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**Faith in Politics: Ramzam Kadyrov, Islam, and  
Hegemony in Chechnya.**

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### **Abstract**

Under the Chechen President, Ramzam Kadyrov, Islamic discourse is being diffused throughout an ever-expanding array of political and social domains, knitting the Chechen polity into a social order that is regulated by Sufi Islam. Using Laclau and Mouffe's 'Discourse Theory', this research project analyses that diffusion of Islamic discourse within Chechnya. The research finds that there is a comprehensive effort by the regime to construct a political order that draws upon, but also subverts, formerly hegemonic understandings of Islam within Chechnya. Through embedding governance and the Chechen subject within its Islamic discourse, Kadyrov's government articulates a political landscape that establishes its authority by positioning itself as the guardian of 'authentic' Chechen Islam. Here, the regime draws upon a powerful discursive resource - traditional Chechen Islamic identity - to naturalise its own authority by associating itself with a historically potent source of Chechen unity, Sufi Islam. However, the regime's discourse silences the traditional understanding of Sufi Islam as embedded within an ethno-nationalist, separatist discourse. Such restructuring marginalises the Islamist resistance - which the Kadyrov dynasty was installed to destroy - and also marginalises resistance that the pro-Kremlin government may encounter from its subjects, who have historically resisted, and greatly suffered under, Russian sovereignty.

### **Abstrakt**

Během vlády čečenského prezidenta Ramzama Kadyrova se diskurs islamismu rozšiřuje nad rostoucím množstvím politických a sociálních domén spojujících čečenskou pospolitost v sociálním řádu regulovaném súfijským islámem. Právě toto šíření diskursu islamismu je předmětem analýzy užívající "teorii diskursu" jak ji zformulovali Laclau a Mouffe. Zjišťuje, že existuje komplexní úsilí režimu konstruovat politickou agendu, která čerpá z původně hegemonního chápání islámu v Čečensku, ale současně jej podvrací. Ztělesněním vládnutí a čečenského

subjektu v rámci islámského diskursu Kadyrovova vláda formuluje politickou krajinu, která utváří svou autoritu tím, že sama sebe staví do pozice strážce “autentického” čečenského islámu. Tady se režim vztahuje k mocnému diskurzivnímu zdroji tradiční čečenské islámské identity, aby naturalizoval svou autoritu tím, že se spojí se súfijským islámem, historicky vlivným zdrojem čečenské jednoty, Režimní diskurs však umlčuje tradiční chápání i slámu vrostlé do etno-nacionalistického a separatistického diskursu. Taková proměna marginalizuje islámskou rezistenci, kterou měla instalovaná Kadyrovova vláda zničit, a také marginalizuje odpor, s nímž by se prokremelská vláda mohla setkat ze strany svého lidu, který historicky odporoval a velmi strádal za ruské vlády.

**Klíčová slova:** Čečensko, Teorie Diskursu, Kadyrov, Islám, Hegemonie, Legitimita.

**Keywords:** Chechnya, Discourse Theory, Kadyrov, Hegemony, Islam.

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

1. The author hereby declares that she compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

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**Signature**

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The author dedicates this dissertation to the endless patience, generosity and support of her long-suffering parents, Jane and Josh.

# Institute of International Studies

## Master thesis proposal

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**Aim of the Project:** Islam has become the central element of the Kadyrov regime's public image. Islamic discourse now threads its way through an ever-expanding array of political and social domains, binding the Chechen polity to a social order that is increasingly regulated by the government's understanding of Sufi Islam. It is that appropriation and diffusion of Islamic discourse under the Kadyrov regime that this dissertation documents and analyses, using Laclau and Mouffe's 'Discourse Theory'. The analytical lens of the research is steadied upon the following areas; the historical-cultural milieu that the Chechen Islamic identity has been traditionally embedded within; identifying the manifestation of Islamic discourse across various domains of governance; and finally, how the government's discourse constitutes, reproduces or alters relations of power between the regime and the Chechen populace.

### Research Questions;

1. **What, if any, Islamic discourses are identifiable in the governance activities and public rhetoric of the Kadyrov regime?**
2. **What kind of social order (or, relations of power) do the identified Islamic discourses create or reproduce?**
3. **How do these discursively constructed relations of power benefit or serve the interests of the Kadyrov regime?**

**Methodology:** This research uses a qualitative methodology and employs several methods of research and analysis.

#### **Method 1;**

Mapping of both the traditional as well as the more recently emerged discourses of Chechen Islam and Chechen Islamic identity. This involved the consultation of historical and contemporary secondary sources that documented or analysed the way in which Islam and Islamic practices came to be integrated into the political and cultural milieu of Chechen society.

#### **Method 2;**

A multi-site discourse analysis of the governance practices of the Kadyrov regime. Here the intention was to scour various sites of governmental practice in order to identify if, where, and how Islamic discourses were present in Chechen



governance. The multi-site approach concentrated upon three sites of governance; the policy-making realm, the organisation of public space, and the linguistic realm.

**Method 3;**

Analysis of the findings gathered by previous two methods. The differences between the competing constructions of Chechen Islam are analysed using the Discourse Theory concepts of power, hegemony, the interpellation of the Chechen subject and construction of the 'Other'.

**Proposed Structure;** Outline Research Questions and intentions of the research; Literature Review; Outline Theoretical Approach and key terms; Method One - mapping historical Islamic discourses within Chechnya; Method Two – Multi-site discourse analysis; Method Three – analysis of Findings; Conclusion.

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*“Everything we do serves the goal of reinvigorating the Chechen people. That’s why we pursue a policy of morality...”*

(Ramzam Kadyrov, 2011 quoted in Nagel 2011).

## 1.0 Introduction

The violence perpetrated by non-state actors, purportedly in the name of Islam, has attracted the gaze of academics and security specialists since the 9/11 attacks of 2001. Chechnya, the restive Southern republic of the Russian Federation, has endured two brutal separatist wars and sporadic, destabilising violence since the demise of the Soviet Union. Since coming to power in 2007, the pro-Russian, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov has maintained a tight grip on the region. Though Kadyrov has styled himself as an ultra-loyal Kremlin ally, it was his father, Akhmad Kadyrov, the Chechen President assassinated in 2004, who originally switched to the Russian side, abandoning the increasingly Islamised separatist cause, in order to assume the Chechen leadership – and therein relieve the Russian government of the pressures of an increasingly costly and lethal ‘counter-terrorism’ campaign. In the post-9/11 world, the continuing instability in Chechnya is all too often understood as but another instance of a fundamentalist Islamist ideology bleeding its way through the arteries of yet another civil war, radicalising its combatants and further widening the gulf between insurgents and the secular state. Yet, what is fascinating about the Chechen context is that political Islam is not a domain that is solely, nor even predominantly, occupied by the nationalist-cum-Islamist resistance. Indeed, Islam has become the central touchstone that defines not only the public image of the Kadyrov regime, but which continues to thread its way through an ever-expanding array of political and social domains, therein knitting the Chechen polity together into a social order that is increasingly regulated by the government’s articulation of Sufi Islam. It is that appropriation and diffusion of Islamic discourse under the Kadyrov regime that this research project documents and analyses, using the approach developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Discourse Theory. The analytical lens of the research is steadied upon the following three aspects; the historical-cultural milieu in which the Chechen Islamic identity has traditionally been embedded; the manifestation of Islamic discourse across various domains of governance; and finally, the effects of the government’s Islamic discourse upon the social order - that is, how the government’s advocacy of Sufi Islam constitutes, reproduces or alters relations of power between the Chechen regime

and the Chechen populace, as well as the constitution of the Chechen subject within this discourse. It is found that there has been a comprehensive attempt by the Kadyrov regime to construct a public image and policy agenda that draws upon, but in key ways, subverts, the hegemonic understandings of Sufi Islam within Chechen society and history that prevailed before the Kadyrovs assumed power. Through embedding an increasingly broad range of governance activities and the construction of the Chechen subject within an Islamic discourse, Kadyrov and his government have strived to articulate a political landscape that attempts to establish the government's hegemonic authority, or legitimacy, by positioning itself as the guardian of authentic Chechen Islam, and by extension, as the guardian of the authentic Chechen culture and identity. By cultivating a Sufi-Islamic identity, the Kadyrov regime attempts to draw upon a powerful discursive resource - traditional Chechen Islamic identity - to naturalise its own dominant position by closely associating itself with an historically potent source of Chechen unity and legitimacy, Sufi Islam. At the same time, the particular understanding of Islam that the government promotes rearticulates, indeed replaces, the traditional discursive understanding within Chechnya of Islam as closely embedded within an ethno-nationalist, separatist agenda. Such a re-articulation of Chechen Islam and Chechen Islamic identity not only serves to marginalise the Islamist resistance – a resistance that the Kadyrov dynasty was installed to destroy - but it also marginalises any resistance that the government may encounter for its pro-Russia stance amongst its own people, who have historically resisted, and indeed greatly suffered under, Russian sovereignty.

This general argument is prosecuted in the following manner. First, the particular research questions that this analysis strives to answer, as well as the initial curiosities that animated this research project - and their resonant affects upon this research - are detailed. Second, a review of the academic literature and media coverage that addresses the Chechen post-soviet context is offered. Herein, this particular research is situated as an original contribution to academic literature, which has until now focused exclusively upon the Islamic discourse articulated by the Chechen, and later, North Caucasus resistance, offering little to no analysis of the Kadyrov regime outside of its counter-insurgency military operations. In Section

Three, the theoretical approach that this research is conducted within, Discourse Theory, and the key terms that the research operationalises, are explicated. The fourth section involves the mapping of the historical as well as more recent discourses of Chechen Islam and Chechen Islamic identity, tracing the common elements amongst them. The analysis explored Islamic discourses within Chechnya as they have been constructed since Islam's arrival to the region in the fifteenth century until 2007, when Kadyrov formally assumed power. This section is intended to furnish the reader with an appreciation of the economy of meanings that have surrounded Islam in Chechnya so to enable the identification of the meanings that Kadyrov's regime not only draws upon, adapts, or silences, but is also challenged by. The fifth section entails a multi-site discourse analysis of the governance activities of the Kadyrov regime. Here the intention was to scour various sites of governance in order to identify if, where, and how Islamic discourses were present in the governance activities of the Kadyrov regime. The multi-site approach concentrated upon three sites of governance; the linguistic realm, the policy-making realm, and the organisation of public space. The temporal focus of analysis across these domains spanned from 2005, when Kadyrov began to emerge as a key decision maker within Chechnya until the end of January 2015. The sixth section analyses the findings garnered from the preceding two sections. It takes the findings of the historical analysis and the identification of contemporary Islamic discourse in Chechen governance and attempts to conceptualise their effects upon the (re)production of power relations and the constitution of identity within Chechnya through the use of several analytical concepts of Discourse theory; hegemony, power, and interpellation. These concepts are then complimented by the insights from the field of political legitimacy. It is hoped that by developing a conceptual link between 'legitimacy' and Discourse Theory will allow this research project to contribute to another field of political science (the study of political legitimacy) whilst drawing attention to the discursive processes that constitute the attainment of (or failure to attain) legitimacy by political actors.



## 2.0 Research Questions and Aims

In this section, I outline the specific research questions that this study endeavours to answer. Firstly however, it is necessary to provide an overview of what can best be described as the author's initial curiosities about, and observations of, Chechen politics under the prime ministerial and presidential reign of Ramzan Kadyrov. After all, these initial impressions formed the impetus for this research project, and they have significantly affected the formulation of its research questions and the collection and analysis of data. The rationale for the inclusion of such 'background' information transcends the academic orthodoxy of elucidating one's particular research questions or methodology. Instead, this information is provided on the basis of the post-structuralist (the broader ontological and epistemological tradition in which this research is located) assumption that the analyst, just like the phenomena they investigate, is embedded within a socially constructed reality (or, discourse) that they are unable to ever completely step outside of. Thus the researcher unavoidably brings their own legacy of assumptions, understandings, and implicit beliefs to bear upon the research process. The articulation of the researcher's original curiosities strives not only to highlight to the reader the broader intentions of the research project itself, but also offers a degree of candidness about the potential biases of the analyst (as will be outlined later, the methodology of this research is also carefully calibrated to limit researcher bias). Therefore the overt acknowledgment here of researcher bias – a risk inherent to any research and analysis – is an additional effort to mitigate the uncritical transmission of bias from the author to the audience.

The initial curiosity that piqued the researcher's interest concerned how the Chechen population would respond to being ruled by a regime that was not only put in place by, but continues to advocate unity with, the Russian Federal government (henceforth, the Kremlin), an institution that was not only seen historically as an invading force by many Chechens, but which also possesses a contemporary record of pervasive, often indiscriminate, violence against the Chechen people during the

two recent Russo-Chechen wars. Large swathes of the Chechen population, across generations, even centuries, were widely understood to be engaged in a perpetual struggle to free themselves of their Russian overlords. And yet now they were to be ruled by a former resistance fighter who switched sides to join forces with Chechnya's historic enemy. How could a regime with so much political baggage appeal to its populace? Would it even try to do so, or would the Chechen government simply continue to rely on the use of force?

The second observation was that the Chechen Republic, under Ramzan Kadyrov, had begun to fund the construction of a large number of mosques, both in Chechnya and abroad, including the second largest Mosque in Israel, after the famous Al-Aqsa Mosque (Vatchagaev 2014; Russia Today 2013; The Times of Israel 2014). The mosques, such as the 'The Heart of Chechnya', located in downtown Grozny, were often large, sprawling, and eye-catching. Why would the government of one of Russia's poorest regions, and one with an (albeit slowly diminishing) on-going threat of violence from an *Islamist* insurgency, financially invest so heavily in building tens, if not hundreds, of Mosques in Chechnya and around the world? Would not such a strategy only feed the flames of religious fervour? Or was it possible that building Mosques was part of a 'charm offensive' to win the so-called 'hearts and minds' of the Chechen people in order to legitimise its own rule? It was these apparent improbabilities that prompted this research project.

The aforementioned observations were fused, and then reproduced as the specific research questions outlined below;

1. *'What, if any, Islamic discourses are identifiable in the governance activities and public rhetoric of the Kadyrov regime?'*
2. *What kind of social order (or, relations of power) do the identified Islamic discourses create or reproduce?*
3. *How do these discursively constructed relations of power benefit or serve the interests of the Kadyrov regime?*

Finally, it is important to note that this research is concerned not with proving the true nature of the regime's promotion of its own idiosyncratic (and many would argue, fictional) brand of Sufi Islam. Rather the research looks to explore the social order that Kadyrov and his government attempt to establish through the use of Islamic discourse – where and how the Chechen citizen is constituted, what regimes of truth are privileged, repressed or marginalised, and what relations of power prevail - and to analyse the reasons for, and political consequences of, this particular social order for both the Kadyrov regime and the Chechen citizen.

### 3.0 Literature Review

Between 2005 and 2010, several commentaries on the use of political Islam by the Kadyrov regime were published by the pro-democracy media outlet, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFERL), and by the Eurasian regional conflict-observers, the Jamestown Organisation. A RFERL report in June 2010 described Ramzam Kadyrov as a dictator with a “shaky grasp of the fundamentals of Islam” who was “resorting to increasingly draconian measures to impose his own eclectic vision of what constitutes ‘traditional Chechen Islam’, as part of a ‘battle for influence’ (RFERL 2010). In two similarly titled commentaries published by the Jamestown regional analyst, Andrei Smirnov, it was suggested that the Kremlin had a history of using “Islam to fight the separatists” (2005a). Smirnov alleged that in 2000, pro-Russian Chechen proxies in the Chechen sharia court declared a Fatwa calling for the death of the deposed Chechen President and separatist leader, Aslan Maskhadov (2005a). Smirnov also pointed to a decree by Ramzam Kadyrov that banned gambling in Chechnya on moral religious grounds, as further evidence of Moscow trying to fight the insurgency “with the help of the Qur’an” (2005a). The underlying logic, Smirnov argued, was to encourage young North Caucasians to turn toward the government-sanctioned Mosques, rather than look to “the Forest” (a euphemism for joining the resistance) (2005a). In an ensuing article, Smirnov however gave little chance of success for that particular strategy, stating that Chechens were aware that the resistance was fighting not only for an Islamist cause but also for the independence of Chechnya itself (2005b).

Within academia, there are multiple studies on the role of Islam within the North Caucasus resistance, and upon how the Chechen resistance has evolved from a previously Chechen-dominated, ethno-nationalist struggle to emerge as a pan-North Caucasus resistance force that fights for the establishment of a North Caucasus caliphate that is governed by Shari’a law. Souleimanov (2007) analyses the role of Islam in Chechen politics and the anti-Russian resistance from the time of the arrival of Islam in the Caucasus to the second Chechen war, showing how Sufi Islamic faith came to be intimately intertwined with the ethnic and cultural aspects of Chechen identity, an identity which was often defined in opposition to Russian culture and

authority. Souleimanov demonstrates convincingly that Islamic identity became closely linked with the struggle of the Chechens to free themselves of their Russian masters. Sagramoso (2012) analyses the specific mechanisms through which the resistance came to fight for the ultimate goal of establishing a Caliphate in the North Caucasus. (2012). Sagramoso points to the influence of a number of influential, radical Salafi preachers who proselytised amongst Chechen youth as well as amongst those already in the ranks of the resistance. He also identifies the pragmatic incentives of turning to political Islam; Islam became a means of attracting recruits, funding, and weaponry to the resistance's cause by re-framing the conflict in religious terms so to appeal to a wider base of potential support from the Middle East but also within the predominantly Muslim North Caucasus (Sagramoso 2012). Meanwhile, Wilhelmsen (2005) identifies the religious radicalisation of key Chechen warlords and political leaders during the first Chechen war and details how the interwar period of 1996-99 shifted the balance of power within the resistance in favour of the Islamist faction at the expense of the secular nationalists.

Yet, in academic and research circles, little has been said on the Kadyrov regime itself. As far as the presence, nature, or the effects of religious discourse in the current Chechen regime's style of governance fares, no comprehensive academic research or analysis exists (advice from Russian-speaking Caucasus specialists also confirmed the same dearth in Russian-language academia). In fact, save for a few brief, passing comments by researchers studying Chechen religious identity, almost nothing has been said at all. It is this gap in the literature that this research aspires to fill.

## 4.0 Outlining Discourse Theory and Defining Key Terms

This research adopts the theoretical approach developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Discourse Theory, which falls within the broader Post-Structuralist tradition (Mole 2007: 18). Discourse Theory is concerned with analysing the hegemonic discourses within a society that organise its social and political identities, which, in turn “establish the conditions of possibility for political action”(Mole 2007: 18). Discourse is defined here as the “rule-bound set of statements which impose limits on what gives meaning and [is based upon] the idea of truth as being discursively created” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). Though this is an abstract definition, the concept of ‘discourse’ will be articulated several times throughout this section, using simple examples that will hopefully enable the reader to grasp this sometimes slippery - and often contested - concept. At the end of this section, once ‘discourse’ as a concept has been clearly defined, I will also provide a definition of how ‘Islamic discourse’ is understood and identified within the context of this research.

Discourse Theory understands the social field as a web of processes through which all meaning is created (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 24). A foundational principle of Discourse Theory is its ‘anti-essentialist’ ontology; whilst reality may exist ‘out there’, we may only access it through language, therein creating representations of reality that are never simply neutral reflections of it but which actively contribute to our understanding of reality (Torfing 2005: 153; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 8-9). Laclau and Mouffe explain;

“...[the assertion] that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought... An earthquake... certainly exists, in the sense that that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether [its] specificity as [an] object is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or ‘expressions of the wrath of God, depends on the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assumption that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence” (1985: 108).

Thus whilst 'reality' may physically exist outside of discourse, phenomena only become meaningful to us through discourse. Importantly, the meaning that we derive or accept has consequences for how we choose to act (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108; Mole 2007: 9). Jørgensen and Phillips provide the example of a flood arising from a river overflowing its banks to illustrate both what a discourse is, as well as how phenomena becomes to be embedded within discourse (2002: 9). During a flood, the water levels rise independently of how individuals or groups may speak about or understand the event, and if individuals do not move out of its way, they will drown (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 9). However, as soon as meaning is ascribed to the rising water, it becomes embedded within discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 9). Though most people would categorise the rising waters as a 'natural phenomena', they may not describe or understand the rising waters in the same way; some might attribute the event to 'God's Wrath', or perhaps see it as a consequence of global warming, whilst others may understand the rising waters as resulting from their government's failure to effectively implement flood-preventing infrastructure (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 9). Each of these various 'discourses' (that is, the various meanings ascribed) of the flood are likely to prompt difference responses to it. Hence the ascription of meaning to phenomena influences how agents speak and act in the world (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 9). Therefore, Discourse Theory asserts an important link between 'knowledge' (or 'meaning') and social action; within particular discourses some types of action appear logical and natural whilst others appear illogical or unthinkable (Burr 1995: 5; Gergen 1985: 268).

Unlike earlier positivist theories of political science, Discourse Theory asserts that the nature of our societies and identities are not pre-ordained or based in iron-clad laws (such as the 'nature' of men, or 'divine reason') but are constructed "in and through a multiplicity of overlapping language games" (Torfing 2005: 153). Hence, Discourse Theory adopts the broader post-structuralist premise that our access to 'reality' is through language (Torfing 2005: 153). Language is conceived of as a "rule-bound system of meaning and action" which conditions the political construction of identity, and in turn, the possibilities for action (Torfing 2005: 153; Mole 2007: 18).

A second foundational assumption of Discourse Theory is its post-positivist epistemology. The analytical thrust of Discourse Theory is that no meaning can ever be permanently fixed (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). All knowledge is understood as socially constructed within discourse and all meaning (knowledge) is *contingent* upon the “historical-cultural” epoch in which that meaning is produced and applied (Howarth 2010: 311). The notion of historical contingency will be explicated shortly but first it is necessary to explain how Discourse Theory understands meaning to be constructed relationally within discourse.

A vast expanse of discourses, which each attempt to structure reality in various ways, compete to define what is considered as ‘true’ within a particular realm of social reality (Rear 2013: 5). Laclau and Mouffe explain this competition to affix meaning through their adaptation of Saussurian structuralism, which they then modify to reflect their own post-structuralist understanding of language as evolving through the interaction of social actors (Rear 2013: 5; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). The structuralist understanding of linguistics can be illuminated through the analogy of the fishing-net (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 11). Each ‘sign’ (any form, linguistic, physical, or otherwise, which conveys a meaning) is fixed into place as one of the knots in the net and each knot is fixed into its position by the position of the other knots (that is, the other signs) (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 11). The knots then are structured into particular relationships with one another; each knot has a specific and fixed location in the net (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 11). Laclau and Mouffe agree that signs are defined through their relationship to other signs but they do not agree that signs are locked into a permanent position - a relationship - to other signs (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 11). Laclau explains that what the sign signifies changes according to the context in which the sign is deployed (1993: 43). Jørgensen and Phillips demonstrate this with the sign ‘work’; ‘work’ in some situations is understood as the opposite of ‘leisure’, yet to ‘work’ in the garden understands the opposite of ‘work’ as ‘passivity’ (2002: 11). Thus, through language, “the position of signs is always subject to negotiation, and it is this constant (re)negotiation of meaning that accounts for the contingency of discourses, and therefore social life



itself" (Rear 2003: 5). Although discourses attempt to finalise signs within permanent positions, this is ultimately impossible (Rear 2003: 5).

I now return to the notion of contingency. Each historical-cultural context possesses its own combination of competing discourses, which influence what is considered as valid knowledge (Howarth 2010: 311). Discourse Theory asserts that we are necessarily historical-cultural beings - that our knowledge of the world, what we consider as true, is a product "of historically situated interchanges among people" (Gergen 1985: 267). Therefore our knowledge is *contingent* upon the enduring struggle between competing discourses (Rear 2013: 4). Since all phenomena are mediated within discourse, their meanings can never be finalised (Rear 2013: 5). Instead, a cornucopia of discourses, which each understand and structure reality in different ways, compete to establish what is 'true' within particular domains of the social world (Rear 2013: 5). To say this in another way, not only is all knowledge and meaning socially constructed, it is also never finalised and it is conditioned by historical contingency. Jørgensen and Phillips neatly describe contingency as "possible but not necessary" - all social formations (whether past, present or future) could have assumed a different form to that which they eventually adopted (2002: 25; 38). This contingency is possible because of the anti-essentialist ontology described above; there are no ultimate truths or laws that shape our world. Instead the social world and its subjects are constituted and then re-constituted through the interactions of agents in an endless cycle.

This has led critics of Discourse Theory, and Post-structuralism more broadly, to argue that if all knowledge and identity is contingent, then the entire social world must be in constant flux with no constraints or underlying rules upon which to organise society (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 6). However, Discourse Theory sees the social realm as far more regulated and bound by rules than this critique suggests (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 38). Though all knowledge is, in principle, contingent, in practice discourses often are fairly rigid and frequently provide a relatively stable set of rules upon which the parameters of available identities, as well as the statements or acts that are accepted as meaningful, are established (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 6). These more rigid or enduring discourses are called 'sedimented

discourses' (Howarth 2010: 312). Discourse Theorists believe that great swathes of the social order become sedimented partly to prevent humans from becoming overwhelmed by contingency (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 37). When discourses are sedimented they have succeeded in becoming naturalised and de-politicised, sometimes to the extent that they can be difficult to identify (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 36-37). Despite their endurance though, these sedimented discourses are still contingent in that they face the eternal possibility of becoming re-problematised as new, conflicting discourses arise (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 36-37).

This understanding of knowledge, meaning, and truth, carves out a particular role for the Discourse Theory analyst. The task of the researcher is not to step outside of discourse (this is considered impossible) to uncover the 'real truth'. Instead, the primary role of the researcher is to analyse what has been said, written, or enacted, and to explore how particular discursive struggles construct our reality – our understanding of knowledge and our identities - so that it appears apolitical and natural (Rear 2013: 5). Discourse Theory then is not concerned with finding 'truth', but with concepts such as 'knowledge' and 'power' in order to explain how the social world has come to be arranged; how social subjects are constituted in particular discourses, as well as what kinds of acts or articulations are considered legitimate or possible.

A brief definition of some of the terms referred to above will now be provided, as well as some core concepts of Discourse Theory that have yet to be fleshed out.

Discourse Theory draws heavily upon the work of Foucault, a seminal post-structuralist thinker. Indeed, the Foucauldian understanding of discourse as a "rule-bound set of statements which impose limits on what gives meaning and the idea of truth as being discursively created" has been adopted by Laclau and Mouffe (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). For Laclau and Mouffe, a discourse is the attempt to affix meaning within a specific sphere (Rear 2013: 6). Discourse then "constitutes and organises social relations around a particular structure of meanings" which privilege certain meanings with a dominant position whilst excluding others (Doty 1996: 239). This exclusion of alternative meanings – and hence, of alternative

identities and practices – is just as important as what is included within a discourse and is interrelated with the concept of ‘power’ (to be explained below) (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 37-38). Discourses attempt to arrange systems of meaning via the constitution of *nodal points* (Rear 2013: 6). Nodal points are privileged signifiers around which the discourse is organised, quilting together a specific scheme of meanings (Rear 2013: 6). Žižek explains nodal points as the signifier that unites a particular field and “constitutes its identity” (Žižek 1989: 95). To provide an example, in Classical Realist discourse, we may argue that the signifier of ‘the state’ is the nodal point that connects the already existent signifiers of ‘defence’, ‘power’ and ‘conflict’ and imbues them with new meanings that diverge from those they may hold in other discourses that they are also embedded within - for example, ‘conflict’ is understood in Realist discourse very differently to the meaning it assumes within a discourse of domestic violence.

The arrangement of nodal points and signifiers within discourse occurs through ‘articulation’ (Huvila 2011: 2530). Articulation includes any act or practice that attempts to ‘articulate’ a connection between elements (those signs within the discourse whose meaning is as yet unfixed) such that their meaning is adjusted as a result of that act or practice (Rear 2013: 7). Moments are those signs which have had meaning affixed to them by the discourse (Rear 2013: 7). Those signs which are especially subject to the simultaneous ascription of meanings by competing discourses are called ‘floating signifiers’ (Huvila 2011: 2530). Whilst nodal points are those signs that have achieved a degree of “crystallisation” within a particular discourse, floating signifiers are those signs involved in an on-going inter-discursive struggle to cement meaning (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 28). Importantly, unlike many other approaches to discourse analysis, Discourse Theory understands language *and* non-linguistic acts or practices – for example, symbols, buildings, uniforms, rituals and so on - as instances of articulation (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 36).

Power is an important analytical focus of Discourse Theory. Laclau and Mouffe view power as intimately connected with knowledge, agreeing with the Foucauldian notion that power and knowledge presuppose one another (Jørgensen and Phillips

2002: 13-14). Power in Discourse Theory is not understood as exclusively coercive or abusive (Van Dijk 2001: 355). As Foucault explains,

“[power] does not only weigh on us as a force that says no... it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (1980: 119).

Power then is not only oppressive but is also productive; it constitutes knowledge, discourse, and subjects (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). Power is diffuse and is spread across different social practices and is deployed in everyday actions and, just like discourse, it does not belong to any one individual or group (Van Dijk 2001: 355; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). Power is central to our production of knowledge, or what Foucault refers to as ‘regimes of knowledge’, which determine what is considered true (the discursively constructed rules for what can be said and done) (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13).

Though there is always an infinite number of possibilities for what may be said and done, the statements and actions within a particular discourse are repetitive and similar and there remain innumerable statements that are never articulated and would never be accepted as valid or meaningful (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). Power then, provides the conditions of what is considered possible, and it is through power that objects become distinct from each other and are ascribed their own characteristics and relationships to one another (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13). Because the knowledge/power nexus is so closely connected to discourse, which itself produces the subjects and objects that we can know something about, Discourse Theory is concerned with exploring how the social world is constructed and constituted through discourses (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 13).

In terms of the constitution of the subject (the constitution of identity), Laclau and Mouffe understand the subject as ‘de-centred’ (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 17). The de-centred subject refers to the multiple and often conflicting identities that are ascribed to a subject through various contingent, temporary discourses (Rear 2013:

10). The process through which a subject is ascribed an identity is through *interpellation* (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 40-41). 'Interpellation' is the process in which language creates a social role (or, a social position) for an individual or group, therein ascribing them a particular identity and associated set of expected characteristics or behaviours (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 40-41). Interpellation can be easily explained through the process of 'hailing' someone; when a person is hailed they turn to face the actor that has hailed them and in that moment, that they become an ideological subject in that they recognise that the 'hail' was 'really' addressed to them (Rapaport 2011: 248; Althusser 1971: 174). By accepting the role as the addressee of speech, text, or other articulations, "we affiliate ourselves to the subject position that the interpellation has created" for us, and with the associated expectations of what can be said and done in that role (Jørgensen and Phillips 2013: 15).

This brings us to the question of *hegemony*, which is closely connected with the process of interpellation and the sedimentation of discourse. Most theories of ideology suggest that absolute truth is attainable if we are able to free ourselves of its distortions of reality (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 17). Laclau and Mouffe disagree with this, arguing that as all knowledge, subjects and social orders are constituted within discourse, no meaning can exist outside of discourse. Therefore 'ideology' does not exist within Discourse Theory because ideology is essentially equated with sedimented discourses instead (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 18 & 37). Rather, Discourse Theory speaks of *hegemony*, the social consensus that is achieved without using violence or coercion, through articulation (Rear 2013: 7). Hegemony is explained by Barret as the "organisation of consent" (1991: 54). For discourses to transition from the field of discursive struggle into a sedimented discourse, a hegemonic intervention must occur wherein alternative truths of the world are repressed, leading to the naturalisation of one particular truth regime, which attempts to mask its own contingency (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 37).

Finally, I now define two key terms as they are understood within the context of this essay. 'Islamic discourse' is defined as the constellation of meanings anchored around the nodal point of 'Islam'. In this research, Islamic discourse refers to the

government's articulations of meaning and knowledge regarding the nature of, and boundaries delineating, the 'Chechen Muslim' subject as well as the meaning attached to signs that are (or become) embedded within the discursive field of 'Islam'. 'Governance' includes those public activities, policies, and statements enacted by governments that target their citizen subjects in the course of governing them. 'Sites of Governance' conceives of those activities of governance as operating across various domains of social life, which interact with one another to produce a cumulative discursive effect that may be totalising or fragmentary in terms of how that society is constituted as a result.

## 5.0 Research Methodology

### 5.1 Philosophy of Methodology;

This section outlines the methodology and research methods that were used to answer the research questions identified in Section 2.0. The methodology of this research project was determined primarily by two factors. Firstly, in order to construct a framework that integrated theory and methodology, it was necessary to consider the social ontology and epistemology (the belief that meaning and knowledge are socially constituted) of Discourse Theory to develop a research methodology with a consistent philosophical basis upon which to pose and answer questions. To this end, the chosen methodological design was not concerned with establishing causality or with revealing 'the truth' (as is generally the case in traditional, positivist political science theories). Instead the intentions of the research design were twofold. The first intention was to investigate the contingency of the social environment – that is, to identify the competitive discursive process to establish the social order in Chechnya in which some regimes of truth were excluded or repressed whilst others became dominant. The second intention was to analyse how these discourses constitute Chechen society and identity. To summarise then, the methodology of this research was designed to enable the identification of the constitutive elements and power relations of the current social order in Chechnya through the lens of Islamic discourse by examining the linguistic and non-linguistic articulations of meaning.

The second determinative factor upon the methodological design was Laclau and Mouffe's conceptualisation of articulation as any act that attempts to establish meaning. This includes written and spoken language, but it also includes non-linguistic articulations such as architecture and the organisation of physical space, symbols such as flags, gestures, clothing and uniforms, national parades and so forth. This broader understanding of the discursive – arising from Laclau and Mouffe's ontological theory that nothing exists outside of discourse – allows for a wider mapping of Islamic discourses that circulate within Chechen society than a traditional linguistic focus would permit (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 3).

## **5.2 Research Design;**

### **5.2.1 Method One: Establishing the Historical Context**

This research uses a qualitative methodology and employs several methods of research and analysis. The first method involved the mapping of both the traditional as well as the more recently emerged discourses of Chechen Islam and Chechen Islamic identity. This method is designed to provide the historical and contextual basis to facilitate the analysis that will answer Research Question Two and Three. The analysis explored Islamic discourses within Chechnya as they have been constructed since the arrival of Islam in the fifteenth century until 2007, when the current Chechen President, Ramzan Kadyrov, formally assumed power. The application of this method is intended to furnish the reader with an appreciation of the economy of meanings of Islam that Kadyrov's regime not only draws upon, adapts, or silences, but is also challenged by (particularly in the face of an ongoing - though much diminished - Islamist resistance) in his role as the pro-Russian leader of Chechnya.

The identification of earlier hegemonic meanings organised around 'Islam' involved the consultation of historical and contemporary secondary sources that documented or analysed the way in which Islam and Islamic practices came to be integrated into the political and cultural milieu of Chechen society. To study the discursive history of Chechen identity and Islam raises the methodological challenge of the language barrier. The primary source material that has survived into the modern era were written in languages other than English. This prompted the utilisation of secondary, English-language sources written by historians and regional specialists. However, the initial limitation imposed by the language barrier is countered in part by the extensive array of literature on Chechen faith and identity, as well as the history of the Russian-Chechen conflict. The challenge of the language barrier was also partly offset by Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of discourse as extending beyond the linguistic sphere. Therefore non-linguistic articulations were interrogated for their discursive value, such as the Chechen tradition of relying upon Islamic institutions and communities as a way for leaders to manage and organise the Chechen resistance. Consequently it was possible to develop a nuanced understanding of the



historic social and political role of Chechen Islam and Islamic identity without referring to primary sources in the Chechen or Russian language. The specific temporal window of analysis (from the fifteenth century until Kadyrov assumed the Chechen Presidency) reflects the author's underlying assertion that Islamic discourse in Chechnya has undergone a significant shift under Kadyrov. Hence, the window of analysis needed to allow for the demonstration of how, and to what extent, those discourses have evolved in recent years.

### **5.2.2 Method Two: Multi-Site Exploration and Triangulation**

The second method involved a multi-site discourse analysis of the governance practices of the Kadyrov regime. This method is applied in order to answer Research Question One. Here the intention was to scour various sites of governmental practice in order to identify if, where, and how Islamic discourses were present in Chechen governance. The multi-site approach concentrated upon three sites of governance; the linguistic realm, the policy-making realm, and the organisation of public space. The temporal focus of analysis here spanned from 2005, when Kadyrov began to emerge as a key decision maker within Chechen politics following the death the former Chechen President (his father), until the end of January 2015.

The analysis of Islamic discourse within the policy domain involved identifying the introduction or modification of Islamic discourses into public and private institutions, such as government-provided education services or the media, as well as the implementation of laws and regulations that were articulated with an explicit concern for governing the moral character of the Chechen Muslims.

The examination of public space focused on the identification and analysis of physical symbols that are embedded within Islamic discourse, namely the intensive construction of mosques across Chechnya and the establishment or removal of memorials in the Kadyrov era. The data for the domains of both policy and public space were primarily gathered from the reports of English-language media based within the region, as well as a smaller number of Russian-language local media outlets.

The final site of governance to be scrutinised was the linguistic realm. Here, the focus was upon the public, written texts of Ramzan Kadyrov himself. The decision to focus on Kadyrov in particular was made for several reasons. Firstly, after some initial research, it became clear that Kadyrov is the most visible and dominant politician within Chechnya, and is widely regarded as having the ultimate (indeed, sometimes the only) say on the formation of government policy. Secondly, Kadyrov is an avid social media user who uses Instagram as a key means of mass communication, and consistently uses it to publish long, meandering communications several times a day, each day of the week. Kadyrov's Instagram account is a rich source of primary data for two reasons; it has yet to be utilised within academic research and analysis and thus heralds the possibility of gaining new insights into contemporary Chechen political discourse. Furthermore, it appears that Kadyrov himself is responsible for writing and posting images and messages on the social media platform. Given Kadyrov's dominance over Chechen governance, a vast catalogue of daily communications produced by Kadyrov himself that routinely outline his public opinions of religion, world affairs, and Chechen and Russian governance, present an invaluable opportunity to examine the discourses that circulate within Chechen governance. Though Kadyrov's Instagram account was reviewed extensively by the author, the sheer volume of Russian-language posts (at the time of writing Kadyrov has posted more than 5000 times) meant that it was necessary to adopt a precise temporal focus so to identify Kadyrov's repetitious articulations of Islam. The month of January 2015 was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the investigation of the policy and public space domains revealed that much of its discursive 'heavy lifting' occurred within the first few years of Kadyrov's presidency. Therefore, a more recent temporal window into the linguistic realm was adopted to investigate whether religious discourse was still dominant in governance rhetoric, and to identify any evolutions in that discourse. Because the texts were translated from Russian to English (by a fluent Russian speaker), this reduces the ability to execute a close textual analysis that focuses on the precise minutiae of syntax and other linguistic elements (Ahram 2008: 119). For this reason, the focus was instead upon the creation of subject positions (that is, interpellation) and relations of power that Kadyrov created both for himself and his audience through his use of Islamic discourse.

The multi-site method was adopted partly to facilitate a more exacting account of the non-linguistic articulations of Islamic discourse that help to constitute Chechen governance. The multi-site approach was also adopted as an analytical quality control mechanism in order to cross-reference, or triangulate, the findings of the research. This 'triangulation' was adapted from the approach of the Critical Discourse Analyst, Ruth Wodak, who argues in favour of a heterogeneous use of research tools (provided they are integrated into a coherent conceptual framework) across various 'levels' of analysis in order to mitigate the risk of "critical baseness" or of simply politicising phenomena instead of analysing it (2007: 1 & 21). In this particular project, the author was cautious of overemphasising political hyperbole that may have had little effect on how the social order in Chechnya was constituted and which failed to penetrate daily life in Chechnya. Hence there was a methodological interest to explore whether Islamic discourse transcended public speeches (which many Chechens may not see or may simply ignore) to penetrate domains of governance that were less easily evaded or missed, and which had an effect on the reconstitution of knowledge, identity and behaviour within Chechnya. Weiss and Wodak stress the importance of identifying inter-textual and inter-discursive relationships amongst different 'utterances' (or when adapted to Discourse Theory, 'articulations'), as well analysing the influence of the broader historical contexts that discursive practices are inescapably embedded within (2007: 21). Therefore the identification of traditional hegemonic and more nascent religious discourses circulating within Chechnya prior to Kadyrov's formal assumption of power is an important step of the triangulation process. Though this research refers to them as 'sites' (because they are understood as laterally-related as each is a site of Chechen regional governance) rather than as 'levels' in Waltzian sense, Wodak advocates switching between different levels of analysis to identify relevant phenomena, and to analyse any connections between them to minimise the risk of analytical bias (Onuf 1995; Meyer 2001: 29-30).

### **5.2.3 Method Three: Analysis of Findings**

The final method answers Research Questions Two and Three by analysing the findings gathered through the application of the previous two methods. Here, the

discursive differences between traditional Chechen Islam and the Islamic discourse of the Kadyrov regime are considered. In answering Research Question Two, the differences between these competing constructions of Chechen Islam are analysed in terms of the construction of the 'Other' and the interpellation of the Chechen subject, as well as the relations of power that are emergent in the Kadyrov era. The analytical concept that drives the analysis in answering Research Question Three is 'hegemony'. This analysis however is also complimented by insights from the field of political legitimacy, which has been adapted to the post-structuralist bent of this research. It is hoped that insights from this field will help to further elucidate the political dynamics within Chechnya's contemporary social order in which Islamic discourse has come to play a central function.

As a final closing remark, a shortcoming of this research project, brought on by the severe methodological challenges of researching a repressive political context like Chechnya, must be acknowledged. This research is unable to assess how the Chechen people are responding to the government's Islamic discourse. It is exceptionally difficult to gauge the opinions of Chechens who often face violent government retribution for dissent, making it hard for journalists and researchers (who themselves may face government harassment and violence) to gauge the political opinions of ordinary Chechens. Though there have been recent, eye-catchingly large "pro-Islamic" demonstrations organised by the government in Chechnya following the publication of the Charlie Hebdo cover that depicted the Prophet Mohammed – which could suggest that Kadyrov's government does represent the religious sentiments of the populace – anecdotal evidence, collected by rights groups operating in Chechnya, indicate that Chechens are often compelled to participate in these kinds of political activities (DW 2015). There is also a profound lack of contemporary ethnographic research or large-scale, independent polling of Chechen citizens again because of the difficulty in working an often violently repressive context like Kadyrov's Chechnya. The researcher acknowledges this gap and recognises that much of the discursive contingency within Chechnya will be hidden from the view of the analyst.

## 6.0 Chechen Islam: Mapping Hegemonic Discourses and establishing Historical Context

This section identifies the hegemonic discourses of Chechen Islam and Chechen Islamic identity that preceded Kadyrov's ascension to the Presidency. It is important to understand the historical context of Islam in Chechen politics, as well as the role that Islam has played in the constitution of Chechen identity because it is only when one is armed with such insights that they are able to identify the religious discourses that Kadyrov now calls upon, adapts, or suppresses in his role as the pro-Russian, anti-Separatist president of Chechnya. Through an appreciation of the traditional roles of Islam in Chechen society, we can also attempt to anticipate the likely sites of struggle to affix meanings within Islamic discourse in contemporary Chechen society. This survey of the historical Islamic discourses of Chechen society covers several phases of Chechen history; the experience of Russian colonialism and Soviet rule, the demise of the Soviet Union, the period of de facto Chechen independence until the outbreak of second war in 1999, and the post-1999 Chechen resistance. These phases reflect different stages of the Chechen-Russian relationship, which itself has been instrumental in shaping the roles of Islamic practice within Chechen society.

It is found that Chechen Islam has been traditionally embedded within an ethno-nationalist, separatist discourse in which separation from the Russian state was the ultimate goal.

### 6.1 Islam Arrives in Chechnya

Sufi Islam began to take root amongst the *Vaynakhs*, a cultural-linguistic group of the North Caucasus to which Chechens belong, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Souleimanov 2007: 53). 'Sufism' is a term that refers to the esoteric, mystical core of Islam: it is believed to have been taught to the followers of the Prophet Muhammad, by the Prophet himself (Francesconi 2009; 112-113). Within Sufism, Muslims strive to achieve 'spiritual cleansing' through the adoption of a strict asceticism and the pursuit of 'holy truth' (Souleimanov 2007: 54). For several centuries, Chechens could be described as Muslims in a nominal sense; Chechen identity and values, as well as the foundations of the social order, were overwhelmingly determined by the *adat*,

the customary law of the highlands - rather than the values and legal codes of Islam - whilst knowledge of Islamic practice and doctrine remained very limited (Souleimanov 2007: 53). As Islam slowly spread throughout the mountainous Caucasus, it gradually integrated with local Caucasian traditions, absorbing pagan practices and customary law in an organic, syncretic fashion (Souleimanov 2007: 53). The shift from nominal to more substantive Islamic practice in Chechen society occurred in the nineteenth century, under the influence of Sheikh Mansur and his followers, who made Sufi Islamic doctrine the foundation of their liberation struggle against expanding Russian colonialism (Souleimanov 2007: 53).

As the first truly concentrated Russian attempt of colonial expansion into the North Caucasus began in the eighteenth century, relations between the small, agrarian communities of the North Caucasus and the Russian Empire became increasingly violent and acrimonious (Moore and Tumelty 2009: 75; Souleimanov 2007: 43-45). In the 1780s, Sheikh Mansur, a local shepherd from what is now Grozny, led the first organised Highlander uprising against the Russian Empire (Souleimanov 2007: 47). Under the banner of Islam, Sheikh Mansur united Chechens, Dagestanis, Cherkess, Adygeans, Kabardians and Nogays through their common mission to protect Caucasian lands from the scourge of the 'infidels' (the Russian colonialists) (Souleimanov 2007: 47). During the first *gazavat* (holy war) against the Russian Empire, an alliance emerged between the "fiercely independent mountain dwellers of the North Caucasus" and the Sufi adepts, who cultivated a strict, ascetic discipline amongst their followers (Moore and Tumelty 2009: 76). Sheikh Mansur introduced his fighters and the local populace to Sufi Islam through proselytising recruits into his *Murid* order, otherwise referred to as the *tariq naqshbandiya* (Moore and Tumelty 2009: 76; Souleimanov 2007: 54). The *Murids* (students, or disciples) were an "almost monastic military Muslim order" that was based upon the spiritual obligation of the Murid to obey the *Murshid* (spiritual leader) unconditionally and whose most sacred duty, and ultimate purpose, was to martyr oneself in battle against 'the infidels' (Souleimanov 2007: 54; Allen and Muratoff 1953: 48). In effect then, the "ruthless insistence on obedience" of the Murid order merged with Adat culture, which placed an ultimate premium on bravery and honour, to create a "potent force of highlander fighters capable of undertaking a drawn-out guerrilla

campaign” against the Russian Empire (Moore and Tumelty 2009: 76). It was also largely through the social infrastructure of Muridism that the great Imams were able to operate effectively within Chechnya throughout the period of anti-imperial resistance; by relying on their status as great religious leaders, the Imams were able to communicate to the populace and to utilise the hierarchical culture of both Muridism and Adat to cultivate religious, militant devotees (Gordon 2012). As the reports of Russian military personnel noted at the time, Sheikh Mansur had managed to establish a regional, multi-ethnic resistance through the promotion of Islam (Moore and Tumelty 2009: 76). Indeed, during the ‘Thirty Years Struggle’ between 1829-1859, the cumulative effect of the series of Imams who led the resistance was to spread Islam ever more deeply across the North Caucasus and to unite distinct, often warring ethnic groups “under the banner of anti-Russian muridism” (Moore and Tumelty 2009: 77). Islam then came of age in Chechnya during a time when Chechens were faced with the erosion of their autonomy by the threat of advancing Russian colonialism. Sufi Islam came to provide a potent and unifying idiom upon which to organise a sustained, armed resistance against Russian colonial encroachment (Smirnov 2005a).

## **6.2 Imam Shamil and Statehood**

The political role of Sufi Islam though was soon to surpass its function as a rallying point for Chechen resistance, and would enter the realm of Chechen statebuilding through the policies and leadership of Imam Shamil. As part of his struggle against Russian domination, Shamil relied upon Islamic principles, including Shari’a law, in his attempt to build a fortified and united Chechen state. In so doing, Imam Shamil helped to cultivate a Chechen national consciousness for the first time, thereby embedding Islam within a discourse of Chechen nationalism and statehood.

The rule of Imam Shamil is an important and well-known chapter of Chechen history. Imam Shamil proved himself a highly capable commander, diplomat, and politician, eventually becoming the first Imam of Chechnya in 1839 (Souleimanov 2007: 52; Gammer 1994: 292). Following the re-intensification of Russian military efforts to overcome the Highland resistance in 1836, Imam Shamil became convinced that a centralised and well organised resistance was necessary to defeat

the Tsarist army (Souleimanov 2007: 53). Henceforth, Shamil's primary concern became the creation of a centralised state – something that had never been established in the North East Caucasus before – to best coordinate all available resources in the anti-colonial struggle (Souleimanov 2007: 53). When in 1839 Shamil was asked by the Council of Elders of the Chechen teyps to lead their resistance against the Russians, Shamil agreed and extended his Imamate from Dagestan into Chechnya; for the first time in history, Chechens became part of a centralised state (Souleiamnanov 2007: 55). This new state, the Military-Theocratic State of Dagestan and Chechnya, united distinct highland ethnic communities into a confederation of states within a singular military and civil system (Souleimanov 2007: 55). In 1840, Shamil led the Great Chechen Uprising in which Russian forces lost large tracts of long-held territory in a series of defeats (Souleimanov 2007: 55). Throughout the Imamate, Shari'a law was applied; it was then that significant tension began to arise between traditional adat laws of the highlanders and the strict rule of Islamic law under Shamil. Analysts have warned against conflating Islam - even Sufism - with North Caucasus identity and emphasise the importance of adat in shaping Chechen identity and culture (Gordon 2012). Adat was connected to the animist beliefs of the Chechen highlanders, and included other non-Islamic traditions such as clan loyalty and blood feuds (vendettas that are declared when the honour of one a clan is insulted by the actions of a member of another clan) (Gordon 2012; Griffin 2000: 24). Shamil explicitly disapproved of adat law, which he saw as competing with the influence of Shari'a law (Gordon 2012). Murids strictly punished those accused of carrying out blood feuds or adhering to adat customs, as well as punishing those caught smoking or consuming alcohol (Souleimanov 2007: 55-56). Celebrations and holidays that did not relate to Islam were also banned, and polygamy was introduced (a formerly foreign concept) (Souleimanov 2007: 56).

Therefore, the Imamate of Shamil was an important period in which Islamic values became more deeply inculcated in Chechnya's social order (Souleimanov 2007: 56). However, relations between Shamil and his Chechen subjects were plagued by frequent dissent as the Chechens struggled to adapt to the Great Imam's stringent application of Shari'a (a previously foreign system) and his authoritarian style of governance that all too often neglected the wishes of local village councils,



prompting *Auls* (mountain villages) to occasionally take up armed resistance against Shamil (Souleimanov 2007: 61). Yet despite these enduring troubles, Shamil had united the linguistically, ethnically, culturally, and socially disparate groups of the North Caucasus through the introduction of a previously alien idea; a single, centralised state based on Islamic law (Souleimanov 2007: 62). The potent cocktail of Shamil's undisputed military and political acumen, the authority he derived as an Islamic leader, and the Russian Empire's brutal treatment of the Caucasus peoples has seen the legacy of Shamil and his Imamate become deeply embedded in the Chechen collective memory as a 'golden age' of Chechen history (Souleimanov 2007: 62). Under the leadership of Shamil, Sufi Islam became connected to Chechnya's understanding (and first experience) of independent statehood.

### **6.3 The Rise of a New Tariq;**

Eventually the Tsarist Army subjugated the Chechen resistance and the region was subordinated to the control of the Russian Empire. Following the end of Caucasian War, the rise of a new Sufi tariq, the Qadiriyya order, emerged in the 1850s (Souleimanov 2007: 68). Named after the *Zikr* (the Sufi circle dance that incorporates the spoken repetition of prayer and scripture), Zikrism was the Chechen approximation of the Qadiriyya order that was originally founded in Baghdad in the eleventh century (Souleimanov 2007: 68). Unlike the militant Muridism of Naqhsbandiyya Tariq, Sufi Zikrism advocated only spiritual resistance against their Russian oppressors (Vatchgaev 2005). The Qadiriyya Tariq believed that armed resistance was a sin and contrary to Islamic teachings, and therefore espoused a conscious withdrawal from the realm of politics to focus on private prayer and meditation (Gordon 2012). The founder of Chechen Zikrism, Sheikh Kunta-Haji Kishiyev, turned to the principles of the Quran that emphasised forgiveness and he called for the cessation of hostilities in order for highlanders to return to a peaceful life (Souleimanov 2007: 69). Kunta-Haji's teachings emerged during a time when Chechens found themselves on the brink of physical extermination and its message of peace was profoundly appealing to a demoralised and decimated populace (Souleimanov 2007: 69). Though Shamil persecuted Kunta-Haji, eventually forcing him to depart the Caucasus, the teachings of Kunta-Haji became increasingly popular amongst war weary Chechens who had also suffered

the severities of Shamil's Imamate (Souleimanov 2007: 69). By the end of the nineteenth century, Zikrism was the most popular form of Islam practiced amongst Chechens (Gordon 2012).

Kunta-Haji was captured by Russian forces and died in captivity in 1867, though his followers did not acknowledge his death (a tradition that continues even today) (Souleimanov 2007: 69; Vatchgaev 2014; 26). Then began Russian authority's repression of his followers, the kuntahajites (Souleimanov 2007: 69). The harsh treatment of the many Chechens who had begun to follow peaceful Zikrism led to bitter resentment amongst the populace, and eventually culminated in Zikrism's profound transformation from a peace-seeking ideology to a militant one (Souleimanov 2007: 69). An uprising began in 1877 under the Zikrist flag (Souleimanov 2007: 69). Henceforth, the Qadiriyya Tariq assumed the prior role of the Naqshbandiyya Tariq – the former bastion of anti-Russian aggression during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – and established itself as the new stronghold of anti-Russian resistance, standing without compromise for the idea of Chechen national independence throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet periods (Vatchgaev 2005; Souleimanov 2007: 69). Russian colonial policy then had played a constitutive role in the re-militarisation of Chechen Islamic identity and reignited Sufi Islam as a social platform upon which to organise militant resistance.

#### **6.4 Soviet Era Islam;**

Islam in Soviet-ruled Chechnya continued to be associated with a distinct Chechen identity and opposition to the Russian state, though mostly in a secretive and subversive (rather than overtly militant) fashion. During this period, Chechen Sufism took on an increasingly idiosyncratic expression as it was forced to adapt to the restrictive Soviet landscape in which Sufi Islam was repressed, and the traditional Chechen social order was undermined (Vatchgaev 2014: 29). Sufism then became one of the ways in which Chechens attempted to retain their own ethnic identity in the face of severe Soviet repression, which culminated in the deportation of the entire Chechen populace to Central Asia in 1944 – a seminal and traumatic event in Chechen history that is still considered by many Chechens as a defining event in Chechen identity (Merlin 2014: 37-39). It was also during the Soviet era that a new

dynamic emerged in the regulation of Islam, a dynamic that we may still observe today in Ramzan Kadyrov's Chechnya (albeit with a reversal of fortune for Sufi Islam); a binary in which one form of Islam was sanctioned by the authorities, whilst other forms of Islam, chiefly Sufism, were marginalised and outlawed.

Immediately after the revolution of 1917, many Caucasian Muslims welcomed the new Communist authorities (Aitamurto 2015: 100). However, this sentiment soon turned to dissent as the Soviet authorities began to adopt extensive measures of religious oppression (Aitamurto 2015: 100). Though some mosques were permitted to function in the North Caucasus, these would eventuate to be little more than 'showcases' of Islamic culture that were disconnected from the religious practice of the majority of Caucasian Muslims, whose own Islamic traditions were increasingly restricted and forced underground (Aitamurto 2015: 100).

Beginning in 1924, the Soviet authorities initiated a crack down on the practices of unofficial Islam, which they saw as a hindrance to the indoctrination of Soviet values in their new Soviet subjects (Jaimoukha 2005: 56). The Sharia't courts (local courts based on Islamic law) were closed and replaced with those that functioned according to Soviet legal and criminal codes (Babich 2008: 21). The Soviet authorities restricted the practice of Sufi rituals and destroyed the educational spheres of Islamic life; nearly all mosques and Islamic schools were closed and the *Mullahs* (Islamic leaders) were persecuted (Babich 2008: 21). The performance of Sufi rituals, particularly those that involved any display of support or fealty to the unsanctioned religious leaders – including the Sufi practice of visiting the burial sites of former Sheikhs - were interpreted as 'anti-Soviet activities' that carried the risk of prison sentences or exile (Vatchgaev 2014: 29). Unsurprisingly the lack of access to Sufi dogma and practice led to their adaptation, or replacement, with so-called 'popular forms' of Islam emerging as self-educated Imams stepped in to fill the void (Babich 2008: 24; Aitamurto 2015: 100). The Sufi brotherhoods, which had emerged under Zikrism in the 1880s, agreed to a watering down of some the obligatory Muslim rituals in order to allow Sufis to practice in secret (Vatchgaev 2014: 29). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Muslims of the Northwest Caucasus had observed the main Islamic commandments (prayers and Ramadan) (Babich 2008: 20). In the Soviet era however, instead of quintuple daily prayers, the

*namaz* would be performed secretly and at night only, and the *uraza* (fast) would only be observed for three days, and the *ziyarahs* (the visiting of Sheikh burial sites) could be done in secret and was considered comparable to making the *Hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca) (Vatchgaev 2014: 29). Sufis were aware (at least initially) that these adaptations were not Islamic but believed that such adjustments were necessary in order to keep the youth connected to Islamic tradition and to counter the inculcation of Soviet atheism (Vatchagaev 2014: 29).

The Islam that the Soviets tolerated was Canonical Sunni Islam that was practiced predominantly by the official clergy who belonged to the North Caucasus Religious Board, a Soviet institution (RFERL 2010; Aitamurto 2015: 100; Atchagaev 2014: 29). During this time, many of these Islamic leaders gained their positions not necessarily through theological virtue or an inherited entitlement to religious authority, but via their cooperation with the repressive Soviet authorities (Aitamurto 2015: 101). The Soviet-sanctioned Islamic communities were subject to government influence and the political intrigues (many of the Spiritual Boards of the Republics remain so in the post-Soviet era) (Braginskaia 2012: 599). Sufism meanwhile, belonged to the realm of ‘unofficial Islam’, and its adherents were forced to practice in secret at the risk of harsh repercussions (Aitamurto 2015: 102; RFERL 2010).

The effect of the intensive effort of the Soviets to remove unsanctioned Islam from the North Caucasus was not to eradicate Sufism but to force its adaptation to the repressive political environment. The Sufi brotherhoods (or, *virids*) were the only institutions of Chechen society that were able to preserve Islamic values, and owing to their determination to develop a form of Sufism that could survive Soviet rule, militant atheism did not make major inroads into Chechen identity (Vatchagaev 2014: 28). Adherence to Sufi praxis – prayer, fasting, and fealty to Sheikhs (deceased and living) – which formed “an integral part of their anxiously guarded ethnic identity” persisted throughout even the most repressive years of Soviet rule (Souleimanov 2007: 132). The adaptation of Islamic practice by the Sufi *virids*, which in 1968 had over thirty Murid groups in the Achkhoy-Martan district alone, also allowed for the clandestine discussion of political events “from a patently anti-Soviet

position”, embedding an anti-Soviet (or, more specifically, anti-Russian Soviet government) subtext within Chechen Sufism (Souleimanov 2007: 132). Sufism during the Soviet era continued to help constitute a Chechen identity that was seen as distinct from its Soviet Russian overlords, and provided a basis upon which Chechens could resist the Soviet attempt to recast Chechens as atheist citizens of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

### **6.5 Post-Soviet Islam;**

The demise of the Soviet Union and its religious repression led to a vibrant revitalisation of Islamic culture in Chechnya that was closely linked to the revival of Chechen ethno-nationalism. (Aitamurto 2015: 100). As Soviet influence diminished in the 1980s, a euphoria took hold in Chechnya that began to translate into a growing ethno-Islamic Chechen nationalism, which partly constituted by a bitter recounting of Russian misdeeds against the Chechen people, serving only to exacerbate tensions with Moscow (Souleimanov 2007: 81).

Both principal expressions of the Chechen renaissance - the assertion of a distinct ethnicity and a distinct Islamic identity - reinforced one another (Aitamurto 2015 100). As Souleimanov explains, the Islamic revival that accompanied the expiration of the Soviet Union was reinforced by a constant fear of Russian aggression, prompting a groundswell of Chechen nationalism, which itself understood Sufi Islam as a central element of Chechen ethnic identity (2007: 133). Hence analysts described Chechen Islam as both a religious and cultural identity (King and Menon 2010: 22). As the Soviet grip loosened, up to 280 Murid groups emerged in the Chechen-Ingush Republic during the late 1980s, and began constructing or repairing hundreds of mosques and Sufi monuments (Souleimanov 2007: 132). The Chechen clergy withdrew from the Soviet era North Caucasian Religious Board and established their own *muftiat* (Vatchgaev 2014: 29). A number of new political parties emerged, each of which were sure to use ‘Islamic’ in their names, and were led by Murshids (though many had dubious reputations, criminal pasts and a minimal knowledge of Islam) (Souleimanov 2007: 133). It was also during this time that the first proponents of Salafi Islam began to appear in Chechen society.

Salafi Islam calls upon Muslims to emulate the *Salaf* (the original Muslims, or 'predecessors') and to live by the original (and unchangeable) principles of Islam (Meddeb 2003: 226; Husband 1999; 79-80). In the Chechen context, the Salafis aspired to remove those animist elements that had become a part of Sufism through its slow diffusion across the Caucasus (Souleimanov 2007: 136). Salafis vehemently reject the Chechen Sufi practices of the *zikr*, the veneration of saints, and the pilgrimage to the tombs of deceased Sheikhs (*Ziyarats*); these are pointed out as un-Islamic as no reference is made to such practices in the Quran or the *Hadith* (the book of sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) (Dobroslawa 2009: 66). Notwithstanding the efforts of some local Chechens to encourage their peers to reject Sufism and adopt Salafism, the Salafis efforts amounted to nought as such reforms were seen as alien and hostile to the Chechen tradition, as after all, Sufism meant Islam to Chechens and the attempt to reform it was itself considered anti-Islamic (Vatchgaev 2005).

Under the presidency of Dzhokhar Dudayev, Chechnya declared itself independent in 1991 (Sokirianskaia 2008: 114). During the first two years of his presidency, Dudayev dismissed any prospect of Chechnya becoming an Islamic state (Wilhelmsen 2005: 36). However, aware of his own questionable Islamic credentials and facing a mounting Chechen opposition to his presidency, and in considering that his support base rested largely within the Qadiriyya tariq, Dudayev began to pepper his speeches with Islamic slogans and soon found them to be an effective tool for mobilising Chechens (Moore and Tumelty 2009: 83; Vatchgaev 2005: 36). It was not until Chechnya was faced with the increasingly likely threat of a Russian invasion in 1994 that Dudayev began to refer to Islam as the underlying basis for his actions (Wilhelmsen 2005: 36). Using nineteenth century Islamic terminology, Dudayev encouraged Chechens to launch a *gazavat* against the invading Russian troops (Wilhelmsen 2005: 36). Thereafter, Islamic phrases became a constant feature of the Chechen separatist struggle against the Russian state (Wilhelmsen 2005: 36).

However, following the brutal first Chechen war in which President Boris Yeltsin attempted (and failed) to 'restore constitutional order' by bringing the self-declared independent Chechen Republic back into the fold of Russian federalism, a shift in the balance of power between the nationalist and the Islamist elements of the resistance

occurred. Prior to the first war, the small community of Chechen and Dagestani Salafis had been dismissed as eccentrics who arrogantly promoted a foreign ideology (Moore and Tumelty 2009: 86). Yet in the absolute chaos, criminality and desperation of the interwar years - a period in which Chechens had finally achieved their (de facto) independence from Russia – several important Salafi warlords and politicians ascended the political hierarchy and were able to agitate successfully for the implementation of Islamic principles into Chechen law, including the implementation of Sharia courts (Moore and Tumelty 2009: 84). President Aslan Maskhadov, the formerly secular politician, found himself in an increasingly weak position, caught between Chechnya's isolation from the Kremlin and a growing Salafi influence, appointed Salafi politicians to key government posts (Moore and Tumelty 2009: 84). For young Chechens, the increasingly appeal of the Salafis was based in the simplicity of their doctrine, which negated many of the challenges of adhering to both Sufi principles and adat customs (Tumelty and Moore 2009: 84). A growing number of young Chechens, alienated by the failures of the secular Chechen state, became critical of the often self-interested and dictatorial actions of the Sheikhs of the various Sufi brotherhoods (Souleimanov 2015: 95). Disobedience to ones elders however was not tolerated within Chechen society and to challenge the sheikh was essentially condemn oneself to expulsion from their familial and social network, a network that provided physical protection, shelter and food – assets that were all difficult to come by in the interwar years (Souleimanov 2015: 95-98). Thus, Salafism became increasingly attractive to many disillusioned Chechen youth who sought religious fulfilment in the egalitarian, well-disciplined Salafi ranks (Souleimanov 2015: 95-98).

Once the second Chechen war began in 1999, the Salafi arm of the Chechen resistance proved well organised and resourced to fight Russian forces (Wilhemsen 2005: 43-45). By framing the conflict in religious terms, the Islamist Chechen resistance was able to diffuse the conflict over a wider area of the North Caucasus and to attract the support and resources of its Muslims citizens (as well as from Middle Eastern ideologues) who were more willing to respond to a religious call to arms than they were to defend Chechen sovereignty (Sagramoso 2012 562-563).

Therefore, the Islamist Chechen resistance became the most effective vehicle through which to resist Russian aggression (Sagramoso 2012 562-563).

### **6.6 Summary of Findings;**

This section has found that Sufi Islam has been a source of unity and solidarity for the Chechen people, providing common ground upon which to resist Russian control and to organise Chechen statehood. The historical analysis has also found that Chechen Sufism was historically embedded within an ethno-nationalist, separatist discourse in which separation from the Russian state was the ultimate goal. Within this discourse, the Other of Chechen identity was the Russian state.

This raises the question then; how does a government installed by the historical foe of the Chechen people attempt to govern Chechnya? The strategy adopted by Kadyrov is explored in the next section.



## 7.0 Identifying Islamic Discourses Within Chechen Governance

This section endeavours to answer to Research Question Two;

*'What, if any, Islamic discourses are identifiable in the governance activities and public rhetoric of the Kadyrov regime?'*

To answer this question it was necessary to examine the governance activities and statements of the Chechen regime to identify if, where, and how Islamic discourses were present. It was found that an Islamic discourse was indeed highly visible across a broad range of governance activities and communication. The sites (or, domains) of governance that were examined include the policy-making domain, the domain of public space, and the domain of public communication (henceforth referred to as the 'linguistic domain' for brevity's sake). The policy-making domain was investigated to assess the articulation of meanings of 'Islam' and Islamic identity across those governance activities that targeted the legal and institutional context of Chechnya (both private and public institutions were included). In other words, this domain spans the policy-making and legislative agenda of the regime. The domain of public space refers to the (re-)organisation of public space within the republic by the Chechen government. This category analysed tangible features of the physical environment that were constructed with government money, including buildings, statues, and memorials. The linguistic domain was necessarily much more specific in scope due to the issues of translation and the sheer volume of data (as discussed above in Section XXXX); here the analysis was concentrated upon the written text of Instagram posts that Ramzani Kadyrov made throughout January 2015.

Before the findings of the multi-site interrogation are laid bare, it is necessary to briefly revisit several key terms that were defined in Section 4.0, which will be operationalised here. 'Islamic discourse' is defined as the constellation of meanings anchored around the nodal point of 'Islam'. It refers to the government's articulations of meaning and knowledge regarding the nature of, and boundaries delineating, the 'Chechen Muslim' subject as well as the meaning attached to signs that are (or become) embedded within 'Islam's discursive field. 'Governance' includes those public activities, policies, and statements enacted by governments

that target their citizen subjects in the course of governing them. 'Sites of Governance' conceives of those activities of governance as operating across various domains of social life, which interact with one another to produce a cumulative discursive effect that may be totalising or fragmentary in terms of how that society is constituted as a result. The analysis here focused not only on what was (re)articulated in Islamic discourse, but also those meanings that were silenced or excluded. It was found that articulations of 'Islam' and the articulation of those signs embedded within its discursive field were chiefly concerned with defining 'Chechen Islam' by, firstly, outlining the expected practices, beliefs, and the appearance of those who wish to identify as a Chechen Muslim, and secondly, through an 'Othering' of those individuals and groups who did not embody these standards as false, dangerous and misleading. It was found that the government's construction of the 'Chechen Muslim' subject was defined in opposition to two groups. Firstly against those who practiced a form of Islam other than Sufism (especially when such groups were located within the North Caucasus), and secondly, against the governments of secular western countries. Both groups were identified as 'evil', 'dangerous', and 'threatening'. In the policy-making domain, this oppositional 'Other' was the 'Islamic radical', who is referred to interchangeably as a 'Wahabbi', 'Salafi' or 'bandit'. It was within the linguistic domain that 'the West' emerged as a monolithic threat to Chechen Muslims.

## **7.1 The policy-making domain**

### **7.1.1 Establishing the policy context**

The policy-making domain focused upon the legislative and policy-driven activities of the government as they targeted or penetrated state institutions, as well as civil domains including the media, cultural consumption, and Islamic worship. The articulation of Islam and the articulation of elements embedded within its discourse usually pursued two interrelated objectives; constructing the Chechen Muslim subject and the marginalisation of non-Sufi Islam.

The description of the Islamist opposition as contrary to Chechen Islam and identity has become a recurring motif of the pro-Russian Chechen leadership (Campana

2006: 141). In February 2005, Alu Alkhanov, the then Chechen President, chaired a republic-level assembly (Fuller 2007). The meeting was held to develop strategies to combat the spread of 'Wahhabism' – the term used by the government to refer to the insurgents of the Caucasus as well as their supporters (Fuller 2007; Smirnov 2005a). The pro-Russian government understood Wahhabist ideology as the primary reason that many Chechen males continued to join the resistance after the new government had assumed power. Following the meeting, Alkhanov ordered a comprehensive approach to counter 'Wahhabi propaganda' and the spread of extremism by promoting 'traditional Islam and patriotism' (Fuller 2007). To this end, the introduction of 'traditional Islam' into the school curriculum was then announced (Fuller 2007).

Several months later on August 4th 2005, Ramzam Kadyrov affirmed his support for this approach in his role as head of the pro-Russian forces in Chechnya and deputy-Prime Minister (Smirnov 2005b). Kadyrov gathered the Commander of the Chechen police special-task unit, and all Chechen Imams and Muftis at the mosque of his home village, Tsentoroi, to chair a meeting during which the spiritual leaders of Chechnya declared a 'jihad' against Wahhabism (Smirnov 2005b). After the meeting, the Mufti of Chechnya, Sultan Mirzaev, stated that 'Wahhabism' was an 'evil' that had to be eliminated and declared its proponents 'international terrorists' (Smirnov 2005b). The violent nature in which the jihad would be waged was left in no uncertain terms when Kadyrov denounced the Wahhabis as "enemies of Islam" and 'the whole of man kind' and stated that "I cannot see any way to oppose them other than physically annihilate them" (Kadyrov quoted in Smirnov 2005a).

The enduring nature of the policy to eradicate Wahhabism by promoting 'traditional Islam' was evidenced via January 2014 meeting, attended by President Ramzam Kadyrov, the Imams of each Chechen town and the Muslim spiritual board (Vatchgaev 2014b). Kadyrov insisted to the clergy "Not only will Wahhabism, Habahsim, and other teachings that contradict the Quran, Sunna and tariqa never exist in Chechnya, but also their very trace will be eradicated" (Vatchgaev 2014b). A renewed public relations campaign against these variants of Islam began in mid-January of 2014, led by Kadyrov himself (Vatchgaev 2014b). Kadyrov passionately addressed the issue at every public appearance he made in the following weeks,

demanding that the entire population actively fight these unwanted Islamic teachings (Vatchgaev 2014).

The above evidence identifies a consistent policy of the Chechen government to regulate Islam and to establish a discourse in which traditional Sufism was articulated as 'traditional' and 'compatible' whilst other Islamic traditions were treated as foreign and incompatible, and were therefore outlawed. It is from this regulation of Islam that many of the post-war laws, interventions and initiatives have emerged and are calibrated towards. 'Islam', as the government defines it (that is, 'traditional Sufism') is being expanded into new - and often traditionally secular - areas of governance and civil society to this end. It is this application and expansion of Islamic discourse in the years between Alkhanov's original initiative until today that will now be identified and analysed.

#### **7.1.2 Gambling and Alcohol;**

Beginning in 2005, Kadyrov began to implement a series of decrees that imposed prohibitions commonly found in Islamic societies around the world (Fuller and Doukaev 2007). These decrees, which introduced restrictions that had not been seen since Shamil's Imamate, targeted the entire Chechen population en masse. In early 2005, Kadyrov banned the sale of alcohol (Smirnov 2005a). By January 20<sup>th</sup> 2005, it was no longer possible to acquire alcohol in stores (Smirnov 2005a). However, it seems that the sale of alcohol within Chechnya is habitually banned and then re-permitted as numerous regional media reports over the course of Kadyrov's presidency indicate (RFERL 2009; Reuters 2011). When discussing his advocacy for the ban of alcohol across Russia in 2011, Kadyrov drew a comparison between the excessive consumption of alcohol and terrorism, pointing out the lethality of both (Sputnik News 2011). The initial restriction of alcohol sales in 2005 was accompanied by another Presidential decree that forbade gambling within the Republic (Smirnov 2005b: 4). After meeting with religious leaders and elders, the government decided that slot machines were against "our traditions" and were henceforth banned, a spokesman for Kadyrov explained (Reuters 2005). Kadyrov stated that all gambling halls had to be closed within a week (Reuters 2005). Local online media outlets quoted Kadyrov as saying "Gambling contradicts Islamic

traditions and negatively affects the education of the growing generation... I will give these bloodsucking businessmen one week. If they don't comply, I will smash their installations myself" (Reuters 2005). These decrees are amongst the first articulations of the Chechen government to establish certain behaviours as beyond the parameters of the Chechen Muslim identity. Not only were these behaviours outlawed but those who facilitated such activity were vilified, and were identified not as Muslims, but as 'bloodsucking businessmen', constituting them as external to the Chechen Muslim identity.

### **7.1.3 Physical Appearance;**

Several governmental decrees designed to regulate the physical appearance of Chechens have also been implemented during Kadyrov's presidency. These decrees, though established with the explicit intention of constructing the physical appearance of the 'Chechen Muslim' appear to apply to all Chechens regardless of their religious denomination. In 2014, the Chechen regime concluded that men with a beard longer than an acceptable length would be more likely to be suspected of practicing Wahhabism (the North Caucasus Islamist resistance, due to its own Islamic doctrine, forbids the removal of facial hair) and may be detained by security personnel (Vatchgaev 2014b). In January 2014, Kadyrov stated publicly "We do not forbid Muslims from wearing beards, as it is prescribed in the Sunnah. This is a personal choice. We are against those who grow beards trying to imitate the Wahhabists" (Vestnik Kavkaza 2015). Several regional media outlets reported that local residents believed the detainment of young bearded men had become systematic following an incident in Kadyrov's hometown, Tsentaroy, in which the logo of the Islamic State (the self-declared Islamist state of Iraq and Syria) was painted onto the wall of a building (Vestnikkavkaza 2015). The head of a local non-government organisation (NGO) spoke anonymously with a local media to allege that raids against bearded men had occurred previously in Chechnya but that the practice was usually most acute after Kadyrov had met with the heads of security forces, clergy or police, to demand they intensify efforts to combat extremism, terrorism, and Wahhabism (Caucasian Knot 2015). The spokesman added that it was the bearded appearance alone that caused the detention of young men (Caucasian Knot 2015).

Soon after assuming the Presidency, Kadyrov issued another decree that required all women who were either employed in the state sector, who were visiting a government office, or who were attending school or university to cover their heads in line with Islamic teachings on female modesty; those who ignored this requirement would not be permitted entry to their particular institution (Fuller and Doukaev 2007; Berry 2009). Speaking about the dress code, Kadyrov stated that “Chechen women looked like real Muslims obeying the nation’s moral rules” once they had covered their hair (Nemstova 2012). In June 2010, groups of masked men in camouflage, often worn by the Republic’s security forces, began to patrol the streets of Grozny, armed with paintballs, which they would fire at women who were not wearing a headscarf as Kadyrov’s 2007 edict had commanded (RFERL 2010). Speaking about these patrols during a speech on a local state television, Kadyrov said, “I don’t know [who they are] but when I find them I shall announce my gratitude... Even if they were carried out with my permission, I wouldn’t be ashamed of it” (Ferris-Rotman 2010). He called those women targeted “naked women” who had most likely been forewarned and labelled journalists and rights activists critical of the paintball attacks “enemies of the people”, a term used to describe ‘traitors’ in the Soviet period (Ferris-Rotman 2010).

This decree was striking as traditionally the headscarf had been treated as a symbol of marital, rather than religious, status in Chechnya (Dobroslawa 2009: 67). Through this policy initiative, a previously secular symbol of Chechen culture had been rearticulated within the government’s Islamic discourse, assuming a new symbolism as the physical representation of a ‘traditional Chechen female Muslim’. The government’s regulation of male facial hair and a woman’s head defined further what could be considered as ‘moral’ or ‘Islamic’ behaviour. The intention to regulate the morality of Chechen men and women from a ‘traditional Islamic’ perspective was made clear in a speech by Kadyrov on Chechen television in which he declared that Chechen State university students had been implicated in multiple instances of ‘questionable behaviour’ (Vatchagev 2014b). The authorities would therefore immediately install members of the Muslim clergy as ‘morality police’ at the entrance to the university to measure the length of male students beards and to ensure that women were covering their heads and dressing appropriately

(Vatchgaev 2014b). Males with long beards and women with an uncovered head were denied entry to the University (Vatchgaev 2014b). In an interesting development however, women in black hijabs were also denied entry to their university (Vatchgaev 2014b).

As the government had vigorously encouraged Chechen women to wear the hijab at university only several years before (there were reports that Kadyrov had offered large sums of money to every woman who agreed to wear the hijab at a particular university when the initiative was first introduced), this development marked an abrupt adjustment to the policy (Vatchgaev 2014b). Though typically most women in Chechnya now wear headscarves that only partially cover their hair, a trend has emerged amongst the younger generations to transition to hijabs that fully obscure their hair as well as parts of their face (Vatchgaev 2014b). In the same way that long beards are now seen as expressing an affinity for Wahhabism, black hijabs have begun to occupy the same significance for the government. In particular, those black hijabs that obscure the chin or other parts of the face are now seen as 'anti-government' and the women who wear them are now denied entry to state and educational institutions (Vatchgaev 2014b). Though the reasoning for the government's sudden change of heart has never been made clear, it could be that the black hijab was also the headwear of choice for the 'Black Widows', the notorious female suicide bombers of the Islamist resistance who partook in the 2003 Dubrovka theatre siege in Moscow that left hundreds of Russians dead. It may be then that the black hijab is too closely associated with the 'Wahhabi' insurgency for the government's own cultivation of the traditional Chechen woman. In this way, the hijab – perhaps even the entire practice of covering a woman's head - can be seen as a 'floating signifier' - those elements of the discourse that are subject to simultaneous and contradictory ascriptions of meaning from other discourses (Huvila 2011: 2530). As a site of inter-discursive struggle, subjects compete to ensure that the contested element is exclusively embedded within their particular discourse. In the Chechen context, the hijab and the covering of a woman's head occupy that mutually contested space wherein the Islamist insurgency and the Chechen government struggle to claim the meaning signified by a woman covering her hair or her face. The hijab, initially a sign of a woman's traditional and Islamic

moral character in the government's Islamic discourse, is complicated by its potential association with the Islamist resistance, a group which is routinely constituted in government discourse as the binary Other of the 'traditional Chechen Muslim'. Thus the symbolic ambiguity of the hijab threatened the coherency of the government's own Islamic discourse and prompted an adjustment of how the Islamic Chechen woman ought to present herself. The fragmentation of meaning ascribed to the hijab by the government also highlights the contingent nature of that discourse; sudden adjustments to one element disrupt the relational fixation of meaning to other signs, reminding the observer of possible alternative meanings, and therein potentially undermining the authority of the government's articulation of Islamic morality.

The government's regulation of its subject's physical appearance constitutes the body as a site of Islamic meaning in way that was previously foreign to Chechen Muslims. Now the length or visibility of certain hair follicles are articulated as elements that demarcate the line between the 'true' and 'moral Muslim' from the 'radical' 'false' Muslim of the insurgency, though as just discussed, this discourse is not without ambiguity.

#### **7.1.4 Media and Cultural Consumption;**

The Kadyrov regime has also regulated on the basis of Islamic values the kind of religious, cultural and news content that may be consumed within Chechnya. Indeed, the possession or consumption of media or materials that the government deems 'extremist' has become grounds for arrest and interrogation (Vatchgaev 2014b). Security forces may stop those they suspect of holding extremist views on the street to check their phone or other media devices for such material (Vatchgaev 2014b). As Deputy Prime Minister, in February 2005 Kadyrov publicly criticised the Republic's media for broadcasting 'immoral programs' and instituted a censorship programme within Chechnya, declaring that "All newspaper articles and television footage are to be screened before publication or broadcasting to ensure that they do not violate the ethical norms of the Chechen national mentality" (Kadyrov quoted in Smirnov 2005a). Additionally, all theatre performances as well as the songs performed in public were now to conform to the principles of the "Chechen mentality and



education” (Kadyrov in Fuller and Doukaev 2007). In January 2008, Kadyrov moved beyond restricting the forms of news and culture that could be consumed legally within Chechnya and began to instruct both state and private media on what content ought to be produced; Kadyrov ordered television channels to reduce broadcasts of Western music and entertainment and to increase the amount of programming dedicated to religious and patriotic themes, warning that channels which failed to conform would be shut down (RFERL 2010). In November 2009, the government announced that a new radio station, dedicated to airing content on Islam-related topics, would begin broadcasting (RFERL 2010). Soon after, in May 2010, a new government website was launched, run by a government-selected Islamic theologian in order to promote Sufism– a move widely interpreted by analysts as an attempt to counter the online profile of the regional Islamist resistance (RFERL 2010).

The Chechen government presents Western and ‘radical’ content as incongruous to, and corrosive of, Chechen-Islamic values. Based on such an understanding, the consumption of Western or non-Sufi Islamic content is equated with being un-Chechen or un-Islamic, thereby setting a behavioural expectation of those who wish to identify as a Chechen Muslim. The restriction of the cultural and news content on the basis of Chechen morality and Islamic principles serves two simultaneous functions. Firstly, activities of social life – the consumption of news, music and entertainment – that were previously located within other secular discourses are now appropriated into the government’s Islamic discourse, and are imbued with a new religious and moral significance. Through this reformation of culture and news consumption, Chechen and Islamic morality are being articulated as mutually constitutive of one another; certain types of media are banned because they are immoral and ‘un-Chechen’ whilst other cultural and news content is encouraged because they are constructed as appropriate for, and emerging from, traditional Islamic values. The restructuring of media and cultural consumption in this way models to its Chechen audience the values that they ought to possess and what subject matters they ought to engage with.

### **7.1.5 Education;**

The education sector has also become a site of articulation for the government's anti-radical, pro-traditional Islam policy. In early 2005, the government announced the introduction of 'Traditional Islam' into the Republic's school curriculum (Fuller and Doukaev 2007). Kadyrov announced a new, mandatory curriculum that teaches students about the Quran and Shari'a law (Smirnov 2005a). The curriculum requires students to study the foundations of Islam over thirty lessons; during these lessons, Wahhabism and the differences between the Sunni and Shi'a Islam are not discussed (RFERL 2010).

The government's 'traditional' Islamic discourse is therefore also present within state education. The inclusion of religion in a government curriculum is hardly peculiar to Chechnya (religious education existed in the North Caucasus in the pre-Soviet era so its inclusion today is not entirely alien to Chechen tradition either). Yet the silence on the major theological divisions within the religion in question - particularly when those differences constitute significant divisions in the immediate local political context - is notable. The school as an institution, is an important site "of production and the reconstruction of the officially authorised version of a... [polity's] history and 'political memory'" (Golubeva 2010: 315). Islam as it is constituted within the government's discourse, is a homogenous, uncontested phenomenon, obscuring the presence of those who challenge the government's discourse (namely the resistance). The distribution of the government's discourse through the teacher-student pedagogy imparts a degree of authority to the content, an authority that may not be directly associated with the government by the students themselves. Such a diffusion of the government's Islam through formal education assists the discourse itself to become naturalised (or, hegemonic).

### **7.1.6 The Clergy;**

The Islamic clergy in Chechnya has emerged as a frontline in the Chechen regime's attempt to eradicate all Islamic teachings beyond the government's 'traditional Sufism' and to assert the government's own understanding of legitimate Islamic practice. Throughout his leadership, Kadyrov has closely monitored and regulated Clergy personnel and their sermons in an attempt to construct a state-approved

Islam that attracts young people and deters them from joining the Islamist resistance who oppose his authority. Kadyrov holds regular meetings with the Muslim Spiritual board, as well as local Imams, during which he either urges the intensification of efforts to combat rogue understandings of Islam, or aggressively confronts the clergy regarding their failure to completely purge non-Sufi Islam from Chechnya (RFERL 2010).

In 2008, the Muslim Spiritual Board (MSB) announced that all Imams were to submit in advance their Friday prayer sermons each week to weed out any personal or subversive views that 'distorted' Islam - distortions, the MSB described as potentially disastrous for Chechen spirituality (RFERL 2010).

At a tense meeting in 2009, Kadyrov demanded to know why young Chechen men "won't listen to you [the clergy] but they will to that Said Buryatsky [a young convert who joined the resistance in 2008 and served as its ideologue until he died in 2010]?" (Kadyrov quoted in RFERL 2010). At another meeting in January 2010, Kadyrov insisted "sermons by Imams of mosques must reach the heart of every inhabitant of the republic, including those who are far from the religion" before decreeing the implementation of a uniform daily prayer schedule (Kadyrov quoted in RFERL 2010). Kadyrov also demanded an ideological vetting of each Imam in Chechnya; the commission evaluated 325 individuals (RFERL 2010). Several months later, in April, Kadyrov declared to the MSB that some Imams only conducted weddings and funerals but "made no effort to combat Wahhabism and extremism" (Kadyrov quoted in RFERL 2010). Those accused Imams were then dismissed (RFERL 2010). An anonymous clergy member told local media that the dismissals were done to rid the clergy of those Imams who refused to condemn as a 'wahhabi' any individual who expressed any dissent or disagreement with Kadyrov's policies (RFERL 2010). The Chechen government has also insisted that the Clergy work closely with the Interior Ministry and other law enforcement agencies "day and night so that even a trace of Wahhabis is effaced" (Kadyrov quoted in Vatchgaev 2014b).

In a similar fashion to the official Clergy's close association with the authorities during the Soviet era, the clergy has again become closely integrated within the

government's policy to regulate Islamic practice in Chechnya. Whether this synergy is unconscious on the part of the regime or not, it potentially complicates and politicises the relationship of Chechens with the clergy in their local mosque, who are now the regime's frontline of defence in their anti-Wahhabi campaign.

#### **7.1.7 Policy-Level Summary;**

Across the policy-level domain, it is possible to observe a range of policy initiatives and decrees that attempt to discursively construct the Chechen Muslim subject; the appearance, cultural interests, religious education and worship, as well as the recreational activities of the Chechen Muslim are all forcefully delineated. Little space is left for deviation from these norms, with any divergence constructed as contrary, and maliciously so, to Chechen religious faith and cultural tradition.

Several initiatives may claim an historical precedent – such as religious education or the banning of alcohol – whilst others mark a novel expansion wherein symbols or activities that previously carried no religious significance are suddenly rearticulated as constitutive elements of the Chechen Muslim and of traditional Sufi Islam.

#### **7.2 The Domain of Public Space**

The second site of governance focused upon the organisation of public space. The extensive construction or refurbishment of mosques under Kadyrov asserts the centrality and ubiquity of Islam to Chechen identity. Meanwhile, the removal of memorials to the victims of the Soviet Deportation and the two recent wars with Russia, alongside the construction of memorials to the Chechen soldiers of the Great Patriotic War, represses two central and interrelated aspects of (pre-Kadyrov) Chechen Sufism. Firstly, the constitution of space in this manner silences the centrality of Islam in constituting and maintaining a Chechen identity that was distinct from its Russian oppressors. This constitution of space also silences the history of Sufism, and its institutions or structures (tariqs and brotherhoods), as a vital constitutive element of Chechen ethno-nationalist separatism.

### 7.2.1 Chechen Mosques;

Chechnya has seen significant growth in the number of its mosques under Kadyrov's presidential tenure. Throughout the Soviet Union, few functioning mosques existed in Chechnya (Vatchgaev 2014a). Though there was a flurry of mosque reparation and construction as Soviet power ebbed in the late 1980s, much of this effort was erased soon after by the destruction of the two wars. In 2003, there were 300 mosques in Chechnya (Fuller and Doukaev 2007). Following the end of the heavy fighting during the second war, the Chechen government embarked on an extensive campaign of mosque restoration and construction as part of the broader reconstruction effort (Fuller and Doukaev 2007). By 2007, in Grozny alone (a city twice razed to the ground in the post-Soviet era), there were twenty-seven Mosques (Fuller and Doukaev 2007). Today in Chechnya, there are over 700 – more than double the figure at the start of the reconstruction programme (Ibragimov 2014). Indeed, Kadyrov claims that every city, town, and village now has its own mosque (Fuller and Doukaev 2007). In 2008, the government formally opened a mosque that was described as the largest in Europe (RFERL 2010). President Kadyrov named the mosque after his father, Akhmad Kadyrov (Kadyrov has named numerous mosques after his family members) (RFERL 2010). The mosque, often referred to as 'The Heart of Chechnya', is able to accommodate 10,000 worshippers (Markosian and Matloff 2012: 48). This structure, its 200-foot minarets dominating the Grozny skyline, is believed to have cost the regime approximately 20 million rubbles (Markosian and Matloff 2012: 48; Fuller and Doukaev 2007). Four large mosques were also commissioned for construction across several towns and cities in 2009 with an intended capacity of 5000 (RFERL 2010).

In the post-war environment, in which most of Chechnya's infrastructure and economy was utterly destroyed, the government's extensive saturation of the landscape with places of Islamic worship was a prominent and conspicuous use of the republic's reconstruction budget, absorbing large chunks of rubbles, resources, and labour. The mosque is now a routine, even ubiquitous feature of Chechnya's built terrain, which undeniably distinguishes today's Chechen topography from that of the Soviet era. The mosque then, has become an architectural symbol of the Kadyrov era in which the public practice of Sufism is keenly facilitated by the

government. The mosque itself is a structure that haunts and reminds the de-centred subject of one's Muslim identity. Through its ubiquity across Chechen towns and cities, appearing in communities that have existed without public sites of worship for most of - if not all of - that community's collective living memory, the mosque has become the physical symbol of the government's consistent discourse in which Sufism is articulated as the defining regulator of social, cultural, political, and religious life. This articulation is also expressed through the sheer size and spectacle of many of the newly built mosques. The Heart of Grozny, carefully and extensively illuminated at night, with arrestingly high minarets, and surrounded by a large, carefully landscaped park, is an arresting sight on the Grozny skyline that inspires awe through its sheer size and splendour. Its stateliness and size impresses upon the viewer a sense of power and authority; it is the fulcrum of Chechen spirituality. These newly built mosques, often able to accommodate thousands of worshipers, suggest to those who behold that that they are large in size and number because they need to be – these mosques cater to masses of Chechen Sufi Muslims. They serve to emphasise Islam as a collective, if not universal, system of belief and morality.

### **7.2.2 Memorials;**

Through the creation and removal of public memorials, the regime's constitution of public space also involves the omission of a once traditional component of Chechen Sufism, and re-articulates the history of Russian-Chechen relations, a relationship that played a key role in the diffusion and inculcation of Chechen Sufism. Sufi Islam, as described in Section 6.0, was historically a central component of ethnic Chechen identity, which itself evolved in the context of the threatening Russian Other. Sufi Islam then was inextricably linked with the Chechen resistance. The Chechen Muslim subject was constructed and entrenched within a discursive struggle between the Russian state and the Chechen people to define Chechnya as part of, or separate from, Russian sovereignty. This enduring discursive struggle manifest itself in numerous violent acts, including the deportation of the entire Chechen population, and most recently, two separatist wars, which collectively cost hundreds of thousands of Chechen lives (Souleimanov 2007: 75; RFERL 2005). Thus, Chechen Sufism was also embedded in the narrative of Chechen suffering at the hands of their Russian conquerors. Yet the Chechen government, which vigorously promotes its

own discourse of 'traditional Sufism', has repressed the Chechen-Russian conflict from public discourse through the absence or removal of memorials and commemorations that remind the beholder of the partisan violence of that conflict, in favour of establishing new memorials that emphasise instances of mutual Russian-Chechen cooperation.

Found in a village in the highlands of Southern Chechnya is a recently constructed memorial to the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, that commemorates the Chechen lives lost in the conflict (Merlin 2014: 37). Inscribed on the large monument, written in Russian and Chechen, is the ode 'Do not forget the national heroes!' (Merlin 2014: 37). The presence of this monument is surprising, even to those who possess only a rudimentary grasp of Chechen history. It is surprising because one of the most traumatic instances of Russian mistreatment of the Chechen people occurred during the Great Patriotic War; the deportation of the entire population to Central Asia, which was enacted as punishment after the Soviet government accused the Chechens of collaborating with the Nazis (Merlin 2014: 37). Yet in recent years, a number of commemorations for those Chechens who were killed fighting on the side of the Russians have emerged. Several streets in Grozny are named for veterans of the Great Patriotic War (Merlin 2014: 39). On May 9<sup>th</sup> 2012, the Chechen authorities solemnly observed the day of 'Victory against German Fascism' whilst school children visited the homes of Chechen veterans of the war to deliver gifts (Merlin 2014: 39).

Since 2008, the original memorial of the Chechen deportation, originally erected under Dudayev's leadership in 1992, was obscured from public view by a tall fence (Merlin 2014: 44). Kadyrov initially explained that the monument was in a poor location that did not allow for the performance of the Zikr or permit buses or cars to park (Merlin 2014: 44). The memorial remained this way until February 2014, when the Chechen authorities dismantled it. That same month, Kadyrov cancelled the annual February 23<sup>rd</sup> commemoration of the deportation, as it coincided with the 2014 Winter Olympics in the Russian city of Sochi (Volcheck 2015). The deconstruction of the deportation memorial saw its gravestones transferred to a new monument that commemorates the 'victims of terrorism' – those law

enforcement and government officials targeted and killed by the Islamist and separatist insurgents (Merlin 2014: 45). According to a local filmmaker, no public discussion of the Russian wars is tolerated and no memorials exist to commemorate the victims (Volcheck 2015). Thus, official commemorations of the two recent wars honour the memory of government and law enforcement figures without any reference to the violence and loss endured by Chechen civilians at the hands of Russian soldiers or their local proxies (Merlin 2014: 15).

The decision to commemorate the 'Chechen heroes' of Great Patriotic War' and the 'victims of terrorism' is a significant re-articulation of Chechnya's past relations with the Russian state. Here, the only references to Islam are those meanings that characterise the Islamist resistance as terrorists who have killed state officials in pursuit of their heresy. The meaning that is ascribed to Chechen-Russian relations is denied any trace of acrimony and instead re-articulates a common Chechen-Russian history of anti-Fascist resistance. No discursive space is left for the formerly traditional association of Chechen Sufism with the Chechen ethno-separatist agenda to secede from Russia.

### **7.2.3 Public Space Summary;**

In one sense, a strong Islamic discourse is identifiable in the constitution of public space in Chechnya. Under the Kadyrov regime, the mosque has become a salient and omnipresent element of the built environment that reinforces to those who inhabit it the central role of Islam in Chechen life. In another sense, the historical persecution of Chechen Sufism during Soviet rule and the historical role of Islam in organising the resistance against Russia are silenced.

## **7.3 The Linguistic Domain**

The analysis of the linguistic domain focused on whether Islamic discourses were identifiable within the public Instagram posts of Kadyrov during January 2015. The identification of repetitive statements and repeated interpellations of his audience assumed analytical priority. It was found that Islamic discourse is highly prevalent in Kadyrov's communication, and is frequently articulated in either of two ways in



order to establish a position of religious authority for himself, as an advisor, and as a (popularly supported) protector.

To begin, Kadyrov frequently discusses Islamic practice and faith in a way that positions his audiences within a submissive, pedagogical relationship in which Kadyrov is the devout proprietor of Islamic knowledge, whilst his audience is constituted as passive recipients of his knowledge. Through his frequent provision of advice on one's responsibilities as a Muslim, which is reinforced by an almost daily demonstration of his own practice of Islam, Kadyrov addresses his audience as students who may learn from his example. In these instances, it is Kadyrov who possesses knowledge, and it is his understanding of Islam that is privileged. Of the thirty-one days of text that were examined, twenty of these documented Kadyrov's visit to the mosque for morning or evening prayer. This particular style of post assumes a regular format; the city and mosque where the worship occurred, as well as the Imam or Sheikh who led the prayer service, are named. Kadyrov then proceeds to communicate either part of the sermon delivered by the sheikh, or his own chosen theme covering Islamic principle, practice, or obligation to his followers. For example on January 31<sup>st</sup>, Kadyrov writes;

*"Among the pillars of Islam in third place is the zakat... Zakat is the duty of every Muslim in possession of certain material and financial capabilities. My dear father, the first President of the Chechen Republic, Hero of Russia, Akhmad Hajji Kadyrov treated this matter very seriously. I believe that it is necessary to pay the zakat. In our family, it is an inviolable rule."*

Here, Kadyrov addresses his audience from a position of knowledge and authority; it is he who is imparting knowledge to, or at the very least, reminding, Muslims of what their responsibilities are. In this particular text, Kadyrov constructs his authority through two ways. Firstly, by demonstrating that he already observes other Islamic obligations (daily prayer), this presents Kadyrov as a practicing Muslim with the authority to speak on Islamic matters. Secondly, Kadyrov establishes his religious authority by reminding his audience of his membership within a pious Muslim family that possesses a history of moral and political leadership within Chechnya.

Indeed, Kadyrov frequently demonstrates the piety of his family, often holding them up as role models for others. On January 15<sup>th</sup>, Kadyrov writes;

*“Today, my dear nephew Khamzat Kadyrov turned 18 years old! I can talk about Khamzat with great pride. He was very young when he learned to read the Holy Quran, memorized it, and became a Hafiz [a Muslim able to recite the Quran from memory] ... I want to note that I am always extremely strict when it comes to his studies, sports, and compliance to our family traditions and customs.”*

Several days later on January 17<sup>th</sup>, Kadyrov praises his young daughter, Hadizhat, who;

*“became a Hafiz, and she strictly complies with the requirements of the Quran and Sunnah.”*

Through these posts, Kadyrov again constructs and emphasises his identity as a diligent Muslim patriarch who ensures the observance of Islamic practice within his family. Praising his family members for their status as Hafizes, their compliance with the teachings of Islam, as well as their observance of familial ‘traditions and customs’ not only establishes Kadyrov as a man who lives by what he preaches, but it also sets a cultural and religious example for his audience to emulate.

In his role of imparting knowledge to his followers, Kadyrov also frequently quotes and explains Islamic scripture. For example, on January 28<sup>th</sup> he writes;

*“The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said that at the Day of Judgment anyone who will preserve for the Ummah forty hadith, will enter through any gate in Paradise. In one of the Hadiths of the Messenger (pbuh) it is said, “When a Muslim prays for his brother, the angels say to him: “And to you, the same thing you are asking for your brother.” The Hadith is not difficult to learn. If you learn one hadith a day, you can learn tens and hundreds of them.”*

These quotations again serve to inform or remind his audience of their responsibilities as Muslims. Kadyrov, as the agent who reminds them, again locates himself in a position of religious authority. Quoting Islamic verse again provides Kadyrov the opportunity to adopt the role of ‘advisor’, interpellating his audience within the role of a student.

The second way in which Kadyrov uses Islamic discourse to create a position of authority for himself is via the construction of a polarised Islam. On one side are the true Muslims that he identifies with, speaks for, and governs, whilst on the other are

the Western intelligence agencies and their Muslim fundamentalist proxies, who Kadyrov asserts are intent on the destruction of all true Muslims. In this context, Kadyrov positions himself as an outspoken protector of ‘true Islam’ and ‘true Muslims’. Speaking on January 15<sup>th</sup>, Kadyrov laments;

*“Unfortunately, in life there are those who condone actions contrary to Islamic norms. They deliberately put the ignorant on the path of committing grave sins and evils. In a righteous world, they will get what they deserve. You cannot be indifferent, when the true enemies of Islam are shedding the blood of innocent people, when they distort Islam and cause enormous damage to religion. In these circumstances, even indifference is unacceptable, because the Prophet (pbuh) told us to actively resist evil. We will fight them with all means and possibilities, so that evil does not come to every home and does not affect every family.”*

Kadyrov establishes a position of knowledge and power for himself through his capacity to identify what is and what is not contrary to Islam and to communicate this to others, despite the intention of false Muslims to deceive and ‘distort the religion’. The repetitive use of ‘they’ externalises these deceivers from both himself and his audience. It is clear that Kadyrov identifies his audience as true Muslims when he says “You cannot be indifferent...” and “...because the Prophet told us...”. Here the audience are hailed as Muslims who must protect their common faith, in part because they all share the knowledge that Prophet imparted to them. Kadyrov takes this interpellation of his audience a step further when he says “We will fight them...” invoking a shared identity between himself and his audience as defenders of true Islam.

Kadyrov gives further shape to the ‘enemies of Islam’ on January 31<sup>st</sup> when, speaking of online counter-terrorism efforts in Chechnya, he explains that

*“...young people... are being dragged into the ranks of blood-thirsty terrorists, whose aim is to destroy Muslims and Islamic countries. The War in Syria and Iraq has led to hundreds of thousands of victims, [and the] destruction of Islamic shrines. The leaders of these gangs are agents of the CIA and other Intelligence agencies.”*

In another post on January 31<sup>st</sup>, Kadyrov posts;

*“Western intelligence agencies are actively working to recruit youth to the ranks of ISIS and other terrorist organizations created by them.”*

And earlier, on January 12<sup>th</sup>, five days after the attacks by two Muslims on the Charlie Hebdo headquarters in Paris, Kadyrov says;

*“I unequivocally condemn the killing of unarmed people in Paris. However, I have no confidence that these events do not have anything to do with some powerful forces. Was it planned by someone to ferment anti-Islamic sentiment or to attempt to divert attention from some other imminent global problem?”*

Whether Kadyrov genuinely believes that ISIS is a Western conspiracy against Muslims, or that the Paris attacks were perpetrated with an anti-Muslim agenda is secondary. In connecting Western governments and their security agencies with those false and violent Muslims who Kadyrov accuses of attempting to distort Islam in an effort to destroy all Muslims, he articulates a dangerous, existentially threatening international environment for all true Muslims. In this construction of reality, true Muslims – that is, Kadyrov and his audience - are under attack. Kadyrov calls for a ‘united’, ‘active’ resistance against these ‘enemies of Islam’ *“with all means and possibilities, so that evil does not come to every home and does not affect every family.”* ‘True Muslims’ then are constituted as those Muslims who support Kadyrov’s battle against ‘fundamentalists’ and ‘terrorists’ who seek to distort Islam and kill its followers. It is in his identification of these false Muslims and their devious Western backers and in his call to defend ‘true Muslims’ that Kadyrov emerges as the protector of ‘Islam’.

Finally, Kadyrov also showed a keenness to demonstrate the widespread support for his defence of Islam at home and abroad. Speaking about the protest that his government organised and held in Grozny on January 19<sup>th</sup> in response to the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad on cover of the recently attacked French satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, Kadyrov posted multiple times in the days leading up to and preceding the rally, claiming the support of all Chechens and Russian Muslims. In one such post, made the day of the rally, Kadyrov stated;

*“Today... more than one million people responded to our appeal by coming to the squares and avenues of Grozny and strongly condemned the unscrupulous and immoral actions of those who draw cartoons and those who support them.”*

Considering that Chechnya’s population was most recently estimated at 1.27 million, Kadyrov’s figure suggests an outstanding turn out (RFERL 2013). He then wrote on January 28<sup>th</sup>;

*The Mufti, on behalf of the world's known representatives of the Islamic clergy, conveyed his gratitude for the principled stance on the events in Paris and the organization of mass demonstrations of protest."*

And in speaking on the Mufti's support of his government's attempt to eradicate Islamist extremism, Kadyrov relayed;

*"...He spoke about the work of the clergy to counter extremism and the attempts of foreign organizations to impose radical movements among the believers. The Mufti stressed that joint efforts of [the] Muftiat and local authorities helped to minimize this threat. Mezhiev said that with every day the number of Muslims who pray in mosques increases."*

In presenting widespread support and cooperation from both the clergy and the people of Chechnya, Kadyrov constructs a role for himself as a popular, pious and learned leader who speaks with authority on behalf of Chechen Muslims.

### **7.3.1 Linguistic Domain Summary;**

The analysis of the rhetorical domain has revealed that Islamic discourse enable Kadyrov to establish a position of authority over those he governs by adopting the role of a pious, knowledgeable, protector who enjoys the support of both the clergy and those that he governs.

### **7.4 Multi-Site Summary**

This multi-site analysis was conducted to answer the following question;

*'What, if any, Islamic discourses are identifiable in the governance activities and public rhetoric of the Kadyrov regime?'*

In answer to this question, it is found that Islamic discourses are highly present in the activities, policies, and communications of the Kadyrov regime. The emphasis upon, and the articulation of meaning around, the nodal point of 'Islam' is central to the government's construction of the Chechen citizen, as well as the articulation of the primary dangers to, or enemies of, that citizen. 'Islam' has been identified as a privileged signifier around which much of social, political, institutional, and of course, religious life in Chechnya is arranged. Within the policy-making domain, the government's Islamic discourse constructs a Chechen Muslim subject who rejects the Islam of the resistance and who accepts the diffusion of Islamic practice and morality

across all areas of social life. In mapping the organisation of public space, the mosque was identified as a key symbol through which the physical environment is constituted in such a way to remind its inhabitants of the importance and centrality of Islam to Chechen identity and daily life. The removal and construction of memorials silences the historic role of Sufism in the Chechen-Russian conflict. Finally, the exploration of the rhetorical domain revealed that Islamic discourse enables Kadyrov to establish a position of authority over those he rules through assuming the role of a pious, knowledgeable, protector who enjoys the support of the clergy and those he governs.

## 8.0 Analysis of Findings

This section answers the remaining two research questions;

2. *What kind of social order (or, relations of power) do the identified Islamic discourses (of the Kadyrov regime) create or reproduce?*
3. *How do these discursively constructed relations of power benefit or serve the interests of the Kadyrov regime?*

### 8.1 Answering Research Question Two;

Though Kadyrov and his government label their discourse as ‘Traditional Islam’, several profound differences abound between the discourse of Sufism that endured in Chechen society prior to the rise of Kadyrov, and the ‘Traditional Islam’ that the regime promotes. Kadyrov’s policies and initiatives have restored some pre-Soviet Islamic institutions (including mosques and religious education), and certainly there are similarities between the laws of Shamil’s Imamate and the decrees of the Kadyrov presidency. Yet two fundamental differences between the discourses persist. Firstly, under Kadyrov, Sufism’s historical role as an important constitutive element of the Chechen (ethno-nationalist) separatist discourse is silenced: that Sufism has been historically embedded within a broader separatist discourse is repressed. Secondly, the government’s Islamic discourse eschews the historical ‘Othering’ of the Russian state. Russia is no longer identified as the ‘infidel’ against whom Chechen Muslims must wage a ‘gazavat’ to protect themselves and their independence, as was the case under the leadership of Sheikh Mansur and Imam Shamil, and most recently under Presidents Dudayev and Maskhadov. Instead the role of the threatening Other is thrust upon the Chechen resistance. It is ironic then that the primary basis upon which the resistance is the ‘Othered’ as ‘false’ or ‘foreign’ to Chechen tradition is because they invoke Islamic (albeit a Salafi, rather than Sufi) discourse in the pursuit of independence from Russia. The government’s traditional discourse has, in effect, turned the traditional synergy between Islam and Chechen independence on its head. The tension that surfaced in the early 1990s between the Sufi majority and the newly emerged Salafi minority - many of whom would

eventually join the ‘Wahhabi’ resistance – has provided the Kadyrov regime with the opportunity to decry the illegitimacy of the separatist resistance, and to attempt to ostracise them as well as their separatist agenda from the mainstream of Chechen society.

In answering Research Question Two, the social order that is constituted by the government’s Islamic discourse is an utterly polarised one. Sufi Islam has become the singular touchstone of political legitimacy and religious morality. Any deviation from the doctrine and practices of the government’s Sufism is understood as a threat. Sufism in the government’s discourse is defined above all by two principles. The first is the Chechen subject’s emphatic rejection of the ‘false Islam’ of the resistance, and - by extension – their separatist agenda. The second principle is the unquestioned adoption of the behaviours, practices and beliefs of Sufi Muslims as the government prescribes them. The failure to satisfy the latter principle indicates the failure to adhere to the former. Those who do not embrace the government’s discourse are identified by the regime as Wahhabis, and as such, are considered a threat to Chechen morality and tradition. In this social order, such people, to (re)quote Kadyrov, must be “physically annihilated” (Kadyrov quoted in Smirnov 2005a). Therefore, the government articulates a social order based on highly unequal power relations wherein the power to articulate religious meaning is dominated by the regime. The only and ultimate authority of Sufi Islamic doctrine – the central regulating principle of the polity - rests entirely with the regime (even the clergy are under their close watch). The Chechen subject is haled in either of two positions, the good ‘traditional’ Chechen Muslim subject who accepts the government’s discourse, or as a ‘Wahhabi’, who must be expunged. No room is left for counter articulations or alternative identities, as to dissent is to face ‘annihilation’.

## **8.2 Answering Research Question Three;**

The remainder of this analysis is dedicated to answering Research Question Three, which now that Research Question Two has been answered, may be reformulated as;



3. *How does the polarised social order in which religious authority ultimately rests with the Kadyrov regime benefit or serve its interests?*

### **8.2.1 Legitimacy and Hegemony;**

To answer this question, the concept of 'hegemony', as it is understood within Discourse Theory, is operationalised. The analysis is also complemented by the concept of 'legitimacy'. To restate the definition provided earlier, hegemony refers to the attainment of consent wherein discourses become naturalised and gain widespread, enduring acceptance and become sedimented (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 6; Barret 1991: 54). Though not a term used by Laclau and Mouffe themselves, legitimacy is a concept that we may see as overlapping with hegemony through its emphasis upon 'consent'. Legitimacy is a term that is often more easily grasped than hegemony, perhaps because it constitutes its own field of study and is a term that has a circulation well beyond the often-esoteric confines of political science. By developing a conceptual link between 'legitimacy' and Discourse Theory allows this research project to contribute to another field of political science (the study of political legitimacy) whilst drawing attention to the discursive process that constitutes the attainment of (or failure to attain) legitimacy by political actors.

'Political legitimacy', as a term, and as a field of study, has been constituted in part by the attempt to answer a question originally posed by Max Weber;

"By what right do some individuals... claim to exercise command over others and gain acceptance of their claims and obedience to their directives from those others as their right?" (Weber in Strong and Killingsworth 2011: 392)

Weber's question prompts us to consider on what grounds do polities grant their consent to those who aspire to lead or govern them. Though legitimacy remains a contested term, a synergy between 'hegemony' and 'legitimacy' is observable in Strong and Killingsworth's reply to Weber. Strong and Killingsworth define legitimacy as a particular relationship between a ruler and those they rule over, which "distinguishes naked force from authority" (2011: 393). Here, Strong and Killingsworth denote the difference between coercive power that relies primarily

upon the use of force to ensure compliance, and the power of authority in which a polity consents to an individual or group's rule. Legitimacy, when conceptualised in this way, synergises with Discourse Theory's formulation of hegemony; the organisation of consent without the use of force. We may therefore understand legitimacy in the same way that we think of hegemony; as the organisation of consent that enables a set of meanings and its accompanying relations of power to become sedimented.

### **8.2.2 The Historical Unity of Sufism;**

In (pre-Kadyrov) Chechen politics, Sufi Islam repeatedly emerged during times of danger and distress as a unifying identity and set of beliefs that transcended local intra-communal tensions to serve as the foundation of a largely cohesive resistance against the Russian state.

As was demonstrated in Section 6.0, the institutions of Chechen Sufism and its leaders gradually attained an entrenched respect and support from Chechen Muslims, who deferred to the discipline and piety of their local Sufi leaders and communities, allowing such institutions (for example, Murid orders and the brotherhoods) to acquire an authoritative leadership role, especially during times of conflict. The post-Soviet era also demonstrates Sufism's potency as a mobilising or legitimising force. For instance, the support of various Sufi brotherhoods in shoring up a leader or a candidate's political position, or the support that Dudayev quickly mustered when he began to embed Islamic references within his public rhetoric and to cast the separatist movement as a *gazavat*, as well as the effective pressure that was put upon President Maskhadov to adopt Islamic institutions of governance all attest to the powerful influence of Islamic discourse within Chechen politics. 'Islam' then seems an obvious narrative to re-gather Chechen society, fractured and weary after two devastating wars, into a cohesive polity.

### **8.2.3 Searching For Legitimacy and Striving for Hegemony;**

By cultivating a social order that relies heavily upon Islamic morality and symbolism, the regime attempts to draw upon a powerful discursive resource - Chechen Islamic identity - to legitimise its own position of power by monopolising the meanings that

circulate within that wellspring of unity and authority. In attempting to cultivate its own legitimacy through Sufism, the Kadyrov regime endeavours to serve its own interests in three ways. Firstly, the regime attempts to mobilise support for itself and its policies on the basis of a historically unifying aspect of Chechen identity, Islam. Secondly, the articulation of Islam as the hegemonic component of the Chechen social order allows the regime to crowd out alternative discourses that challenge its authority. Thirdly, in associating itself with Sufism, the regime reinforces its own authority and marginalises dissent.

### **8.2.3 Mobilising Support;**

By presenting themselves as the guardians of 'true' Islam and by articulating Sufi morality and tradition as the foundation of Chechen governance and the Chechen subject, the Kadyrov regimes strives to associate itself with a historically unifying and fiercely guarded element of Chechen identity – Sufism – in the hopes of generating that same fierce and unified support for itself. The invocation of Sufi principles and values attempts to appeal to the common values and understandings of Chechen society; it seeks to harness the prevalent notion in Chechen society of Shamil's Imamate as a golden era of Chechen history, to invoke the same defensive commitment that accompanied the protection of Sufi practice during the repression of the Soviet era, and to reinvigorate the initial euphoria of the Chechen Islamic renaissance of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The goal is to provoke such sentiments and to transform them into a similarly fervent and united support for the Kadyrov regime. Of course now, Chechen unity will be directed toward vanquishing the Islamist resistance, rather than Russian interference. Therefore the government's articulation of Sufism as the guiding principle of Chechen identity and governance attempts to appeal to the fondly remembered history and fiercely protected traditions of Chechen society, despite the entirely novel circumstance of the Chechen leadership's ardent pro-Russian stance.

### **8.2.4 Crowding Out Alternatives;**

The aggressive establishment of Sufism as the seminal component of Chechen identity allows Kadyrov to claim to represent Chechen traditions and identity whilst crowding out any alternative discourses that involve those traditions and identity

that may undermine the government's narrative. In particular, this crowding out silences the formerly prominent understanding within Chechen society of the Chechen subject as embedded within an enduring struggle for its own independence.

The government's particular discourse of Sufism leaves no space for the ethno-nationalist discourse that bound Chechens together in a common struggle of survival and resistance against the Russian state. This particular discourse of Chechen identity is suppressed because it is incompatible with the regime's most fundamental condition of possibility; the political and economic support of the Kremlin. The regime was put in power by the Russian state to neutralise the Chechen separatists and to enforce Chechnya's status as a subject of the Russian Federation. Cluttering the political, cultural and religious domains with constant references to Sufi morality, as well as the plethora of Islamic symbols (mosques, headscarves, and trimmed beards) that condition one's own appearance as well as the surrounding physical space, disciplines the populace by producing a consistent narrative of Chechen identity that is devoid of any reference to the struggles of the past, and which through its ubiquity, attempts to naturalise the understanding of Chechens as Muslim citizens of the Russian state (Weeden 1999: 157; Foucault 2002). Therefore, the articulation of Sufi discourse allows Kadyrov to claim to represent Chechen interests and traditions whilst simultaneously repressing any aspect of Chechen identity that challenges his own authority.

#### **8.2.5 Marginalising Dissent;**

Finally, by claiming Sufism, and the protection of it, as the foundation of Chechen governance means that to challenge the government's authority is increasingly associated with challenging Sufism itself. This conflation of religious and political authority is reflected in the government's tendency to denounce its dissenters and critics as 'Wahhabis'. By interpellating its critics as 'false' Muslims, the regime attempts to again draw upon the history of collective unity amongst Chechen Muslims – a sensibility that is most acute when Chechens feel their identity and traditions are under threat. In doing so, the regime's intention is to present an attack or critique of the government as an attack or critique on Sufism itself, therein involving the identity and interests of the Chechen population at large. The

government thereby marginalises the contestation of its authority, by claiming the content and the author of such criticism as disingenuous and dangerous, and serves to create an environment in which any criticism of the government would also be roundly condemned by society itself.

#### **8.2.6 The Benefits of Legitimacy;**

The way in which the interests of the regime are served when its own authority becomes sedimented is further illuminated when we consider how such appeals work and why the attainment of consent is important for this particular regime. The government's Islamic discourse is not imposed onto a blank slate but interacts with the understandings of Chechen identity and politics that are already in discursive circulation (Brown 2009: 5). By drawing on an existing economy of meanings, the regimes own discourse is better able to claim continuity with the traditions and customs of the Chechen culture. As Brown argues, those narratives which utilise the existing economy of meaning within a particular social system stand a greater chance of being accepted and internalised if they at least resonate with or reference "extant categories of understanding" (Brown 2009: 5). The reason that its Islamic discourse may function as a highly effective means of bringing genuine and widespread authority to the Kadyrov government is that it allows the regime to present its own interests (maintaining its own power) as also representing the interests of Chechen society in that its continuing authority delivers the realisation of a larger social purpose, in this case, the creation of a social order in which Sufism is protected and the ability of Chechen Muslims to engage with a key aspect of their own identity, Islamic faith, is guaranteed (Matveeva 2009: 1097).

The above discussion though begs a broader question – why would the regime bother with attempting to naturalise its own position of power? This question becomes more perplexing when consideration is given to the ever-increasing number of reports from local and international rights organisations that document the infamous willingness of Kadyrov to use forceful coercion (most notably, through his own militia) to maintain his iron grip on power. To answer this question, it is again necessary to refer to the Kadyrovs ascent to the Chechen leadership. The Kadyrovs were installed by the Kremlin with the chief purpose of restoring

Chechnya as an orderly subunit of the Russian Federation and to quell the violence that had begun to spill across Chechnya's border into other areas of the Russian Federation. Political stability accrues when a system of power is viewed by its subjects as a legitimate system of authority, who then understand themselves as obligated to comply with that legitimate authority (Beetham 1985: 33). Therein, the Kadyrov regime benefits from enhanced legitimacy as it encourages a placid compliance with the existing social order. The cultivation of placid compliance is important to this regime because Moscow's support is heavily conditioned by maintaining that peace and stability (Russell 2011: 519).

### **8.2.7 Marginalising the Resistance and Cauterising the Separatist Impulse;**

Aside from Islamic discourse offering a potential route to naturalising the regime's own power, the polarised social order also offers another means through which to further marginalise the appeal of the Islamist resistance. It was briefly discussed above that by casting the resistance as un-Islamic and as counter to the ideals of Chechen Islam, the government attempts to dissuade Chechens from joining the Islamist separatists as it runs counter to their own values. This will now be expanded upon. The government, in its polarised binary of possibilities for the identity of the Chechen subject, has cast the Islamist resistance, and those who support it, as deceptive individuals who intend to bring harm up 'true' Chechen Muslims and to destroy Islam itself. Insofar as the Islamist resistance continues to strive for independence (albeit in a Salafist theocratic form, rather than the secular state envisioned by the nationalist resistance), the goal of separatism itself is likewise tarred with the same brush; as divisive and malicious. By framing the resistance and its own Islamist narrative as threatening to Chechen Sufism, the government attempts to de-legitimise not only the Islamist resistance itself but to also de-legitimise the broader goal of Chechen independence. By constructing the Chechen separatists as the threatening Other, the Kadyrov regime again constructs a social order that corresponds to its own political interests; an order in which the Chechen people no longer contest Russian sovereignty and instead support the regime in the struggle against the separatists.

The social order in which Sufism is strictly enforced also marginalises the resistance as the stringent regulation of Sufi doctrine enables the government to compete against the potential appeal of the Islamist resistance, which also promotes its own discourse in which the strict observance of (Salafi) Islam is paramount (Gammer 2005: 836-837). In the interwar period, for some Chechens – particularly those Chechen youth who were traumatised by the brutalities and losses of the war - Salafism, as a religious and political system, became increasingly attractive for several reasons (Souleimanov 2015: 95). Firstly, the partisanship and acrimony that dominated relations between the various Sufi brotherhoods undermined the authority of, and respect for, Sufi Islam amongst some Chechens (Souleimanov 2015: 96). Secondly, the profound lack of theological knowledge amongst the Sufi clergy – a symptom of their leadership as inherited through kin rather than appointed on the basis of theological acumen – alienated young Chechens, some of whom were simultaneously exposed to the teachings of the Salafi missionaries from the Middle East, who critiqued Chechen Sufism as a kind of paganism that was de-linked from true Islamic practice (Souleimanov 2015: 96). “Many Chechens were impressed by the immense piety, self-constraint, and discipline” of the Salafi resistance (Souleimanov 2015: 97). The dynamic in which the Salafi resistance was understood as an alternative for those Chechens who sought a more rigorous and disciplined religious community is potentially another reason for the government’s own militantly enforced discourse of Islam. The regime’s continuous oversight of the Clergy’s sermons, the regulation of prayer schedules, and its constant chastising of the clergy to “reach the heart” of every Chechen in order to keep them at the mosque and away from ‘the forest’ suggests that the government’s Islamic discourse is just as much about ‘out-religioning’ the insurgency as it is attempting to realise its own legitimacy (Kadyrov quoted in RFERL 2010).

### **8.3 Analysis Summary;**

This analysis has identified stark differences between the Islamic discourses that circulated within Chechnya in the pre-Kadyrov era and the discourse of ‘Traditional Islam’ articulated by the government. Specifically, Sufism’s historical role as a constitutive element of Chechen separatist discourse is repressed whilst the Islamist resistance assumes the role of Other, formerly occupied by the Russian state.

The polity that is established by the government's Islamic discourse is one in which the identity of the Chechen subject is polarised between the 'good', 'true' Chechen Muslim, and the false Muslim who must be removed. Within this discourse, Sufism (as the government defines it) becomes the central organising principle of Chechen culture and governance, and any deviation from the norms set by the government is articulated as a threat that must be neutralised. The regime's ability to dominate the production of meaning and identity allows it to serve its own interests. The regime attempts to cultivate its own legitimacy and authority by drawing upon a powerful discursive resource of Chechen society, Islam, by positioning itself as the arbiter and protector of Chechen Islam. By presenting itself in this manner, the regime hopes to attract the support of the Chechen populace. In articulating Sufism as a central component of Chechen governance and society, the Kadyrov regime claims to represent Chechen society whilst repressing any aspect of Chechen identity or tradition that is counter to its own interests. In conflating its own authority with the authority of Islam, the government also marginalises criticism of itself by reframing that dissent as criticism of Sufism itself. In attempting to ostracise the resistance and its goal of independence, the regime attempts to equate its own political interests (satisfying its original mandate by the Kremlin to quash the separatist movement and neutralise the burgeoning violence) as synonymous with the interests of the Chechen people. By constructing the Chechen separatists as the threatening Other, the Kadyrov regime constructs a social order that corresponds to its own political interests; it attempts to create an order in which the Chechen people no longer contest Russian sovereignty and instead support the regime in the struggle against the separatists. Finally, the government's own Islamic discourse appears to be just as concerned with 'out-religioning' the insurgency (to neutralise its appeal to potential recruits) as it is about attempting to realise its own legitimacy, which is itself concerned with cultivating a supportive and compliant Chechen citizen.



## 9.0 Conclusion

Using Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory, this research project has investigated and analysed the content and effects of the Islamic discourses that have emerged during the rule of the Kadyrov regime. This research project focused its enquiry and analysis upon three broad areas; the historical-cultural milieu in which the Chechen Islamic identity was traditionally embedded, the manifestation of Islamic discourse across various domains of Chechen governance, and lastly, how the government's Islamic discourse constitutes the Chechen social order and how such a constitution may serve the interests of the regime.

It was found that the government's Islamic discourse locates an ever-expanding array of activities, behaviours, institutions and identities within the discursive field of Sufi Islam, thereby knitting the Chechen polity together into a polarised social order that is structured according to the government's articulation of 'true' Sufi doctrine, practice and morality. The social order that is constituted by the diffusion of Islamic discourse across Chechen society serves to (or, attempts to) enhance the legitimacy of the regime by cultivating widespread support, or at least, placid compliance from, the Chechen populace by appealing to a traditional source of Chechen unity and mobilisation, Sufism.

Profound differences were identified between the Islamic discourses that circulated within Chechnya in the pre-Kadyrov era and the discourse of 'Traditional Islam' that is articulated by the regime. Sufism's historical role as a central element of the Chechen separatist discourse is now repressed whilst the Islamist separatist resistance is externalised as a dangerous and threatening Other of Chechen identity (a role that was formerly filled by the Russian state).

The regime's capacity to dominate the articulation of meaning and identity within Islamic discourse serves its own interests in numerous ways. The regime attempts to cultivate its own legitimacy and authority by drawing upon a powerful discursive resource of Chechen society, Islam, by positioning itself as the arbiter and protector

of Chechen Islam. By presenting itself in this manner, the regime hopes to generate support from amongst the Chechen people. In articulating Sufism as a central component of Chechen governance and society, the regime claims to represent Chechen society whilst repressing any aspect of Chechen identity or tradition that is threatens its own interests. By conflating its own authority with the authority that is traditionally afforded to Islam within Chechen society, the regime reframes criticism of the government as criticism of Sufism itself. By attempting to marginalise both the resistance and Chechen independence, the regime endeavours to equate its own political interests (to neutralise the separatist movement and nullify political violence) as synonymous with the interests of the Chechen people. By constructing the Islamist separatists as the threatening Other, a social order is established that corresponds to the regimes own political interests wherein the Chechen people no longer contest Russian sovereignty and instead support the regime in its struggle against the separatists. Finally, the government's own Islamic discourse attempts to 'out-religion' the insurgency and to neutralise its appeal to potential recruits.

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