

By Sword and Word: Literature, Violence and Religion in the North Caucasus

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For over a century and a half, Russia has exercised a narrative monopoly on the Caucasus War. Both in fiction and in scholarship, the understanding of one of the most prolonged conflicts in Russian history has been largely mediated by the Russian perspectives. Voices and perspectives from the Caucasus, thus, have remained essentially unheard.

Today, I will be presenting a part of a larger research project, motivated by the intention to revise the literary history of the Russia-Caucasus War. Overall, my study explores the fictional representation of the 19th-century Russia-Caucasus War in Russian literature and Arabic-language literature written at the same time locally in the Caucasus. The «Russian» part of the project looks at Aleksander Marlinkii's *Ammalat-bek*, Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* and Lev Tostoi's *Khadzhi-Murat*. Narratives from the Caucasus include three formerly unknown Arabic-language texts written in the Caucasus in the 19th century: *The Shining of Dagestani Swords in Shamil's Selected Gazavats* by Mukhammad Takhir Al Karakhi, the novella *Gazimukhammad* by Khasanilav Al Gimravi, and poetic works by Gadzhi-Iusif Al Iakhsavi.

My paper today focuses on the nexus of literature, violence, and religion. I will start by a brief summary of the ways in which different visions of the war resulted in the creation of alternative models of literary violence in Russia and in the Caucasus. I will then proceed to a detailed discussion of representations of violence and religion in authors from the Caucasus. I will argue that Al Karakhi, Al Gimravi and Al Iakhsavi used fictional violence both as a means to explain the religious underpinnings of their political struggle, and as a way to exercise authority in

generating particular discourses on the Russia-Caucasus War.

The Caucasus War, which took place from 1817 to 1864, is the longest military conflict in Russian history. The period I focus on is that of Shamil's Imamate (from 1834 to 1859). On the map, you can see Shamil's Imamate – a tiny self-proclaimed state inside the vast Russian Empire. The correlation between the size of the two states actually reflects the state of our knowledge about Russia vs. the Caucasus Imamate. Both in literature and in scholarship, our understanding of the Caucasus has been largely mediated by Russocentric perspectives. Therefore, the other part of the story remains unknown to us.

Russia and the Caucasus generated two strikingly different visions of the Caucasus War. Russian literature presents the Caucasus campaign as matter of imperial splendor, a heroic quest for expansion, and a sublime literary scene for exploring and answering questions born elsewhere.

For Russian authors, literature was a way to reflect broadly on violence – both in the Caucasus and beyond it. For example, for Marlinskii, the exotic material of the Caucasus was a covert way to discuss his political ideals and the Decembrist trauma. For Lermontov, it was his absorption in exploring the image of the “Other” which prompted him to explore the theme of emotional estrangement and destruction, epitomized by Pechorin. Perhaps Tolstoi's own preoccupation with the conflict of religion and identity drew him closest to a real encounter with the Caucasus. All three authors developed their Caucasus material in an acutely dramatic mode. Their fiction centers on a protagonist who is in incessant conflict with the external world – an obvious legacy of Pushkin's *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1822) and its Byronic mode. This tension occasionally materializes in seemingly random acts of extravagant, picturesque, and spectacular violence, whose signature trait became bodily mutilation.

In stark contrast, authors from the Caucasus (Al Karakhi, Al Gimravi, and Al Iakhsavi) share a vision of war that is universal across all three authors. They all maintain that it first started from

internecine fights in the Caucasus, and from the attempts of two young Islamic scholars, Gazi Mukhammad and Shamil', to establish *shariah* (or universal Islamic law) and eradicate *adats* (or local legal codices) in their land. Gradually, this struggle became interwoven with the struggle against Russia, and the resistance movement grew into *jihad* (or *gazavat*, as it is called in the Caucasus), just war against the infidels. In Islamic theology, as I will explain, word and sword are merely two different tools for fulfilling *jihad*. Therefore, neither violence nor literature in themselves held particular significance for Al Karakhi and other writers. Thus, although in their works, depictions of violence are no less plentiful than in the Russian works, its cruelty is habitualized, and presented in a simple, mundane language. This reflects the religiously driven nature of such literature, and the modest place and role it assigns to the individual. At the same time, the normalization of violence shifts the focus from individual characters and specific cases of cruelty to the grand narrative of the Caucasus' struggle against Russia. To sum up, both Russia and the Caucasus produced their own models of violence nested in their broader visions of war as a campaign for imperial expansion and as a religious just war, respectively.

Muhammad Takhir Al Karakhi

Al Karakhi's introduction to *The Shining of Dagestani Swords* articulates a holistic world picture, wherein the coming of Imam Gazi Mukhammad, the first fighter for the establishment of universal law (shariah law), was a rightful retribution for a Muslim land sunken in sin:

People of Dagestan used to call themselves Muslim. But they did not have anyone to call them to perform the instructions of shariah and forbid what had been denied by Allah. They gradually turned the customs of adat into religion, glorifying its leaders for the establishment and reinforcement of the adat. They called adat justice. Praise be to Allah Almighty. And how ugly was what was among them in their gatherings and medleys, of the negated, especially with the Russian infidels. Some even went to war against Muslims with the infidels. Others mingled with the infidels day and night through the blending of ancestors, children, brothers and grandsons. Still others gave the infidels their children as hostages, seeking their charity as if they were beggars. And still others gave way to some seductive devil, for the infidels rule their house or allowed for this to be done by them, won approval by the infidels for sincere service to the Tsar and approving his politics. They considered all this a necessary deed in the establishment of their earthly and

otherworldly deeds, while thinking what Allah Almighty ordered them to do in true faith to be a sin and a way to perish.¹

Al Karakhi's aspiration to present a broad historical canvas, showing the affinity of Shamil's story to the broader history of the Islamic world, places his work into the pre-modern tradition of Islamic literature, whose one traditional characteristic is "the weight of history, the importance of access to the past and concurrence and continuity with the models provided by it" (Green 288). This is no coincidence: the author of the Caucasus's perhaps most famous Arabic-language historical chronicle was one of the best educated people of his time. A revered Islamic scholar, an author of prose, poetry, and multiple theological works, and a mufti of the Karakhi *naibstvo* at one point, Al Karakhi held close connections with the Islamic theologians of Mecca and Egypt (Shikhsaidov 40) and was famous for his expertise in Islamic theology (Kaiaev 13). Perhaps Al Karakhi's reputation as a scholar was one of the reasons why in the 1850s, he was personally called to Venedo (then capital of the Imamate) by Imam Shamil' to work on a historical chronicle recounting the history of the Imamate's *jihād* against the Russian Empire.

Al Karakhi's son Khabibullakh wrote at length about Shamil' and Al Karakhi's work on the chronicle, and about the reasons that prompted Shamil' to commission this work:

I want to collect stories about the events, which happened in my time, however, being busy with war and various other activities, I cannot find time for this (quoted in Barabanov 8).²

Shamil's decision to preserve the history of the Caucasus War in written form was not unpragmatic: from the very beginning, Al Karakhi's chronicle was designed for immediate wide readership (Krachkovskii 593). This is, in fact, the one satisfying explanation as to why Arabic language (rather than Shamil's native Avar) was chosen for the chronicle. Arabic, the language of literature, correspondence and, most importantly, religion, was a *lingua franca* in the Caucasus in the

فان اهل داغستان في حاذها لالعصر المتاحرة كانوا مستميرين بالسلام و ليس هم من يدعو الى الحكامه و ينحى عن منكراته بل لانوا متدينين برسم العادى¹ حتى ان فضاتحميتون الناس اليه و يمدحون روسايه بتنفيذهو يشيبله و يسمونه العدل فسبحان الله ما اسنع كفار الروس فهولا يسعون معهم حتى في الحروب على المسلمين و هولا ينتلطون بهم ليلا و نهارا احتلاط الأصول و الاولاد و لالحوين. و الاحفاد و هولا يرهنون يولادهم. لطلب شي. من. منالمم. و هولا ينكمون فيما بينهم طاغوما من طويغيتحميو من يرضون بسيرته من بينهم يستخلصون خدمة الفادشاه و يسترضونه و يستحسنون بسياسته و يرونها امرا ضروريا في استقامة دنياهم و يخرتهم و يرون ها شرع الله معلي لهم في الدين القيم

² «Я бы хотел собрать рассказы о событиях, случившихся в мое время, однако я не могу найти досуга для этого по занятости всякими делами и войнами.»

nineteenth century, which ensured *The Shining of Dagestani Swords*' circulation in the circles of educated Muslims in the Caucasus and beyond. This would not be possible for a text written in any of the Caucasus languages (Abakarova 15). In addition, creating a chronicle of the events in the Caucasus in Arabic would inscribe the text into a rich historiographical tradition in Arabic, which has existed in Islamic culture since the seventh century (Zaimeche 34). And perhaps no less important was the fact that medieval Islamic literature, which was the major influence on Arabic-language literature of the North Caucasus, attributed divine qualities to the Arabic language (Chejne 467). In the medieval tradition, Arabic was considered "a God-given language, unique in beauty and majesty, the best equipped and the most eloquent of all languages for expressing thoughts and emotions" (Chejne 449).

The Shining of Dagestani Swords was designed as the first text that would present to the world not Imperial Russia's perspectives on the Russia-Caucasus War, but, rather, the Caucasus Imamate's. Its narrative structure is plain and straightforward. Chronologically, Al Karakhi leads us through the three main stages in the story of the Imamate. The first part of the chronicle describes the initial struggle and the variable success in the attempts of the three Imams, Gazimukhammad, Gamzat and Shamil', to establish shariah law in place of *adats*, and to unite Dagestan against the Russians – a narrative which culminates in the chapter on the battle of Akhul'go. This part of the chronicle is very dynamic, tightly organized and polyphonic – an effect created by Al Karakhi's constantly recording multiple first-hand witnesses' testimonies (always acknowledging his sources by name). The second part of the chronicle portrays Shamil's rise to power after his move to Chechnya, the unification of Chechnya and Dagestan, and the military successes of the Imamate, followed by its gradual decline and ultimate fall. These two parts of the chronicle, thus, are focused on Shamil's two major «deeds» - the establishment of shariah across Chechnya and Dagestan, and the execution of *gazavat* against Russia.

Alongside its chronological unfolding, there is another, and in many ways more productive, way to read the chronicle: by focusing on the concept of *qadar*, which performs the major organizing structural function in the chronicle.

Qadar is the phenomenon of divine foreordaining, explained in the Hadith of Gabriel:

Iman is your belief in God and His Angels and His Books and His Messengers and the Hereafter and the good and evil fate [ordained by your God] (Saheeh Muslim 1:1).³

The focus on *qadar* (which, importantly, embraces both the “good” and the “evil” fate) suggests an interpretation that builds on the character’s relationship with the Divine, and the ethics of religious belief.

The chronicle’s two major gravity centers are the chapters are the battle of Akhul’go, and the «Chapter about the great calamity and misfortune for all of Dagestan»- the two largest, most complex in organization and the most poetic chapters of the chronicle. These chapters underlie the chronicle’s mirror-like composition, for each of them revolves around the concealed conflict between free will and predetermination. Structurally, both chapters present a situation where Imam Shamil’ is forced to choose between his own will and what he thinks is prescribed by religion. In both situations, Shamil’ follows the will of God and takes what is to him an undesired but righteous decision. Such behavior of the chronicle’s foremost protagonist rests in stark contrast with the Russian fiction about the Caucasus, where the main character constantly resides in acute conflict with the external world. Al Karakhi’s approach here is quite the opposite: surprising as it may sound, the portrayal of Gazi Mukhammad and Shamil' in the chronicle is anything but “heroic”. On the contrary, the way Al Karakhi portrays the two leaders of *jihad* as very “earthly”, devoid of any elevation in the presentation of a heroic character. This may at first seem somewhat counter-intuitive for a text written in glorification of the Imams’ religious struggle, and comprising a huge number of dramatic episodes, which are a potentially fertile material for portraying a heroic type.

3 “ أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَتُؤْمِنَ بِالْقَدْرِ خَيْرِهِ وَشَرِّهِ ” 3

Look at the way Al Karakhi describes Shamil's position in Chechnya, where he fled following the defeat under Akhul'go:

Shamil resided in Garashkiti like a dumped rug; no one looked at him and no one appealed to him.⁴

Furthermore, he describes Shamil' himself as recognizing his lack of power:

Once a woman from Chirkei named Aziza came to him, and complained that she was being sold to slavery here. Shamil' explained that he was in no position to help her.⁵

Multiple examples of mundane, humble heroism can be found not only among the three protagonists, but also among the myriads of secondary personages. At one point, for example, Al Karakhi mentions a story of a woman, whose two sons "died as shahids":

They say that when their mother found them both, she didn't cry, didn't show any sorrow, but on the contrary, revealed jubilation and delight after the shahid death that staggered them. She even regretted that her third son was not around with them, and did not become a shahid, as had those two; he was away on a trip.⁶

This episode is followed by a (partial) quotation from the Quran: "patience is most fitting. And Allah is the one sought for help against that which you describe".⁷

These many instances of modest heroism help the writer to outline a *Weltanschauung* where all fates and decisions, big and small, are equally predestined by the Almighty. The role of a human being arising in this picture, then, varies substantially from the way the concept of a "hero" has been understood in Russian Romantic literature at the time. It may even seem insipid and unimpressive from the outside, especially if we compare this type of character to the Byronic types inhabiting Russian fiction about the Caucasus. In Russian Romantic literature, the very quality of heroism arises from, and is nurtured by the character's manifest opposition with the environment. But in the Caucasus literature, the portrayal of the two imams is that of active and charismatic, yet at the same time righteous and modest personae, acting in a world of mundane things. Unlike in the

4 "و حين اقام هنالك كان كالحزفة الملقاة لا بيالية اهل و لا يلتفت اليه"

5 " و حين اقام هنالك كان كالحزفة الملقاة لا بياليه و لا يلتفت اليه"

6 " فحات امرأة چركية يقال لما عزيزى تشنكي اليه بانها مبيعةها هنا مستعبدة فافهمها بانها لا قدرة له اختلاضها هن ذلك"

7 "فَصَبْرٌ جَمِيلٌ وَاللَّهُ الْمُسْتَعَانُ عَلَىٰ مَا تَصِفُونَ"

Russian literature, in the Dagestani narrative, heroism is a matter of dedication and adhering to the path prescribed by the God.

In the case of Shamil' and Gazi Mukhammad, this path is a missionary one. Their special role and status are constantly emphasized through the introduction of various instances of mysticism – most commonly, prophetic dreams, visions, and miracles. These comprise an extremely important narrative device, which captures the moments of interaction between the physical reality and the unearthly world, and alludes to Shamil's and Gazi Mukhammad's transcendental abilities. Visionary experience lies at the center of Sufi mysticism (Green 287) and is an important element of the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. The Quran supports the vision of dreams as experiences of encounter with the divine (39:42, 6:60) – moreover, it provides multiple examples for it, the most authoritative being, of course, Muhammad's first encounter with angel Gabriel (Green 289). This “Quranic point of reference lent the vision great prestige as well as legitimacy, both of which were reinforced by many hadith as well as, in turn, alter traditions, which elaborated the theme further” (Green 292).⁸

Dream and vision scenes also come to play an important role in the narrative structure of *The Shining of Dagestani Swords*. For example, Shamil's prophetic dreams are an important link, which connects the chronicle's two crucial chapters, those describing the battles of Gimry (1832) and Akhul'go (1839). On the eve of the Gimry battle («Chapter about the battle, wherein Gazimukhammad died as a shahid, and Shamil' was wounded»), both Gazimukhammad and Shamil' experience prophetic visions. First, we hear Gazi Mukhammad predict his own death (in the

⁸ Middle Eastern cultures boast a strong practice both of dream interpretation, where “theories of the imagination and the description of its experience in dream and visionary experience” (Green 287) received considerable scholarly attention. Some of the most important Islamic thinkers contributed to the theory of the imagination: Al Farabi, Ibn Sina, Al Mamun, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Khaldun all wrote on dreams and visionary experience. Since visions are a crucial element of the Sufi tradition, a number of Sufi philosophers wrote about the experience of prophetic dreaming, e.g. Shihad al-din Suhrawardi (d. 1191 AD) and Ibn Arabi of Mursiyah.

conversation quoted above): “I will soon part with you” (49). Following that, Al Karakhi describes the dream Shamil’ sees just prior to the siege of Gimry:

As if he is in a house, and his gun and pistol broke down. And the enemies entered the flat roof of the house, made a hole in it, and are poking guns at the murids, and he, Shamil’, is pushing the guns away from inside, and thus saves himself.⁹

Alongside these prophetic visions, *The Shining of Dagestani Swords* also contains multiple episodes of miracles – another important element of Islamic culture. Brown goes as far as to suggest that “belief in the miracles of [...] has been “a requirement in Sunni Islam” (123); however, he refers to miracles performed by Muslim saints. An allusion to this type of miracle can be found in the Akhul’go chapter, where Shamil’ tells his starving son that “food and water would be found at the summit of a nearby mountain” (112) – an episode which received different interpretations by the Caucasus historians Gary Hamburg and Moshe Gammer. Hamburg considers this occasion a proof of “Shamil’s control over time, natural objects and human matters” (206). Gammer, however, concludes that in this episode, Al Karakhi “aims at showing the imam’s power of clairvoyance” (752) – a suggestion, which seems somewhat more grounded: there are no other examples of Shamil’s ability to materialize objects in the chronicle.

Through the creation of a system of mystical references permeating their works, such as dreams, visions, or miracles, Al Karakhi and Al Gimravi saturate their narratives with religious elements. As Abakarova argues, “the miniature “stories” in the structure of this chapter have a clear intentionality. Through them, the author of the chronicle claims that Allah gives the people the opportunity, first, to ascertain that his deeds are unattainable for a human mind; secondly, that he favors and bestows paradise onto those who embraced death without doubting faith; thirdly, he punishes those, who does things contrary to the divine will” (47-48).

No less nuanced and convoluted than the network of dreams, visions, and miracles in the chronicle is Al Karakhi’s dialogue with the text of the Holy Quran. As is common for any work in

⁹“كانه بيت وقد تلف مكفاله التويل و القصير و خرج الاعدا على سطح ذلك و ثقبوا سطحا و هو يدخلون اليها المكافل و هو يطعنها هن الداخل و هن جلك”⁹

the Islamic literary tradition, the text of the Holy Book of Quran is constantly present behind Al Karakhi's writing. The writer uses a whole host of narrative devices to shed light on this indivisible (if not always visible) connection, and occasionally bring the Quranic references to the front. These range from the characters' simply quoting or indirectly referring to the Quran, to overt comparisons and thoughtful, carefully calculated complex allusions. References to the Quran fulfill a number of functions, of course. But one of them is particularly important for this discussion: the appeal to the Quran as a way to establish parallelism between the images of Shamil' and Gazi Mukhammad, and the Prophet himself. References to the Quran legitimize Al Karakhi's vision of Shamil' and Gazi Mukhammad as the carriers of Allah's mission. His conviction is a result of belief in the sixth pillar of *iman* (faith): in Al Karakhi's view, the Imams' mission is predetermined, prescribed to them by Allah. Moreover, in the light of established parallelism with the Prophet Mukhammad, a religious figure beyond ethical judgment, the idea of the divine foreordaining, which governs Gazi Mukhammad and Shamil', is reinforced to eliminate any doubt about the validity of their deeds - including any and all violent action.

Violence is a pervasive motif in Al Karakhi. Statistically, in *The Shining of Dagestani Swords*, the verbs "to kill" and "to die as a shahid" are among the most frequently used. In fact, one narrative technique Al Karakhi resorts to on a constant basis is that of listing the names of casualties, overwhelming the reader with cumbersome name sequences. Reiterated from chapter to chapter, the enumeration of human losses becomes a powerful device, serving to show the scale and intensity of violence behind the imams' glorious stories.

Moreover, the normalization of fictional violence leads to a switch in artistic optics: rather than focusing on individual cases of violence (which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is characteristic of Russian literature about the Caucasus), Al Karakhi chooses to portray ubiquitous, casual violence, whose scale and intensity virtually have no restraints in the North Caucasus.

Through this choice, Al Karakhi accentuates the scale of violence in the Caucasus, and the fact that it was firmly inscribed into people's life in the region at the time.

Notably, Al Karakhi does not draw ethical boundaries between violence initiated by the Russians, or that committed by the Imams. On the one hand, he shows how Russia spared no lives to advance in the Caucasus (for example, Count Vorontsov lost 13,000 soldiers in the battle of Akhul'go [Abakarova 53]), and showed no mercy, using the cruelest methods of warfare. On the other hand, Al Karakhi provides multiple examples of violence between the people of the Caucasus, revealing their internecine struggles and bloodlust. Al Karakhi also doesn't shy away from showing that the struggle the Imams lead requires violence and cruelty. Abakarova notes that much of the violence in the chronicle is a result of the authorial intention to show Shamil's full dedication to the struggle he leads (39):

Importantly, unlike the Russian fiction of the Caucasus War, violence is seldom accompanied by suffering - a detail, which further serves to emphasize its normalization and routinization. This rhetorical practice calls to mind an observation made by Gil Z. Hochberg in her study of Palestinian art of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hochberg noted that in Palestine, artists and photographers "refused to display suffering" - which Hochberg interpreted as an artistic resolve to avoid public self-victimization through artwork (97). At the same time, Hochberg argues, the refusal to display suffering raises a challenge to the dominance of existing modes of representation, with their result in creating unequal rights to see.

Khasanilav Al Gimravi

While Al Karakhi's Arabic-language chronicle¹⁰ served as a formative text for all of the Caucasus literatures, its impact was particularly strong on the Avar literary tradition, the first local written tradition in the North Caucasus.

The author of the novella, Khasanilav Al Gimravi, remains today one of the least studied authors of early Dagestani literature. It has been established that he was born in Gimry, the birth place of two Imams, and was also buried there, in close proximity to the mausoleum of Imam Gazi Mukhammad. Al Gimravi grew up a *budun*'s¹¹ family and received traditional Muslim education from his father and the *ulama* (scholars) of Gimry and other Avar villages. In fact, at one time, he studied under none other than Mukhammad Takhir Al Karakhi. During his lifetime, he served as a *budun* in the villages of Kakashura¹² and Gimry.

It is quite curious that even the story of the novella's creation is somewhat reminiscent of Shamil' and Al Karakhi in Vedeno. Akhmed Murtuzaliev, author of Bagadur Malachikhanov's biography, suggests that Gasan Mallachikhanov¹³ of the village Ashil'ta,

...while a commandant of the Khunzakh fortress [...] invited Khasanilav Al Gimravi and asked him to write a piece about the first imam of Dagestan in his native language motivating this by the fact that nothing has been written about Gazimukhammad, and people know almost nothing about him¹⁴ (Malamagomedov 133).

¹⁰ Alongside written literature in Arabic, the mountaineers at the time also created improvisational oral poetry in local languages. The Lezghi poet Etim-Emin, the Dargin poet Omarla-Batyrai, and the Kumyk poet Irchi Kazak are some of the known authors (Fadeev 692).

¹¹ "Budun" is a synonym of "muazzin", a minister, appointed to announce calls to prayer at a mosque.

¹² Currently the area of the town of Buinaksk.

¹³ In 1926 Gasan Mallachikhanov publishes an abridged version of Al Karakhi's chronicle (1, с. 8) (Malamagomedov 134). «Примечательно, в том же году вместе с Али Каяевым он перевел на русский язык с арабского рукопись Хайдарбека Геничутлинского «Повествование о коловратных временах дагестанских народов со времени имама-восстановителя Гази-Магомада до имама Шамиля» (134).

¹⁴ «...будучи комендантом Хунзахской крепости, пригласил к себе Гасанилава Гимринского и попросил его написать произведение о первом имаме Дагестана на родном языке, мотивируя это тем, что о Газимухаммаде ничего не написано, и народ о нем практически ничего не знает.»

What is interesting here is that we see a motivation, similar to Shamil's – a dedication to capture the story of the Imamate in written form. However, the influence of *The Shining of Dagestan Swords* on Al Gimravi should not be overestimated. Despite its obvious reliance on *Al Karakhi's* chronicle, *Gazimukhammad* is a fully-fledged, if not completely autonomous, work of fiction, wherein Al Gimravi introduces a substantial amount of new information not mentioned in Al Karakhi – e.g., an argument between Gazi Mukhammad and Shamil' (Abakarova 142).

Gazimukhammad's most important feature, which makes it stand out against other Dagestani historical chronicles, is its focus on an individual story rather than on a grand narrative of state-building. While *The Shining of Dagestani Swords* and the majority of other Dagestani chronicles of the time proceed through the Imamate's history under all three rulers, Khasanilav Al Gimravi's *Gazimukhammad* concentrates on the story of Imam Gazi Mukhammad. This idiosyncrasy may be partly related to the fact that Al Gimravi's work was inspired by his having been a first-hand witness to the rise of the Imamate. The writer maintained a close relationship with Gazi Mukhammad's family. The memoirs of the latter's widow, Patimat, became the foundation for the novella (Malamagomedov 133). However, by and large, the focus on an individual story is a principal authorial decision, which shifts the narrative register from the historical to the biographical. And although the composition of the narrative remains strictly chronological, the scope of the story differs from Al Karakhi's.

Al Gimravi's story, too, is a chronicle. However, it is a chronicle of a life, not of a state. The idea behind Al Gimravi's work could be described as a story of Gazi Mukhammad's discovery of his spiritual mission. This is reflected in the tri-partite composition of the novella. Each part reflects Gazi Mukhammad's gradual progress towards the fulfillment of his divine mission. Interestingly, in Al Gimravi's depiction this is a progression from the spread of knowledge through word first, and to armed struggle later.

The first part of the story communicates some information about Gazi Mukhammad's family, and the life of his native village Gimry. This shortest part of the novella is quite notable for the utter concentration of everyday violence in Gimry (as well as quarrels and fights between the neighboring villages of Gimry and Untsukul'), presented over some ten pages. The story starts with the murder of Gazimukhammad's ancestor Mukhammadsultan by his fifteen-old nephew, and proceeds, through a chain of various cases of cruelty, to the death of Gazimukhammad's father, who is found slaughtered one morning. Several versions of his murder circulate around the village, including some people saying that "его умертвила жена, влив ему в рот кипящее масло". Following his father's death, Gazi Mukhammad intends to drop his studies but is dissuaded by his mother, who tells him that "ничто не сравнится с учением как для мирской, так и загробной жизни". This is an important turning point. The second part of the novella shows Gazi Mukhammad defining his life goal: to follow the example of his learned grandfather, an Islamic *ulem (scholar)* (Abakarova 152-153). The family details, including information about Gazi Mukhammad's grandfather and father, as well as the important role of his mother's intervention, are extremely interesting, since (outside the ubiquitous discussions of *adats*) this is the first reference to the importance of family circle and tradition in the Caucasus fiction.

The second part of the novella portrays Gazi Mukhammad as a *mutaalim (learner)*, his diligent study of Islam and formation as a theologian, whose reputation starts to exceed that of his teachers. Finally, the third part of the story demonstrates the protagonist's coming to terms with what Al Gimravi presents as his divinely foreordained mission: establishing shariah all over Dagestan and fighting against the Russian rule in the Caucasus.

The presence of the family element in the narrative is of utmost importance. On the one hand, Al Gimravi's character is portrayed in a similar way to Shamil' in Al Karakhi – as an ambitious self-proclaimed Imam, a prophetic character. But at the same time, Al Gimravi's portrait of his character is substantially different. In *The Shining of Dagestani Swords*, Gazi Mukhammad

and Shamil' are interesting in their instrumental role, as the carriers of Allah's will. In Al Gimravi, Gazi Mukhammad is important as a human person, and as the moral example he becomes in the course of his life and *jihad* (whose first dictionary meaning, we should recall, is "road, path, striving"). Providing a portrait of a real human, not an anthropomorphic carrier of idea, as was the case in the earlier chronicles, requires a deeper immersion in those parts of life which were omitted in Al Karakhi. This includes, for example, private life, family life, and interpersonal relations. This is why, unlike in Al Karakhi, in *Gazimukhammad* we get to see the Imam prior to starting his vocation and the decision to unite the villages under the law of *shariah*. On the contrary, we commence by looking at Gazi Mukhammad's years as a *mutaalim* – which also allows us to peek into his family and various people surrounding him. Thus, Al Gimravi gives us a chance to observe the formation of Gazi Mukhammad's character. This emphasizes that the author viewed *Gazimukhammad*, first, as a biographical work, and only then as a story of a state.

Quite logically, then, in *Gazimukhammad* we get to witness the protagonist in his interactions with other characters. Each of these episodes serves the goal of opening up Gazi Mukhammad's character and showing various aspects of his personality. And just as in Al Karakhi, these insights do not exclusively bear positive information – to the contrary, some episodes show Gazi Mukhammad from a decidedly non-idealizing angle. One deheroizing episode talks about Gazi Mukhammad's intention to marry an underage girl, Patimat, who is nine or ten at the time – even though *makhar* (*the ritual of marriage*) cannot be performed until the coming of a legal marital age.

However small she was, Gazi Mukhammad really wanted to marry her.¹⁵

Gazi Mukhammad ends up with an ethically doubtful compromise: instead of marrying Patimat, he takes her elder sister as his wife. This way, Al Gimravi marks «a contradiction between Gazi Mukhammad's mind and his feelings, typical for youth» (Abakarova 120).

¹⁵ «Однако как бы мала ни была, Газимухаммаду очень хотелось жениться на ней.»

These episodes, however, do not overshadow Gazi Mukhammad's character. The deheroization and the author's pointed departure from romanticized imagery, in fact, end up making the story of character formation more powerful. While in Al Karakhi the special status of Shamil' and Gazi Mukhammad as endowed with prophetic knowledge came because they were the "chosen" ones, in Al Gimravi, we get to witness the full dynamics of Gazi Mukhammad's formation as an outstanding leader. Gradually we observe the strengthening of his knowledge, will power and religious striving – the qualities, which he works hard to develop, and which make him rise above the other characters in the novella.

Just as in *The Shining of Dagestani Swords*, in *Gazimukhammad* the role of "miraculous" episodes as instances of external validation is reinforced, allowing us to observe the inner mechanics of the formation of a religious reputation. The tale of Sheikh Al Iaragi going blind and Dzamaluddin numb, just cited, is a vivid example. As they recognize and correctly interpret the miracle, they change their opinion of Gazi Mukhammad. Gazi Mukhammad, in turn, is attracted by the interaction with the Sufi sheikhs, and especially by the religious knowledge that opens up to him through the Sufi teachers. This new knowledge also makes him ultimately understand that the Muslims of Dagestan live a wrong, unrighteous life.

In comparison with Al Karakhi, Al Gimravi is a more skeptically, or, at the very least, practically-minded narrator. While he undoubtedly admires his protagonist, he is also quite skillful in demonstrating how auspicious circumstances and random occurrences contribute to Gazi Mukhammad's reputation as a spiritual leader endowed with supernatural abilities. At one point in the novella, in the third part, the miracles' role of providing external approval to Gazi Mukhammad's claims for a divine mission is openly articulated by Al Gimravi and laid bare in an episode involving an earthquake. Al Gimravi labels the earthquake as a spontaneous natural phenomenon, unrelated to any of Gazi Mukhammad's unearthly powers. But "the superstitious mountaineers connected [the earthquake] to Gazimukhammad, which elevated him in the eyes of

the simple people as a man, sent by the Allah". The author has distanced himself from this adulatory assessment of Gazi Mukhammad, reminding his readers that not all can be explained by his powers or divine gifts.

Overall, Gazi Mukhammad's formation story has two sides. On the one hand, his going through different steps to educate himself, the multiple witnesses of his piety, and the stories that "humanize" his character, are one part of the formation. The other part, however, is his coming to terms with his religion mission, which at times demands leaving the human behind. The further Gazi Mukhammad moves to becoming the man designed to fulfill this mission, and working on its accomplishment, the more the religion-violence nexus is escalated. Unlike his earlier years as an ordinary, if talented, young man, full of natural contradictions, once he is a religious and political leader, Gazi Mukhammad is completely different. In this role he emerges as a completely uncompromising, violent and cruel figure. Al Gimravi makes a very straightforward claim that Gazi Mukhammad was an utterly stern leader, and that his self-proclaimed mission made him exercise no mercy towards himself and others around him. With regards to this, Abakarova makes a pointed observation: she suggests that «with all this in the novella, he emerges as a person with a great life goal, and he never retreats as he is moving towards it" (146). The scholar even goes as far as to suggest that in Al Gimravi, the religious aspect of Gazi Mukhammad's struggle is stronger than in Al Karakhi's portrayal of Shamil' (146). She argues that Al Gimravi «considered the war with the renegades of shariah and the Russians to be holy, and therefore exonerated Gazi Mukhammad's behavior, including those things, which could not be excused from the standpoint of Islamic religion (violence, pogroms, plunder)" (Abakarova 145).

Khasanilav Al Gimravi's departure from the conventions of historical chronicle-writing, and his shift of focus from a state-building narrative to a biographical story, result in a major change of artistic optics. Once the story departs from a state narrative to become a story of an individual

human life, the depiction of violence also grows more detailed and specific. This allows the author to retrieve a refined and nuanced view of violence.

In *The Shining of Dagestani Swords* violence as an action was virtually ignored. It remained unnamed, even as it spread over the lands of Avaria and Chechnya as an ever-present background. The lists constantly enumerating the names of killed people were a standing device in the text, made perhaps all the more horrendous because none of them ever provoked a comment or a lament from the author.

Gazimukhammad presents a more complicated mechanism behind violence in the Caucasus. Here, violence arises as an activity committed by human beings: it is personified, not infrequently driven by a discernible motivation of emotion, and is not unilateral. A description of an act of violence in Al Gimravi oftentimes also includes people's reactions and opposition to violence, both physical and emotional.

Presenting this fairly complicated dynamics of violence in the novella allows the author to depart from the static picture of the North Caucasus as residing in an unceasing conflict with the Russians. In contrast to *The Shining of Dagestani Swords*, Al Gimravi's novella creates a fictional microcosm where the political element is nearly bracketed out. This opportunity to see the inner world of the North Caucasus, particularly, Dagestan, outside of the Russian conflict, reveals a surprising picture. Al Gimravi's *Gazimukhammad* demonstrates that this world was full of violence even before warfare came to the land.

Furthermore, when it comes to the establishment of shariah in the Avar villages, we see that the violent ways of *shariah* propaganda caused a reverse reaction among the people: they rejected the forceful ways the new law was brought, and only pretended to follow it (Abakarova 136-137). In the end, the violence unleashed by Gazi Mukhammad did not give the desired results. *Shariah* did not change the Avar people of the villages Gazi Mukhammad attacked and forced to give up

adats. The new law did not turn former sinners into more pious and moral, better people – rather, it provoked resistance.

The grand conflict of *The Shining of Dagestani Swords* unfolds between Russia and the Caucasus, and culminates with Shamil's full-blown struggle against the imperial expansion. *Gazimukhammad* instead comes across as a story of local conflicts, and internecine strife, of violence against your own kind. In the novella, we get to witness the disapproval of Gazimukhammad's activities, involving unjustified violence, which found no approval even in his own camp."¹⁶

Of course, the larger war always serves as a guarantee of local violence – a claim which, as we shall soon see, partly underlies the critique of Shamil's Imamate by Gadzhi-Iusuf Al Iakhsavi. For now, though, it should be noted that Al Gimravi's formal departure from the genre of chronicle opened substantial new possibilities for the development of local literatures in the Caucasus. Al Gimravi's decision to focus not on a character, personifying the story of a state (like Al Karakhi's Shamil') but on character per se, resulted in the appearance of biographical fiction in the Caucasus. The shifts implemented by Al Gimravi in *Gazimukhammad* provide us with more nuanced perspectives on violence. The latter, however, do not mitigate the intensity of the religion-violence nexus in Al Gimravi's fiction.

In fact, the situation is quite the contrary. The intensity and importance of the religious substrate is unwavering in *The Shining of Dagestani Swords* and in *Gazimukhammad*. However, in Al Karakhi, this religious substrate is projected through the state of the Caucasus Imamate, and the common deed of *gazavat*, headed by Shamil'. In *Gazimukhammad*, the author is left with the sole medium to transform the underlying religious content into his text. By virtue of the novella's

¹⁶ «В действиях Газимухаммада связанных порой с неоправданным насилием, которое не одобрялось даже в его лагере.» (146)

biographical nature, the religious substrate is transmitted exclusively through the figure of Imam Gazi Mukhammad – producing, in the end, an image of the protagonist as a religious fanatic.

Gadzhi-Iusuf Al Iakhsavi

Despite Al Karakhi's and Al Gimravi's glorification of the two Imams, it should be noted that their religious and military deeds were not universally supported – On the contrary, sometimes they met with considerable criticism. The life and work of Gadzhi-Iusuf Al Iakhsavi, a lifetime opponent of Imam Shamil', makes for an invaluable addition to the great narrative of nineteenth-century historical writings in the Caucasus. It demonstrates alternative opinions and highlights those aspects of Shamil's war against Russia which were left unaddressed by authors such as Al Karakhi or Al Gimravi. At the same time, it demonstrates that despite the internal contradictions and varying assessment of Gazi Mukhammad and Shamil', the writers' broader vision of the Caucasus War maintains its integrity – a condition upon which their polemics rests.

During Shamil's time, there existed and actively thrived two parallel written traditions of political critique. Gadzhi-Iusuf Al Iakhsavi contributed to both of them. The first tradition is that of legal scholarly dispute. The years of 1847-1856 were a heyday for legal polemics in Dagestan (Shikhsaidov, Shikhaliev 26), as the project of Shamil's state became a major subject of discussion between Shamil's supporters as well as his opponents.

Among Shamil's supporters were Murtada 'Ali Al Uradi, author of *Al Murgim*, “the largest and most authoritative text written in support of Shamil's Imamate”¹⁷ (Shikhsaidov Shikhaliev 28-29). Al Karakhi, in turn, authored *The best interpretation of what has been happening during*

¹⁷ «Наиболее объемным и авторитетным трудом, написанным в поддержку имама Шамиля»

Imam Shamil's time (Akhsan at-ta'wil lima waka'a fi zaman imam Shamuil) (Shikhsaidov Shikhaliev 28-29).

All theological dispute among Dagestani Islamic scholars of the time developed “exclusively within the framework of the traditional legal schools” (Shikhsaidov, Shikhaliev 29-30). This rigid framework may have produced Al Iakhsavi's somewhat precarious position in the dispute. Although he was a well-known scholar of Islam at the time, especially in Arabic language and literature and in the *shariah*,) (Musaev 633)”, Al Iakhsavi's reputation was not uniformly unblemished. Gasan Alkadari, for example, viewed Al Iakhsavi as less strong in *fiqh* (*Islamic law*) than was Al Karakhi (Musaev 12). Some of Al Iakhsavi's *fatwas* (*authoritative legal opinion on questions pertaining to shariah*) were extensively critiqued by his contemporaries, scholars such as U'ti Gadzhi Al Gumuki, Gadzhi-Mukhammad As Suguri and Mukhammad Al Gazigumuki (Musaev 633-634).

These disagreements made the legal dispute on the Imamate all the more heated and all the more attractive for later scholars. Some later Dagestani theologians (e.g., Gasan Al Kadari and Nadzhmad-Din Al Khutsi) joined the dispute with their replies addressed to Al Iakhsavi (Musaev 634). Scholars have expressed a range of opinions on the outcomes of the polemics. Al Kadari thought that Al Iakhsavi conceded to Al Karahi and some others, and Nazir Ad Durgili considered Al Iakhsavi the winner, arguing that «Iusuf ridiculed them and showed their real place in scholarship»¹⁸ (Ad Durgili 9, 136 quoted in Musaev 634). A different view was held by Ali Al Gumuki, who notes that “some of them composed, in response to Iusuf's satirical works, even more beautiful and grandiose poems in Shamil's defense”¹⁹ (Musaev 634).

Alongside these theologians' legal disputes, there was a no less fervent poetic dispute. The tradition of *naka'id*, polemic poetry, originated under the Umayyads as a poetic competition

¹⁸ «Йусуф осмеял их положение, показав их место в науке».

¹⁹ «Некоторые из них сочинили, в пику сатирическим произведениям Йусуфа, ещё более прекрасные и ещё более обширные стихотворные произведения в защиту Шамиля».

between two contestants, and then, in later centuries, was preserved as a poetic tradition in different Muslim communities (Hussein 305). In nineteenth-century Dagestan, it came to comprise one of the ways whereby scholars could critically reflect on various aspects of life under the Imamate. The very existence of political poetry, capable of eliciting immediate debate, demonstrates that at the time, literature was seen as having a practical function in the Caucasus. It was more than just an aesthetic object: it was also an instrument for intervening into the political situation in the Imamate.

The work which made Al Iakhsavi prominent among the Dagestani readers (Musaev 634) was his *qasida* against Shamil'. Al Karakhi included it in the third part of *The Shining of Dagestani Swords*, accompanied by a poetic reply of his own. Al Iakhsavi's *qasida* famously starts with the words "Shamil's valors have turned into ashes, even though they made him Imam"²⁰.

The *qasida* has a curious prehistory. While in Mecca on a hajj,²¹ Al Iakhsavi requested a *fatwa* "on Iusuf's own actions, and the deeds and need of *hijra* prescribed by the imam" from the mufti of Mecca. The *fatwa* he received proved him wrong and instructed the people of Dagestan to commit a *hijra*, should Imam Shamil' order it. Al Iakhsavi, however, did not cease to critique Shamil' either after the fatwa or after Shamil's defeat and captivity (Musaev 635): he reckoned that the defeat was caused not so much by the Russian troops but, rather, because people were exhausted by the war (Abakarova 66-69). The poem expresses both a critique of Shamil' ("you kindled a fire among us"; "you trampled the rights of the Muslim"; "your emirate is a destruction") and a sort of *Schadenfreude* concerning his captivity of 1859 ("Allah has dethroned you and subjected to disgrace to punish your hubris"; "your nobility is a humiliation. This is your infamy").

Al Karakhi included Al Iakhsavi's *qasida* into his chronicle as an example of the argument developed by Shamil's opponents. However, he did not simply quote Al Iakhsavi's poem. He expanded Iusuf's *qasida* by adding a derogatory reply to each *beit* (*stanza*) in the poem. Each of

²⁰ «Достоинства Шамиля стали прахом, хотя они и поставили его имамом.»

²¹ Which Al Iakhsavi accomplished three times (Musaev 635).

these *beits*, inscribed by Al Karakhi, is consonant with those of his opponent's, and is connected to them both thematically and in syntax. For example, in his first *beit* Al Iakhsavi states:

Shamil's valors have turned into ashes
Even though they made him imam.²²

Al Karakhi replies with a parallel *beit* of his own:

Shamil's valors rose in their greatness,
Which is why they made him imam.

Al Iakhsavi's next accusation of Shamil':

He woke up in the morning, miserable, and towards the evening
Turned out filled with earthly good and denounced.²³

Al Karakhi follows with a symmetrical reply:

He entered his mission alone, on his own,
And towards the end he amassed much help, and became a stronghold of Islam.

One part of Al Iakhsavi's claims in this *qasida* comprises a set of personal attacks against Shamil': the greed and avarice the poet ascribes to the Imam, and his hubris. The second set of accusations deals with Shamil's policies, oppression of the Muslim people, kindling internecine conflicts, and committing violence against his own people. Al Iakhsavi also briefly notes what he considers Shamil's departures from the true Islam.

In his conclusion to the chapter, dedicated to Al Iakhsavi, Al Karakhi wrote that Al Iakhsavi changed his opinion of Shamil', acknowledging him to be one of the best people.²⁴ However, there is no further proof of Al Iakhsavi's reconciliation with Shamil', and even Al Karakhi's statement makes no references to witnesses.

Other poetic works by Iakhsavi tend to center on religious critique, as in *Verses against*

Shamil' and his naibs:²⁵

From my love to Allah, I announce, that the ecstasy of a tariqah member
Is called forth by Allah, and at him it is directed...

22 "شمايل شامل أضحيت قتي ما و ان كانوا اقاموه اما ما"

23 "غدا في عغفون الامر ضمرا و امس مفعم العرض ملا ما"

24 «Признав его «одним из лучших людей».

25 "Стихи против Шамиля и его наибов".

But I am agitated by the ignorance of the followers
And the long life of the tyrant, a despicable liar
Openly devouring and looting the forbidden possessions of the Muslims
And doing so without the inherited lines of kinship.
For this is either fraud or ignorance...
To believe what people say, you are even worse than earlier,
And you have no soul, only a body that simulates the tariqah...
How delighted are they by the one who started preaching to them after the crime
Showing to the path, leading them as their imam...
All the districts are groaning from him, and everywhere
The villages are devastated and ruined to their last stone,
And his companions, sprinkled by the rain of death,
Enriched themselves by their possessions and were satiated by them
Oh, gathering of the fallen, struck by a lie!..
I beg my Allah to separate us
From the group of wrong-acting people, to augment our forces,
Save our families, possessions, villages and plains...²⁶

Here, Al Iakhsavi repeats his accusation of Shamil' and his naibs of greed and avarice. Equally important point is the "simulation of tariqah". Al Iakhsavi assumes a position of a true Sufi believer. He claims to have experienced a state of *wajd*, of spiritual ecstasy, which can be achieved through *zikr*, or reciting the Quran or spiritual poetry. *Wajd* is an ecstatic experience of God's existence (Ali-Zade), achieved through zealous practicing of Sufi rituals. For the more spiritually advanced Sufis, however, *wajd* does not require special practices but is a natural state (just like it was for some of the Prophet's companions) (Ali-Zade). Presumably, here it is the former, which Al Iakhsavi describes as a condition "caused by Allah and directed at Allah"). Attaining the state of *wajd* is what validates Al Iakhsavi's right to critique both Shamil's practical failures and the falsity of his religious deeds.

²⁶ «По любви к Аллаху заявляю, что экстаз тарикатиста
Вызван аллахом, направлен к нему же...
Но меня волнует невежество последователей,
И долгоденствие тирана, лжеца презренного,
Открыто поедающего и захватно собирающего запретное
И, без родства наследующего имущество мусульман.
Ведь это либо мошенничество, либо незнание...
По мове народной вы хуже, чем прежде,
И нет у вас души, есть тело, симулирующее тарикат...
Как они восхищены тем, кто после преступления стал поучать,
Указывая им путь, поведя их так в качестве имама...
Стонут от него все округа и во всюду
Селения, опустошенные и разрушенные до основания,
А спутники его, окропленные дождем гибели,
Обогатились их имуществом и пресытились им.
О, скопище падших, пораженных обманом!..
Молю аллаха моего, чтобы он отделил нас
От группы преступных, увеличив наши силы,
Спаси наши семьи, имущества, поселки и поля...»

Gadzhi-Iusuf Al Iakhsavi's poems elaborated three main arguments and fields of criticism against Shamil'. Firstly, the poet reckoned that the years of struggle exhausted the mountaineers, and led to considerable losses and destruction (Gaidarbekov 7). In contrast, Al Iakhsavi frequently wrote about the enrichment of Shamil' and his naibs, their greed and dishonesty. The second set of accusations comprised religious criticisms, varying from generic accusations of Shamil' as a "false sheikh" to such intricate concerns as the situation of diarchy in the caliphate, and Shamil's challenging of the Turkish sultan as the caliph (Abdullaev 253). In one of his works, Al Iakhsavi went as far in his critique of Shamil's and Gazi Mukhammad's performance as spiritual leaders and Sufi sheikhs as to suggest that they were seduced by the devil:

You are lying when you say that you love the pious. This is a sheer delusion of yours. You have no [idea] of what piety really is. Iblis and the sinful satan have led you astray. Your clothes are woven of treachery. [Gazi-Mukhammad] attacked Sa'id, and the latter was a pious servant of God. Without having the right to do so, gave away Sa'id's books with his right hand. Oh, how he belittled the precious knowledge!²⁷ (quoted in Musaeu 634)

However, Al Iakhsavi's possibly harshest criticism was directed against the violence Shamil' as well as Gazi Mukhammad unleashed against their own people. Gadzhi-Iusuf insisted that shariah forbids "the *jihad* of the weak against the weak" (Gaidarbekov 7), and that the Imams' acting by force against the villages, whose people refused to give up *adats* and accept shariah, was an unforgivable wrongdoing:

Haven't they [the imams] treacherously, illicitly killed Nur-Mukhammad while he was performing his morning prayer, right as he was pronouncing the shahadah?! And he also illicitly threw Bulach, the child who called for the Prophet's help, into the river. And [what they did] with [their] mother, slaughtered among the lions?!²⁸ (Musaeu 634).

Al Iakhsavi's exposing the imams' violence logically continues the discussion, which was virtually omitted in Al Karakhi, and brought up in passing in Al Gimravi. In Gadzhi-Iusuf Al Iakhsavi's

²⁷ «Вы лжете, утверждая, что любите благочестивых. Заблуждение ваше абсолютно. Вы не имеете [представления] о богобоязненности. Сбил вас [с пути] иблис и блудный сатана (шайтан). Одевание ваше соткано из коварства. ... [Гази-Мухаммад] напал на Са'ида, последний же [благочестивый] раб Божий. Не имея права, раздавал его книги своей правой рукой. О, как он принизил драгоценные знания!»

²⁸ «Не погубили ли они (имамы - авт.) вероломно и преступно Нур-Мухаммада при исполнении полуденной молитвы, когда он произносил слова исповедания веры?! И Булача бросил он в реку преступно, ребенка, который призывал на помощь Пророка. И [что сделали] с [их] матерью, зарезанной среди львов?!»

poetry, this dissatisfaction with the Imams' violence against their own people, becomes ultimately articulated.

Al Iakhsavi's criticism of violence emerges side by side with his religious criticism.

Consider in the final lines of his and Al Iakhsavi's poetic debate, Al Karakhi ties together the law of Allah and the path of *jihad*.

Al Iakhsavi's *beit* reads as follows:

Your flagrant rejection of your lord
Lead to your punishment as the revenge.²⁹

Al Karakhi's reply demonstrates that despite his disagreement with Al Iakhsavi's argument, the two authors speak the same conceptual language. He writes:

In jihad, you protected the faith of your lord,
And he will reward you with blessing in return.

To Al Iakhsavi's charge in "rejection" of faith, Al Karakhi counterposes "*jihad*". This opposition does not strike one as intuitive. However, it appeals, once again, to the central idea behind the representation of the Caucasus War in local fiction: the connection between religion and warfare.

The works by Mukhammad Takhir Al Karakhi, Khasanilav Al Gimravi, and Gadzhi-Iusuf Al Iakhsavi share a common vision of its history, and the role of religion and violence therein. Their works show important forms of similarity in the representation of the Imamate, and demonstrate that nineteenth-century Dagestani literature worked out its own conceptual language and a model of fictional violence.

The founding element of this model is the connection it establishes between violence and religion, and the development of a standing set of literary devices used to reinforce this connection in fiction. Thus, all of the analyzed texts rest on the position of the utmost acceptance –

²⁹ "رماك الله في جنب أتضاع بما استاكبارت يا وغد تعاما"

bordering in fact on naturalization - of two concepts: that of divine predestination and of the inescapability of violence in the contested, volatile territories of the Caucasus. The fictional characters of Gazi Mukhammad and Shamil', as presented by Al Karakhi and Al Gimravi, are the two quintessential, if quite different examples of such a mindset - which the Imams, in essence, forcefully inculcate in Chechnya and Dagestan alongside *shariah* law.

Fictional insights into the psychology of violence in the Caucasus, as it arises in the works of Al Karakhi, Al Gimravi and Al Iakhsavi, help to calibrate two spaces of violence: the broader space of war-induced, "destructive", uncontrollable violence, and the space of what might be called "constructive" violence, or violence by choice in the name of God. The outer shell of these two scenarios of violence remains, of course, unchanged, a progression from life to death. However, nineteenth-century Dagestani literature forcefully seeks to reimagine this trajectory as meaningful and purposeful. This search is illustrated by Al Karakhi lending violence a religious dimension in *The Shining of Dagestani Swords* – a shift which is accomplished through the use of a specific set of literary devices. These include a particular narrative optics for representing violence, a distinct presentation of character, and an extensive palette of scenes, references and appeals to various aspects of the Islamic culture, aiming to bridge the worldly and the unearthly planes.

This artistic approach to the representation of violence and religion became authoritative. Al Gimravi's *Gazimukhammad* closely mirrors Al Karakhi's concept in his fictional portrait of Imam Gazi Mukhammad. Similarly, Al Iakhsavi, for all of his skepticism about Shamil', constructs his argument using much the same combination of narrative elements. Thus, while Al Iakhsavi's poetry challenges certain aspects of Shamil's state-building, it does not challenge or change the existing language of its representation.

This conceptual unanimity is particularly important when considering the performative dimension, which fiction of the Caucasus conflict came to acquire over the course of the war –both

in Russia and in the Caucasus. Narratives created by Mukhammad Takhir Al Karakhi, Khasanilav Al Gimravi and Gadzhi-Iusuf Al Iakhsavi made important contributions to the *jihad of pen*. Their views on violence and religion came to represent the Caucasus' ideological position: the desire to tell the story of the Russia-Caucasus War in a particular way, and the attempt to generate a particular discourse on it. One could say that these narratives unleashed fictional violence in order to turn it in their favor - by carving out a narrative trajectory where cruelty was a willed choice inside a predefined scenario, and the only way to exercise agency and authority.

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