



(Review B) ‘Popular Ijtihad’ and Entangled Islamic Discourse on the Covid-19 Pandemic in Russia

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ABSTRACT This is the second review of the preprinted article “‘Popular Ijtihad’ and Entangled Islamic Discourse on the Covid-19 Pandemic in Russia.” The review will be taken offline once the final article has appeared.

KEYWORDS review, preprint

Summary Evaluation

Accepted with suggested minor revisions (B)

[1]

Original Article

The original article can be found under the following link: <https://er.ceres.rub.de/index.php/ER/article/view/8919>

[2]

1. Give a presentation of the article. What is its contribution to research?

The article discusses a very topical theme of the interpretations of the Covid-19 pandemic in Russian Islamic online discussions. In addition to accounting the main themes in these discussions, the article addresses the changes in the role of traditional religious authority as well as the impact of the internet and social media on Russian Muslim community. The article introduces the new concept of popular ijtihad that reflects the individualization of Islam in contemporary world.

[3]

2. Assess the source materials and research literature.

The material of the study that composes of internet discussions in online platforms is fascinating and it is obvious that the author has read a vast amount of different kinds of discussions. However, the author should explain how the material was selected and gathered, what it contained and how it was analyzed. In addition, it would be good to say something about the ethical concerns in using material from social media. The research literature that is used in the article is well selected and the author is clearly familiar with the relevant discussions in the field. [4]

3. Assess the problem formulations; are they clearly stated?

The article seems to have two somewhat separate focuses or research goals. The first one of these, the concept of popular ijihad makes an intriguing contribution to the theoretical debates about individualization of Islam and the erosion of traditional authority. The other focus is thematic analysis of the themes and interpretations in the Russian (and perhaps also global) Islamic online discussions about Covid-19. Both of these are fascinating topics, but I would recommend choosing which one has the primacy, that is, what is the main research question or argument of this article. Another option might be dividing the paper into two publications. [5]

4. Assess the analysis and conclusion.

The analysis presents well different viewpoints and arguments in the online discussions and the quotations nicely convey the voice of the people who are studied. It seems that in the analysis the themes of the discussions have been at the focus while the role or the reception of different authorities or the elaboration of the “popular ijihad” is less developed. While there are several competing interpretations in the online discussions, promoted by different actors, what are the specific features of “popular ijihad”? For example, did the participants use the term “ijihad” or did they discuss the right or even the need of an individual to interpret the religious scriptures and authorities by themselves? The analysis demonstrates the way in which Russian Muslims adopted arguments from the representatives of the “new ulema” but it would be interesting to read more about how they creatively combined and reinterpreted these. If other scholars would like to apply the concept of “popular ijihad” in future, what would be its definition or specific features in contrast to a just a discussion with some different opinions? [6]

The conclusions gather the main findings and arguments of the article but also seems to introduce some new topics. Though the conclusions, as the article in general, contains many original insights, I would again recommend clarifying what the main finding of the study is or what is the main argument it wishes to put forward. [7]

5. Summary, final verdict, and rationale for your decision:

The article contains many insights, it participates in two timely discussions about the reactions to Covid-19 in Muslim communities and the change in the religious authority. However, the [8]

main research question and argument could be formulated more clearly in the introduction, in the analysis and in the conclusions. Therefore I recommend publishing this article only after minor revisions.