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Islamic Networks in Russia: The Transformation of the Local Ummah in a Global Context[1]

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Abstract: This article presents the results of a study into Islamic networks since 2015. Islamic networks are increasingly active actors within the Russian ummah, assuming leadership from traditional Spiritual Administrations of Muslims. Transregional and transnational networks demonstrate significant efficiency, establishing parallel Islamic communities in different regions. Muslim networks are successfully solving important everyday tasks related to various aspects of Islamic life. The power of networking lies in the absence of one apparent leader, combined with high mobility and the ability to discuss and solve problems almost instantaneously. Messaging applications have a pivotal role in the activities of Muslim networks, ensuring their effective functioning. Muslim networks in Russia also facilitate a deeper integration of the country's ummah into the global Islamic community by forming transnational networks within the Salafi and Sufi paradigms. Muslim transregional networks occupy a prominent position within the country, effectively uniting its Islamic space and fostering internal cohesion.

Keywords: Islamic Networks, Russia, Georgia, Sufis, Salafis, Spiritual Administration of Muslims

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Introductory notes

It is challenging to envisage a human community devoid of networks – networks that are not digital, albeit the latter may first come to mind upon encountering the word. Humans are surrounded by networks rooted in kinship, acquaintanceship or friendship, each activated in response to a specific need. In family matters, individuals tend to rely on networks of relatives, whereas seeking assistance from friends activates networks of friendship. Networks of acquaintances are usually engaged when families and friends have failed at the task. Regardless of whether the issue is personal or communal, the ability to mobilise in response to a problem or task is a fundamental aspect of networking. Unlike formal organisations, associations, or parties, networks lack publicity. They can overlap with other networks, enhancing each other's capacities. For example, a network of individuals devoted to a shared ideology might choose to solve a collective task, such as the delivery of promotional leaflets, by involving personal networks of relatives, friends, or acquaintances who may not share the beliefs of the ideological network's members.

It is often emphasised in the literature that defining such networks is a daunting task, with this definition potentially encompassing several elements (Gradoselskaya 2004, 20). The networks discussed in this article can be characterised as social collectives grounded in interactions among individuals who, although not members of any formal organisation, feel united by shared causes and common objectives (network activism). The role of activism in religious and ethnic movements has been increasing over the past decade amid a pronounced trend towards their decentralisation in Russia.

The decentralisation of religious movements and the rise of network activism prompt researchers to revise their approaches to studying religious groups. Although it is undoubtedly important to examine institutionalised forms of organisation, solely focusing on them produces a skewed picture. Investigating organisations such as the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims or interviewing muftis and even local imams does not provide a comprehensive view of Muslim life in regions and mosques. Jamaats are becoming increasingly complex, with one mosque attended by Muslims of different beliefs, madhabs and movements. A mosque's formal jamaat may unite members of other networks and 'virtual' jamaats',[3] which are more cohesive and consolidated than the 'patchwork' community of

[3] The 'virtuality' of these jamaats lies in that their actual members may meet rarely, sometimes not being acquainted in person, as they live hundreds or even thousands of kilometres apart. They are united into a single jamaat by following one imam or sheikh, whose sermons resonate with them much more profoundly than those of the khatib at the mosque they attend on Fridays.

a brick-and-mortar place of worship.[4] Furthermore, the 'formal' leaders may have limited knowledge about the situation or be hesitant to share their insights with researchers. Networks 'override' organisational structures, including traditional communities, such as jamaats centred around mosques.

It seems propitious to investigate these networks, which concentrate a substantial part of Islamic activist efforts affecting the dynamics of increasingly complex urban and rural Muslim communities. The most effective methods to study network communities are those employed in ethnography – such as participant observation and interviews – and sociology: focus groups, surveys and expert interviews.

On the other side, ethnographic studies of Muslim networks have been extensively pursued since around the 2000s. A recent classic is the edited volume *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop* (2005), edited by Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence. This is one of the first books in the series of 29 (as of the time of writing this article) titled "Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks."[5] A considerable advantage of the volume is its scope covering a wide range of Muslim networks without the typical unwholesome concentration solely on radical ones. Salafi networks are scrutinised in only one article, authored by Quintan Wiktorowicz who provides an excellent description of the ideological and doctrinal tenets of the movement (Muslim Networks 2005, 208-234). Another book in the series directly pertaining to the subject of this article delves into the role of the Internet in Muslims' network activities (Bunt 2009).

Overall, the historiography of Muslim networks shows a bias towards examining them either in the context of radicalisation, radical and extremist movements, and CVE[6] (see, Gul 2010; Sageman 2008) or within the framework of Sufi networks (see, Yarosh 2019; Kutlutürk 2020). This may create a false impression that networking is the prerogative of radicals and extremists, on the one hand, and Sufis, on the other. Naturally, this is not the case, and this distorted picture results from the significant neglect of other Muslim network communities in the literature.

Although Muslim network communities in Russia have not been the focus of dedicated research so far, many authors in the country and beyond have looked at

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[4] The jamaats of mosques, particularly in larger cities, encompass people who follow different spiritual leaders. In this sense, one can refer to these communities as 'combined' or 'patchwork' jamaats.

[5] The other books in the series not mentioned in this contribution include: Carl W. Ernst (2003), Ebrahim Moosa (2005), Omid Safi (2006), Sufia M. Uddin (2006), Fatemeh Keshavarz (2007), Iftikhar Dadi (2010), Jonah Steinberg (2011), Karen G. Ruffle (2011), Scott Kugle (2007), Sa'diyya Shaikh (2012), Roxani Eleni Margariti (2007), Rudolph T. Ware III (2014), Sahar Amer (2014), Edward E. Curtis IV (2014), Ebrahim Moosa (2015), Kishwar Rizvi (2015), and Scott Kugle (2016).

[6] CVE stands for 'countering violent extremism'. This term, widely used in the English-language literature, originates from the US legal framework, which differentiates between punishable violent extremism and non-punishable non-violent extremism.

the network activism of local Muslims. This issue has been addressed by Sokolov (2019), Kapustina (2017), Demintseva (2020), Oparin (2020), Laruelle and Hohmann (2020), Smetanin (2022; 2023), and Yarlykapov (2020, and Yarlykapov and Adiev 2021). Circassian ethnic networks in Russia and Turkey are the focus of the book *Technologies of Ethno-national Mobilisation in Plural Societies: the Case of Circassians in Russia and Turkey* by Veronkia and Sergey Tsibenkos (2021). The volume is virtually the only work exploring the political aspect of Russia's networks of ethnic Muslims.

Sufi networks within the post-Soviet space are receiving increasing attention from scholars in erstwhile Soviet republics. The edited volume *Sufism after the USSR* appeared in Russia at the beginning of 2022. One of the two parts of the book examines transnational Sufi networks. However, almost none of the studies of ethnic or religious networks in the post-Soviet space pay attention to their political dimension – an aspect that consequently remains poorly studied. Research into networks viewed in a broader geographical context is not as scarce. For example, a noteworthy article by Russian researchers Mohammad Omar Nessar and Valentina Komleva was published at the beginning of 2022 (Nessar and Komleva 2022). They focus on the political dimension of ethnic, religious and other networks in Afghanistan.

Therefore, there is ample research into the network communities of radical Muslims and Susfis, particularly those beyond Russian borders. Yet, Russia's Muslim network communities outside of radical and Sufi groups have received little attention either domestically or internationally. This study is an attempt to fill this gap. The author of this contribution has been closely investigating Islamic networks since 2015. This work draws on his findings from Novy Urengoy, Tomsk, the North Caucasus (Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan), as well as cases from Chelyabinsk-Magnitogorsk-Gardabani (Georgia) and Dagestan-Kvareli (Georgia). In Georgia, field studies were conducted in the Gardabani and Kvareli municipalities in April and May 2018.

This study employs methodological principles typical of interdisciplinary research. These principles are grounded in philosophical tenets offering rational explanations for social, including religious, phenomena. The emphasis here is placed on a methodology for analysing empirical data from individual interviews, expert and sociological surveys, focus groups, participant observations and text analysis results. The above considerations do not imply understating the importance of the subjective factor. Methodologically, it is crucial for interdisciplinarity to ultimately translate into a systematic analysis of the object of research. The most important indication of the success of such an analysis is the description of the research object's aspects that cannot be elucidated otherwise – that is by employing any single methodology comprising the interdisciplinary approach.

One of the principal approaches underpinning this study is actor-network analysis. The concept of communication networks suggests that the central task for a researcher is to detect overt or covert networks of interactions between individuals and collectives held together by common ideals and interests (Latour 2005, 11–12). Significant attention is given to individuals who act as 'nodes' in a network, generating meanings and ideologies in close communication with other participants. Information is exchanged within these networks through both digital communication and offline contacts. In other words, the networks in question are not so much online phenomena as communities of individuals sharing common ideas and goals.

The primary method employed in studying ethnic and religious networks was field ethnography, particularly interviews with network activists and experts. The preferred techniques included semi-structured or unstructured in-depth interviews organised into thematic blocks and incorporating open-ended questions. It was essential to allow the interviewees to express their thoughts freely, even if they occasionally veered off-topic. In such instances, the conversation was guided back to the relevant discussion points. Participant observation, adapted for 'digital anthropology', was also important: the researcher joined groups on WhatsApp and other messaging applications and social media, where relevant discussions and a significant part of network activism were carried out. Sociological methods were also applied, such as focus groups with network community members.

Transregional and transnational networks

Transregional Islamic networks

Regional Islamic networks in their pure form are virtually non-existent. Although these networks primarily focus on local agendas and address regional issues, they are connected by numerous links to other regions, with these connections constantly growing and strengthening. This phenomenon is particularly evident in communities with a substantial proportion of migrants.

A prime example of transregional Islamic networks in Russia is those established by the followers of the late Dagestani Sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi (Chirkeisky), who now control the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan (SAMD). They belong to the Mahmudiyya branch of the Naqshbandi tariqa. This branch, named after the Transcaucasian Sheikh Mahmoud al-Almali (1810–1877), developed for a long time in neighbouring Shirvan, primarily among Sunnis originating from Dagestani peoples. In the second half of the 19th century, this branch penetrated Dagestan and gradually supplanted the Khalidi branch. In the early 20th century, the Naqshbandiyya merged in Dagestan with the Shadhili

tariqa under the guidance of Sheikh Saifulla-qadi Bashlarov (1853–1919). He integrated the Naqshbandiyya with Shadhili practices, with the latter viewed as a preliminary step before transitioning to the former (Shikhaliev 2007). Said Afandi al-Chirkawi (1937–2012) belonged to this branch.

The SAMD, established in 1990 on the ruins of the Soviet Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the North Caucasus, was, unlike the Soviet muftiate, pro-Sufi. In post-Soviet Dagestan, Sufi life has flourished, with as many as two dozen sheikhs representing four main Sufi groups (or *wirds*) (Shikhaliyev 2020, 217–218). The Naqshbandiyya-Mahmudiyya branch holds the foremost influence in the republic, boasting the largest number of followers. It is closely linked with the Shadhili order, once led by Said Afandi al-Chirkawi. In the second half of the 1990s, his adherents gained full control of the muftiate, bolstering their political influence in Dagestan. At the time, a campaign against 'Wahhabism' unfolded, taking a toll on Mufti Saidmuhammad Abubakarov, who was killed in a bombing on 21 August 1998 while entering the grounds of the Central Cathedral Mosque in Makhachkala. However, relations between the republic's Sufis and Salafis (the so-called 'Wahhabis') have seen rapprochements and periods of 'cold peace'. Particularly, in the spring of 2012, at the initiative of Said Afandi al-Chirkawi, representatives of the SAMD and moderate Salafis from Dagestan's Ahl as-Sunnah scholars association met to adopt an unprecedented resolution preventing clashes between Sufis and Salafis.[7] Despite the subsequent terrorist attack that resulted in the death of the sheikh, a 'cold peace' has since been maintained between Sufis and Salafis in the republic.

The political significance of Said Afandi al-Chirkawi's group increased as influential figures in the government and parliament of the republic became his followers. Those close to the sheikh included the powerful Minister of Internal Affairs of Dagestan, Adilgerey Magomedtagirov (assassinated by a sniper in 2009), and the Minister for Nationalities, Bekmurza Bekmurzaev (in office from 2010 to 2013). Some of the sheikh's allies were prominent businesspeople, including Abusupyan Kharkharov, Director of the Makhachkala Sea Port from 1998 to 2010. Thanks to such policies, in the 2010s, the Sufi network of Said Afandi al-Chirkawi became Dagestan's most authoritative religious force that consolidated both official structures, such as the SAMD, the Council of Ulama and many of the republic's Islamic universities and madrasas, and informal networks. Currently, Said Afandi al-Chirkawi's branch is represented by three sheikhs: Mufti of Dagestan Ahmad Hajji Abdulaev (born 1959), Abduljalil-Afandi from the village of Verkhny Karanay (born 1943) and Muhammad

[7] The resolution is available on the Caucasian Knot website at *https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/206244*.

Kurbanov, who died on 4 January 2022 at the age of 75 (for more details, see Alikberov and Shikhaliyev 2019).

As Dagestan's formal organisational structure, the SAMD vigorously extends its activities beyond the republic, leveraging the networks of Said Afandi al-Chirkawi's adherents, primarily the murids of Mufti of Dagestan. These efforts intensified in the 2010s when the view took hold in Russia that Sufism most aptly satisfies the criteria for constructing the image of 'traditional' Islam. Although there is still no consensus among the Islamic leadership in Russia on this matter and the outcomes of the conference Followers of the Sunnah: Who Are They? held in Grozny at the end of August 2016 – as expressed in the so-called Grozny fatwa – were contested by the Council of Muftis of Russia,[8] there is generally a favourable attitude towards Sufism. The expansion of the SAMD beyond the republic is a result of this shift in state policy regarding the country's Islamic movements.[9]

SAMD networks usually follow the in-migration routes of the peoples of Dagestan – primarily, but not exclusively the Avars. A leader of the Avar community in Tomsk said in an interview:

> "We had formed ourselves into an association, the Union of Dagestani Peoples, by 2010. We were holding various events, Mawlid celebrations[10]... In 2011, Dagestani ulama[11] came to Novosibirsk; my acquaintances contacted me and asked to arrange ulama's visit to Tomsk, given that they were nearby. We received them in Tomsk, and they gave a talk. We've been in close contact [with the SAMD] since then. We have organised ulama's lectures at five universities in Tomsk. They deliver sermons in the mosque on Fridays and lead prayer as imams."[12]

[8] For more details, see "Sovet muftiev Rossii dorabotal Groznenskuyu fetvu ob istinnykh musul'manakh" [The Council of Muftis of Russia revised the Grozny fatwa on true Muslims]. *RIA Novosti,* October 21, 2016, https://ria.ru/20161021/1479765081.html

[9] Both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union considered Sufism a hostile Islamic movement, the former being particularly concerned about the so-called Muridism.

[10] Mawlid is the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. It is usually held in the month of Rabi' al-awwal. In the North Caucasus, the celebration of Mawlid became widespread in the 1960s and 1970s, transforming into an almost year-round event: it is held not only during Rabi' al-awwal but also for other significant occasions, from conscripts' farewell parties to weddings.

[11] Ulama are Islamic scholars and theologians. Although this word has been borrowed into different languages in the plural form, the Dagestani use the plural form *alimy*.

[12] FD. An interview with A.A., a leader of the Union of Dagestani Peoples in Tomsk, Tomsk, 4 December 2019.

The Dagestanis tend to congregate in Tomsk at the so-called White Mosque, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Omsk muftiate (Smetanin 2022, 181). Although the Dagestani community has a prayer house in the city, where dhikrs are recited, it is the White Mosque that hosts sermons by Dagestani imams and offers Arabic language courses.

In September 2019, the 105th anniversary of the White Cathedral Mosque was celebrated in Tomsk. The festivities included an exhibition of the 'relics of the Prophet', most of which had been brought from Dagestan.[13] On 23 October 2020, the Union of the Peoples of Dagestan held a Mawlid celebration, which enjoyed overwhelming support from Dagestan. Nasheeds were performed by Muhammad Gazimagomedov, a vocalist of Dagestan's renowned ensemble Inshad. The event was attended by high-profile guests from the republic – Deputy Imam of Makhachkala's Jumu'ah Mosque Ramazan Hajji Kebedov and Assistant Mufti of Dagestan Muhammad Hajji Mukoshdibirov. Most of the Dagestanis present at the event were members of the Sufi network.[14] Such events undoubtedly strengthen SAMD communities by engaging individuals from across different geographical regions.

However, it would be a misapprehension to assume that Dagestani Sufi networks are maintained exclusively by the Avars. In the last decade, these networks have significantly evolved to include many representatives of other Dagestani peoples previously indifferent to Sufism. In particular, since the early 2000s, the SAMD has been actively integrating Nogais into its networks, Nogais being the only adherents of Hanafism in the republic, where Shafi'ism strongly predominates. The SAMD actively participated in the opening of the Abu Hanifa Madrasa in the village of Terekli-Mekteb in 2002. The establishment provides the basics of Sufi education, having encouraged a significant number of Islamic figures from Dagestan's Nogai district to become murids of Sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi (for more details, see Yarlykapov 2022, 148–152). Today, the Nogais are among the most active participants in Sufi networks in the Asian part of Russia. Notably, the current sheikh, Mufti of Dagestan Ahmad Hajji Abdulaev, proudly mentioned in the interview that in the village of Fedorovsky (Surgut district, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug), not one but four Nogai murids could recite the complicated prayer khatmu-salawat, which is an intricate form of worship.[15] Therefore, engaging members of different groups, including ethnic ones, provides ample opportunities for Dagestan's Sufi networks to expand to other regions in Russia's North, Siberia and the Far East.

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[13] FD. An interview with Fedor Smetanin, Tomsk, December 4, 2019.

[14] FD. Tomsk, October 23, 2020.

[15] FD. An interview with Ahmad Hajji Abdulaev, Makhachkala, Dagestan, August 20, 2021.

Transnational Islamic networks

Transnational networks are increasingly influencing Muslim communities worldwide by uniting people across national borders. These networks are shaped not only by migrations but also by involvement in Sufi or Salafi networks, as well as ethnic solidarity.

A vivid example of involvement in a transnational Islamic network is the small Avar village of Tivi, located near Kvareli in Georgia. Although Tivi has a government-appointed imam, the community's religious affairs are controlled by people from Dagestan, representing the Sufi networks of the Dagestani muftiate. Observations showed that even the Friday prayers in the village mosque are usually led by the Dagestani rather than the appointed imam. In Tivi, along with other Avar settlements in the Kvareli municipality, a Sufi community has emerged, adhering spiritually to Dagestsan's esteemed tariqa established by the late Said Afandi al-Chirkawi. This situation was made possible by the permeability of the borders, enabling Avars from the neighbouring Tlyaratinsky district to move freely between Tivi and their home area.[16] Said Afandi al-Chirkawi's followers have become active participants in the now transnational network connecting Sufi communities of the two neighbouring countries.

There is also a group in the village of approximately twenty young men who adhere to Salafi views and refrain from attending the mosque, opting instead to gather separately. Remarkably, the resultant division has led to differing ideas about the timing of rituals. For example, there is no agreement on the exact start time for fasting. The Sufi segment of the community believes in commencing and concluding fasting based on the calendar, while the Salafis advocate using the sighting of the new moon in Mecca as the guide.[17] Hence, this tiny village, comprising slightly over 300 inhabitants, has been impacted by two transnational networks, those of the Sufi and Salafi movements, which function autonomously from the directives of the formally appointed imam. Overall, Georgia's diverse and fragmented Muslim community finds itself in a dynamic state. As for the efforts of transnational Islamic networks, Sunnitisation in traditionally Shiite regions inhabited by Azeris merits special attention.

Over the past decade, the Shiite suburb of Tbilisi, Ponichala, has become 40% Sunni.[18] As local residents report, previously Shiite villages like Karatakla and Agtakla in the Gardabani municipality have become 50% Sunni.[19]

[16] FD. An interview with Sh., the imam of the village of Tivi, May 11, 2018.

[17] Ibidem.

[18] In terms of administrative division, the village falls under the Gardabani municipality within the Kvemo-Kartli region.

[19] FD. An interview with E.G. The village of Gochiani, the Gardabani municipality of the Kvemo-Kartli region, April 22, 2018.

Interestingly, the Sunnitisation of Azerbaijanis in Georgia has two sources – Azerbaijan and Russia. Russia-induced Sunnitisation occurs to a considerable extent within the country itself. For example, around two thousand of Agtakla and Karatakla's combined population of approximately seven thousand reside in Moscow and Petrozavodsk. Azerbaijanis in Russia, predominantly involved in automobile and clothes trade across major cities, such as Moscow, St Petersburg, Petrozavodsk, Chelyabinsk and Magnitogorsk, tend to fall under the influence of Chechen criminal groups acting as 'protectors'.[20] Chechens play a significant role in the rapid conversion of Shiite Azerbaijanis into Sunnis in Russian cities. Newly converted Sunnis, when returning to Georgia, maintain their ties with co-religionists in Russia, thus becoming part of a transnational network. Once back to their villages, recent Sunni converts enhance religious observance among local Shiites. Field research demonstrated that in villages with mixed Shiite-Sunni populations, more individuals from both groups attend mosques and participate in local Islamic life.

The above examples of transnational networks illustrate the extent to which Russia's Muslim networks are integrated into the post-Soviet Islamic community, potentially influencing developments in other Eurasian states. The following section examines the case of Novy Urengoy, a city with a substantial migrant population, to elucidate the role of networks in the self-organisation of Muslim communities.

Network activity: the case of Muslims in Novy Urengoy

Novy Urengoy, a recently founded subpolar city in the Tyumen region's Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YNAO), has experienced a surge in migration from the North Caucasus and Central Asia, primarily by Muslims, since the early 1990s. The Islamisation of the city corresponds with this wave of migration. According to the imam, Tatars and Bashkirs comprise approximately 7 to 10% of those attending the mosque on Fridays, despite constituting in total over 6.6% of the city's population as per the 2010 census (Goroda Rossii). Most of the Muslim community's activity is driven by individuals of Caucasian and Central Asian descent.

Tatars, however, maintain formal leadership in the Muslim community: the mufti of YNAO is Haidar-Hazrat Hafizov,[21] a Bashkortostani Tatar, while the khatib of the Central Mosque of Novy Urengoy is Tatar Ilgiz-Hazrat

[20] Ibidem.

[21] The office of the Mufti of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug is not located in the district capital, Salekhard, but in the Central Mosque of the city of Novy Urengoy.

Gilmanov, also from Bashkortostan. The largest ethnic Muslim communities in Novy Urengoy consist of Vainakhs (1,500-2,000 people officially, over 5,000 unofficially, predominantly Chechens, with the Ingush community numbering 200-500 people), Nogais (5,000-7,000), Dagestanis (approximately 5,000) and Central Asians (up to 10,000, mainly Kyrgyz, whose population in Novy Urengoy totals up to 7,500 people). Representatives of other ethnic groups are few in number, with Russian Muslims being a rarity.[22]

Today, the formal Muslim community of YNAO is represented exclusively by the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims (CSAM), headed by Supreme Mufti of Russia Sheikh-ul-Islam Talgat Tadzhuddin. This situation arose from the removal from YNAO of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Asian Russia (SAMAR), led by Nafigulla Ashirov. Yet, interviews and conversations with Muslims, their informal leaders and even with the mufti of YNAO indicate that Haidar Hafizov has failed to establish himself as the exclusive authoritative figure for the local Muslim community. Although Local Muslims interact with Hafizov in daily affairs as he is supported by the authorities and has access to the officials, the diverse Muslim community of the city has several other leaders holding indisputable authority among their followers.

A brief observation and a few interviews conducted within the study show that the community comprises the following groups:

a) 'traditional' Hanafis (Tatars, Bashkirs, Nogais, Central Asians) and Shafi'is (Dagestanis and Vainakhs), who form a rather heterogeneous group;

b) Sufis (Dagestanis and Vainakhs), a diverse group including followers of the SAMD, primarily adherents of the late Said Afandi al-Chirkawi, Chechen and Ingush Sufis of various branches (Ingushes alone are represented by six different Sufi *wirds*: Naqshbandis, Batal-Hajjis, Kunta-Hajjis, Audi-Hajjis, Bamat-Girey-Hajjis and Hussein-Hajjis);

c) various youth groups: 'Salafis' of different branches, among whom are followers of the movement sympathetic to sheikhs influenced by the late Qatari mufti Yusuf al-Qaradawi (the Sahwah movement), Madkhalis, those who do not adhere to any specific madhab and 'traditionalists' – adherents of the Hanafi or Shafi'i madhab who critique the established Hanafi and Shafi'i religious practices, especially as regards funerary and memorial rites, and

d) extremists primarily influenced by the Islamic State's propaganda.

[22] Ilgiz-Khazrat Gilmanov, the khatib of the mosque in Novy Urengoy, says that there are fewer than ten Russian Muslims in the city, and they are not organised into a separate community of Russian Muslims. Currently, there is no sizable group of Russian Muslims in Novy Urengoy, and the few Russian converts to Islam prefer not to stand out from other Muslims.

All these groups are led informally by individuals whose religious opinions carry more weight than those of the YNAO mufti and the official imam of the Novy Urengoy mosque. This circumstance is especially evident among the Salafis. Therefore, the mufti and the imam must navigate a path, taking into account, to varying degrees, the opinions of the large and influential Salafi community.

According to interviews with young Muslims, the majority have experienced re-Islamisation upon migrating to the subpolar region. While residing in the North Caucasus or Central Asia, they identified as Muslims, yet frequently held rudimentary understandings of Islam and generally did not fulfil fundamental Muslim duties. Their engagement with Islam, as they recount, was confined to participating in funeral and memorial rituals, where older men guided the process. Upon coming to the North, young people become interested in Islam: they start praying, fasting, contributing zakat and embracing other practices. They believe that it is the North where they have *accepted* Islam and *become* Muslims.

These young people seem to feel little connection to the form of Islam they encounter in their homeland, where very few were educated by elders beyond the performance of rituals. This situation can be described as one of 'mutual alienation': young Muslims returning to their homeland on holiday are seen as bearers of a 'different' Islam, strangers in their own community, while they feel disconnected from the local tradition, no longer seeing it as their own. In other words, re-Islamisation increases the diversity of the Muslim community and strengthens the authority of informal leaders of various groups.

The way Muslims in Novy Urengoy are effectively addressing issues related to the procurement of halal products, primarily those permissible for Muslims to consume, is noteworthy. The issue of halal meat delivery became acute in the city in the 1990s as the number of local Muslims increased dramatically. Commercial enterprises refrained from handling halal goods, prompting Muslims to address halal delivery privately, albeit at considerable expense. The situation was altered by the establishment of a motorway link with Surgut, facilitating uninterrupted delivery of halal meat from the North Caucasus. A representative of the Nogai community in Novy Urengoy said in an interview:

> "There was a problem with [halal] food until the 2000s when there was no motorway, no direct link to home. The road only opened in the early 2000s. Once this happened, they started bringing food from the Caucasus, and the halal issue was solved by default: Nogais now get meat directly from

> the land [Dagestan]. Many ship in halal sausage; the supply is uninterrupted. There are companies selling halal products. Several outlets that deal specifically with meat: A.T. has a refrigerator with halal meat and poultry. The Terekli meat processing plant[23] also supplies products. They deliver large batches, but some bring in small quantities in refrigerated GAZelle vans, selling the stock within 3–5 days. They also carry parcels handed over by relatives. Within a month, 15–20 vans come. Shipment ads on websites and in special Telegram and WhatsApp groups have the drivers' numbers."[24]

Private entrepreneurs, who bring meat for sale in refrigerated vans, park near the mosque to sell provisions directly from the vehicle. Other products from the Caucasus, such as jams, homemade cheese, urbech and wild garlic, are also available in this format. Live sheep are transported to Novy Urengoy by car from the North Caucasus for sacrifice on Kurban Bayram (Eid al-Adha) at a designated place outside the city. Retail chains in Novy Urengoy do not purchase halal meat and sausage; instead, Muslim networks secure the availability of permitted food.

A network of halal cafes has also appeared in the city. The largest and most well-known chain of such establishments is Karavan. These cafes, found in several of the city's districts, primarily offer Central Asian cuisine, their popularity extending far beyond the Muslim community. Several cafes in Novy Urengoy specialise in Caucasian cuisine, including Amina – located in the courtyard of the Central Mosque, the establishment serves a mix of Caucasian and Central Asian dishes. Many halal locations in the city provide not only food but also places to pray. For instance, the Vainakh cafe has a prayer room.

Muslim businesspeople also engage in food delivery: there is a sushi delivery service, and customers can order takeaway from Svetlana's Ossetian Pies. In other words, with minimal assistance from the muftiate, the city's Islamic networks have succeeded in establishing the infrastructure for Muslim life. However, where intervention from a formal organisation, i.e. the muftiate, is needed, problems remain unresolved for extended periods. Securing halal food at workplaces remains a problem for the city's practising Muslims. While such issues are absent in Novy Urengoy, the companies typically do not provide halal meals at the oil fields. Muslims working in the oil industry solve these issues privately: instead of eating the food provided by the employer, they cook fish or eggs. Although the believers are convinced that the muftiate could approach the

[23] A meat processing plant located in the village of Terekli-Mekteb in the Nogai district of Dagestan.
[24] FD. Interview with I.A., Novy Urengoy, March 6, 2018.

companies to ensure the halal food supply, this does not happen.

There are other forms of Muslim self-organisation leveraging the opportunities provided by widespread internet access and electronic devices. Various groups are set up, typically on WhatsApp, to swiftly update fellow believers about the delivery of halal products, prayer schedules, and other occasions. Thanks to these groups, Muslims can instantly get in contact and provide assistance to co-religionists facing hardship in severe polar conditions. Young Muslims in Novy Urengoy have created an educational mobile application called Namazvdom, which works on iOS and Android. This software assists in learning how to perform prayer, which is extremely important for the re-Islamising young individuals.

Although fragmented, the Muslim community of YNAO, especially in Novy Urengoy, represents a competitive landscape. The Sufi network of the SAMD shows significant interest in the region. The administration has even appointed an unofficial representative to YNAO, who is particularly active among the local Dagestani community. The Dagestani Muftiate sends a delegation to YNAO every year during Rabi ul-Awwal, the month of Prophet Muhammad's birth, to conduct Mawlid rituals marking the beginning of the month. Additionally, during these days, representatives from the Dagestani muftiate attempt to appoint leaders for collective prayers at the Cathedral Mosque of Novy Urengoy. Moreover, the Dagestanis recite Sufi dhikr in the basement of the mosque. Another way of spreading the influence of Dagestani Sufis is the distribution of the newspaper *As-salam* – a periodical from Makhachkala, it is promoted as an all-Russian spiritual and educational newspaper.

Conclusion

Islamic networks are emerging as increasingly active actors within the Russian ummah, assuming leadership from traditional Spiritual Administrations of Muslims and other Muslim organisations. Transregional and transnational networks demonstrate significant efficiency, establishing parallel Islamic communities in different regions, notably exemplified by the case of Novy Urengoy. Muslim networks are successfully solving important everyday tasks related to various aspects of Islamic life, from teaching worship rituals to organising halal meals. Field ethnographic research shows the growing role of networks in this respect.

The power of networking lies in the absence of one apparent leader, combined with high mobility and the ability to discuss and solve problems almost instantaneously. Messaging applications have a pivotal role in the activities of

Muslim networks, ensuring their effective functioning.

Muslim networks in Russia also facilitate a deeper integration of the country's ummah into the global Islamic community by forming transnational networks within the Salafi and Sufi paradigms. Muslim transregional networks occupy a prominent position within the country, effectively uniting its Islamic space and fostering internal cohesion. As a result, many Islamic entities, including the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan, extensively utilise networks to broaden their sphere of influence.

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Исламске мреже у Русији: трансформација локалне уме у глобалном контексту

Сажетак: Овај чланак представља резултате истраживања исламских мрежа од 2015. године. Исламске мреже су веома активне међу руском умом, позивајући се на лидерство традиционалне Духовне администрације муслимана. Трансрегионалне и транснационалне мреже показују високу ефикасност у успостављању паралелних исламских заједница у различитим регионима. Оне успешно решавају свакодневне задатке који се тичу различитих аспеката живота муслимана. Моћ ових мрежа лежи у недостатку јасног лидера, заједно са високом мобилношћу и могућности да решавају проблеме. Апликације за комуникацију имају кључну улогу у муслиманским мрежама, омогућавајући им ефективно функционисање. Муслиманске мреже у Русији такође утичу на јачу интеграцију уме у глобалну муслиманску заједницу стварајући транснационалне мреже између салафистичких и суфијских парадигми. Ове мреже заузимају битно место у земљи јер ефективно уједињују исламски простор и јачају унутрашњу кохезију заједнице.
Кључне речи: исламске мреже, Русија, Грузија, суфије, салафисти, Духовна администрација муслимана