrange classes on their initiative, and the most learned person in the community runs the classes. There is no tuition fee to enrol on these courses, and usually, no certificate is provided upon completion.

Summer schools or Muslim camps are usually arranged by Muslim organisations to educate Muslim children about basic Islamic knowledge during the school vacation period for those who attend regular secular public schools. In 2017, for example, more than 200 Muslim boys from different regions of the country participated in an All-Russian Muslim Summer School programme organised by the Russian Council of Muftis (RCM) for low-income families from July 18 to August 7 at the base camp Zerkal'niy. The programme for girls began

on August 9 at the same base, and more than 170 girls attended the programme.[37] Such programmes are organised in all regions during school vacations. As an example, the Mahinur *madrasah* in Nizhny Novgorod alone operates an estimated 15 summer schools during summer vacation for schoolchildren, where they study Arabic, Qur'an, basics of *fiqh*, and stories of the prophets and rightly guided caliphs, in addition to enjoying themselves with various activities.[38] In Tatarstan, for example, about 5,600 children participated in Islamic summer school programmes in 2010, offered by at least 13 mosques in the capital city, Kazan, and other town and village mosques.[39]

Another informal source of Islamic education in Russia is gatherings. Gatherings were commonly used by Muslim preachers (*da'i*s), particularly those who belong to *Nurcu* (the followers of a Turkish scholar Said Nursi) and *Jama'ah al-Tabligh* movements to invite ethnic Muslims to return to the Islamic way of life. Such gatherings were organised sometimes in the mosques but mostly in the houses of practising Muslims, particularly on weekends. However, these decreased in the last few years due to state restrictions.

Islamic Publications and Education Within State Restrictions

In the late 1990s, Post-Soviet Russia witnessed a publishing boom in the field of Islamic literature and periodicals, as well as the proliferation of Islamic books, and audio and video materials produced in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Pakistan and the United Kingdom. Within two decades, several publishing houses such as *Iman* in Kazan, *Ummah* in Moscow and Medina Publishing House in Nizhny Novgorod emerged as Russia's leading Islamic publishers. Islamic books today are published in Russia with an expanding number of titles and enhanced quality. Annual Islamic book fairs have become a tradition in the country. The Medina Publishing House alone produces four academic journals and a newspaper. It also works on creating a 12-volume encyclopaedia, *Islam v Rossiyskoi Federasii* (Islam in the Russian Federation). It published many essential books on *fiqh* and also organised international and local symposiums, conferences and seminars.

As of 2002, there were around forty newspapers and magazines with Islamic content in Russia.[40] Today, in Tatarstan alone there are an estimated 25 Muslim publishing houses issuing newspapers and magazines amounting to an average of 66,000 copies per year in both Russian and Tatar languages. The largest among them are *Islam info*, *Iman*, *Vera* (Faith) and *Umma*. The Spiritual Board of Tatarstan issues *Islam Nury* (The Light of Islam) newspaper and a magazine called *Deen ve Adap* (Religion and Morality). In 2003, a Muslim Journalists'

Union was set up under the auspices of the Muftis' Council of Russia and with the Russian Journalists Union's support. The real situation is not always gleeful for Islamic education in Russia due to various complications emerging in Russia in the last decade.

The first years of the post-Soviet era are usually identified as a short period of growing tolerance and movement towards accepting greater cultural, religious and political autonomy for Muslims. As with many other countries, the September 11 attacks were the catalyst for Russia's decision to get serious about religious extremism. The disastrous results of the two Chechen Wars of 1994–96 and 1999–2000 as well as the Beslan Tragedy[41] in September 2004 provided further impetus to the politics of prejudice towards all things Islamic in Russia. The dominant shift was towards greater government control over Muslim religious and cultural life, the reversal of trends towards cultural and political autonomy, and growing anti-Muslim sentiment – Islamophobia. As a result, many informal channels of Islamic education were labelled as extremist due to their foreign funding or international associations. Registration of Islamic educational institutions became complicated due to manifold screening. For example, according to official data of the Committee on the Freedom of Conscience and Cooperation with Religious Organisations of the Republic of Dagestan, in 2014, only six of the eight universities and 13 madrasas out of 29 had a license for educational activities. The rest were functioning without formal registration. Thus, the certificates of graduates of these institutions are not recognised by the state and are classified as illegally operating Islamic institutions.

Another complication in Islamic education is related to publications and online sources with Islamic contexts. No official censorship exists in Russia although all publishing houses know the list of desired or unworkable topics. In the wake of the Russian *Law on Extremism* of 2002, cases of discrimination against Muslims and violation of Muslims' rights under the pretext of fighting against religious extremism or Islamic terrorism significantly increased in Russia. Dozens of mainstream Islamic books such as the *Riyadh al-Salihin* (The Gardens of the Righteous), *Sorok Khadisov* (Forty Hadiths) of Al-Nawawi, *Mizan al-Amal* (Balanced Criterion of Action) of Imam Ghazali, *Jizn' Proroka Muhammada* (The Life of the Prophet Muhammad) of Ibn Hisham and al-Mubarakfuri, parts from the *Risale-i Nur* of Said Nursi were indiscriminately banned in various district courts in Russia for allegedly inciting inter-religious and inter-racial hatred and promoting exclusivity and superiority on the basis of religion. On 12 August 2015, for example, the Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk city court banned the Qur'anic commentary, "Supplication to God: Its Significance and Place in Islam", and caused alarm among the Muslim community as this verdict effectively outlaws certain verses of the Qur'an. Rushan Abbyasov, deputy-chairman at the RCM, called this ruling "a

disgrace for Russia".[42] Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of the Chechen Republic, and Ravil Tugushev, a Muslim lawyer, also questioned this court verdict. President Putin consequently signed into law on 23 November 2015 the amendment to the *Extremism Law* prohibiting the banning of sacred texts of Russian traditional religions – the Bible, the Qur'an, the Tanakh and the Kanjur – as extremist literature. Muslim scholar Ilhom Merazhov commented that this amendment does not solve the problem. "No one will be able to ban the holy books," he said to Forum 18, "but religious books – commentaries on holy books – may still be prohibited".[43]In addition, a number of Muslim organisations, movements and societies such as *Hizb al-Tahrir*, *Jama'a al-Tabligh*, Nurcular (followers of Said Nursi), the *Ahl al-Sunna*, Islamic Jamaat, Salafism, Wahhabism and others were banned in Russia as being extremist and contradictory to the traditional Hanafi *madhhab*, according to the 2002 *Law on Extremism*. These bans have inevitably led to the arrests of dozens if not hundreds of Muslims in Russia on allegations of belonging to extremist groups.[44] In 2015, several Muslims were detained for setting up an organisation that, according to human rights activists and lawyers, does not exist. Imam and teacher Komil Odilov, for example, was arrested on 6 December 2015 and was charged for the second time with organising a cell of the banned extremist organisation Nurcular in Novosibirsk and is currently being held in custody. His appeal against his first conviction is still under consideration by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Two other men accused of Nurcular membership, Andrei Dedkov and Aleksei Kuzmenko, were found guilty at Soviet District Court in Krasnoyarsk on 18 December 2015. Although prosecutors sought custodial sentences, Judge Yevgeny Repin instead imposed fines of 150,000 Roubles (about €2,025 or $2,205) on Dedkov under *Criminal Code Article 282.2*, Part 1 ("Organisation of an extremist organisation") and 100,000 Roubles (about €1,350 or $1,470) on Kuzmenko under *Criminal Code Article 282.2*, Part 2 ("Participation in an extremist organisation").[45]

Such harsh restrictions on Islamic literature and interpretations under the pretext of fighting against religious extremism consequently weakened the Islamic education system in Russia. Religious freedom and citizens' rights to get basic religious education deteriorated as well. Informal education channels became unsafe to be attached to, and Russia's Muslims became once again deprived of the right to access preferred types and sources of Islamic education.

Conclusion

After surveying the tradition of Islamic education in Russia, this paper suggests several conclusions. Firstly, the new territory of Russia was an important centre

of Islamic education with advanced learning centres and renowned scholars for centuries. This unique experience of Russia's Muslims should be taken into consideration while dealing with problems occurring in the contemporary Islamic educational system in Russia. The concept of formal Islamic education started during the Tsarist Russian period by initiating the practice of imperial appointment of qualified *imams* beginning in the early nineteenth century. But informal types of education were always there to educate the Muslim masses about their religious rituals and responsibilities.

Secondly, this paper suggests that Islamic education should be defined in a much broader setting. At present, scholarly discussions connote it as the formal structure of producing certified imams and Islamic officials. In practice, the term Islamic education is more relevant to a comprehensive system of the guidance of Muslim masses from early childhood until the last breath. Informal types of education play a vital role in providing continuous education. In Russia today, it offers common Islamic knowledge to the public through summer camps, Sunday schools, online sources, publications and informal gatherings. Also, if Islamic education is defined in a populist sense, basic Islamic knowledge of the Muslim population in Russia is obtained mostly by informal channels, while formal Islamic universities and institutions mainly focus on producing certified Islamic professionals.

Another important point worth mentioning is that the history of Russian-Muslim encounters is not merely one of conflict, conquest and resistance. Instead, the relations between Russians and Muslims were marked by times of co-existence, tolerance, accommodation and cooperation. Catherine the Great's reign provides an early case of such encounters. The positive results of such provision of religious freedom and the right to education were seen later. This was when a phenomenon of the educational and socio-political revivalist movement of Russia's Muslim intellectuals took place in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, commonly defined as *Jadidism*. Thus, this paper suggests that the clash of the civilisation hypothesis seems to be one-dimensional in explaining the comprehensive history of human civilisations, their mutual encounters and transformations. Instead, through many centuries human beings learned to live in peace side by side and affected one another positively, although conflicts and wars were the options occasionally.

Fourthly, even though informal education is critical in providing Islamic knowledge to the public in terms of enabling them to comprehend the tenets of their faith, religious obligations and restrictions and rituals, it has severe complications in the Russian case. At present, the majority of Russia's Muslims obtain information on specific issues in Islam through social networking and the internet. These ideas may not always be in line with the tradition of Russia's

Muslims and government policies. It is also possible that internet sources may spread extremist interpretations of religious principles. Thus, the government tries to control the stream of foreign ideas in the country by banning Islamic movements and certain Islamic books. These restrictions on Islamic literature and activities proliferated largely after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, and affected the well-being and security of local Muslims.

Lastly, harsh restrictions on Islamic literature under the pretext of fighting against religious extremism consequently weakened the informal Islamic education systems in Russia. Religious freedom and citizens' rights to get basic religious education deteriorated as well. Informal education channels became unsafe to be attached to, and Russia's Muslims once again became deprived of the right to access preferred types and sources of Islamic education.

At the end of the discussion, the paper highlights the following recommendations:

1. Islam in Russia cannot be classified as a result of postcolonial immigration or a manifestation of the recent acceleration of globalisation and cultural exchange. Muslims are indigenous citizens of Russia who live in their native lands. This aspect should be respected in scholarly works and policy papers while referring to Muslims in Russia.
2. This paper recommends a review of the Extremism Law of 2002 in light of the fundamental human rights of faith and education.
3. Lastly, as the history of Muslim-Christian relations in Russia demonstrates, through many centuries, human beings learned to live in peace side by side and affected one another positively, although conflicts and wars were the options occasionally. Thus the paper recommends reviewing the clash of the civilisation hypothesis as it seems to be one-dimensional in explaining the comprehensive history of human civilisations, their mutual encounters and transformations.

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1. There is no official record of the number of Muslims in the Russian Federation as the 2010 census did not include a question on religious beliefs. The results of the 2021 census are not announced yet.
2. "Kolichesvto Migrantov V Rossii na 2016 God" [Number of Migrants in Russia in 2016], accessed 23 January 2022, http://topmigrant.ru/migraciya/obshhaya-informaciya/migranty-v-rossii.html.
3. http://voprosik.net/russkie-musulmane-segodnya, accessed 23 January 2022.
4. www.pewforum.org/2014/04/04/religious-diversity-index-scores-by-country/, accessed 23 January 2022.
5. Gordon Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 1.
6. The period which is called the time of the Righteous Caliphs consists of the rule of four companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) after his death: Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali (632-660CE).
7. Galina Yemelianova, "Islam in Russia: An Historical Perspective," in *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia: Public and Private Faces*, ed. Hilary Pilkington and Galina Yemelianova (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 28.
8. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Marjānī, *Mustafād al-Akhbār fī Aḥwāl Qāzān wa Bulghār* (Kazan: Tatarstan Kitap Nashriyaty, 1989), 51.
9. Ibn Fadhlan, "Puteshestviye Ahmed Ibn Fadhlana Na Volgu [Travel of Ahmed ibn Fadhlan to Volga]" in *Na Styke Kontinentov i Tsivilizasiy* [Frontier of Continents and Civilizations], ed. I. Muslimov (Moscow: Insan, 1996), 12.
10. Shireen Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 3.
11. Riza Bariyev, *Voldzskiye Bulghary: Istoriya I Kul'tura* [The Volga Bulghars: History and Culture] (St. Petersburg: Agat Publishing House, 2005), 65-6.
12. Ibid., 66.
13. Ibid., 93.
14. Ravil Bukharayev, *Islam in Russia: The Four Seasons* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 116.

15. Gamirzyan Davletshin, "Pis'mennaya Kul'tura I Nauchniyi Znaniya" [Writing Culture and Scientific Knowledge], in *Istoriya Tatar* [History of Tatars], ed. Usmanov and Hakimov, vol. 3 (Kazan: Institute Marjani, 2009), 644-53.
16. Mikhail Khudiakov, *Ocherki po Istorii Kazanskogo Khanstva* [Essays on History of the Kazan Khanate] (Moscow: Insan, 1991), 272-5.
17. Some sources mention that the mosque Qul Sharif had six minarets. Bariyev, *Voldzskiye Bulghary*, 237.
18. Khudiakov, *Ocherki*, 154-5.
19. E. Akhmetova, *Islam in Russia: Historical Facts and Modern Developments* (Malaysia: IAIS Publications, 2013), 13.
20. Alan Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 71.
21. as Gayaz Ishaqi, *Idel-Ural* (Naberejniyi Chelny: KAMAZ, 1993), 32.
22. Bukharayev, *Islam in Russia*, 311.
23. Ibid., 310.
24. Eileen Kane, *Russian Hajj: Empire and Pilgrimage to Mecca* (USA: Cornell University Press, 2015), 83.
25. "Obshchiy Svod po Imperii rezul‟tatov Razrabotki dannykh pervoi vseobshchei perepisi naseleniya, proizvedennoi 28 ianvarya 1897 goda," [General Results of the First Census of Russian Population on 28th January 1897], vol.1 (St. Petersburg: n.p., 1905), 250-251.
26. On Dumas see, Dilyara Usmanova, *Deputaty ot Kazanskoi Gubernii v Gosudarstvennoi Dume Rossii* [Delegates from the Kazan Gubernia to Russian State Duma] (Kazan: Tatarskoe Knijnoe Izdatel‟stvo, 2006); and Aidar Khavutdinov and Damir Mukhetdinov, *Obshestvennoe Dvijenie Musulman-Tatar: Itogi I Perspektivy* [Social Movement of Tatar Muslims: Results and Perspectives] (Nizhniy Novgorod: DUMNO, 2005), 39-42.
27. Serge Zenkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 289-290.
28. Elmira Akhmetova, "Pan-Islamism in Russia 1905-1930: Analysis of Its Origins, Features and Impact," (PhD thesis, IIUM, 2014), 118; and G. Alisov, "Musul'manskiy Vopros v Rossii," *Russkaya Misl'*, no. 7 (1909): 28-61.
29. Bukharayev, *Islam in Russia*, 227.
30. According to Zenkovsky, the other main centres of Islam at the beginning of the twentieth century were Cairo, Istanbul and Calcutta. See, Zenkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia*, 36, 290.
31. Akhmetova, *Islam in Russia*, 43.
32. "Rossiya stanovitsya tsentrom islamskogo obrazovaniya" [Russia is becoming a centre of Islamic learning], *Islam News*, available online at

http://www. islamnews.ru/news-21943.html, accessed on 15 January 2022.

33. http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/state, accessed 14 January 2022.
34. Yemelianova, "Islam in Russia," 54-5.
35. Fiona Hill, "Putin and Bush in Common Cause? Russia's View of the Terrorist Threat After September 11," *Brookings*, available at https://www.brookings.edu/articles/putin-and-bush-in-common-cause-russias-view-of-the-terrorist-threat-after-september-11, accessed 16 January 2022.
36. "Skhemy Finansirovanya Islamskogo Radikalizma v Rossii" [Scheme of Financing of Islamic Radicalism in Russia], *APN*, available at http://www.apn.ru/index.php?newsid=36175, accessed 15 January 2022.
37. http://dumrf.ru/common/regnews/12716, accessed 16 January 2022.
38. Akhmetova, "Russia," in *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, ed. Jorgen Nielsen et al., vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 445.
39. Akhmetova, "Russia," in Jorgen Nielsen et al., eds., *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 503.
40. Hunter*, Islam in Russia*, 75.
41. More than 1,300 children and adults were taken hostage in a school in Beslan, North Osetia, on 1 September 2004. Two days later, following an assault by Russian security forces, 344 civilians died (according to official figures) – most of them children.
42. Arnold, Victoria, "Russia: Religious literature banned and blocked," *Forum 18*, available at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2103, accessed 18 January 2022.
43. http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2126, accessed 18 January 2022.
44. On the banning of Islamic books and organisations, see "Russia: The battle with 'religious extremism' – a return to past methods?", *Forum 18*, 28 April 2009, available at http://forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1288, accessed 21 January 2019; Fagan, Geraldine, "Russia: Religious freedom survey, October 2008", *Forum 18*, 1 October 2008, available at www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1196, accessed 18 January 2022; and "Fabrication of 'Islamic extremism' criminal cases in Russia: Campaign continues", *Memorial Human Rights Centre,* www.memo.ru/2008/09/04/0409082.htm, accessed 10 January 2022.
45. Arnold, Victoria, "Raids, charges, detentions and fines of Muslims continue," *Forum 18*, available at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2141, accessed 14 January 2022.

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http://www.infoislam.ru/publ/stati/aktualno/semejnoe_obrazovanie_musulmane_obsuzhdajut_v_internete_otdavat_li_svoikh_detej_v_shkoly/49-1-0-41470, accessed 23 January 2022.

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