Introduction

by Alfrid Bustanov

Preface

In the summer of 2018, Vener Usmanov, a historian of Muslim graveyards in Russia, introduced me to a lengthy book of memoirs composed by ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri al-Istärlibashi, a.k.a. Majid qari Qadîrov (1881-1962),¹ a Qur’an specialist from Istärlibash village in the south-west of Bashkiria and a survivor of the Gulag.² The manuscript,³ written in Arabic-script Tatar, exists as a unique autograph, carefully preserved first in the hands of the author’s daughter Maryam Kadyrova (1928-1999) and currently in the possession of his granddaughter Zuhra Valiullova (b. 1958) in Ufa.

On first sight, I did not recognize the importance of this first-person narrative. However, diving deeper into al-Qadiri’s narrative, it struck me how little we know about the Weltanschauung of Muslim individuals in Russia. What can we say about their ever-changing sense of self? What concepts formed the core of their personhood in various contexts? What vocabulary did they develop to describe themselves and the world around them? And how has that vocabulary altered in the course of the last two centuries?

I believe that a fruitful approach to addressing these questions is to explore sources that mirror the vernacular concepts of the self. Usually those are

1 ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri is not to be confused with Qiyyam al-Din al-Qadiri (1882- ca. 1953), a Naqshbandi shaykh from Kazan, whose poetic self-reflections have been published recently: Islamskaia poeziia v epokhu Stalina: Sbornik stikhov Kyiametdina al-Kadyiri, ed. by Alfrid Bustanov and Ilham Gumerov (Kazan: Mardjani Institute of History, 2018).
2 The first history of this village was published already in the late nineteenth century: Muhammad-Shakir Tuqaev, Tarikh-i Istärlibash (Kazan, 1899). Another study of the Islamic history of this village has been written by Vener Usmanov. His book contains an account of the village mosques, the local madrasa teachers, and a detailed description of the Arabic-script gravestones in the cemetery: Vener Usmanov, Tarikhi yadkärlär. Vol. 1 (Ufa: DizainPoligrafServis, 2005).
3 All the sources that I use below were initially consulted de visu in private or state archives across the Russian Federation; during the writing process, I worked with digital copies of various forms that I have collected in my personal repository. Hence, all references made below refer not to the physical items, but to the digital copies of them acquired during expeditions and archival work. With this ‘confession’ I follow the lead of Carnelis van Lit, who calls researchers to reflect on the digital culture that surrounds our work: L.W.C. van Lit, O.P., Among Digitized Manuscripts: Philology, Codicology, Paleography in a Digital World (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020).
classified as ego-documents, be they private correspondence, diaries, photographs, or poetry. That is not to say, of course, that other genres or types of documentation are less relevant for our discussion of Muslim individuality, but it is in the first-person narratives of various forms and genres that we find the most vivid manifestation of a writer's subjectivity. So far, the ego-documents of Russia’s Muslims, both in their textual and visual form, have either been neglected by researchers, or used for the purpose of writing about the status of Muslim subjects in the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. Sources of this kind are hosted today in a myriad of private archives of varying size and prominence across the Russian Federation. In sharp contrast to the extensive autobiographical texts from early twentieth-century Central Asia that have appeared in English editions in recent decades, so far no Muslim life narrative from late imperial Russia has been made accessible to an international audience. Moreover, while post-Soviet hagiographies and oral testimonies of Gulag experiences are available to scholars, al-Qadiri’s narrative remains, to the best of my knowledge, the only eye-witness account of an educated Muslim who

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4 A good example of a purely theological work, bearing great value for the study of Muslim individuality in Russia, is an encyclopedic compendium of ca. 1700 pages crafted by Fath al-Qadir b. Muhammad Dhakir Babich (1890-1976), elder brother of the poet Shaykhzada Babich (1895-1919), somewhere near Khuand (back then called Leninabad) in 1968. This extensive manuscript was initially meant as a refutation of an atheist pamphlet entitled Mysteries of the Qur’an (Kor‘än serläre) and published by Garif Gobiä in Kazan in the same year, but ultimately developed into a fully-fledged manifestation of the Tatar Islamic tradition that provides glimpses into the cultural standards of Muslim personhood of the time. The only copy of this precious manuscript survived in the library of ‘Abbas Bibarsov (1937-2012) in his home village of Urta Eluzan, in Penza region. Some village histories of the early twentieth century also blur the genre boundaries; for example, Allen Frank classifies Tarikh-i Barangawi (1914) by Ahmad al-Barangawi as “one of the most extensive autobiographies in Tatar Islamic literature”: Allen Frank, Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia: Sufism, Education, and the Paradox of Islamic Prestige (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 16.

endured the Stalinist repressions. In analyzing and publishing this source, I hope to draw closer attention to the self-perception of Russia’s Muslims.6

The memoirs of ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri form a book consisting of 208 folios of first-person narrative, allowing for a fresh view on Muslim personhood, full of personal drama, intimate thoughts, (un)intended omissions, and profound nostalgia, peppered occasionally with either humor or sorrow. His memoirs are as exceptional in their detailed description of the awful experience of the Great Terror7 as they are ordinary in their intimate narration of everyday concerns.8 It is important to note however, that by the 1950s, when the elderly al-Qadiri wrote his book, there was nothing unusual in composing one’s life narrative. Since the late nineteenth century, various forms of life writing had proliferated among the Muslims of Russia, greatly inspired by the already existing Islamic models.9 In the course of this Introduction, I will refer to a wide range of autobiographical texts, which were composed in abundance chiefly in the first half of the twentieth century. None of those texts, however, expand on the individual Gulag experience to an extent comparable with al-Qadiri’s memoirs.

What kind of personality did al-Qadiri embrace in his life story? I propose that by approaching the life stories of Muslim individuals as a form of self-fashioning, we can learn a great deal about the self-conceptions of social actors in the past. Shifting the research agenda in this way has clear potential for the de-exoticization of Islam and Muslims, by emphasizing the practices of introspection and self-description that cannot be narrowly ascribed to religious

6 Michael Friedrich has nicely formulated the need of attention to the non-political aspects of subjectivity: “Could it not be that this diary gives evidence of a life, which [...] was not fundamentally imbued by politics and ideology – the life of the renowned ‘masses’, that is the ordinary people, who happened to be Soviet citizens too?” Michael Friedrich, “Living in the 1920s: A Tatar Diary from Āji, Kasimov and Samarqand,” The Past as Resource in the Turkic Speaking World, ed. by Ildikó Bellér-Hann (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2016), 120.
7 Recent studies on Muslim experiences of Stalin’s purges include: Allen J. Frank, Gulag Miracles: Sufis and Stalinist Repression in Kazakhstan (Vienna, 2019); Michael Kemper, “From 1917 to 1937: the Mufti, the Turkologist, and Stalin’s Terror”, Die Welt des Islams 57.2 (2017), 162-191.
identities. Therefore, I use the adjective “Muslim” only to describe practices of self-description defined by creative engagement with Islamicate models and adaptation of the tools of other cultures and religious traditions (in other words, ‘Islamizing’ them). Simply put, I support the definition of Islam as ‘whatever Muslims say it means’, by emphasizing the active role of Muslim actors in self-description and in endowing the world around them with a specific meaning. While for anthropological studies of contemporary Islam in Russia the subjectivity of actors has become a central topic of concern, historical scholarship of the same field has largely ignored this trend. Nonetheless, it is in this realm of historical expressions of subjectivity by Russia’s Muslims that al-Qadiri’s life narrative fits so well.

In this Introduction to al-Qadiri’s memoirs, my goal is to broadly contextualize this particular ego-narrative and discuss the author’s personhood in comparison with similar sources. To do so, I will first propose a conceptual framework for the assessment of Muslim life writing in late imperial and Soviet Russia. Here I take a historical anthropological approach, prioritizing an emic take on the study of personhood where vernacular forms of self-expression are highlighted. Following that, I will introduce the contents of the manuscript and offer my conceptual reading of the work.

I believe that the research focus on the subjectivity of actors and their hybrid ways of self-fashioning helps to reveal the evolving process of day-to-day engagement with multiple factors of life in imperial and Soviet Russia, of which the state was only one factor, however prominent. By necessity, the study of Muslim subjectivity leads to scrutinizing emotions and looking more into horizontal forms of communication rather than established hierarchies. Al-Qadiri’s memoirs present a superb case that can serve as a starting point for formulating new questions and exploring the rich culture of Muslim personhood in Russia. I have therefore purposely avoided the easy classification of al-Qadiri as a Muslim reformist or Jadid. While modern conveniences – such as newspapers, steamboats and trains – were a normal part of his life, to see his memoirs exclusively through a modernist lens would be a great simplification.

Al-Qadiri’s manuscript allows for multiple readings. On the one hand, this rich text contains extensive information on the social and cultural history of Russia’s Muslims throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.
century. Al-Qadiri writes extensively on inter-ethnic relations in the Russian imperial borderlands, and provides glimpses of the various modes of self-positioning by non-Russian individuals in imperial contexts. Still, after careful study of the work, I believe that it is above all a life narrative: one that tells the story of a country dweller who happened to live under extreme conditions and nonetheless tried to make sense of his experiences in a distinctly religious manner. With this work, al-Qadiri produced a fascinating account of the history of the moral subject in Russia, written squarely within the Muslim episteme.

Al-Qadiri himself must have had access to similar life narratives produced by his predecessors, or even his contemporaries. What models did he have in mind when structuring the book of his life? What was the audience that he addressed? Was it a case of a psychological self-treatment undertaken by a former prisoner, or perhaps an attempt to imitate another’s style with the aim of leaving a personal trace in history? His treatment of temporal and spatial contexts depended greatly on the cultural models that were available to him. Analysis of these contexts facilitates close examination of the actual performance of the type of persona that al-Qadiri chose for himself. I conclude this Introduction by contrasting al-Qadiri’s self-narrative with an autobiographical novel by his daughter Maryam. By taking this approach to the text, my aim is to put al-Qadiri’s book in perspective as part of a larger cultural repertoire of self-description.

**Conceptual Framework**

The case of al-Qadiri is fitting for a *longue durée* study, since the book’s contents reflect the circulation of modes of personhood from approximately the 1850s, as well as those that al-Qadiri had practiced or witnessed during the first half of the twentieth century. Additional sources from the private archives of his relatives, as well as interviews with them, allow us to extend our perspective into the late 1990s. This unusual chronological take, inspired by our sources, enables us to detect the internal dynamics in Muslim societies that do not exactly match the imposed and politically-motivated periodization and classification that populates most scholarship written from the state perspective. What matters here is the sense of time that the Muslims of Russia have developed over centuries, only partly in dialogue with imperial time frames.

The culture of personhood was surely known to Russia’s Muslims well before the 1850s, but its earlier forms of expression remain to be explored – not simply because of the scarcity or inaccessibility of sources, but mainly due to
the current dominance of the Eurocentric narrative concerning the rise of the modern subject at the turn of the nineteenth century. This narrative influences the selection of suitable case studies, portraying the reformist intellectuals as the best match for an exploration of Muslim subjectivity during the twentieth century; moreover, it obliges us to evaluate this subjectivity against the backdrop of the Western standard. Similarly, existing studies on the subjectivities of Russian writers identify European models as the sole point of reference, thus integrating the history of Russian subjectivities into the grand Western philosophical lineage.

Western modes of self-description, including those associated with the Russian imperial and Soviet realms, circulated among an array of other models that social actors could possibly realize for themselves. Usually, models remained fashionable and successful for a time and then went into decline, giving way to other models. Social actors could describe their life experiences as a strict adherence to a single model, or as a conversion from one model to another.

Conceptually, I perceive the concrete forms of self-description as emanating from the dynamic interaction between commonly-shared templates on the one hand, and individual experiences on the other. These templates include a


variety of rules and societal expectations that a person must fulfill to adhere to models that are current in a given community. An array of available templates makes up a repertoire from which individuals select and combine elements as appropriate. As Peter Burke puts it: “the self is not only a garden, but the gardener as well.”19 The wider the repertoire of templates, the more complex and hybrid Muslim personhood tends to be. In other words, individuals were engaged in self-fashioning by consuming and cultivating cultural models, thus contributing to the formation and, ultimately, the change of those models. This process sets the limits of autonomy for the subject. I believe that the number of cultural models and their combinations cannot be endless, which means it is possible to describe, summarize, and conceptualize them. I take a similar approach to the interplay of individual and society: society is constantly engaged in the production and maintenance of cultural models, and expects individuals to follow them within a framework of shared understanding.

Words describing a concept might remain unchanged, but their meaning is subject to constant review and debate.20 Individuals describe the cultural models they adhere to, as well as their life experiences, using specific jargon. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze not only the topics that individuals deemed relevant to discuss in relation to themselves, but also the language strategies systematically employed in such discussions. I therefore draw a link between the actual performance of individuality at the intersection of cultural standards and personal experience, and language use. Historically, Muslim culture in Russia was characterized by linguistic plurality and a variety of pragmatic language strategies.21 This is especially true with regard to self-description. What motivates the various linguistic combinations that accompany the

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19  Peter Burke, “Historicizing the Self, 1770-1830,” 19.
writing of one’s self? Often these are instances of code-switching from one script to another, from one language to another, or even the borrowing of synonyms from different languages.22 The Muslims of Russia had to write about themselves differently in different contexts; however, this is not to say that they necessarily reserved their supposedly ‘true’ identity for private texts, and changed masks (and therefore ‘lied’) in texts meant for public or official purposes.23 Rather, individuals developed a very pragmatic sense of language use in different situations and for different audiences.24

The pragmatics of self-fashioning brings us closer to the concept of persona, i.e. the public and private forms of the self, constructed over time in accordance with societal expectations and individual choices.25 I find this concept potentially promising in the study of Muslim culture in Russia. Individuals developed certain qualities in themselves and implemented personas26 that they perceived as prestigious. They cultivated behavioral styles that cannot be reduced to a simplistic change of masks. The actual performance of persona reflects a complex engagement with expected and self-construed roles. It is not surprising that the rise of theater culture in the first half of the twentieth


century coincided with the popularity of new forms of self-reflection in diaries and memoirs. Further development of individual self-consciousness took place in the form of cultural practices clearly borrowed from the West – either directly, or via a Russian or Ottoman intermediary – such as the writing of diaries and autobiographies. Author subjectivity was most dramatically expressed in the cultural assimilation of these European genres and the way their forms were filled with Islamicate meanings. Examples of this include personal notebooks printed in the Soviet Union between the 1930s and 1970s with Arabic-script notes, written by Karim Sagitov (Fig. 1), Zainap Maksudova, and ‘Abd al-Hamid Mulakaev. This process of cultural appropriation of foreign genres can be compared to the adaptation of Persian and Arabic narratives in the textual landscape of Eastern Turkestan: by the eighteenth century, the imported texts were effectively domesticated and no longer perceived as foreign. A similar assimilation of Western practices of self-fashioning took place among Russia’s Muslims in the course of the twentieth century.

27 Madina Goldberg, Russian Empire – Tatar Theater: The Politics of Culture in Late Imperial Kazan. Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Michigan, 2009). Notably, Mir Khaydar Fayzi (1891-1928), an author of popular theater plays, produced as many as seventy booklets with diaries covering his entire life: Kazan University Library, Mir Khaydar Fayzi Collection, MS. 40-106. These precious texts are now being prepared for publication. For a detailed overview of contents: Mirkhädär Fäizi şiäkhsı arkhväynyg tasvärlämasy, ed. by Diliara Abdullina (Kazan University, 1988), 7-125.

28 Karim Sagitov (1888-1939) was a journalist and Orientalist who worked for the Institute of Oriental Studies in Leningrad in the 1930s. His personal files are today kept by his granddaughter El’mira Tissenko in St Petersburg.


30 Imam ‘Abd al-Hamid Mulakaev (1909-1979) was the son of Hamidullah (1870-1959), a long-standing imam of Chapuren village near Volgograd. Their family archive consists of Hamidullah’s autobiography composed in 1936, a few texts of Friday sermons, ‘Abd al-Hamid’s notebook, his will (wasıyat), and a few photographs. I consulted this archive at the house of ‘Abd al-Hamid’s son Rafiq Mulakaev (b. 1952) during my expedition to the village in early September 2019. Reportedly, ‘Abd al-Hamid possessed a rich library, which moved into the hands of ‘Abbas Bibarsov in the 1950s, who must have sold it, because I failed to find anything related to the Mulakaev family in his archive in Urtu Eluzan.

Given the performative character of subjectivity, I emphasize the importance of emotions alongside the history of concepts and language use, because individuals perceived emotions as crucial for self-definition. It is through the articulation of emotions that the structure of one’s worldview becomes visible. Zainap Maksudova was well aware of this fact and described the role of emotions in the production of intimate poetry as follows:

Turkic poetry has the following rules: it is easy to recite, its rhythm is balanced, fitting to musical performance and suitable for rhythms of drumming of feet and dance movements. In addition, poetry does not reduce itself to the clear statement of a poet’s ideas. It has to reproduce (tudîrîrga) the proper picture and strong feelings (khislär) from within the poet’s heart (küngel) in the heart of a listener or reader, be that excitement, happiness, sorrow, anger, longing, aspiration, desire to escape or to approach.32

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This (re)production of emotions lays the ground for introspective judgments, reflects the interrelation of individual and community, and sheds light on intimate, familial relationships. It remains to be explored, however, how Muslim individuals expressed their emotions in writing, which emotions were relevant when, which emotional regimes were developed, and what their impact was on those individuals’ sense of self. Covering all these aspects here is impossible, but the memoirs of al-Qadiri provide us with a good starting point for discussion.

In analyzing al-Qadiri’s narrative, I trace both the development of societal expectations and the way individuals put them into practice. Naturally, social actors mainly pursued the cultivation of successful types of persona; therefore, our task here is to identify those types that became popular during the lifetime of al-Qadiri, as well as those that became marginalized. Language use reveals the emotional value attached to personal experiences as well as to spaces and objects. Performance of persona, as expressed in language strategies, thus reveals an ever-changing attitude of individuals to themselves and the world around them.

The Author

‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri was born in a Kazakh settlement called Isenbay in March 1881, but spent most of his youth in Istärlibash. Istärlibash, situated at the border of Tatar, Bashkir, and Russian settlements with the Kazakh Steppe, was by then an eminent center of Islamic learning. Al-Qadiri received elementary Islamic education from his father Shaykh al-Islam (1843-1918) and then continued his studies with other teachers, his chief patron being ‘Ubaydullah ‘Alikaev (d. ca. 1929) from Yalpaqtal in the Inner Horde, the residence of a prominent group of Sufi masters.34 Despite the fame of the Naqshbandi lineage of his teacher and the sacred environment embodied in the shrines of Sufi shaykhs found in the Istärlibash cemetery, al-Qadiri never entered the Sufi path; nor did he consider going to Central Asia to increase his knowledge, as generations of his predecessors had preferred to do,35 but instead dreamed of traveling to the Near East. ‘Ubaydullah ‘Alikaev provided al-Qadiri with

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33 Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History, ed. by Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (Oxford University Press, 2018).
34 Allen J. Frank, Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia: The Islamic World of Novouzensk District and the Kazakh Inner Horde, 1780-1910 (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001), 297-300.
35 Allen J. Frank, Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia, 95-150.
financial help to perform the hajj in 1904. Seizing this opportunity, the young student traveled to the central lands of Islam and spent four years in Medina, at the Mosque of the Prophet, where he memorized the entire Qur'an. After obtaining a diploma and traveling extensively, he returned to Istärlibash in 1908 and married Fatima (1881-1949), the daughter of ‘Ali Aydabulov (d. 1920), a Kazakh scholar. From then on, he taught the Qur'an and performed recitations during the month of Ramadan in different locations. An experienced and successful entrepreneur, in 1912 he initiated the opening of a cooperative for everyday needs (potrebitel’) in Istärlibash.

To escape military recruitment, in 1916 al-Qadiri began working at the sewing workshop in Orenburg. Between 1917 and 1922 he taught at rural schools in Mäläkäy and Istärlibash. Benefiting from the New Economic Policy (NEP) of the Bolsheviks, between 1923 and 1928 al-Qadiri devoted himself to agriculture and managed to establish a robust household. Meanwhile, he continued to perform his duties as a Qur’an specialist.

In 1928, together with thirty-six imams and wealthy co-villagers, al-Qadiri was imprisoned; however, the court did not find enough evidence to proceed and set him free for a while. Nonetheless, he was already arrested again the following year and accused of “counterrevolutionary activities.” In August 1929, al-Qadiri was sent off to the construction of the White Sea Canal. He was
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sentenced to ten years, but was released early and rejoined his family as early as 1935. Local officials in Istärlibash were hostile towards the former prisoner, and al-Qadiri had to flee to a place near Tashkent (Fig. 2). He worked there in factories until November 1942, when he was arrested again on a political charge and sentenced to ten years. This time he had to spend the entire term in several labor camps around Tashkent. Meanwhile, his wife Fatima passed away and was buried in Angren in 1949, when al-Qadiri was still in prison.

Al-Qadiri, by then sick and elderly, was finally released in 1952. He stayed for some time in the city of Angren with his children, then traveled to his beloved Istärlibash, visited his friends in Kazan, and spent his last days in Orenburg. ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri died in Orenburg in 1962 and was buried in the old Muslim cemetery. In 1990, due to construction works near the cemetery, al-Qadiri’s relatives decided to rebury him and his wife in Istärlibash, near the shrines of the great shaykhs of the village.

In many respects, al-Qadiri’s life path was typical of people of his time and background. Many of them studied abroad and then were imprisoned and even executed under false allegations. In one respect, however, the case of al-Qadiri stands out among his contemporaries: he dared to write a detailed account of his life.

The Work

The memoirs of al-Qadiri are exceptional in the existing corpus of Muslim life writing in Russia for several reasons. First of all, the work covers a long period from roughly the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, with little attention to the events of conventional political chronologies. For example, he conflated the Russian Revolution into a single process that took place over a period of several years leading right up to the Great Terror, and the Second World War is simply absent from the story.36 Secondly, the narrative comes not from a first-ranking theologian who would usually attract the attention of scholars,37 but from a modest madrasa graduate who did not leave us any other

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37 One can observe that even the personal writings of outstanding individuals, such as Shihaib al-Din al-Mardjani, have remained outside academic interest: Kazan University Library, Ms. 1967. This manuscript has been stored at the library since 1965, but has never been...
writing besides his memoirs. The language used by al-Qadiri gives an impression of the direct speech of a simple countryman, not the speech of a learned person of Islam. This linguistic contrast becomes striking when compared to the extensive diaries of ‘Alimdjan al-Barudi (1857-1921), a prominent scholar in Kazan. The latter included in his notebooks some pieces of self-composed Persian poetry, used many Arabic and Persian loanwords, and formulated long sentences. In fact, al-Barudi wrote in a scholarly fashion even in his self-reflective notes, thus mirroring a completely different type of persona, namely a scholarly one.

Al-Qadiri had been initially inspired to embark on the project of writing his memoirs by his return to Istärlibash in the summer of 1953, soon after his release from the labor camp in Uzbekistan and a few months after the death of Stalin, an event which is completely ignored in the memoirs. Al-Qadiri writes about his return to Istärlibash as follows: “I spent the winter of 1953 with my children in Angren, but in early June my daughter Wasilya, at her own expense, brought me back to Russia to my home village of Istärlibash, to see my sister Farhi Sorur and daughter Halima. In the village I visited my relatives and the graves of my parents.” He visited the village several times in the next few years; he wrote about seeing his house during the visit in 1954, and appears in a group photograph taken on that occasion. Returning to this former place of happiness after a long time of hardship certainly had a great emotional impact on al-Qadiri, who was by then elderly.

The composition, paleography, and content of the manuscript (Fig. 3) suggest a rather complex history of the text. To write his extensive book, al-Qadiri had to rely greatly on his memory – or khäter, as he referred to it. As a professional Qur’an reciter, he possessed excellent skills of memorization, but on many occasions he confesses that he does not remember a name or a particular date. To reproduce the minute details of his journey in the Near East, including prices of goods and distances between places, the author needed to rely on documentation, namely notebooks containing budgetary information and brief everyday notes. Such notebooks became part of the regular literary culture of Russia’s Muslims already in the first quarter of the 20th century.
nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{42} After his second imprisonment, on the basis of his brilliant memory and the remaining items from his private archive, al-Qadiri composed three sections of the text, each dated October 1955.\textsuperscript{43} Following that, while in Orenburg, he copied a printed book of \textit{Iman shartï} and marked the date as December 1955. It seems that the three sections mentioned above were copied and arranged together later, after 1956, because on fol. 134b, after the colophon dated October 9, 1955, al-Qadiri explicitly states that he had copied (\textit{kücherdem}) the text and on several other occasions writes about events happening in “this year of 1956,” while the subsequent colophon still indicates October 1955.\textsuperscript{44} Evidently, in order to produce this comprehensive account of his life, al-Qadiri relied on his notebooks (clearly dating to before his first imprisonment in 1928), later copying his reminiscences into a single book, and finally editing the contents, including making corrections, underlining the names of important places, and adding comments in the margin. Several biographies and notes were attached to the text in the early 1960s, just before

\textsuperscript{42} For example, a notebook with personal financial data from 1874-75, penned by a merchant (?) from a Tatar village near Nizhni Novgorod: Kazan University Library, Ms. 6363 T, 43 fols.


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., fols. 138ab, 154a.
al-Qadiri’s death.\footnote{In fact, the last dates mentioned in the manuscripts are 1958 (the birth of his granddaughter Zuhra, fol. 207b) and 1961 (the death of his closest friend ‘Ayd Muhammad, fol. 208a), but these are separate events added to the main narrative later.} The seemingly well-structured text thus appears to be the result of a laborious process of copying and editing. Given that none of the ‘raw’ materials used in the production of the manuscript seem to have survived, the book of al-Qadiri’s memoirs can produce a misleading impression of a narrative composed all at once.

The scarcity of written resources available to al-Qadiri from previous stages of his life was a dramatic outcome of state violence: his house was stormed by the police in 1930 and all documents were lost.\footnote{Ibid., fol. 92a. Hasandjan Akhmerov found himself in a similar situation and had to write his childhood memoirs without any documents, having emigrated to Dushanbe: Häsändjan Äkhmärov, Istålekläär (Qarmätbash avïlï mödärrise wä imam-khatïybï istäle-kläär), ed. by Masgut Gaynetdinov (Kazan: Iman, 2017), 145.} However, except for two diplomas for Qur’an recitation that served him as symbols of authority and supported his persona of qari, al-Qadiri does not mention items that had been present in his personal archive. This archive must have contained passports, textbooks, newspapers, and letters; in other words, all the paperwork usually associated with the teaching, trade, and travel activities that al-Qadiri describes at length in his book. We know that ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri valued books greatly: he writes with much pleasure about his personal development through reading certain books at the madrasa.\footnote{Noting down the books studied in childhood forms a standard part of the ego-narratives compiled by Russia’s Muslims. Almost every diary and memoir that has survived to our day includes a section on the consumption of literature. Sometime in the 1910s or 1920s Zainap Maksudova produced an annotated register of books in various languages that she had read: Uqïlgan kitaplar haqïnda. The National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, 18369-542 (undated).} Later on, when we read about his travels in the Near East, we see that al-Qadiri spares no expense in buying and shipping books from Damascus and Istanbul.\footnote{‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fol. 95a, 97b.}

To write the biographies of other individuals and the history of Istärlibash, al-Qadiri relied on a variety of sources, including gravestone inscriptions, locally produced manuscripts and documents,\footnote{For example, al-Qadiri notes a manuscript book copied locally in 1799: Ibid., fol. 150ab.} and the family registers (‘ailä däftäre) in which the demographic data of the village were recorded annually.\footnote{Ibid., fol. 137ab, 138b.} Al-Qadiri was able to consult these sources on his visits to Istärlibash starting from 1953.
The practice of collecting a personal archive as a form of self-reflection and interest in historical artifacts was certainly known to al-Qadiri: he lists the five richest libraries of Russia's Muslims\(^51\) and relates a rumor that the Sarov monastery near Nizhnii Novgorod possessed ancient Islamic manuscripts in its archive.\(^52\) As is evident from the chronological register at the beginning of the book, al-Qadiri possessed a historical consciousness and was interested in old documents in private collections in his home village of Istärlibash.\(^53\)

In contrast to the large private collections carefully gathered by Muslim scholars of the era,\(^54\) by the 1950s al-Qadiri had no extensive archive or library in his private possession; today, the manuscript in question remains the only written evidence of al-Qadiri, which has survived due to its emotional significance for his descendants. The radical rupture in cultures of documentation\(^55\) sets al-Qadiri's memoirs apart from the earlier autobiographical accounts based on familial archives. Ahmad al-Barangawi (1877-1930) relied extensively on his rich family papers (although these do not seem to have survived\(^56\)), and

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\(^{51}\) “Rich libraries. The following are the richest libraries holding artifacts (ätthärälär) of Russia's Muslims. First, the library of 'Alimdjan hazrat Barudi in Kazan. Second, the library of Zaynullah hazrat Rasulev in Troitsk. Third, the library of hajji Muhammad Hasan Aqchurin at Gur'ev factory. Fourth, the library of Muhammad Yusuf Dibirdiev at Bälândä factory. Fifth, the library of Ahmad al-Ishaqi in Orsk” (‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fol. 54a). The only library that has largely survived is the Barudi collection, now stored at Kazan University Library.

\(^{52}\) “Ancient Muslim artifacts (ätthärälär). Muslim artifacts and manuscripts of the old times (böringï zamannan qalgan) are supposedly (guya) kept at the Sarov Monastery in Nizhnii Novgorod governorate” (‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fol. 52a). Indeed, a document on land ownership dated from 977 / 1569-70 has just recently been discovered in the collection of the Sarov Monastery, now stored at the State Archive in Saransk: Marsel’ Akhmetzianov, Maksut Akchurin, “Dokument o piatisotletnei traditsii zemledëfcheskogo khoziaistva tatar,” Nauchnyi Tatarstan 2 (2013), 84-91.


\(^{54}\) The personal archive as part of the Muslim culture of documentation in Russia emerged at the earliest in the second half of the nineteenth century and only spread further in the course of the twentieth: “Shihab al-Din al-Mardjani and the Muslim Archive in Russia,” Islamology: Journal for Studies of Islam and Muslim Societies 9.1-2 (2019), 138-148. Danielle Ross accounts for the emergence of a new culture of privacy by pointing towards the broad availability of Russian manufactured paper in this period: Danielle Ross, Tatar Empire: Kazan’s Muslims and the Making of Imperial Russia (Indiana University Press, 2020), 76.

\(^{55}\) On the term: James Pickett and Paolo Sartori, “From the Archetypical Archive to Cultures of Documentation,” JESHO 62 (5-6), 773-798.

\(^{56}\) One exception is his work on the rules of Tatar orthography: Ahmadjan b. Hafiz al-Din al-Nasrî, Adab al-kätib (1327 / 1939-10), Kazan University Library, 2203 T. Besides that, the Institute of Language, Literature, and Arts at the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan possesses at least one manuscript copied (jama’ahu) by Hafiz al-Din
thus related his personality to similar life models of his close relatives, most of them being Islamic scholars of a Bukharan, Persianate type. Authors writing roughly between the 1900s and 1930s usually had access to an abundance of written sources from rich personal, family, or institutional holdings. It seems that many mosque collections came into existence after the Great Terror and especially in the course of the 1950s and 1960s, when parts of the libraries of pre-revolutionary ‘ulama started to be donated to various institutions after the death of their owners. This explains, for example, why the Mardjani mosque in Kazan became host to more than 500 manuscripts by 1969, clearly originating from the former scholarly collections in the city and its surroundings. A mullah in one such place compiled a register of incoming literature, both in manuscript and printed form. Possessing an interest in life writing, in 1961 al-Qadiri noted excerpts from Ibn Khallikan’s (1211-1282) biographical dictionary Wafayat al-a’yan wa anba’ abna’ al-zaman and some other titles. Possibly, he borrowed those works from the mosque library in Orenburg; in any case, we see that the classical biographical dictionary was likely among the sources of inspiration for al-Qadiri’s account.

After several initial pages of notes, al-Qadiri’s manuscript begins (fols. 17a-28b) with a hand-copied leaflet on Muslim catechism in Turki, Iman shartï, originally published in Kazan in 1909 and copied by al-Qadiri during his time in Kazan. By contrast, it is very unlikely that we will in the future discover anything else produced by ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri. On Ahmad al-Barangawi’s historical work see: Allen J. Frank, Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia; Riza al-Din b. Fakhr al-Din, “Tārjémā-yī hāl wā tābāqāt kitāplārī,” Shura 1915 (2), 45; Marsel’ Ākhmatjanov, Miras istālekäre (Kazan, 2008), 3-63. The latter work is a never-cited, but pioneering study of Tarikh-i Barangawi.

59 Al’bert Fatkhiev, Liliia Shaidullina, “Berekh’ drevenie knigi,” Nauka i religiiia 1969 (6), 48-49. Additional acquisitions from the Mardjani mosque in the following decades enriched the collections of the Institute of Language, Literature and Arts as well as the National Library of the Republic of Tatarstan.
60 Kazan University Library, Ms. 6048T, 6 fols.
61 ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fol. 1a. Albert Fathi briefly mentions that he visited the library of Orenburg mosque in 1967 and must have brought some manuscripts back for the Kazan University collection. No publication, however, reveals the findings of this expedition. Cf.: Al’bert Fatkhiev, Liliia Shaidullina, “Berekh’ drevenie knigi,” 49.
62 In the nineteenth century, “such works in local languages greatly aided proselytism among animist and baptized Tatars.” Agnes Kefeli, Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 69.
in Orenburg, in December 1955. At the stage of binding, this section was put at the beginning; the reason being that this brief summary of Muslim belief serves as a good conceptual introduction to the rest of the text, symbolically identifying the cultural sphere from which the writer’s personality originates. Moreover, *Iman sharti* was among the very first books that al-Qadiri studied in his childhood with his father.  I can imagine that while writing his reminiscences in Orenburg (Chkalov) in 1955/56, he felt nostalgic and, once a printed version of the book was in his hands, he decided to copy it out of emotion. Zainap Maksudova shares a similar emotional assessment of her childhood reading experience that must have influenced her life-long interest in ancient literature:

More than a half-century ago I was a passionate (*daître*) schoolgirl, who had only started to read and write in Turkic and learn Qur’anic verses at a female school (*abištay mäktäbendä*) in one of the distant villages of Tatarstan. My teacher, i.e. my own mother, paid much attention to the study of books in the Turkic language, to becoming familiar (*yaqinlashtïru*) with the literature in the native language, and she must have had many ideas [in this regard], since she owned a great number of manuscripts and some printed versions of *Bäkhetsez yeget, Böcayat mâ’shuqnamah, Nawruz, Kisekbash, Rahat-i dil, Yusuf kitabï* and others. She would look at them regularly, but would not give me any of them. In the end, she singled out one thick manuscript and said: ‘Here, have a look at this book. In the case that you do not understand certain words, ask me.’ I took the book and sat on a bench near the stove, close to the door. My mother taught both boys and girls. The girls were sitting on the top of the stove and the boys below the stove. Since there was no place on the top, I joined the boys. I was the smallest among them. I tried to read, went through several pages at the beginning, but failed to understand many words and was not sure about my reading. [...] While moving through the book, closer to the end I found the following title written in red saffron: *A Story. In ancient times a boy called ‘Umar lived in a city.* The word *story* was quite familiar and dear to me. Every evening I wanted to hear yet another *story* [before going to sleep]. ‘Umar was also a familiar name. In our village the son of Borgash *abziy* was called ‘Umar, they would relate various anecdotes about him. Therefore, I believed that this book contained a very interesting story or fairytale and started to read it carefully.

In what follows, Maksudova reproduces the text of that story which she read as a child from the same manuscript that she inherited from her mother. In

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64  In the original: *Hikayat. Zamanï mazïyda ber shähârdä ber ‘Umar attïg yeget var ide.*
contrast to Maksudova’s focus on supervised reading, in 1931 Said Vakhidi (1887-1938), one of the founding fathers of Tatar manuscript studies, recalled the oral transmission of texts: “From early childhood I was exposed to hearing from my parents, as well as from my beloved grandfather ‘Abd al-Latif babay and the highly respected Mahi ābi, the tales, legends and other oral histories about our ancestors, the Volga Bulghars, and about our native history.”66 Childhood memories played an important role in Soviet-era Muslim memoirs, and both reading and listening to oral recitation formed key activities that the authors remembered in later life.67 The entire book written by ‘Arabshah al-Qïshlawi (1887-1961) is devoted to his childhood, often evoking events that took place before he could have naturally remembered them himself.68 Interestingly, these practices of childhood literacy continued until the 1950s, at a time when they could not be supported by the traditional Islamic institutions. Albert Fathi (1937-1992), lifelong custodian of the collection of Tatar manuscripts hosted at Kazan University,69 underlines in his autobiographical sketches that in his early childhood his grandmother and aunt played an important role in transmitting to him a passion for Arabic-script Tatar literacy:

Besides relating to me the regular news (those were the years of war and right after), my grandma and aunt were similarly telling me various things, from the history of our village to fairytales and poetry, but the most exciting was to take a wrapped book from the shelves. That was like a moment of meeting that history face-to-face ... And what is more, the letter from my father [who had perished in the war] was also written in that old script.70

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67 On the interplay of reading and listening in a similar context: Rian Thum, The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History, 52-95. While Rian Thum emphasizes the social role of manuscripts in shaping collective identities distinct from nationhood, my study highlights the importance of texts in self-construction.
68 The author similarly lists Iman shartî among the very first books that he read: Gadelshah Äkhmädiev, Kolîy babay näsele, ed. by Ilshat Fäyzrakhmanov and Gölfia Shâlikhieva (Kazan: Mardjani Institute of History, 2018), 88.
70 Kazan University Library, Albert Fathi Collection, d. 191, fol. 16a. As many other items in this collection, the file contains Fathi’s sporadic and very chaotic self-reflections. These particular reminiscences go back to the 1980s.
Besides the formation of “a sense of collective regional and historical identity,”\(^{71}\) the consumption of texts similar to *Iman shartî* in early childhood contributed immensely to the reproduction of the moral subject. I assume that al-Qadiri had emotionally recognized the centrality of this moral catechism to his concept of self, and that this is what led him to place a handwritten copy of it at the beginning of his life story.

The next part of the book (fols. 52a-70a) consists of a long list of historical events (*tarikhi waqi'alar*) with a very brief commentary for each, from the events of medieval Russian and European history until April 1961 (Fig. 4). To be precise, these chronological notes are mixed with medical prescriptions (*tibb*)\(^{72}\) and there is no clear sequence of events, only a list of episodes of global and Russian history with Muslim insights. This part of the manuscript provides a glimpse into the author’s historical consciousness. While he does not necessarily follow the chronological order of events, and freely mixes the Christian and Muslim calendars,\(^{73}\) this engagement with chronology provides the author with an opportunity to write himself into history – either by linking his life experiences to great people of the past, or simply by evoking events that he witnessed during his lifetime. Furthermore, the form of this chronological narrative resembles at least two traditional genres, or models of writing, that al-Qadiri felt suitable for his discussion of history.

The first genre consists of noting down the events of the outside world (*waqa'înamâ*),\(^{74}\) be that the first snow or an outbreak of cholera. Quite often, these brief chronological notes appear as marginalia in manuscript books, thus reflecting the personal dimension in claiming the classical canon of

\(^{71}\) Allen J. Frank, “Turkmen Literacy and Turkmen Identity before the Soviets: the Ravnaq al-İslām in its Literary and Social Context,” JESHO 63 (2020), 309. Here also on similar texts from the school (*maktab*) curriculum that proved central to identity formation.

\(^{72}\) The theory and practice of Muslim medicine, strongly tied to occult sciences and Sufism, was an important element of one’s worldview that provides glimpses into the history of body, engagement with nature, and ideas on the structure of the universe. The circulation of medical texts among the Muslims of Russia had been extensive, as evidenced by the rich manuscript tradition since at least the mid-eighteenth century. However, no comprehensive study of this phenomenon exists to date. Examples of texts are present in: Marsel’ Akhmetzianov, *Tatar khalkynyng boryngy yrym-arbaulary hâm törle falnamâlâre* (Kazan, 2012); idem, *Tatar arkheografiâse: Tatar khalkynyng kul’iazma tyib khäzinäse mirasy* (Kazan, 2016).

\(^{73}\) For some pioneering insights into the history of time in Muslim Central Asia see: Anke von Kuegelgen, *Legitimitatsiiia sredneaziatskoi dinastii mangitov v proizvedeniïakh ikh istor-ikon* (XVIII–XIX vv.) (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2004), 186-245.

Islamic literature. A good example in this regard is a historical note (ta’rikh) in Persian on the supposed destruction of the city of Bulghar by Tamerlane, on the leaves of an ancient copy of the Qur’an. According to current historiography, the composition of chronological registers was fostered by such works as Chingiznamä, a seventeenth-century historical narrative, and subsequently spread in the course of the nineteenth century. Zainap Maksudova collected

75 Kazan University Library, Ms. 5020 ar., fol. 181a. This must be one of the oldest known waqa’înamä. On this interesting manuscript copied between the 15th and 17th centuries see: Nuriia Garaeva, “Stareishii spisok Korana v sobranii Nauchnoi biblioteki im. N.I. Lobachevskogo Kazanskogo (Privolzhskogo) Federal’nogo Universiteta,” Vostochnye rukopisi: sovremennoe sostojanie i perspektivy izucheniiia, ed. by R.F. Islamov and S.F. Galimov (Kazan, 2011), 93-105. Another reminder of genre boundary blurring comes from an anonymous anti-missionary treatise A Present to the Pious for Rejection of the Wrong Beliefs, copied (or authored?) by ‘Ilman akhund Kärimi in the late nineteenth century. The work starts off with a short chronology on the problematic relations between Russia’s Muslims and the imperial state. Ironically, all the dates here are given according to the Julian calendar: Tuhfat al-rashid li-radd i’tiqadat al-fasid. The Cultural Center of Kazan, Ms. 10966/60, 344-345. Another copy of this work is stored at the Institute of Language, Literature, and Arts in Kazan (no. 3263, fols. 1b-75a) and is available online: http://miras.info/projects/mirasxane/manuscript/208-rukopis-kritika-vzgljadov-missionera-vasileva-po-voprosam-islama.html (last accessed 18.06.2020).

some old examples of such records, dating back to the mid-eighteenth century. They often begin with the capture of Kazan by the Russians in 1552, and include a list of dates in the Hijri calendar accompanied by an animal name according to the Turkic calendar. Historical information is usually provided briefly and often deals with contemporary political events, be that uprisings, wars, or enthronement of a new ruler. The spatial scope of such records is geographically wide: the clear focus is on events in ancient Bulghar and Kazan, but they also follow the situation in Moscow, Bashkiria, and the Orenburg region. Therefore, it is difficult to precisely identify the locality of such texts, since textually they are not bound to certain settlements, as Sufi hagiographies or village histories would be. These chronological registers usually lack any clear impact of their author’s personality, but they certainly mirror the cultural models that were in circulation at the time, whether in terms of the scope of historical consciousness, or in the way they juggle different chronological styles. Al-Qadiri was familiar with the genre of chronological registers, but he made this style of history writing more personal by inserting his memoirs right into his description of historical events, thereby realizing himself as a historical figure. For example, in a section devoted to the biography of Imam Shamil (1797-1871) and his descendants, al-Qadiri notes the following:

When I was in Medina the Radiant, at one of the Friday prayers in 1906 or 1907, a mu’adhdhin informed the community present at the Mosque of the Prophet that, in accordance with the Shafi‘i law, after the congregational prayer the funeral of the son of the fighter Shaykh Shamil would take place. Then we conducted the funeral prayer. Your servant (fāqirengez) was also present at the funeral. May God cover him with His mercy. Amen. ‘Abd al-Majid Qadırov.

The second genre – which al-Qadiri must have been familiar with while compiling his chronological record – is *tabaqat*, the classical genre of Arabic biographical literature, where biographies of outstanding individuals had to be

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78 Zainap Makusdova, *Waqa‘ınamälärđän chiüplänmälär*. The National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, Ms. 18669-366, fols. 1b-2a. As far as I know, this *waqa‘ınamâ* genre was completely unknown in Western Siberia.

79 ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, *Memoirs*, fols. 53ab. Given that Ghazi Muhammad, the second son of Imam Shamil, passed away a few years before in 1902, al-Qadiri must have attended a funeral of some other relative of Imam Shamil.
organized according to a particular format. A similar mode of writing was adopted a few decades after al-Qadiri by ‘Abd al-Khabir Yarullin (1905-1993), a long-standing imam of the Mardjani mosque in Kazan, who also compiled a list of deaths of individuals whom he knew and accompanied that list with brief biographical notes. Al-Qadiri used the writing templates of these two genres to express himself as a person of historical consciousness, capable of linking the events of global history with the history of his own life.

Missing from the chronological narrative are myriad events of family life and local history. Meanwhile, the death of two of al-Qadiri’s closest friends made its way into the list, only a few pages after the death of Ibn Taymiyya and the fall of Granada. Immediately after a brief treatment of Riza Fakhreddinov’s biography and a description of his grave in Ufa, al-Qadiri proceeds with a note on Imam Shamil’s tomb in Mecca. This is the first occasion upon which he expresses his involvement in historical matters and direct engagement with objects of the past. During his studies in Arabia, al-Qadiri took the opportunity to pay homage (ziyarat qilīb) to the grave of Shamil and performed a Qur’an recitation there. A longstanding fighter against the Russian Empire in the Caucasus, Imam Shamil certainly enjoyed fame among the Muslims of Russia. As al-Qadiri was writing those lines in Orenburg, he noted down the grave inscription as he remembered it (khä’teremdä qalmış). When evoking the events of a distant past, al-Qadiri makes reference to his own

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80 The most famous example from the Russian context is Wafiyyat al-aslaf, the magnum opus of Shihab al-Din al-Mardjani. This work covers the biographies of important figures of the Islamic world up to the time of the author. Numerous copies of the work have survived, but it has yet to be published. Kazan University Library, Ms. 149 Ar., 639 Ar. – 615 Ar., 4444 Ar.; National Library of the Republic of Tatarstan, Ms. 445 G; National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, Collection R-5406, ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Umari, Op. 1, D. 28, 29, 30 (copied in 1889). A small part of the work was translated into Tatar by a group of scholars in the 1950s, but has only recently been published: Shihatdetdin Märıjanı, Sailanna äsärür (Kazan, 2018), 35-126.


82 The personal archive of ‘Abd al-Khabir Yarullin kept by his grandson Na’il (Kazan). Item 43. Bu däftärddi ülgün keshelärneng adresleri, qaychan üllüläre haqında. This manuscript covers the events between 1969 and 1993.

83 My observations here are inspired by the recent studies on time in autobiographical writing: Controlling Time and Shaping the Self: Developments in Autobiographical Writing since the Sixteenth Century, ed. by Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf M. Dekker and Michael James Mascuch (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011).


85 Ibid., fol. 52b.
memory, especially in cases where he had forgotten something. In a similar way, the former mullah Hasandjan Akhmerov (1874-1955) makes reference to his memory when retrospectively evoking events of the 1920s. Neither al-Qadiri nor Akhmerov, who had been imprisoned in 1926, explicitly cite any personal notes or contemporary diaries as their sources. It is not improbable that al-Qadiri had an impressive memory, but in some cases, especially with regard to his trip to the Near East, the precision and minute detail reveals that his memory must have been stimulated by written evidence from the time of those events.

The extensive ego-narrative that follows (fols. 72b-169a) comprises the following sections, separated by occasional titles and/or colophons:

a) Majid qari's formative years in Russia, fols. 72b-82a;

b) A Trip to Medina the Radiant (1904-1909) and life in Istärlibash (1909-1926), fols. 82b-104b;

c) construction of the water system in Istärlibash (1926), fols. 104b-108a;

d) years spent at the White Sea Canal and labor camps near Tashkent (1928-1933, 1943-1952), fols. 108b-135b;

e) biographies of his ancestors and relatives, fols. 136b-148a;

f) the history of Istärlibash village, fols. 148b-157b;

g) biographies of teachers in Istärlibash, fols. 157b-163b;

h) biographies of Qur'an specialists in Istärlibash, fols. 163b-167b;

i) al-Qadiri's teachers, fols. 168a-169a.

The memoirs of al-Qadiri thus bring together a range of historical and (auto)biographical genres that had been in circulation among Russia's Muslims before the Great Terror. This ego-narrative includes parts that can be variously identified as a pilgrimage account (hajjnamâ), a biographical

86 Hasändjan Äkhmärov, İstälekläär, 129. These memoirs were composed in Arabic-script Tatar, while the author resided in Dushanbe in 1945/1946. Cf.: Gadelshah Äkhmädiev, Kölîy babay nüsele, 96.

87 The genre of hajjnamâ was known in Inner Russia from at least the seventeenth century and continued into the years of late Socialism: the first account is from Murtada al-Simitî (1110 / 1699) and the last is from 'Abd al-Khabir Yarullin (1387 / 1968). Paradoxically, the Soviet era hajjnamâs are the most detailed and numerous; most of them, however, remain unpublished: The private archive of 'Abd al-Khabir Yarullin, file 16; 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rasuli's account, Kazan University Library, Ms. 3868T (this work was copied widely and is known in multiple versions); Muhammad Tugyzbaev's account (1954), Kazan University Library, Ms. 4208T; accounts by Sa'id Allagulov (1954) and Muhammad Rakhimov (1955) from the private archive of Hamza Torushev (Ust' Ishim, Omsk region); Ni'matdjan b. Din Muhammad's account (1956) from the library of 'Abbas Bibarsov in Urta Elezen (Ms. 48). Some publications include: Tatar säyakhätänmälär, ed. by A. Alieva (Kazan, 2015); Säyakhätänmälär, ed. by Raif Märdanov (Kazan, 2013); Aidar Khäiretdinov,
dictionary, a village history (awil tarikhi), and a genealogical treatise (shajärä). The genealogical genre in particular helped al-Qadiri to define himself as part of a hereditary community: he explicitly identifies composing a genealogy (nasl wa ansab) as one of the main goals of his book. Starting one's ego-narrative with an extensive genealogy and treatment of ancestors was a customary practice in Muslim life writing of the early twentieth century, as exemplified by the autobiography of Ilman akhund (1901/02) and the introduction to Mir Khaydar Fayzi's diaries. Even though al-Qadiri does not mention it explicitly, the section on village history (fols. 148b-157b) reveals a degree of dependency on a book published by Muhammad Shakir Tuqaev in Kazan in 1899, but through the lens of Majid qari's life experience.

The complex structure of the book mirrors not only the composite nature that arises from the assembling of separate notes, but also al-Qadiri's approach...
to writing his life, whereby he highlighted only a selection of stages that he wanted to share with his prospective audience: his formative years, his contribution to the welfare of his home village, his prison experience, and the biographies of people who he admired or who were dear to him.

Since al-Qadiri’s book was unintelligible to his heirs (his daughter Maryam Kadyrova’s autobiography from the 1990s does not reveal familiarity with the contents of her father’s memoirs), we do not find much external intrusion into the text. Very few notes have been added to the manuscript after al-Qadiri: only a short poem that the author enjoyed reciting has been added at the beginning, and the date of his death at the end. At a certain point, the holders of the manuscript decided to bind the separate notebooks into a single volume to ensure its preservation. The binder, however, was careless with respect to the contents of the memoir – presumably simply because she or he did not understand a word of it – and cropped its pages to fit the size of the binding, destroying many of the margin notes left by the author.

The Audience

Who were the intended audience for al-Qadiri’s memoirs? It is safe to say that he wrote primarily for himself: the very process of writing a life story can be seen as a means of psychological self-treatment. After being released from a long imprisonment, it is likely that al-Qadiri wanted to restore justice by producing an authentic and true narrative of himself. In fact, at the time of writing and still at the time of his death, al-Qadiri was not yet officially rehabilitated. This rejection of unjust oppression (na-haqq, bāla-gunahsiz māzlūm) increases the value of the author’s subjectivity: al-Qadiri mobilizes literary and behavioral practices known to him and combines them all in a single multifaceted text.

As someone who consciously fashioned himself as a Qur’an specialist, al-Qadiri constantly addressed God, and invocations of God (du’ā) appear regularly in the text. One of them, “Oh Allah! If s/he was a doer of good then increase his or her good fortune. And if s/he was a wrongdoer then overlook his/her wrongdoings,” features as many as twenty-two times, as a short prayer for certain deceased individuals about whom the author wrote positively. In fact, the use of this invocation is intertwined with al-Qadiri’s assessment of others’ personality. This constant pious rhetoric shows that al-Qadiri’s dialogue with God served an important function in his self-perception as a sincere believer, as well as in writing about others’ lives. The same is true for Muhammad Fatih
al-Ilmini’s historical work *Tawarikh-i Altï Ata* (1909), where the author regularly includes invocations of God.94

Writing in the Arabic script long after the official change of the alphabet, al-Qadiri still intended his memoirs for a certain readership. While describing crimes committed during the famine of the 1920s, he makes an emotional appeal to an imaginary reader: “Dear readers (*uquchïlar*), judge for yourself.”95 Still, the readership is assumed to be local enough to be able to appreciate the good deeds performed by al-Qadiri for his beloved village of Istärlibash: “Maybe [the villagers] will learn the story upon reading this; I ask the readers (*uquchïlar*) to pray for me.”96 Al-Qadiri’s apparent confidence in continued access to Arabic-script literacy might, to a certain degree, reflect the situation at the time of writing: in the 1950s there were still many people able to consume texts that reproduced the visual standards of Islamic book culture. Moreover, for al-Qadiri, as for many other individuals of his generation and background, Arabic-script literacy in Tatar remained the most effective tool for self-expression, despite all the efforts of Soviet nation-building policies in shifting to the Latin and then Cyrillic scripts. Throughout the entire Soviet epoch, traditional Islamic literacy remained an option for the older generation as well as for a relatively small number of younger individuals who received their education in Soviet-era madrasas, and even for some circles of the intelligentsia.97 This can also explain the absence of visual sources in al-Qadiri’s book: he simply felt at home in the purely textual realm with its visual aesthetics, leaving aside photographs as rather alien to his mode of self-conception. That said, the language used by al-Qadiri demonstrates much flexibility, with openness to borrowing from different tongues, as well as code-switching when

94 Kazan University Library, Ms. 124 T. The work’s shorter autograph (Ms. 5854T, 106 fols.) contains margin notes written by the manuscript owners, including the author's granddaughter Balkys Karmysheva (1916-2000). On this work, see Allen J. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia*; idem, “Islam and Ethnic Relations in the Kazakh Inner Horde: Muslim Cossacks, Tatar Merchants, and Kazakh Nomads in a Turkic Manuscript, 1870-1910,” *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries. Vol. 2: Inter-Regional and Inter-Ethnic Relations*, ed. by Anke von Kuigelgen, Michael Kemper, Allen J. Frank (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1998), 211-242.


96 Ibid., fol. 103a.

97 Notable is the correspondence of two eminent Orientalists, ‘Abd al-Rahman Tagirdzhanov (1907-1983) and Mirkasym Usmanov (1934-2010), in the 1970s and 1980s: always in the Arabic script and following the rules of traditional letter-writing. Institute of Language, Literature, and Arts of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan. Collection 115 (the archive of ‘Abd al-Rahman Tagirdzhanov), op. 4, d. 63, 25 fols. Similarly, the graduates of the Mir-i ‘Arab madrasa in Bukhara would regularly use the Arabic script for private purposes throughout the era of late Socialism.
reporting the direct speech of actors in the narrative who speak in Arabic, Kazakh, or Russian.98 While for Qur’anic citations and hadiths al-Qadiri usually does not provide any comment or translation, borrowed words in everyday use are regularly rendered in several forms, i.e. in the original form followed by Tatar and Russian (all in Arabic script). Linguistic plurality and flexibility of choice, eloquently employed by the author, are thus placed in the context of traditional Tatar manuscript culture. Poets contemporary with al-Qadiri also made use of this linguistic polyphony in their work. For example, Muhammad Sadiq al-Imanquli (1870-1932) in his verses allows a Turk, an Arab, and a Persian to each speak in their own tongue, providing poetic translations only for the Persian speech.99 Notably, one can hardly detect any influence of Persian literacy in al-Qadiri’s memoirs: by the early twentieth century, when the formation of his individuality took place, the popularity of Persianate linguistic and behavioral models had entered their phase of decline.

As a graduate of the Russian-Tatar school100 in Istärlibash, al-Qadiri knew spoken Russian well, to the extent that he was able to serve as a translator for Kazakh hajjis on their way to Mecca. Still, on his return trip from Arabia in 1908, al-Qadiri expressed some unease with official documentation: upon receiving a document from Russian officials he needed the assistance of “a learned person” (*belgän keshe*) to read it out for him.101 Later on, he successfully evaded military service, where he would have improved his knowledge of Russian; but it is certain that during his two periods of imprisonment he must have learned the language well (including the prison jargon102), as revealed by his regular translations of certain Arabic and Tatar words into Arabic-script Russian throughout the text. During the past three centuries, Russian words in Tatar texts could be rendered either in the Arabic script,103 or in Cyrillic,
depending on the will of the individual author. This situational practice served as a mode of either alienation or nativization, given the ambivalent status of the Russian language for Muslims. On the one hand, comprehending the Russian language increasingly became a practical necessity, especially in the urban context and even more so for someone like al-Qadiri, engaged in operating a small business; on the other hand, the language was strongly associated with Christianity, state oppression, and the dominant culture of the Other. This ambivalence created a gray space for language tricks: even those who knew the language well still turned to the service of translators to win time in a conversation and gain control over the social situation.

Based in Leningrad in the late 1970s, the mufti ‘Abd al-Bari Isaev (1907-1983) had to render his drafts of the Arabic-script Tatar translation of the Qur’an in Cyrillic, despite the fact that he did not really feel at home with the rules of the Soviet-style Tatar grammar. In fact, this manuscript was the only work in his extensive written oeuvre that he did not write in the Arabic script, and therefore his Cyrillic text reflected many features of traditional Islamic literacy, i.e. the omission of vowels, the absence of capital letters, and irregular punctuation. Isaev tried to address a broad audience consisting of the recent generation of Soviet school graduates, who would certainly not have been literate in Arabic. In contrast, al-Qadiri still believed that, on a local level, his life narrative would be understood in a traditional, if not to say conservative, linguistic and visual form. The same is true for the written oeuvre of Saduaqas Ghîlmani, a Muslim scholar from late Socialist Kazakhstan.

To write memoirs in Arabic-script Tatar in the mid-1950s with the hope of a possible readership in the future was a conscious choice of the author, who did not feel comfortable writing about himself in any form other than those familiar to him from childhood. In practice, this meant that from the very beginning of his project there was no real audience for his written narrative: the modes of self-description current in the first quarter of the twentieth century proved

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104 As early as 1187 / 1773-1774, after copying a Turkic medical treatise, a certain ‘Uthman b. Isma‘îl decided to repeat his name in the Cyrillic script for no apparent reason: Kazan University Library, Ms. 134 T, fol. 121b.


to be hopelessly outdated and incomprehensible already for his children’s
generation.108

Al-Qadiri’s narrative is full of emotions and reflections on his life experi-
ence, where Islamic piety combines strikingly with prison jargon. There are
many instances of the author providing the direct speech of his interlocutors,
giving us a real sense of oral communication at that time. What we hear is
not the voice of the learned elite, but of simple countryside folk who are dis-
engaged from scholarly debates and uninterested in maintaining the sacred
authority. What is the literary tradition that this voice appealed to?

Sources of Inspiration

When we think of templates of Muslim life writing in the Russian empire, the
first genre that comes to mind is a tradition of Tatar biographical dictionar-
ies. First introduced to international scholarship by Mirkasyim Usmanov and
Allen Frank, these sources provide researchers with extensive data on thou-
ousands of individuals. However, as Danielle Ross rightly observes, compila-
tions of biographies “were carefully curated self-representations of a specific
close-knit network of scholarly families, their students, and their clients who
dominated social and cultural life in Kazan and its neighboring villages.”109
When approached through the lens of personhood (shakhsiya), we observe
in these extensive biographical texts a great degree of standardization of
individual biographical entries and even of the language chosen to describe
those life histories. It would be extremely interesting to know which role
models were important in collecting data for biographical accounts. In other
words, the collections of biographies, or classical tabaqat genre, had the aim
of teaching Muslims how to live a life worth remembering.110 Hence the title
of the most famous biographical collection, i.e. Traces (Athar), composed by
Riza Fakhreddinov between the 1890s and 1930s. By the 1950s, together with
Mardjani’s Mustafad al-akhbar, these were the only biographical diction-
aries of prominent Tatar individuals available in print111 and they proved to

108 Descendants of Hasandjan Akhmerov were also unable to read his reminiscences:
Häsändjan Akhmärov, Istälekляр, 139.
109 Danielle Ross, Tatar Empire, 3.
110 Cf. the genre of elegies that served a similar purpose: Danielle Ross, “The Promiscuous
Life,” 343-376.
111 Other biographical dictionaries existed in manuscript form and enjoyed only limited (if
Kazakh Steppe, xviii-xx.
be influential in the composition of similar works: for example, Zinnatullah Muhammad Rahimi in his biography of the poet Shams al-Din Zaki explicitly referred to these authors.\footnote{Zinnatullah Muhammad Rahimi, \textit{Shams al-Din Zaki târjemâ-yi hâle} (1915), The Scientific Archive of Ufa Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, F. 3, op. 63, d. 47. I used a photocopy of this manuscript: Kazan University Library, Ms. 6325 T, fols. 6-9.} Al-Qadiri was also reading Ibn Khallikan's biographical dictionary to use it as a possible example. Behavioral models propagated via biographical dictionaries included seekers of knowledge, professional theologians and Sufis, and, to a lesser degree, those who supported them financially, i.e. pious merchants, often themselves involved in gaining knowledge in one way or another. Reading scholarly biographies of the past was not part of the regular school curriculum, but some exceptions were made to that rule. ‘Alimdjan al-Barudi remembered with gratitude that when he was eleven years old, his teacher Nur ‘Ali al-Barudi attached to a copy of al-Zamakhshari’s primer on Arabic grammar, \textit{al-Anmuzaj}, a brief biography of its author, and thus “opened the door to the enjoyment of biographical writing.”\footnote{Galimdjan Barudi, \textit{Khätirä däftäre. 1920 elnyng oktiabrenän alyp 1921 elnyng noiabrenä kadär} (Kazan: Mardjani Institute of History, 2018), 140.} Indeed, it is not uncommon to find similar biographical notes on the first pages of Tatar madrasa textbooks of the nineteenth century, sometimes with references to the famous bibliographical reference book \textit{Kashf al-zunun} by Hajji Khalifa.

Of course, there is always a certain degree of standardization involved in life writing in order to make the text understandable for an intended audience that shares common cultural values. In contrast to biographical dictionaries, accounts of the Prophet Muhammad provide a far more universal role model, democratic in its outreach: not everyone could excel in sciences or become wealthy, but everyone was meant to follow the example of the ideal Muslim personality embodied by the Prophet. The genre of prophetic biographies (\textit{sira}) traces its history back to the first centuries of Islam, but such books were not always popular in Russia. Given our lack of knowledge about the dynamics of the circulation of Arabic and Persian texts in imperial Russia, it is hard to judge how intensively such classical \textit{sira} books were consumed.\footnote{An incomplete catalog of Arabic manuscripts hosted by Kazan University Library, compiled by Masgud Idiiatullin in the 1970s, lists only fourteen biographical works. Almost all of them deal with biographies of Muslim scholars in classical forms of \textit{tabagat} and \textit{tarajim}, either collective for the Hanafi school, or individual (a biography of Imam Shafi‘i copied in Egypt in the early seventeenth century: 1183 Ar.). One exception is a detailed biography of Abu Nasr al-Qursawi, copied by his great admirer, Muhammad Najib al-Tuntari, in the 1870s (1468 Ar.).} Clearly, such texts had been known and copied in local madrasas, but they did not
accentuate the personal character of their heroes, emphasizing instead their prescribed roles as pious bearers of Muslim authority.

Alfina Sibgatullina links the rapid growth of printed prose and poetry devoted to the character of the Prophet with the spread of the Naqshbandiyya khalidiyya Sufi brotherhood among the Tatars in the second half of the nineteenth century. Good knowledge of the personal characteristics of the Prophet was a necessary prerequisite for conducting Sufi practices of spiritual concentration on the figure of Muhammad via one’s patron. Al-Qadiri was surrounded by great Sufi masters but was not a Sufi himself; nor did he ever openly criticize Sufism either. His case shows that the prophetic example was still in demand beyond the strict confines of Sufi circles. Similar behavioral models were thus available to individuals from different ideological streams.

To continue this line of thought, it is tempting to draw a teleological line of genre development, from hagiographies of the early modern period that dealt with symbols rather than human lives, to biographies and then autobiographies of the modern period that manifest the rise of the Muslim self and the appearance of self-reflection, and which focus on individuality as the central modus in the narrative. Indeed, there is a clear difference between Muhammad al-Birgawi’s (d. 1573) 

Tariqa muhammadiyiya, an Ottoman poem that circulated widely in the Russian empire of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the new 

sira books by the local authors. While in al-Birgawi’s book the Prophet plays the role of a legendary man, the 

sira books reflected a demand for rationalism and for the Prophet as a figure closer to people, emphasizing the human aspects of his life experience and his qualities as a person. Different books aimed to produce different types of moral subject.

Biographies of the Prophet started to be published in Tatar in the 1880s, from which point the writing of such books was established as a tradition. Clearly, the image of the Prophet in Russia experienced changes from the late

115 Alfina Sibgatullina, Chelovek na minbare: obraz musul'manskogo lidera v tatarskoi i turetskoi literaturakh (konets XIX – pervaja tret’XX v.) (Moscow: Sadra, 2018), 100.
117 Cf. a similar process in the literary history of Christian autobiographies in imperial Russia: Vera i lichnost’ v menialushchemsia obschestve. Avtobiografika i pravoslavie v Rossii kontsa XVII – nachala XX vv., ed. by Denis Sdvizkhov, Gari Marker, Tat’iana Sochiva (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2019).
118 On the perception of Tariqa muhammadiyiya in Russia see: Michael Kemper, Sufis und Gelehrte in Tatarien und Baschkirien, 1789-1889: Der islamische Diskurs unter russischer Herrschaft (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1998), 148-172.
119 ‘Ata’ Allah Bayazitov, Muhammad Mustafa salla Allah ‘alayhi wa sallammeng diönyaga kilüe wä dinneng bashlanuwä (Kazan, 1881); Shähär Shäräf, ‘Asr-i sā’adät (Kazan, 1909); Rida
nineteenth century, especially if we take into account the rise of hadith scholarship in the region that took place at the same time. Again, there are no statistics that we can easily refer to, but even the available catalogs of manuscripts allow us to see that a specialized study of prophetic traditions was not all that popular before the mid-nineteenth century.

Al-Qadiri does not openly state the sources of his inspiration. By 1955, when he produced his memoirs, he would have had access to both the Muslim tradition of life writing and Russian/Soviet examples. Still, even without being cited directly, the Muslim symbolic language was sufficiently rich to provide al-Qadiri with all the templates that he used in his memoirs. By contrast, the Soviet models that were arguably available did not manifest in any of the literary and visual tools that al-Qadiri employed in his work.

‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri had certain role models that he desired to imitate. In particular, he writes about individuals who, in his opinion, embodied the ideal qualities of a Muslim scholar. He did not pursue that path himself, but held those who did in high esteem. Shihab al-Din al-Mardjani (1818-1889) was one such figure. Al-Qadiri mentions him in his memoirs only in passing, to say that his teacher ‘Abd al-Kabir Sateev had a similar health problem to al-Mardjani;\textsuperscript{120} but in his outline of historical events he writes a short biography of al-Mardjani, whose life is portrayed as a struggle for truth against ignorance. It is also stated that it was God who guided al-Mardjani on this path.\textsuperscript{121} In other words, al-Qadiri does not focus on the personal qualities of the scholar, but on his ideological convictions and the power of God to support truth in this world. This is especially interesting given the popularity of al-Mardjani already during his lifetime as an embodiment of the ideal Muslim personality – indeed, an entire poetic tradition came into being to praise his personal qualities.\textsuperscript{122} Moreover, al-Mardjani himself took care over his public image, by producing one of the earliest Muslim autobiographies in Russia and showing a positive attitude to being photographed.\textsuperscript{123} Note also that, as al-Qadiri was writing before the formation in the late 1950s of the Soviet academic discourse praising

\textsuperscript{120} ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fol. 168b.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., fol. 62a.
\textsuperscript{123} Shihab al-Din al-Mardjani, \textit{Wafiyyat al-aslaf wa tahiyyat al-akhraf}, Kazan University Library, Ms. 614 Ar., fols. 291a-292b. His biography was also narrated by the generation of his students, as in the notebook of Muhassina Khabibullin (1871-1937) from Safajay village near Nizhnii Novgorod: Kazan University Library, 2016 T, fols. 22b-23b. Mardjani's close
al-Mardjani and his associates as secular ‘enlighteners’ and promoters of the national culture,\textsuperscript{124} his inspiration must have come from within the Muslim tradition of life writing.

Al-Qadiri’s entry on ‘Alimdjan al-Barudi, another influential Muslim scholar, unanimously elected as the first Soviet mufti in 1917, is more detailed. It starts with a biographical sketch that emphasizes al-Barudi’s mastery of hadith scholarship acquired in Arabia and Egypt,\textsuperscript{125} which al-Qadiri must have admired as someone who shared similar interests. What follows is a memory of direct contact with this great scholar, admiration of his personal qualities, and a description of commemorative practices:

\begin{quote}
I hope that God will count him among the forgiven servants. During his trip to Istärlibash he received me with special grace and asked me to recite a passage from the Holy Qur’an as well as a hadith, ‘The deeds are judged by the intentions’\textsuperscript{126} from \textit{Sahih al-Bukhari}. In his capacity as \textit{mufti al-islam} he granted me a permit (\textit{ijazatnamä}) in his handwriting to teach the hadith and Qur’an. When traveling, every time when I was in Ufa I would respectfully greet him. It is no exaggeration to say that he was very modest and a true scholar of Islam. While in Istärlibash, he collected the people of three neighborhoods together in a single mosque and provided good guidance to men and women. On every occasion he called on people to reject superstitions in religion.

In June 1958 I went to Kazan and was honored to perform the Qur’an recitation at the honorable grave of my respected teacher. Full of hope that God would accept [my prayers], I went home. May God forgive him. ‘Abd al-Majid Qadiri.\textsuperscript{127}
\end{quote}

Notably, in his own diaries, ‘Alimdjan al-Barudi described issuing \textit{ijazas} as a mundane affair that he performed on a daily basis.\textsuperscript{128} However, although he was otherwise attentive to documenting the names of grantees, al-Barudi seems to

\begin{quote}
\ldots
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{124} Alfrid Bustanov, Michael Kemper, “From Mirasism to Euro-Islam: The Translation of Islamic Legal Debates into Tatar Secular Cultural Heritage,” \textit{Islamic Authority and the Russian Language: Studies on Texts from European Russia, the North Caucasus and West Siberia} (Amsterdam: Pegasus, 2012), 29–53.

\textsuperscript{125} The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St Petersburg hosts a collection of \textit{ijazas} that al-Barudi had acquired during his trip to the Near East: Ms. C 2042.

\textsuperscript{126} [In the original: \textit{إِنَّالَا أَمْرَالَآفِيَات}].

\textsuperscript{127} ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, \textit{Memoirs}, fol. 66a. While recitation of the Qur’an at one’s grave may be considered a Sufi practice, during the twentieth century this became a widespread custom no longer directly associated with Sufism.

\textsuperscript{128} At least two documents issued by al-Barudi (that I know of) deal with the transmission of the \textit{Dala'il al-khayrat} in particular. One such \textit{ijaza} was given to Muhammad Zarif b. al-Kamal (in the private archive of Islam Shangareev, Moscow) and another to Burhan Sharaf (dated 1314 / 1896, in the private archive of Al’mira Aminova in Kazan).
have completely forgotten about al-Qadiri: he does not mention ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri among the people who received *ijaza* upon his visit to Istärlibash.\textsuperscript{129} This small episode neatly demonstrates the difference in importance attributed to social interactions between members of distinct classes. For al-Barudi, a member of the elite, his encounter with a former Medinan student did not appear to be important at all, but for the latter even a brief meeting with a person of respect was highly valuable. Al-Qadiri viewed the great scholars of Islam with much respect, but the kind of personas that he employed in the description of his life appear strikingly different from the traditional scholarly models. He was neither a theologian, nor an imam.

**Persona I: Qari**

When writing about himself, al-Qadiri usually replaces the first-person pronoun *min* with the modest expression *fäqirengez*, literally meaning “your servant.” This expression was widely used in private correspondence of the late imperial era.\textsuperscript{130} Alternatively, he uses the plural form *biz*, “we.” Following this etiquette was not the only available option: in his autobiographical novel of 1936, ‘Ali Chaghatay (1867-1942), the first Tatar mullah to reject religion even before the Revolution, refers to himself in the third person, thus creating distance, as if to present himself as a literary hero.\textsuperscript{131} In contrast to both al-Qadiri and Chaghatay, a contemporary of al-Qadiri, al-hajj ‘Arabshah al-Qïshlawi (1887-1961), who served as gatekeeper of the Tatar cemetery in Kazan after the Second World War, refers to himself in his childhood reminiscences directly in the first person (in the form *min üzem*)\textsuperscript{132} and only in the book’s colophon does the style change to a more self-denigrating: “I, the weak and poor servant of God” (‘Alahînîng zä’îf wä fäqir qolî *min*).\textsuperscript{133} This variant was part of the same cultural repertoire, and the concrete choice between available forms depended

\textsuperscript{129} Galimdjan Barudi, *Khätirä däftäre*, 163.

\textsuperscript{130} For example, the correspondence of Rîza Fakhreddinov and Muhammad-Najib al-Tuntari: Kazan University Library, 1595T, 35 fols.

\textsuperscript{131} Galiäsgar Gafurov-Chygtay, *Galineng altmîsh elîyk istälege*, ed. by Zufar Ramiev (Kazan: Sûz, 2017), 12 et passim.

\textsuperscript{132} Gadelshah Äkhmadiev, *Koly babay näsele*, 60, 75, 83, 89, et passim. ‘Abd al-Bari Isaev in his autobiography from the late 1940s uses the same self-reference *min üzem*: [“Türjemäh hälem,”] in: Gabdelbari khâzät Isäev, *Dînî üsârlär*, ed. by Alfrid Bustanov (Kazan, 2019), 221.

\textsuperscript{133} Gadelshah Äkhmadiev, *Koly babay näsele*, 163 (in facsimile and transliteration). This change in writing is also peculiar to colophons, where the copyist would usually render their names in the third person.
on speech register: while Chaghatay aimed to compose a novel based on his life, al-Qişlawi kept the narrative quite informal; meanwhile, despite his preference for simple language, al-Qadiri elevated the style of his memoirs to somewhere between the literary persona of Chaghatay (with possible Soviet influences of the time) and the written everyday speech of al-Qişlawi.

Throughout his life narrative, ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri describes himself in two main capacities, which I regard as two types of persona that he purposely assimilated and displayed in writing: a pious Qur’an specialist and an unjustly oppressed individual.

First, al-Qadiri presents himself as a qari. This term refers both to a professional reciter of the Qur’an, and to someone who has made a conscious effort to memorize the Word of God and spread it among his co-religionists. This combined meaning is a feature of the particular context, because one would normally expect that reciters are not necessarily bearers of the Qur’anic text (hafiz kalam Allah). The kind of persona that al-Qadiri developed through the years prior to his first imprisonment in 1928 had as its foundation a focus on the Qur’an and the authority of the Prophet as an embodiment of ideal personhood (al-insan al-kamil). As al-Qadiri claimed in support of the highly

Fig. 5
contested celebration of the Prophet’s birthday:134 “especially today, in this time of weakness of religion, there is a dire need to tell the younger generation in their mother tongue in general terms about the personality (nindi keshe bulgan) of the Prophet and how he spread Islamic religion all over the world”135 – hence the understandable emphasis on hadith scholarship, mastery of the Arabic language, and social activism. We can be certain that this type of persona dealt with prophetic legacy, simply in view of the fact that the young ‘Abd al-Majid went to Medina, the city of the Prophet, to master the art of the Qur’an recitation.

Qari was the title that al-Qadiri used himself and placed in the mouths of his heroes, who address him as Majid qari. Within the main text, he refers to himself twice in the colophons as “‘Abd al-Majid b. Shaykh al-Islam Qadïrov known as (al-mashkur) Majid qari”136 and “‘Abd al-Majid qari b. Shaykh al-Islam Qadïrov.”137 When inserting his reminiscences in the chronological register (fols. 52a-70a) that precedes the main narrative, al-Qadiri leaves several types of personal signature, whether a slightly Russified ‘Abd al-Majid Qadïrov, a traditional Muslim form ‘Abd al-Majid b. Shaykh al-Islam Qadiri, or simply Qadiri.138 In this way, the author navigated between the two intertwined cultural paradigms – the Russian and the Islamic – and claimed their authority by producing the respective forms of his personal name.

The epigraphic traditions of Istärlibash, to which al-Qadiri felt a strong personal attachment – he regularly refers to gravestone inscriptions in his book and had produced inscriptions himself – prescribed the formula hajj al-haramayn (“a pilgrim to the two Sacred Places”).139 Hence ‘Abd al-Majid qari felt obliged to mention his Mecca trip in the text of his envisaged epitaph (although this epitaph was never realized, even after the reburial of his ashes in Istärlibash in 1990). Majid qari preferred here a purely Muslim phrasing, in the Arabic script: “‘Abd al-Majid b. Shaykh al-Islam al-Qadïri al-Istãrlibashi, a pilgrim to the Sacred Places and a bearer of the Qur’an, is buried here.”140 Occasionally,
one can encounter the same title of \textit{hajj al-haramayn} already in colophons of nineteenth-century Tatar manuscripts,\footnote{Epigraphic materials of the era would still prefer \textit{al-hajj} as a stable formula. For example: Alfrid Bustanov, “Rukopis’ v kontekste sibirskogo islama,” Aleksandr Seleznev, Irina Selezneva, Igor’ Belich, \textit{Kult sviatykh v sibirskom islame: spetsifika universal’nogo} (Moscow: Mardjani Publishing House, 2009), 190.} but it is only in the twentieth century that this title becomes a standard that we find on gravestones\footnote{Vener Usmanov, \textit{Tariikki yadkärlär}, 18 (\textit{hajj al-haramayn}, dated 1915), 71 (\textit{al-hajj bi-l-haramayn}, 1337 / 1918).} and even in commemorative photographs (Fig. 6).

The combined reference to Qur’anic expertise and pilgrimage is also present in the signatures of Shakir Khiyaletdinov (1890-1974) and the abovementioned ‘Abd al-Bari Isaev, the two subsequent muftis of Soviet Russia. Their personal writings as well as their gravestones in Ufa and St Petersburg feature the same
title. Since all of these figures were contemporaries, it is safe to assume that they belonged to a community with shared life experiences, which defined one’s individual personality. ‘Abd al-Bari Isaev in particular, as a systematic practitioner of Qur’an recitation throughout his life, strongly maintained his identity as a bearer of the sacred word, often referring to himself simply as Bari qari. The difference between Isaev and al-Qadiri, however, was that Isaev was proud of his scholarly credentials, authored religious treatises, and served as imam for many years in Ufa and Leningrad, while al-Qadiri consciously rejected an offer to become an imam and never associated himself with scholarly obligations.

Interestingly, before the turn of the twentieth century we do not encounter individuals who describe themselves explicitly as reciters of the Qur’an, because knowledge of the Book was considered part of the regular training of ‘ulama. For example, the merchant Niyaz Aytikin (d. 1847) went to Cairo with the purpose of excelling in Qur’an recitation, but neither his grave inscription nor the biographical dictionaries refer to him as a qari.\(^{143}\) When traveling to Medina to acquire the mimetic experience of memorizing the Holy Book at the Mosque of the Prophet became accessible to many, some individuals started to fashion themselves as bearers of the Qur’an and were proud of the chains of transmission that they shared with famous scholars. Al-Qadiri states that he first received an ijaza, a document stating his qualifications in Qur’an recitation, from his teacher Muhammad Shukri in Medina in 1908. In the 1920s, he asked for an additional certificate from ‘Alimjan al-Barudi.\(^ {144}\) Another person known for collecting similar documents testifying to mastery in Qur’anic sciences was Abu Bakr al-Shahmirzawi (d. 1321/1904). He had also studied in Cairo and possessed at least two ijazas for recitation.\(^ {145}\) It seems that only documents from abroad were deemed prestigious: even though ‘Abd al-Bari Isaev was very proud of his qari status, I failed to find a formal ijaza from his teachers that would confirm it. In his autobiography, however, Isaev made it clear that he learned the Qur’an at the age of fourteen under the tutelage of Habib Rijal qari ‘Abd al-Qadiri, a rural Qur’an specialist in Bashkiria.

Al-Qadiri’s description of his qari persona largely follows an established pattern, which becomes striking when compared with the memoirs of other Qur’an reciters, such as Fayd al-Rahman b. Ahmad al-Amiri (b. 1874). In 1925,

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\(^{143}\) Alfrid Bustanov, “‘Abd al-Rashid Ibrahim’s Biographical Dictionary on Siberian Islamic Scholars,” Kazan Islamic Review 1 (2015), 29, 73.

\(^{144}\) ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fol. 92a.

\(^{145}\) The National Library of the Republic of Tatarstan, Ms. 385 G. On him: Rizaeddin Fäkhreddin Asar. 3 khäm 4 tomnar (Kazan: Rukhiat, 2010), 277-284.
al-Amiri composed his life story, presenting himself as an individual who strived for knowledge from early childhood and preferred the role of a Qur'an specialist to the prospect of being a merchant. Unlike al-Qadiri, al-Amiri memorized the Qur'an already in Russia, at the madrasa of Ahmad Rahmanqulov in Troitsk, between the ages of twenty and twenty-three. Subsequently, in 1900 he decided to go to Cairo to deepen his knowledge of the Qur'an and learn the seven styles of recitation. Al-Amiri received a certificate from his teachers in Cairo and then returned to his home village of Iske Mängär near Kazan to teach and perform recitations.146

From the turn of the twentieth century onwards, we regularly encounter individuals who invested in learning the Qur'an, even in their later years in the Gulag setting: Jihangir Abyzgildin (1875-1938), imam of the first mosque in Ufa during the interwar period, wrote in his diary that he used his time in the Gulag to memorize the Holy Book. For this he was praised widely, including by fellow Qur'an specialists. Even though Abyzgildin did not call himself a qari, his situation resembles that of al-Qadiri, who combined the identities of a Qur'an specialist and a former prisoner.147

The rise of qari as a self-designation coincided with the paradigmatic shift towards translation and commentary of the Qur'an in the Tatar language: a whole series of works in this genre were composed between the 1880s and 1970s. This phenomenon can be considered as the formation of a new Qur'anic culture that included the practices of memorization and recitation as distinctly valuable, and therefore crucial for individual self-consciousness. Al-Qadiri was part of this emerging culture and the Qur'anic text certainly played a pivotal role in the formation of his core self. However, this culture was not highly prized beyond the Tatar-speaking areas of Inner Russia. Daghestani Muslims did not distinguish reciters of the Qur'an, while Daghestani vernacular translations of the Qur'an have appeared only recently. As far as I am aware, the same is true for Central Asian contexts: Tajik migrants became famous for their recitation skills only in the post-Soviet era, after all the Tatar qaris had passed away; and even then, only in Russia, where the prestige of professional reciters remains very high.

‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri’s ego-narrative presents an intriguing case of the author systematically describing his life experiences with the aid of the Qur’an and hadiths. Regular citations of sacred formulas by heart are not merely ritual

146 Fayd al-Rahman al-Amiri, Tärjimä-yi häl, The private archive of 'Abd al-Khabir Yarullin (Kazan), Ms. 96, fol. 4a.
147 The Diary of Jihagir Abyzgildin is preserved in the private library of Abbas Bibarsov (Urta Eluzan village of Penza region), Ms. 65, fols. 388b-390a.
acts; we can consider that they had real importance for the author. Prayers (du'a) that he cites in the book are all 'reliable' in a sense that they all originate from the respectable hadith collections. Of course, the actual usage of such phrases was part of a long tradition that presupposes oral and written references to the holy books in everyday communication, especially in letters. Against this cultural background – that is, the typical speech acts – al-Qadiri chooses religious formulas that help him to advance an argument of his own; namely, that during one's lifetime one must leave a considerable legacy that benefits the community. A separate chapter on renovating the water systems in Istärlibash lays a particularly clear emphasis on this religious theme. In 1926, al-Qadiri became actively engaged in organizing this renovation work and described the whole procedure in minute detail, culminating in the following statement:

In my heart (küngelenmnän) I pronounced the following prayer: “When God asks me: ‘What good have you done for people in the world?’ I will point to this work. In accordance with the hadith “The one who points towards something good gets the same reward as the one who did the good itself”¹⁴⁸ may the Lord of the Universe count my work as an enduring donation (sadaqa-yi jariyya) with reward until the End of Times.” To this day, that water system is still functioning. All the people around said: “Look, qari, your service was not for nothing.” The whole village drank this water and everyone thanked the constructors after drinking. May that be for the sake of God. This must be the only good that I performed for Istärlibash. Maybe they will learn the story upon reading this; I ask the readers (uquchïlar) to pray for me.¹⁴⁹

It seems that leaving behind an object of material and spiritual value for the community was deemed crucial for describing one’s personality.¹⁵⁰ The digging of a well near the mosque in Orenburg by the imam Ḥabd al-‘Aziz Murtazin is similarly described by al-Qadiri as an enduring donation (sadaqa jariyya).¹⁵¹ ‘Alimdjan al-Barudi, in turn, repeatedly mentions sadaqa jariyya as an important goal in one's life, including his own.¹⁵² Writing much later, Ḥabd al-Kabir Yarullin mentions the term in the context of education: “Abu-l-Muhsin b.

¹⁴⁸ In the original: الدال على الخير كاعله
¹⁵⁰ The poet Muhammad ‘Ali al-Chuqri (1826-1889) praised Ni’matullah al-Istärlibashi (1772-1844), a patron of the local madrasa and a grand Sufi master, for his efforts in creating public spaces: Muhammad ‘Ali al-Chuqri, Tadhkirat al-shaykh al-marhum mulla Ni’matullah al-Istärlibashi. The private archive of ‘Abbas Bibarsov (Urta Eluzan village of Penza region), Ms. 1. fols. 3ab.
¹⁵² Galimdjan Barudi, Khätirä däftäre, 110, 178.
Shafi’ullah passed away around the age of eighty-seven years on August 16, 1975. May God forgive him. He left behind a considerable enduring donation. For many years he was a madrasa teacher in Kazan.153 From this broad chronology of the term’s usage, we see that the moral ideal of Islamic philanthropy was not just associated with Muslim reformists of the early twentieth century; rather, it was a category of piety regularly evoked in discussion of moral subjects.

By making an enduring donation, individuals hoped for eternal salvation and spiritual reward in the afterlife – as much as through regular engagement with the Qur’an. Being a qari became al-Qadiri’s main identity, reflecting a dream that only partly came true: due to his long imprisonment, al-Qadiri ceased reciting the Qur’an regularly. This caused him much sorrow, that one can read between the lines: “Having performed the Qur’an recitation ten times, after 1927 I could not continue, because following the Great Russian Revolution I stopped performing the recitation. Many troubles befell me, as I have written above.”154

**Persona II: Mäzlüm**

The unjustly repressed individual (mäzlüm) who spent a great part of his active life in prison is another persona displayed in al-Qadiri’s memoirs, which has deep roots in the Qur’anic textual tradition. While the persona of qari was a historically recent role model, for which al-Qadiri probably did not have any clear example to follow besides his that of contemporaries, the concept of mäzlüm provided a self-defensive strategy with a rich tradition of its own. The general pathos of this concept concerns the issue of power and authority: an unjust ruler (zalim) treats the pious Muslims badly and they suffer under his despotism. Imprisonment, exile, and the resettlement of Russia’s Muslims in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided fertile ground for self-victimization as an unjustly oppressed individual (mäzlüm) and the blossoming of prison poetry (habsiyyat).155 In the 1870s, Ahmadjan al-Tobuli (1825-189?) described his experience in the Tobolsk jail in a similar fashion to the experience of a poor person (bicharä mesken) fated to endure

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tribulations.\textsuperscript{156} Hamza Turushhev (1899-1983, from a Siberian village), and Qiiyyam al-Din al-Qadiri (1882-1953, from Kazan), developed their reflections on imprisonment in the 1920s and 1930s along the same lines of passive opposition to the state.\textsuperscript{157} Given the problematic history of relations between Muslims and the Russian state, the persona of an oppressed pious subject remained fairly stable and popular over a long period and, unlike the \textit{qari} persona, was available to Dagestani Muslims from at least the era of Imam Shamil.\textsuperscript{158} One might observe here that although \textit{mäzlüm} was a persona to describe a personal encounter with state oppression, not everyone who had experienced prison opted for this form of self-fashioning. In their extensive diaries and memoirs, ‘Alimdjan al-Barudi and ‘Abdullah Bubi (1871-1922),\textsuperscript{159} who had been sentenced to different terms of exile, did not describe themselves as victims of the political regime.

Al-Qadiri’s use of the \textit{mäzlüm} paradigm is rather ambivalent. On the one hand, he clearly states that the authorities treated him unjustly, but he moves the responsibility from the abstract Bolshevik state to the local officials in İstärlibash, whom he knew personally, and some malicious individuals in Tashkent. On several occasions, al-Qadiri underlines that he has no objections to the Soviet government and even expresses gratitude to the labor camp management for their careful treatment of him as an elderly person, as he had become by the end of his term.\textsuperscript{160} Thus, \textit{mäzlüm} in al-Qadiri’s account blends self-victimization with a clearly pronounced loyalty to the Soviet regime. This apparent loyalty may in fact conceal a fear of being imprisoned again; however, it does not make much sense to speculate about the sincerity of these claims of loyalty, because we only have what al-Qadiri wrote in his memoirs. What al-Qadiri could not conceal is the unusual nature of this combination of acceptance of the new regime, gratitude for survival, and complaints of injustice. Regardless of these complexities, the deep sorrow of losing a long-desired persona of Qur’an reciter remained with al-Qadiri until his death.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{156} Alsu Khasavnekh, \textit{Akhmetzian Tubyli: zhizn’ i tvorchestvo tatarskogo poeta-sufiia XIX veka} (Kazan, 2017), 163-167 (excerpts from prison poetry).
\item \textsuperscript{159} Kazan University Library, Ms. 207 T–208 T; Bertugan Bubyilar hâm Izh-Bubyi mädrässä, ed. by Raif Märdanov, Raml’ Mingnullin, Suleiman Räkhimov (Kazan, 1999), 14-105; Gabdulla Bubyi, \textit{Khatynnar}, ed. by Al’ta Mäkmüütova (Iar Chally, 2013).
\item \textsuperscript{160} ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, \textit{Memoirs}, fol. 134b.
\end{itemize}
Mäzülüm was a persona of self-description, but for al-Qadiri it also provides a template for writing about the fate of religious personnel in the aftermath of the October Revolution. For example, in his list of historical events, al-Qadiri writes about the impressive complex of madrasa institutions and their servants in Qarghala near Orenburg:

After the revolution (inqilab waqïtïnda), mosques and madrasas were closed down. They transferred into the hands of the government and were host to a whole variety of institutions. The following are imams and teachers of Qarghala of our times [...]. Zaki hazrat was among the last of them. He was exiled (manfi bulîb) and disappeared (gha'îb buldí). May God cover him with His mercy.¹⁶¹

This mäzülüm type of persona was later developed further in the way al-Qadiri’s life was perceived by his children. His daughter Maryam mainly described him as a victim of Stalinist purges, but without all the religious connotations that al-Qadiri himself intended when writing about his experience in the first person.

The repressions of the 1930s formed a dramatic moment in the lives of al-Qadiri and many of his associates. For al-Qadiri, it was very important to write about this experience, evaluate it and provide the readers with his version of events: a version that would restore his moral status after the unjust accusations and excessive violence that he had been subject to as a result of the Bolshevik revolution. Al-Qadiri’s narrative had to serve the function of “a memory (yädkär) for my children and to provide a lesson (‘ibrät).”¹⁶² To achieve this goal, al-Qadiri came up with an elaborated vocabulary that helped to describe the Great Terror from a distinctly religious viewpoint.¹⁶³ Imprisonment is mähbus(lek), confiscation of property is denoted by the word musadara, and of course those who perished are called shahids (martyrs). The jail term is rendered in one place as mähbuslärneng wä’däse; elsewhere it is the Russian srok, however.¹⁶⁴ Exile is always expressed as näfi and voluntary exile is referred to as ikhtiyary sürgen.¹⁶⁵ Another interesting example is siyasi maghyublar – a term to denote political prisoners.¹⁶⁶ Al-Qadiri repeatedly used the term najat

¹⁶¹ Ibid., fol. 64a.
¹⁶² Ibid., fol. 108b.
¹⁶³ Elaborating a special vocabulary in Tatar makes al-Qadiri’s case distinct. Fayd al-Rahman al-Amiri, who described his brief imprisonment in 1921, preferred to use Russian loan-words: al-Amiri, Tärjimä-yi häl, fols. 12a-13b.
¹⁶⁴ ʿAbd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoïrs, fols. 128a, 133b.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid., fols. 117a, 159a.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid., fol. 147a.
to denote the long-awaited release from prison.\textsuperscript{167} The term \textit{najat} as salvation of believers in the afterlife was central to Islamic theological literature (\textit{'aqa'id} and \textit{kalam}), and proved to be immensely important in the debates between the Orthodox missionaries and their Muslim counterparts in Imperial Russia in the course of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{168} Most of the vocabulary used by al-Qadiri to describe the Great Terror has Arabic roots and clear religious connotations. It is improbable that al-Qadiri could have borrowed this vocabulary from the Soviet Tatar language of the time, which by then had already adopted the Cyrillic script and been systematically purged of Arabic and Persian loanwords. Rather, he transplanted these terms from the domain of Muslim piety to the context of violence and injustice to support his life narrative of a moral subject, one that hoped for salvation (\textit{najat}) in the afterlife for himself and the people he knew.

Al-Qadiri was not alone in pursuing such a literary agenda. Ussam Khanzafarov, a native of the Samara region, penned an extensive collection of poetry while exiled in Leninabad (Khujand) in the Tajik SSR, around 1939. His pious self-reflections form a powerful display of the author’s mastery of the Qur’an and

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., fols. 144b, 147a, 159a.

Muslim creed. As an expression of the idea that both good and evil stem from God, Khanzafarov drew a dramatic scene depicting a dialogue between a scholar and a Bolshevik (Fig. 7). The scholar proclaims: “I'm not afraid of you! I fear only God, the Invisible. [...] Oh comrade (qardāsh), put down your rifle and embrace piety (taqwalîq). [...] I am armed only with [the Qur'anic verse] ‘fear God’\textsuperscript{169}.” The Bolshevik replies: “I am stronger than you. You will survive, if you are like me. Look at me: I am a god unto myself.”\textsuperscript{170}

While linking repressions with the outcome of revolutionary events, al-Qadiri spoke neither of the Russian Revolution, nor of the Great Terror, as the end-times. He did not use apocalyptic language and did not refer to any of the popular narratives that would from time to time appear among the masses to predict the arrival of the apocalypse.\textsuperscript{171} Both al-Qadiri and Khanzafarov preached the moral superiority of believers over the Bolsheviks, and here, the Terror represented a personal trial that comes from God in order to reveal the best moral qualities of an individual. The practice of piety (taqwa) must lead to salvation (najat) in paradise.

Al-Qadiri’s descriptions of others’ imprisonment and execution trials reveal the author’s deep feelings of sorrow. He classified those victims as innocent people, harmed by the government for no apparent reason other than that they were wealthy or belonged to the religious elite. In early 1905, while in Mecca, al-Qadiri first met a certain Farah al-Din efendi, a native of Turay village in Belebey district. Writing retrospectively, al-Qadiri added here that “at the time of the Great Russian Revolution (olugh Rusiya inqilabï) he was senselessly murdered by the revolutionaries, simply because he was a mullah. May God count him among the forgiven servants of God and among the martyrs of the religion (din shähidläre).”\textsuperscript{172}

It must be noted that al-Qadiri’s usage of the term müzlüm is not restricted to the state Terror. He also turns to the term when relating the life stories of those who were killed by criminals, such as in the following two excerpts:

Lutfullah ‘Alıkaev did not study much and was overwhelmed by worldly matters, doing agriculture. He had a mill at the Künderäk River in Shipay village. One night, a local official (nachal’nik) passed by and saw that a canal bridge was broken. He woke Lutfullah up and asked him angrily why he didn’t care about the bridge. Lutfullah must have said something to him in irritation, and for this

\textsuperscript{169} Q 59: 18.
\textsuperscript{170} ‘Ussam Khanzafarov, [Khikmätte fikerlären, shigyr'lären iazyp bargañ däfṭäräre], Kazan University Library Ms. 1849 T, fol. 77a.
\textsuperscript{171} A tradition of apocalyptic texts with a heavy imprint of Sufi hagiographies was in circulation in Tatar manuscripts starting from the turn of the nineteenth century up to the late Soviet era.
\textsuperscript{172} ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fol. 86b.
reason the official shot him with his revolver. Wounded like this, in a month Lutfullah passed away as an unfortunate victim (mäzlüm). May God forgive his sins, amen.¹⁷³

When ‘Izzatullah abzï was alive, I went to see him at Azfikä station. He was a very poor and harmless person. Since he had a little education, he gave lessons in religion to the Bashkir children there. In summer, he would go to the foreign markets to be hired by the rich people for agricultural work. In his last days he used to transfer travelers from Azfikä station on his horse. One night he was innocently (bi-gunah mäzlüm) murdered by a Russian whom he transferred to a village. He was a very good person. May God have mercy upon him and count him among the martyrs (shähid).¹⁷⁴

Notably, the style of writing in these cases does not differ from al-Qadiri’s descriptions of the Great Terror. Non-political murders and those committed by the totalitarian state were united by a common theme of injustice. In fact, al-Qadiri uses the same word shähid for the victims of the state Terror, of everyday crime and of the Second World War.

Even though al-Qadiri did not blame the government for his own experiences in exile, he is very open about the role of the state in repressing those closest to him, including his teacher ‘Ubaydullah ‘Alikaev: “Around the time of the Great Revolution, he was sent into exile (näfï qïlinïp) and stayed there for a while. That must have been around 1929.”¹⁷⁵ One of the village aristocrats ‘Abd al-Rahim b. Lutfullah Tuqaev similarly became a victim: “Because of the Great Russian Revolution, he was unlawfully oppressed (mäzlüm na-haqq bälalärgä duchar bulïp) and must have died in prison in 1930. May God have mercy upon him. He perished so early. May God count his service to the people as an enduring donation (sadaqa jariyya) and forgive his sins.”¹⁷⁶ Revolution for al-Qadiri was a cause of and synonym for destruction and personal tragedy. It is notable that he repeatedly makes references to revolution, but never explains how the Soviets actually took power in Istärlibash, nor who the new rulers in the village were, under whom he had to suffer.

It is striking, however, to observe the contrast between al-Qadiri’s descriptions of the horrors of state repression on the one hand and the achievements of his family members on the other. In a section devoted to his genealogy, al-Qadiri largely follows the traditional biographical genre with places of education, names of important teachers, and the social prestige acquired by those

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., fol. 141b.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid., fol. 159a.
¹⁷⁶ Ibid., fol. 157b.
who devoted their lives to the pursuit of knowledge.\textsuperscript{177} When it comes to writing about the young generation predominantly born in the Soviet Union, al-Qadiri’s text appears to normalize the forced modernization. His sons and daughters pursued successful careers beyond the heritage of Muslim culture – a culture that was so dear to al-Qadiri, but apparently meant little to his immediate heirs. Descriptions of unjust punishments and difficulties in prison aside, al-Qadiri seems to suggest that the forced modernization was worthwhile, because his children received an education and managed to establish themselves well in the new system. A similar strategy was followed by ‘Abd al-Bari Isaev, also a qari, who was briefly imprisoned and lost many of his teachers. In his poetry from the 1950s he referred to repressions simply as a wind of change, thus normalizing the state violence against Muslim culture in Russia for the sake of societal well-being. His children also successfully integrated into the Soviet system by obtaining university diplomas and getting important jobs in education and military service across the country.

In fact, al-Qadiri does not portray the destruction of Islamic infrastructure, execution of elites, and burning of libraries as the abrupt end of a centuries-long tradition. His picture is more complex than simply one of decline: for example, he attended the Qur’an recitations at the Orenburg mosque in 1954/55

and praised ‘Abd al-Rahman Aydabulov (1881-1972, Fig. 8) for his continuous service as a village imam after his return from the labor camps. While al-Qadiri must have realized that there was little that united his worldview with that of his children, he apparently preferred not to reflect on it in his book.

Nostalgia was a theme that united the two types of literary persona, qari and mäzlûm. Al-Qadiri’s description of his years of study and active travel reveals that this was the high point of his life. He perceived his imprisonment and the many years spent in labor camps as a great personal tragedy that forever prevented him from being able to achieve his life goals. However, he was restrained in his narrative and refrained from blaming the state for all of his personal troubles.

**Sufi Models of Subjectivity**

It is probable that, during his life, al-Qadiri had access to various modes of self-fashioning. In the assemblage of biographies (fols. 157b-169a) he makes explicit mention of merchants and traders, agricultural workers, teachers, and legal and medical scholars. One particular cultural tradition of cultivating the self had historically been so prominent in his ecumene that al-Qadiri could not simply bypass it: the Sufi Naqshbandi tradition deeply rooted in the local tradition of Muslimhood.

Al-Qadiri’s relation to Sufism proves to be ambiguous in the text. Even though he clearly avoided direct personal association with Sufi networks and practices, his life narrative and neat descriptions of other individuals reveal multiple borrowings from that tradition and a selective approach to mysticism.

In his narration of village history, al-Qadiri depicts Istärlibash as a prominent regional center for Islamic education and Sufism:

Istärlibash counts among the famous villages; its madrasas functioned as home to several hundreds of students from different places annually. There were many students from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. From among the inner cities of Russia, numerous students arrived from Saratov, Astrakhan (Achtrakhan), Uralsk, Simbirsk, Kazan, Ufa and other governorates. There were also many people pursuing the sacred knowledge of Sufism (tariqat ’ilm-i batin) from the shaykhs. Some 200 years ago, knowledge started to spread from here.179

The grand tradition of Sufism in Istärlibash was strongly bound to a single mujaddidi line of succession, associated with those who had studied with

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179 Ibid., fol. 149b.
Niyyaz Quli al-Turkmani (d. 1821) in Bukhara at the start of the nineteenth century. As we know from other sources, the Sufi shaykhs in Istärlibash practiced the silent form of remembrance (\textit{dhikr-i qalb}), and from very early on began cultivating the special status of the local cemetery, which contained the holy graves of the deceased Sufi masters. These graves were organized in architectural complexes uniting several burial places, with impressive epigraphic memorials built into the brick wall surrounding the graves themselves. The production of high-quality gravestones coincided with the import of Naqshbandi Sufism to the village. This epigraphic tradition reproduced the high standards of aesthetic culture that played skillfully with the Arabic-Persian and Turkic linguistic triplex (sometimes in verse) and a style of script and ornamentation clearly meant to have an emotional impact on visitors (Fig. 9-10). Unlike other places in the Volga-Urals, traditions of Arabic-script epigraphy were practiced in Istärlibash until the 1960s, by ‘Abd al-Rahim Aydabulov (1867-1966), a talented calligrapher (\textit{munaqqash}) and close friend of ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, who is mentioned regularly throughout al-Qadiri’s memoirs.

Figs. 9 and 10  The gravestones of ‘Abd al-Kabir b. Din Muhammad al-Arslanî (left) and shaykh Ni‘matullah al-Istärlibashi (right). (Photographs by the author.)

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{180} Allen Frank, \textit{Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia}, 112.  
\textsuperscript{181} Ni‘matullah al-Utari, \textit{Risala-yi madaniya}, Ms. Kazan University Library 5899 Ar., fol. 33b (an anonymous note on names, locations and practices of Sufi shaykhs in the Volga-Urals area).}
The architectural complex in the cemetery was spatially and symbolically parallel with the educational complex within the village, with its multiple mosques and madrasas. The worlds of the dead and the living were inherently intertwined. This high culture of Islam engraved in stone was a result of a dialog between the elements brought by Tatar migrants from their homeland near the city of Kazan, with its rich epigraphic legacy and thousands of professionally produced grave monuments, and the Persianate cultural models imported from Central Asia, as well as aspects of Russian architectural design. Similar patterns of spatial organization can still be seen in the neighboring settlement of Qarghala near Orenburg, the Russian outpost in the south: namely, the parallel architectural complexes in the village and the cemeteries (of which there are three) and the proliferation of the transregionally famous Sufi tradition. In fact, Istärlibash and Qarghala can be regarded as parts of the same spatial phenomenon of Tatar Muslim expansion in the South Urals, which was accompanied by the birth of new cultural combinations (including the contribution of elements of nomadic culture).

In short, al-Qadiri was exposed from childhood to a strong, rich tradition of Sufism in the region that strictly defined models of behavior and forms of social expectation. Despite this grand tradition, al-Qadiri rejected Sufism as a path because he perceived it as having become corrupt. It is interesting to note that al-Qadiri did not question the legitimacy of Sufi rites or worldview from a legal or philosophical perspective. On the contrary, he praised those Sufi masters who struggled against unlawful innovations in the religion, such as the celebration of spring festivals (*sabantuy*) and gatherings in commemoration of the deceased.\footnote{\textit{'Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs,} fol. 150b.} He does not openly criticize Sufism in his memoirs; however, he does offer vivid descriptions of the personal qualities of several prominent shaykhs whom he deeply respected for being the true Sufis: for him, they were the exceptions that proved the rule of moral decay in Sufism relating to exploitative behavior, namely, the overreliance of its leading figures on alms from their followers. Negative examples of Sufi shaykhs, in contrast, are never named in al-Qadiri’s book: only at one point does he refer to them anonymously as “our ignorant mullahs (\textit{salqîn sufi-mullamîz}).”\footnote{Ibid., fol. 95b. Interestingly, 'Abd al-Khabir Yarullin used this idiom, \textit{salqîn sufi}, during his sermon at the Mardjani mosque in Kazan, referring to those mullahs who operate beyond the mosque.}

Al-Qadiri’s treatment of Zaynullah b. Husraw Shir ‘Alikaev (1810–1905), also known as Amir khalfa (Fig. 11), is paradigmatic as a portrayal of moral Sufism. This was in fact the kind of Sufism that al-Qadiri approved of. Zaynullah did
not even need to go to Bukhara for his studies, because of the presence of
great teachers in Istärlibash, to where he had migrated from his home village
in 1827. He had first learned the esoteric sciences from Muhammad Harith b.
Ni’matullah, and later, after Ni’matullah’s death, from ‘Abd al-Hakim in Chilabi,
who granted Zaynullah the authority to teach on his own. For al-Qadiri, this
was an embodiment of the true qualities of a shaykh:

I knew him, he was a true shaykh. He lived as a true person (chïn keshe) who
sustained himself by doing a sufficient amount of agriculture and cattle breed-
ing. He did not force his Sufi disciples to work for him, but had two assistants. He
regarded everybody as equal and did not try to enter into public affairs on every
occasion, nor did he talk a lot at gatherings. He did not travel to other villages
to enjoy the hospitality of his disciples. Only rarely, if there was a huge wedding,
would he go. He did not care about his stomach as other shaykhs did (nafs khur
bulip). May God have mercy upon him. He gave the impression (okhshiïydir) of a
sincere shaykh.184

Zaynullah’s son ‘Ubaydullah first stayed with his father, then studied in Bukhara
and finally established himself as a prominent Sufi authority in Yalpaqtal, in
the Kazakh lands. Al-Qadiri writes about Ubaydullah a number of times185 as
he helped al-Qadiri to travel to Mecca and acted as his patron (wali ni‘mät).
In a similar case, Fayd al-Rahman al-Amiri enjoyed the support of the famous
Zaynullah Ishan (1833-1917) who resided in Troitsk,186 suggesting that the older
Sufi generation did not prevent the young students from acquiring knowledge
in Cairo and Medina.

Next to these two positive examples of moral Sufism, al-Qadiri lists
Habibullah b. Muhammad Harith Tuqaev (Fig. 12) among his teachers.
Paradoxically, this shaykh was considered good because he did not practice
Sufism:

It can be said that our teacher was very sincere and modest, a true scholar of the
highest caliber; he was a specialist in every science. He received his education
at the madrasa of the late ‘Abdullah hazrat Gabdulgafurov in Olugh Chaqmaq
village on the banks of the Íq River in Belebey district. Then he went to study in
Bukhara for several years and returned after getting a license (ijazat) in Sufism
(‘ilm-i tariqat) from Niyaz Quli al-Turkmani hazrat. […] After that he started to
teach the great khalfas at the madrasa, concentrating exclusively on exoteric
(zahir) studies, without pursuing esoteric studies (‘ilm-i batin). He said that first
it is imperative to master the exoteric, and only then is the study of the esoteric
allowed, because the exoteric is similar to a bowl: one has to properly clean it

185 Ibid., fols. 74b, 80b, 81a, 99b-100a, 125a, 159a.
186 al-Amiri, Tärjimä-yi häl, fols. 21ab.
before putting the esoteric knowledge inside. For this reason he did not practice Sufism (ishanlıq) and focused on exoteric studies only. 187

Moreover, al-Qadiri classifies the times of Habibullah’s teaching as “the time of progress for religious scholarship.” 188 Closer to the twentieth century, possessing the knowledge of Sufism without actually practicing it and transmitting it to students was becoming increasingly widespread. Models of personality fueled by the Persianate Sufi tradition were being gradually replaced by other models, as is evidenced by al-Qadiri’s life account.

In his portraits of outstanding Sufis and Muslim scholars, al-Qadiri lays particular emphasis on their passion for knowledge and preference for reading books rather than socializing. For example, he praised such qualities in ‘Abd al-Rahim Sha’manov (“He owned many books on medicine. He was reading constantly. […] He did not socialize much, was always occupied by his job, caring about his rose garden and beautiful flowers” 189) and Fathullah b. Fattah al-Din, who “was not talkative,” “was knowledgeable in various sciences and in

188 Ibid., fol. 155a.
189 Ibid., fol. 161b.
Introduction

[373x624]later years [...] carefully investigated the writings of scholars from Egypt and Istanbul. He understood the many superstitions (khurafat) present in religion. He spent all of his free time reading books.190

While disassociating himself from Sufi models, al-Qadiri nonetheless borrows significant aspects of Sufi practice, such as the veneration of graves and the celebration of Mawlid. Even though al-Qadiri does not reflect upon the roots of these two rites, their Sufi connotation remains obvious. According to his life narrative, al-Qadiri systematically visited the graves of important individuals – not only Sufis – both in Russia and abroad (on one occasion he even describes his visit to the tomb of a Muslim saint in Damascus, relating his hagiography191). The memorial culture of Istälibash, greatly enhanced by the Sufi tradition, had become so normalized and locally embedded that it formed part of al-Qadiri’s individuality without much self-reflection. The same is true for Mawlid celebrations: in his book, al-Qadiri alludes to his contemporaries who criticized Mawlid for not being part of the prophetic legacy. In the context of the “weakened religion,” al-Qadiri defends Mawlid as an opportunity to preach to simple folk and repeatedly evoked his own performance of the ritual in his youth.192 This approach of integrating certain aspects of Sufi practice was shared by some contemporary Daghestani literati, such as ‘Ali Kaiaev (1878-1943) and Abu Sufyan Akaev (1872-1931), who did not question the legitimacy of Sufism, but insisted on adherence to its moral principles.193 What united these figures was their advocation of a moral ideal which was intentionally distanced from Sufi connotations.

Inter-Subjective Relations

Al-Qadiri’s subjectivity was not solely a product of autonomous self-reflection. His sense of self was greatly enhanced by multiple encounters in various places across Russia, Central Asia, and the Near East. Mobility and sociation194 served to broaden an individual’s horizons, also engendering direct contact

190 Ibid., fol. 162a.
191 Ibid., fol. 94b.
192 Ibid., 151ab.
193 Amir Navruzov, “Dzharidat Dagistan” (1913-1918) kak istoriko-kul’turnyi pamiatnik (Makhachkala, 2007), 181; Shamil’ Shikhaliev, “Musul’manskoе reformatorstvo v Dagestane (1900-1930 gg.),” Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov’ v Rossii i za rubezhom 3 (2017), 159. I am indebted to Dr. Shamil Shikhaliev for this observation.
194 Sociation is a Simmelian term that entails the centrality of social interactions for our understanding of individual and society. Bryan S. Turner, Max Weber: From History to Modernity (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), 166.
with multi-ethnic and multi-confessional environments that provided paths to self-improvement. In this section, I address how mobility and intersubjective relations are intertwined in al-Qadiri’s narrative, when he writes about himself and others.

In his memoirs, al-Qadiri appears as a highly mobile subject. In his youth, clearly under the impression of new textbooks and newspapers, he was eager to see the world and traveled on a steamboat as a tourist. His educational trip to the central lands of Islam was undertaken with the purpose of mastering the Holy Book and becoming a professional reciter (hafiz kalam Allah). Later on, much of his travel was involuntary, such as the years of wandering related to periods of imprisonment, or the act of reburial after his death. Al-Qadiri belonged to the first generation of his village who could afford regular international and interregional travel. In that sense, he benefited greatly from technological progress and took advantage of the cultural repertoire of modernity, including Western clothing and expensive watches – a paradigmatic symbol of ‘the modern subject.’

It is fair to say that al-Qadiri was born into a migrant community, especially given that mobility was characteristic of Russia’s Muslims already long before his birth. His father Shaykh al-Islam originated from Tatar Qaramal village in Ufa governorate. Al-Qadiri, who was born in Isenbay and raised in Istärlibash, was officially registered in Tatar Qaramal. Pursuing education required extensive travel: Shaykh al-Islam first went eastwards to study with ‘Abdullah Ghafurov in Olugh Chaqmaq village, before joining Khalilullah b. Rahmatullah in Istärlibash. There, he finished his studies and got married. Shaykh al-Islam’s work as a teacher of small children brought him into contact with the neighboring Kazakhs: the locals of Isenbay gave him the nickname “Sarı mullah” after the yellow color of his hair. It is therefore no surprise that,

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197 ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fol. 80b. The author provides multiple instances of individuals bearing a nickname (laqab). Even the great shaykh Ni’matullah al-Istärlibashi had a nickname “Kättä hazrat” (fol. 150b), while shaykh Zaynullah ‘Alikaev’s nickname “Amir hazrat” (fol. 161a) was even engraved on his gravestone. The laqab practice helped to make
being part of this culture of mobility, al-Qadiri spent his entire life traveling long distances.

To illustrate his close affinity with his father, al-Qadiri described the great emotional impact of the very first trip that they took together to the Kazakh steppe, when the young ‘Abd al-Majid was just eight years old. The romantic retelling of the story of his first journey reflects how the mobile lifestyle was ingrained in al-Qadiri from early childhood. He learned the specifics of travel infrastructure, the hardships of long-distance travel and, most importantly, how to establish fruitful social connections. He became part of the multi-ethnic world at the southern imperial frontier: the Kazakhs loved him and he made a number of visits to Isenbay, the place of his birth. For al-Qadiri, the Kazakh identity was very familiar and emotionally close, especially since his wife Fatima was a daughter of a Kazakh scholar. Later on, as a madrasa student in Istärlibash, al-Qadiri traveled to the nearby places populated by Bashkirs and Russians in order to engage in small-scale trade that allowed him to continue his studies, as his father had financial difficulties. Therefore, it was natural that ideas of travel should arise spontaneously in al-Qadiri’s mind: “sometime around 1898 it occurred to me that I wanted to travel the world.” Travel, which had already been customary for his parents, was made much easier by modern infrastructure: by steamboat he toured the major cities on the Volga, not in the role of a pious pilgrim, but as a curious tourist. Along the way, he was assisted by relatives, co-villagers, or family acquaintances. Travel, trade, and inter-ethnic sociation in a variety of languages came easily to al-Qadiri, who had been familiar with such activities from early childhood; indeed, his accounts of sociation in his early life are full of humor and joy.

It was upon encountering various characters during his trips that al-Qadiri started to formulate the type of persona he wished to adopt. In Yalpaqtal, for example, he met a greedy Qur’an reciter and became irritated by his jealousy; this bad example fostered the desire to become a true qari and to perform recitations for the sake of God.
Al-Qadiri’s journey to the Near East combined the hajj\textsuperscript{202} with educational and touristic travel. Along the way he traveled by steamboat, train, and even caravan, and encountered many people, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Initially, he shared the journey with several Kazakh pilgrims, whom he undertook the role of servant and translator, but already in Istanbul he decided to part ways with them, preferring to spend time in the city. There were several people in Istanbul whom he could visit and spend time with. Some of these were individuals who had resettled from Istärlibash (here, al-Qadiri uses the word *hijra*, which might reflect the religious motives underlying their emigration from Orthodox Russia), while others were students like him, such as his lifelong friend ‘Ayd Muhammad Akhmerov (d. ca. 1956). Incidental encounters on the steamboat left strong impressions, such as a meeting with Sayyid ‘Abdullah Jafri, “a relative of sharifs in Mecca and a student of Istanbul University. [...] We traveled together, laughing and joking. Sayyid ‘Abdullah was a handsome person with blackish hair, [dressed] in a European way with a tie.”\textsuperscript{203} The appearance of his interlocutors was appealing to him, and he certainly wished to imitate them.\textsuperscript{204} Al-Qadiri quickly made friends and did not note any cultural or language barrier between himself and Muslims from other countries. Another prominent figure with whom the young ‘Abd al-Majid managed to establish a strong connection was ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Habibullah Tuqaev, a member of the aristocratic Tuqaev family from Istärlibash, who was at that time studying in Mecca.\textsuperscript{205} They communicated “as relatives,” “there was no end to [their] conversations” and they both “felt nostalgic.”\textsuperscript{206} ‘Abd al-Rahman’s tragic death from cholera affected al-Qadiri so deeply that, even at


\textsuperscript{204} Body practices form an important part of al-Qadiri’s subjectivity. Regarding his fashion preferences, he repeatedly noted the way that dress could change the perception of individuals in the urban space. One such example is his changing from Tatar clothes to Ottoman dress in Istanbul in order to achieve a European appearance: Ibid., fol. 84a.

\textsuperscript{205} Note that even the offspring of this well-established family with its rich Bukharan background from the nineteenth century did not go to study in Central Asia. The fashion for Ottoman / Near Eastern education became dominant by the early twentieth century, and the leading families championed that process. For more details on Tatar student experiences in Medina see Alfrid Bustanov, “On Emotional Grounds: Private Communication of Muslims in Late Imperial Russia,” 655-682.

the time of writing his memoirs, he still heard the last words of his dying companion in his ears. All the people with whom al-Qadiri had studied, whether in Istärlibash or in Medina, are referred to as his companions (shärik), a term that elevated them above friendship (dust).207

During his travels in the Near East, he exhibited curiosity about the world; his descriptions of visits to sacred places are combined with ethnographic observations. He notes that Jerusalem was mainly populated by Jews (yahudlär) and even describes their appearance, which reminded him of the customs of backwards traditionists at home: “The elderly Jews wore white caps (käläpush) and their beards were very long. They kept beads (tasbih) in their hands, thus this habit must have come from them. We thought that our ignorant mullahs (salqïn sufi-mullamïz) sitting in the mosque niches with rosaries must have taken this habit from the Jews.”208 Al-Qadiri also took an interest in the Arab Christians of Beirut: “Their language is Arabic; their books and newspapers, as well as sermons in churches (chirkäülär), are in Arabic. Their scholars have also authored many books in Arabic, such as a book called Nujum al-furqan, i.e. “A Guide to Verses of the Qur'an,” accessibly written by Christian Arabs of Beirut.”209 He did not compare them to baptized Tatars in Russia, however. Moreover, when it comes to conversion of a Chuvash village into Islam back in 1905, al-Qadiri reproduced the narrative of discovery of the true ancestorial religion. During his trips, al-Qadiri did not shy away from visiting churches, including those built on the Holy Land by the Russians. The world of al-Qadiri was populated by multiple nations with distinct identities, who could nonetheless share a religion, as in the examples of the Christian Arabs in Beirut and the Chuvash Muslims in Russia.210 His understanding of nations was rather nuanced and was informed by the reformist geographic literature of the early twentieth century (available in Tatar, Ottoman, and Arabic) as well as by a wealth of personal experience. The central concept he evoked in this regard was that of millät, but his use of the term depended on context. On the one hand, he speaks of Chuvash and British millät (fols. 95a, 103b), while on the other hand, he describes the servants at the tomb of Maryam as being of Christian millät (fol. 95a). With regard to his own identity, al-Qadiri did not accept the Bulghar identity of his predecessors; for him, the Volga-Urals were

207 ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fols. 75ab, 81b, 84a (shärik), 78a, 80a, 102b (dust). Unfortunately, there is no specialized study on the concept of friendship among the Muslims of Russia. Cf.: Oleg Kharkhordin, “Friendship and Politics in Russia,” Common Knowledge 22.2 (2016), 220-236.
208 Ibid., fol. 95b.
209 Ibid., fol. 95a.
210 Ibid., fol. 103b.
home to multiple nationalities. What is certain is that al-Qadiri did not adopt the Soviet concept of ‘friendship of peoples’ or the Soviet ethnographic nomenclature that would undermine the fluidity of confessional and national identities.

Each time al-Qadiri came in contact with Russian imperial officials, he played tricks to turn the situation to his advantage. Despite having plenty of money in his pockets after his stay in Medina, al-Qadiri arranged free tickets from the Russian embassy to travel from Damascus to Istanbul, and even managed to sell those tickets for a good price in order to get a spot on a better steamboat. Always eloquent in his use of language, he captured those games with a single proverb: “even a mangy sheep is good for a little wool.” He used similar tricks during the 1914 military mobilization. Having been advised by his friends, he was not enthusiastic about fighting at the front and did his best to secure papers that allowed him to stay at home. Moreover, al-Qadiri provided financial and material support to the Turkish captives, who happened to be in a hospital in Ufa. He states clearly in the text that “in those years, Turkey fought against Russia on the German side,” but explains his moral duty by citing verses of the Qur’an that exhort believers to help captives for the sake of God. These sympathies laid the ground for later Soviet accusations that al-Qadiri was not a reliable subject of the state and, eventually, “a Turkish spy.”

In short, before the Great Terror, al-Qadiri was adept at dealing with state bureaucracy and other subjects on a horizontal level. It was after 1928 that things took an unpleasant turn; namely, with the ‘Aleev affair in Istārlībash, when the accidental death of a local authority figure was used as a pretext for large-scale repressions in the village. Al-Qadiri was sentenced to the Solovki

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212 This aspect of al-Qadiri’s subjectivity reminds me of the “trickster,” a type characterized by the ability to play at the intersection of different worlds without really belonging to one. Cf.: Mark Lipovetsky, “The Trickster and Soviet Subjectivity: Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Soviet Modernity,” *Ab Imperio* 4 (2020), 62-87.


prison camp and, beginning with his first imprisonment when he was already forty-seven, he lost his grip on rules of sociation, which changed along with the political developments. His repeated attempts to continue the practices of his youth always had negative consequences. For example, upon his return to Istärlibash, he intended to join his daughter Halima in Uzbekistan, but needed some money for the journey; to raise funds, he began buying and selling goods at the market in Orenburg. However, he was quickly arrested for speculation, as private trade was banned in Soviet Russia. As a result, his passport was confiscated, with the threat of a new jail term.216 A somewhat similar encounter took place in Piskent: a certain storekeeper named ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Uthmanov “sought personal profit by buying the products that [al-Qadiri] collected for the state supply without including them on the state account.” Al-Qadiri did not want to participate in stealing the products and soon became enemies with ‘Uthmanov, who made sure that al-Qadiri would go to prison under political allegations.217 Distinct forms of sociation thus divided the life of al-Qadiri into two parts: the era of his youth when he knew how to accomplish things by means of trade and travel, and the era of repressions when he became a victim of state violence. The second period was also marked by changes in the way his interlocutors addressed him: the term babay classified him as an elderly person.218 These two distinct eras exactly match the two types of persona embraced by al-Qadiri; namely, the pious Qur’an reciter (qari) and the innocent victim (mäzlüm).

On several occasions, al-Qadiri explicitly notes that the propensity for good or evil behavior did not depend on the nation of origin. He states that it was a Tatar who denounced him in Piskent, and that it was “a female Tatar procurator” who asked the court for the death penalty.219 With much disappointment, he recounts how, on his way back from Solovki, nobody wanted to give him a lift: “The kolkhoz people were going home with empty carriages, but nobody took me on to where I was going. They carried hay. I reached the place on foot, saying to myself that even among Muslims there are such people.”220 In sharp contrast, he recalls crying when a small Russian boy gave him a piece of bread in a moment of desperate need.221 Similarly, when he became ill during his second prison term, the Russian “Kovalev, an old man with whom I spent years there, helped me as much as he could despite his poor condition.

217 Ibid., fols. 129b-130a.
218 Ibid., fols. 119ab, 121a, 125a, 126b, 131b.
219 Ibid., fol. 130b.
220 Ibid., fol. 129b.
221 Ibid., fol. 119b.
My Uzbek and Tatar companions did not even give me water." This is not to say that positive interactions with compatriots are absent from the text: al-Qadiri also provides an example of a co-villager who helped him with transportation, for whom al-Qadiri has many words of gratitude:

This poor fellow Tahir, maybe he did not even drink a cup of tea in my house in his whole life, but in my hard times he brought me home over 60 km, out of respect. This is a true Muslim. I will never, ever forget it. May God endow his life with blessing, may he live peacefully with his children without depending on other people. Amen. May his deeds be on the path of God, may God forgive his sins, may he leave this world with faith in his heart and enter paradise. Amen.

Naturally, al-Qadiri changed over the years, and so did his attitude towards the people around him. The more time wasted at labor camps, the more fervently he desired to be with his beloved family (Figs. 14-15). Constant travel, both voluntary and forced, made him value the time spent with his wife and children.

Fatima, the wife of al-Qadiri, features only occasionally in her husband's memoirs. Al-Qadiri did not write anything about their relationship or the kind of emotions that were present between them. He spoke highly of her, and had respect for her origins from the family of a prominent Muslim scholar. Moreover, they were close relatives, as their mothers were cousins (note that this did not contradict Islamic law and was a rather widespread practice among the Muslim peoples of Russia). In his book, al-Qadiri regularly offers words of gratitude for the care his wife gave him when he was in exile or in prison: “Thank you: despite the difficulty of those days, you thought of me. For this I asked God for a good life for my wife and children. […] I did not experience much hunger, because my wife and children, though they did not have enough themselves, sent money and food.” As a young couple, however, they did not see each other often, despite his parents' intention to arrange the marriage as a means to put an end to his trips. They married in 1909; however, al-Qadiri relates that already one month later he traveled to see his patron ʿUbaydullah ʿAlikaev, and then continued traveling until 1912. Their oldest child, Halima, was born only in 1913, four years after their marriage (although it is possible that there were other children who passed away in infancy). It was not until 1915 that the young family moved into their own house. Fatima

222 ʿAbd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fol. 132b.
223 Ibid., fol. 125a.
224 Ibid., fol. 117b.
225 Ibid., fol. 130b.
226 Ibid., fol. 99b.
passed away in 1949; however, al-Qadiri did not write anything about how he learned of her death (he was still in prison at the time). He instead focused on commemoration practices: two years after his release from prison, al-Qadiri erected a gravestone for his wife and took several photographs of the burial place as a keepsake for his children:

This way I spent forty years with my wife Fatima and she passed away in Angren city of Tashkent oblast in Uzbekistan. “Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return.” She was buried in the cemetery of Tishektash community in Angren. In 1954, I placed a gravestone with an Arabic inscription and a grave enclosure (ihata) there. I also took a picture (fotografiia) [of the grave] and passed it on to my children as a keepsake (khätirä). May God have mercy upon her. The gravestone has the following inscription: “This is the grave (qaber) of Fatima, daughter of ‘Ali. Pray in remembrance of her. This is the grave of Fatima, daughter of ‘Ali and wife of Majid qari. She died on August 26, 1949. Her elderly brother ‘Abd al-Rahman is a [gravestone] scribe (yazguchi). Her son Muhsin ordered the inscription.”

The period between the birth of his first child and his first imprisonment (1913-1928) was relatively quiet and free of travel. This is especially evident from the silence of the memoirs on this long period: al-Qadiri writes only about the terrible hunger between 1920 and 1922 and the restoration of the water system in 1926. Subsequently, al-Qadiri spent much of the rest of his life in Soviet labor camps and was unable to remain much with his family. In 1935, he moved to be near his daughter Halima and her husband, who had moved to a place near Tashkent. Indeed, many Tatars migrated at that time to various settlements in Central Asia. Some perceived this region to be relatively safe from repressions, others aimed to pursue new careers. Nonetheless, al-Qadiri could not remain long with his family in Uzbekistan: he constantly changed workplaces between Piskent and Angren and bought a house only in 1942, the year in which he was imprisoned for a second time. With al-Qadiri absent for so much of the lives of his children, their worldviews were formed largely within the new realities of Soviet modernization: boys pursued military careers, girls studied medicine, and the younger generation lived scattered across the Soviet Union, breaking with most of the cultural repertoire of their parents.

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Figs. 13 and 14  Before and after Solovki: the family of al-Qadiri in Istärlibash, June 1928 (left) and in Uzbekistan in the 1940s (right; al-Qadiri is absent in prison).
On the Perception of Space

Which modes of conceptualizing space were available to al-Qadiri during his lifetime, and which of them did he apply in his life narrative? The hagiographical narratives of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries systematically constructed a space of Bulghar identity, mainly associated with conversion to Islam and the sacred tombs of saints. Danielle Ross has recently described the expansion of this spatial identity in the South Urals during the eighteenth century. This region was jointly colonized by Russians and Tatars at the cost of the Bashkirs, who lost their lands, and in close interaction with Kazakhs, who also inhabited the region and received education at Tatar madrasas. The biography of Shaykh al-Islam, al-Qadiri’s father, is illustrative of this process: he was a native of a Tatar village in south-east Tatarstan and operated as a school teacher in the Kazakh borderland. This multi-ethnic environment, at the intersection of cosmopolitan nomadic and settled traditions, was al-Qadiri’s home.

The turn of the twentieth century saw the crisis of Bulghar identity and its replacement by the new national narrative. “If I lived to do so, I intend to return to our country (mämläkät) after the month of Mawlid in 1326 of Hijri,” writes al-Qadiri about his plans while still in Medina. This short sentence illustrates the complexity of his perception of time and space. In the example cited above, al-Qadiri calls the country he came from mämläkät or “homeland.” This word was often used in the course of the twentieth century to denote the space inhabited by the Tatar Muslim nation (millät). Riza Fakhreddinov used the term mämläkät to denote the space of Muslim culture in Inner Russia that did not include the North Caucasus and Central Asia. Siberian Tatar migrants in present-day Turkey who moved there in 1907 still use the word with this meaning, attaching a great emotional value to it. It seems that this spatial term came into use together with the rise of Tatar nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mustafa Tuna has recently approached this spatial aspect by suggesting a division into cultural domains in which

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228 Danielle Ross, Tatar Empire, 32-39.
229 For a study of Bulghar geography as represented in local hagiographies and historical works: Allen Frank, Islamic Historiography and ‘Bulghar’ Identity Among the Tatars and Bashkirs of Russia (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 1998).
231 The title of Riza Fakhreddinov’s work reads: “Traces. This is the book that contains the biographies of Muslim scholars of our country (üz mämläkätemezdä), their dates of birth and death, as well as other information” (Kazan, 1900). In contrast, the foreign lands are called chit mämläkät: al-Amiri, Tärjimä-yi häl, fol. 5b.
232 Fieldwork by the author in Bögrüdelik village (Turkey), July 2012.
individuals operated, but without much attention to the vivid perception of space by social actors themselves.

What can be said about the repertoire and evolution of indigenous spatial terms? Their usage must have been situational and bound to individual choice, at least between the ever-changing state demarcations and local spatial vocabulary. If mämläkät is an emotionally laden term that expresses a certain attitude towards the Tatar homeland, then al-Qadiri also uses Rusiya to render the name of his home country in a more neutral way. While mämläkät was widely used at the turn of the century, it ceased to be an everyday term with the demise of the tsarist empire. In Soviet times, the word “government” (hükümät) completely replaced any references to homeland (in the sense of mämläkät): al-Qadiri never speaks of the Soviet Union as a spatial entity and instead refers to separate republics (besides Tatarstan, he also mentions Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan).

In fact, there were three places that al-Qadiri was intimately bound with. He was born in a Kazakh settlement, Isenbay, which he called his watan (homeland). He also felt affinity towards Tatar Qaramali village, the birthplace of his father and the residence of close relatives whom he had visited in childhood. Moreover, from an administrative perspective, al-Qadiri was registered at Tatar Qaramalï until at least the 1920s and had to go there to obtain an international passport to perform hajj. Nonetheless, the place that really formed al-Qadiri as a person was Istärlibash.

The village of Istärlibash (Fig. 15), despite not being the place of his birth, was central to al-Qadiri’s self-conception. It is no coincidence that he used that place name for his nisba (attributive name), al-Istärlibashi, signaling an emotional attachment to that locality and thus constructing his personal identity around that place. Despite his origins in a Kazakh village, his great mobility during his life, and his residence in the city of Orenburg at the time of writing his memoirs, this is ultimately how he wanted his name to appear on the grave inscription that he envisaged shortly before his death.

The village of Istärlibash was established by migrant Kazan Tatars in the early eighteenth century. These lands initially belonged to Bashkirs, and the new settlers arranged rental agreements with the Bashkirs that had to be renewed every fifty years. The history of this settlement must be viewed in the context of the gradual Tatar colonization of the South Urals in the eighteenth century.

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233 Mustafa Tuna, Imperial Russia’s Muslims, 239.
234 ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fols. 86a, 95a, 156a.
235 Ibid., fols. 92a, 102b, 159a.
236 Ibid., fol. 207b.
The visual landscape of Istärlibash in the 1950s. (A family photo album preserved by Vladimir Galimov, Istärlibash.)
century and the absorption of the region into the cultural realm of Tatar Muslims. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the village dwellers maintained their connections with Ufa, Orenburg and its satellite Qarghala ca. 200 km south of Istärlibash and, to a lesser degree, Kazan; as well as with the group of Tatar migrants in Khorezm.237

The village itself is located on the banks of the Istärli river, at the foot of a mountain. According to the 1897 census, the village population at that time numbered 2,124 people. While the majority of this population consisted of peasants, with only a few traders, from early on in its history Istärlibash became famous as a prominent educational hub and for being home to a dynasty of Sufi masters. Ni’matullah Tuqaev (1772-1844) was the first to gain fame for his Sufi credentials as one of the students of Niyyaz Quli al-Turkmani (d. 1821) in Bukhara. Even though we do not know of a single treatise authored by Ni’matullah ishan, he attracted numerous followers who composed and widely copied eulogies praising him.238 The famous poet Muhammad ‘Ali al-Chuqri (1826-1889) arrived at the madrasa of Ni’matullah ishan only after the death of its director, but was nonetheless greatly inspired by his legacy: “his deeds have prompted affection (māḥābbāt āylāde),” wrote al-Chuqri. In his commemorative verses, al-Chuqri praised the shaykh for his restoration of the mosque and madrasa as well as for the construction of a water system (chishmā) and a rich garden (bagh).239 Another poet, the blind Shams al-Din Zaki (1825-1865) was also part of this sophisticated milieu that valued refined literary forms. The

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238 *Wasf-i Istärli or Manaqib khazrat-i ishan al-Istärli*, an anonymous Tatar poem with an introduction in Arabic, is known today in at least three copies: Kazan University Library, 664 T, fols. 27b-29b; 2006 T, fols. 10a-12b (lacks ending); 5974 T, fols. 15a-24b (a full copy, but without introduction). Ni’matullah al-Istärlibashi possessed a library, the remnants of which al-Qadiri reports existing at the time of writing: “since there was a shortage of printed books, he spent a lot of money to get hold of the literature. One can still find volumes (majmā’lar) copied in his hand. There are copies on every subject: people say that he traveled far away to copy the *tafsir Qadi* and *tafsir Shaykhzada*. Many manuscripts that he brought from Bukhara the Noble are still in existence” (‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, *Memoirs*, fol. 152a). The library of the Historical Mosque in Samara now hosts a copy of *Jami’ al-rumuz* that belonged to him.

239 Muhammad ‘Ali al-Chuqri, *Tadhkirat al-shaykh al-marhum mulla Ni’matullah al-Istärlibashi*. The private archive of ‘Abbas Bibarov (Urta Eluzan village of Penza region), Ms. 1. fols. 3ab (a draft autograph).
Tuqaev dynasty\textsuperscript{240} was thus an embodiment of the local ideal of Sufi ethics and piety that was still present when al-Qadiri was young. The charisma of this family was present physically in the village landscape, in the form of a whole complex of religious buildings (Fig. 16), a library, a water system and, of course, a family burial place in the cemetery featuring impressive gravestones with calligraphic inscriptions (Fig. 17). The prestige of the family was so great that al-Qadiri even emphasizes the location of his father’s grave close to the spectacular grave complex of the Tuqaev family with its surrounding stone wall. It is not surprising that this was the area where al-Qadiri was reburied in 1990.

\textsuperscript{240} More on them: Danielle Ross, \textit{Tatar Empire}, 101-102.
a friend, ‘Ubaydullah ishan Tuqaev on the other hand prohibited him from teaching at the village madrasa.241 This uneasiness notwithstanding, we do not see al-Qadiri being dependent on the patronage of the Tuqaev family, unlike in many similar cases throughout the nineteenth century in which wealthy sponsors exercised great power over Islamic infrastructure and networks of promotion. Al-Qadiri’s mobility and flexibility of occupation, be that entrepreneurship or religious service, allowed him to survive beyond the reach of the traditional networks.

Fig. 17 Vener Usmanov indicating the family burial place of the Tuqaevs. (The main plaque in this picture bears a bilingual text with the Arabic title of Ni’matullah al-Istārlibashi and two lines with Persian verses, dated 1260 / 1844. Curiously, in another part of the wall that surrounds the burial complex there is another version of the same plaque, with only Arabic text. The latter version was clearly made as a later copy, which illustrates the disappearance of Persian from active usage in the early twentieth century. Hazırlär qaberlege or ‘the graveyard of imams’ is a vernacular term to refer to this complex of graves at the center of the village cemetery, located at the foot of the mountain. Törbä or ‘mausoleum’ would be another word, but is rarely used nowadays. Reportedly, this architectural complex was visited by Russian Orientalist Vasilii Bartol’d in June 1913, who read the Persian inscriptions that became unintelligible to the villagers, and the mufti Riza Fakhreddinov in 1918. Vener Usmanov, Bashkortstan respublikasy tatar epigrafik hääkälläre, 5.) Istārlibash, summer 2019. (Photo by the author.)

241 ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fols. 75ab, 90a, 99b, 100b.
Although writing just after the death of Stalin, al-Qadiri rarely evokes the system of Soviet administrative divisions. For him, the space is organized in terms of cities and villages belonging to the administrative units of the late imperial era; that is, he prefers to speak of governorates (guberna) and districts (öyaz). The same goes for the names of Russian cities, but with the important caveat that most of this geographical vocabulary is rendered in an adopted way: for example, Truiski for Troitsk and Chivastapul for Sevastopol. This practice mirrors a competitive process of claiming and domesticizing the imperial landscape. Russians applied the same process: every Tatar village in the Volga-Urals received an official Russian name that was supposedly derived from the Tatar version, such as making Chupchugi out of Chipchiqlar. Al-Qadiri’s narrative illustrates the conservative character of Muslim mental mapping that preferred the late imperial administrative divisions to the new Soviet geography. As for the native forms of spatial imagination, the Bulghar identity that was crucial for generations of Muslims in the region all but disappears in al-Qadiri’s narrative. He never once uses the attributive name al-Bulghari, which had been so popular for centuries. This does not mean, however, that al-Qadiri subscribed to the new Soviet cultural paradigm, which was notoriously national in form and socialist in content. On the contrary, it is impossible to find a trace of the Soviet version of Tatar nationalism in al-Qadiri’s writing, simply because he made use of completely different cultural templates that predated the Soviet modernist project and were all religious in nature. In sum, although he called himself a Tatar and did not use the name al-Bulghari, he nonetheless remained in opposition to Soviet models, or rather, developed an alternative self-image.

At Bulghar, al-Qadiri witnessed pilgrims performing unauthorized rituals; for him, however, Bulghar was only a touristic and historical site, devoid of any sacred meaning. Nonetheless, it was full of secular knowledge about the past that could be derived from old inscriptions, architecture, and coins.242 Thus, given his purposeful visit to the site, we can assume that al-Qadiri must have heard of Bulghar back in his home village, but his perception of the world was not built around that place. Al-Qadiri’s memoirs testify that he did not belong to the community that would venerate Bulghar as more than a historical site, and at that time his attitude must have already been the majority view. People like al-Qadiri would instead appreciate the religious topography of the Near East, familiar to them from biographies of the Prophet and histories of his successors. Naturally, al-Qadiri describes that region in much detail, giving all the geographical locations on his way to Mecca and Medina their ‘proper’ Islamic

242 ʿAbd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fols. 79ab.
names including the customary attributes. The same can be said of Kazan: he perceived the city as attractive for its many madrasas, but it was far from being central to his self-consciousness.

At the level of the immediate locality, al-Qadiri pays particular attention to individual houses and their surroundings; that is, the material world of Russia’s Muslims, where ordinary people spent most of their lives. He writes about the house of his uncle ‘Abd al-‘Alim agha as follows: “He was prosperous, owned a house covered with tiles and a proper garden in front of it, full of beehives. He lived off agriculture and kept [just] enough horses, cows and sheep. Behind the house he had an abundant garden. Besides that, on the outskirts of the village, he also kept beehives.”243 These were places of mimetic experience, the recollection or visiting of which generated the corresponding emotions.

Interestingly, the two personas that al-Qadiri instrumentalized to describe himself – qari and mäzlüm – are both spatially and emotionally separate. Everything positive in his life took place in Istärlibash and Medina, which was also the space associated with the study and recitation of the Qur’an. State oppression not only deprived al-Qadiri of the systematic practice of the Holy

Book, but also uprooted him from his beloved Istärlibash. Even after his final release from labor camps in Uzbekistan, al-Qadiri could not stay in the place of his youth, despite his nostalgia and a brief visit to the village in 1954, which took place either just before or already during the process of compiling his memoirs. This visit, captured in a photograph taken in front of his former house (Fig. 18), must have contributed to al-Qadiri’s decision to write his life story.

Life After Death

The telling of al-Qadiri’s story did not end with the last sentence of his memoirs. The manuscript was not linguistically accessible to his heirs, but photographs, oral testimonies, and vivid memories of al-Qadiri prompted a tradition of autobiographical writing among his descendants. At least two autobiographical sources of the late 1990s included al-Qadiri as one of the main actors in their respective life narratives. An entire page was devoted to al-Qadiri in a family photo album composed by Vladimir Galimov (b. 1942), a close relative of al-Qadiri (al-Qadiri’s wife was the sister of Galimov’s grandfather). Similariy, Maryam Kadyrova, the daughter of al-Qadiri, composed what she called an “autobiographical novel,” which began with her reminiscences of her father and gradually evolved into a personal diary with self-reflections covering the last years of her life. Both of Kadyrova’s narratives differ significantly from the way al-Qadiri had fashioned himself. Firstly, the later self-representations are characterized by multimodality, i.e. a combination of textual and visual dimensions (Figs. 20-21), while al-Qadiri’s book does not contain any illustrations. For al-Qadiri, this must have been a conscious choice: he could have included some photos in his life story, but apparently felt more at home describing himself according to the traditional Tatar book culture, which eschewed images. Secondly, even though they both knew Tatar well, Galimov and Kadyrova used only the Russian language to write about themselves. The usage of Russian goes hand-in-hand with the transformation of sartorial practices. Only elderly people in the photos appear wearing traditional clothes – men in old-fashioned madrasa suits, skullcaps of various shapes on their cleanly shaved heads, usually with long beards and their wives in long dresses.

244 Galimov’s photo album, fol. 8b (the private archive of Vladimir Galimov, Istärlibash village, Bashkortostan). This photo album was initially put together by his father Lutf al-Rahman.

245 A rare exception to this rule is the collection of autobiographical poetry by ‘Ussam Khanzafarov from the 1930s, illustrated with drawings of individuals: Kazan University Library, Ms. 1849 T, fols. 39a, 68b-69a.
Attached to the cover of al-Qadiri’s book is a small piece of paper with the following ownership note in Russian, written by al-Qadiri’s daughter: “The diary (dnevnik) belongs to Kadyrova Maryam Mazitovna. Häzrät qari Kadyrov Mazit composed the diary about his two periods of imprisonment in Stalinist camps: 1930-1935; 1942-1952. Mazit qari studied in Mecca between 1911 and 1916.” This note misrepresents al-Qadiri’s memoirs as a diary by chiefly focusing on his prison experience, leaving aside the whole range of other life events described in the manuscript. Since she was unable to read the script, Maryam apparently developed her own perception of the book. It is likely that this note was added in the wake of Perestroika with its pathos of de-Stalinization: al-Qadiri was rehabilitated only posthumously, in May 1989. Tellingly, the state documentation described him as “an illiterate peasant.”246 In the eyes of Maryam, her father emerged as one of the many victims of the regime; hence she endowed the manuscript with the corresponding emotional value. This is how she described his prison experience: “In fact, he spent most of his mature years in prison without committing a crime. This was the will of our leader I.V. Stalin. Victims of the Stalinist repressions count in the millions. The entire Soviet intelligentsia was destroyed, i.e. the main gene pool of Russia was destroyed.”247

246 Al-Qadiri’s name appears in the database of the International Memorial: https://base.memo.ru/person/show/56390 (last accessed on 26.06.2020).
Unsurprisingly, this is exactly how al-Qadiri’s heirs presented him on his grave inscription (see below), contrary to the pious image of a qari and mäzlüm that he wished to leave of himself.

Maryam Kadyrova’s self-narrative is full of frustration with her family life. She was married twice and apparently with little success: she describes both her husbands as lazy, weak-willed individuals. As a medical worker, Kadyrova (Fig. 21) invested greatly in her career, achieving positions of authority. While al-Qadiri built a self-image of a pious individual, his daughter Maryam did not appeal to any of the strategies of self-description that we find in al-Qadiri’s memoirs. Though these two life narratives are the work of closely related individuals, they demonstrate a great cultural rupture in terms of the instruments and outcomes of self-building. Maryam Kadyrova was proud of possessing a critical mind and of achieving a prominent social position. Quite telling in this regard is her reflection on her personal discovery of Islam in 1997 (she certainly did not receive religious teaching from her father): together with another elderly woman called Rahima, she visited a mosque in Ufa for Sunday classes, but confessed to herself that for “a critical mind” many aspects of religion were
simply difficult to accept. Maryam referred to her “critical mind” as a reason for her “doubtfulness” (*dvoistvennost*'). She started to read the Qur’an, but in a Russian translation, and did not bring up any memories of her father being a *qari*. Kadyrova’s situation can be seen as a perfect example of subjective fragmentation: exposed to conflicting behavioral models, the subject fails to assimilate them and struggles to meet the expectations. The result is such that an individual loses internal integrity. While al-Qadiri managed to create a narrative that projects a clear vision of his selfhood, Kadyrova clearly encountered difficulties in giving coherence to her life experiences.

Kadyrova’s style of self-narrative marks a radical departure from the kind of subjectivity that al-Qadiri displayed in his book. For him, religious ethics diffused into all aspects of life, while for his daughter a conscious encounter with religion took place only in the wake of post-Soviet religious revival, and posed significant difficulties to her self-conception as a self-made, powerful woman. This shift does not appear to be merely generational, though. The main change took place in the realm of the cultural repertoire that was available to social actors at the moment of writing. Al-Qadiri’s ways of self-fashioning differed significantly from the nineteenth-century Persianate models because he sought more successful patterns of behavior; meanwhile, Maryam Kadyrova conceptualized the life of her father only in terms of his suffering at the hands of the Stalinist regime, and she herself turned to forms of self-narrative completely alien to al-Qadiri, since his modes of subjectivity proved to be marginal and even dangerous in late Socialist society.

Unlike al-Qadiri, Maryam Kadyrova goes into more detail about her mother Fatima and devotes some space to her biography. Due to al-Qadiri’s imprisonment, Maryam did not see her father for many years, and was thus emotionally closer to her mother. Nonetheless, it is the commemorative image of al-Qadiri that functions as the point of departure for Kadyrova’s work.

In the memoirs of al-Qadiri, the reader is only introduced to part of his self-reflections. From interviews conducted with his relatives we know that in his last years, possibly in parallel with writing the book, al-Qadiri used to talk about his life with his friends, who would then retell those stories to their children (Fig. 22). In this way, al-Qadiri’s concept of self traveled far beyond his book. In particular, Maryam Kadyrova was inspired to write the story of her life by her father’s example. The retelling of al-Qadiri’s life stories also inspired his granddaughter Zuhra to claim: “I love him even though I have never seen him. The

stories of his life entered my consciousness and throughout my life I feel his presence. He is with me and helps me to live.”\textsuperscript{250} Interestingly, al-Qadiri does briefly mention the newborn Zuhra, whom he went to see and give a Muslim name: “According to the telegram sent by my son-in-law ‘Abd al-Haqq from Melekes, on August 4, 1958, my daughter Maryam gave birth to Zuhra. That was 7 Safar 1378 of Hijri. May she be a servant of God, a member of the Prophet’s community, and a loving child of her parents. Amen. In September 1958, I went there myself to give her a name, according to the Muslim tradition. This is written by her grandfather, ‘Abd al-Majid Qadirov, in Orenburg.”\textsuperscript{251}

The visual gaps in Maryam’s autobiography are particularly fascinating. Although she constructed a visual narrative, sometimes accompanied by extensive commentaries in Russian, her daughter Zuhra has removed several photographs portraying the funeral of al-Qadiri (Figs. 23-24). This series of photographs must have portrayed the funeral ceremony of al-Qadiri, since the pictures are dated January 4, 1962, the date of al-Qadiri’s death. The first

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig_22.jpg}
\caption{The family of al-Qadiri in Piskent (Uzbekistan), 1939. (The private archive of Vladimir Galimov, Istärlibash village, Bashkortostan.)}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{250} Interview with Zuhra Valiullova (Ufa, August 24, 2019).
\item \textsuperscript{251} ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri, Memoirs, fol. 207b.
\end{itemize}
missing picture has the following commentary in Russian: “Your worldly wanderings are over now, may your soul rest eternally in paradise. Amen.” Another picture adds the location (Orenburg) and a brief note: “The last goodbye to our father.” The last caption reads as follows: “They follow Mazhit qari to his grave at the Muslim cemetery in Orenburg.” Even in the absence of the photographs, it can be noted that these textual remarks made by Maryam Kadyrova contrast with the vocabulary usually employed to describe Muslim funerals. There are no prayers, and the author uses late Soviet clichés such as “the final journey” (poslednii put’) instead of turning to the rich commemorative tradition of the Muslim Tatars.

This is how Zuhra Valiullova explained her decision to ‘clean up’ her mother’s autobiographical account: “I do not need his dead body. What can I do with it? The only thing I need is his thoughts.”252 Indeed, it was this desire that moved the daughters of Maryam Kadyrova to seek historians who would be able to decipher the life writings of al-Qadiri.

Officers from the secret police took an interest in photographs of al-Qadiri already during his lifetime. Maryam Kadyrova mentions that when they searched their house in Angren after al-Qadiri’s second arrest in 1942, officers confiscated two pictures of him: one photo with his friend wearing a turban.

252 Interview with Zuhra Valiullova, Ufa, August 24, 2019.
taken in Saudi Arabia, and another portraying al-Qadiri in a Turkish fez. They used these pictures as evidence to accuse him of espionage for the Turks.\footnote{253} It is interesting to note that those photos had therefore not been confiscated when police stormed al-Qadiri’s house in Istärlibash back in 1928/29; based on this, we may hypothesize that some fragments of al-Qadiri’s pre-revolutionary archive were still in existence at least until 1942 and were even brought to Angren.

A similar desire to expunge the image of a dead body can be found in another family photo album; namely, the album composed by Vladimir Galimov. An obviously staged photograph of relatives gathered around the corpse of Vladimir’s grandfather ‘Abd al-Rahman Aydabulov (1880-1972) is missing one significant part: the body of the deceased, probably with face uncovered as was standard for Soviet death photography, has been cut off from the picture, leaving the rest of the photograph intact (Fig. 25).\footnote{254}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{photo25}
\caption{The funeral of ‘Abd al-Rahman Aydabulov in 1972. (Galimov’s photo album. Maryam Kadyrova is fourth from the left with a scarf only partly covering her head.)}
\end{figure}

\footnote{253} Maryam Kadyrova, \textit{An Autobiographical Novel}, fol. 14.  
\footnote{254} Galimov’s photo album, fol. 8a (the private archive of Vladimir Galimov, Istärlibash village, Bashkortostan). Compare with Figure 2 above, where the face of the deceased was slightly moved towards the camera to make it recognizable.
The fashion of producing entire series of pictures with all phases of a funeral had been adopted by Muslims already before the Revolution\textsuperscript{255} and continued well into the Brezhnev era. In some cases, such scenes were captured not by invited professional photographers, but by members of the community and even relatives of the deceased. One prominent exception among the visual gaps in Maryam Kadyrova’s autobiography is the presence of a group photograph taken on the occasion of the reburial of al-Qadiri and his wife Fatima in the historical cemetery in Istärlibash (Fig. 27). There are two possible explanations for this exception. First, that Zuhra Valiullova decided to keep the picture, because there is no dead body present; and second, given the recent date of the event (1990), that Zuhra must have had her own feelings associated with this photograph and the event it represents. What we see here is clearly a shift in the perception of death: while al-Qadiri’s generation still placed great value on the epigraphic traditions of Istärlibash cemetery (cf. the gravestone of al-Qadiri’s father in Fig. 26), al-Qadiri’s daughter preferred to organize his burial place in accordance with late Soviet commemorative practices (Fig. 28), and Zuhra Valiullova wished to avoid the visual representation of death.

\textsuperscript{255} For example, already in 1913, the funeral of ‘Abdullah Tuqay was carefully photographed.
Fig. 27 A group photograph at the new burial place of al-Qadiri and his wife Fatima in Istärlibash (1990). Maryam Kadyrova is first from the left. (Maryam Kadyrova, An Autobiographical Novel, fol. 6b.)

Fig. 28 A monument at the grave of al-Qadiri and his wife Fatima. (Photograph by the author, summer 2019.)
Conclusion: The Fate of the Moral Subject in Soviet Russia

What kind of subject did al-Qadiri ultimately describe in his memoirs? Is it some variation of the modern subject as it emerged in the West? Or is it a subject whose qualities differ substantially from its Western or Soviet counterpart(s)?

In his critique of Western knowledge, Wael Hallaq has argued for the strict analytical distinction between, on the one hand, Muslim societies governed by shari’ā and therefore producing moral subjects, and on the other hand, the modern state that had its origin in the West and extended its power to regulating the psyche of the modern subject. As a distinctly European invention, the modern state exercised political as well as epistemic sovereignty over its subjects, a situation impossible for Islamic states. According to Hallaq, the moral subject was a product of madrasas and charitable foundations, i.e. institutions created for the sake of God. Extending Foucauldian observations, Hallaq describes the goal of colonialism in the Muslim lands as the production of European-like subjects, echoing the aims of Thomas Babington Macaulay: “a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.”

Despite forced Christianization and the establishment of native schools for European-style education of Muslims, the fruitful engagement with grassroots Islamic tradition and the reproduction of the moral subject in Russia blossomed spectacularly, which makes Hallaq’s clear-cut opposition rather problematic. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the rapid burgeoning of madrasas in European Russia as well as the proliferation of charitable foundations, the two strongholds of the moral subject.

European historiography attributes practices of introspection to the birth of the modern subject around 1800. Based on our sources, uncritical acceptance of this paradigm would lead us to adopt the late modernization paradigm, as if Muslim individuals in Russia only discovered their selves by the mid-twentieth century under the pressure of Soviet modernization, and in doing so joined modern trends in self-reflection, comparable to European models of the earlier epochs. I would not support this teleological line of

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reasoning, because even research into European history of the last two centuries reveals significant inner dynamics and indicates multiple turning points to introspection. For example, contrary to the findings of historians studying early modern Europe, Claire Langhamer identifies the years immediately following the Second World War as crucial for sparking introspective narratives in Britain.\(^{259}\) In my view, the existence of such debates about the exact birthdate of the modern subject suggests that self-reflection is a practice that has been available and accessible to individuals over a considerable period of time. In the case of al-Qadiri, a timely realization that there would be nothing of his life experience to pass on to his children must have prompted him to start writing a book about himself. To do so, he combined a number of genres and literary forms that were familiar to him from his pre-Gulag experience, with the goal of communicating his true identity as he understood it. Soviet models of subjectivity, though possibly known to him, remained absent from his memoirs.\(^{260}\) He wrote his book using the symbols and language that he found most appropriate and closest to his intimate sense of self. Al-Qadiri portrayed Soviet modernity as a source of personal struggle for himself, but of career success for his children. This ambivalence notwithstanding, the memoirs of al-Qadiri marginalize the colonial language as irrelevant to the portrait of a Muslim moral subject that the author wished to portray.

As a result of the cultural ruptures of the twentieth century, the contents of al-Qadiri’s book became inaccessible to his immediate heirs. What he did manage to do, however, was to create a colorful picture of subjectivity, not centered on the repressive state, but rather evolving in creative engagement with a variety of behavioral models and cultural traditions beyond the Soviet canon. Al-Qadiri produced a personal account of a moral subject that prioritized Islamic tradition and the symbolic language associated with it. Al-Qadiri was not the only person in post-war Soviet Russia to hold such values, but, as far as we know, he is the only Muslim survivor of the Gulag who dared to set the dramas of his life down on paper. Now, sixty years after his death, the memoirs of ‘Abd al-Majid al-Qadiri can finally find their well-deserved international readership.


\(^{260}\) In this respect, al-Qadiri’s life narrative offers a correction to recent observations on Soviet-era autobiographical writing in Central Asia: “notwithstanding the familiarity of some of these \[Soviet Tajik\] writers with pre-Soviet genres, the sources, the models, and perhaps even the inspiration for the Central Asian memoirs were those of the Russian intelligentsia, […] the model was in some ways quite straightforwardly Russian” (Artemy Kalinovsky, Isaac Scarborough, “The Oil Lamp and the Electric Light,” 133).