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It should be said that I referred to ecumenism in its wide, inter-confessional, context. If scrutinized in the narrow, "inner-Christian," context, it can be concluded that its followers should have concentrated on removing the internal contradictions rather than playing the roles already claimed by the numerous new and non-traditional religions and movements acting out their parts on the globalization arena. So far it remains one of the many social utopias.

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ISLAMIC TRADITION IN THE CAUCASUS: AMIDST TRADITIONALISM, REFORMISM, AND SECULARISM

Abstract

slamic tradition is never questioned by its followers, yet for centuries it has remained and still remains a subject of all sorts of interpretations. This article attempts to grasp the meaning of Islamic traditionalism by assessing its impact on Islam in the Caucasus along with the potential of Islamic revivalism and the future of Islam in secular states.

Introduction

The way Islamic tradition is treated in Azerbaijan and the Northern Caucasus (the specifics of Islamic development notwithstanding) is one the major factors of religious life in both of them. The traditional clergy, finely tuned to the slightest political changes, claims exclusive right to interpretation of Islamic tradition. However, remaining as it is in pinching religious-cultic limits, it is not yet ready for a dialog with its religion opponents. It is unable to fully tap the social and spiritual potential of Islam, which undermines confidence in it and in Islamic tradition as a whole. The void is gradually being filled by preachers of revivalist Islam who, being disunited ideologically and organizationally, are vulnerable in the face of the internal and external forces that use groups of Muslim (mainly young) activists to alter the vector of religious development. The government, which never tires of repeating that the moral and ethical values of Islam are indispensable for cultural development and a dialog between civilizations, still treats the Muslim communities with caution.

This is an attempt to assess the religious development in the Caucasus and its short-term perspectives by identifying the specific features of Islamic traditionalism, its influence on domestic policies, the most typical trends of religious thought in the Caucasus, and their analogies elsewhere in the Islamic world. In the Caucasus, Islam is developing in secular states, which makes it necessary to demonstrate how the limits of secularism change from one state to another and to assess the prospects of political Islam in the region.

Specifics of
Islamic Traditionalism

Western social thought has been interested in cultural-historical traditions and their impact on personal and social development since the 17th century. The historical-political reasons for the critical attitude toward traditions apart, we must admit that traditions are an inevitable feature of any mature ideological system. David Gross, an American sociologist, pointed out that certain "naturally surviving traditions" find themselves "subsisting in a context that is by no means conducive to it: a context dominated by a state, market, and culture industry whose basic collective interests are anti-traditional."[1]

There is a multitude of approaches to the problem, yet different interpretations of the term "tradition" are very close. Sometimes it is described as "a component of the social and cultural heritage which for a long time remains alive in society or individual social groups and is part and parcel of their value system."[2] Traditional society, therefore, is described as a society "in which institutions and ideas of the past assume the role of the main form of reproduction of the given social system."[3] Traditional society rests on an ideology created by the preserved social order, traditional institutions, and values that evolved throughout history. According to American sociologist Edward Shils, "traditionalism is deliberate and persistent confirmation of traditional norms, while being fully aware of their traditional nature and fully convinced that their value stems from the traditional transfer from a certain holy source."[4] For this reason we distinguish between reactionary traditions that slow down sociocultural development and progressive traditions that bring law and order to evolutionary processes.

Traditional societies depend on historically developed institutions in order to function: these institutions maintain public order and contacts between generations; for this reason the traditionalists treat the impact of industrial culture as potentially dangerous. On the one hand, modernization removes certain cultural distinctions, while on the other, changes in public order and scientific achievements may cast doubt on some aspects of tradition and set destructive social processes in motion. M. Barbashin has the following to say on this score: "If any of the cultural pillars crumbles and the spiritual sphere proves unable to compensate for this, the economic and social structures suffer."[5]

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[1] D. Gross, *The Past in Ruins: Tradition and the Critique of Modernity,* University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1992, p. 126.

[2] I.N. Andreeva, "Traditsia," in: *Sotsiologicheskaia entsiklopedia,* ed. by A.N. Danilov, Belorusskaia entsiklopedia Publishers, Minsk, 2003, p. 331.

[3] L.R. Polonskaia, A.Kh. Vafa, *Vostok: idei i ideologi (Kritika burzhuaznykh i melkoburzhuaznykh kontseptsiy "tret'ego puti" razvitiia,* Nauka Publishers, Main Editorial Board of Oriental Literature, Moscow, 1982, pp. 40-41.

[4] Quoted from: V.V. Aver'ianov, "Traditsia i traditsionalism v nauchnoy i obshchestvennoy mysli Rossii (60-90-e gody XX veka," in: *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost',* No. 1, 2000, p. 72.

[5] M.Iu. Barbashin, "Teoreticheskie aspekty transformatsii kul'tur (sotsiologicheskie podkhody k tranzitivnostu," in: *Traditsionalizm i modernizatsia na Severnom Kavkaze, Iuzhnorossiskoe obozrenie Tsentra sistemnykh regional'nykh issledovaniy i prognozirovania IPPK RGU i ISPI RAN,* Issue 23, Rostov-on-Don, 2004, available at [http://kavkazonline.ru/csrip/docs/pdfs/uro_23.pdf].

Islam is a traditionalist ideology because it rests on the holy tradition represented by the Quran and the Sunnah. The earliest Muslim societies, however, caught in the whirlpool of economic, political, and social changes, cannot be called traditionalist in the full sense of the word. In fact, during the first three centuries of Islam social thought was developing along the principles of ijtihad, independent investigation of the holy tradition in search of adequate answers to the ever emerging questions related to all aspects of social life.

In the mid-9th century, however, Muslim socio-religious thought was bogged down in taqlid, "uncritical imitation." At the early stages the Shari'a sciences were institutionalized through the development of the theological, legal, and ideological legacy of the founders of the madhhabs and their closest followers in the form of fundamental works on Islamic principles and law, later shortened and simplified to serve the wide masses of the faithful. At this stage the ijtihad supporters proved unable to check the inertia of the madhhabs that were rapidly building up their influence. Over time the contradictions among the madhhabs developed into fanatical rejection of any ideas that did not fit the frameworks of any of them. The relations among the followers can be aptly described as mutual enmity and hatred. According to a biography of Qadi Muhammad ibn Musa al-Bilasaguni (d. in 506 H.), one of the Hanafi theologians, he used to say: "Had I the power I would have taxed the Shafi'ites with jizia" (the duty paid by non-Muslims).[6]

Taqlid was one of the reasons why Islamic socio-religious thought was fossilized. Ibn Haldun wrote in his *Prolegomena*: "You should know that among the factors that prevent people from seeking knowledge and achieving their aims there are too many works, as well as too many different terms and teaching methods. The students and pupils have to memorize them to become teachers in turn. The pupil must learn all the texts, or nearly all of them, by heart and follow these methods. Meanwhile, human life, even if completely dedicated to the study of everything written about one discipline, is too short."[7]

Interference of the rulers and the nobility in university and madrasah affairs was another factor behind the crisis of Islamic thought. As-Sayyid Sabiq wrote: "One of the reasons why the spirit of backwardness spread everywhere was the building of madrasahs by rulers and the rich at which only one or several selected madhhabs were taught. The ulema, who preferred to continue drawing their salaries, made this possible by abandoning ijtihad. Abu Zur'a asked his teacher al-Balqini: 'Why did sheikh Taqi ad-Din as-Subki ignore ijtihad while having perfect command of all the instruments?' Al-Balkini kept silent while Abu Zur'a continued: 'I think he abandoned ijtihad for the post that could be filled only by a lawyer of one of the four madhhabs (he refers to the four most popular theological and legal schools—the madhhabs of Abu Hanifah, Malik ibn Anas, Muhammad as-Shafii and Ahmad ibn Hanbal.—E.K.). A person who went beyond these limits could not hope to get the post and lost his right to work as a qadi while people would reject his fetwahs and call him a heretic.' Al-Balkini smiled and agreed with him."[8]

The zeal with which the theological-legal schools tried to preserve their principles cemented the traditionalist approaches. The traditionalists rejected ijtihad, which helped adjust the Shari'a to different historical, national, cultural, and other conditions.[9] Those Islamic scholars who tried to revive the early tradition of independent study of the Quran and the Sunnah were persecuted by the traditionalists and rulers who succumbed to their influence. This happened to many of the theologians, including Taqi ad-Din Ibn Taymiyya, Shams ad-Din Ibn al-Kayyim, and Jamal ad-Din al-Kasimi.

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[6] See: Az-Zahabi Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *Mizan al-I'tidal,* Vol. 6, Dar al-kutub al-ilmiyya, Beirut, 1995, p. 350.

[7] Ibn Haldun, *Tarih,* Bayt al-afqar ad-dauliyya, Amman-Ar Riyadh, p. 287.

[8] As-Sayyid Sabik, *Fikh as-sunna,* Vol. 1, Dar al-jayl, Beirut, 1416/1995, p. 10.

[9] See: D. Makarov, R. Mukhametshin, "Official and Unofficial Islam," in: *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia: Public and Private Faces,* ed. by H. Pilkington, G. Yemelianova, Routledge Curzon, London, 2002, pp. 124-125.

B. Erasov, one of the students of traditionalism, has pointed out that in the Middle Ages there was the wrong impression that the world had finally been cognized: "Hence the mounting deadening formalism in religious conscience; frequently the earlier level of religious rationality was simply abandoned. Thinking is channeled not toward seeking new but toward organizing and improving already existing knowledge, its interpretation and adjustment to the new circumstances."[10]

This means that as early as in the Middle Ages traditionalism in most regions of the Islamic world was reduced to the dogmatic adjustment of social life and even scholarly thought to the theological-legal texts of the madhhabs and ideological attitudes of speculative theology (kalam). It refused to adapt the main sources of faith and law (the Quran and the Sunnah) to the changing realities but interpreted them according to the traditions of the theological schools.

These specifics of Islamic traditionalism can still be observed everywhere, Azerbaijan and the Northern Caucasus being no exception. I. Dobaev has pointed out in this respect: "According to the traditionalists, Islamic heritage cannot become an object of scholarly historical studies. They insist that the speculative approaches to the sacral texts that took shape in the Middle Ages should be strictly followed together with the traditions of the past and the indisputability of the religious wisemen. This is what taqlid is about. More likely than not they are critical of rationalist analysis of the religious dogmas."[11]

Traditionalism and Islam in the Caucasus

In all cases the official clergy can be safely counted among the supporters of traditional Islam in the Caucasus, along with most Muslims who, being completely satisfied with observing some of the traditions, never bother about the meaning of their religion and religious practices. The clergy, which claims that their interpretation of religion is the only correct one and fears to lose their grip, has chosen confrontation with any groups of Muslims potentially able to undermine their ideological underpinning and narrow down their social basis.

Clergy members who take all calls for change in religious life as the enemy's attempts to undermine the unity of the Muslim ummah have chosen the role of "custodians of the traditional way of life and religious ideals that popular consciousness identifies with social justice."[12]

This did not help the official clergy to preserve its popularity: according to expert opinion, in Azerbaijan the Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus (AMC) is not popular either among the faithful or among the public at large.[13] The public opinion poll conducted by the FAR Center revealed that merely 13.5 percent of the polled trusted any of the religious leaders while the AMC Chairman had only 4 percent on his side.[14]

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[10] B.S. Erasov, *Sothial'no-kul'turnye traditsii i obshchestvennoe soznanie v razvivaiushchikhsia stranakh Azii i Afriki,* Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1982, p. 67.

[11] I.P. Dobaev, "Islamskiy traditsionalizm na Severnom Kavkaze," in: *Traditsionalizm i modernizatsia na Severnom Kavkaze, Iuzhnorossiskoe obozrenie Tsentra sistemnykh regional'nykh issledovaniy i prognozirovania IPPK RGU i ISPI RAN,* Issue 23, Rostov on Don, 2004, available at [http://kavkazonline.ru/csrip/docs/pdfs/uro_23.pdf].

[12] L.R. Polonskaia, A.Kh. Vafa, op. cit., p. 46.

[13] See, for example: B. Middel, *State and Religion in the Black Sea Region,* Report 035 CDSDG 07 E on 2007 Spring Session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, available at [http://www.nato-pa.int].

[14] See: S.E. Cornell, *The Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan,* Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2006, pp. 63-64. According to the result obtained by the Institute of Peace and Democracy in 2003, the AMC chairman had the support of 27 percent of the polled (34 percent against and 39 percent neutral or undecided) (see: A.S. Iunusov, *Islam in Azerbaijan,* Zaman Publishers, Baku, 2004, p. 305).

This is also true of Daghestan. According to the poll conducted by the Center of Information and Analysis at the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth Policies of Daghestan, an approximately equal number of people approve of and criticize the involvement of religious organizations in the republic's political life (42 and 44 percent, respectively).[15]

The low level of popular trust in the traditionalists does not reflect the attitude toward Islam as a whole. The already mentioned poll conducted by the Institute of Peace and Democracy in 2003 revealed that in Azerbaijan 97 percent of people born into Muslim families spoke of themselves as faithful.[16] It seems that mistrust is limited to the religious leaders and to the predominant tradition which is irrational and complicated.

Here is how Uzbek academic Bayram Balji described one of the Shi'a rites he observed in March 2004 and February 2005 in the Nardaran settlement outside Baku: "In the small hours pilgrims filled the main streets of the town; they all went to the Rahime-Hanim tomb. Some of them had spent the night at the holy place. After venerating the shrine the crowd filled the vast esplanade between the tomb and the still unfinished mosque. The public address system was blaring out ayahs as well as wails for Hussein. The mullah, whose accent betrayed an Iranian Azeri, delivered a sermon that contained no anti-government salvos. In the center the faithful aligned themselves into two rows that formed two groups in which the main scenes of Ashura took place. In one of the groups made up of children and teenagers between 12 and 16, the men rhythmically beat themselves with chains to the accompaniment of singing and shouts from the crowd. From time to time the participants went into a frenzy—their shouts showed their despondency caused by the thought that they had been unable to support Hussein during his execution and contained condemnations of his murderers."[17]

The Sufi traditions of the Northern Caucasus are no less complicated and just as hard to explain. Witness what J. Spencer Trimingham had to say about the procedure of secret prayer (*dhikr khafi*) practiced in Naqshbandiya: "He must keep the tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, his lips and teeth firmly shut, and hold his breath. Then starting with the word *la,* he makes it ascend from the navel to the brain. When it has arrived at the brain he says *ilaha* to the right shoulder and *illa 'llah,* to the left side, driving it forcefully into the pineal heart through which it circulates to all the rest of the body. The phrase *Muhammad rasul Allah* is made to incline from the left to the right side, and then one says, 'My God, Thou art my goal and satisfying Thee is my aim.'" Trimingham's comment: this is the simplest of all practiced forms of the rite.[18]

These and similar customs and rites with no justification in the Quran and the Sunnah make tradition open to criticism. For this reason the clergy prefers to avoid an open dialog and any steps toward either the right (radical groups) or the left (reformers and modernists).

The cult of the saints rooted in ancient pagan cultures is one of the elements of Islamic traditionalism in the Caucasus that draws criticism from all sorts of Islamic schools and non-Muslim students of Islam. It has been accepted for a fact that fire-worshiping and paganism left a deep imprint on the traditions and ways of the Azeri Muslims.[19] Indeed, many of the holy places are closely associated with totemic and animistic religious ideas—their Muslim associations date to much later times: respected Muslims were often buried close to the pirs while their tombstones carried epitaphs in the Arabic alphabet.[20]

Prominent Hungarian Orientalist Ignác Goldziher wrote in his time that the holy tree is associated with Muhammad or a wali might be buried under it. While the pagan form of tree cult might live

[15] See: *Religia i SMI,* 9 November, 2007, available at [http://religare.ru/article47293.htm].
[16] See: A.S. Iunusov, op. cit., p. 295.
[17] B. Balji, "Sud'by shiizma v postsovetskom Azerbaidzhane," available at [http://www.islamica.ru/?pageID=217].
[18] J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam,* Oxford University Press, U.S., 1973, p. 202.
[19] See: R. Aslanova, *Islam and Culture,* Baku, 2002, p. 281 (in Azerbaijani).
[20] See: Z.I. Iampolskiy, "Piry Azerbaidzhana," *Voprosy religii i ateizma,* Issue 8, Moscow, 1960, pp. 229-236.

on in a desert outside Muslim traditions, in Muslim towns this cult depends on an association with a saint for its further existence in Islam."[21]

The revivalists (modernists, reformers, and traditionalists) reject traditional Islam because of its inflexible conservatism and remnants of paganism. They all look at the traditional clergy as "priests" who do not merely obstruct the development of Islamic thought but also of society as a whole. The three groups, however, cannot agree among themselves on many religious and sociopolitical issues.

The modernists are convinced that the future of Muslim societies hinges on their emulation of the European lifestyle and acceptance of Western values. Far from rejecting the ideological experience and organization of the West they are "out to adjust Islam to the borrowed forms of social development and to the Europeanized and Americanized lifestyles."[22] Those who think like this are normally critical of the religious theories and practice that stand between their ideas and the faithful.

The traditionalist revivalists insist that religion should be purified of novelties: they blame the present decline of the Muslim societies on their abandonment of the ideological heritage and practices of early Islam. This is the most active and the least cohesive group with no shared ideas about the world and way of action. V. Naumkin of Russia agrees with the authors of the report supplied by the International Crisis Group: he describes them as "Islamic activists" and divides them into the supporters of political, missionary, and jihad Islam.[23]

Both forms of traditionalism rely on the middle class and poor sections in cities and the countryside, which adds heat to the contradictions raging in Islam. While in Azerbaijan they have not developed into an open confrontation between those who support the clergy and the "activists" (mainly because both groups are too small), in the Northern Caucasus the conflict is developing along different lines. In his fundamental work E. Kisriev has written: "The religious split between the Wahhabis and the tariqat-ists has finally left the narrow circles of Islamic intellectuals to engulf the larger part of the republic's faithful, and not only it… Families in which children went against their fathers or brothers became enemies are not rare. This means that the split into the Wahhabis and tariqatists was a profoundly *societal* phenomenon with serious sociopolitical repercussions."[24]

In its fight against the "activists" traditional Islam demonstrated inordinate flexibility: on the one hand, unlike their opponents, the traditionalists pushed their former contradictions aside to close ranks. On the other, all of them (with the exception of the Chechen tariqatists during the first Chechen war of 1994-1996) demonstrated their loyalty to secular powers, which ensured them support of the power-related structures. This is a no mean political achievement of the Caucasian tariqats since in the past Muridism was regarded as an ideology of resistance to Russian power in the Caucasus.[25]

Reformism in the Caucasus: Revival after a Century of Silence

The Muslim reformist movement, the third group that challenged traditional Islam, took shape in the latter half of the 19th century when the anti-imperialist movement was at its height.

[21] I. Goldziher, *Kult sviatykh v islame*, Moscow, 1938, p. 82.

[22] Iu.M. Kobishchanov, "Islamskoe reformatorstvo," in: *Islam v Zapadnoy Afrike*, Nauka Publishers, Main Editorial Board of Oriental Literature, Moscow, 1988, p. 50.

[23] See: V.V. Naumkin, *Islamskiy radikalizm v zerkale novykh kontseptsiy i podkhodov*, KomKniga, Moscow, 2005, pp. 47-48.

[24] E.F. Kisriev, *Islam i vlast' v Daghestane*, OGI, Moscow, 2004, p. 148.

[25] See: N.A. Smirnov, *Muridism na Kavkaze*, Publishing House of the U.S.S.R. AS, Moscow, 1963, p. 142.

The reformers who looked at social history in the light of contemporary theories fit Islamic values into the social context; they worked on the religion's rationalist content and urged to revive the ijtihad tradition.

In the Russian Empire this took the form of Jadidism which in the early 20th century reached the Caucasus. Jadidism, which called for a reassessment of the Islamic tradition and criticized taqlid, found its way to the Muslim schools in the form of new teaching methods. The Russian reformists poured their efforts into the educational system.[26]

Galina Yemelianova has written that in Russia the Islamic reformers insisted on ijtihad as a creative approach to Islam: "They rejected Islamic scholasticism and the dogmatic and factional differences between Sunni and Shi'a Islams and, in particular, within Sunni and Shi'a Islams. Instead they emphasized the cultural and ethical dimensions of the Islamic faith, viewing it first and foremost as a source of moral judgment and self-control for the individual. They suggested a modified interpretation of iman (faith), namaz (prayer), zakat (alms) and other basics of Islam, which reflected Russian geographic and cultural realities."[27]

Today, just like 100 years ago reformism strives for the reform of Islamic religious education. The Muslim reformers in Azerbaijan and the Northern Caucasus do not discard the positive experience of the West in the conviction that rationalism in Islam will make it easier to adapt it to the never ending changes.

The altered political and sociocultural realities notwithstanding, the reformers still rely on what Muhammad Iqbal said some 80 years ago. He described the incredible speed with which the world of Islam was moving toward the West as the most striking feature of his time. There was nothing negative in this movement, said he, because intellectually European culture was nothing more than the evolution of some of most important stages in the history of Islamic culture. He voiced his apprehension, however, that the brilliant external side of European culture might slow down the movement and would not allow Muslims to reach its genuine inner spirituality.[28]

The reformers frequently appeal to reason; they turn to the holy tradition in an effort to deal with the problems created by scientific and technical progress and the socioeconomic changes. The ijtihad, however, practices and the quest for new solutions inevitably breed errors, which gives the traditionalists and other opponents a chance to criticize the reformists and lure away the larger part of their supporters.

The traditional clergy, which uses the same weapons to fight both "Islamic activists" and reformers, is partly responsible for the Muslim reformers' narrow social basis.[29] Neither in Azerbaijan nor in the Northern Caucasus do the reformers have financial and administrative resources at their disposal; their ideas are rejected. "The reformers lose to their opponents," writes Alexei Malashenko, "because they offer ideas that are outside the grasp of the average Muslim. They appeal to reason rather than to feelings and faith. They have been removed from their posts in mosques. Finally, there are few of them. More than that: they can be easily accused of aping the West and of betraying Islamic tradition, which makes the already hard task of promoting their ideas even harder."[30]

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[26] See: Z. Abdulagatov, "Wahhabism and Jadidism in Islamic Consciousness in Daghestan: Parallels and Contradictions," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (42), 2006, p. 98.

[27] G. Yemelianova, "Islam in Russia: An Historical Perspective," in: *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia: Public and Private Faces*, p. 34.

[28] See: M. Iqbal, *Rekonstruktsia religioznoy mysli v islame* (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam), transl. from the English, Vostochnaia Literatura Publishers, Moscow, 2002, p. 30.

[29] A similar situation could be observed in the Russian Empire in the latter half of the 19th-early 20th centuries: the traditionalists (qadimites) accused the jadides of heresy and tapped the administrative resource to remove the latter from all posts in madrasahs and mosques.

[30] A. Malashenko, *Islamskaia al'ternativa i islamskiy proekt*, Ves mir Publishers, Moscow, 2006, p. 129.

Some experts describe the Wahhabi (Salafi) movement as reformist for the simple reason that they call on the faithful to purify Islam "of the layers accumulated throughout the centuries in theology and religious practices and sanctifying the institutions typical of the feudal retrogressive society."[31]

On some points the difference between the traditionalists and reformers is vague because all Islamic trends appeal to the two main sources—the Quran and the Sunnah—when it comes to theological and practical issues. The holy tradition also contained the idea of reform (tajdid) based on the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: "A Mujadid will appear at the end of every century."[32]

Nevertheless, Alexey Malashenko has pointed out that the generally accepted classification of Islamic thought does not relate the Salafites to the reformers. "Islamic reformism," writes he, "is something connected with the modernization of Islamic interpretations, a synthesis of Islamic tradition and external novelties—first of all, those which the Islamic ummah borrows from the West. If we recognize that the reform of Islam can take place only when the religion is purified of wrong ideas, which include the pre-Islamic archaisms, then we can agree, to a certain extent, that reformism and Salafi are correlated."[33]

Secularism
Caucasian-Style

The West first formulated the idea of secularism and the need to keep religion apart from public and state institutions during the Enlightenment. Modernism, which dominated in the 20th century, completely undermined the position of religion in the mass consciousness by supplanting it with faith in science's unlimited potential. Today, in the clutches of doubt and uncertainty, post-modernist society is pushing Western man toward religion, occultism, and irrational methods of maintaining psychological equilibrium. The academic community has already registered the mounting interest in the West in magic practices and folk beliefs. "The shaking of confidence in rational thinking, which was promoted by modernity, induces the reappearance of many kinds of non-rational practices, which affords the opportunity for popular religion to regain the popularity and legitimacy which modernity intended to eradicate."[34]

This has not stopped secularization in the West: today religion is pushed aside not by developing scientific conscience but by global processes that are becoming increasingly hard to control. In contemporary society the boundary between the secular and the religious is highly fluid—the repercussions of which cannot so far be assessed. "The secularization thesis explains why and how religion as an arena of human endeavor faces peculiar challenges in contemporary global society; it cannot, however, predict how the observable responses in the religious domain will fare, simply because at that macrosocial level there are far too many variables at play."[35]

Despite the fact that most contemporary societies are described as secular there is no unified idea of secularism: its essence and practice change from country to country. In France, where the

[31] Z.I. Levin, *Razvitie arabskoy obshchestvennoy mysli,* Nauka Publishers, Main Editorial Board of Oriental Literature, Moscow, 1984, p. 194.

[32] The hadith was related by Abu Davud, al-Hakim and al-Bayhaki in Ma'rif as reported by Abu Hurayry. Al'Albani described it as authentic (see: Sahih al-jami' as-sagir [1874]).

[33] A. Malashenko, "Sheikh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab: propoved' i politika," in: Suleyman ibn Abd ar-Rahman al-Hukayl, *Zhizn' sheikha Muhammada ibn Abd al-Wahhaba,* Progress Publishing Group, Moscow, 2003, pp. 9-10.

[34] L. Voyé, "Secularization in a Context of Advanced Modernity," *Sociology of Religion,* Vol. 60, Issue 3, 1999, p. 279.

[35] P. Beyer, "Secularization from the Perspective of Globalization: A Response to Dobbelaere," *Sociology of Religion,* Vol. 60, Issue 3, p. 299.

bourgeois revolution of the late 18th century established inflexible principles of secularism not found elsewhere in Europe, the state has distanced itself from the Catholic Church while all sorts of religious rites are banned in the state educational establishments. In Germany, on the other hand, religion is taught among other subjects in the state schools while the followers of the Catholic and Evangelic churches pay church taxes. In Norway, the state supports confessions and even funds religious communities. The institute of state religion is present in the U.K., Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Greece, and other countries.

From the very first days of independence the post-Soviet Caucasian states had to identify the limits of secularism. Until recently, however, the relations between the state and religious institutions remained more or less vague. This happened at the time when religion in the West was regaining its lost ground: "In the stable democratic societies the political methods of regulating social relations are gradually retreating to be replaced with moral and religious norms. The religious factor is playing an increasingly greater role in the political process itself."[36]

In the Russian Federation religious policies are expected to promote "harmony rather than opposition between the secular and the religious."[37] At the same time, the state is consolidating the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in public life. The "dual standards" leave the religious minorities vexed: they insist on complete equality of all religions before the law and the state.

The Muslim clergy of the Russian Federation, the Council of Muftis of Russia in particular, defend the principle of secularism and call on the government to keep all confessions at an equal distance from itself. The Muslim clerics regard the legal relations regulated by international and federal laws as identical to the concept of contract in Islam.[38]

Traditionally the Armenian Apostolic Church not only enjoys certain privileges but also greatly influences state policy. The constitutional amendment adopted by the 2005 referendum legalized the Armenian Apostolic Church's special role: "The state recognizes the exclusive historical mission of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church as a national church in spiritual life, in the development of national culture, and in the preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia." Earlier the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations recognized the Armenian Apostolic Church as the national church, although technically it was equal to the other religious organizations.

In Georgia, the church plays a much lesser role in social and political developments. Nevertheless, in 2003 the Georgian Orthodox Church and the state entered a Constitutional agreement that recognized the special role of Orthodoxy in shaping the Georgian nation and culture.

In Azerbaijan, with its predominantly Muslim population, neither the clergy nor the state has so far initiated a similar concordat despite the tangible Islamic influence on the masses. The relations between the state and religion should be clarified: today there are fears that the geopolitical reality and ideological expansion of the West might bring religious extremes in the form of fundamentalism and religious cosmopolitism.[39]

The idea of a secular state in Azerbaijan is not opposed to religion, yet it presupposes that the religious factor should not be used "to alter the country's strategic course, reorient religious ideas on a mass scale, or put psychological pressure on the broad popular masses through religious canons."[40]

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[36] A.A. Nurullaev, "O sootnoshenii politiki i religii," *Vestnik Rossiiskogo unversiteta druzhby narodov.* Political Science Series, No. 2, 2000, p. 62.

[37] See: *Kontseptsia gosudarstvennoy religioznoy politiki RF, razrabotannaia kafedroy religiovedenia Rossiiskoy akademii gosudarstvennoy sluzhby pri Prezidente RF in 2003 g.,* available at [http://www.religare.ru/article8227.htm].

[38] See: Dokument Soveta muftiev Rossii "Osnovnye polozhenia sotsialnoy programmy rossiiskikh musul'man," available at [http://www.muslim.ru/1/cont/8/15/99.htm].

[39] See: R. Mehtiev, "The State and Society under Globalization," *Azerbaijan,* 25 September, 2007 (in Azeri).

[40] R. Mehtiev, *Na puti k demokratii: razmyshliaia o nasledii,* Sherg-Gerb, Baku, 2007, p. 569.

This limits the role of Islam to a source of morality and "an element of what can instill compassion and solidarity."[41]

This means that the traditions of secularism in each of the Caucasian states are developing in the context of national, cultural, and religious specifics. In all of them the state is separated from the church, yet this principle is interpreted and applied in practice in full conformity with the objective (the ethnoconfessional picture, domestic policy, etc.) and subjective (interests of the political elite, activeness of the traditional religious institutions, etc.) factors.

Islam in the Caucasus: Standing up to Islamism

In the early post-Soviet period the Caucasus became the target of Sunni and Shi'a ideologies, which regarded the Shari'a state as the main objective of Islam.[42] Today, religious and religious-political thought lumps them together under the blanket term Islamism (political Islam). At the same time, not all and every interference of Islam in politics can be dismissed as Islamism. Islam is not limited to the private lives of its followers; it is a comprehensive system that not only comprises the varied aspects of earthly life but also connects man with the Cosmos and his life on earth with eternity. The moral norms of Islam are applied both to spiritual life and to the relations between social structures. In other words, Islamic tradition demands that moral norms should be observed in politics as strictly as in economics, science, and other fields of human endeavor.

In the absence of a generally accepted conceptual apparatus the media and even the academic community are not alien to speculating about the concepts of Islamism and fundamentalism. Igor Dobaev, a leading Russian student of Islam and its problems in the Northern Caucasus, describes as Islamist all sorts of armed groups that he regards as either radical or as extremist or terrorist.[43] K. Poliakov, on the other hand, sets apart Islamism, Islamic radicalism, Islamic extremism, and terrorism proper: to bundle them together, says he, renders opposition to the "negative phenomena in this sphere"[44] unproductive.

Political Islam relies on the Islamic factor in its political struggle for the Shari'a state as its final aim. This sets strictly apart Islamism and the political activities of the Shi'a and Khawarij sects in the Caliphate, Islamism and 19th-century militant Muridism in the Caucasus, and Islamism and the political activities of parties that rely on Islamic morality yet are not seeking the Shari'a state (such is the Justice and Development Party in Turkey).

Interpreted in this way political Islam has nothing to do with the religious culture of the Caucasian peoples—it was elaborated by Muslim thinkers and public figures after 1924 when the Caliphate disappeared. Political experience of the Muslims of the Caucasus between the 1st Congress of the Muslims of Russia of 1905 and the establishment of Soviet power cannot be described as Islamism either because it stemmed, first and foremost, from defense of the Muslim peoples' political, civil, and religious rights.

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[41] Ibid., p. 579.

[42] For more detailed criticism of these religious-political trends, see: al-Madhali Rabi' Hadi, *Mudrost' i logika prizyva prorokov k Allahu*, Transl. from the Arabic by E. Kuliev, Badr Publishers, Moscow, 2000, pp. 106-120.

[43] See: I. Dobaev, "The Islamist Movement in the Northern Caucasus: Trends, Possible Developments, and How to Oppose It," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (39), 2006, pp. 146-152.

[44] K.I. Poliakov, *Arabskiy Vostok i Rossia: problema islamskogo fundamentalizma*, Editorial URSS, Moscow, 2003, pp. 141-142.

It was mainly Iranian missionaries who brought political Islam to Azerbaijan, while the Northern Caucasus got its share of it from the Gulf countries. The Islamists, however, failed to gain wider social strata: the pro-Iranian Islamic Party of Azerbaijan remained on the stage for less than three years: its official registration was annulled as early as in 1995. The Islamic Democratic Party of Azerbaijan born in 2002 has not yet obtained official registration. The Islamist ideas have gained no popularity in the country; those who side with the Shi'a leaders promoting political Islam are few and do not carry much weight with the public.

In the Northern Caucasus, the pro-Islamic parties and movements that appeared in 1989 and 1990 very soon fell apart into regional structures for want of inner unity, ramified ideology, political experience, and skilful management. Domestic instability in Daghestan and the war in Chechnia pushed the Islamist jamaats to radicalism; political methods of struggle were forgotten. This explains why in 1994 the leaders of the Islamic parties preferred not to apply for official registration.[45]

What happened later in Chechnia and Daghestan strongly affected the religious and political preferences of the Muslims across the post-Soviet expanse. In the latter half of the 1990s radical Sunni ideas reached Azerbaijan from the Northern Caucasus. Later, however, in 1999-2000, when the Caucasian jamaats were defeated and the open armed conflict went underground, the influence of the Islamic radicals on the region subsided.

Why and how political Islam in the Northern Caucasus developed into a jihad is a separate subject.[46] Here I shall limit myself to saying that neither political Islam nor religiously motivated extremism became the key factors of religious development in the Caucasus. K. Gajiev has rightly pointed out: "The budding interest in Islam obvious among large groups in the Caucasus cannot be interpreted as a firm intention to adjust the lifestyle to the Islamic norms. In this context Islam cannot be regarded as a systemic factor of statehood and political strategies."[47] Alexey Malashenko confirms this by saying that Islam as a political instrument not only failed to bring together the Caucasian peoples—it split local society.[48]

The negative effects of Islamic politicization and radicalization can be described as the highest stumbling block on the Muslim ummah's road toward spiritual, economic, and cultural consolidation. Previous experience[49] and the current political and socioeconomic situation in the Caucasus suggest that neither administrative methods nor force will produce the desired results unless genuine Islam based on spirituality, morality, tolerance, and the holy tradition adjusted to the current sociocultural conditions moves to the fore.

Those who think that Islam can be separated from the Shari'a are wrong.[50] Russian expert on Islam Leonid Sjukijainen is convinced that the attempts to divorce Islam from the Shari'a will push

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[45] See: V. Bobrovnikov, "The 'Islamic Revival' in Daghestan: Twenty Years Later," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (44), 2007, p. 144.

[46] For more detail, see: R. Kurbanov, "Interaction between Power and Religion in Daghestan: Experience, Errors, and Lessons," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (33), 2005, pp. 77-88.

[47] K.S. Gajiev, *Geopolitika Kavkaza*, Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia Publishers, Moscow, 2003, p. 276.

[48] See: A. Malashenko, "Dva neskhozhikh renessansa," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, No. 5 (14), 2003, available at [http://magazines.russ.ru/oz/2003/5/2003_5_68.html].

[49] Back in 1930 General Paskevich wrote to Nicholas I: "Our policy and our treatment of the mountain peoples were wrong. Cruelty bred hatred and called for retribution; lack of firmness and indecision betrayed weakness and inadequate strength" (see: M.Ia. Geller, *Istoria Rossiiskoy imperii*, in 3 vols, Vol. 1, MIK Publishers, Moscow, 1997, p. 62, available at [http://www.krotov.info/history/11/geller/gell_19b.html]).

[50] According to Azerbaijanian academic N. Qasýmoðlu, the calls to observe the Shari'a "objectively contain impulses of the politicization of Islam and establishment of a religious social order" (see: N. Qasımoğlu, *Islam and a Secular State (Should the State Interfere with the Religious Issues)*, available at [http://ddm.iatp.az/ddm/devlaz.html], in Azeri). Politician H. Hacizadə is of the same opinion (see: H. Hacizadə, "What is Going On in the Muslim World and What is the Future of Religious Freedom in Azerbaijan," *III Sector—Democratic Journal*, No. 7, 2004, available at [http://www.3-cusektor.org/n7/n7_meruze.htm], in Azeri).

this powerful political and ideological tool into the hands of Islamic radicals. "As a rule, Muslim laws are much more effective than civil legislation when it comes to pushing aside the adats found outside any legal system. This means that the Shari'a is not merely a legal instrument proper but is also a powerful socio-psychological factor. We all know that Muslim laws are effective because they are especially close to the Muslims' legal awareness and world outlook. They perceive the laws as closely connected with their national and cultural roots and faith. Muslim legislation is an instrument that makes the current laws legitimate."[51]

It seems that a stronger position for the moderate Muslims actively involved in public life and state development is the only answer to the challenge of Islamism. To achieve this the legal principles and mechanisms of interaction between the state and the Islamic religious institutions should be improved; the most respected and knowledgeable religious leaders should be supported: if the state sides with those religious figures who have no support among the faithful it loses the chance of tapping the moral and intellectual potential of Islam needed to strengthen the state and civil society. In fact, in this situation society falls apart into jamaats.[52]

C o n c l u s i o n

The above has demonstrated that the nature of Islam in the Caucasus largely depends on which of the interpretations of Islamic tradition triumphs in the near future and to what extent Islam will affect the sociocultural processes. So far, the passivity of official Islam and its inflexibility in the face of the revivalist ideas have limited Islam as a social regulator. The still pending political, social, and economic problems, along with the outside factors, create fertile ground for religious radicalism.

Under these conditions a special type of religiosity that brings together Islamic tradition and the readiness to critically revise it is badly needed. It should be free from extremism, radicalism, and isolationism; it should facilitate instead integration into society and involvement in social and political processes. So far, Muslim religious thinking in the Caucasus has been changing at a slow pace. The reformers who have some of the faithful on their side have neither an active religious position nor administrative, financial, and other support.

When deciding on the limits of secularism in Azerbaijan and the North Caucasian republics, the government is not taking full account of the potential of reformist Islam. The dialog with the Muslim communities is mostly one-sided; it can be described as an attempt to change the religious situation from above. The last three centuries, however, have demonstrated that force and administrative measures cannot produce long-term results. Today, these measures are even less effective than in the past because Islam is on the demographic and ideological offensive while the role of the Islamic world in global politics and economics is mounting.

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[51] L. Sjukijainen, "Rossiiskaia vlast' i Islam," *Otechestvennye zapiski,* No. 5 (14), 2003, available at [http://www.strana-oz.ru/?numid=14&article=687].

[52] See: Iu.A. Mikhailov, *Pora ponimat' Quran,* Ladomir Publishers, Moscow, 2007, pp. 102-103.