

RELIGION IN SOCIETY

**ISLAM
AS A POLITICAL FACTOR
IN POST-SOVIET AZERBAIJAN**

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Religious revival in Azerbaijan as a research subject is too vast to be discussed within the scope of one article, therefore I shall limit myself to its individual aspects. In particular, I shall show how Islam acquired a greater political role after 20 January, 1990 and how its political clout largely depends on the situation in the republic and on its political leaders.

**1. Emergence of Religious Identity and
the “Islamic Renaissance” of
the Late Soviet Period**

Religious renaissance as a phenomenon typical of many post-Soviet transit societies is commonly regarded as a process that either predates or postdates a new national identity. I think that religious revival in Azerbaijan in the late Soviet period postdated the new national identity of the titular ethnos. So far, there is no agreement in the academic community about the factors leading up to the creation of the new national identity. Brenda Shaffer, for example, has written that this process was deeply rooted in the pre-perestroika period, when the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, highly impressed by historical writings and literary works, developed ideas of a new collective identity.¹ Mark Saroyan in turn believes that it was the events of the 1980s around Nagorny Karabakh that contrib-

¹ See: B. Shaffer, *Borders and Erethren. Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*, The MIT Press, London and Cambridge, 2002, pp. 6-7, 119.

uted to the process of forming the Azerbaijanis' new national awareness.² Russian and Azerbaijani academics mostly believe that although reflected in what small dissident and quasi-dissident groups were doing under Soviet power (the political activities of the future president, Abulfaz Elchibey, can be cited as an example), the new national identity stems from the Karabakh conflict and what is called the "Armenian catalyst."³

In any case this conflict can be regarded as a boost to the Azerbaijanian national movement and an indirect cause behind the slow growth of the titular ethnos' religious awareness. Ali Abasov has written: "Even if society was mainly deprived of its religion, the failure of the communist ideology and the new upsurge in the national-liberation movement that happened when Soviet power had nearly reached its end inevitably pushed Azerbaijani society toward Islam."⁴ The Azerbaijanis were driven by cultural considerations rather than a desire to come back to the fold of their religion. Indeed, the nation's majority "graduated" from the Soviet school of atheism, and Islam as an ideology was non-existent for them. We cannot say, therefore, that from the very beginning the Karabakh conflict was seen as a religious war in that milieu.⁵ Contrary to what Dmitry Trofimov has written, the fact that most Azeris are Shi'a Muslims does not mean that they are driven by the "Islamic ideology," which was manifested, in particular, in the "cruelty of (Armenian.—R.S.) pogroms" in Baku in January 1990.⁶ It seems that Audrey Altstadt was more objective: "Despite popular media references to a 'Muslim-Christian conflict' and the convenient use of Shi'ism to explain the unrest, the Azerbaijani Turks have not made religious appeals. Islam, although important in culture and personal life, has not been used for political mobilization, political organization, for unifying the population, or defining any major political platform in Azerbaijan."⁷

Religious revival in late-Soviet Azerbaijan, which followed national renaissance, was not an ideological, but rather a cultural process: the nation driven to Islam as part of its ethnic culture visited the mosques in greater numbers than before. It should be added that the mosques themselves were either built anew or restored using foreign funds. In the past, before the Soviet Union was formed, there were about 2,000 mosques in Azerbaijan, most of which were destroyed in the 1930s, or closed down during the atheist campaign launched by the communist government and designed to uproot religion in the Soviet Union. During World War II, some of the mosques were reopened: the Stalin regime used all the means at its disposal, including religion, to mobilize the Soviet people to fight Nazi Germany. Still, until the mid-1980s there were only 16 officially registered mosques in the republic; two central and five district ones in the capital.⁸ By 1991, there were 84 mosques and other religious organizations functioning in the republic, some of them illegal or semi-legal.⁹

Religious revival stirred up the political activities of the main Muslim religious structure of Azerbaijan—the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Transcaucasus (SAMT).¹⁰ Its head, Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pasha-zadeh, came forward with several initiatives for peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict. In May 1988, he met with head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Vazgen I, in Ros-

² See: M. Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs, and Modernity: Reshaping Community in the Former Soviet Union*, University of California, Berkeley, 1997, p. 175.

³ See, for example: D. Furman, A. Abasov, "Azerbaijanskaia revoliutsiia," in: *Azerbaijan i Rossia: obshchestva i gosudarstva*, ed. by D. Furman, Sakharov Foundation, Moscow, 2001, pp. 124–125; S. Cherniavskiy, *Novy put Azerbaijania*, Azeri-Media, Kniga i Bizness, Moscow, 2002, pp. 26–28; A. Balaev, *Azerbaijanskoe natsional'noe dvizhenie: ot "Musavata" do Narodnogo fronta*, Elm Publishers, Baku, 1992, p. 38.

⁴ A. Abasov, "Islam v sovremennom Azerbaijane: obrazy i realii," in: *Azerbaijan i Rossia: obshchestva i gosudarstva*, p. 293.

⁵ See: *Zerkalo* (Baku), 17 March, 2001, p. 22.

⁶ D. Trofimov, *Islam in the Political Culture of the Former Soviet Union: Central Asia and Azerbaijan*, IFSH, Hamburg, 1995, p. 57.

⁷ A. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity Under Russian Rule*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1992, p. 209.

⁸ See: Y. Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union. From the Second World War to Gorbachev*, Hurst & Company, London, 2000, p. 182, f. 5.

⁹ See: R.G. Landa, *Islam v istorii Rossii*, Vostochnaia literatura RAN, Moscow, 1995, p. 249.

¹⁰ There was another religion-related structure. I have in mind the Religious Administration at the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijanian S.S.R. set up to control all religious communities in the republic.

tov-on-Don.¹¹ In June 1989, Pasha-zadeh was elected a delegate to the First Congress of People's Deputies of the U.S.S.R., which riveted the attention of the entire country; later he served on the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet committee for openness, citizens' rights and complaints and was a member of the group entrusted with drafting a law on the freedom of religion;¹² and for a long time he sat on the Soviet Children's Foundation Board.

His political involvement (which looked fairly active at the first glance) did not mean that Islam had an important political role to play in the republic. It acquired this role in the small hours of 20 January, 1990 in Baku when, as a result of bringing Soviet troops into the capital, over 100 people of different nationalities and religions were killed or crushed by tanks.¹³ It was understood that the troops were brought in to stem the Armenian pogroms in Baku, which had reached their peak on 13 January. Officially, Moscow described the bloodshed, in which peaceful citizens of Azerbaijan lost their lives, as a "struggle against Islamic fundamentalists" wishing to capture power in the republic. In his address to the Soviet people, Mikhail Gorbachev said: "An attempt to establish an Islamic regime was made in Azerbaijan."¹⁴ On 21 January, the spiritual leader of Azerbaijan, Allahshukur Pasha-zadeh, openly criticized the Moscow leaders for the first time in the history of the religious establishment of Azerbaijan. He accused Gorbachev of "sanctioning the bloody events." In his letter to him, he stressed that the use of the "Islamic factor" in an attempt to justify the use of force in Baku was aimed at fanning enmity between the republic's Muslims and the Christians.¹⁵

Burials of the victims, a purely religious ceremony, developed into a political protest against the Moscow-organized repressions of the Azerbaijani national movement. On 20 January, 1990, about one million people went out into the streets of Baku to honor the memory of the victims. Together with the spiritual leader of the Muslims of Azerbaijan, leaders of other confessions (Russian Orthodox and Judaic included) came to the funerals of the victims of the Soviet army's aggression.¹⁶ They also resolutely condemned the introduction of troops. According to the local custom, a 40-day long mourning for the innocent victims was announced, the most striking feature of which, according to many people, was Koran readings in Arabic, with which the Radio Liberty-Azadlıq service interspersed its information programs to mark its solidarity with the mourning nation. The 20 January events in Baku can be described as the beginning of a religious revival in the republic. The process that started after perestroika as a cultural one received a new impulse, which propelled it to a qualitatively new level, that of the politicization of Islam.

2. Islam during the First Independence Years

As soon as it acquired its independence in 1991 Azerbaijan began establishing friendly contacts with the Muslim world. By that time it had already established close ties with its neighbors, Iran and Turkey; it extended its diplomatic relations further, to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, etc. On 8 December, 1991, Azerbaijan became the first post-Soviet Muslim republic to be elected a member of the OIC.¹⁷ Islam was gradually moving to the center of political activities; since 1990,

¹¹ On the SAMT initiative for settling the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, see: V. Ibayev, *Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi və Ermənistan-Azərbaycan Münaqişəsi*, Əbilov, Zeynalov və Oğulları, Bakı, 1999.

¹² See: P. Savin, "Ne proizvodite rasstroystva na zemle!" *Nauka i religia*, No. 9, 1989, pp. 14-16.

¹³ See: *Konflikty v SSSR: Cherny ianvar v Azerbayjane. Vyderzhki iz Otcheta amerikanskoy khel'sinskoy gruppy*, s.l., May 1991, p. 22.

¹⁴ V. Ibayev, op. cit., p. 60.

¹⁵ See: Şeyx ul-Islam Allahşükür Paşa-zadə, *The Appeal to the Secretary General of CC of CFSU, the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the U.S.S.R. Mikhail Gorbachyev* [<http://www.president.az/azerbaijan/20/english/yan06.htm>].

¹⁶ About religious confessions in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, see: R. Sattarov, "Interreligious Dialogue in the Era of Globalization: The Example of Azerbaijan," *Journal of Azerbaijani Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3-4, 2002, pp. 79-85.

¹⁷ See: *Islam Qazeti*, 19 December, 1991.

several political parties and public organizations (*cəmiyyətlər*) guided by Islamic principles and moral values have existed: the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (IPA); the Azerbaijanian Party of Islamic Progress, and public organizations, Azad Ruhanilər (the Free Clergy) and Tövbə (Repentance). In the early 1990s, at least three Islamic newspapers appeared in the republic. *Islam*, an apolitical weekly, was published by the Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus (the former SAMT); two other publications, *Islam Dün-yası* (the Islamic World) and *İslamın Səsi* (the Voice of Islam),¹⁸ belonged to the IPA and were its political mouthpiece.¹⁹

It should be said, however, that these Islamic organizations were not typical of the political landscape of Azerbaijan. The majority of the republic's political leaders looked at Islam as a unifying principle which connected the country with the rest of the Muslim world, and nothing more.²⁰ There is no denying that Islam acquired a greater political role in independent Azerbaijan. This can be graphically illustrated by how the post-Soviet leaders took advantage of the nation's religious sentiments. Aiaz Mutalibov, the first president of independent Azerbaijan (1991-1992), was obviously leaning on the Qardaşlıq (Brotherhood) public-religious organization and on the Repentance organization mentioned above. Abulfaz Elçibey, the second president (1992-1993) and the Popular Front of Azerbaijan leader, introduced religious symbols into official ceremonies for the first time in the republic's history. In June 1992, he kissed the Koran and the Constitution during his inauguration, thus bringing religious and secular symbols closer together. Even though the president himself was a secular-minded person and looked at religion as part of culture, he used the Muslim factor to promote his interests. Indeed, head of the AMC, Pasha-zadəh, not only attended his inauguration, but also blessed the newly elected president. This can be interpreted as an effort to enlist the support of religion and the clergy.

During his presidency, two main Muslim holidays—Qurban Bayramı²¹ and Ramazan Bayramı²² were made state holidays. For purely personal reasons, President Elçibey supported the religious activities of numerous Turkish organizations operating in Azerbaijan: the Ministry for Religious Affairs (Diyənet Başkanlığı) and the Religious Foundation (Vaqf) (Diyənet Vaqfı).²³ It was during his presidency that Turkish mosques and religious secondary schools (of the imam-khatyb type) appeared in Azerbaijan, while the media promoted Sunni Islam. For example, in 1992, thanks to the organizational and financial support of the Ministry for Religious Affairs, which supplied staff as well, the secular Baku State University acquired an Islamic theology faculty (İlahiyyət Fakültəsi). In the same year, the Azerbaijani version of the Turkish newspaper *Zaman* (Time), published by the supporters of the disgraced Turkish religious leader Fethullah Gülen, the spiritual leader of the Nurcular movement, began appearing in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis had the opportunity to receive programs from the pro-Gülen satellite TV channel Saman Yolu (Milky Way); for many of them it was the only source of cultural-religious information. In August 1992, the Milli Mejlis passed a highly liberal Law on Freedom of Conscience. As a result, the number of officially registered mosques and Muslim organizations in the republic reached 230.²⁴

Private persons and public organizations from Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait were as active as the Turkish ones when it came to paying for more mosques, religious schools, and centers in Azerbaijan.

¹⁸ In May 2004 the *Nəbz* (Pulse) newspaper can be regarded as the ideological successor to these two earlier publications. It is an unofficial IPA newspaper; this is confirmed by the nature of publications in it and its Internet address [<http://www.islaminsesi.aznet.org>] that brings to mind the *İslamın Səsi* newspaper.

¹⁹ In 1993 the *Islam* newspaper was discontinued, probably for financial reasons; two years later IPA newspapers also disappeared. In the latter case, the disappearance was caused by an official campaign aimed at banning the party.

²⁰ See: A. Polonskiy, *Islam v kontekste obshchestvennoy zhizni sovremennogo Azerbajijana* [<http://www.1september.ru/his/99/his28.htm>].

²¹ Qurban Bayramı (Arabic *id al'-adha*), the main Muslim holiday of offering.

²² Ramazan Bayramı (Arabic *id al'-fitr*), the second important Muslim feast that closes the fasting of the Muslim month of Ramadhan.

²³ According to official statistics in 1994 alone, Turkey paid for 14 new mosques and two religious schools built in Azerbaijan (see: A. Abasov, op. cit., p. 296).

²⁴ See: Ibidem.

Convinced that it was closer, at least spiritually, to the Shi'a culture which dominated in Azerbaijan than its Sunni "rivals" (Turkey and Saudi Arabia), Iran was especially active. First, Tehran supported the IPA even though its members denied this. Second, the humanitarian Imdad Khomeini Foundation, Al'-Houda international publishers, and other Iranian organizations did their best to extend a network of religious education. They invested, in particular, in infrastructure of Baku Islamic University at the AMC and in promoting religious Shi'a literature. They also paid for pilgrimages to Iran and for religious propaganda in the local media.

3. Islam and Politics Under Heydar Aliev

In October 1993, during his inauguration, Heydar Aliev, who came after Elchibey, also exploited religious feelings, although the Koran kissing and blessings by the AMC should not be interpreted as his favorable disposition toward religion. Still, there were some rational considerations behind these symbols—Aliev's first year at the helm testified this. From the very first days of his presidency, he took part in nearly every important Muslim event: Qurban Bayramı, Ramazan Bayramı, Mövlüd,²⁵ and Ashura.²⁶ For example, on 5 September, 1993, Heydar Aliev, still Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan, addressed the people who gathered in the central Shi'a mosque of Azerbaijan to celebrate Mövlüd with a long speech later published in three languages (in Azerbaijani, in the Cyrillic, Latin and Arabic scripts, and in Russian and English) under separate cover (*Let's Move Together along the Way of Allah*).²⁷ In July 1994, during his official visit as president to Saudi Arabia, Heydar Aliev and the republic's entire religious establishment headed by Sheikh ul-Islam Pasha-zadeh, which accompanied him, made a smaller pilgrimage (*umra*) to Mecca.²⁸

The Islamic factor started rapidly losing its political importance in the republic once the oil "contract of the century" was signed in 1994 and the Azerbaijanian leaders turned to the West, to the detriment of relations with Russia and the Muslim East. On 12 November, 1995, the country acquired a new constitution; Art 7 described the country as a secular state; Art 18 said: "Religion shall be separated from the State in the Republic of Azerbaijan." The document contained no mention of a "state religion" and said: "All religions shall be equal by law" (Art 18). Art 48 spoke about religious freedom for all individuals and groups, while the state educational system was described as secular (Art 18).²⁹ The document caused a wave of protest among certain Iranian clerics, such as Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati and Ayatollah Ali Akbar Meshkini.³⁰

In 1995 Heydar Aliev launched a course designed to remove Islamic parties from political scene; the government was feeling more and more apprehensive of the IPA, which was fairly noticeable in Azerbaijan's political landscape.³¹ In August 1995, the Ministry of Justice refused to renew its registration because its activity contradicted the secular nature of the state. Its original registration, obtained in Octo-

²⁵ Mövlüd (Arabic *maulid*), the ceremonies marking the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

²⁶ Ashura, a set of mourning ceremonies in Shi'a Islam to commemorate the martyrdom of al'-Husayn, the third Shi'a imam and grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, in 680 during the battle of Karbala (now Iraq).

²⁷ See: H. Əliyev, *Allahın Yolunda Hamımız Bir Olaq*, Azərbaycan Dövlət Nəşriyyatı, 1993.

²⁸ See: R. Əliyev, *Heydər Əliyev, Din və Mə'nəvi Dəyərlər*, İrşad Mərkəzi, Bakı, 1998, p. 12.

²⁹ Art 18 of the Constitution called "Religion and State" says: "Religion shall be separated from the State in the Republic of Azerbaijan. All religions shall be equal by law. The spread and propaganda of religions, which humiliate human dignity and contradict the principles of humanity shall be banned. The State education system shall be of secular character." Art 48 of the same document called "Freedom of Conscience" says: "Every Person shall have the right to freedom of Conscience and Religion. Everybody shall have the right to independently define his/her attitude toward Religion, to profess Religion alone or together with others, or to profess no Religion at all, to express and spread convictions. Free conduct of religious rites if it doesn't violate public order or public morality shall be authorized. Breaches of law shall not be justified by religious creeds and religious convictions."

³⁰ See: *BBC Service of World Broadcasting*, SU/2467 F/3, 22 November, 1995.

³¹ See: A. Useynov, "V Azerbaijane religia okonchate! no otdelena ot gosudarstva," *Segodnia*, 14 September, 1995.

ber 1992 when the Popular Front of Azerbaijan was in power, was annulled; the IPA was outlawed, and its publications were closed. In 1997, its leaders and certain other members were brought to court on the charge of espionage in favor of Iran.³²

Even though religious revival in the republic continued (in 1996 there were 800 mosques functioning in the republic³³), by the mid-1990s the first cases of local Muslims converting to other faiths or joining sects had been registered. This direct result of the increased activities of foreign missionaries who had come to the country in the early 1990s caused public indignation and forced the government to take certain legal measures. On 13 March, 1996, the Milli Mejlis passed a Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons, which prohibited religious propaganda by foreigners. On 27 December, 1996, this provision was entered into Art 1 of the Law on Freedom of Conscience, which dated back to Elchibey's presidency. The measures were aimed at limiting the activities of foreign (Islamic included) missionaries in the republic, which brought religion too close to politics. This was the official explanation of these steps.

American official circles, local religious and human rights organizations, and their colleagues in certain other countries were displeased with these measures.³⁴ It should be said that despite regular warnings against the threat of so-called "Islamic fundamentalism," which have been appearing since 1998,³⁵ political Islam had no important role to play in the republic. First, the model of an Islamic state promoted by the IPA and other similar organizations was very close to the Iranian model never popular among the Azeris. Second, some of the laws, or amendments, adopted under Heydar Aliev effectively kept religious figures (*din xədimləri*)³⁶ away from political activities. In particular, they cannot run for the Milli Mejlis³⁷ and the local administrative bodies.³⁸ Third, Heydar Aliev's government banned certain political parties and religious organizations that betrayed their political biases,³⁹ including the IPA. This measure was designed to reduce the role of political Islam in the country. Finally, in June 2001, a State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations was set up to control everything related to freedom of conscience and state registration of religious organizations.⁴⁰

Not everything went smoothly though. Certain publications, for example, did their best to present the clashes between the police and the local people (in which one person was killed, while dozens of others were wounded or arrested) that took place in June 2002 in the settlement of Nardaran (30 km up north from Baku) as an outburst of political Islam. However, the events caused for social and economic reasons should not be taken as an indicator of the rise of political Islam in the republic.⁴¹

³² According to official information, they were accused of cooperating with the Iranian special services. In 1997 the Baku City Court sentenced four IPA members to 10-11 years of imprisonment for high treason (see: *RFE/RL Newline*, Vol. 1, No. 11, Part I, 15 April, 1997).

³³ See: R. Aliev, "Sovremennye islamskie techenia v Azerbajiane," *Publikatsii konferentsii "Obshchestvennaia i politicheskaia mysl' v Azerbajiane. XX vek*, Khazar University Press, Baku, 12 May, 1996, p. 81.

³⁴ See: U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Affairs, "Azerbaijan," *Report Consistent with the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act, Fiscal Year 1997*, House Report 3610, 22 July, 1997 [http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/]. In 1996, the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan "repeatedly pointed to discrimination against the Christians and their consistent persecutions" in the republic caused by the legal steps of the government of Azerbaijan described above (see: *Ibidem*).

³⁵ For example, according to a very ambiguous and biased Report on Religious Freedom in the Majority of Islamic Countries published in 1998 by the Aid to the Church in Need organization, religious freedom in Azerbaijan existed "in theory," while in practice "nationalists, influenced by Islamic fundamentalism, were becoming increasingly anti-Christian" [http://www.allenazacattolica.org/acs/acs_english/report_98.htm].

³⁶ See: *Constitution of the Republic*, 1995, Art. 56, "Election Right," Point 3 [<http://www.constitutional-court-az.org/az/const-chapter3.htm>]. The English translation of the constitution can be found on the official site of the president of Azerbaijan [<http://www.president.az/azerbaijan/const.htm>], the term "din xədimləri" was wrongly translated as "religious people."

³⁷ See: *Constitution of the Republic*, Art 85.2.

³⁸ See: Law on the Elections to Municipalities of 2 July, 1999, Art 3.3. Finally, under the Law on Political Parties adopted in June 1992, religious figures could not be party members (Art 8.3).

³⁹ Art 4 of the Law on Political Parties prohibits the institution of political parties whose aims or methods are designed to fan racial, ethnic, or religious strife.

⁴⁰ See: *Decree of the President of the Azerbaijanian Republic about setting up the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations*, 21 June, 2001 [<http://www.addk.net>].

⁴¹ See, for example: *Zerkalo*, 6 June, 2002.

C o n c l u s i o n

Religious revival in Azerbaijan of the late Soviet period mainly unfolded as the growing awareness of Islam as a cultural component of the titular nation's ethnic identity. Its political role started increasing after the events of 20 January, 1990 when the SAMT head, Allahshukur Pasha-zadeh, openly criticized the Moscow leaders for the first time in the history of the Azerbaijanian political establishment and accused Mikhail Gorbachev of "sanctioning the bloodshed" in Baku.

During the early years of independence the Islamic factor figured prominently in the country's foreign policy: Azerbaijan established diplomatic relations with the Eastern Muslim countries and was elected a member of the OIC. Under Mutalibov and Elchibey, the republic acquired its first political and public religious organizations; religious (obviously Muslim) newspapers appeared; and foreign Islamic missionaries were active in the republic.

Under Heydar Aliiev, the country slowly but surely turned to the West; this became obvious after the signing of the oil "contract of the century." The Islamic factor gradually retreated from the political scene; and its role was further limited by certain legal, political, and public steps. It should be added that the Azeris had never been ardent supporters of the ideas of political Islam preached by the IPA. The Nardaran events, which the local media tried to pass for evidence of a revival in political Islam, were caused by purely social and economic factors. The State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations was set up to supervise the developments in religious affairs in the republic.

The above examples and the generally low level of religious feelings among the local people suggest that in the near future Islam has no chance of developing into political Islam. But we should not ignore the possibility that under certain circumstances (such as worsening social and economic conditions) quasi-religious circles may try to exploit the situation to achieve their own selfish aims.