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Between Salafism and Eurasianism: Geidar Dzhemal and the Global Islamic Revolution in Russia

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ABSTRACT

Geidar Dzhemal was arguably the best-known mouthpiece of radical Islam in the contemporary Russia media world: with his broad erudition in Western philosophy, Abrahamic theology and world history, he easily upstaged most official representatives of Islam in the country. While his Islamic project borrowed heavily from Marxist thinking, Dzhemal's non-conformist teaching and his personal charisma also made him famous among right-wing thinkers, who see him as the 'Godfather' of Russian converts to Islam. However, Dzhemal defied common classifications, both political and religious; his discourse adapted to the changes in Russian politics from Yeltsin to Putin, which allowed him to appeal to a broad range of audiences. This article argues that his popularity can be explained by the fact that, with his promotion of a global anti-Western revolution under the Islamic banner, Dzhemal was still embedded in mainstream discourses on Russia's national interests.

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Geidar Dzhemal (1947–2016) was the enfant terrible of Russia's Islamic scene. The Russian public knew him as an eloquent guest of prime-time talk-shows who had the courage to speak up for a radical political vision of Islam. He challenged the Russian political establishment head-on, including the clownesque nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskii (Solov'ev 2005). Dzhemal was also famous for mocking the official representatives of Islam in Russia, the mullahs and muftis, for whom he had nothing but contempt. Against the official concept of 'traditional Islam',¹ Dzhemal posited his own radical interpretation of the Islamic tradition – an interpretation with which he nevertheless attempted to strike a chord with Russian patriotic sentiments, in order to forge solidarity with what he understood as the Muslim struggle for justice and higher metaphysical fulfilment. His works on revolutionary Islam were still intrinsically linked to mainstream 'Russian' topics, and to what are perceived as Russia's national interests.

Dzhemal's public image was constantly in flux: in his long career as a public philosopher, he presented himself as an eccentric Moscow Bohemian inspired by Western esoteric literature, as a Russian fascist, as a proponent of Sunni Salafism, as an Islamic theologian in the Shii tradition of Iran and as a geopolitical thinker of the Eurasian trend. Yet he was also seen as an Islamic Marxist (Umland 2014; Laruelle 2016). Dzhemal's journey through

all of these political and religious programmes, and the mosaic of his ideological and religious constructions, reflected the turbulent period through which Russia has passed, from Perestroika to Putin.

This article analyses the philosophical, Islamic and political trajectory of one who was probably Russia's best-known public mouthpiece of Islam. After around 1990, when he started publishing on Islam, Dzhemal experimented with many concepts and linked himself to various movements, but the vagueness and the internal contradictions of his visions were not detrimental to his success. Rather, this diversity of orientations allowed him to connect with various trends in Russian society, and to constantly present himself as the most thought-provoking 'Muslim expert' on Islam, in a political environment that has been shaped by many breaks and changes. It is the appearance of depth, sincerity and passion that made his such a powerful and compelling voice.

We argue that Dzhemal managed to remain acceptable in the public discourse and escaped prosecution because he was never successful in establishing a broader movement or a group of obedient followers or a religious community that would remain under his wing. In fact, his political projects were very visible but remained marginal. But even this was not detrimental to his popularity – on the contrary: the 'virtual' character of his political platforms allowed him to escape classification as a political threat to the system, and to maintain his access to the television screen. As a result, we argue, this radical thinker was part of the system: he remained a thought-provoking insider, an independent philosopher who constantly pushed the boundaries of what can be said, but who played within the limits of the political game in the same way as other, non-Muslim, radical thinkers did.

This study explores the adaptability that Dzhemal demonstrated by linking his career as a political figure with his work as a public intellectual. We draw on Dzhemal's books and articles and his regular political comments, as well as on his interviews, video lectures and speeches. These will be contextualized by the reactions that Dzhemal provoked from various sides.

Dzhemal's colourful trajectory

On the website of his Islamic Committee of Russia, Geidar Dzhemal described himself as 'a Russian with Islamic roots', 'an example of a Russian of the nearest future: a Russian-speaking Muslim, a patriot of Islamic Russia' (Islamskii Komitet Rossii [n.d.](#); cf. Mukhamiatov 2008). As 'a Muscovite of Azeri origin' Dzhemal emphasizes his city-citizenship, and thereby a certain Muscovite aristocratic attitude. And indeed, Dzhemal's father (a famous Azerbaijani artist, Dzhakhid Dzhemal') is believed to have a genealogy going back to Hulagu Khan, a grandson of Genghis Khan, while his mother was the ethnic Russian Irina Shapovalova (a well-known equestrienne and horse trainer) descended from the Russian noble family of the Shepelevs (Lesko 2009; Pozner 2013).

As his parents divorced, Geidar Dzhemal grew up with his maternal grandparents, who moved in Soviet political elite circles. Dzhemal's grandfather, Igor Shapovalov, was a professor of German classical philosophy and a director of the Malyi Theatre; he also served as First Deputy Minister of Culture of the Soviet Union. Igor Shapovalov exerted a lasting influence on the formation of his grandchild's philosophical ideas. In 1965, he smoothed Geidar's path into Moscow State University's Institute of Oriental Languages. There,

Geidar Dzhemal met Vladimir Zhirinovskii (then in his second year of studies), who, some say, was already close to the KGB. Yet soon Dzhemal was accused of promoting ‘bourgeois nationalism’, and was expelled from the university (Chelnokov 2012; see also Lesko 2009).

Dzhemal then joined Moscow’s intellectual and esoteric circles of the 1960s and 1970s. He attached himself to an alternative group (*tusovka*) around Iurii Mamleev, who explored the link between the world and the supernatural. Mamleev inspired the so-called ‘schizoid intellectual underground’ (*shizoidnoe intellektual’noe podpol’e*), where Bohemians enjoyed discussing esotericism ‘with a glass of port wine’ (Bekkin 2012, 373). Some prominent members of this circle had access to the closed collections of the Library for Foreign Literature, and brought works by various mystics and philosophers into the discussions; among these were books by the well-known esotericists Julius Evola, Alain de Benoist and Claudio Mutti, who subsequently – and through Mamleev’s circle – became popular among Russia’s ‘intellectual’ neo-Nazis (Chelnokov 1997).

Under KGB pressure, this ‘underground’ disintegrated. To escape from army service, Dzhemal registered at a psychiatric institution as suffering from schizophrenia (see Silant’ev 2008, 162). When Mamleev had to emigrate to the USA in 1974, Dzhemal, together with Aleksandr Dugin (b. 1962), gathered around a new leader, the philosopher Evgenii Golovin, who established the occultist ‘Black Order of the SS’ (Pribylovskii 1998, 41). Interestingly, when in 2013 Dugin characterized Dzhemal as ‘a brilliant thinker’ (Goloslama 2013), Dzhemal revealed that he regarded Dugin as his ‘former disciple’ (Pozner 2013, 2:50–3:11). In 1988, both held positions in the right-wing movement *Pamiat’*, but Dzhemal was soon excluded from the movement for the ‘occultism’ that he allegedly practised (Tiashlov 2016). Dugin for a brief period joined the National Bolshevik Party of Eduard Limonov, and from 2000 developed his own Eurasianist platforms, which made him an influential political philosopher. Inspired by the Eurasianists of the 1920s, Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianism holds that Russia must realize its distinct destiny, emanating from the country’s unique geographical position in Europe and Asia and from its diverse ethnic composition. In the neo-Eurasian model, Russia is called upon to counter-balance the decadent West, the Atlantic world, and particularly the imperialist USA (see Shlapentokh 2007; Laruelle 2008; Shekhovtsov 2009; Umland 2010; Laruelle 2015). This messianistic ideology is to a large degree built on appeals to spirituality, which allows it to connect to various religious traditions of the Eurasian ‘heartland’.

From Western esotericism, Dzhemal found his way to Islam. Probably inspired by the Iranian Revolution (1978/1979) and the mujahidin in Afghanistan, Dzhemal joined the Islamist movement in Tajikistan, where an Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (*Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston*) came into being. In 1990, Dzhemal participated in the Astrakhan convention of Islamic activists that established an umbrella Islamic Revival Party (*Islamskaia Partiiia Vozrozhdeniia*). Active in various parts of the USSR, this party emphasized the role of Muslims in geopolitical terms, claiming that only the USSR’s Turks, Caucasians and Islamized Slavs could enable the Soviet Union to stand against the West (Shlapentokh 2008, 35). The party leadership came from various Islamic traditions, and some of its leaders, including the Daghestani (Avar) Akhmad-Kadi Akhtaev, later spear-headed the movement of ‘Wahhabi’ dissidents in the North Caucasus (Bobrovnikov 2007, 162).

According to Muhiddin Kabiri (who knew him from 1990 on), Dzhemal’s grand philosophical designs and his excellent Russian made a huge impression on the Tajik activists:

they almost held him in higher esteem than their own leaders.² During the Civil War in Tajikistan (1992–1997), Dzhemal reportedly worked as an advisor to Davlat Usmon, one of the founders of the Tajik Islamic Revival Party (Laurinavicius 2015). The Civil War was eventually settled by integrating the Tajik Revival Party into a coalition government, from which it was then, however, gradually removed (Dzhemal' 2014; Pannier 2015). The Russian branch of the Islamic Revival Party was eliminated in 1994, when the conflict in Chechnya turned into a war.

From 1992, Dzhemal frequently visited Iran and forged ties with leaders of the Islamic Republic (including with Khomeini's son Ahmad), which significantly expanded Dzhemal's financial muscle. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR, Iran was one of Russia's few remaining partners in the Middle East, and both Dzhemal and Dugin provided spiritual legitimacy for this strategic partnership. For Dugin, Orthodox Christianity is close to Shia Islam since both have managed to preserve their esoteric nature, while Western Churches and Sunni Islam have degenerated and become 'purely social' religions (Dugin 1995, sections 3 and 4). Dzhemal asserted that Russia should even help Iran to acquire a nuclear bomb to counterbalance the state of Israel, which both Dugin and Dzhemal regarded as a Western colonial outpost in the Middle East (Shlapentokh 2008, 42; Dzhemal' 1999a, 233).

Yet while Dzhemal defended Iran as a positive model, he still differentiated himself: 'I am not a *Rāfiḍa*', meaning he did not accept for himself the label that Sunnis often give to Shiis, namely that they are 'rejectors' of the first three caliphs who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad, and only revere the fourth caliph, 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661), as the rightful heir to Muhammad. Going even further, Dzhemal distanced himself from much of the Shii theological tradition: 'I am the enemy of the Sufi and Qom pantheism' (obviously referring to the monistic theosophical traditions of famous Iranian thinkers such as Mullā Ṣadrā, d. 1640), 'but in terms of *fiqh* [Islamic law] and the evaluation of Islamic history I adhere to the *Sunna* of the Prophet as transmitted through Hazrat Ali (A.S. [*alayhi al-salām*, 'peace be upon him'])). In many aspects, this tradition coincides with Salafism' (Dzhemal' 2010c, 243; cf. Laruelle 2016, 91). He thus reduced Shiism to its legal school, which has historically been characterized by a conflict between adherents of *taqlīd* (conservative emulation) and *ijtihād* (the quest for renewal through new readings of the Islamic source texts). Dzhemal strongly sided with the latter, against *taqlīd* (Dzhemal' 2008e). And *ijtihād*, usually defined as a qualified scholar's right to solve legal questions by directly turning to the Qur'an and the Hadith traditions of the Prophet, is indeed also a major element of the Sunni reformist thought that ultimately led to the emergence of various trends of Salafism.

In the early 1990s, Dzhemal became a regular guest on the main Russian state television channels, and even hosted his own talk shows (including *Nyne* and *Sakral'naia geografiia*). He also established his own information centre *Tawḥīd* ('Monotheism') and launched an Islamic Russian-language newspaper, called *Al-Waḥdat* ('Unity'). The names of these outlets are key concepts in the Salafi discourse, not only in Russia; by making the unity (and complete otherness) of God one of his central concepts, Dzhemal tried to build bridges between Shiism and Sunnism. As he argued in a 1999 interview, the differences between the 'inner spirit' of Islam, as preserved in Shiism, and the 'outer', geopolitical and Eurasian dimension, as developed in Sunnism, 'are already being washed away' (Dzhemal' 1999a, 3–4). In particular, according to Dzhemal, the Shii concept that the

Twelfth (Hidden) Imam is still ‘among us’ does not contradict the Sunni concept that the best members of the community should take power; those who come to power will just prepare the ground for the return of the Imam (7–8). The ‘intellectual and determined centre’ of the new Islamic movement has to be as inclusive as possible, in order to keep the Muslim *umma* together (Dzhemal’ 2005, 9).

In 1995, Dzhemal founded what he hoped would be such a centre, the ‘Islamic Committee of Russia’ (*Islamskii Komitet Rossii*) (Pribylovskii 2003), as an organization that would bring together Muslim thinkers from all over the Russian Federation. Yet far from being an ‘inter-regional public movement’ (as it claimed to be), from the start the Committee became his own media platform.

The uneasy Shii-Salafi background of this enterprise is reflected in the fact that Dzhemal first announced the establishment of his Islamic Committee in 1992 (Mukhamiatov 2008, 70–71), after participating in a convention of the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress in Khartoum. This organization strove to ‘bring together under a single banner hard-line Islamic militants and nationalists’ (Jacquard 2002, 31) of various shades and colours. The founder of the Congress, the Sudanese religious leader Ḥasan al-Turābī, reportedly endorsed Dzhemal’s initiative, since it promoted Islam as a ‘successor of communism on the territory of the former Soviet empire’ (Kudinova 2010, 98).

The goal of Dzhemal’s Islamic Committee is to ‘formulate an ideology of political Islam of the twenty-first century’, specifically for ‘the Muslim diaspora’. By ‘diaspora’, he meant Muslims in Russia operating outside of their ethnic homelands. For Dzhemal, Muslims in a non-Muslim environment, in ‘a culturally foreign space’ (Kudinova 2010, 156), are at the forefront of Islamic intellectual development. Needless to say, the Muscovite Dzhemal promoted himself as the natural front man of this movement.

There are reports that in 1996 Dzhemal became advisor to Aleksander Lebed’, the well-known Russian general who in that year negotiated the Khasaviurt accords with the Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, and who then ran against Yeltsin in the first round of the 1996 presidential elections. Yeltsin eventually made Lebed’ secretary of Russia’s Security Council, and in this function Lebed’ employed Dzhemal to draft policy reports on the North Caucasus (Gurianov 2014). If this information is true, it confirms Dzhemal’s links to popular right-wing Russian nationalists, who may have seen him as a broker with access to dubious Chechen leaders whom the Russian organs could not contact directly. In fact, after the start of the war in Chechnya, Dzhemal declared his support for the Arab and Chechen ‘Wahhabis’, and he was personally acquainted with the warlord Shamil Basaev and Chechnya/Ichkeria’s ‘chief ideologist’ Movladi Udugov. Dzhemal saw the war in Chechnya as the beginning of a global civil war between the ‘party of God’ and ‘the party of Satan’, the latter represented by the ‘world government’, multinational corporations, banks and national bureaucracies (Dzhemal’ 1999c, 45). He claimed that Russia had been drawn into the Chechen war by Western secret services (Dzhemal’ 2001a, 187). He continued to link up with various patriotic movements and with Islamic platforms outside of Russia’s official Islam, and in 1999 even tried to get a seat in the State Duma (Tiashlov 2016).

Dzhemal’s bellicose discourse, his polemical attacks on Israel and the West, and his criticism of the growing influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (in 2005 Dzhemal called for Christian symbols to be removed from all national emblems, including from the coat of

arms) (Lenta 2005), are indeed in line with the radical Russian nationalist discourse. At the same time, Dzhemal's political vision of a revolutionary community has anarchist features that appeal to other political dissidents, including Eduard Limonov. The latter confessed that his interest in Islam resulted from a conversation with the 'Godfather' of Russian Islam in 1998 (Bekkin 2012, 394).

The 9/11 attacks of 2001 created a new environment for Dzhemal to roll out more conspiracy theories, and to adapt his teaching to the new circumstances. He argued vigorously that the attacks had been carried out not by Islamists but by an unnamed totalitarian sect 'from a certain country that does not exist anymore', and that they were orchestrated by the CIA and other government circles in the US (Dzhemal' 2001d, 111). He claimed that the chaos and fear spread by the attacks had allowed a 'fascist putsch' in Washington, leading to the obliteration of all civil rights in the West, and to carpet bombing in Afghanistan, and that, under the weight of Russia's substantial foreign debt, Russia's new president, Putin, willingly supported the global dictatorship, thereby 'transferring American policies into the Eurasian space'. According to Dzhemal, Putin's weak leadership led to a sell-out of Russian sovereignty, for the West wanted to tear Russia to pieces. In this situation, according to Dzhemal, the only real force that could resist the global world order was political Islam: 'today Islam is ready to cooperate with all anti-globalization forces, which are morally united in their rejection of the oligarchy and of the new, essentially fascist world order that is now imposed on the world after the provocations of 9/11' (127). By linking up with the world's protest movements, Islam would be able to leave its 'confessional ghetto' and become the vanguard for the common people; if Russia joined forces with Islam and with the European Left, it would win the upcoming Third World War (Dzhemal' 2003b, 313). In another piece, he described this new alliance as an international Left movement, and called for the establishment of an International Sharia Court, as an alternative to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, with the task of prosecuting US war crimes in Afghanistan (Dzhemal' 2002, 137). Needless to say, nothing came of this. Later Dzhemal lobbied for released Guantanamo prisoners of Russian citizenship, and one of them joined the Islamic Committee (Mukhamiatov 2008, 71).

However, starting in 2002, Dzhemal changed his tone towards Putin, obviously realizing that the latter could no longer be accused of being simply a puppet of the West. Dzhemal now called upon Russia to reconsolidate the post-Soviet area, and 'if Russia becomes a geopolitical ally of the Islamic world against the American dictate, then the task of a Muslim living in Russia will be to strengthen the opportunities of this geopolitical formation'. He also discouraged Volga Tatars from using Islam as a means to solidify their ethnic identity (Dzhemal' 2003a, 199–201) – a position that implicitly legitimized the Kremlin's dismantling of Tatarstan's autonomy during that period.

Geidar Dzhemal's Islamic project

According to Laruelle (2016, 89), 'Dhemal advances a paradoxical blend of geopolitics that combines pro-Islamic, pro-Russian, and pro-Fascist traits into an eclectic "postmodern" blend that is typical in the era of digital geopolitics'. Seen from the perspective of Russian radicalism and fascism studies, Dzhemal appeared to be using Islamic concepts as just another political tool (86). But while there is no doubt that Dzhemal employed

Islam for self-promotion, the popularity that his statements still enjoy among Muslim intellectuals requires a closer look at how he used elements of the Islamic tradition for his political constructs. Such an analysis will accentuate less the fascist roots in Dzhemal's thinking, and emphasize more the leftist elements in his Islamic thought.

Dzhemal makes a geopolitical distinction between *dār al-Islām* (the 'House of Islam', in his eyes achieved only in Iran), *dār al-kufr* (the 'House of Unbelief', which he applies to countries like the United States, Great Britain and France, obviously because these states pursue a war against Islam), and an intermediate category, *dār al-ḥarb* (the 'House of War'). The last comprises most countries of the Muslim world, since their governments are 'in the hands of infidels'. Interestingly, Dzhemal locates Russia not in *dār al-kufr* but, like most of the Middle East, in *dār al-ḥarb*, arguing that Muslims have been living there for centuries, and that Russia's Muslims have the possibility to formulate their own goals, and to influence the domestic and foreign policies of Russia (Dzhemal' 1997a, 93–94). This is his playing field.

In 2003, Dzhemal published his first book ('The Revolution of the Prophets'), a collection of his philosophical and political lectures on Western philosophy and traditionalism, the Bible and the Qur'an, and radical geopolitical thinking (Dzhemal' 2003f). A year later, he published 'The Liberation of Islam', a collection of his previous interviews and journalistic pieces (Dzhemal' 2004a). Three more books appeared in 2010 (Dzhemal' 2010a; 2010b; 2010c), which can be downloaded for free.

While the changes in Dzhemal's politico-philosophical writings are astounding and confusing, he had already formulated central elements of his personal discourse in short essays in 1990: the spiritual bankruptcy of Enlightenment thought and multi-culturalism in Russia and the West; the global financial sector's dominance in the world; Russia's need to stand up against the US; and the emphasis on radical Islamic political theology as Russia's natural ally against the West. For Dzhemal, humanity is 'in a mortal crisis', and only Islam can defeat this global Dajjāl (Antichrist) in the upcoming final battle. This scenario has clear eschatological features: we are living immediately before the End of Time. The USSR, as a colonial state that repressed Islam, was already a servant of the Dajjāl, but Khomeini in Iran, as well as the mujahidin in Afghanistan, demonstrated the weakness of the superpowers.

At the same time, Dzhemal remained deliberately vague as to what kind of Islam would be victorious. When talking about the core of Islam, he constantly referred to Abraham, as the first prophet, and de-emphasized Muhammad, whose achievement was the return to the core of the Abrahamic tradition and the completion of the prophetic cycle. That is, the Islamic revolution is presented as a project that brings us back to the origin of all three monotheistic religions; and 'the prophets were revolutionaries in the first place' (Dzhemal' 1999a, 19).

His writings after 1990 contain the discursive devices that Dzhemal has continued to employ ever since, namely broad generalizations and provocative assumptions about the current state of humanity. His political analysis of current affairs includes surprising comparisons to ancient Greece, Rome, India, China and the Muslim world, and references to the Bible and the Qur'an. Equally characteristic since that time has been his preference for spoken lectures and the question-and-answer format, to elucidate his ideas in a lively manner that appeals to an educated Russian audience (see Shevchenko 2016). Later he established a strong Internet presence, with blogs and regular political essays.

Dzhemal emphasized his complete independence from any other living Islamic thinker (see Dzhemal' 2005, 7); the only positive references that he made were to Ayatollah Khomeini and the well-known Iranian left-wing Islamic sociologist 'Alī Shari'atī (1933–1977). But Dzhemal was quick to reject the system of *mujtahids* that came to power after the Islamic Revolution; for him, the Iranian clergy are just another religious caste created by the state (Dzhemal' 2011a).

As the West has declared a 'total war' on Muslims, by means of violence, economic blackmail and informational terror (Dzhemal' 2005, 8), the Muslim community has now taken over the role of the proletariat – a thesis that takes its inspiration from Khomeini's rhetorical struggle for the 'downtrodden' (Persian: *mustaḍ'afān*, in Dzhemal's Russian: *obezdolennye*), and ultimately from Shari'atī. Muslims must transform their *religious* subject-hood into *political* will (9). This should be accomplished under the auspices of a platform organization, an *Islamintern* (11), which would unite all revolutionary Islamic movements. While twentieth-century Marxism had the Socialist International, political theology so far lacks such a centre that can communicate, in a new language, with 'Providence, history, humanity, and the tsars' (Dzhemal' 2003f, 329–330). *Islamintern* should declare 'total jihad' against the world system of tyranny and injustice; and Russia should understand that Islam is her most valuable partner in this struggle. The Islamic doctrine for uniting the Islamic world might come from Russia's *umma*, as Dzhemal already envisaged in 1999 (Dzhemal' 1999b, 232–233).

His own task in this process Dzhemal saw in 'revolutionizing the understanding of perception, gnosis, and discursive technologies', in order 'to create a methodology of thought as an effective instrument of freedom'. The ultimate goal is to ensure the advent of the Mahdī, the expected redeemer of Islam who will rule before Judgment Day and lead the chosen faithful into the 'upcoming final war' (Dzhemal' 2003f, 329–300). The figure of the Mahdī is very prominent in Shii eschatology, but the redeemer also figures in Sunni traditions, and many jihad movements in history (including in the North Caucasus; see Kemper 2005, 174–184) had such eschatological components. While in his early texts the advent of the Mahdī, with the Black Flag of Abū Muslim from Khorasan, was still central (Dzhemal' 1990, 84), in later writings the Mahdī topic receded into the background, and with it Dzhemal's Shiism – obviously in order to be more inclusive.

Dzhemal argued that, in the history of humanity, every revolution was linked to 'a true religion' (*istinnaia religiia*), which is the 'religion of the prophets' (*religiia prorokov*). The prophets of the Abrahamic religions were revolutionaries by definition, since they always began their divine ministry with a radical critique of the existing tradition. A revolution is an activity of the 'Holy Spirit', a religious mystery, and it is impossible beyond the religious context of Abrahamism, since Abraham was the first to fight against tyranny (Dzhemal' 2001b, 38–39).

The opposite of this revolutionary-prophetic mission is '*popovshchina*', the rule of professional clerics who furiously defend the established tradition and the status-quo. The 'clerical apparatus' that emerged in Russia, the muftis of the state-approved 'Muslim Spiritual Administrations', are just state-appointed officials, and have no legitimacy (Dzhemal' 1999a, 5, 9). Similarly, Sufism is just another attempt to establish a clerical caste by smuggling pre-Islamic elements into Islam (30).³ Yet Dzhemal also rejected

Muslim modernists, whom he depicted as Masonic-liberal captives of the West (33). In other words, Dzhemal opposed all forms of mainstream Islamic authority that exist at the present time, in Russia and beyond.

Although all three Abrahamic religions are at their core ‘theologies of revolution’, peaceful coexistence between the three is impossible: ‘ecumenism is a thing of the priests’ who support each other across all denominations (19–20). Peace will come only after Judgment Day. True Judaism, in Dzhemal’s view, had already been exterminated in the course of the Jewish revolts (13), and similarly, contemporary Christianity has nothing to do with Christ’s message; the European churches have simply institutionalized social injustice.

The true religion of the prophets is in mortal, irreconcilable confrontation with the natural world religions, such as the religion of the priests (*zhretsov*), of Plato, of Aristotle, Brahmanism, Taoism, and so forth. [...] And those who teach the unity of all traditions (including Christianity and Islam), [...] simply do not understand what the prophets have spoken about. (19)

While he also saw the Russian Orthodox Church as being on the side of the rich and the powerful (Sozaev-Gur’ev 2010), Dzhemal nevertheless regarded Orthodox Christians as potential allies in the initial phases of the war against the Antichrist (Dzhemal’ 2009, 384).

And Islam, too, needs to be completely reconfigured. In Dzhemal’s reading of Q 2.143, ‘We made you a community standing in the middle (*ummatan wasatan*)’ does not mean (as most scholars have it, including the Muslim Brotherhood) that the Islamic community should be ‘moderate’, in the sense of ‘in the middle between the extremes’. Rather, for Dzhemal this verse meant that the Islamic *umma* is now ‘at the centre of human history’ (Dzhemal’ 2005, 5). Today, only ‘authentic’ Islam has preserved the transformative energy of the prophetic revolutions.

In Dzhemal’s definition, this is ‘the Islam of those who are willing to shed their blood for Allah’, who accomplish the mission transmitted from the Jews and the early Christians (Kudinova 2010, 156–157). The task of the Islamic community is to produce ‘heroic elites’, people with a militant psychology who will become the basis of the future ruling class in the Islamic *umma* (Dzhemal’ 1999a, 33). A faith ‘must be aggressive, must be passionate (*passionarnyi*)’, a term that Dzhemal perhaps borrowed from the historical, ethnological and anthropological works of Eurasianist Lev N. Gumilev (1912–1992). The *passionarii* oppose the cynicism that is dominant in our time, and the ‘tolerance towards everything’ (34). And eventually, in 2010, Dzhemal praised Russia’s top jihadist, Said Buriatskii (1982–2010), as such a fighter for the ‘genuine’ power of Islam against ‘*kāfir* neoliberalism’ (Dzhemal’ 2010c, 85–86).⁴ A Duma deputy had wanted to bring Dzhemal to court in 2009 (in the context of Dzhemal’s appraisal of the Islamists who in 2005 carried out attacks in the Kabardino-Balkarian capital of Nalchik ‘as heroes’), but the case was dropped (Kavkaz-uzel 2016).

For Dzhemal, mujahidin should direct the Muslim community and conduct grassroots uprisings against illegitimate religious authorities. According to Dzhemal, Q 4.59 (‘Have recourse to the *ūlū al-amr* [the people of authority] among you’) does not mean that Muslims should obey dynastic rulers, or scholars of Islamic law, as conventional Qur’an commentaries wrongly have it. Rather, the verse means that leaders must rise up from

among self-governing communities. These communities recognize the freedom of each of their members and build relationships with other communities on principles of a treaty. A Muslim community should therefore establish a *shūrā* ('council'), a term borrowed from both the Soviet and the Islamic political lexicons. According to Dzhemal, the *Shūrā* would give power to the people, who could then unite all Muslims and implement the activities of the 'Party of God' in Russia (Dzhemal' 1997b; cf. Dzhemal' 1999a, 4, 19, 21, 33–34). How the leaders should be identified, however, is left open: Dzhemal rejected the Sunni concept of elected leadership (Dzhemal' 1999a, 8), which implies that leaders should emerge through their own sense of vocation.

Eurasia, diaspora, and Russian Muslims

While Dzhemal presented Islam primarily as a supra-national, internationalist project, his 1990 writings already contained racist attitudes. In particular, he attributed the decline of the Islamic world in the post-Mongol period to the growing dominance of the 'Turkic element', which led to 'organizational stagnation', to a defensive attitude towards the West, and thus to a loss of Islamic vigour. He argued that the Turkic nationalism that succeeded the Ottoman ideology was in fact formulated by Anatolian Jews, and that Arab nationalism was the work of Armenians (Dzhemal' 1990, 80–81). For Dzhemal, the ideas of nationalism and patriotism are harmful myths to enslave the people. Equally harmful, in his opinion, are concepts such as 'Bashkir Islam' and 'Tatar Islam', for these would only split the Muslim community (Sozaev-Gur'ev 2010).

At the same time, Dzhemal is struggling to distinguish his vision from that of Aleksandr Dugin. Without mentioning the latter's name, in 2001 Dzhemal mocked the growing popularity of Eurasian geopolitics, which he called a parody of the Mongol and Turkic traditions. Geopolitics in the Mongol tradition (which, in his view, culminated in the gigantic Soviet bureaucracy) are an uninspired and 'anti-passionate' conception (*a-passionarnaia kontseptsia*) – a false science (*lzhenuka*) that relies on the 'cult of soil', 'as a basis for constructing a neo-pagan mentality for the middle and lower classes, so that these become immune against influences of social destabilization'. In other words, Dugin's neo-Eurasian ideology is rejected as a conservative cover-up to discourage radical political activism in Putin's Russia (Dzhemal' 2001c, 222–223).

But Dzhemal offered another, allegedly more sublime and revolutionary Eurasian model – one that is not a Mongol tradition but Indo-European in nature. This he identified with the project of Alexander the Great: by uniting the space that is today the core of the Muslim World – from Xinjiang to Libya – Alexander laid the basis for Hellenism, which was the soil on which both Christianity and Islam grew. In the Islamic tradition, the historical Alexander is usually identified with Dhū al-Qarnayn, a personality mentioned in the Qur'an. In Q 18.92, Dhū al-Qarnayn is introduced as a prophet who built a gigantic wall to protect the descendants of Noah from the destructions brought by the hordes of Gog and Magog, which are generally associated with Turan, the Central Asian Turkic world. For Dzhemal, the Chingizid model that the new Eurasianists emulate was in fact a counter-revolution to Dhū al-Qarnayn/Alexander's earlier, and more inspired, attempt at 'revolutionary globalism' (Dzhemal' 2001c, 216). While Dzhemal thus distanced himself from Dugin, he reinforced Eurasianist thought by developing an alternative, Indo-European version of neo-Eurasianism.

In 2003, Dzhemal ended his flirtation with international anti-globalists, whom he accused of being usurped by feminists and softies, and of having no ‘idea’. From then on, the ‘militant diaspora’ was at the heart of his politico-theological construct.

His concept of diaspora is equally rooted in the history of monotheism (from the Babylonian exile, through Hellenism, to Muhammad’s *hijra*) (Dzhemal’ 2003c, 366). But the contemporary diaspora that Dzhemal had in mind is not a compact ethnic group living in a foreign environment; rather, he envisaged the new type of diaspora as an internationalist network of self-governing communities. Their passionaric non-conformists resist global rule, the ‘System’ and the ‘Superelite’. This network will paralyse the bureaucracy and cause a massive breakdown of the world economy, which will then give them the opportunity to carry out a new world revolution. This ‘theological diaspora’ takes its force from the Abrahamic tradition, from the consciousness that human existence has a final goal, and thus from their readiness to sacrifice their lives for this goal. In terms of organization, this plan is designed according to early Bolshevik models, with a vanguard party of professional revolutionaries (a ‘World Internationalist Party of Armed People’s Democracy’). However, this should be based not on materialism but on ‘meaning’ (*smysl*), with the proletariat being replaced by the diasporas (Dzhemal’ 2003d, 406). This utopia is thus conscious of its Marxist roots but has transposed its superstructure and foundation, back to Hegel’s idealism.

One would assume that such outright excesses of sheer futurologist writing would have marginalized Dzhemal as a political thinker, but he retained a central place among Russia’s intellectual Islamists, many of whom have direct experiences of inner or real ‘exile’. With his Aryan-Eurasian-Islamic model, he again appealed to many Tajik Islamic thinkers, both in Tajikistan and in the Russian diaspora.⁵

And in the early 2000s, Dzhemal also gained a small circle of devoted followers consisting of ethnic Russians with no previous attachment to Islam. Dzhemal gave them individual research projects, the results of which he edited in 2005: Anastasiia Ezhova produced studies on ‘Alī Sharīfātī and on the Egyptian Muslim Brother Sayyid Qūṭb, Anton Shmakov worked on the Pakistani-British Islamic thinker Kalim Siddiqui, and others researched the Nation of Islam in the US and Catholic Liberation Theology in Latin America.

Some of his disciples eventually converted to Islam, including Anastasiia (Fatima) Ezhova, who became a powerful defender of the Iranian Shii model and of Russian Islamic feminism (Kemper 2012). Similarly, the young Russian nationalist Vadim Sidorov (Harun ar-Rusi) joined Dzhemal’s circle in 2003 (Sidorov 2012), and converted not to ‘contemplative Sufism’, as he put it, but to the ‘radical, *dzhemalist*’ version of Islam (Sidorov 2015a). In particular, Dzhemal’s 2001 critique of Dugin’s neo-Eurasianism, and his development of an alternative model based on Alexander the Great, fascinated Sidorov and other ethnic Russian Muslims from a right-wing background; they began to revere Dhū al-Qarnayn as the prophet of all Indo-European tribes, including Russians. In early autumn 2003, Sidorov and nine others announced the creation of the Russian Muslim Jamaat ‘Banu Zulkarnain’ (meaning ‘Children of Alexander the Great’). This group saw itself as a Russian ‘bastion’ of the Aryan race, which would ‘fulfil the mission of Dhū l-Qarnayn, who had erected the Iron Gates [usually associated with the Derbend Wall] to deter the infernal hordes of Gogs and Magogs’. In June 2004, the ‘Banu Zulkarnain’ and several other groups of *russkie* Muslims from Moscow, the

Volga region, Siberia and Kazakhstan united in the National Organization of Russian Muslims (*Natsional'naia Organizatsiia Russkikh Musul'man*; NORM), as an organization of ethnic Russian converts who present themselves as the intellectual vanguard of Islam in Russia. Conversion to Islam was promoted as the solution to Russia's crisis (Mitrofanov 2004).

However, Dzhemal preferred to keep his distance from NORM, 'a trueborn, but not planned, and in general unwanted child', as Ezhova called it (Ezhova 2011; see also Sozaev-Gur'ev 2010). Likewise, Sidorov began to accuse Dzhemal of preaching 'heretical Shiism' and 'Caucasian racism', and of contradicting Islam 'in any version of its classical schools' (Sidorov 2015b, 3). Eventually, Sidorov sought integration into another Islamic diaspora, the international Murabitun movement established by Scotsman Ian Dulles. With its home basis in Cape Town, the Murabitun adhere to the Mālikī *madhhab* (school of Islamic law), coupled with Shādhiliyya Sufism, both of North African origin. Eventually, in 2007 NORM officially adopted the Mālikī *madhhab* (which has barely any other followers in Russia), with the result that many members left the association. To conclude, Dzhemal succeeded in raising a number of Russian political Islamists, but he clearly failed to keep them under his wing; they went in various directions, to the left (Ezhova) or right (Sidorov) of the political spectrum. But they remained true to Dzhemal's diaspora project in so far as they refused to link up with the Sunni Islam of Russia's autochthonous Muslims, and thus remained marginal themselves.

In Putin's new Russia: back to the Caucasus

Particularly since around 2008, Dzhemal's writings have centred on the Caucasus. In his essay collection *Fuzei i Karamul'tuki* (Dzhemal' 2010a), he dealt with contemporary political developments especially in Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan. Dzhemal had always perceived the region as a last bulwark of passionate Muslims, and his essays often took the form of obituaries dedicated to Islamic activists, including the Ingush human rights activist Magomed Evloev (Dzhemal' 2008b) and the Dagestani Islamist and gangster Nadirshakh Khachilaev (Dzhemal' 2003e). Equally prominent are essays, often sarcastic in tone, on corruption, violence and events that display the helplessness of the regional and central authorities. The title of the book, *Fuzei i Karamul'tuki*, refers to two types of flint guns used in the Caucasus, and the book itself is thought of as 'an exchange of gunfire between infantry units prior to a big battle' (Dzhemal' 2010a, 2).

But 2010 also saw the publication of another collection, entitled *Stena Zulkarnaina*, 'The Wall of Dhū l-Qarnayn' (Dzhemal' 2010c). In this volume, the articles are designed as instructions for the 'warriors' in that upcoming final war. This also entails a change in linguistic strategy: for the first time, his Russian text contains Arabic religious terminology and mainstream Islamic expressions such as the *basmla* and eulogies of the Prophet, which Dzhemal had not given much attention in earlier writings. Several articles have the Q&A format, and deal with theological and legal issues in Islam, such as the difference between Salafism and Sufism, the defence of belief against infidels, the image of Paradise in Islam (38–66, 211–244). Dzhemal thus outlined what he saw as the path of a genuine believer, up to the issue of martyrdom. Largely avoiding any reference to Western thinkers, his argumentation was built on the Qur'an and on the lives of Islamic activists who

achieved martyrdom (such as the Shia theologian Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr, executed in 1980 in Saddam Hussein's Iraq) (254–258, 257, 272–273).

The Caucasus is the battlefield between Islam and the forces of Iblis (Dzhemal' 2008c, 268), and torn apart by Russia's imperial ambitions and the 'world liberal club', the latter being accountable for the 2008 war in Georgia (Dzhemal' 2008d, 15). Dzhemal asserts that the existing republican units in the North Caucasus are just illegitimate 'administrative pieces', created to manipulate Russia's minorities; the region is capable of resistance only if it comes together in a supra-ethnic union (Dzhemal' 2008a, 23). And the Caucasus has already brought forward a whole plethora of 'passionate Muslims' (Dzhemal' 2004b, 28; 2010c, 77). He clearly sympathized with the 'Caucasus Emirate' that had been proclaimed in 2007, and that continued to organize terrorist attacks against the authorities and Islamic leaders in the North Caucasus and beyond.

Dzhemal now treated the Caucasus as an entity separate from the rest of Russia, and seems to have given up on Russia's salutary and revolutionary mission in world history. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia became an imperialist state, albeit 'of the third order', playing the role of 'a junior partner' in the Pax Americana (Dzhemal' 2015b). And ultimately, the US would be Russia's 'destroyer' (*pogubitel'*) (Dzhemal' 2004b, 8). It is in this light that Dzhemal saw Putin's military intervention in Syria in September 2015 – as a confirmation of Russia's submissiveness to the US: Russia is not combating the 'Islamic State', as it claims, but is defending the regime of the 'sectarian' [Alawite] Bashar al-Assad (Dzhemal' 2015a, 03:20–03:21, and 6:01–6:07), who 'by thousands of strands is linked to the masons, to the West' (02:39–02:42). The US has sanctioned Russia's operation in order to isolate Turkey, which is the only powerful player in the region demanding Assad's resignation. For Dzhemal, Russia's air strikes and missile attacks close to the Turkish–Syrian border were meant to deter Turkey from closing the Bosphorus to Russia's navy, and thus from access to the Tartus base (Bochkarev 2015).

The Russian mainstream media image of Russia 'rising' back to power and glory, rampant especially since the annexation of the Crimea in March 2014, was in Dzhemal's eyes just 'an ice cube in spring' (Dzhemal' 2015b); the euphoria will soon be replaced by deep frustration. Dzhemal again prophesied the explosion of this discontent in a new religious war. Yet now he had to acknowledge the role of the 'Islamic State': the latter 'makes jihad a political issue, not only a theological phenomenon as it used to be' (Kochetkova 2014). It seems that this acknowledgement must be seen against the background of the exodus of many North Caucasus warriors to join ISIS in Iraq and Syria, which they find more attractive than the declining 'Caucasus Emirate' (see Youngman 2016).

Conclusion: the discourse of radical ambiguities

Dzhemal's militant rhetoric placed him right in the middle of the religious confrontation that has been blazing in Russian society since the early 2000s; he openly declared his opposition to the current regime, participated in the annual Dissenters' Marches (*Marsh nesoglasnykh*), praised Muslim combatants, and called for revolution.

Dzhemal's role was somehow similar to that of the controversial but very influential journalist Maksim Shevchenko, who also professes a strong sympathy for the Caucasus, and for 'non-traditional' Islam up to Hamas and Hizbollah. Shevchenko leaves open the question of whether he considers himself a Muslim but is widely seen as a defender

of Muslim interests. And when in 2012 the authorities came to Dzhemal's apartment to search for 'extremist literature', Dzhemal did not give them entry until his friend Shevchenko arrived on the scene, to give him protection from possible abuse. While searches of this kind usually bring up at least something, in this case nothing illicit was found (Ansar 2012). The incident sparked an open letter of support for Dzhemal; among its 464 signatories, we find not only well-known journalists like Shevchenko and Aleksandr Prokhanov (of the radical left-wing newspaper *Zavtra*), and controversial Islamic intellectuals (such as Aslambek Ezhaev and Fauziia Bairamova, leader of the self-proclaimed Tatar National Assembly), but almost people who identified themselves as engineers, lawyers, entrepreneurs, doctors, artists, bloggers, teachers and students – which gives an indication of the intellectual audience that Dzhemal reached. Only one person signed as a professional imam (Kavkaz-uzel 2012).

So, who was Geidar Dzhemal? The usual dichotomies of 'right-wing' versus 'leftist', 'Western' versus 'Islamic', 'Russian' versus 'Caucasian', do not work in cases like his; and also, in addition his Islamic agenda, there is a mixture of many elements, from Shia discourse to Salafism, with a strong dose of Marxism and Eurasianism. His 'projects', including the Islamic Committee of Russia, had as their major function to attract attention, to provoke and to allow alternative thinking in a whole variety of directions. His crude anti-Westernism he shared with Dugin, from whom, however, he distanced himself by focusing on Islam and on the Caucasus. Yet his view of Islam was completely self-made, and he cannot be classified as either a Salafi or a Shii (the more so since he avoided discussing the traditional theological and ritual differences between such groups). In fact, he was trying to build bridges between the various camps while at the same time radically rejecting the conventional essence of each of them. Importantly, Dzhemal exploited the fact that Russia's mainstream Islamic authorities have so far failed to distinguish themselves as independent thinkers.

While Dzhemal's structure of conspiracy theories was highly opportunistic and therefore ambiguous, he remained true to his image as an anti-systemic thinker within Russia's accepted intellectual elite. His major resource was his sharp intellect, his broad philosophical and historical erudition, and, as not only his disciples argue, his personal charisma; the last seems to counterbalance the many inconsistencies within his geopolitical casting of the world.

Geidar Dzhemal passed away on 5 December 2016 in Almaty (Kazakhstan), where he was being treated for cancer. According to his disciples and admirers, he wished to be buried in the historical homeland of the Turks, with a view on the Alatau mountains. This 'Pan-Turkic' good-bye was the last ambiguous testimony of the alleged 'Aryanist'.

Notes

1. For the concept of 'traditional Islam' in Russia, see Kristina Kovalskaya's contribution to this special issue of *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*.
2. 'Dar borai Haydar Jamol va ta'siri u dar bedorii mardumi Osiyoi markazi.' Personal message from Muhiddin Kabiri to Dr Sophie Roche (Heidelberg), on behalf of the authors. 4 December 2016.
3. A view that Dzhemal paradoxically shared with the Orthodox missionary Daniil Sysoev; on Sysoev, see Gulnaz Sibgatullina's article in the present issue.

4. As Danis Garaev shows in the present issue of *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, the passionarity concept was also central in Buriatskii's own messages; the latter might have retrieved it via Dzhemal's writings.
5. 'Dar borai Haydar Jamol va ta'siri u dar bedorii mardumi Osiyoi markazi.' Personal message from Muhiddin Kabiri to Dr Sophie Roche (Heidelberg), on behalf of the authors. 4 December 2016.

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