

THE HISTORY AND SPECIFICS OF THE ISLAMIC RENAISSANCE TODAY IN THE CHECHEN REPUBLIC

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Introduction

The specifics of the Islamic renaissance in the Chechen Republic today are related to the increased activity of Muslims and the spread in non-traditional religious trends, as well as to several political and cultural factors that have had an impact on shaping the sociocultural characteristics of Chechen society over the course of history.

The extremely complicated religious and political situation in the Chechen Republic today is defined by Islamic traditions, the sociocultural characteristics of the Chechen ethnicity, and the contradictory influence of the new religious trends. It is worth noting that the Islamic trends that became clearly designated right before the collapse of the Soviet Union have added dynamism to the spiritual and religious-political situation not only in the republic itself, but also throughout Russia as a whole.

The religious renaissance in Chechnia in the pre-Soviet period was accompanied by an increased interest in Islamic values and the Muslims' desire to improve the conditions for public worship. In order to satisfy the need for religious knowledge, mosques had to be built, Islamic educational institutions established, and the corresponding literature and periodicals published. On the eve of the Soviet Union's collapse, the Islamic renaissance in the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R. found no obstacles in its path, particularly since the participants in this process were not politically active nor did they call for religious fundamentalism or replacement of the communist slogans with provisions of Shari'a law.

The negative aspects of the Islamic renaissance appeared some time later when Islamic parties and movements emerged bearing slogans of integristism. They refused to recognize public

power and called for creating a theocratic state and full Islamization of secular society. The holders of these ideas, the followers of Wahhabism (Wahhabis), became active after the collapse of the Soviet Union: they began creating organizational structures and press organs, lobbying their interests in the power structures, and gaining access to television.

The Wahhabis considered their most important task to be achieving spiritual and political domination in society; these attempts exaggerat-

ed the religious contradictions within Muslim society and also gave rise to a conflict between secular and religious values.

Such moods were expressed most virulently and manifested in extreme forms in Dagestan, Chechnia, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria.

Many religious-political and sociocultural phenomena relating to the Islamic renaissance can be analyzed using the example of the Chechen Republic based on historical facts.

Syncretism of the Lifestyle and World Outlook of the Chechens

The essence of every ethnicity is formed by its lifestyle and world outlook. The Muslim community of present-day Chechnia is a variegated and diverse religious-social phenomenon, while the aggregate of different ideas and provisions composing the fundamentals of its world outlook form an extremely syncretic system.

Chechnia's Muslim community is composed of different groups; some of them adhere strictly to mandatory religious rituals (they include both traditionalists and so-called Salafis or Wahhabis), however there are also those who consider themselves believers but who do not strictly observe the religious rituals, or even ignore them.

The data of a sociological poll conducted in May-June 2003 by the North Ossetian Center of Social Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Sociopolitical Studies with the direct participation of the author of this article document the current state of religiosity in the Chechen Republic. The poll used a stratified area-specific model of selection, the scope of which (800 respondents) was entirely sufficient¹ for reflecting the entire mindset of different strata of the population.

As the poll results showed, 97.8% of the respondents consider themselves to be Chechens, 96% see themselves as the followers of Islam, and 32.4% regard themselves as very religious, 56.1% as quite religious, 7.8% as not very religious, while 3.7% did not know. So more than 1/3 of the respondents consider themselves to be very religious.

To the question of whether they think that the Chechen people should live according to the Shari'a laws, 26.2% respondents said yes, 34.8% said no, and 39% did not know. This attitude toward the Shari'a stems from the campaign to discredit it during the time of Dudaev and Maskhadov, when the performance of Muslim rituals was severely criticized and condemned. This was when the national saying, "The Shari'a is for the lower masses and dollars and oil are for the upper classes," came into being.

The Muslims of Chechnia belong to the Sunni trend of Islam represented by the Shafi'i and Hanafi maddhabs. The Shafi'i maddhab is widespread among the Muslims of Dagestan, Chechnia, and Ingush-

¹ See: Kh.V. Dzutsev, *Chechnia v sotsiokulturnom prostranstve Rossiyskoy Federatsii: etnosotsiologicheskiy analiz*, Program study and results of a sociological poll of the Chechen population conducted in May-June 2003, Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Sociopolitical Studies, Moscow, 2007, p. 4.

etia, while the Hanafi maddhab has followers among the Kumyks, Kabardins, Balkarians, Karachays, Adighes, and Circassians.

Islam in the Chechen Republic, as well as throughout the entire Northern Caucasus, is called traditional and since Soviet times has been called national; Western Islamic experts, on the other hand (Alexandre Bennigsen in particular) coined the phrase “parallel Islam.” But this term did not catch on in Russian Islamic studies.

Various studies often claim that Islam has existed in the Chechen Republic since the end of the 18th century in the form of muridism related to the activity of Sheikh Mansur. However, this viewpoint cannot be considered scientifically correct.

Muridism did not appear until later. It emerged at the end of the 1820s in Daghestan and was associated with the movement of Gazi Muhammad and Shamil. Muridism should be understood as the religious-political movement of the Caucasian mountain-dwellers who began the struggle against the expansionist policy of czarism under the banner of ghazavat. At the end of the Caucasian war, this struggle died down, and the movement lost its fanaticism and bellicosity. But later the Daghestani and Chechen mountain-dwellers repeatedly declared a holy war on the forces that restricted their freedom and independence.

In the 1880s-1890s, groups of murids (vird brotherhoods) appeared in Chechnia; many still exist today, occupying a corresponding niche in the republic’s religious life.

The religious culture of the Sufi brotherhoods has been preserved in Chechnia despite the social, political, and cultural transformations that have been going on over the past one-and-a-half centuries. The brotherhoods are adapting surprisingly well to the most diverse socioeconomic changes, and their practice of rituals and spiritual understanding of life have been preserved in post-Soviet times. Despite the fact that Chechens, like other ethnicities of the national autonomies in the Soviet Union, were subjected to socialist modernization, a high level of religiosity and adherence to traditional values were retained in Chechnia during Soviet times.

In the 19th century, the Sufi Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya tariqahs from Daghestan became widespread in Chechnia and Ingushetia, which put down roots in the form of vird brotherhoods. In their religious activity, these brotherhoods relied on the basic values of Islam, but there are certain ideological and ritual differences among them which emerged during the historical development of the Muslim culture in different regions.

The Shaziliyya Tariqah, which appeared at the beginning of the 20th century thanks to the activity of Sayfulla-Qadi Bashlarov (1853-1919), exists and is successfully functioning in present-day Daghestan. This tariqah is sufficiently well grounded in the religious-political and spiritual-cultural life of the Daghestanis, which is related to the activity of Said Afandi al-Chirkawi, the living sheikh of three tariqahs (the Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya, and Shaziliyya). For example, K. Khanbabaev writes, “Said Afandi has more than 10,000 active murids who live in the Buynaksky, Kizilyutovsky, Khasavyurtovsky, Shamilsky, Gergebilsky, Gumbetovsky, Kazbekovsky, and Levashinsky districts, as well as in the cities of Makhachkala, Buynaksk, Kizilyurt, Khasavyurt, Kizlyar, Derbent, and Moscow. It is thought that he supervises the Spiritual Administration of Daghestan, among the leaders of which are his murids.”²

In addition to followers of the Shaziliyya Tariqah, Sheikh Said al-Chirkawi also gathers members of the Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya tariqahs for collective prayers, or dhikr (repeated invocation of the name of Allah). In his opinion, there is no principal difference among these tariqahs, for all of them are paths that lead the believer to God.

² K.M. Khanbabaev, “Sufiyskie sheykhi i ikh posledovateli v sovremennom Dagestane,” in: *Dagestan i musulmanskiy Vostok*, Marjani House Publishers, Moscow, 2010, p. 167.

The Naqshbandiyya Tariqah, important aspects of which are asceticism and mysticism, began to spread in Daghestan in the 15th century; later its followers became participants in various anti-feudal and anti-colonial demonstrations. In the 1820s, it acquired a pronounced religious-political nature due to intensification of czarist Russia's expansionist policy and the conciliatory activity of the local khans and princes who supported it.

The appearance of the Qadiriyya Tariqah in Chechnia is associated with the activity of Chechen Sufi Kunta-haji Kishiev. At the end of the 1850s, when the Caucasian war was already drawing to a close, Sufi Kunta-haji, wishing to prevent further bloodshed and destruction, repeatedly called for the Chechens to stop their resistance to the Russian army. His activity was objectively directed against the ghazavat—holy war—that Shamil declared against czarism, which was to be brought to a victorious conclusion.

Shamil persecuted Kunta-haji for his anti-war sermons and the loud dhikr (which differed ritually from the silent dhikr performed by the Naqshbandiyya murids) he and his murids (students) practiced. All the same, the Qadiriyya teaching became widespread among the mountain-dwellers who, tired of war, became very receptive to the new ideology. Despite the peaceful nature of Kunta-haji's activity, the czarist military administration arrested him and sent him into eternal exile in the town of Ustyuzhino in the Novgorod Gubernia. This caused Kunta-haji's supporters, armed only with ceremonial daggers, to rebel on 18 January, 1864, an act which was consequently dubbed the *Dagger Uprising*.³ The rebels were brutally dispersed by the czarist troops, many being arrested and sent into exile. The dhikrists (followers of Kunta-haji) were subjected to repression throughout the entire existence of czarist power, so their activity was largely of a clandestine nature.

The Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya tariqahs popular among the Chechens are broken down into smaller religious groups—vird brotherhoods. Due to the absence of a unified spiritual leadership, they have different interpretations of the teaching of the founders of the local tariqahs.

Although the representatives of all the Sufi brotherhoods in Chechnia adhere to the main provisions of orthodox Islam, their religious practices often differ in the rituals associated with the cult of saints. They revere the local founders of the tariqah or vird brotherhoods and visit their ziyarats (burial sites). These pilgrimages become much more frequent during the holy month of Ramadan.

Various legends about the miracles supposedly performed by their founders circulate among today's followers of the vird brotherhoods (such myths form a specific religious understanding of the world). Islamic non-traditionalists think they are misconceptions, so they criticize the Sufi traditions.

During the years of Soviet power, a short description was compiled of the 32 virds of the Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya tariqahs, which contains some information about their distinguishing features and relations with each other. But this study, during which many valuable ethnographic, theological, and culturological facts were collected, was interrupted by the political and military events in Chechnia. As a result, the past and present of the vird brotherhoods in Chechnia, their interrelations, distinguishing features, and level of impact on Chechen society have still not been fully studied.

However the study of Sufism has been revived today due to the greater participation of the vird brotherhoods and their leaders in the spiritual-cultural and political life of present-day Chechnia. This is why, on 6 July, 2008, the Muftiate of the Chechen Republic organized and held an international Islamic conference on the topic "Sufism and Its Role in the Development of Islamic Society" in Gudermes.

³ This uprising of dhikrists is described in detail in our work called *Sheykh Kunta-Khadzhi: zhizn i uchenie* (Grozny, 1994), as well as in the book *Narodnye vosstaniia v Chechne v 60-70-kh gg. XIX veka* (Moscow, 1999) by D.Sc. (Hist.), Professor S.-A.A. Isaev.

The conference's final document stated that "Sufism has played a significant role in spreading Islam in different regions of the world, reinforcing unification among Muslims, and preserving spiritual-moral and humanistic values and ethnocultural diversity. The ideals of Sufism are directly related to recognizing monotheism, understanding the numerous attributes of the Almighty, spiritual perfection, confirming love and kindness, overcoming sinful deeds, and condemning social injustice and violence."⁴

The participants in the forum called on believers to take a deeper look into the rich spiritual and cultural heritage of Sufism (for this it was suggested that a World Center for Study of the Sufi Culture be created), maintain a regular dialog between Muslims and non-Muslims based on humanistic ideas, and so on.

Chechen and Ingush virds have their own founders, whom followers call sheikh (ustaz or awlia). In contrast to Daghestan, there is not one practicing sheikh at present in Chechnia, which is a result of the brutal repressions of the clergy in czarist and Soviet times.

Virds have always played a perceptible role in the religious life of believers (and a slightly lesser role in the political life of the people); the representatives of some of them headed various national movements in the past. These include the movement of dhikrists (the beginning of the 1860s), the movement of Alibek-haji (1877-1878), the anti-Soviet uprisings of N. Gotsinskiy and Said-bek Shamil in Daghestan and Chechnia (the beginning of the 1920s), and the uprising of the Benoevs (the 1930s). Most frequently they were aimed against economic and spiritual oppression by the authorities.

At the dawn of Soviet power, Naqshbandi Sheikh Uzun-haji attempted to reanimate the imamate of Shamil. To this end he founded the North Caucasian emirate with its center in the Chechen village of Vedeno. As some studies assert, this theocratic formation was created on the advice of Turkish emissaries who supposedly passed on the Sultan's decree to the sheikh in which he was declared "the head of the spiritual and secular power of the Northern Caucasus."

In one of his appeals, Uzun-haji said: "I, as a spiritual person and a deeply believing Muslim, consider it my duty to assiduously call on the people to take only the path shown by our Muslim teaching, the Shari'a. I am against everyone who interferes with fulfilling the demands of the Shari'a and believe that such people can only be supporters of the old regime and its collaborators remaining from destroyed czarism."⁵

Uzun-haji is known for his declaration of a ghazavat on the Volunteer Army of Anton Denikin which occupied Ingushetia and Chechnia. To fight the "white general," he organized a national liberation army and formed a government, and he also appointed a military staff consisting of representatives of various anti-Denikin sociopolitical forces and militant groups. At that time, the Bolsheviks considered Uzun-haji their ally; Chechnia was liberated from Denikin's troops by the joint efforts of the Red Army and the sheikh's murids.

After the end of the Civil War and sudden death of Uzun-haji on 30 March, 1920, the ephemeral emirate he created fell apart. Uzun-haji's followers and murids, whom the authorities declared counterrevolutionaries, went underground.⁶ But the idea of creating an Islamic state formation based on the Shari'a lived on in the minds of some believers. Followers of Uzun-haji's vird can be found today in the Vedeno and Shatoy districts of the Chechen Republic.

In 1923, a struggle unfolded in Chechnia against the religious authorities who condemned the agricultural tax in kind that ruined the Chechen peasantry and doomed the people to starvation. Ali

⁴ Исламан зӀаьнарш (The Dawn of Islam), 10 July, 2008.

⁵ *Gorskaia respublika*, 1 March, 1918.

⁶ See: I.Kh. Sulaev, *Gosudarstvo i musulmanskoie dukhovenstvo v Dagestane: istoriia vzaimootsheniya (1917-1991)*, Makhachkala, 2009, p. 29.

Mitaev, the son of Sheikh Bamat-Girey-haji, who was repressed by the czarist authorities, was one of the first to speak out against the NEP policy. He was an open supporter of establishing Shari'a rule in Chechnia and did not hide his views. He became a member of the revolutionary committee of the Chechen Autonomous Region on the recommendation of the Bolsheviks, but in 1924 he was arrested and shot by the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) on the accusation of making preparations for an anti-Soviet uprising. He was in fact not involved in an armed uprising against Soviet power, although he spoke out against the brutal methods of administration and management, in particular against the agricultural tax in kind, justifiably believing that the Chechen peasantry was unable to pay it.

These issues are examined in greater detail in a book by M.D. Zaurbekov, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Исламан зӀаьнари* (The Dawn of Islam) published in Grozny.⁷ In his book, the author notes that on 28 July, 2004, prosecutor of the Rostov Region, state counselor of the second rank A.I. Kharkovsky issued a "Decision on the Rehabilitation of Mitaev A.B. and U.B. under Criminal Case, Archive No. 29370/5908/."⁸ So, Ali Mitaev and his brother Umar, executed under fabricated Chekist accusations, were not politically rehabilitated until 12 years after the downfall of Soviet power.

At the end of the 1920s, more than 300 representatives of the traditional Chechen clergy accused of counterrevolutionary activity and sectarianism were shot in the basements of the OGPU. In September of the same year, the mountain-dwellers' uprising broke out. According to A. Avtorkhanov, during the night of 31 July and 1 August, 1937, a so-called general operation to eliminate anti-Soviet elements was carried out in all the auls and districts of Checheno-Ingushetia in compliance with lists compiled in advance by the NKVD. During this operation, up to 14,000 people were arrested, which amounted to approximately 3% of the republic's total population⁹; believers constituted their overwhelming majority. They were all arrested under the same prosecutor's warrant and they were all part of the same trial in absentia conducted by the Emergency Troika of the Chechen-Ingush NKVD consisting of First Secretary of the Regional Committee Egorov, Head of the NKVD Dementiev, and special prosecutor of the NKVD of the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R. Porubaev.¹⁰ The NKVD Emergency Troika sentenced some of the arrested to execution by a firing squad, while the rest were sent to concentration camps.

At the end of 1980s, a new stage in rehabilitation of the victims of the Stalin-Beria repressions began in Checheno-Ingushetia. The archives of the KGB of the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R. contain thousands of case-records (form No.1) containing information about the people repressed in 1937.

For example, in 1937 the NKVD troika of the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R. sentenced L. Beymurzaev (born in 1903, a resident of Mudar-Iurt of the Nadterechny district) to death, who was recognized as a kulak and accused of carrying out anti-Soviet agitation among the people of his village. The sentence was carried out on 24 September, 1937, whereby L. Beymurzaev was rehabilitated by a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. of 16 January, 1989.

On 29 July, 1937, Z. Beymurzaev (born in 1875, a resident of the village of Gordali of the Sayasanovsky district) was arrested for anti-Soviet agitation among the people of his village; he was convicted by the NKVD troika on 14 September, shot on 25 September, 1937, and rehabilitated by a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. of 16 January, 1989.

S.B. Beysagurov (born in 1861, an Ingush, resident of the village of Khuli of the Galashkinsky district) was sentenced to death for anti-Soviet agitation. His case-record indicated that he was a mullah,

⁷ See: M.D. Zaurbekov, *Sheykh Ali Mitaev: patriot, mirotvorets, politik...* Moscow, 2005.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁹ See: A. Uralov (A. Avtorkhanov), *Ubiystvo checheno-ingushskogo naroda: narodoubiystvo v SSSR, Vsia Moskva Joint-Stock Company, Moscow, 1991, pp. 46-47.*

¹⁰ See: *Ibid.*, p. 47.

a tamada of Kunta-haji's sect, participated in 1930 in an anti-Soviet uprising, and carried out agitation under cover of religious dogma. He was rehabilitated by the same decree of 16 January, 1989.

In 1989, mullah M. Beymurzaev from Mudar-Iurt, who was executed for carrying out anti-Soviet agitation among the people of his village, was also rehabilitated.

On 13 January, 1938, A. Batsalgov (born in 1900, from the village of Tazbichi of the Itumkalskiy district of the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R.), who was declared a bourgeois nationalist, was arrested. He was convicted by the NKVD Troika of the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R. on 13 February, 1938 and executed on 5 March of the same year; he was subsequently rehabilitated (by a decree of 16 January, 1989).

Similar data on people arrested, sentenced for various terms, and rehabilitated are also kept in other numerous card catalogues in the archives of the KGB of the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R.

All these instances of repression of the population of the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R. are direct confirmation of the criminal activity of the Emergency Troika of the NKVD described by A. Avtorkhanov.

On 23 February, 1944, all of the Chechens and Ingush were deported en masse to Kazakhstan and Central Asia. They retained their cultural traditions and religious convictions while in exile. As for the Chechens in particular, they were able to preserve their customs and spiritual values due to the activity of the vird brotherhoods. When they returned home, they began tidying up the neglected cemeteries and rebuilding the ziyarats of the sheikhs and ustazes. It should be noted that affiliation with vird brotherhoods and Islam as a whole is a marked feature of the ethnic identity of the Chechens.

The attitude of the Soviet authorities toward the vird brotherhoods was extremely negative, since it saw hidden religious-political opposition in their activity. The party structures of the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R. considered one of their most important ideological tasks to be eradication the remnants of the past associated with the national customs and traditions, as well as the activity of religious sectarians.

At the height of Gorbachev's perestroika, the press organ of the Chechen-Ingush Regional Committee of the C.P.S.U. noted that "in the village of Pervomaiskoe, followers of the sect of Kunta-haji, violating the law on religious cults, gathered in the home of one of the villagers, Z. Gunaev. They not only performed religious rituals at this gathering, but also discussed the activity of the rural council regarding land use issues and the confiscation of illegal surplus land from some of the village residents."¹¹

The anti-religious situation that existed in Checheno-Ingushetia was most fully described in the statement of Kh. Bokov: "Religious prejudices are now the strongest hindrance to the spiritual development of most of the population of Checheno-Ingushetia. Muridism of the Muslim sects is a particular problem here. Ideologists of the sectarian formations are not only trying to regulate everyday life and morals, but are also forcing their way into the social spheres of activity of believers and their close relatives and trying to bring them into opposition with Soviet schools, clubs, libraries, Communist morals, and Soviet law."¹²

But by some quirk of fate, it was not at all the "muridism of Muslim sects" that became the hindrance to the spiritual development of the population of former Checheno-Ingushetia; it did not interfere in social spheres of activity and was not in opposition to schools, culture, morals, or the law (even Soviet). All of this applied to the non-traditional Islamic trends (Salafism and Wahhabism), which 12 years after Kh. Bokov's statement, saw a deadly threat to their existence in this same "sectarian muridism."

¹¹ *Groznenskiy rabochiy*, 15 September, 1987.

¹² Kh.Kh. Bokov, *Internatsionalizm na dele*, Sov. Rossiia, Moscow, 1984, p. 193.

The Correlation between Traditions and Innovations

Re-Islamization gradually began during Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost in the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R. Religious establishments and centers arose all over the place, the clergy became much more active, and previously unknown or unavailable religious literature began to appear.

In 1989-1990s, speeches were made at meetings in Grozny claiming that the Koran was the Constitution of the Muslims and there could be no other law for them. New religious parties and movements emerged which were joined by people of different world outlooks and political orientations, including former communists.

The activity of many people, including believers, was prompted by the desire for social, political, and cultural changes to replace the entrenched communist traditions. Branches of the Islamic Party of Renaissance (IPR) formed in 1990 in Astrakhan emerged in Daghestan, Chechnia, and other regions of the country. According to some researchers, the traditional clergy of Daghestan began calling the members of the IPR Wahhabis.

After the "revolution" in 1991, the instigators of Islamic innovations and the representatives of religious radicalism, the authority of whom significantly increased due to their participation in the first Chechen war, began to gradually fortify their position in the power structures of the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R. Under their influence, Shari'a courts were created and active Islamization of social and cultural life occurred.

Over time, the ideology and practice of the representatives of so-called North Caucasian Wahhabism began to acquire an anti-traditional nature: its followers began deliberately criticizing the Sufi traditions of the peoples of Daghestan, Chechnia, and Ingushetia. They evaluated the religious activity of the vird brotherhoods as anti-Islamic, which gave rise to inter-religious conflicts that frequently escalated into bloodshed.

At the beginning of 1992, Dzhokhar Dudaev and Zelimkhan Yandarbiev began eliminating the Muftiate that opposed them headed by Magomed-Bashir Arsanukaev, a well-known alim and follower of the Naqshbandiyya vird of Abdul-Wahhab Aksaisky. To this end, an Islamic center was created and Muhammad-Hussein Alsabekov, who came from Kazakhstan, was appointed its head. The authorities intended to replace the Muftiate with a new religious structure, but the representatives of the official clergy convened a Muslim congress at which these intentions were condemned.

It was under Dzhokhar Dudaev that a large number of the representatives of traditional Islam began being pushed toward the periphery of spiritual and sociocultural reality in Chechnia. A mechanism for discrediting the traditional clergy of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria was exposed in a publication by M. Vakhidova.¹³

In order to deprive the traditional Chechen clergy of its influence, a Mekhk-Kkhel was created headed by the controversial figure of S. Adizov, who unsuccessfully tried to subordinate the Muftiate to his power. But since the traditional clergy condemned the policy of the new authorities, the latter decided to modernize the republic's Muslim administration.

Under the pressure of the authorities, Mufti Magomed-Bashir Arsanukaev left his post and follower of the Qadiriyya Tariqah M. Garkaev was elected in his place. However, on the eve of the First Chechen War, he also left his post, showing his disagreement with Dzhokhar Dudaev's policy. The new, pro-Dudaev mufti, Muhammad-Hussein Alsabekov, proved more complacent: whereas his predecessors were against declaring ghazavat on Russia, he easily consented to it. Later, enjoying the fa-

¹³ See: M. Vakhidova, "Komu meshaet muftiiat?" *Golos Checheno-Ingushetii*, 24 April, 1992.

vor of the Russian troops, Alsabekov abandoned his previous stance, claiming that he had been acting under pressure.

A few of the vird brotherhoods also participated directly in the political events of the 1990s. Some of them supported the head of the separatists of Dzhokhar Dudaev; while others, who were in direct opposition to his entourage, were persecuted (for example, the followers of D. Arsanov's vird, who enjoyed significant influence among the believers of the Nadterechny district of the Chechen Republic, as well as among the Ingush).

The traditional Chechen clergy, which largely consisted of the followers of Naqshbandiyya, did not support the Dudaev-Alsabekov ghazavat declared against the Russian troops in the fall of 1994.

Essentially all the vird brotherhoods opposed the Wahhabis, and some of them (for example, the Tashu-haji and Kunta-haji brotherhoods) entered into armed conflict with them on 14 June, 1998 in Gudermes, refusing to accept their religious and political ideas and corresponding practices.¹⁴

Today, as a result of the restricted activity of religious non-traditionalists and their inability to introduce their innovations into Chechen society, the position of traditional Islam, as well as the followers of Sufism and the most influential Kunta-haji vird, has greatly strengthened. Descendants of the Chechen ustazes and sheikhs respected among the people are taking active part in resolving the conflicts among believers, trying to reconcile sworn enemies and supporting one political figure or another.

Despite the segmentation of Sufism into vird brotherhoods and the noticeable differences among them, Islam in Chechnia is nevertheless unified. The Muslims of Chechnia are Sunnites who follow the Shafi'i maddhab (a theological law school founded by Muslim theologian Muhammad ash-Shafi'i). Due to its simplicity, this maddhab has become widespread in many Muslim countries and also penetrated into Daghestan, Chechnia, and Ingushetia. This explains the antagonism most of the Muslims of Chechnia and Ingushetia express against Wahhabism, which denies the Sufi traditions.

Chechen Teips and Virds as Incompatible Social Phenomena

For many Chechens, belonging to teips (clans) is a many-century historical tradition of the social structure of their society, forming ethnic psychology and the mechanisms for regulating ethnic relations. However, over the course of history, external factors that changed their world outlook and lifestyle had an influence on the vision and ethnopolitical ideas of the Chechens.

Vird brotherhoods arose much later than teips. Their existence became a sacral tradition and spiritual aspect of Chechen existence. The spiritual-cultural traditions of the Chechens are still primarily homogeneous, although the diversity of teips and virds often gives rise to contradictory situations in which inter-religious unity is violated. The presence of archaic social and religious institutions might be seen as evidence of sociocultural heterogeneity and the amorphousness of Chechen society, but this is not entirely true. History bears witness to many instances when Chechens became mobilized and consolidated in the face of external threats, defending themselves and their religious interests.

Some studies assert the direct tie between teips and virds; such arguments are incorrect from a strictly scientific point of view. The Arabic word "taifa" is interpreted as a kind of collective term that

¹⁴ See: V.Kh. Akaev, *Islam: sotsiokulturnaia realnost na Savernom Kavkaze*, North Caucasian Scientific Center Higher School Publishers, Rostov-on-the-Don, 2004, p. 159.

also includes the people living in a certain territory but not necessarily joined by blood ties, on which, as we know, a clan is based. Teip is not a kindred or tribal ethnic structure, but a conglomeration of people (consisting of representatives of different clans, ethnicities, and even races) living in the same territory and entering into sociocultural relations.

Some researchers of the czarist period, without delving too deeply into the gist of the concepts of “teip” and “clan” and their interrelationship, have placed an equals sign between them. Chechen ethnographer of the pre-revolutionary period U. Laudaev is also of the same opinion, for whom teip means people of “the same last name, clan, or tribe.”¹⁵

This kind of negligent attitude toward terms is also characteristic of Soviet ethnographic studies. A book by M. Mamakaev can be mentioned by way of example.¹⁶ However, it should be noted that U. Laudaev expressed a thought that was not further developed, i.e. that Chechens say the following about other peoples: “Giriy taipa, Donskoy taipa, that is, Ossetian family, Don family, and so on,”¹⁷ thus giving the term “teip” an expanded interpretation.

He calls the Ossetian ethnicity (хИррий) or Don people (i.e. an entire ethnicity or part of some ethnicity) “teip,” but not “clan.” He calls members of a clan “vezhariy” (“brothers”) and their relations “voshalla” (“brotherhood”).¹⁸

Since the mid-1990s alone, works have been appearing in Chechnia that re-examine the meaning of the terms “clan” and “teip.” For example, Ya. Chesnov tried to determine the nature of the social structure of Chechens through the correlation of teips and tukkhums, admitting that these terms were borrowed from the Arabic language. From our viewpoint, their artificial transfer to the social structure of Chechen society led to confusion that continues to this day. Moreover, Ya. Chesnov, understanding that the Chechen “clan” and “teip” are not identical concepts, tried to clarify the difference between them. But he did not succeed: he writes that in the literature “taips” are often called “clans.”¹⁹ He interprets a “taip” (teip) as a “neighboring community consisting of farmer-proprietors.”²⁰

S. Nataev recently carried out a pioneer study devoted to an analysis of the essence, structure, and social dynamics of the Chechen teip.²¹ His colleagues engaged in the Soviet period in the development of ethnographic science were skeptical about it. S. Nataev very justifiably suggested that a strict defining line be drawn between the terms “clan” and “teip.” But his conception, according to which teip is a brotherhood, was criticized by well-known Russian academic ethnographers.

In keeping with the religious-political structure of the vird brotherhoods, their members are usually the representatives of entirely different teips, whereby the first are much fewer in number than teips, so identifying them with each other cannot be considered correct.

According to M. Mamakaev, there are 135 teips in Chechen society²²; this figure is more than four times higher than the number of vird brotherhoods. According to some expert estimates, virds

¹⁵ U. Laudaev, “Chechenskoe plemia (with commentary),” in: *Collected Facts about Caucasian Mountain-Dwellers*, Issue VI, Tiflis, 1782, p. 15.

¹⁶ See: M. Mamakaev, *Chechenskiy teip v period ego razlozheniia*, Checheno-Ingush Book Publishers, Grozny, 1973.

¹⁷ U. Laudaev, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁸ See: Ibidem.

¹⁹ See: Ya. Chesnov, *Byt chechentsem: lichnost i etnicheskie identifikatsii naroda, Chechnia i Rossiia: obshchestva i gosudarstva*, Polinform-Talburi, Moscow, 1999, pp. 69-70.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ See: S.A. Nataev, *Chechenskiy taip: sushchnost, struktura i sotsialnaia dinamika*, Author’s dissertation abstract for a Ph.D. in Historical Science, Makhachkala, 2010.

²² See: M. Mamakaev, op. cit. In his Ph.D. dissertation, S.A. Nataev established the existence of 282 teips in Chechen society, which he divides according to professional and national characteristics. This is due to the fact that Chechens accept the representatives of other ethnicities as their members. This is where the existence of approximately 20 teips of different nationalities in Chechen society comes from, such as Abzoy (Abazins), Глазгумки (Laks), Гезалой (Tatars), гуьржи (Georgians), жуьгги (Jews), гIалгIазки (Cossacks), etc. According to him, Chechen society was not a closed social system, as some researchers think; it was open and always integrated people of non-Chechen origin into its structure.

cover approximately 80% of all the believers in Chechnia: 60% of them belong to the Qadiriyya virds (the most numerous of them being followers of the Kunta-haji vird), while 20% are the followers of various Naqshbandiyya virds. Fifteen percent of all believers do not belong to any of the vird brotherhoods, while 5% of the population consists of people indifferent to religion.

The role of virds in the social and political mobilization of the Chechens is quite perceptible, whereby the descendants of sheikhs and some vird authorities often have greater influence on Chechen society than the leaders of “prestigious” teips. Political figures often turn to them for support during political campaigns and elections, asking them to mobilize their congregations. What is more, vird authorities play a key role in reconciling hostile sides, particularly sworn enemies.

Sociocultural traditions contain quite a number of human values, but they are also somewhat conservative. In contemporary Chechen society, religious traditions play a significant role in opposing extremist manifestations. All the same, the ethnic component in national Islam predominates over the religious.

Believers are often faced with a dilemma: should they call themselves Muslims or the representatives of a specific ethnicity? This question came up most frequently during the standoff between the supporters of North Caucasian Wahhabism and the representatives of traditional Islam.

The Wahhabis believed that religious affiliation, particularly with jamaat groups which aim to create a caliphate, is higher than kindred and ethnic ties. The representatives of traditional Islam, on the other hand, give preference to the ethnic component, seeing the ideology and practice of radicals as a threat to spiritual and cultural traditions.

Acting against the ideology and practice of Wahhabism, which is non-traditional for Chechnia, Akhmad Kadyrov (who was Chief Mufti and then became President of the Chechen Republic) expressed his position on this issue in the following phrase: “First we are Chechens, then Muslims.” This statement shows the syncretism of the ethnic and religious identity of the Chechens.

The ethnic component dominates in the self-consciousness of the Chechens, which is also characteristic of many ethnicities of the Northern Caucasus. But this factor was not taken into account by the forces who tried to impose values of religious radicalism on Chechen society formed outside the civilizational-cultural expanse of the Caucasus.

Some researchers believe that the Islamic traditionalism issue will inevitably lead to a conflict in the Northern Caucasus between the Islamic youth and representatives of the older generation who are the bearers of traditional Islam. Young people criticize Sufism, believing that it differs from Salafism (Islam of the times of the righteous caliphs) in many issues. In their opinion, the Muslim religion should be purified of innovations and misconceptions. In this respect, it can be presumed that a new stage in the Islamization of the Dagestanis, Chechens, and Ingush is in the offing under the influence of “people’s Islam.”

Traditional or “people’s Islam” in the Chechen Republic is on the whole a symbiosis culture based on two traditions—ethnic and Islamic. The development of Islam in the republic is inseparably related to local specifics generated by the spread in the Sufi culture and the functioning of the institution of vird brotherhoods that uphold, along with the main provisions of Islam, non-traditional elements of ritual practice (for example, performing silent or loud dhikr, visiting ziyarats), as well as with the existence of a teip structure, which gives a certain diversity to the ethnic culture of the Chechens.

At the same time, the ideological and political activity of the radical Muslims is introducing certain innovations into the religious-political situation in Dagestan, Chechnia, and Ingushetia. At present, the activity of the Wahhabis is not open: they have changed their tactics, toned down their propagandistic activity, and, moreover, been deprived of publicity. Nevertheless, they still have influence over young people. When asked where the Wahhabis had gone, one of our information sources said that the Chechen Republic is full of them and you can convince yourself of this by visiting the mosques. During

prayer services, the Wahhabis keep to themselves, standing apart from the rest of the congregation; they can also be recognized by their style of dress. What is more, as soon as the imam has finished the official part of the prayer service, they immediately leave the mosque, while representatives of the vird brotherhoods continue to perform additional prayers, which in the opinion of the local non-traditionalists (that is, the Wahhabis) is an innovation and misconception that does not correspond to "true" Islam.

The open conflict between the followers of Sufism and Wahhabism that lasted for an entire decade (since the beginning of the 1990s to the beginning of the 2000s) in Daghestan, Chechnia, and Ingushetia has taken on a latent form today. But some Wahhabi jamaats which carried out extremist and terrorist acts against the secular government are continuing to kill representatives of the traditional clergy who speak out against their ideology and practice.

Lowering the level of religious-political radicalism in the regions of the Northern Caucasus will help to improve ethnic and interconfessional relations, as well as establish an effective cultural dialog. Both the representatives of traditional confessions for Russia and the local power structures that define ecclesiastical and confessional policy could largely promote these processes. For example, the ziyarats and burial sites of all the well-known saints have been reconstructed in the Chechen Republic today. This campaign was made possible by the financial and moral support of the republic's leadership.

Pilgrimage to the Holy Places as a Factor of the Religious Identity of Chechens

As we know, hajj to Mecca is one of the mandatory pillars of Islam and performed by all Muslims who have sufficient resources. It is also one of the factors determining the religious identity of the Muslim. Every year the number of Chechens going on hajj to Mecca is growing. This has been promoted by the Muftiate's support and Ramzan Kadyrov's personal interest, who renders financial aid to Muslims unable to make the pilgrimage.

In many countries, there is a historical tradition of making hajj not only to Mecca, but also to the burial sites of prophets or saints, which gives a particular flavor to the Muslim culture of a particular region. The widespread cult of saints is accompanied by believers who visit their graves performing various rituals and prayers. A. Suvorova notes: "Veneration of a saint almost always means worshipping his tomb, in which, along with the interred remains, some substantial evidence of his earthly life is preserved: his clothing, turban, sandals, staff, weapon, prayer beads, which have become relics."²³

Pilgrimage to the holy places, visiting the tombs of well-known prophets, praying to them, and having confidence in their intercession are the most important components of Sufi national Islam. This tradition, which is evidence of religious syncretism, has also been preserved in the Northern Caucasus, including in the Chechen Republic.

An extremely important feature of the religious life of contemporary Chechnia is the mass pilgrimage of people to the tombs of Tashu-haji, Bammat-Girey-haji, Deni Arsanov, Dokku-sheikh, Uzun-haji, and others. An enormous number of people, particularly young people, go on pilgrimages to the

²³ A. Suvorova, *Musulmanskie sviatyie Iuzhnoy Azii XI-XV vekov*, Moscow, 1999, p. 12.

burial site of Khedi, the mother of Sheikh Kunta-haji. Throughout May and June, day and night, children of school age and young people go there on foot, while adults and the elderly travel there on some kind of transport. According to expert data, in 2006, more than 300,000 people went on pilgrimages; they also included followers of Qadiriyya who came from Jordan. In the middle of July of this year, a group of employees from the Ministry of the Chechen Republic for External Communication, National Policy, Press, and Information went on a pilgrimage to Khedi's grave.

Veneration of Khedi is the main religious cult in Chechnia. According to legend, Kunta-haji told his mother that the path leading to her tomb would never become overgrown. This prophesy is confirmed by the annual mass visits by believers, particularly young people from remote Chechen villages.

Pilgrimage to the ziyarats of the saints plays an extremely important role in the ritual practice of the Muslims of Chechnia. It is an important symbol of the Chechens' religious beliefs, marking their religious identity. When they visit the holy places, believers pray to the Almighty asking for their relatives and loved ones to be cured, prosperity for their family, children, and so on.

The special features that create the syncretic nature of Islam in present-day Chechnia have developed over many centuries. They are related to the history of the spread of Islam in Chechnia and its adaptation to the ethnocultural values of the people, as well as to the military-political processes that occurred during the colonial policy of czarism. The clashes between the traditional culture of the Chechens and radical and extremist trends in the form of the Wahhabis have also left their mark on national Islam.

The overwhelming majority of Chechnia's Muslims, as followers of traditional Islam, have rejected the ideology and practice of Wahhabism forcefully imposed on them. From the mid-1990s to the beginning of the 2000s, Akhmad Kadyrov put up active resistance to Wahhabism.

Spiritual-Moral Upbringing— An Important Project of Chechen Sociocultural Development

In the Chechen Republic, a project of spiritual-moral upbringing and development of young people, formation of tolerant attitudes, and discrediting of the ideology and practice of religious radicalism and extremism is being implemented. The idea for this transformation was expressed by President Akhmad Kadyrov. It reflected one of the main elements of his spiritual-political credo.

Mobilization of the moral-humanistic potential of Islam and the achievements of the Sufi culture formed on the basis of religious-philosophical and moral-humanistic ideas, as well as the practical activity of the sheikhs (including sheikh Kunta-haji) who showed their people the way to spiritual perfection, are playing a significant role in carrying out the designated tasks.

What is more, sociocultural reality is such that Chechens today are looking for appropriate models of social structure, their own identity, national idea, and ways to enhance successful spiritual-cultural development. Finding solutions to these difficult tasks is extremely difficult. A complicated and contradictory path must be taken that entails overcoming numerous obstacles associated with non-acceptance of the innovations of mass culture and radical ideas that go against the spiritual, cultural, and social traditions of the Chechens.

The tragic events the Chechens experienced in the 20th century have had an impact on their lifestyle and world outlook. However, religious and moral-humanistic upbringing has always been the

concern of every civilized society, and it has not lost its urgency for the Chechen Republic. Focusing their attention on the spiritual and cultural healing of the republic's population, Head of the Chechen Administration Ramzan Kadyrov and the official Chechen clergy are promoting the organization of different kinds of undertakings aimed at overcoming aggressive, radical, and extremist manifestations in young people; sports, culture, and education are being successfully developed. Chechen young people strive for knowledge; many of them are enrolling in well-known Russian universities and up to 300 students from the Chechen Republic are studying in Europe. This has become possible due to Ramzan Kadyrov's financial support.

Some Chechen families, trying to inculcate the Islamic culture in their children from preschool and school age, are teaching them to read the Koran. Competitions of Koran readers and experts in the history of Islam and one's native region are being held in the republic. Almost all the large population settlements of the Chechen Republic are building Islamic schools. For example, a Hafiz madrasah which is a masterpiece of architectural art has been built in Ramzan Kadyrov's home village of Khosi-Yurt. Many Islamic educational institutions have been built and are functioning on money allotted by the Akhmad-haji Kadyrov Fund, while some enjoy the donations of wealthy people.

Round tables and lectures are being held and sermons preached in families, schools, and higher educational institutions that reveal the humanistic and peace-loving role of Islam (often with the involvement of the media). Chechen society is being gradually Islamized (this process is often artificially accelerated); more and more women and men are incorporating Muslim attributes into their behavior and way of life. All the institutions of the republic have received an order from the Administration of the Head of the Chechen Republic demanding that women wear national clothing. But this order contains a legal absurdity, since this type of clothing has not been developed in the republic and has not been legislatively approved.

The activity of Chairman of the Council of Alims of the Chechen Republic Khozh-Akhmed Kadyrov plays an important role in spiritual-cultural upbringing. He gives comprehensive answers to the many questions asked by believers about different aspects of their life based on the Koran and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. He calls on believers to oppose evil and violence, carry out pious deeds, and be just and merciful, as the Prophet taught.

The Islamic Way organization supported by the government and headed by V. Khashkhanov plays a positive role in implementing the youth spiritual and moral upbringing project. The members of this organization frequently call on young people (particularly girls) to wear clothes that correspond to the religious regulations. This activity is aimed at legitimizing the above-mentioned organization, some of the functions of which intertwine with the work of the Chechen Republic Muftiate.

On 27 July, 2011, in Grozny, on the eve of the month of Ramadan, the Youth Committee under the Government of the Chechen Republic organized a procession through the city streets bearing slogans of "No to alcoholism! No to smoking!"; the participants in the campaign used their own money to buy alcohol in the stores and then made a demonstration of pouring it out. In the opinion of the procession participants, their protest, which condemned antisocial manifestations and social deviations, was aimed at encouraging a healthy lifestyle. It should be noted that this campaign was approved by quite a large number of people.

Contemporary Chechen society has still not rid itself of different forms of deviant behavior and social injustice; it suffers, as does Russian society as a whole, from a high level of corruption, unemployment, and poverty, extreme wealth of bureaucrats, and so on, which often arouses justified criticism from the followers of trends that are not traditional for Chechnia.

The field of activity of religious-radical or jamaat groups active in Daghestan and Kabardino-Balkaria is perceptibly limited in the Chechen Republic, which is an important result of the political and ideological activity of the leadership and federal structures of the republic.

Conclusion

The religious renaissance in present-day Chechnia is manifested in the increased activity of representatives of traditional Islam, including the authorities, which are acting as the main driving force behind this process. Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov is making a significant contribution to the reconstruction of ziyarats, the building of magnificent mosques and Islamic educational establishments in the Turkish architectural style, and the construction of houses, stadiums, and recreation parks for children and adults. The destructive strategy demonstrated by the separatists is being replaced by a renovating and creative process. At the same time, religious-extremist manifestations are being minimized in Chechen society, which is an indication of the sociopolitical and religious-cultural renaissance of Chechen society.

Today's Chechen youth, on whom the authorities are depending, is oriented toward modernized changes in society and retaining the fundamental values of the Chechen ethnic culture. It is open to accepting new social and cultural programs that correlate to the national mentality.

But different strata and professional groups of Chechen society are concerned about the various unresolved problems associated with social injustice, the low standard of living, poverty, corruption, and so on. However, the authorities, although focusing great attention on the spiritual and cultural rebirth of the nation, are far from always successfully resolving its urgent socioeconomic problems. This is shown by the high level of unemployment which, according to official data, reaches 40% of the total number of able-bodied workers in the Chechen Republic.

The authorities and Chechen society (at least its rationally thinking members) are looking for appropriate solutions to the designated problems. Keeping in mind the specifics of the Islamic renaissance in the Chechen Republic, it can be presumed that the spiritual and cultural changes achieved will acquire new dynamics providing that the people, including believers, can achieve a higher level of prosperity.
