

Levels of Identity? The Project to Establish a State-Nation in Multiethnic Daghestan during the Revolution of 1917

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Introduction

The February Revolution, the abdication of the Tsar Nicholas II from the throne and the collapse of the old order in the Russian Empire in 1917 set in motion a period of intense transformation in the political horizons of Dagestani scholars of Islam (*'ulamā'*). The Arabic-language newspaper *Ġarīda Dāġistān*¹ published the Declaration of the members of the Provisional Government of Dagestan, which stated:

Oh, Dagestani brothers in faith! Be aware that the workers, soldiers and other inhabitants of the country have risen because of their love for their homeland (*al-waṭan*) and their great desire to set up brotherhood (*'uḥūwa*) among people and to equate (*taswīya*) all nations living in Great Russia, despite their national differences (I'lān al-ġam'īya al-dāġstānīya al-mūwaqqata sāhib al-'amr wal-ḥukm 1917).

At first glance, this letter aims to rouse patriotic feelings, positive attitudes among Dagestani people to the Russian state and a hope for the future national equality. The end of despotism and the proclamation of freedom and equality served people and homeland, “Great Russia”, which of course clearly resembles the rhetoric of Revolution in the Russian capital (Figes and Kolonitskiy 1999). However, this letter was published precisely by those people who had their own ideas of what Dagestan’s future should look like, together with “Great Russia” or separately.

A revolutionary situation at the Russian centre activated local discussions on the future of Dagestan. There was a consensus around the necessity of a new order, the model of which became a hot topic of debate. By analyzing the texts from the First All-Russian Muslim Congress that took place in Moscow (May 1917), Elizabeth Bospflug demonstrates that there were two distinct camps of Russian Muslims, so-called “Federalists” and “Unitarists”, with different ideological views and political goals.

The Federalists desired autonomous ethnic republics within a federative Russia while the Unitarists preferred to be the citizens of a “Muslim nation” within a unitary Russian state (Bospflug 2017, 132, 159-161). Nevertheless, the author discusses the case of the First All-Russian Muslim Congress only where the participants did not raise the question of separate independent state. My analysis of texts of the Dagestani ‘*ulamā*’ demonstrates the local dynamics and the different agendas of various actors at the fringes of Russia. These actors did not share the desire of the participants of Moscow Congress to stay with Russia. For them a separate state was not just possible but also desirable. I argue that there were several models envisaged by Dagestani intellectuals: a) a semi-secular state-nation; b) an Islamic state ruled by *imām*, a Muslim theocratic leader; and c) a subject of Russia. In this paper I try to demonstrate a direct link between the choice of political project and the dominant markers of identity based on preferred language of instruction.

The Caucasus presents a linguistic diversity matched by few other areas in the world of comparable size. This ‘mountain of tongues’ (*ğabal al-alsun*), as the tenth-century geographer al-Mas‘ūdī (896–956) referred to the Caucasus denoting a multitude of languages of the region, harbours approximately fifty languages belonging to different language families (Catford, 1977, pp. 283-284). In this Caucasian polyglossia, Dagestan is in itself a mosaic of more than three dozen of indigenous languages spoken by Dagestani ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Avars, the Kumyks, the Dargins, and the Lezgins. Arabic as a language of Dagestani elite and religion dominated over the national tongues in the local written tradition. The mass printing in vernaculars was launched only by the end of the nineteenth century (Kemper 2010, 63).

At the turn of the century language became a key national and religious marker in Dagestan, while the promotion of vernaculars served as a powerful platform for state-building. As Frederick Hertz notes (1944, 78), “all nations regard it [language] as a symbol of their independence and honour, as the supreme expression of their personality, and they esteem its exclusive domination within their national territory more highly than obvious spiritual and material advantages”. The imperial administration understood very well the political weight of languages (Clarke, Dear and Clark 1984), which is why the Russian state sought to consolidate its power also by linguistic means. Competing state models had their visions on which language must be dominant.

Conventional historiography presents the language discussions as a struggle between Muslim reformists (so-called “*ğadīds*”) and traditionalists (the “*qadīms*”), the former supporting vernaculars and the latter advocating Arabic. This dichotomy deals exclusively with an explanation of dynamics through the positive or negative evaluation of reformist or traditionalist paradigms. It understands the reformist

programme from the positive lens of modernity, labeling its advocates as “pioneers” of a new educational system that prioritized the native languages over Arabic. Consequently, this narrative often portrays the traditionalists as reactionary and unaware of contemporary trends. Thus, *madrassa* (Muslim schools), a widespread educational institution in Dagestan of the time, with Arabic language of instruction, were described as backward (Mirzoev and Donogo 2015). As has been recently shown by our colleagues, this dichotomy as a self-explanatory paradigm does not fully reflect the complexities of individual choices and changing political preferences (Kemper and Shikhaliev 2015; cf.: DeWeese 2016, 37-92).

To make sense of the linguistic discussion unfolding on the pages of historical narratives in revolutionary Dagestan, I suggest moving away from the immediate terminology of our sources. In particular, I am interested in the ways that a political agenda defined language choice and the rhetoric employed by participants in this debate. Further, what were the linkages between discussions of language politics and state-building in revolutionary Dagestan?

During my research in Dagestan, I had an opportunity to consult some of the works of Dagestani ‘*ulamā*’, witnesses of the Russian Revolution. In this article, I analyze several of these texts by the authors who actively engaged in the language debates.

In this paper mainly turns to the discursive practices of Dagestani scholars, who supported the bilingual educational system, i.e. vernaculars and Turkic² or Arabic. The ongoing vernacularization strengthened the national identity and the demand for an independent state, and the use of Turkic or Arabic as a lingua franca playing a unifying social role. However, the case of Turkic was equivocal since some Muslim scholars were clearly afraid of Turkification (*tatrīk*) advancing the interests of the neighboring Ottoman Empire. Next to the vernacular languages as a base for the Daghestani state-nation project, in the last two sections of this paper I also set out the background for the renewed meaning of Arabic as the language of Islamic state in Dagestan. Here I identify the role of Arabic in the creation of Islamic identity and the building of an Imamate.³ In the last part of the article I study the role of the Russian language. I demonstrate that the negative experience of the late imperial epoch prevented the Russian language from gaining broad support.

Vernacular languages on the roads to a state-nation

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a period of rapid rise in importance of national languages. Here I analyze the sources written by the supporters of vernacular and Turkic languages without separation, since the Turkic was not only the dominant language outside Dagestan (in the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim regions of Russia), but also Kumyk was one of the indigenous

languages of Dagestan. In other words, supporters of Turkic could either be in favour of Turkification as part of the Ottoman influence or call for nationalization and support of native languages.

The point of view of vernacularists was mainly manifested in the periodicals. In his article called *al-Ta'līm bi-l-'arabīya am bi-l-turkīya* (“Education in Arabic or Turkic?”) Kūrdī Zākū Zādeh claimed that education in primary schools should be conducted in the native languages and in Turkic in the high schools. To justify his point of view, Kūrdī Zākū Zādeh explained the significance of the Turkic language for Dagestan. He listed five arguments in its support: 1) the Turkic language was the most widespread in Dagestan and many people knew it; 2) this language was easy to study (some Arab scholars even called it the easiest language in the world); 3) Dagestanis were surrounded by the Turkic nations with whom the Dagestani people maintained strong ties; 4) Turkic was dominant among the Muslims of Inner Russia; 5) Turkic was an official language of the only Islamic State, i.e. the Ottoman Empire (Zākū Zādeh 1917, 4).

These notions are remarkable, because they stress the inter-regional communication of Dagestani Muslims⁴ and their loyalty to the Ottoman state headed by the caliph. Kūrdī Zākū Zādeh also feared that if “the Dagestanis stopped studying the Turkic language, the Russian language would spread in their schools, Russian customs would become dominant in Dagestan, Dagestanis would forget the Muslim culture and manners and eventually become Russians” (Zākū Zādeh 1917). Obviously, Kūrdī Zākū Zādeh regarded the Turkic language not as a local tongue, but as the official language of the Ottoman state, the symbol of Islam.

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

... thank God, for almost three to four months now, freedom of religion has been given to all people of Russia. Now we can define for ourselves what we will read or write, we can use the language we desire. If we make a wrong choice, consequences can be very bad. It is clear, however, that we will not choose the Russian language. The Russian language, although it is very rich and there are plenty of books published in it, is not "ours", neither in a religious sense, nor in terms of the alphabet (al-Ġazānīšī 2012).

For Abū Sufyān this was a way to say that Dagestan is not part of Russia, and that Dagestanis have a right to define their future. Prominently, al-Ġazānišī delineates Russian and the languages of Islam, i.e. culturally associated with Islamic tradition. Next to Arabic, also Dagestani vernaculars and among them Turkic were counted as the languages of Islam. It remains an open question where did al-Ġazānišī pick up this notion of Islamic languages, but it seems that the concept goes back to an early Orientalist vision of languages that carry out the values of Muslim culture (Bevilacqua 2018). Still, some hesitation remained there on the language choice. This is what al-Ġazānišī says on the Arabic and Turkic:

Our native tongue is Turkic, while the language of religion is Arabic. We have to choose between them: Turkic or Arabic? If Turkic, we have to decide, is that the language we speak here or the one that is spoken in Istanbul? Or shall we turn to Azerbaijani or Kazan Turkic? (al-Ġazānišī 2012)

Here it is noteworthy that Kumyk was native to Abū Sufyān. That is why his article deals with the Kumyk language. He suggested the Avars and other ethnic groups to make their own choice. This shows that for Abū Sufyān Turkic was a part of vernacularization process, not Turkification. Hence, after raising the question of Turkic dialects, Abū Sufyān stated that “among the dialects of Turkic language Kumyk is the clearest; other dialects – Kazan, Azerbaijani and even Istanbul Turkic – had many loanwords from Persian, Arabic and Russian” (al-Ġazānišī 2012).

After his arguments about the importance of vernaculars, Abū Sufyān turns to Arabic:

...if there are no masters of Arabic language, we will have no chance to save our religion from spoiling. The sources of our religion – the Qur'an and the Sunna – are all in Arabic. When one says "Let us study in Turkic and in Kumyk," someone else fears that we will lose Arabic. But these are empty fears. We must understand that when we say "Let us study in Kumyk," it means that we learn at least something in Kumyk and do not depend entirely on Arabic. It does not mean that we deny or reject Arabic altogether (al-Ġazānišī 2012).

Abū Sufyān al-Ġazānišī suggests using the bilingual system of instruction: in Kumyk (for the Kumyks and other vernaculars for the nations of Dagestan) and Arabic. What makes Abū Sufyān different from other supporters of Arabic is that he reserves for Arabic only a religious function. This means that he distinguished between the secular state and religion:

Those who graduate from elementary school and want to become engineers will be able to enter university, where an advanced course of secular subjects is taught in Kumyk ... And those who after completing the course of religious subjects want to get diplomas of a *qāḍī* (judge of the Shari‘a court), *mu‘allim* (teacher) or *mufīṭ* is free to enter a madrasa and to continue education there. In the madrasa all religious subjects are to be mastered in Arabic... (al-Ġazāniṣī 2012)

It is not that hard to find the roots of the idea of a bilingual educational system in Dagestan. It had been practiced in the Ottoman Empire and since the Ottomans served as example for Dagestanis, they tried to deal with language questions in a similar way. The Ottoman state allowed the multilingual education not only among non-Turkic population but also among the Turks. Education of Muslims “in foreign languages was in the effect of religion” (Dolgunsoz 2014, 102). In the Ottoman Empire two educational institutions applied multilingual education: *madrasa* and *enderun*. Beside Ottoman Turkish “in Madrasahs, Arabic was taught as a second language... Enderuns included more multilingualism as they both taught Arabic and Persian” (Dolgunsoz 2014, 102). Both institutions dealt with Arabic as the language of Islam with religious functions only. Obviously, al-Ġazāniṣī sought to insert this practice in Dagestan as well and thus to have a secular state with national languages and Arabic with religious functions only.

While Turkic was native to al-Ġazāniṣī, another prominent historian of Dagestan ‘Alī al-Ġumūqī (Kaiayev, 1878-1943), perceived the promotion of Turkic as Turkification. In his article called *Siyasātāni muḥtalifatāni* (Two Different Policies) ‘Alī al-Ġumūqī discusses the importance of vernacularization and the dangers of Turkic and Russian languages:

Before the Russian Revolution, there were two policies in our region. One aimed at integration of Dagestan in Russian culture, while another promoted the Turkic culture.

The autocratic Russian government opened the primary schools (*al-makātib al-mubtada‘iya*) in every village and the secondary schools (*al-makātib al-mutawasiṭa*) in large Dagestani villages. Those who graduated from these schools occupied high positions in the government and naturally propagated the Russian culture. Gradually they broke away from their native culture and became attached to Russian culture. ...The Russian administration called the Dagestanis to enter these schools to get rid of that dark hypocrisy (*al-naḥaqa al-ẓalīma*). Many mountaineers responded to these calls, trusting them sincerely.... Under this mellifluous call, they did not notice the deadly venom, which deprives a man of his national and religious foundations.

Supporters of another policy are mainly from the South Caucasus, for example from Baku. They sought to Turkify the Dagestani people (*tatrīk 'ahl Dağistān*). Nevertheless, before the Revolution, they were unable to do that. After the Revolution, which provided the freedom to choose a language and culture, they have started to conduct their propaganda in the Caucasus. ... They believe that Turkish is the most appropriate language of communication in Dagestan, since it is widely spread in the Caucasus as the language of scholarship and periodicals. Arabic is a difficult language that has an application only in the sphere of religion. As for Russian, this is a language of unbelievers (*kufār*). The languages of Dagestan, because of their number, cannot serve for interethnic communication and education.

Some believed these words... They did not notice that they kill the Dagestani languages, Turkify the people, turn Dagestanis into disciples of Genghis Khan and Hulagu Khan, who during their reign destroyed the Muslim culture ... (al-Ġumūqī 1917)

The first paragraph of his article is similar to al-Ġazānišī's work. 'Alī al-Ġumūqī also sees the Russian language as the language of Tsar and the "Trojan horse" sent by the Russian state. His article was full of the most malignant insinuations about the danger hidden in the spread of Turkic. For him both policies – Russian and Turkish – had the same goals and impact, i.e. they sought to deprive Dagestanis of their national identity and to enforce assimilation. 'Alī al-Ġumūqī sees the Ottomans not as the protectors of Islam and keepers of caliphate, but as "disciples of Genghis Khan and Hulagu Khan," i.e. the enemies of Islam. The author highlights that Turkic is not of great demand among Dagestanis, since they had been Muslims even before the Turks converted to Islam. Here we see that the position of al-Ġumūqī in the caliphate debate⁵, i.e. his denial of the Ottomans' primacy in the Muslim world, resulting in strong support for the local Dagestani tongues:

Many people say: "When will we stop speaking different languages? There is no benefit. It is better to have a shared language (*luġa 'āma muštarika baina-l-jamī'*), for example, the Turkish language, which is the language of our Muslim neighbors, the language of science and enlightenment (*luġa ġirāninā al-muslimīn wa-l-'ulūm wa-l-ma'ārif*) ..."

By answering these questions, we must say that the benefits of national languages are the same as the benefits of our independence and our culture. If we reject our language and take a foreign one, we will lose our nationality, we will cease to be the children of our fathers, we will turn into Turks.... Our

affairs will be in the hands of Turks, we will have to follow Turkey and repeat what the Turks say. This will be so since the world order is such: small nations follow bigger ones. If we keep our language, then we will be able to defend our independence, to act on our own.

Some believe that if our language of communication becomes Turkic, we will not lose anything, we will not cease to be Dagestanis. We answer them that the supporters of Russian culture also claimed the same in the era of Tsarism. They state that the Turks only care about the prosperity and enlightenment of Dagestanis. We reply that Russians used the same technique in Dagestan during the Tsarist reign.

...Not to lose ourselves, we need to teach our children in the native languages, so that they know who they are, who “ours” and “others” are. After that, you can practice any of these languages without a fear for their future. In my opinion, out of these three options Arabic looks as the most suitable for the study of Arab scholarship and religion, while other subjects can be studied in other languages. We also need Russian. After all, the Turks are not limited to teaching in their native language, since there is not much academic literature in Turkish. At elementary school, they teach all subjects in a native language, in the spirit of Turkish identity and culture. After that school they teach foreign languages to their children (al-Ġumūqī 1917).

What is al-Ġumūqī's stand? First, as did other supporters of vernaculars, he promotes a unique Dagestani identity. Like al-Ġazānišī, he also highlights the difference between Dagestani nations on the one hand and Russians and Turks on the other. Hence, al-Ġumūqī puts equality between Turkic and Russian considering both as the languages of “others”, consequently, separating Dagestan both from the Russian and Turkic worlds. Turkification was seen as a new wave of Imperial policy but now from the side of the Ottomans.

Given the fears of Turkification, the vernacularists made a clear distinction between Ottoman Turkish and Kumyk which was more acceptable rather than the Ottoman Turkish. Kumyk was functioning as a native language for one of the Dagestani indigenous ethnic groups and, moreover, this dialect of Turkic was a spoken lingua franca across the northern Caucasus. Kumyk was in common use as a literary language in the lowlands, among Chechens, Avars, Dargins, and Nogais (Gould 2016, 13). Supporters of this claim considered Arabic only as the language of religion. In the end, promotion of vernaculars pursued a goal of political independence that could only be achieved through the independent and nationalized system of education.

The Projects of Imamate and a Subject of Russia

As I have already mentioned, besides vernacularists' state-nation project there were two other projects as well – Islamic Imamate with the dominant religious marker of identity based on the Arabic language and a subject of Russia with dominant Russian language.

Arabic as a brick of Imamate

“Among Muslims, the revelation of the Qur'an, and the recognition of its language as the Word of God (*kalām Allah*), turned every religious scholar into a linguist and made the mastery of the divine language the single most important prerequisite for intellectual and artistic accomplishments” (Haeri 2003, 1). In Dagestan, where Arabic has a long history as the language of intellectual elites, proficiency in this language was equivalent to education. The settlement of Arabs in Dagestan and gradual Islamization had promoted Arabic in the North Caucasus (Kemper 2010, 66).

However, starting from the end of the nineteenth century the dominance of Arabic was challenged by the introduction of national languages in education. I would argue that the struggle for the dominance of Arabic can be linked to the political concept of Imamate, i.e. the state structure based on the Islamic legal regulations and headed by a Muslim ruler. Many religious leaders supported both the Imamate as the future political model for Dagestan and Arabic as the main language of instruction at schools. For example, Nağm al-Dīn al-Ḥuzī (Gotsinskiy, 1859-1925)⁶ was among the staunch supporters of Arabic. Many of his followers regarded the future reestablishment of Imamate as a continuation of Dagestani Muslim state of the nineteenth century.⁷ Consequently, Nağm al-Dīn was perceived as the fifth *imām* of Dagestan after Ġāzī Muḥammad (1829-1832), Ḥamza Bek (1832-1834), Šāmil (1834-1859), and Muḥammad Ḥāğğī (1839-1877).

When Nicholas II was forced to abdicate, supporters of Imamate proclaimed Nağm al-Dīn al-Ḥuzī their *imām*. On 5th March 1917, a group of mountaineers gathered in Vladikavkaz to analyze the current situation. This led to the setting up of the First All-Mountain Congress launched in Vladikavkaz on 1st May 1917. Represented by 300 delegates from the North Caucasus, the Congress adopted a resolution on several vital problems such as attitudes towards war and government, the right to carry arms and school reforms (Donogo 2011, 134-144).⁸ Nevertheless, at the First All-Mountain Congress Nağm al-Dīn was proclaimed a *mufti* of the North Caucasus, i.e. a Muslim authority who interprets and expounds Islamic law, but not an *imām* (Gammer 2006, 121). Not satisfied with the status of a *muftī*, supporters of

Nağm al-Dīn took several steps. Uzun Hāğğī al-Sāltī (1848-1920) was one of the ardent defenders of Nağm al-Dīn's Imamate. In June 1917, Uzun Hāğğī traveled from Dagestan to Chechnya calling for Nağm al-Dīn to be proclaimed an *imām*. For that purpose, the Second All-Mountain Congress was launched in Andi, the village where Šāmil's deputies (*nāi'bs*) gathered in 1847 to discuss organizational aspects of the Imamate. The place was ideal to declare the Imamate and link it with the legacy of Šāmil. However, Nağm al-Dīn unsuccessfully tried to force the issue during the Second All-Mountain Congress in Andi. Even though he was proclaimed an *imām*, several influential '*ulamā*' pushed him to reject the title and remain a *muftī*.

A similar situation was created during the so-called Temir Khan Shura campaign in 1918. During this campaign several thousands of soldiers led by Nağm al-Dīn and Uzun Hāğğī went to Temir Khan Shura, where Nağm al-Dīn was re-proclaimed *imām*, but again had to refuse under the pressure of other authorities such as Muḥammad-Qāḍī al-Qarāḥī (Dibirov, 1875-1929) and Abū Sufyān Akāi al-Ġazānišī (Akayev, 1872-1931). Abū Sufyān stated that according to Islamic law there should be a single *imām* in the Muslim world: "Our *imām* is the *imām* of Caliphate, the sultan. We do not need the Imamate of Nağm al-Din. The only case, when it becomes possible, is the existence of sea between two groups of Muslims in need."⁹ Nağm al-Dīn's ambition to be an *imām* was thus overturned twice.¹⁰

Arabic was indispensable for the defenders of the reestablishment of Imamate. In this model of the future every aspect of life had to be regulated by the main sources of Islam in Arabic. This stance is clear from the article of Murtaḍā al-Kudālī published in *Ġarīda Dāğistān*. He emphasizes that "the Holy Qur'an, collections of the prophetic traditions, and the whole religious literature had been written in this language". The main thesis of the author celebrates Arabic as a vital tool to regulate life in the country according to Islamic law: proficiency in Arabic is essential "to solve the problems and secrets of religion". Murtaḍā al-Kudālī states that the works on Shafī'i jurisprudence authored by al-Nawawī (1234-1277) and Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī (1372-1449) are key sources for solving those problems and they need Arabic to have access to those works (Al-Kudālī 1917).

By emphasising the importance of the works penned by the medieval Shafī'i scholars, Murtaḍā al-Kudālī demonstrates his attitude towards the supporters of independent reasoning (*iğtihād*) (Shikhaliev 2017, 142-143) and represents himself as a strict follower of the Shafī'i legal school (*taqlīd*). Murtaḍā al-Kudālī presents the reading of the main corpus of the Shafī'i literature and the development of legal scholarship as a communal duty (*min furūḍ al-kifāya al-qīyām bi 'ulūm al-šar'*). For him, only the knowledge of the appropriate literature would improve the legal system (*bi ḥaiṭu yaşlahu li-l-qidā' wa al-iftā'*), and consequently, implement the Will of God (Al-Kudālī 1917). He also states that the

second language after Arabic is Russian, since Muslims lived “under their [i.e. Russian] protection and obedience” (*taḥta ḥimāyatihum wa ṭā’atihum*), but the dominant language should be Arabic (Al-Kudālī 1917). This is a pragmatic and clear political statement at a time of societal turmoil. Although the author underlines the importance of Russian, he rejects the Russian legal system and demonstrates his desire to create an Imamate.

Beside the proponents of Imamate project, Dagestani Socialists supported Arabic, but their support raised doubts among the contemporaries. At first, the public image of Socialists was seen in opposition to Islam, but to gain support in the region they had to appeal to religious leaders. Therefore, Dagestani Socialists decided to support Arabic. In early 1917 the Socialist group in Dagestan was not strong enough and had very few resources to openly develop their agenda. For this reason, they were often trying to attract reputable figures of the time and get their support (Takho-Godi and Isayev 2006). They managed to find common ground with a prominent Sufi leader ‘Alī Ḥāḡḡī al-Akušī (1847-1930) (Abdulaev 2007, 451-465). These political moves were negatively perceived by other actors. Muḥammad Qāḏī al-Qarāḥī in his *History of Dagestan: Events after Revolution*,¹¹ originally written in the Kumyk language¹², describes the meetings, congresses and other events that took place in Dagestan during the Russian Revolution. al-Qarāḥī considered the Socialist language policy fraudulent and suspected it of motives other than simply defending Islam. In June 1917, Turkic language pedagogical courses were opened in Temir Khan Shura to train “national teachers”. According to al-Qarāḥī, “this was a start for the nationalization of schools and the spread of these cultural and educational centers in Dagestan.”¹³ For al-Qarāḥī these pedagogical courses were the centres of national culture and their closure was regarded as violation of national rights. Since the Socialists and a group of religious authorities sought to keep only Arabic schools, al-Qarāḥī considered such plans dangerous and suggested to replace Arabic with Turkic:

The language of these courses is Turkic, because [this language] surrounds the Dagestani peoples, Turkic is spoken in most of the districts of Dagestan, and therefore this international language promotes the unification of Dagestani nationalities.

The Socialist Party did not want to see the Turkic language in Dagestan as the language of instruction and tried to close these courses. They told the people: "In Dagestan, the training should be conducted in Arabic, since our Qur’an and Shari’a are written in Arabic".

Next to Socialists, most religious scholars also opposed the opening of courses in the Turkic language and wanted to teach in Arabic. Religious scholars opposed because they relied on their poor

knowledge of the Arabic and dreamed to control the secular affairs. However, the Socialists were aware that it is impossible to teach in Arabic. Their tactics had a primary goal in introducing the Russian language in Dagestan. They could not state that openly and the recognition of Arabic was just a step towards future linguistic Russification...Famous Nağm al-Dīn and ‘Alī Efendī from Kazikumukh joined the Socialists and headed the opposite camp. This struggle lasted quite a long time. Socialists tried to convince religious scholars and Sufis to take their side. When ‘Alī Ḥāğğī arrived at Paraul village their leaders, comrades Makhach Dakhadayev and Ğalāl al-Dīn Korkmasov, went to him and guaranteed him friendship and assistance of their [Socialist] party. ‘Alī Ḥāğğī willingly took the side of the Socialists and announced that in Dagestan the education in Arabic was a necessity and that teaching in the Turkic language, especially religious topics, violates the Islamic law.¹⁴

From this citation it is apparent that Muḥammad Qāḍī al-Qarāḥi politicized the language issue by deemphasizing the religious significance of Arabic and raising political aspects in its usage by his political opponents. His accusation of religious scholars of having poor knowledge of Arabic cannot be taken at face value for obvious reasons. Clearly al-Qarāḥi tried to delegitimize the supporters of Arabic as those who betray the national interests. In a way, this position can be seen as a national opposition to a religiously colored articulation of the language issue.

Russian and the Unitarists

The strong links between Arabic and vernaculars on the one hand and Islam and nation-building on the other left to the Cyrillic Russian only a role in assimilation project. Timothy K. Blauvelt and Anton Vacharadze claim that in the Caucasus “ability in the imperial lingua franca was a desired commodity, one that gave significant opportunities for success and advancement for all classes among the national minorities, and one that they themselves valued and demanded from the educational system” and “the demand for improvement in Russian instruction in the Caucasus came as much from below as from above” (Blauvelt and Vacharadze 2017). However, this claim is true for the South Caucasus with rather separate Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani linguistic spheres (and the respective state policies) and where Russian served as an imperial language. As for Dagestan, the state politics was the same for all the multiple languages in the region and it was Arabic and Turkic rather than Russian that served the purpose of inter-ethnic communication. Russian officials understood this situation and tried to use Arabic for their goals. In 1914 the government launched the journal *Ĝarīda Dāğistān*, planned as an Arabic translation of *Dagestanskije oblastnie vedomosti* (Dagestan regional reports)¹⁵, the official newspaper of

Tsarist administration (Navruzov 2012). This Arabic newspaper can be considered a state project, but in the end the government stopped funding it, when realized that the audience was limited to local scholarly elites. The Russians also tried to improve the position of Russian in the region by opening schools and even forcefully trying to make Russian the language of legal courts.¹⁶ This policy created much anxiety among the locals, but Russian had both supporters and opponents.

A rare example of the supportive position can be found on the pages of *Ġarīda Dāġistān*. An anonymous author (using the double Arabic letter ‘*ayn*’ as a signature) replies to Kūrdī Zākū Zādeh's article analyzed above. The author claims that Turkic was not the most popular in Dagestan, since in some regions, such as Gunib, Kazikumukh, Andi, and Dargi, only vernaculars like Avar and Dargi were shared by different ethnic groups. The author then agreed with Zākū Zādeh that spoken Turkic is easy, but not the literary language with its loanwords from Persian, Arabic and even some Western tongues. Here the author arrives at the defense of Russian:

[S]ince the Russian is the language of all nations of the country and many of these nations, such as the Tatars, have an excellent command of it, Dagestan needs the Russian, not Turkic” (‘A‘A 1917, 3-4).

The author emphasizes the already existing ties within the Russian state, where the knowledge of imperial language is mandatory and binds peripheral territories to the metropolis. This is a Unitarist view that promotes the idea of a “Muslim nation” within the Russian state (Bospflug 2017). The existing ties with the outside world, particularly with the larger Muslim world, are downplayed here. But the fact that the article remained anonymous proves that this view remained marginal among the scholarly elites. One might even suspect some governmental support behind this attempt.

Fierce rejection of the Russian language, on the contrary, was a mainstream. There were many authors who brought up the arguments against “Russification”. Such is the article *On Freedom* by ‘Alī al-Ġumūqī.¹⁷ Here he clearly links the language choice and the national freedom:

... Up to now, Russia has been under the rule of Romanovs. They defined the policy... for the Russians as well as other peoples, and Russian was the only language allowed. All people were forced to work for the benefit of the Russian language and Russian culture. They intended to eliminate all languages in Russia and to establish a single Russian language, to make all the people speak the same tongue. To this end, Russian schools were opened in each village ... At that time our poor people was mostly dozing, did not know what was going on, and sent their children to Russian schools. Some leaders

almost became Russian, they considered shameful to speak the language, other than Russian. They did not wear any other cloth, but Russian. They could not say anything about the future. Everybody knew that disobedience will be persecuted. Now, thanks to the mercy of Allah, this policy is over. We avoided assimilation and losing our religion... (al-Ġumūqī 1993).

Here we see a double victimization of Dagestanis: they do not realize their loss of identity, they believe in usefulness of the new Russian schools, while those who aware of the situation are unable to change anything. Similarly, Abū Sufyān sought to demonstrate that the collapse of Empire and the Revolution gave them a new chance:

After religion, there is nothing more important than language. A nation that does not have problems with the language will always be superior. On the contrary, the nation, which could not avoid these problems, will stay behind...

Just three or four months ago, in the Russian Empire, there was no chance of raising the question of our language. Moreover, the Russians when possible would impose their language on us, make us forget our native tongue. At schools and madrasas such important subjects as geography, history and other secular subjects were allowed to be taught only in Russian. The purpose of such policy was to Russify us, tear us away from our roots. I am sure that the nation (*millet*) without its language (*tīl*) and national clothes will lose with them both religion and faith... (al-Ġazānišī 2012)

Learning Russian was identified with Tsarist policy, and when the Tsarist regime has collapsed, they decided to choose a different language, not Russian.

Another aspect of debate has to do with those who studied at Russian schools. This is what Naġm al-Dīn al-Ḥuzī had to say on the issue in his public address to the people of the Caucasus:

Many Muslims brought up in the Russian schools do not respect the Shari‘a, they violate the covenants of the Prophet Muhammad, declare polygamy unlawful and give married women the right to divorce.¹⁸

According to al-Ḥuzī, national friendship is only possible with the preservation of separate national education. Therefore, the Russian schools were notorious as centres of cultural assimilation. Another text on this topic is a paragraph from the *History* by Muhammad Qāḍī al-Qarāḥi:

...After the Revolution, the attitude of Dagestanis towards the Socialists was unfriendly because the former stood for filtering both political and public affairs through the Shari‘a. In this process scholars and Sufis played an important role. That means all power is concentrated in the hands of the scholars. Moreover, there were many of those who wanted the persons educated in Russian to be completely removed from authority.¹⁹

It seems that for Dagestani people the students “educated in Russian” formed a separate group. This separation was upheld by the supporters of Arabic and vernacular tongues. The situation around the Russian language was mainly dependent on the heritage of tsarist policy, which had created an atmosphere of profound hostility. Moreover, the idea that the Revolution had set Dagestan free from the chains of imperial policy was spread widely. A refusal of Russian was perceived as a significant step on the road of Dagestani state-building process.

Conclusion

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

In the discussion of an independent state, the premise was that it would endow each Dagestani ethnic group with a native language of instruction. This model, which “stands for a political-institutional approach that respects and protects multiple but complementary sociocultural identities”, is sometimes called the “state-nation” (Stepan, Linz and Yadav 2011, 4). As the authors of the theory claim, the “state-nation” recognizes and supports “more than one cultural identity (particularly recognition of more than one official language), even more than one cultural nation, all within a frame of some common polity-wide symbols” (2011, 8). The works of the vernacularists promote this idea, i.e. to give the Dagestani ethnic groups the right to use their mother tongue, to identify themselves from one hand with their ethnic groups, such as Avar, Kumyk, and Dargi. On the other hand, these were envisaged within a sense of belonging to the supra-level group of Dagestanis. In this model, the lingua francas – Arabic and Turkic – are not dominant, but they are important as bridges between the ethnic groups.

As for the project of Imamate as the future state structure, religion was the dominant factor. To defend religion and to organize life in the future state accordingly, the main duty was to preserve the key positions of the Arab language education, one of the vital tools of acquiring knowledge. On the one hand Arabic in Dagestan was largely defended as a sacred language in which the Qur'an was originally revealed. Consequently, Islamic discourse was mainly articulated in the Arabic language as the language of scholarly debate and high education and prestige. On the other hand, Arabic was protected for more practical reasons, i.e. to create a future state model that is fully based on the legal system described in religious literature.

Finally, the debate around Russian demonstrates that for the advocates of this stand being part of great empire was central. Consequently, Russian was turned into a tool of demonstrating loyalty and to keep communication with the metropolis. Nevertheless, the negative experience of the tsarist times in cultural assimilation made the discussion of the Russian language rather one-sided, leaving almost no room for supporter among the local population.

After creation of the Soviet Union in 1922, the Soviets made a clear emphasis on the national character of peripheral regions, a politics that was carried out around the country (Kivelson and Suny 2017, 292). In Dagestan, Soviet language policy has culminated in the acceptance of the Kumyk language as a state language of the Dagestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 29 June 1923.²⁰ Even though the Bolsheviks have raised the importance of the Kumyk language, they did their best to cut it from the Muslim cultural environment by effectively changing the script from Arabic to Latin in 1929 and from Latin to Cyrillic in 1938. Russian took the dominant positions for decades to come leaving no room for the competitive political projects associated either with Arabic learning or with the local national movements.

¹ Among the sources of this paper the articles published in *Ġarīda Dāġistān* (in Arabic - "Dagestan Newspaper") are of crucial importance. *Ġarīda Dāġistān* had been publishing during 1913-1919 in Temir Khan Shura. Firstly, it was financed by Tsarist administration, but later the newspaper continued his existence through the efforts of Badawi Saidov (1877-1927), the chief of the Chancery of the Military Governor of Dagestan Oblast' and Muhammad-Mirza Mavraev (1878–1964), the owner of the Islamic printing house in Temir Khan Shura. The newspaper had several sections: Official, Unofficial, Literary, Announcements, Scientific and Section of Letters (Navruzov 2012). The last two pages (out of four) were mostly used by Dagestani Muslim scholars who were discussing the issues such as education and Islamic law. The language issue became one of the key topics in the newspaper during 1917 (Shikhaliev 2017, 74-79).

² Dagestani 'ulamā' are using the term *al-luġa al-turkīya* both for a plethora of Turkic languages, including Azerbaijani and Tatar, and for the Ottoman Turkish. To avoid confusion, I separate the terms: Turkic for the mother language and Turkish or Ottoman Turkish for the language spoken in the Ottoman Empire. In the cases when the term *al-luġa al-turk* (the Language of Turks) was used it simply meant Turkish.

³ In Dagestan the term *imāma* (Imamate) is similar to a *khilāfah* (caliphate).

⁴ For a study of inter-regional and translocal communication of Dagestani Muslims see: "Sayfallāh-Qāḍī Bashlarov: Sufi Networks between the North Caucasus and the Volga-Urals" by Shamil Shikhaliev and Michael Kemper (2017); "Sufizm bez granits: pis'ma dagestanskogo shaykha Makhmuda al-Amali v Chistopol'" by Alfrid Bustanov (2015).

⁵ More about the debates on the Ottoman Caliphate see in the article “Opposition to the Ottoman Caliphate in the Early Years of Abdülhamid II: 1877-1882” by Ş. Tufan Buzpinar (1996, 59-89).

⁶ I use the names of the Muslim scholars in the form as they would have it in their manuscripts.

⁷ In the nineteenth century, in many parts of the Muslim world the new religious movements under Islamic leadership turned the teaching of jihad into a defensive doctrine against European colonialism (Kemper, 2007, p. 29). In Dagestan imam Ġāzī Muḥammad declared a *ḡihād* against the Russian Empire. In the next three decades a part of Dagestan was proclaimed the land of Islam (*dār al-Islām*) and the three rulers of it – Ġāzī Muḥammad, Ḥamza Bek, and Šāmil – proclaimed Imams of the Caucasian imamate. Nevertheless, the Russian Empire defeated Šāmil and the Imamate collapsed. In 1877, during the Russian-Ottoman war, spontaneous revolts broke out in Dagestan proclaiming Muḥammad Ḥāḡḡī (1839-1877) *imām* of Dagestan and Chechnya. Nevertheless, due to the lack of unified leadership and spiritual authority, the uprising failed as well (Kemper 2002, 49).

⁸ A body of documents related to the Congress was published in *Soiuz ob 'edinionnykh gortsev Severnogo Kavkaza i Dagestana (1917-1918 gg.)*, *Gorskaja Respublika (1918-1920 gg.)* (2013, 14-75).

⁹ Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Respubliki Dagestan (TsGA RD), f. 160, op. 1, d. 14, l. 18.

¹⁰ Later, in September 1920, a large uprising took place under the banner of Islam that was led by Naḡm al-Dīn al-Ḥuzī. He demanded that the Bolsheviks reconsider their approach to the governance of Dagestan. The uprising was suppressed in May 1921 and Naḡm al-Dīn fled to Chechnya and continued his actions against the Soviets. Only in 1925 the Soviets managed to defeat Naḡm al-Dīn's army and arrest him. Already on September 28, 1925 in Rostov-on-Don Naḡm al-Dīn al-Ḥuzī was shot by the decision of the OGPU (Donogo 2011; Gammer 2006).

¹¹ Muhammad Dibirov. *Daghistan tarikhi*. Institut istorii, arkeologii i etnografii Dagestanskogo nauchnogo tsentra RAN, Fond vostochnikh rukopisey, Fond Magomedsaidova Saidova (IIAE DNTs RAN, FVR, FMS), op. 1, d. 2 (in Kumyk language); Dibirov. M.-K. “Istoriya Dagestana (Sobitiya posle revolyutsii)”, IIAE DNTs RAN, f. 2, op. 1, d. 256, f. 16 (the Russian translation by Temirbolat Baybolatov).

¹² I use the term Kumyk language not anachronistically, accepting the similarity of the present-day literary Kumyk and the early twentieth-century Turkic texts in Dagestan, but with a reference to the usage of contemporaries, who regarded the newspapers and their manuscript works as written in the “Kumyk language”.

¹³ IIAE DNTs RAN, FMS, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 42-44 (in Kumyk); IIAE DNTs RAN, f. 2, op. 1, d. 256, ll. 10-12 (in Russian)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ On 3rd June 1837 Tsarist administration made the publication of *Gubersnkie vedomosti* (Regional reports) mandatory for all guberniyas of the Empire. The main purpose of the administration was an increasing of the centre's influence. The Tsarist administration turned to “*printed word to have an impact on the society*” (*vozdeistviya na obshestvo pri pomoshchi pechatnogo slova*) as Boris Glinsky, a Russian publicist and politician put it at the end of 19th century (Glinsky 1898, 292-233).

¹⁶ TsGA RD, f. 2, o. 1, d. 21a, l. 5.

¹⁷ The original of the article was published on the 6th issue of Lak-language newspaper “Channa Tsuku” from September 23, 1917.

¹⁸ IIAE DNTs RAN, FMS, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 59-64 (in Kumyk); IIAE DNTs RAN, f. 2, op. 1, d. 256, ll. 24-26 (in Russian).

¹⁹ IIAE DNTs RAN, FMS, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 53-54 (in Kumyk); IIAE DNTs RAN, f. 2, op. 1, d. 256, l. 20 (in Russian).

²⁰ The Soviet language policy of 1920s-1930s was discussed in the chapter *Yazikovoe stroitel'stvo i politika korenizatsii* of J. Karpat's book (Karpat 2017, 264-283).

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