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Chapter 3

Translating Islam into the Language of the Russian State and the ROC

This chapter¹ opens Part I of the thesis and introduces the first of three case studies that analyse the Russian language of Islam. The discussion in this chapter centres on how leaders of the official Islamic institutions that operate at the federal level employ the Russian language. With examples from speeches and sermons given by the head of the major Spiritual Directorate in Moscow (DUM RF), Mufti Ravil' Gainutdin, this study supports the claim that on the lexical level, speech styles of Russia's Islamic elites resemble those of the ROC leadership and of political elites; this congruence also stretches across the dominant tropes and narratives. My argument is that Mufti Gainutdin establishes links to prominent patriotic discourses on Russia's culture, history and moral code in order to construct Islam as one of Russia's "traditional" religions. These lexical and discursive practices, I argue, are instruments that Gainutdin uses to offer an inclusive interpretation of Islam for the Russian state and society. As the leader of the DUM RF, he claims to represent and foster *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo* (Russia's Islam), a definition of Islam that cultivates loyalty of Russia's Muslims to the state and portrays them as an inherent and valuable part of Russian civilization.

¹ This chapter is based on G. Sibgatullina (forthcoming). "Translating Islam into the Language of the Russian State and the Orthodox Church", *Religion, State and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2018.1562775>.

3.1 Introduction

Ravil' Gainutdin, born in 1959 in the Tatar Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, belongs to the old generation of the "turbaned" Islamic elites who received their training from Soviet Islamic institutions in the last decade of the Union's existence (in 1984 Gainutdin graduated from the Mir-i 'Arab madrasa in Bukhara). Since its creation in 1994, he has chaired the Moscow-based DUM RF. Both the DUM RF and the SMR (established in 1996) – another large umbrella organization under Gainutdin's leadership – claim to represent Russia's Muslim community as a whole and strive to be recognized as the only official and legitimate Islamic authority in the country. Yet, since religious institutions are heavily dependent on political and financial backing from the Russian state, and Gainutdin's personal relationship with the high ranks in President Putin's administration has been vulnerable to vicissitudes, the Mufti has not succeeded in securing a firm grip on power. His position as head of Russia's *umma* is challenged by the leader of another Muftiate at the federal level (TsDUM), Talgat Tadzhuiddin, as well as by chairs of regional spiritual directorates. For the purposes of this chapter, it is relevant that Mufti Gainutdin's discourse does not represent the position of an individual religious leader. Rather, he voices standpoints of two influential official Islamic establishments – the DUM RF and SMR – that have hundreds of local and regional organizations affiliated with them. Therefore, his lexicon and rhetorical strategies potentially give direction to Russia's official Islamic discourse and function as examples that lower ranks of the Islamic elites tend to emulate.

Gainutdin's lexicon has previously attracted the attention of scholars, who stressed the fact that the Mufti practises translation of original Islamic terminology into Russian and avoids or minimizes the use of Arabic and Persian loanwords.¹ A strong reason for the Islamic elites to use this "purified" Russian is that the majority of the Russian-speaking Muslim community can easily understand their writings and speeches. That is, "purified" Russian helps to reach out to believers who may not be familiar with Islamic terminology, and also to those who live outside of Russia but still speak the Russian language. In addition, Gainutdin's speeches also address Russia's non-Muslim population and, most importantly, the state. The Mufti therefore consciously avoids using terms that may not be familiar to his target audience.

¹ M. Kemper, "Mufti Ravil Gainutdin: the Translation of Islam into a Language of Patriotism and Humanism", in *Islamic Authority and the Russian Language: Studies on Texts from European Russia, the North Caucasus and West Siberia*, ed. A.K. Bustanov and M. Kemper (Amsterdam: Pegasus, 2012), 105-41; Bustanov and Kemper, "The Russian Orthodox and Islamic Languages in the Russian Federation".

The need for an official Islamic discourse to be transparent and understandable, in particular to the political elite, can be traced back to the practices introduced by Empress Catherine the Great, who created the very institute of state-appointed Islamic leaders by establishing the first imperial Muftiate in 1788. In the Soviet Union, although Islamic officials wrote primarily in ethnic vernaculars, communication between Islamic leaders and secular authorities also had to be conducted in Russian, including regular translations into Russian of official documents issued by the Muftiates, which could be surveyed by the Communist Party. In the post-Soviet context, where numerous Muftiates have been in competition for power and recognition, the language that communicates embeddedness in the mainstream discourse on religion also yields political advantages.²

In essence, Gainutdin's Islamic Russian draws primarily on translation – a translanguing adaptation of sacred terminology derived from Arabic or Islamic. Some terms can be translated easily and find common acceptance, while for others there is a wide spectrum of possible translations. By opting for a full translation of Islamic terminology into Russian, Gainutdin prioritizes the strategy of “domestication” – sometimes referred to as “acculturation”.³ The concept of the domestication strategy, first formulated by the American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti in contrast to “foreignization”, means assimilation of a text to target cultural and linguistic values, whereby the signs of otherness are blurred and disguised.⁴ In the Russian context, this strategy minimizes the perception that the Islamic discourse is inherently “foreign” to the Russian culture, which helps to construct an image of a “familiar”, “loyal” and “peaceful” Islam that accords with the Russian system of values. By and large, translation here is not so much a technical act of communication between two languages, but more a kind of complex negotiation between two cultures – Russian and non-Russian (i.e., Islamic, ethnic minority culture). These cultures are obviously not equally powerful. It is the Islamic elites who have to adapt their texts to the specific audience – high-ranking politicians, Church clergy and the Russian ethnic majority – according to the norms defined by that audience. By formulating an identity that is acceptable to the dominant culture, the translator – in this case, the Mufti – uses only those terms and concepts that help to construct a positive image of Islam and to argue

² Kemper, “Mufti Ravil Gainutdin”.

³ S. Bassnet, “Bringing the News Back Home: Strategies of Acculturation and Foreignization,” *Language and Intercultural Communication* 5:2 (2005), 120-30.

⁴ L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995); also S. Bassnet, *Translation* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 47.

that this religion has been an important part of Russian culture over the centuries. The flip side of these practices is that they inevitably involve manipulation and simplification for the sake of gaining recognition by the dominant culture.



Figure 2. Ravil' Gainutdin (right) and Damir Mukhetdinov

In fierce competition with a kaleidoscope of Islamic trends, local and imported from abroad, Gainutdin claims to represent a religion that is free of “foreign” elements and built into patriotic rhetoric. Gainutdin’s deputy, Damir Mukhetdinov (see Figure 2),⁵ coined the expression *Rossiiskoe musul’manstvo* (Russia’s Islam)⁶ in his programme essay⁷ to refer to the form of Islam that incorporates the historical heritage of Russia’s Muslims, although it has been modified to suit the social and political context of present-day Russia. As the analysis below will show, Mukhetdinov’s project did not emerge in a vacuum, but rather summarized standpoints that the DUM RF leadership had been pushing forward in previous years.

3.2 Data

The following two sections of the chapter examine the discourse of Mufti Gainutdin using techniques of quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to reveal

⁵ The photo source: Getty Images, <<https://www.gettyimages.nl/license/481837685>> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

⁶ Here I translate *musul’manstvo* into English as ‘Islam’, although in Russian the term has a broader connotation than just the word *islam*. In various contexts it may also imply the entire Muslim community and/or the essence of being Muslim.

⁷ D. Mukhetdinov, *Rossiiskoe musul’manstvo: prizyv k osmysleniiu i kontekstualizatsii* (Moscow: Medina, 2016).

and explain the power of certain lexical and rhetorical practices; the methodological framework outlined by Fairclough⁸ and discussed in Section 1.4 defines the structure of this chapter.

Section 3.3 analyses the lexical characteristics of Gainutdin's discourse; the focus lies on his choice of particular religious terms. The analysis is based on data from a corpus that consists of seventy texts authored by Mufti Gainutdin (in total 91,048 words).⁹ These texts were produced in 2001-2017 and include the Mufti's conference presentations, open letters to public figures and transcripts of Friday sermons. The individual items have been selected from the official website of the SMR (www.muslim.ru) and analysed with the programme *Sketch Engine*.¹⁰ A complete list of the texts that comprise the corpus can be found in Appendix I.

The method of examination that I use in this section, i.e. corpus-assisted discourse analysis, helps to solve the issue of representativeness of the studied texts. By using a random sampling procedure and a large sample size, corpus linguistics makes it possible to highlight lexical regularities and conduct a comprehensive, rather than selective analysis. In this section of the chapter, the number in square brackets that is given next to each analysed word, indicates how many times it occurs in the corpus; e.g., *Vsevyshnii* [231]. Corpus-assisted discourse analysis thus serves to reduce the possible bias of the researcher and prevent cherry-picking.¹¹

This section also introduces arguments from scholarly discussions in favour of or against translating Islamic religious terms into Russian. Making reference to academic discourses and scholarly expertise, I argue, is a tool that Gainutdin uses to give greater credibility to his aims and goals.

Section 3.4 analyses Gainutdin's landmark speech *Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie* ('Christmas message').¹² The *Poslanie* was delivered on 27 January 2015, on the occasion of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Here, I examine Gainutdin's rhetorical strategies; namely, how he employs religious reasoning and authority to enter the public debate. The focus will be on two examples of Gainutdin's references to other prominent discourses: first, his evocation of the popular image of the West being the

⁸ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, p. 73.

⁹ The corpus comprises only the Mufti's texts in Russian and leaves out his few publications available in Tatar.

¹⁰ On methods of using the online corpus analysis interface *Sketch Engine*, see A. Kilgarriff et al., "The Sketch Engine," *Proceedings of Euralex* (2004), 105-16.

¹¹ See also V. Kamasu, "Corpus Linguistics for Critical Discourse Analysis. What can we do better?," in *Language, Corpora and Cognition*, ed. P. Pęzik and J.T. Waliński (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 220-39.

¹² R. Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie Muftiia Rossii Gainutdina", *The official website of the DUM RF*, 27 January 2015 <<http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/8925>> (Accessed on 30 January 2017).

enemy that challenges Russia's integrity and security; and second, his adaptation of the state- and Church-supported narratives on Russia's "traditional religions" and "traditional values".

3.3 Lexical aspects

The analysis of the selected linguistic corpus shows that Gainutdin frequently replaces original Islamic terminology in Arabic and Persian by what he perceives as its Russian equivalents. Based on the frequency with which Arabic and Persian loanwords and their Russian equivalents occur in the analysed corpus, the following examples single out and discuss key strategies used to translate Islamic terms into Russian.

The majority of key Islamic terms have entered the Russian language in the form of loanwords from Arabic and Persian; these loanwords have already been conventionalized in Russian and we can assume that the broader Russian-speaking public, including non-Muslims, are familiar with their meaning. Nevertheless, in Gainutdin's speeches, Arabic and Persian loanwords are used interchangeably with, or fully replaced by their Russian (Church Slavonic) counterparts: e.g., *namāz* is rendered as *molitva* meaning 'prayer', *hajj* as *palomnichestvo* 'pilgrimage'. Although these non-Islamic variants often refer to shared concepts among all Abrahamic religions, their semantic fields in some cases do not cover the whole range of meanings that are present in the original Arabic or Persian words. For instance, Russian *molitva* does not make a distinction between *namāz*, which means obligatory ritual prayer, and *du'ā* – a general term for an act of supplication; in the official Islamic discourse, the word *molitva* is then used for both concepts.

Why does the Mufti prefer to employ Russian words that are connected to the Orthodox Christian discourse, thus running the risk of losing some essential meanings of Islamic terms? Translation rather than simple transliteration of Islamic terminology into Russian yields tangible advantages for the speaker. We have to keep in mind that Gainutdin's audience consists not only of Muslims, but to a larger extent of non-Muslim listeners/readers, many of whom are not familiar with Arabic terms and Islamic theology. To make sure that the broader public understand and accept his message, the Mufti avoids "foreign" words. As a consequence, he also deconstructs the image of Islam as the religion of the "Other".

It is also noteworthy that Mufti Gainutdin prefers to use Orthodox Christian vocabulary instead of introducing or coining confession-neutral terms. There are two possible explanations for this. His strategy could be an attempt to emphasize theological closeness between Islam and Orthodox Christianity, where, as the Mufti suggests, key

notions are full synonyms across languages. Another explanation could be hidden in the symbolic value of Orthodox Christian vocabulary: it is often etymologically linked to Church Slavonic, which many Orthodox Christians perceive as the “sacred” language of the ROC. That is, the use of Church Slavonic is seen as a sacred act in itself and as a form of religious expression.¹³ Thus, when the Mufti uses Church Slavonic terms, he also elevates the status of his speeches. In addition, one could argue that the “sacredness” of Church Slavonic words transmits in the best way possible the symbolic value of original Islamic terms in Arabic, which also enjoys the status of the sacred language in Islam.

Gainutdin consciously accepts the risk that this process of “familiarizing” Islam will mute the complexity of original Islamic terms and reduce their meaning when used in the cultural framework of the target language (Russian). Another pitfall of this strategy is of a theological nature. The Mufti implicitly suggests that Islam bears a close resemblance to the Orthodox Christian theological tradition, although he does not elaborate on this. For instance, Gainutdin uses the Arabic word *Allāh* [455] interchangeably with Church Slavonic concepts, such as *Bog* [35] ‘God’, *Gospod’* [56] ‘Lord’, *Tvorets* [41] and *Sozdatel’* [34] ‘Creator’. Interestingly, the word *Vsevyshnii* [231] ‘Exalted’, which in Soviet dictionaries was still regarded as part of the Church lexicon, has been completely “hijacked” in the Islamic discourse, since the ROC spokesmen barely use it anymore. Gainutdin also introduces phrases like *edinyi i edinstvennyi Bog* [4] ‘the one and only God’, to restrict semantic fields associated with the word *Bog* in Russian and avoid the concept of the Holy Trinity:

“...pilgrims go to the very first temple built on earth to worship the Exalted, with sincere feelings of fulfilled duty, with tears in their eyes [...], faithful to the one and only God”.¹⁴

The word *Koran* [158] ‘Qur’ān’ is another key Islamic term, which in Gainutdin’s texts is often rendered by Orthodox Christian notions, some of which bear exclusive Christian meanings. For instance, the Mufti translates the word as *Zakon* (*Vsevyshnego/Boga/Allah*) [3] ‘Law of God’, *Zavet* [2] ‘Covenant’, *Slovo Bozh’e* [1] ‘Word of God’:

“These young people mistook the holiness for aggression and a complete disrespect for the sanctity of human life [and] disrespect for the Law of Allāh”.¹⁵

¹³ For a definition of a “sacred” language, see A.J. Liddicoat, “Language Planning as an Element of Religious Practice,” *Current Issues in Language Planning* 13:2 (2012), 121-44. Here p. 122.

¹⁴ Text # 27 as given in Appendix I.

¹⁵ Text # 46.

By using the Russian forms *Zakon* and *Zavet*, Gainutdin attempts to place the Qurʾān in the series of agreements made between God and humanity; for Orthodox Christian speakers of Russian, however, these words primarily refer to the New Covenant (*Novyi Zavet*) that replaced the Old Covenant described in the Old Testament (*Vetkhii Zavet*). In his speeches, the Mufti obviously does not dwell on the relationship between the New Testament and the Qurʾān;¹⁶ although his critics could argue that he implicitly suggests that the Qurʾān must enjoy greater importance, as it was delivered after the NT and, as Muslims believe, through God’s last Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁷ However, Gainutdin does not use these terms very often, perhaps realizing that he risks arousing resentment. More frequently, we encounter “safer” translation variants, such as *Sviashchennoe Pisanie* [20] ‘Holy Scripture’ or *Sviashchennaia Kniga* [2] ‘Holy Book’, which have also been used outside of Islamic contexts to refer to the Sacred Scriptures of all Abrahamic religions.

In some cases, Muslims, as well as Christians, have met Gainutdin’s translation choices with harsh criticism. For instance, in his *Poslanie* (to be analysed in the next section), the Mufti translated *miʾrāj* – the Prophet’s Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and thence to heaven – as *vozneshenie* ‘ascension’:

“After obtaining a better insight into the essence of his [the Prophet Muhammad’s] *rozhdestvo* [‘birth’], we are called to remember and delve into the events of his life path (in Arabic ‘*khidhra*’), the culmination, the highest point of which was his ascension [*vozneshenie*] (in Arabic ‘*miradz*’) to the Lotus of the Utmost Boundary (*sidra al-muntakha*)”.¹⁸

Used in a religious context, the noun *vozneshenie* in Russian means “one of the twelve main Christian holidays, which commemorates the ascension of Christ to Heaven”.¹⁹ Similarly problematic is another word that appears in the same speech – *rozhdestvo*, which Gainutdin uses to translate *mawlid an-nabī*, meaning the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. The word *rozhdestvo* can have two different meanings: 1) one

¹⁶ See D. Thomas, “Gospel, Muslim conception of”, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. K. Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2018) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/573-3912_ei3_COM_27508> (Accessed on 19 June 2018). See also the discussion in Chapter 7.

¹⁷ In traditional Muslim belief, the Prophet Muhammad is the “last and greatest of the prophets”, which, as Frants Buhl et al. argue, is a concept that “is most likely based on a later interpretation of the expression ‘seal of the prophets’ (*khātam al-nabiyyin*)”, which is applied to Muhammad in Q 33:40. See F. Buhl et al., “Muhammad”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, 2018 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0780> (Accessed on 19 June 2018).

¹⁸ Gainutdin, “Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie”.

¹⁹ S.I. Ozhegov and N.I. Shvedova, *Tolkovyi Slovarʾ Russkogo Iazyka* (Moscow: TEMP, 2006).

of the Christian holidays, commemorating Jesus Christ's birth; 2) the birth of Christ.²⁰ To be able to use this word in an Islamic context, Gainutdin coined the phrase *rozhdestvo proroka Mukhammeda*, which in English would be something like 'Christmas of the Prophet Muhammad'.²¹ The Mufti himself is aware of the ambiguity of the term and explains his word choice in his speech. He argues that the word *rozhdestvo* used to be neutral in medieval Russian and simply meant 'to be born'. Therefore, Gainutdin continues, the new phrase with an Islamic meaning is "justified" (*zakonno*) in the Russian-speaking space and does not distort the Islamic nature (*sushchnost'*) of *mawlid al-nabi*.²² Not everyone found this argumentation entirely convincing, and the speech stirred up controversy in the mainstream media.²³

For terms like *prikhod* [4] 'parish', *prikhozhane* [1] 'congregation', *pastva* [2] 'flock', Gainutdin does not give an Arabic equivalent, implying that these pose no semantic challenges when used in an Islamic context. The concept of 'Muslim clergy', following the imperial and Soviet traditions, is rendered either as *islamskoe dukhovenstvo* [48] 'Islamic clergy', or *sviashchenosluzhiteli / sluzhiteli ku'ltu* [2] 'servants of the cult':

"Working with young people, with parishioners, requires a tribune; for clergy [*sviashchenosluzhiteli*], it is a minbar in mosques, the number of which is still catastrophically inadequate in Russia".²⁴

It is important to note that most of the DUM RF spokesmen, including Gainutdin himself, translate quotes from *sūras* and *āyās* without references to the already existing translations of the Qur'ān in Russian. Basically, these speakers use El'mir Kuliev's translation,²⁵ but do not refrain from also "looking for inspiration" in the Russian Qur'ān translation from 1878,²⁶ which was the work of the nineteenth-century Orthodox Christian scholar Gordii Sablukov (1803-1880).²⁷

²⁰ Ibid., p. 682.

²¹ Although the Russian word *rozhdestvo* does not contain the word 'Christ' in its root, its semantic links to Christianity are equally strong.

²² Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie".

²³ E.g., R. Silant'ev, "Pokhititeli rozhdestva", *NG Religii*, 4 February 2015 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2015-02-04/4_xmas.html> (Accessed on 5 February 2017). Also R.A. Mukhametov, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie Gainutdina. Propoved' dlia elity i obshchestva", *Ansar*, 23 January 2015 <<http://www.ansar.ru/analytics/rozhdestvenskoe-poslanie-gajnutdina-propoved-dlya-elity-i-obshhestva>> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

²⁴ Text # 22.

²⁵ E. Kuliev, *Koran. Perevod smyslov i kommentarii* (Moscow: Umma, 2003).

²⁶ From the author's interviews with DUM RF associates, who prefer to remain anonymous. These interviews were conducted in Russia and Sweden in October 2016.

²⁷ G. Sablukov, *Koran. Perevod s arabskogo G. Sablukova* (Kazan: Tsentral'naia tipografiia, 1907).

Within the DUM RF and the SMR, Gainutdin's strategies of translating Islamic vocabulary into Russian enjoy support of other prominent figures, who at various points in time have also spoken in favour of "purifying" Russian from Arabic and Persian loanwords. In the early 2000s, Viacheslav Ali Polosin (b. 1956), a former Orthodox Christian priest who converted to Islam, called for new, more "understandable" translations of the Qur'ān, arguing that esthetical features of the text and transparency of meaning should rank above literalness (see Chapter 5).²⁸ Gainutdin's outspoken and assertive deputy, Damir Mukhetdinov, has also been a keen promoter of the Mufti's approach to using vocabulary shared with the ROC, diligently warding off the critics who disagree with Gainutdin's translation strategies.²⁹

By giving priority to the linguistic Russification of Islam, however, Gainutdin faces difficulty reaching out to Muslims in Russia's ethnic republics and to regional Muslim spiritual directorates. The extensive use of Russian, among other factors, alienates those spiritual directorates (DUMs) where Russian is perceived as a threat to the local ethnic identity and vernacular. For instance, the Mufti of Tatarstan, Kamil' Samigullin, went against the Russification trend and determined that all mosques in the republic should conduct Friday sermons exclusively in Tatar, not in Russian.³⁰ Samigullin's main argument was that Russian has been actively used by adherents of Salafism and serves as a means to promote "non-traditional" forms of Islam in the region.³¹ Such tensions with regional Islamic authorities, especially the influential ones like that of Tatarstan, compromise Gainutdin's aspiration to become the undisputed leader of Russia's *umma*.

3.3.1 Meta-discourse: academic discussion on the translation of religious terms

The question of whether Islamic terminology can and should be translated into Russian has also been a subject of discussion in Russia's academic circles. As early as

²⁸ E.g., V.A. Polosin, *Priamoi Put' k Bogu* (Moscow: Lodomir, 2000); V.A. Polosin, *Pochemu ia stal musul'maninom. Priamoi put' k Bogu* (Moscow: Priamoi put', 2003).

²⁹ D. Mukhetdinov, "O rozhdstvenskome poslanii muftiia i 'detskikh bolezniakh' riadom s nami", *LiveJournal*, 12 March 2015 <<http://damir-hazrat.livejournal.com/133207.html>> (Accessed on 6 February 2017); D. Mukhetdinov, "Razmyshleniia posle Rozhdstvenskikh parlamentskikh vstrech", *LiveJournal*, 22 January 2015 <<http://damir-hazrat.livejournal.com/2015/01/22/>> (Accessed on 5 February 2017).

³⁰ L. Lukmanova, "Kamil' khazrat Samigullin: 'V Tatarstane piatnichnye propovedi dolzhny byt' tol'ko na tatarskom iazyke'", *Tatar-Inform*, 11 August 2016 <<http://www.tatar-inform.ru/news/2016/0-8/11/515950/>> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

³¹ Such binary oppositions, where Tatar is perceived as the language of "traditional" Islam and Russian as the language spoken only by supporters of "Wahhabi" Islam, are obviously simplified. On challenges of applying the "traditionalism" paradigm to the languages spoken in Tatarstan, see Bustanov, "The Language of Moderate Salafism".

2006, Stanislav M. Prozorov from the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg expressed his discontent with the custom of using Christian religious terms in an Islamic context, although without attacking the Islamic officials directly. Taufik Ibragim, a scholar of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, whose works the DUM RF actively promotes, countered Prozorov's points of criticism.

Prozorov argues that every religion should maintain its specificity. In countries where there is a dominant religion, like Orthodox Christianity in Russia, the "foreignness" of other denominations should be respected. The full translation of Arabic-Muslim terminology into Russian, in his opinion, is not correct from a theological point of view, because "symbols in each religion are not interchangeable". For instance, to replace 'Allāh' with an abstract 'Bog', for Prozorov "means to ignore the specificities of Islam as an ideological and theological system". The scholar emphasizes that he supports ecumenism, if the latter means seeing Abrahamic religions as equal to each other; but he does oppose their "unification", where peculiarities of one religion are dissolved into another, more powerful religious discourse.³²

His opponent in this discussion, Taufik Ibragim, believes that pluralism "will not work" among a single (*edinyi*) monotheistic tradition, and therefore should not be promoted. In his opinion, believers of all Abrahamic religions share the same understanding of the concept of God, and any differentiation, including a variation in terminology, would only distance believers from each other. Instead, he argues, the translations should emphasize that Jews, Muslims and Christians – who make up about half of mankind – believe in the same God; the prevalence of this idea would be an incentive for them to work together and to resist religious confrontation and the growth of atheism.³³

Translating Islamic concepts into Russian and using this language as the *lingua franca* for Muslims is an adequate practice, continues Ibragim, since the language is already "permeated (*proniknutyi*) by the monotheistic tradition" of Orthodox Christianity, and thus is suitable for meeting the linguistic needs of Muslims.³⁴

The cooperation of the DUM RF with Ibragim reflects the trend that the Islamic establishment in Russia increasingly feels the need to embrace academic expertise on

³² T. Ibragim and S. Prozorov, "Allakh ili Bog?", *Minaret* 1 (8), 2006 <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/history_culture/minaret/8/allahgod.htm?> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Islam. Ibragim's position on translation corresponds with the agenda of the DUM RF to promote Russian as the language of Islamic preaching, education and communication. Using words and images "familiar to the Russian culture", Gainutdin aspires to make the "Islamic message accessible to our contemporaries".³⁵ Against the background of a growing number of Muslims in Russia who prefer to use Russian as their language of communication, Gainutdin attempts to occupy the niche of the authoritative translator. The DUM RF has been trying to create a canon of Islamic religious texts in Russian, intended to represent the opinion of Russia's "traditional" *'ulamā*, Muslim religious scholars.³⁶ Among their recent publications is the Qur'ān in Russian,³⁷ based primarily on the English translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872-1953). Further, an Islamic encyclopedia and a *ḥadīth* collection in Russian have been part of their roadmap.³⁸ Gainutdin's deputy, Mukhetdinov, believes that the standardization of Russian terms in the Islamic discourse will put an end to Russia's Muslims being "taught [with the help of] little brochures in bad Russian, which [contain] controversial statements and radical appeals".³⁹

3.4 Textual structures

This section of the chapter analyses Gainutdin's *Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie* (2015). The *Poslanie* 'Message' consists of two parts: first, Gainutdin introduces the term *rozhdestvo*, legitimizes its use in the Islamic context (as discussed above), and explains the value of *mawlid an-nabī* celebrations for Muslims and adherents of Abrahamic religions in general; in the second part of his speech, Gainutdin comments on the attack carried out against editors and journalists of the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015.

The title of Gainutdin's speech – *Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie* – is a direct reference to Christmas messages traditionally delivered by the head of the ROC. In his yearly official Christmas message, the Patriarch addresses primarily the Church clergy and flock; during Orthodox Christmas celebrations, he also gives a speech at the Parliamentary

³⁵ Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie".

³⁶ D. Mukhetdinov, "Nuzhny klassicheskie i sovremennye tafsiry, sostavlennye nastoiashchimi alimami islama", *Minaret* 4 (14), 2007 <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/history_culture/minaret/14/muhetdin11.htm> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

³⁷ See DUM RF, *Soviashchennyi Koran. S kommentariami Abdully Iusufa Ali* (Moscow: Medina, 2015).

³⁸ The DUM RF started these projects in cooperation with the Turkish Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs) but after the relationship between the two institutions deteriorated, the projects were put on hold. See Islam News, "Sovet muftiev Rossii obvinil turetskoe upravlenie po delam religii v predatel'stve", *Islam News*, 29 September 2017 <<https://www.islamnews.ru/news-sovet-muftiev-rossii-obvinil-turecko/>> (Accessed on 12 July 2018).

³⁹ Mukhetdinov, "Nuzhny klassicheskie i sovremennye tafsiry".

Christmas Readings in the State Duma, where the Patriarch's direct audience is the political leadership of the country.

Gainutdin's text, in fact, combines both types of audiences (which also corresponds to the division of the speech into two parts) and is therefore oriented both inward and outward. On the one hand, the speech is inward-oriented because it addresses primarily the in-group of believers, religious leaders and communities, not only Muslim but also Christian and Jewish. The Mufti uses the occasion of the speech – the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, which in 2015 coincided with Orthodox Christian Christmas celebrations – as a pretext for fostering the interreligious dialogue in which Russia's major religious institutions are expected to be involved.

On the other hand, the text is also outward-oriented and reaches out to secular audiences. By delivering his version of a "Christmas message", Gainutdin claims to be the authoritative leader of Russia's Islamic community. Thus, the Mufti attempts to gain recognition and to secure special treatment, preferably of the kind that the ROC enjoys, for Islamic institutions under his leadership.

If we look at the structure of this speech, the Mufti starts his message with the traditional *basmala*,⁴⁰ fully translated into Russian, and ends with a prayer. Throughout the text, he uses references to religious authority, primarily to the Qur'ān, to support his arguments, which allows us to characterize it as a religious speech. Gainutdin's argumentation leaves little room for discussion and excludes those who do not share his religious beliefs and assumptions.⁴¹

From a perspective of rhetorical strategies, references to the Qur'ān introduce God as the author of the message, while the speaker (Gainutdin) becomes only the utterer. This distribution of roles helps to displace responsibility for what is said from the Mufti to an abstract figure of the Supreme Being.⁴² In the context of present-day Russia, actors who enter public debate with religious arguments and advance religious claims, enjoy the support of the conservative political establishment. For instance, the ROC leadership has been actively using religious arguments in public debate: supported by the state, the Church tends to act as a moral entrepreneur that promotes

⁴⁰ The word *basmala* refers to the Islamic formula commonly translated into English as 'in the name of God, the Clement, the Merciful'.

⁴¹ J.N. Blum, "Public Discourse and the Myth of Religious Speech," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 33:1 (2018), 1-16; A.F. March, "Rethinking Religious Reasons in Public Justification," *American Political Science Review* 107:3 (2013), 523-39.

⁴² W. Keane, "Religious Language, Religion and Marked Language Practices," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997), 47-71. Here p. 58.

conservative norms.⁴³ In his speech, Gainutdin also attempts to draw on the symbolic power of religion as an unhampered source of truth and moral norms. He uses religious argumentation to comment on the relationship between freedom of religion and freedom of expression within contemporary multicultural societies: in public and political discourses, these two fundamental human rights have increasingly been regarded as contradicting each other. In his speech, the Mufti follows the ROC discourse and introduces the image of the West being the common enemy of Russia's "traditional religions"; Gainutdin then juxtaposes Russia's "traditional values", guarded by its religions, and Western "fundamental", "universal" values.

3.4.1 Meta-discourse: the image of the pernicious West

In 2015, less than a month prior to Gainutdin's speech, the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* published a series of satirical cartoons on Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. This publication "brought back the spectre of the 'culture wars' that erupted in 2005-2006";⁴⁴ back then a Danish newspaper published twelve cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad, which triggered a global controversy and an intense editorial debate. On 7 January 2015, gunmen stormed *Charlie Hebdo's* office in Paris, killing several journalists and editors; following the assassination, numerous rallies around the world took place for the victims and to support freedom of expression. In Russia, by contrast, protests broke out *against* the practices of European media;⁴⁵ Gainutdin's SMR "angrily condemned" the attack, but placed some of the blame for the assault on the magazine's staff who, as Gainutdin put it, committed the "sin of provocation".⁴⁶

In the second part of his *Poslanie*, the Mufti brings this issue into discussion. This part is clearly more emotional than the first one and contains many interrogative and exclamatory sentences. Such an appeal to emotions helps Gainutdin to engage the audience and construct an in-group ("us") – out-group ("them") dichotomy. The in-

⁴³ Stöckl, "The Russian Orthodox Church as Moral Norm Entrepreneur".

⁴⁴ B. Bergareche, "A Look Back to the 2006 Danish Cartoons Crisis", *Medium*, 7 January 2015 <<https://medium.com/@borjabergareche/a-look-back-to-the-2006-danish-cartoons-crisis-34137f714713>> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

⁴⁵ In Chechnya, one of Russia's predominantly Muslim republics, thousands of Muslims joined the protests against the immorality of the French cartoonists, see A. Luhn, "Thousands of Chechens Rally Against Charlie Hebdo Cartoons as Firebrand Leader Attacks the West", *Vice News*, 19 January 2015 <<https://news.vice.com/article/thousands-of-chechens-rally-against-charlie-hebdo-cartoons-as-firebrand-leader-attacks-the-west>> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

⁴⁶ SMR, "Terrorizm ne imeet opravdaniia", *Sovet Muftiev Rossii*, 7 January 2015 <<http://www.muslim.ru/articles/280/8518/>> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

group, which overlaps with Gainutdin's target audience, includes "not only those who are born to Islamic families, [and] who have chosen the path of monotheism on their own, but [also] all honest people, the seekers of truth". The latter, for Gainutdin, are those "who are in Muslim culture called the 'people of the Book', i.e. the believers in the One God, the 'children of Abraham', the Jews and Christians of all denominations".

Thus, Gainutdin presents Russia's Orthodox Christians and Jews as belonging to the same in-group as Muslims; he argues that the anti-religious sentiments in the West also pose a serious threat to Russia's non-Muslim religious groups. Gainutdin further implies that the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad are (or at least should be) equally offensive to Christians and Jews; he supports his claim with the verse from the Qur'ān proclaiming that the Prophet Muhammad is a "mercy to all the worlds" (Q 21:107). Therefore, in Gainutdin's opinion, Russia's Abrahamic religions should join forces to protect the Prophet's image against mockery.

In constructing a negative image of the West, Gainutdin uses a type of argumentation similar to that of Patriarch Kirill, who delivered his speech at the Christmas Readings in the State Duma around the same time.⁴⁷ For instance, the "Western" values, according to Gainutdin, are mere "ultraliberal ravishment (*upoenie*) by liberty" and "the utmost egocentrism". Kirill, in his turn, called them "wrongly understood freedom" and contrasted them with what he perceives as Russia's "solidarity society".⁴⁸ For Gainutdin, the West is a place full of "grimaces of neo-atheism" and "non-adequate terror", where the most influential mass media support the mocking of religion; for the ROC Patriarch, Russia is challenged by a "dangerous post-Christian and post-religious world" and the West is an embodiment of "chaos and conflict", which is supported by "politically and ideologically biased mass media".⁴⁹ The anti-Western and isolationist rhetoric that Gainutdin fully embraces is deeply rooted in Russia's political culture. Rejection of the imagined "Western liberal ethos" is something that the present-day ROC shares with the Soviet ideologized moral code. As Agadjanian argues, in the ROC discourse "such paradigmatic conservatism had been celebrated as constitutive to the Russian civilisation's uninterrupted religious inheritance".⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Patriarch Kirill, "Vystuplenie Sviatishogo Patriarkha Kirilla na otkrytii III Rozhdestvenskikh Parlamentskikh vstrech", *The official website of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 2015 <<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3960558.html>> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Agadjanian, "Tradition, Morality and Community", p. 43.

3.4.2 The “traditionalism” discourse

In their response to the *Charlie Hebdo* events, both the Patriarch and the Mufti mobilize the “traditionalism” rhetoric. This rhetoric was first incorporated into the language of the Russian government, and when used by the state, it portrays Russia as the defender of “traditionality” against the country’s domestic and foreign enemies. Starting in 2002, attacks on “traditionality” were increasingly interpreted as “religious threats” and led to the introduction of the term “traditional religions” (Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism), as entitled to state protection and preference.⁵¹ In opposition to “traditionalism”, there are “radicalism” and “extremism”. These concepts are relative, but “generally presented as recognizable and concrete evils and threats to Russia”; they are either “inherently violent [or] they seek to change Russia’s moral character”.⁵²

By 2012, another concept, that of “traditional values”, had become widespread in the official discourse. Among official representatives of Christianity and Islam, there is a consensus that the concept of “traditional values” has a religious connotation, and these are in fact religious values. In Islamic and Christian discourses, the primary meaning of “traditional values” has revolved around principles associated with morality and family. Like the very institutions that guard them, “traditional values” are also believed to be under (Western) attack and in need of defence.⁵³

In his *Poslanie*, Gainutdin refers to the concept of “traditional values”, arguing that they are shared by Russia’s monotheistic religions and challenged by “pernicious” Western liberties. In the context of the cartoons scandal, the Mufti elaborates on freedom of speech. The French journalists, he argues, have committed the “sin of provocation”, condemned in the Qur’ān; they are those, who are mentioned in the Q 4:46, who “twist [the meaning of God’s revelation] abusively with their tongues to disparage religion”. Gainutdin thereby adopts a standpoint similar to that of the ROC as expressed in the document from 2008 on human rights.⁵⁴ The ROC recognizes freedom of speech as very important but assumes that it can be rejected if the spoken word instigates strife in society or spreads a sin. The ROC document places emphasis not on the *right* to exercise this freedom, but “on the *responsibility* of an individual for

⁵¹ Verkhovsky, “The State Against Violence in Spheres Related to Religion”, p. 13.

⁵² O. Olikier, “Introduction”, in *Religion and Violence in Russia* (Lanham, MD: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018), 1-7. Here p. 4.

⁵³ Du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy, “Violence and the Defense of ‘Traditional Values’ in the Russian Federation”, p. 101.

⁵⁴ ROC, “The Russian Orthodox Church’s Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights”.

his or her speech".⁵⁵ In Gainutdin's opinion, it is the task of religious communities and institutions to help those who "went astray (*ostupivshiisia*) and committed a crime", meaning the French journalists.⁵⁶ That is, Gainutdin criminalizes the publication of the cartoons in the French magazine. He implicitly refers to provisions of the anti-blasphemy law adopted in Russia in 2013⁵⁷ and claims that Muslims are also covered by the right to be protected against critical discourses by "secular and anti-Muslim thinkers" and "those who feel indignation (*negodovat'*) at the belief of Abraham's Children".⁵⁸

Gainutdin also argues that the anti-religious nature of the West is the result of ideas introduced during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. These ideas, according to Gainutdin, later received a considerable boost in German philosophy, in particular in the works of the "Frankfurt School" of critical philosophy.⁵⁹ The "Frankfurt School", in the Mufti's opinion, is responsible for the very concept of ultra-liberalism. This argument may come as a surprise in such a message; and since Gainutdin's deputy, Damir Mukhetdinov, previously expressed similar criticism in his programmatic paper on Russia's Islam (see the following section),⁶⁰ he may well be the co-author of this part of Gainutdin's speech. In Russia's religious context, a reference to the "Frankfurt School" is relatively safe, as many people are simply not familiar with this philosophical movement. As a rhetorical tool, the reference helps the Mufti to present himself as a reputable authority not only in theology, but also in secular sciences.

3.4.3 *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo (Russia's Islam)*

The critique on Western liberal values in the discourse by the DUM RF leadership should be seen as part of a more complex ideological construction. What we observe in speeches by Gainutdin and his deputy Mukhetdinov is an attempt to offer

⁵⁵ Original emphasis, A. Agadjanian, "Liberal Individual and Christian Culture: Russian Orthodox Teaching on Human Rights in Social Theory Perspective," *Religion, State & Society*, 38:2 (2010), 97-113. Here p. 101.

⁵⁶ Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie".

⁵⁷ The law illegalizes actions that can be regarded as a violation of the religious feelings of believers. It does not provide any definition of "religious feelings", which allows prosecutors to target any critical speech. Moreover, as Alexander Agadjanian rightly argues, the law, in its essence, does not aim to protect the individual against offensive expressions; but it does protect an Orthodox community's negative right not to be offended. See Agadjanian, "Tradition, Morality and Community", p. 48.

⁵⁸ Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie".

⁵⁹ The term "Frankfurt School" refers to a group of intellectuals who applied Marxism to a radical interdisciplinary social theory. The group was closely related in origin to the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research and included Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and Eric Fromm (1900-1980), among others.

⁶⁰ Mukhetdinov, *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo*.

an interpretation of Islam that would be approved and accepted by Russian society and the state.

In the last decade, the presidential administration has been sending out clear signals that such an interpretation is urgent. In particular, in 2013 during his meeting with leaders of Russia's Muslim Spiritual Directorates in Ufa, President Putin addressed the need to "socialize" (*sotsializatsiia*) the Muslim community. This "socialization", according to the President, should focus on modernization of Russia's *umma*, meaning that the Muslim way of life and value system should develop in accordance with contemporary social reality. Moreover, Putin encouraged the development of a "political Islam", that is, an interpretation of Islam that does not contradict Russia's political and legal systems but, to the contrary, helps to strengthen the state's agenda. In his speech, which was later referred to as the "Ufa Theses", the President stressed that Russia's Muslim leaders should also contribute to the social adaptation of Muslim migrants coming from Central Asia.⁶¹

Several scholars have emphasized the fact that in their interpretation of Russia's Islam, the DUM RF leadership draws primarily on (neo-)Eurasianism ideology, or rather on the vague understanding of this ideology in the state discourse.⁶² The (neo-)Eurasianism ideology in the interpretation of the DUM RF also falls back on ideas of anti-globalism, and the need to defend "traditional values" and to promote multiculturalism and moderate conservatism. Contrary to the state discourse, however, it places greater emphasis on the role of Islam in shaping Russian civilization.

For instance, in recent years Gainutdin has repeatedly stressed the "large-scale Eurasian culture" (*masshtabnaia evraziiskaia kul'tura*) to which Russia's Islam belongs.⁶³ The Mufti has also called for a positive reconsideration of the Golden Horde heritage and declared that Russia owes not only its statehood but also its greatness to the Golden Horde, and that the Tatars today embody the historical link to Muslims of the khanate.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Malashenko, "Islamic Challenges to Russia"

⁶² On the critique of DUM RF's instrumentalization of (neo-)Eurasianism ideology, see I.L. Alekseev, "Osmyslenie rossiiskogo musul'manstva – zadacha stol' zhe vozvyshennaia i pokhval'naia, skol' ambizioznaia i riskovannaya", in *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo: prizyv k osmysleniiu i kontekstualizatsii*, ed. D. Mukhetdinov (Moscow: Medina, 2016), 80-87; R. Bekkin, "Russkoe evraziistvo i islam," *Zvezda* 11 (2017), 135-48; Kemper, "Islamic Theology or Religious Political Technology?"; also Sibgatullina and Kemper, "The Imperial Paradox".

⁶³ I. Gashkov, "Sheikhi rossiiskogo konservatizma", *NG Religii*, 17 January 2014 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2014-12-17/1_gainutdin.html> (Accessed on 18 July 2018); also Sibgatullina and Kemper, "The Imperial Paradox".

⁶⁴ Sibgatullina and Kemper, "The Imperial Paradox".

Damir Mukhetdinov elaborated on the interpretation of Russia's Islam in his programme essay entitled *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo* (2016).⁶⁵ In many respects, this essay summarizes ideas that have already been prominent in the DUM RF discourse: Mukhetdinov argues that there is an original (*samobytnyi*) form of Islam practised in Russia, which is called *rossiiskii* Islam, literally 'Russia's Islam'; this includes the adjective *rossiiskii*, which is a broader and more neutral term than *ruskii* 'Russian'. This *rossiiskii* Islam was shaped by and has contributed to the Russian civilization in the past and continues to do so today.⁶⁶

Another cornerstone in the discourse of the DUM RF is the project of "Qur'ānic humanism", which was introduced and supported by Taufik Ibragim.⁶⁷ The DUM RF has successfully incorporated this project as a way to modernize Russia's *umma* by fostering the humanist character of Islam.

The DUM RF's promotion of "traditional" and *rossiiskii* Islam, as well as their emphasis on "traditional" Muslim communities, consequently excludes Muslims who do not match this definition. In particular, the problem concerns adherents of "non-traditional" Islamic movements, Muslim labour migrants and, as we will see in the next chapter, ethnic Russian converts to Islam.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the discourse in Russian of Mufti Gainutdin as a representative of Russia's official Islam. On the lexical level, Gainutdin employs the strategy of translating Islamic terminology into Russian using Orthodox Christian religious vocabulary. By avoiding "foreign" Arabic and Persian vocabulary, the Mufti attempts to "familiarize" Islam as a genuinely "traditional" religion, integral to Russian culture. The Mufti thereby assumes that Islamic and Orthodox Christian religious vocabulary can be used interchangeably in the Islamic context; he does not elaborate on theological implications of such translation practices.

⁶⁵ Mukhetdinov, *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo*. The title of the programme makes direct reference to an essay by the Crimean Tatar intellectual Ismail Gasprinskii (1851-1915): I. Gasprinskii, *Russkoe musul'manstvo: mysli, zametki i nabliudeniia musul'manina* (Simferopol': Spiro, 1881). In terms of content, these documents also echo each other: both advocate Muslim loyalty to the Russian state and, at the same time, criticize the state's failure to see Russia's Muslims as an asset and not a threat. For a more detailed overview of Mukhetdinov's essay and an analysis of resemblances to Gasprinskii's book, see Kemper, "Islamic Theology or Religious Political Technology?"

⁶⁶ Kemper, "Islamic Theology or Religious Political Technology?"

⁶⁷ T. Ibragim, *Koranicheskiĭ Gumanizm* (Moscow: Medina, 2015); see also M. Kemper and G. Sibgatullina, "Liberal Islamic Theology in Conservative Russia: Taufik Ibragim's 'Qurānic Humanism'", in *Islamic Authority in Eurasia*, ed. R. Sela (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, Forthcoming).

A textual analysis of Gainutdin's *Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie* has shown that the Mufti relies heavily on the discourse of the ROC leadership and adopts exclusive Orthodox genres as well as argumentation strategies and references to other dominant political discourses that are prominent in the speeches made by the Patriarch. By employing this strategy, Gainutdin aims to become recognized as an Islamic alternative to the head of the ROC and claims to be the single, most authoritative leader of Russia's Muslim community at the federal level.

It should be noted that the degree of resemblance to the ROC is historically inherent in the very institutions of Russia's official Islam. Today, against the background of the close Church-state relations and the threat of religion-inspired extremism, the Islamic authorities are left with even less room for manoeuvre. In tough competition with other Muftiates, Gainutdin adopts the ROC rhetoric to reach out not so much to broader audiences of Muslims, but rather to political elites, and to promote an interpretation of "traditional" Islam embedded in the mainstream patriotic discourses.

This transformation in Russia partially matches what Niels V. Vinding refers to as "churchification" of Islam in Europe. The term is understood, first of all, as a rhetorical tool, when Islamic institutions, authority and practices are compared to those of Christianity: e.g., mosques to churches, *imāms* to priests. In terms of normativization, the notion of "churchification" is also "associated with modelling of Islam on the Christian example or fitting it in the established framework for state and religion relations";⁶⁸ that is, the state tends to format Islam, as well as other religions, to meet the blueprint of a church and insists on assuming a similarity among different religions in the name of equality between believers. Adopting (or deliberately rejecting) the church model can also be a conscious political move on the part of Muslim organizations, continues Vinding. In particular, by building Christian-type structures, Muslims hope to gain recognition in the mainstream society.⁶⁹ I will also discuss further attempts to "churchify" Russia's Islam in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

The following Chapter 4 will zoom in on a community of ethnic Russian converts to Islam who use strategies similar to Mufti Gainutdin in order to "purify" Islamic discourse in Russian. However, their use of these linguistic tools enables the converts to address different audiences and put forward their own interpretation of Russia's Islam.

⁶⁸ N.V. Vinding, "Churchification of Islam in Europe", in *Exploring the Multitude of Muslims in Europe: Essays in Honour of Jørgen S. Nielsen*, ed. N.V. Vinding et al. (Brill, 2018), 50-66. Here p. 59.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*