

## ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF HISTORY AND ITS PROSPECTS: RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL ASPECTS

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he article reveals the fundamental aspects of the emergence and development of discourse on Islamic identity as part of the national identity model in Kazakhstan in the historic retrospective, the role and place of Islam and related identity typical of the historical-political realities of the Soviet Union. It identifies the conditions

under which the importance of Islam and the identity it has determined may change in Kazakhstan. The article emphasizes the importance of the global shift in the discussions of Islamic identity from the Orientalist perception of the Islamic World to its perception as an equal actor and entity in constructing human identity.

**KEYWORDS:** *Islamic identity, national identity, adab, Islam in Kazakhstan, Soviet discourse of Islamic studies, Kazakh culture, modernization of religious consciousness.*

## *Introduction*

Islamic discourse in its historical perspective is actualized within objective reconstruction of Islam and its spiritual and moral importance for the social and cultural realities of Kazakhstan. Having begun in the year 2000 across Central Asia, Islamic revival has acquired a more or less consistent status despite turbulence in the Islamic East and Western Europe caused by migrations and deconstruction of the religious paradigms that formed the religious (Islamic) landscapes.

For a better understanding of the events related to Islam by individuals and society as a whole, contemporary society defined by Ziauddin Sardar as “post-normality” (a world dominated by complexity, chaos, and confusion) should reassess social, cultural and political realities of the past.

## **Methodology**

In view of the multitude of components and complexity of the object of our studies we relied on interdisciplinary methods of humanities: historiographical, content-analysis, comparative and hermeneutical, endorsed by the Islamic studies tradition. This set of methods, whose elements have been repeatedly tested by practical studies, is used here to reconstruct the discourse of Islamic identity.

## **Discourse of the Soviet Islam and Soviet Islamic Studies**

It is difficult to comprehend the historical, cultural and political importance of Islam in Soviet society as we face confrontational and conflicting hermeneutics of archival documents, legal acts and strategic programs published and adopted in the Soviet Union. While addressing Islam in Soviet Kazakhstan we should identify two concepts: Soviet and Sovietological, the first being at the core of the latter. Prominent Sovietologists who worked at the universities of Cologne, Munich, Texas and in Harvard—Barrington Moore, Raymond Aron, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Józef Bocheński, Hélène Carrère, Alain Besançon, Nicolas Werth and others—studied the Islamic issue in the context of historical reconstruction of Islam in the Soviet period. As could be expected, the Soviet Union’s disintegration strongly affected the future of Sovietology: the Soviet axiological system and the Soviet paradigm of Islam (de-Islamization and shaping an atheist idea of the world) collapsed. The subject of “Soviet” Islam raised by Sovietologists is absolutely unique in the context of the tragic fate of Islam in the Soviet period. The Soviet history of Islam and the history of Islam as presented by Sovietologists are two different scholarly paradigms:

- the first was based on the totalitarian discourse methodology—Islam as an ethnic and cultural element of the Soviet cultural mosaic;
- the latter—on the historical, cultural and phenomenological approach to Islam as a profound ethical and spiritual tradition and practice of the dogmatic cult.

Religious policies of Soviet times reflected the implicit phenomenology of everything Soviet as the cornerstone of the spiritual and material spheres of life in the Soviet Union in which Islam was interpreted within Soviet ideology, which divorced religion from church; it was expected to die and be forgotten. Soviet people were expected to accept Nietzsche's famous "God is dead" as an ideal version of a new paradigm in which God was pushed aside and forgotten, while association with the world realized as His reasonable rejection. Atheism as a philosophical paradigm and a Soviet project failed in the countries of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Islam was not only a religious cult, but the "historical memory of the tradition" that tied together many generations and their spiritual mentalities.

In the Soviet Union religious practice was a dual phenomenon—either uncompromisingly repressive or partly amenable, but never indifferent. The media did a lot to deconstruct the religious consciousness: Soviet newspapers, magazines and popular literature as a sort of a Soviet-style *adab* slighted religious consciousness as a product of narrow-mindedness. In 1922, for example, the *Bez-bozhnik* (Non-Believer) newspaper played a certain role in the appearance of the Union of Militant Atheists that waged an ideological struggle against religion. In the 1940s-1950s, criticism of religion was somewhat subdued. During the Khrushchev Thaw atheism triumphed against the background of the unrivalled Soviet scientific achievements that helped destroy everything related to religion as an archaic and conservative hindrance of the scientific and civilizational progress. During what is called stagnation—the epoch of Leonid Brezhnev (1960-1984)—religion was revived and, by the same token, destroyed. Axiological paradigms were changing; the wave that destroyed the Soviet consciousness at the individual and collective levels swept away the historical myth of a "Soviet man," for whom the Soviet ideology (which had no place either for God or for man) had been created in the first place. The Soviet state religious policy was a policy of "stick and carrot." Russian Orthodox Church was politically important in czarist Russia. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, it was destroyed; starting in 1918, Catholicism was persecuted as well; Protestant churches were closed; Judaism shared the fate of all other religions. In 1920, repressions moved on to Islam. It should be said, however, that at that time the First All-Russia Congress of Muslims held in Ufa set up the Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims. Three years later, the Second All-Russia Congress of Muslim Activists in Ufa outlined the functions and powers of the Central Administration as the main center of all Muslims of the U.S.S.R.

Soviet power began its offensive against Islam with the de-institutionalization of Islamic education.<sup>1</sup> No matter how hard they tried, Islamic clerics lost the battle. In the 1990s, local Islamic education of the Soviet period lost the battle to radical trends. Four regional spiritual administrations were set up to promote regional Islamic models: there were spiritual administrations of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan with the center in Tashkent, of Transcaucasia with the center in Baku, of the European part of the Soviet Union and Siberia with the center in Ufa and of the Northern Caucasus with the center in Makhachkala. *Musulmane Sovetskogo Soiuz*a (The Muslims of the Soviet Union) journal that appeared at the same time was the only official publication that published historiographical essays about Islam and its traditions.

Its history is a long and tragic one: it was banned and resumed several times mainly to inform other countries that the Soviet Union was a country of religious freedom. It was published in Arabic, Uzbek, English, Farsi, Dari and French. The Russian-language edition was launched in 1990. In the post-Soviet period it is published as *Musulmane Maveranakhra* (Muslims of Transoxiana); it is free from Soviet dictate and ideological Soviet banalities that have in any case lost their meaning in the de-ideologized post-Soviet space. Soviet Islam did not become a phenomenon of Soviet society, since

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<sup>1</sup> See: N. Seitakhmetova, M. Smagulov, A. Dosmaganbetova, R. Sartayeva, A. Sagikyzy, "Institutionalization of Islamic Education in the Kazakhstani Secular Society," *European Journal of Science and Theology*, No. 2, 2018, pp. 68-69.

atheism and Islamic ontology were worlds apart. In an effort to build up antireligious consciousness, the “Soviet adab” created a genre of anti-Islamic literature, where the main characters “persecuted” by religious figures sacrificed their freedom and even lives to the cause of atheism.

Within the scholarly discourse, the Islamic tradition was studied professionally and fundamentally even if the academic community had to accept the priority of ideology that infringed on creative freedom. Those who failed or refused to follow the general ideological line of atheism never saw their works published; at best they appeared distorted by cruel censorship. The methods of Islamic studies that emerged at that time can be described as the best examples to be followed in the post-Soviet period. Ignatyi Krachkovsky, Stanislav Prozorov, Oleg Bolshakov and many others relied on historiographical methodology to open the vistas of an objective historical reconstruction of Islam and the Islamic identifiers of culture.

The historiographical method allows us to shed light on one of the most tragic pages in the history of Soviet peoples—de-sacralization of their national cultures, “demarcation” with God, and the culture in which the world was “stamped” with the paradigm of godlessness.

In his work *Musulmane v SSSR* (Muslims in the U.S.S.R.) published in Paris in 1983, Alexandre Bennigsen offered an interesting observation: national Muslim communism with its own program had been developing within the Soviet borders.<sup>2</sup>

The wave of repressions gave rise to the Islamic dissident movement. Anti-Soviet in its essence, it was determined to revive the Islamic tradition as spiritual, ethnic and aesthetic; religious freedom as an inalienable human right; the system of Islamic education as a spiritual and moral element of a secular society. This became possible in the independent post-secular Kazakhstan.<sup>3</sup>

Today, Islam and its role in cultural formation in Central Asia is a highly peculiar issue: the impact of Islamic culture on the region has not yet been properly studied, hence the continued desire to belittle the role of the Islamic tradition in the region’s multi-cultural landscape. In the Soviet period this was caused by the fear of a flood of pan-Turkism, on the one hand, and of pan-Arabism, on the other. While Sovietologists examined “Soviet Islam,” the object of their studies, as a problem of ethnic, social and political development, the studies of Soviet scholars were purely academic. Today, they are represented by classical Islamic studies by Ignatyi Krachkovsky, Stanislav Prozorov, Vassili Bartold, Evgeni Bertels, Teodor Shumovsky and others. Works of applied nature were very different: ideologically they “removed” the Islamic element from the civilizational past, present, and, as could be expected, future of Central Asian ethnicities. The cultural split defined as “Islamic tradition” in history created a void in the spiritual continuity of the generational paradigm of Islam.

De-Islamization of Kazakhstan in the Soviet period was caused by the change of paradigms, that is, destruction of traditions, religion and tongues. In the 1980s-1990s, national self-awareness was gradually revived and the national Soviet doctrine revised. The relatively liberal nature of the Soviet nationalities policy, on the one hand, and the rigid pro-Russian discourse, on the other, created zones of inter-ethnic turbulence and barely concealed intolerance of certain ethnicities in the Soviet Union. The Soviet policies of bringing people, cultures and religions closer together finally led to an open contraposition of traditional and Soviet cultures. The discourse of an opposition to cultural unification was connected, among other things, with Islamic identity. Soviet modeling of Kazakh culture and general lifestyle replaced the tradition, upon which everything Kazakh had rested, with “a Soviet zombie,” an individual unaware of his origins. It was in the late 1980s that the binary opposition—tradition vs. Soviet-style modernity—became absolutely dichotomous: destruction of cultural and religious sovereignty fanned national self-awareness and the quest for the future of national culture and its prospects as part of Soviet history.

<sup>2</sup> See: A. Bennigsen, *Musulmane v SSSR*, Series: *Chto nuzhno znat o...?*, Issue 1, Ymca-Press, Paris, 1983, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> See: M. Bektenova, N. Seitakhmetova, G. Kurmangaliyeva, B. Satershinov, R. Sartayeva, “Problematization of the Issue of Islamic Education in the Post-Secular World,” *European Journal of Science and Theology*, Vol. 13, No. 1, February 2017, pp. 136-137.

The Alash movement of Kazakh intellectuals was the first to formulate the problems of preservation of the identity, religious and cultural sovereignty of Kazakhs; their ethnicity, language and Islam as the traditional religion of the Great Steppe. Its media played a huge role in emphasizing the humanitarian dimension of Islam, which should be saved from destruction as the spiritual and cultural tradition. The Alash program strategies related to Islam seem to be modernizing today: its members were convinced that Islam was potentially able to absorb the ideas of innovational, scientific and technological progress and intellectualization of society. The Alash media were a social, political and cultural institution that strongly affected Kazakh society and, first and foremost, the minds of its youth. As a public opinion institution, the periodicals shaped public consciousness, and stirred up critical reflections on cultural and religious identity.

This means that the Soviet discourse of Islam was highly varied, the fact which went against the stream of Soviet ideological modeling.

The post-Soviet period (or the post-colonial period, according to certain authors, since it liberated the Islamic discourse) is shaping a new logic of Islamic identity through interdisciplinary methodologies and different objectives, both in academic and applied studies of Islam. Reconstruction of Islamic identity and its history contrary to the “Soviet adabs” represents its development in the Central Asian space. Alisher Ilkhamov in his “Archeology of Uzbek Identity”<sup>4</sup> has written that the national identity project was never completed. As applied to the problem of Islamic identity, its nature is hardly complete, while its further development depends on the social, political, economic and cultural factors of current realities in which national doctrines play a big or even gigantic role.

Destruction of spirituality and lack of spirituality in Soviet society were seen as a problem created by dedication to Marxism-Leninism. Today, however, we are talking about a crisis of spirituality once more: “We can for decades explain the predatory nature of today by the predatory nature of yesterday. This will not help us improve the real situation.”<sup>5</sup> What can and should be done?

The strategy of modernization of social and historical consciousness launched in Kazakhstan is something more than a mere re-elucidation of historical contexts. This is a critical reassessment that creates a context in which unity of mankind is realized, and in which spiritual forms (religion being one of them) determine one’s personality, while identity is perceived as a culture of communication of representatives of different confessions.

The set of descriptions of contemporary humanities that determines the subjects of scholarly studies of Islam and Islamic identity is especially interesting. Clifford Geertz,<sup>6</sup> for example, has turned to the subject of the relationships between the religious and the national in the countries with Muslim populations, the factors of Islam’s viability in different cultures in postnormal times (Ziauddin Sardar<sup>7</sup>)—the epoch of differently determined modernities, territorially stipulated religious cults and lifestyles in the context of Muslim population, as well as the degree of politicization of Islam as pan-Islamism. In other words, contemporary Islamic scholarly discourse demonstrates its bias towards the political paradigm of the Islamic way of life. We can easily detect a trend towards comparative methods in the essays of Western scholars of Islam, who tend to compare the above-mentioned aspects in Islam and Christianity.

In the politically determined discourse of Islam of the 20th century, the categories of nation/national and ethnicity/ethnic are pushed aside. Starting with Benedict Anderson,<sup>8</sup> who interpreted

<sup>4</sup> A. Ilkhamov, “Archeology of Uzbek Identity,” *Central Asian Survey*, Issue 3-4, Vol. 23, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> N.K. Seitakhmetov, *Nravstvenny smysl germanskogo idealizma*, Almaty, 2007, p. 301.

<sup>6</sup> See: *Islam. Modernity. Nationalism*, Interview with anthropologist C. Geertz, Interviewer S. Glebov, *Ab Imperio*, No. 3, 2004, pp. 91-111.

<sup>7</sup> See: Z. Sardar, “Welcome to Postnormal Times,” *Futures*, No. 42 (5), 2010, pp. 435-444.

<sup>8</sup> See: B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised and enlarged edition), Verso, London, 1991.

these categories as artificial and imaginary constructs, and Samuel Huntington,<sup>9</sup> who pointed to the advantages of civilizational over national community, these traditions have been developing in contemporary Islamic studies.

In this context, identity rests not on the national-ethnic, but on the axiological-civilizational basis. In other words, Western scholars continue the discourse of civilizational Islamic identity in the developing countries. In the 20th century, in the postcolonial countries of South and Southeast Asia and North Africa Islam helped replace the secular identity imperatives with those of a religious (Islamic) nature as the determining factor.

Political interpretation of Islam as a problem field points to the need to deprive Islam of its territoriality and the extent to which this process can be controlled. In this context, Clifford Geertz concentrates on the problem of administration, the autonomous nature of the Muslim population and the state's interference in the process.

The scholarly discourse that is unfolding around Islam demonstrates, among other things, the trend towards overcoming the alignment with the world of Western Orientalists when studying the problems associated with Islam and related subjects. This explains why the vocabulary of Islamic studies brims with the terms connected, according to Geertz' pertinent remark, with the concepts of identity, collective memory and the ideology of traditionalism. "Passivity" of the Orient is perceived as the initial background. According to contemporary Orientalists, Muslim intellectual activity had reached its apogee in the Middle Ages. Since that time, the highly introvert Islamic World, which is seen from the West as a monolith of sorts, has not produced academic works and publicist writings. New generations of Islamic scholars are raised on the works of Bernard Lewis, Eli Keduri, Ernest Gellner, Roman Yakobson and Yuri Lotman.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the scholarly discourse of our days is shaped in the West and in accordance with its ideas about the course of world history.

## Contemporary Studies of Islamic Identity: Variety of Subjects

Identity is rapidly developing into the main issue of the day: it crops up in media headlines, fiction and academic papers—in short, in all written forms of human thought. It should be said that having appeared in the Orientalist discourse in the West, the subject of identity changed its nature several times.

- At the height of the studies of the Orient in the 18th-19th centuries, the subject of identity was more theorized than in the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century when scholars were especially interested in the specific features and domination of ethnic and religious identity of post-colonial peoples. Works included those by Eli Keduri and Ernest Gellner, who discussed the problems of nationalism; Clifford Geertz, who wrote about national specifics of Islam in North Africa, South and Southeast Asia; Samuel Huntington, who paid special attention to civilizational characteristics that determined the behavior codes; and Bernard Anderson, who revealed the artificial nature of the concept of identity as a system-forming element of the image of the world in individual minds and in society.

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<sup>9</sup> See: S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon&Schuster, London, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> See: B. Lewis, *Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, 1st ed., Oxford University Press, 2010. 240 pp.; E. Keduri, *Natsionalizm*, Ale-gale, St. Petersburg, 2010, 136 pp.; E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1983; R. Yakobson, *Raboty po poetike*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1987. 464 pp.; Iu.M. Lotman, *Vnutri myslishchikh mirov*, Azbuka, Moscow, 2014, 416 pp.

- Today, the understanding of the term “identity” in Western/European science is somewhat modified. The works of Western intellectuals are filled with the fear that the wave of immigrants will wash away European identity. This discourse serves as the communicative space that reflects and, at the same time, forms what people think/should think about the (mainly Muslim) migration. In his *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*<sup>11</sup> Douglas Murray concentrates on destructive activities of Muslim migrants who have refused for many generations to come to integrate into local European contexts. The passive position of Europe as the host continent is explained by Murray as the “exhaustion by history” and “colonial guilt,” as well as domination of political correctness and multiculturalism.<sup>12</sup> The author offers no ways out of the trap; he has nothing to say about possible Donald Trump-style ban on migration; he has no opinions about possible training of migrants to assimilate them in the host culture. He is incapable of saying anything about the host culture except its connection with the church and Christian attributes.
- Contemporary Muslim intellectuals—Ziauddin Sardar, Tariq Ramadan, Talal Asad, and Merryl Wyn Davies—demonstrate a different tonality. They focus on integrity, staunchness and authenticity of the Muslim lifestyle and thinking, perception of the world and the relationships with the world, in short, everything that determines the identity of Muslims in all corners of the world. This is opposed to modernization/Westernization, the result of globalization of mass non-Western consciousness.

One of the interesting areas of thought in this regard is the theme of historical milestones, the perception and spread of Islam, as well as an explanation of the resilience of this religion. This is what Ernest Gellner tells us about looking at Islam as perceived by the people living in the Middle East as an ethnic, social and civilizational patchwork.<sup>13</sup>

## Islamic Identity in the Cultural and Communicative Space of Kazakhstan: The Role of Adab in Cultural Tradition

In Kazakhstan, the discourse related to Islamic studies testifies that the society had reached the stage of spiritual revival, religious and civilizational re-identification in the post-secular cultural and communicative space. The problems discussed in Kazakhstan—history of Islam in Kazakhstan, prevention of religious extremism, continuity of Kazakh-style Islamic traditions, cultural and axiological alignments, orientation towards the Hanafi madhab and Yassawi tariqa traditional for Kazakhstan—are suggested by the pragmatic desire to maintain inter-confessional stability in the multi-cultural and polyethnic society with the help of religion that ensured a safe performance of all social rites.

Current dynamics of Islamic studies in Kazakhstan is the echo of the period in the history of the people that have survived enforced spiritual deprivation, namely alienation from their traditional religion and values. The seventy-year long history of the country as part of the biggest political and ideological organism of the 20th century left a deep wound in the minds of those who had created it

<sup>11</sup> See: D. Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*, Bloomsbury, London, 2018. 384 pp.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> See: E. Gellner, “Post-Traditional Forms in Islam: The Turf and Trade, and Votes and Peanuts,” *Daedalus*, Vol. 102, No. 1, Post-Traditional Societies, 1973, pp. 191-206.

in the first place, and in the minds of those who came after them. The ambitious plans to build a superpower with a huge population demanded an equally great effort: a new ideology of equality and friendship, a new philosophy and a new identity.

The transformation of economic processes into social ones was initiated by the far-reaching plans nurtured by the leaders of the country, one of the most important actors on the world political stage. Nationalization of private property (landed property and cattle in the context of the nomadic lifestyle) depersonalized individual interests at the economic level. Individual religious consciousness of people who found themselves at the “turning point of history” was shattered by interference of Bolshevik ideology/Communist rhetoric in social life. Traditional life became impossible in all spheres of personal, social, cultural and communicative space; the spiritual and religious sphere was affected to a greatest extent. Atheism as part of Communist ideology was absolutely alien to those who lived in what is now Kazakh territory at all stages of their history. We should admit, however, that Communist ideology attached special importance to its spiritual and moral component. Values common to mankind, norms of morals and honor typical of religious consciousness were moved to the center of civic spirituality, yet not as a tribute to religious world perception. They were elements of indispensable social regulations, essential, in their turn, to the achievement of the highest political aims proclaimed by the country’s leaders.

The end of history of one country (the U.S.S.R.) launched the histories of independent states that proclaimed freedom of speech and freedom of conscience. The period of total control was replaced with a period of total euphoria ignited by the right to spiritual self-determination. Destructive religious teachings and transborder extremism that threatened international security were the other side of the gained independence and democratic freedoms.

This concise historical essay stirs up the need to ponder on the determined nature of the Islamic discourse unfolding in the academic community, which is extremely responsive to the vacillations and transformations of public consciousness. This fully applies to the realities of Kazakhstan of the Third Modernization Period of the Fourth Industrial Revolution Era, which requires the spiritual mobilization of all individuals capable of responding to the challenges of the day. Today, the Kazakhstani society, deprived in the past of its religious identity, demonstrates a surge in spiritual seeking. It reanimates and reassesses its religious traditions.

The sociological studies of religious identity in the independent Kazakhstan, carried by the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies of the Committee for Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2018 deserve special mention.<sup>14</sup> They have demonstrated that after the Soviet Union’s disintegration, which made Kazakhstan an independent state, most of the respondents (54.6%) associated religious revival with the restored traditions (see Fig. 1).

The sociological survey also reveals that the Islamic content was spreading in people’s minds (see Fig. 2).

According to the poll, 80.1% of the respondents associated themselves with the confessions traditional for Kazakhstan: 51.0% with Islam and 29.1% with Russian Orthodox Christianity, with the choice obviously determined by ethnicities: 82.0% Kazakhs spoke of themselves as Muslims while 75.0% of Russians—as Orthodox Christians. This was confirmed by the respondents: 79% of them insisted that they professed the religion of their ethnicity.

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<sup>14</sup> See: Sociological studies of *The Role and Meaning of Religious Identity in the Spiritual and Cultural Resurrection of Kazakhstani Society* was carried out in 2018 by the Center for Business Information, Sociological and Marketing Studies BISAM-Central Asia on order of the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies at the Committee for Science under the RK Ministry of Economy and Science for the program Formation of Kazakhstani Identity in the Context of Modernization of Public Consciousness within program funding (2018-2020).



Figure 1

**What in Your Opinion Contributed to the Spiritual Revival in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan?**  
(% of the total number of polled)

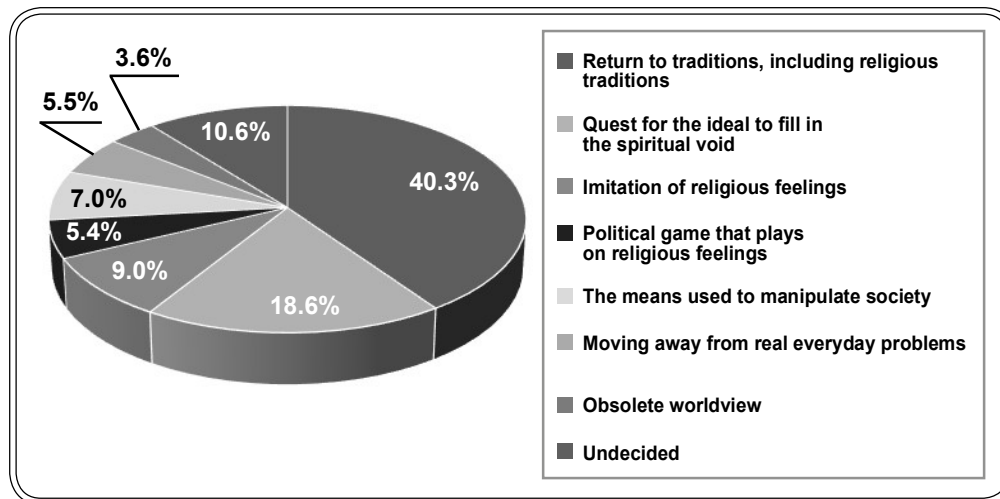
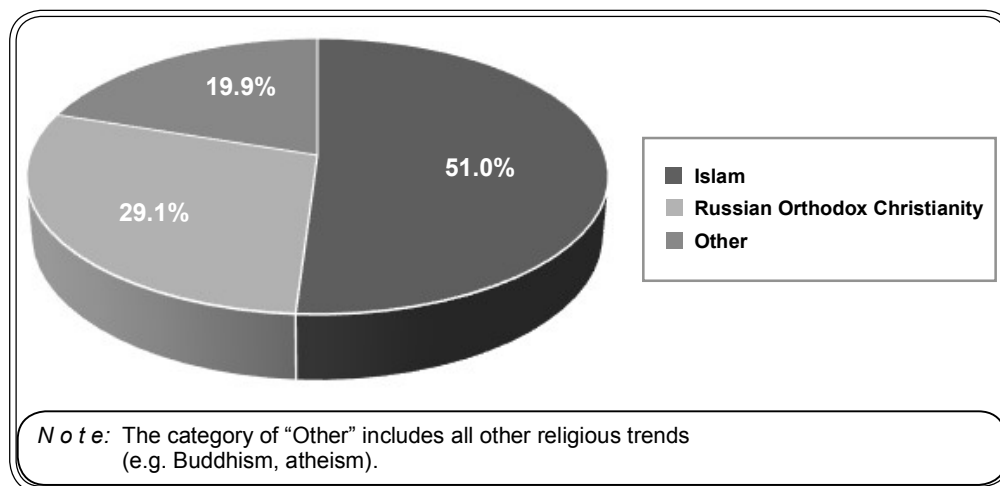


Figure 2

**With Which Religion Do You Identify Yourself?**  
(% of the number of polled)



The polled Muslims saw no deep contradictions between the secular and religious paradigms. In Kazakhstan, Islamic identity is consistent with and is modeled as Sunni identity that relies on the Hanafi madhab and is predominantly ethnic. It should be said that its viability is under attack by the radical trends that are infiltrating Kazakhstan and Central Asia. This means that preventive measures are needed.

First of all, we are talking about a new academic paradigm of hermeneutics and studies of Islam that should rely on objective historical sources and adequate methodology. In Kazakhstan, the genesis of Islamic identity was concentrated around the spiritual traditions of the Kazakhs, and identity itself relied on an organic unity of cultural paradigms. In fact, the sociology of Islam as a method of the 21st century is gaining consequence and opens up extensive possibilities of studying the modernization processes in Islam.

The Islamic factor plays the key role in the countries of the Islamic World and speaks volumes about the importance of Islamic identity. In the Islamic World, Islamic identity is equated with national identity: institutionalization of “citizenship” is correlated with the Islamic tradition. Sociological studies of national identities of the Islamic World, which have become especially active in the 21st century, revealed the turbulent and destructive trends fraught with fragmentation of national identities.

This means that the sociological dimension of the Islamic identity studies is vitally important to our understanding of the religious situation as a whole and interpretation of its possible configurations.

In this context, the continued reinterpretation of text and discourse seems absolutely logical, and should include both its sacral content and the traditional opinions about the sacral. This re-actualizes the traditional values and their adaptation to the contemporary world.<sup>15</sup> Ziauddin Sardar is convinced that the Muslims should reinterpret the norms of the Shari‘a, the product of the specific requirements called to life by medieval society and later elevated to the status of the divine and, therefore, unassailable. This explains what he articulates about the very much needed critical approaches.<sup>16</sup> Adibs (intellectuals known as past masters of the written word and critical thought) put a lot of effort into reinterpreting the religious heritage in line with contemporary times.

Adab plays an immense role in this context, because it comprises the best humanistic qualities of Islam and national traditions/civilizations. From the time when it first appeared in the Golden Age of Muslim culture, adab was perceived as a critical discourse within which traditions, culture of conduct and sacral texts were revised and reinterpreted. The classical narrative of adab born by the great minds of classical Islam is continuing; it is superimposed on national specifics, enriched through them and has been revealing its vitality for many centuries. This continuity presupposed the emergence of what is known as contemporary adab shaped in the age of postmodernity. While preserving its loyalty to the humanism of the past, adab is transformed into a scholarly and social narrative. It is modernized and gains weight in the social, political, cultural and communicative space. This type of adab is unfolding around the idea of re-actualization of the traditional Islamic values as a potential foundation of a new perception of Islamic identity which is undergoing transformations, which creates new meanings and which, on the whole, is progressive.

When revealing the meaning of religious identity from the positions of religious studies, one-sidedness should be avoided by all means: today, studies in humanities are possible only if they rely on interdisciplinary methodologies. Religious identity is formed in national history through national culture. Traditional culture is a product of spiritual and material practices of an ethnicity or a people; religion is one of its important components. Islamic tradition, which had accumulated spiritual and moral experience, served as a pivot in the national culture of Kazakhs. We can even say that their cultural traditions and the universal Islamic tradition served one and the same aim of spiritual and moral ethnic consolidation.

In the 8th-10th centuries, the unique and very specific nature of Kazakh culture received a new lease on life from Islam, which predetermined the social and cultural development of Kazakhstan.

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<sup>15</sup> See: Z. Sardar, *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, ed. by S. Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell, Pluto Press, London, 2003, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 29.

The modernizing processes realized in Kazakhstan are closely connected with the rediscovery of the role of the religious (spiritual and moral) factor in the history of the Kazakh culture. This adds relevance to the problem of correlation between national, civic and religious identities. Indeed, it is impossible to construct a civic identity outside its religious component. In poly-cultural societies, the social identity of a person requires an inevitable interpretation of the phenomenon of “religious identity” as part of a single homogenous configuration of civic identity.

National identity and its studies constitute the subject-matter of humanitarian studies realized by constructivists and primordialists. For the former national identity is a process constructed in the course of social and cultural practices of man, in which the ethnic factor is not the basic one. Primordialists, on the other hand, insist on the ethnic factor as the cornerstone of national identity, because, they argue, it forms national self-identity and uniqueness.

Unfolding globalist processes have already formulated new tasks: a search for the mechanisms of preservation of the national cultural sovereignty, balancing out universalism and individualism, preservation of the religious factor, etc. The national identity of Kazakhstan took shape through the development of historical awareness of the Kazakh ethnicity, daily routine and spiritual practice. It has acquired historically determined markers: priority of moral principles in everyday life; openness to other religions and cults; tolerance; traditionalism and philosophical freedom. Despite globalization, which unifies cultures and traditions, the continued functioning of national cultures and traditions that reveal the very essence of national identity remains the most prominent trend of our days. National identity shaped in the process of interaction between man, society and culture is interiorized by the codes of civil society to become civic identity. National identity cannot be defined without a clearer understanding of the term “nation.” The discourse of studies of “nation” as a concept, which is ongoing on in Kazakhstan and abroad, defines it as a debatable category; as “ethnicity,” “citizenship,” etc. In this context, the quest for national identity is closely connected with the quest for the national idea.

The theoretical and methodological approaches to the studies of the relationships between the national, civic and religious identities are needed to identify the specifics of each and the place they occupy in the blanket term “civic identity.”

The highly complicated and dynamic nature of the process of nationalization of identity is responsible for the highly debatable nature of its studies. In poly-cultural communities, national identity is a product of the inter-cultural and inter-confessional communication strategy designed to avoid a conflict of cultures and, what is even more important, a conflict of cultural-religious identities.

Prominent scholars discuss the identity-related problems in an effort to find alternative answers to the question of priorities of national-civic identity. Norbert Elias,<sup>17</sup> Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>18</sup> Erik Erikson,<sup>19</sup> Eric Hobsbawm<sup>20</sup> and others have revealed new horizons in the identity studies as a complex and dynamic phenomenon with polyvalent meanings.

The states need a national identity model to preserve their national culture, language and ethnicity, not to mention to consolidate the society and integrate into the international community.

One of the central roles in the process belongs to the national educational system.

In the first two decades of the 21st century, pluralistic ideology and introduction of religious education in secular societies made the religious component part of national identities. For example, a prominent scholar Jenny B. White in her *Islamist Mobilization of Turkey* has concluded that Turkey is shaping a new identity based on glorification of the Ottoman past and a gradual retreat from Ke-

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<sup>17</sup> See: N. Elias, *La Société des individus*, Fayart, Paris, 1991, 301 pp.

<sup>18</sup> See: P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge, 1984.

<sup>19</sup> See: E. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, W.W. Norton Company, New York, 1968.

<sup>20</sup> See: E. Hobsbawm, *Fractured Times: Culture and Society in the 20th Century*, Little, Brown, 2013.

malism.<sup>21</sup> Today, practically all post-cultural societies have made religious identity an inevitable part of their national identities. National and civic identities in poly-cultural states differ in their correlations: civic identity is correlated with society, while national identity—with ethnicity. National identity is molded as civic identity, while religious identity becomes one of its main components.

### *Conclusion*

Studies and analyses of identity problems are just as important as all other aspects of self-awareness of a person in society and in the world. Identity understood as a process is based on the meaningful reckoning points of human life and a collective perception of the world by the nation viewed as a community united in its diversity. This process is strongly affected by internal and external factors. Internal phenomena that affect development trends and the intensity of the identity-forming process are determined by the system-forming humanistic ideas established by the cultural tradition. This is even more relevant when applied to religious identity, since its spiritual content is supported by its social, political and historical content, hence the impact of external factors. The latter presupposes an active involvement of the Kazakhstani society in inter-cultural dialog, integration and education on an international scale. Islamic identity should be realized by the entities that rely on the entire scope of rights and that are, therefore, “actors” of global creative communication.

Kazakh society understands that it needs an identity that is fully integrated into the cultural and communicative space of the contemporary world, hence its support of the religious ideas proclaimed by the traditional Hanafi madhab, which are loyal to the image of the ontological Other and acceptable for the secular society of Kazakhstan. It is the Hanafi madhab that mitigates the stress of the process of constructing Islamic identity and prevents the radicalization of Islam. National identity is never static, it exists in the process of never-ending changes, there is no final model, since poly-cultural and communicative societies incessantly create new types of social contacts and relationships.

Understanding of the Islamic world as a community with unified identity revives the problem of reinterpretation of the religious tradition, whose peacekeeping and intercultural-dialogical potential must fit into contemporary realities to prevent marginalization of the Muslim ummah. Reinterpretation of the Islamic tradition should take into account the historical-cultural specifics of each particular region, in which the ontological introduction of Islam should be tuned up to the spiritual system of values.

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<sup>21</sup> See: J. White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey. A Study in Vernacular Politics*, University of Washington Press, 2002, 304 pp.