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RELIGION IN SOCIETY

ISLAM IN THE CASPIAN AND THE CAUCASIAN FOOTHILLS BORDERLAND: SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS REVIVAL ON THE FRINGES OF THE MUSLIM WORLD

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Tested by Islamophobia: Russia and the Muslim Question

Islam is rapidly gaining weight across the world. Islamophobia is escalating just as rapidly in the West, while in Russia certain highly influential segments of its political class have begun aping the West. By 2004, the unchecked wave developed into anti-Islamic hysteria.

After writing *The Rage and the Pride* in the wake of 9/11, Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci produced an anti-Muslim Western manifesto. She poured her hatred out on Islam and the Islamic world and addressed her affection and pride to the West. Her ideas are limited to only one thought: an anti-Islamic struggle without conditions and without mercy. In Russia, certain sources have done their best to familiarize the Russian public with her ideas. Vagrius Publishers put out a Russian translation of her book in 2004.[1]

[1] See: *Nezavisimaia gazeta,* 16 December, 2004, p. 6.

We can only marvel at the tenacity of the anti-Islamic and anti-Islamist ideas: the passions bring to mind the atmosphere of the anti-Communist "witch hunt" of the early 1990s. In 2002, guided by her anti-communist syndrome, Margaret Thatcher tagged Islamism as "new Bolshevism."[2] Like many others, Daniel Pipes equated fascism and Islamism in his article "Contemporary Fascism" translated and published in the *Moskovskiy komsomolets* newspaper.[3] In the West, people no longer distinguish between Islamism and fascism—it was Alexey Malashenko who familiarized the Russian audience with the state of affairs in this sphere.

In Russia, it is the media controlled by the liberal Russophobic circles that are zealously promoting anti-Muslim sentiments. The best evidence of this was the Vremena program run by famous TV personality Vladimir Pozner. In the fall of 2004, he suggested that the Islamists as a whole, and the Muslims living in Europe, in particular, should be treated with more severity. Some of the members of Russia's Muslim clergy went as far as accusing the anchorman and the ORT channel of deliberate anti-Muslim propaganda.

The National Organization of Russia's Muslims (NORM) circulated a statement in which it called on the country's leaders "to revise in the most radical way the information policies of the state-owned TV channels with respect to Islam."[4]

At the same time, we can hardly agree with Islamic Committee Chairman Gheidar Jemal, who described "demonization of Islam" as the "conceptual guidelines of Russia's political class."[5] It has become obvious, however, that anti-Islamic information policy is on the agenda of the most influential groups in Russia's establishment: political clans, business groups, and media corporations are openly promoting their anti-Islamic ideas. Here is a typical example: after 9/11 a State Duma deputy, who represents the Union of Rightist Forces, called on the law enforcement bodies to start checking the contacts of all Russian Muslims to find out whether any of them were connected with Osama bin Laden.[6]

The same circles tend to present any attempt to check anti-Muslim campaigns, as well as any pro-Muslim sentiments, as "the threat of Wahhabism" or connivance of terrorism. This has become an effective instrument of political pressure willingly used by political opponents, as well as rivaling Muslims organizations. Despite its sensation mongering and doubtful statements, this approach has struck root in the academic community: there are people who look at Islam, and also Russia, as an opponent to be carefully studied.

They tie the Koran and the Sunnah to terrorism and assert that evil was allegedly present during the very act of Islamic creation. By the same token they argue that the Koran and the Islamic world's spontaneous radicalization are a cause and effect. Here is what well-known Deacon Andrey Kuraev has to say: "If terrorism is a product of the distorted interpretation of the Koran, it must be stressed that we are talking here precisely about the Koran, and not the Winnie-the-Pooh book. And it was distorted by learned Islamic ulema, not by illiterate Arabian skinheads. It is not poor students who bring together the Islamic world and the world of terror, but excellent and very popular teachers!… At this level, the terrorist message is an ailment of the entire Islamic community."[7]

This approach has pushed aside the key parameters of development: alternatives, turning points, phenomenological evidence, and borderline cases to replace them with tags and teleological formulas.

Strange as it may seem, the latest works by prominent Russian academics Alexey Malashenko and Alexey Vassiliev also betrayed certain signs of anti-Islamic academic didactics.[8] In an effort to identify

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[2] A. Malashenko, "Islamizm na vse vremena," *Svobodnaia mysl—XXI,* No. 12, 2004, p. 19.

[3] See: *Moskovskiy komsomolets,* 18 June, 2004.

[4] *NG-Religia,* 1 December, 2004, p. 3.

[5] Ibidem.

[6] See: D. Glinskiy, "Musul'mane Rossii: obretenie politicheskoy sub'ektnosty," *Konstitutsionnoe pravo: Vostochno-evropeiskoe obozrenie,* No. 2 (39), 2002, pp. 21-22.

[7] A. Kuraev, "Kak otnositsia k islamu posle Beslana?" *Izvestia,* 15 September, 2004.

[8] See: A. Malashenko, op. cit.; A. Vassiliev, "Ot rassveta do zakata? Ekstremizm kak proiavlenie krizisa tsivilizatsii," *Poisk. Ezhenedel'naia gazeta nauchnogo soobshchestva,* No. 6 (820), 11 February, 2005, p. 13; S. Gradirovskiy's culturologically beautified conception of "Russian Islam" is another variant of fear of Islam.

the rhythms and pace of the Islamic world's activization and the causes of its "overheating" at the turn of the 21st century, the authors ask: "Why is Islamism dangerous?" This alone shows that they treat Islam as an enemy. Regrettably, they never formulated another important question: "What is behind the radicalization of Islam?" Meanwhile, an answer is urgently needed. The respected scholars are holding forth about the evil and immutable line of Islamic development associated with anti-modernism. They look at the Islamic world as an impasse of modernity caused by the sick cells of the Islamic tradition.

Why does the renovated form of Islam, including its radical forms, prove attractive to the broad masses? Indeed, extremism is no answer to social problems. Do people look at the "Islamic order" as an alternative to "democracy Russian style" ("Uzbek," Kyrgyz" or Afghan style) as the greatest delusion of their past?

In an effort to identify and assess the signs of Islamic revival today, the Russian academic community has obviously been driven to despair. It was Editor-in-Chief of *Otechestvennye zapiski* Vitaly Kurennoy who measured the deepness of this feeling by saying that as a source of study Islam is developing into an evasive object.[9]

Research Landmarks

The Islamic community is a very complicated phenomenon with a lot of phenomenological features manifested in different spheres: the economy, socio-territorial organization, communication, and the reproduction channels. Some Russian academics believe that the possibilities offered by investigative neo-classicism, understood as "predominantly empirical studies of specific groups (trends, movements, schools, etc.) which appear and function in Islam as Islamic phenomena,"[10] should be tapped to help understand the phenomenon of Islam.

We shall copy this approach—it alone will help us explain changing Islam as a social and political enigma. It should be said that certain analysts have correctly identified the phenomenon of Muslim regionalization as a situation under which the Islamic leaders concentrate on religious developments at the local level.[11] We shall try to explain this phenomenon through the de-modernization conception. We regard the Islamic answer as part of society's crisis conscience.

Working hypothesis. In Russia, radical Islam is, first and foremost, part of a nationwide political protest and social adaptation. The Islamic jamaats are a variant of local Muslim completeness and a form of self-defense under the conditions of a systemic crisis. We believe that this variant has proven successful and viable in the context of the tormenting and vague transformations, which are especially painful in their marginal forms.[12] This explains why the local level of the "Islamic alternative"[13] can be regarded as an extremely fruitful unit of political analysis.

Here are several preliminary yet necessary explanations.

Nature of the research. It is not our aim to discuss the forms of Islamic existence and its religious-teaching component; we favor the wider approach typical of political science in which there is

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[9] See: V. Kurennoy, "Uskol'zaiushchiy predmet," *Otechestvennye zapiski,* No. 5 (14), 2003.

[10] V. Ignatenko, "Raskolotaia umma v ozhidanii Sudnogo dnia (Novy vzgliad so starykh pozitsiy", *Otechestvennye zapiski,* No. 5 (14), 2003; V. Kurennoy, op. cit.

[11] It should be noted that professor of the Center of Slavic Studies at Hokkaido University Kimitaka Matsuzato has arrived at a truly novel approach within the research project "Islam and Politics in Russia: Multilayered and Comparative Approach (April 2003-March 2006)." A. Malashenko's idea about the "multilayered" nature of Islamic alternative that exists at four layers—local, national, regional, and global—can be described as heuristic and fruitful. (see: A. Malashenko, op. cit., pp. 22-23).

[12] In their latest work Magomed-Rasul Ibragimov and Kimitaka Matsuzato described the role of the jamaats as the basic system-forming territorial stability of Daghestani society (see: M.-R. Ibragimov, K. Matsuzato, "Chuzhoy, no loial'niy: prichiny 'nestabil'noy stabil'nosti' v Daghestane, avanposte slavianskoy Evrazii," *Polis,* No. 3, 2005).

[13] A. Malashenko's term.

a component of Islamic studies. We are turning to the problem's religious side in order to better and more adequately understand the phenomenon of Islam and politics in multiethnic transition societies, of which Russia is one.[14]

It is highly important to reach an agreement about the terms used: they should be easily understood and should not offend anyone. We are convinced that in Russia today the term "Wahhabis" is a tag rather than a description of confessional identity. We do believe that the more neutral term "Salafis" is much better suited to describe radical Islam.

This is important: the term "Wahhabis" has become one of the symbols of the post-communist "witch-hunt." In this context, we cannot accept as sincere M. Roshchin's arguments that "the North Caucasian Islamic fundamentalists who are frequently called "Wahhabis" do not like the term *for not quite clear reasons*"[15] (italics ours.—*A.M., V.V.*). We shall demonstrate that the reasons are clear and absolutely justified.

We have posed ourselves the task of analyzing Islam's borderland within the Caspian-Caucasian Foothills Muslim communication lines. We have asked the question: What is the nature of the Islamic religious revival "from below" and what is the nature of the local "Islamic alternative" on this periphery of the contemporary Islamic world?

Our article is structured in the following way: first we analyze the historical and geographical roots of the Astrakhan political "flexibility" which predetermined the specific features of Caspian borderland Islam. Then we look at the key social and migration features responsible for the phenomenon of the Caspian-Caucasian Foothills Muslim case. Finally, we try to identify the nature of the "local Islamic alternative" by studying the community of the Astrakhan Salafis.

1. The Phenomenon of Astrakhan Political Flexibility

Historically, Astrakhan has been always associated with the Caspian Sea and its related problems. The Caspian Region offers the best possible illustration of Russia's cultural and ethnic specifics, therefore we deemed it necessary to provide a concise overview of the Caspian sub-area.

The Caspian meso-area is one of Russia's key polyethnic migration areas of more or less recent development. Its historical and demographic specifics are responsible for its "mutually penetrating" ethnic and confessional content: Christian and Muslim, with Buddhist and Lama fringes and Judaic components. This all determines the great potential of the political flexibility and social stability of the region.

The region is an obvious Islamic fringe. As one of the busy trade and transportation crossroads of the south of Russia, Astrakhan is imbibed with diverse forms of classical and periphery Islam. Below we shall demonstrate that these processes have changed and enriched the content of Islam in Russia as whole. This is explained by the fact that Astrakhan historically represented the southern migration belt of Russia crossed by the human migration routes. A stranger normally saw Astrakhan as a unique city of the "Istanbul on the Volga" type, in which the East and the West, Islam and Christianity meet and coexist. It seems that Alexander Dumas' father, who visited the Astrakhan Gubernia in 1858, put his impressions in a nutshell in his *Voyage de Russie:* "Its background is Russian, while its designs are Armenian, Tartar, and Kalmyk."[16]

[14] Our inadequate knowledge of the subtler points of Islam limits us in our more detailed use of the results of Islamic studies; we want to avoid profanation of Islam, a fascinating and monumental phenomenon.

[15] M.Iu. Roshchin, "Islamskiy fundamentalism na Severnom Kavkaze" [http://viktorpopkov.narod.ru].

[16] Quoted from: V. Viktorin, E. Idrisov, "'Astrakhanskiy mir'—prezhnie i novye grani mezhetnicheskogo edinstva i sotrudnichestva," *Astrakhanskie izvestia,* No. 5, 29 January, 2004.

In the religious context Astrakhan proper is seen as a perspective Eurasian borderland. Scottish missionary W. Glenn, who visited the city long before Dumas' father, pointed out that the city was a strategic coordinating center of Turkic, Persian, and Armenian missionary efforts.[17]

The geopolitical feature—the region's strategic importance for Russia—which revealed itself once more late in the 20th century played an important role in adding new characteristics to Islam in Astrakhan. When the Soviet Union disappeared from the map of the world, it was through Astrakhan that Russia overshadowed the Caspian Sea—and the Islamic world—with its continental mass. The city's geographical location between the Islamic world in the south and the emerging "strategic Caspian initiative" of the Kremlin has transformed the region into an important compositional element of the Caspian meso-area.

The geographic factors were also responsible for the historical specificities of the Caspian-Caucasian Foothills Islamic synthesis.

Islam came to the Lower Volga in the 10th century together with Arabian travelers and merchants; the Tartar-Mongol invasion intensified its spread across the area: under Khan Berke, Islam was accepted as the Golden Horde's official religion. In the middle of the 14th century, under Khan Uzbek, Islam claimed an even firmer foothold.

Russian Orthodox Christians came to the region when there was no longer the Golden Horde and the Astrakhan Khanate had become part of Russia. The area fell under Russian administration; the large Muslim stratum was represented by the Turkic-speaking descendants of the Polovtsians and the settled descendants of the formerly nomadic Nogais. Late in the 14th century, during the process of their formation, the latter adopted Sunni Islam of Hanafi madhab, which allowed the local people to preserve their customs and rites (adat and maslagat as norms of customary law). At that time, the nomads had not yet fully embraced Islam. According to 17th-century traveler Jean de Luc, the Nogais "are Muslims, yet they never obey the rules of their religion, they do not fast and not gather together for prayers; there are hajii and mullahs, Muslim theologians, yet they do not live among them since they cannot get used to the Nogais' way of life."

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Nogais, as well as merchants from Bukhara and Persia (Gilan) and migrants from Kazan were the only Muslims in Astrakhan. The newcomers were Muslim Kalmyks (Sheret), Turkmen, and Kazakhs from the Inner Bukeev Horde.

There were Sunnis in the region: Tartars, Nogais, Turkmen, Kazakhs, Uzbeks from Bukhara (Sarts), and Shi'as (Persians from Gilan). There were rather specific sects, such as mendicants, which were reminiscent of the Persian and Central Asian Sufi dervishes. There were 23, mainly Nogai, "aulias"—burials of saints served by "mutshafirs"—the saints' descendants.

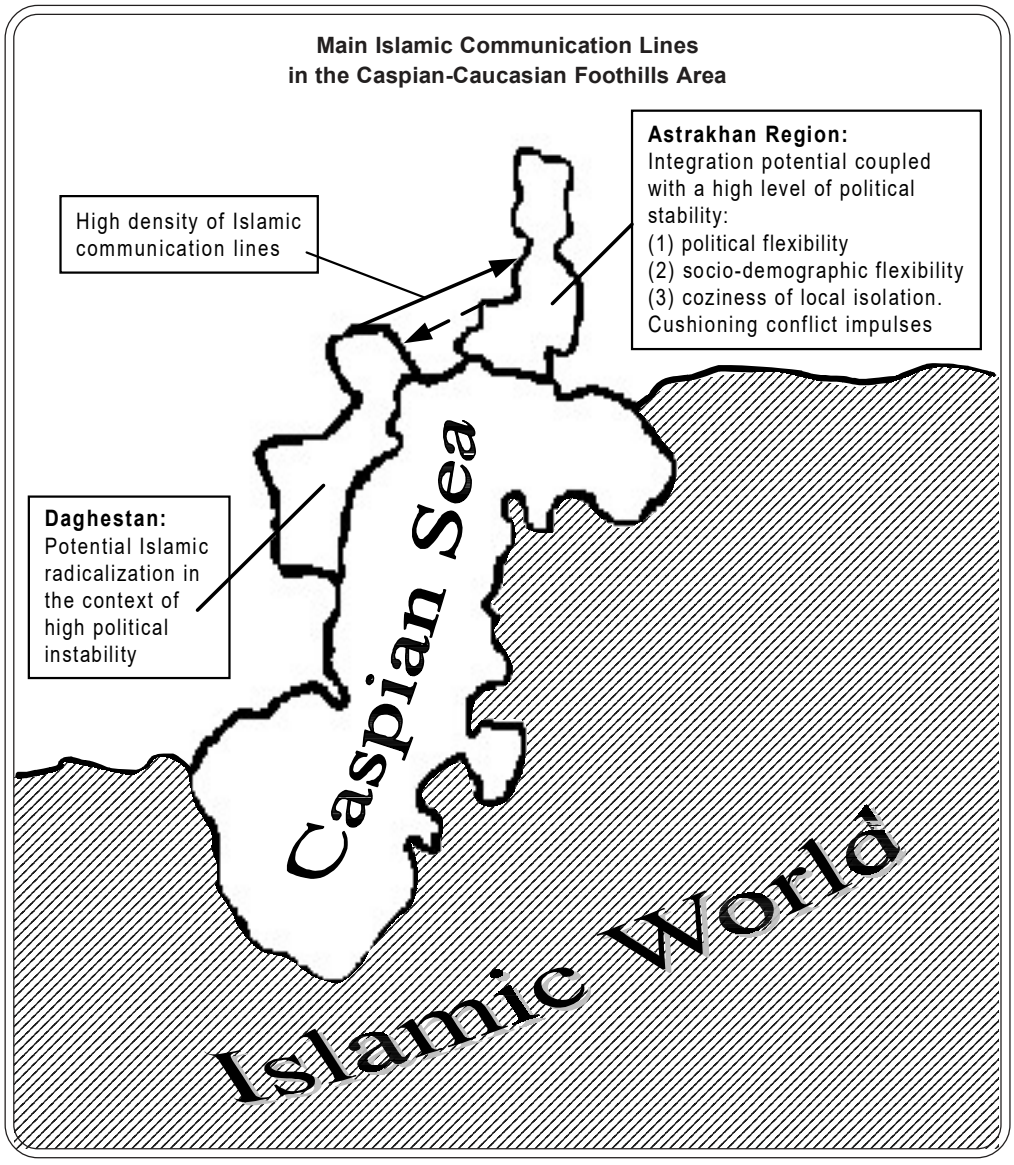
This all speaks of the highly specific nature of local Islam generated by its borderland location and of the mutations of Islamic trends in the fringes.

2. The Nature and Trends of the Caspian-Caucasian Foothills Islamic Communication Lines

In the recent past, Astrakhan Islam has been developing under the strong impact of the social-Muslim transformations in the Northern Caucasus and primarily under religious-political pressure from another Caspian region, Daghestan (see Fig.).

[17] See: S. Batalden, "Musul'manskiy i evreyskiy voprosy v Rossii epokhi Aleksandra I glazami shotlandskogo bibleista i puteshestvennika," *Voprosy istorii,* No. 5, 2004, pp. 48-49.

Figure



Let's have a look at the key stages and basic characteristics of the Muslim communication lines in the Caspian-Caucasian Foothills area, in which Astrakhan played the role of a useful crossroads and a cozy asylum.

1. Astrakhan became a center of Muslim revival in Russia at the beginning of the 1990s: on 9 June, 1990, an "informal" congress convened by activists from Daghestan and Islamic ideologists from Moscow set up the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) Nadkhat, the first ever Islamic political structure in the Soviet Union that described its aim as "defense of the right of all

Muslims to live according to the laws of Allah." People from the "revivalist" Islamic society based in Kizil-iurt in Daghestan headed by the Kebedov brothers, Abbas and Bagautdin, were among the founders.

2. Astrakhan was where the notorious Khachilaev brothers convened a legal congress of the Union of the Muslims of Russia on the eve of the 1996 elections. The leaders were quite open about their intention to replace the local clergy and put all local Muslim communities under their control. This forced Mufti Nazymbek-khazriat to appear at the congress uninvited to quench these ambitions.

3. It was under pressure from Daghestan that plans were formed to open a branch of the Buynaksk Islamic Institute in Astrakhan under the aegis of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus. The local clergy rebuffed the onslaught by opening a madrasah of their own under their own spiritual administration based in Ufa. In 1999, it became an Islamic Institute.

4. Finally, the North Caucasian factor was clearly manifested in the environment of so-called "radical Islam." By the mid-1990s, the Avar family of the Omarovs, well known for its profound religious knowledge, took over leadership in Astrakhan "fundamentalist revivalism" (so-called Wahhabism) from the confessionally ignorant local Tartar-Nogais (Khalikov and Abuliasov).

Table 1 and the text below offer detailed social and migration descriptions of local Islam.

The increase in the number of Muslims can be explained by two factors: the high birth rate among the Kazakhs living in rural areas and the Russian-dominated migration of the 1990s, which also brought people of other nationalities (Tartars and Muslims of other ethnic origins) to the region. Since 1988, over 80,000 passed through the region, while 63,000-65,000 of them settled in it. There were about 45,000 Russians (75 percent) among them; 4,000 Tartars (7 percent); 3,500 Azeris and Talyshes (5.5 percent); 4,300 Daghestanis (7.1 percent); 3,000 Chechens (5 percent); 2,300 Meskhetian Turks, Tajiks, and Uzbeks (3 percent).

The political representation problem. On the whole, the regional bodies of power correspond to the region's ethnic composition. This is especially true of the State Duma of the Astrakhan Region—no deputies, however, were elected for their ethnic origin. Young Duma deputy and prominent businessman Alikper (Alikerim) Pashaev, a Kumyk from Daghestan and political leader of the North Caucasian Muslims, is supported by the trade quarters of Astrakhan. Leader of the regional Tartar Duslyk Society Anver Almaev, who was elected to representative bodies of all levels and who in December 2004 ran for the mayor of Astrakhan, is inclined to more fully tap the ethnic and religious factor. The chairman of the regional court and the minister of construction and road building are Kazakhs; an editor of one of the most popular newspapers is a Tartar of Nogai-Bukhara extraction; another such paper is headed by an Armenian (a descendant of those who arrived in the area in the 18th century to escape the Persians).

The share of Muslim students. The share of Muslim students in the secular higher educational establishments (the State University, the State Technical University, Medical Academy, Conservatory, and numerous branches offering paid education) on the whole corresponds to the share of Muslims living in the region. The share of educated Muslims has grown due to those studying new subjects (Oriental tongues—Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and also the Kazakh and Tartar languages) at Astrakhan State Technical University and graduates from the Turkish lyceum.

There is another no less important fact: in the last 25 years the share of educated Kazakhs in the local Kazakh diaspora increased by 80 percent between 1979 and 1989. This means that every year 3,000 to 5,000 Kazakhs received higher education, first in the Soviet Union and then in the Russian Federation; the corresponding figure for the Tartars was 60 percent, with less than 40 percent among the Russians.

Table 1

The Qualitative and Quantitative Parameters of the Islam-Biased* Population of the Astrakhan Region

Total Population:	
1989	2002
1 million	1,200,000
Of them Muslims:	
22-23% (about 20,000)	26% (about 250,000)
Of them: Kazakhs:	
13%	14.5%
Tartars:	
—	7.2%
Daghestanis (over 30 ethnoses):	
In 1959 there were 239 people	1.8% (30,000)
Chechens:	
0.8%	1% (15,000-20,000)
Azeris (and Talyshes):	
0.5%	0,8%
Nogais:	
0.4%	0,5%
Turkmen:	
—	0,2%
Uzbeks:	
—	0,1%

*Traditionally gravitating toward Islam of different types to different degrees.

Source: Personal archives of V.M. Viktorin, advisor to the governor of the Astrakhan Region.

In the 1990s, the progress of paid education accelerated the process: the number of educated Kazakhs among the more or less recently (until 1939) nomadic ethnic group greatly increased. As a result, this ethnic group acquired young intelligentsia.

The growing number of Muslim migrants influenced the development of Islam in the region.

3. The Rise and Fall of the Astrakhan Muslim Revivalists Community

Islam in Astrakhan consists of two components: the structures developing within official policies, the leaders and activists of which have regular contacts and consultations with the region's authorities (the so-called "official" Islam). The second component took shape much later, in the dramat-

ic circumstances of the 1990s when "revived" Islam was gaining momentum in its peaceful and radical forms.

There are 39 Muslim spiritual communities and 11 groups in the region, which comprise about one-third of all religious communities, as well as 32 mosques (seven of which are registered as historical or cultural monuments of local or regional importance) and 6 prayer houses.

Nazymbek-khazriat (N.A. Iliasov) is the mufti (previously—imam-mukhtasib) of the region's Muslims and an elected deputy of Sheik Talgat Tadjuddin, the Supreme Mufti, Chairman of the Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Russia and the CIS European Countries based in Ufa. There are also two Islamic centers based in large mosques, as well as the Khaji-Tarkhan Islamic Institute, which produced its first graduates in July 2003. Muhammed Va-al Abdat from Algeria, who himself graduated from a higher educational establishment in Astrakhan, was its first rector.

The local authorities and local people regard the Muslims as an important historical and cultural component of their region; well aware of the considerable numerical strength of the Muslim electorate, the local politicians deem it necessary to cooperate in a constructive way with the Islamic organizations and their most respected members and leaders. The regional budget regularly allocates money for these purposes.

It should be added that, behind the screen of fairly smooth official Islamic policies, the storm of Muslim revivalism was raging. The sub-regional specifics were generated by the Astrakhan-Caucasian Islamic synthesis, in which the active Daghestani radical Islamic group dominated. I have in mind the community of Astrakhan Muslim revivalists ("mukhmins"), wrongly called Wahhabis.

Their community (mukhmins are supporters of the iman, the Islamic code of piety) was headed by Angut Magomedovich Omarov, better known as Ayiub of Astrakhan, a remarkable figure, known among the Islamic theologians as an expert without equals. He was one of the best pupils of Bagautdin Kebedov. Ayiub, an Avar by nationality, was born in the Tsumada District of Daghestan.

The earthquake of 1970 drove people away from this district to more prosperous Astrakhan. Early in the 1990s, the migration outflow from the North Caucasian republics swelled the ranks of the Muslim community in Astrakhan. The mukhmins group was one of the results of these processes. It occupied a niche of its own in the city's economy: engaged in trade they mainly live in the Bolshie Isady neighborhood bordering on the city's central marketplace. Its spiritual leader Ayiub did not want any contact with the authorities, therefore the community remained isolated both from the city and regional official structures, the public, and the mass media. The local "official" clergy preferred to keep away from the well-educated mukhmin theologians who criticized the "apparatchik mullahs" for their abandonment of the religious ethics ("iman"). In the mid-1990s, the mukhmins were actively involved in missionary efforts, which attracted many new members—Tartars, Kazakhs, and Russians, along with people from the Northern Caucasus. By 1994, there were 300 members.

It is not enough to say that Islam in Astrakhan is a unique phenomenon—we have to explain its nature. The members of the local Islamic community observe Russian laws and speak good Russian. On the other hand, their religious fervor is much more passionate than in other places, they preach the revival of Islam's original purity with a good share of fanaticism. Astrakhan is their home where they seek a social niche in which they must be accepted as true Muslims. They say: "Astrakhan is our home. We want to live and work here without interfering in the affairs of others and without slipping into paganism."[18] Their leaders consider themselves tied to the region by moral and social obligations and believe it necessary to obey Russia's laws.

What were the religious ideas of Ayiub and the members of the jamaat of mukhmins? They wanted to profess "pure" Islam cleansed of later additions. Ayiub was fairly strict primarily with his followers

[18] B. Akhmedkhanov, "Zhizn 'Wahhabita' na perekrestke okrain," *Obshchaia gazeta,* No. 42 (376), 19-25 October, 2000, pp. 1-3.

(his strictness often being interpreted as religious radicalism or even extremism) as far as their traditional appearance and adherence to the religious dogmas were concerned. This strictness, limited to the religious sphere, had no political or military undertones.[19]

The trend itself was not only dynamic—it was contradictory. Back in 1993, before the first war in Chechnia the community betrayed the first signs of dissent; by the late 1990s it had been divided into several trends—the radical, moderate, and peaceful—as well as several transition groups inclined toward traditional Islam. The split was sealed when, in the early spring of 1999, 200 young supporters of Ayiub left to fight in Daghestan and Chechnia. Their departure strengthened the 70-strong group of supporters of peaceful religious and cultural revivalism.

Ayiub's community, which had finally acquired its numerical strength and ideological convictions, did not support the Chechen and Daghestani separatists. There is information that at a secret meeting held in the summer of 2000 at some place on the Caspian coast of Daghestan, the revivalists outside the Northern Caucasus (Ayiub-Angut Omarov from Astrakhan among them) condemned the second Chechen war and war in general. Ayiub's supporters from Astrakhan were united in their opinion that "there was no jihad in Chechnia" and "we condemn this war." The radical fighters outlawed them in the Caucasus.[20] Despite this, after the well-known events of 1999 when the so-called Wahhabi enclave in Karamakhi, as well as the Basaev-Khattab detachments had been routed, Ayiub and his followers were branded Wahhabis with far-reaching political and religious consequences and criminal persecutions. Ayiub of Astrakhan was branded as a Wahhabi for purely political purposes: the Daghestani authorities and the supporters of the official "Muslim vertical" wanted to uproot any manifestations of opposition in Islam.

As a result, the leaders and the official clergy of Daghestan suggested that the Law on Banning Wahhabism and Other Extremist Activities in the Republic of Daghestan (adopted by the republic's People's Assembly in September 1999 in the wake of the Karamakhi bloodbath) should be extended to the neighboring territories and Russia as a whole. An impressive delegation of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Daghestan which came to Astrakhan on 6 December, 1999 supported the motion. More than that: the prominent figures of the Daghestani Murid societies—the tariqates—accused all the Muslims of North Caucasian extraction living in Astrakhan of Wahhabism.[21] In the fall of 2000, official Makhachkala used force against the Ayiub community, which the Astrakhan special services described as unjustified.

The Astrakhan "mukhmins" whom official Islam loathed as an internal enemy became an easy prey. The jamaat leaders had to adjust to the new realities: they abandoned their previous unwillingness to come in contact with the official structures and addressed the region's leaders. Driven into a corner, the community had no other alternative. Ayiub kept receiving threats that force would be used against him and his family; in February 2000 he was wounded in an assassination attempt that cost his assistant's life.[22] Later, on 4 October and 2 December of the same year, his house was shelled by grenades (luckily no one was hurt as a result). For some time the leader and founder of the jamaat had to go underground; and his community was steadily driven away from its trade niche in local business and the city markets.

No wonder, the "mukhmins" twice, on 13 and 18 December, 2000, sent the region's governor letters in which they asked for their rights to be restored and for people to stop calling them by the derogative term of Wahhabis. Some of the local and central media made the situation even worse by calling Astrakhan "the capital of Russia's Wahhabism."

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[19] Interview with Rector of the Astrakhan branch of the All-Russia Institute of Law Prof. O.I. Cherdakov, Astrakhan, June 2004.

[20] B. Akhmedkhanov, op. cit.

[21] Interview with the leader of the Daghestani community in Astrakhan A. Pashaev, deputy of the State Duma of the Astrakhan Region, May 2002, June 2004.

[22] See: *Volga,* No. 22, 15 February, 2000; *Komsomolets Kaspia,* 27 July, 2004.

Nor did this help the local Muslim population or the region's leaders. The local religious and official leaders clearly stated that the reports in the press amazed them "by their authors' lack of information and obviously deliberate falsifications."[23] Miron Blier, head of the information department of the administration of the Astrakhan Region, had the following to say: "It seems that someone is profiting from the unending discussions of Wahhabism and this someone is not found here, in Astrakhan, but in Moscow. Several people asked me: 'How can you tolerate the fact that the Wahhabis freely live in your city?' I should say that Astrakhan and the Astrakhan Region is home to 170 ethnic groups and confessions—so far we have had no ethnic or religious conflicts here. The problem appears when it is constantly discussed. The authorities are creating irreconcilable enemies themselves, against whom they then have to fight. So-called Wahhabism in Astrakhan is a way of life. It is a form of Islamic Protestantism which does not violate Russian laws. All those who are called Wahhabis trade in the Kirov market, this is a merchant guild of sorts which defends its members' interests." The mufti of the Astrakhan Region Nazymbek-khazriat pointed to the same specific feature of the Astrakhan "revivalists." He described them with a great deal of respect as a "fully-fledged community of a fairly large number of Astrakhan dwellers active in the religious and absolutely secular sphere by trading on the market."[24]

The genuine Islamic alternative can be locally realized as jamaats: this has been amply demonstrated by its successful transformation "from below" in the Kadar enclave of Daghestan. This is how this alternative can be realized: it does not need a political party for its realization. In this connection we should say that by formulating a question about the multi-layered nature of political Islam and by identifying its viable local cross-section, K. Matsuzato and A. Malashenko made a significant contribution to Islamic studies.

The "Islamic Protestants" have become perfectly adapted to the business and everyday life of Astrakhan. A Moscow correspondent who wanted to know what the local people thought about the "bearded men" learned that they did not give them a second thought: "They came here long ago and do not interfere with us" was the most frequent answer.[25] They are reserved and ascetic in their personal tastes, they do not drink, smoke, or use drugs—these features are approved by the neighbors of the "mukhmins" and other peaceful "revivalists." The neighbors of the Karamakhi Salafis also approved them for the same reason (see Table 2).

The above is not intended as an apology for Ayiub's community; he is a cruel and theologically controversial figure. Whatever the case, the experience of his community has demonstrated that the "revivalist" groups are perfectly viable if they make their aims public; the local social-religious initiatives "from below" profit from such openness—it is secrecy that breeds suspicion on the part of their neighbors and leads to persecutions.

In fact, Islam may avoid radicalization in the revivalist environment and may turn radical in the traditional environment. This suggests a far from simple question: To what degree does a low educational level stimulate radicalism and aggression? The leaders of the Islamic Revival Party which met in Astrakhan for its congress in 1990 were very educated people: a secular scholar and academician, Vali-Akhmed Sadur, a prominent theologian and preacher, Bagautdin Kebedov, his pupil, Ayiub (Angut) Omarov, and others. Their Astrakhan followers, however, (M. Abdurazakov is an unskilled worker and A.-Kh. Khalikov a gardener) demonstrate very aggressive and primitive instincts. Similar religious activists normally acting at the grass-root level of the radical-re-

[23] "Radikalizm ot imeni islama i Astrakhanskiy kray." Materialy 'kruglogo stola' 13 oktiabria 1999 g.," *Informatsionny biulleten administratsii Astrakhanskoy oblasti,* No. 4, November 1999, p. 2.

[24] *Obshchaia gazeta*, No. 42 (376), 19-25 October, 2000; *Informatsionny biulleten administratsii Astrakhanskoy oblasti,* No. 4, November 1999.

[25] B. Akhmedkhanov, op. cit.

Table 2

Profiles and Parameters of the Local Islamic Alternative in Russia Today
(*Comparison of Caspian-Caucasian Salafi Case Studies*)

	1. Karamakhi community (the "Kadar zone" enclave)	2. Ayiub's Astrakhan community
Similarities		
Form	self-administering rural community	self-administering urban community
Economics	agriculture (commercial production of vegetables); market trade	freight haulage, wholesale and retail trade*
Religious development	through conflict and a split inside the rural community	through conflicts with rural dwellers, relatives and final split inside the community**
Public morals	fight against drug abuse, drinking, and smoking	fight against drug abuse, drinking, and smoking
Differences		
Assessment of power	critical: as corrupt and criminal especially with respect to the Daghestani authorities	neutral and not publicly announced
Relations with the authorities	conflict with the republic's leaders and its power-wielding structures	no relations at first and later positive relations
Conflict settlement	through the use of armed force and liquidation of the jamaat	through negotiations and a dialog with the regional authorities

* According to journalist Milrad Fatullaev, "there were no poor in Karamakhi." An average family possessed 70,000 sq. m of land (a large amount for Daghestan); 12 calves for fattening, and a heavy KamAZ truck. The fertile soils, not much inferior to those of the Kuban area, produce rich yields of vegetables; one thousand and six hundred households own over 700 KamAZ trucks; men are involved in freight hauling in Russia and earn between 30,000 and 50,000 rubles every month, the lion's share of the total income of local families (M. Fatullaev, "Daghestan: tri goda posle voyny," *Nezavisimaia gazeta,* 3 December, 2002, p. 5). These are very good economic results for the republic, produced by the truly Herculean efforts of the Islamic Protestants and their entrepreneurship.

** In 1997, people of the village of Kvanada in Daghestan where Ayiub Omarov was born started burning down the houses of their neighbors who had embraced so-called Wahhabism. Religious enmity between the Wahhabis and those who followed official Islam spread to Astrakhan. In the same way the conflicts, clashes, and murders in the villages of the Kadar zone accompanied the Karamakhi Salafi jamaat as it was being formed. This casts doubts on the arguments of those who say that the radical Islamic communities were tied together by kindred and community bonds. Here we have an opposite process: an Islamic response of sorts to the crisis of public conscience in the country's remote areas.

Comments to the table:

The table excludes an attempt at typologization—it concentrates on examples of the local Islamic alternatives. The latter are different forms of local Muslim self-organization and adaptation to market conditions. It turned out that sometimes they are realized contrary to the "natural" ethnic features and geographic boundaries and are bonded by social parameters and shared values. Even though the Salafi communities were based on the "area factor" and were formed within enclaves their development caused splits and severed kindred and community ties.

vivalist movement follow the pattern: ignorance–narrow-mindedness–enemy image–attack. This proves that de-modernization and archaization of society are accompanied by radicalization and aggressiveness.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated that the multi-layered approach to Islam, which identifies its viable local segment, has a considerable heuristic potential. This approach helps understand the inner dynamics of the "Islamic alternative" as a complex social and political phenomenon. This reconfirms the old truth that the deeper the analyst goes into the past the more integral an image of reality he acquires.

The de-modernization conception offers a fairly exact explanation of the roots of the "Islamic alternative," the different variants of which are society's response to the systemic crisis of the 1990s and the collapse of the social institutions—the fall of the Soviet Union delivered a cruel blow to the ethnic and Muslim communities. No matter what the liberal ideologists say about the Soviet Union as a "totalitarian monster," the Soviet epoch was a time of social modernization and flourishing ethnic cultures (even the smallest ethnic minorities acquired their own culture based on their written tongues and elites of their own), as well as budding civil awareness. Socialism gave the Muslims and ethnic minorities a modern free system of education, social guarantees, and free medical services. They were given the chance to increase their numerical strength and realize vertical social mobility. No wonder, says Austrian historian Andreas Kappeler, the Muslim peoples, with the exception of the Crimean Tartars, kept away from the nationalist-separatist movement of the perestroika period and did not contribute to the downfall of the Soviet Union.[26]

The political system of today has deprived the ethnic and religious minorities of fair representation in the bodies of power; this is one of the reasons why the Muslims treat Russian democracy as an alien phenomenon. The ruling classes have unequivocally condemned everything "non-Western" in Russia. The liberal crowd in Moscow and the academic circles that serve it have absolutely openly betrayed their disapproval of the fact that there are ethnic minorities in Russia. At one time Sergey Averintsev said that "the existence of different peoples was accepted as a purely ethnographic fact"—today these peoples "are making their claims." The state of affairs at the top level is supported by no less eloquent facts: in ten years (between 1992 and 2002), there were only three "ethnic Muslims" in the seven RF cabinets (154 ministers in all) appointed by former president Boris Yeltsin and President Vladimir Putin.[27] There are no ethnic Muslims among the heads of Russian TV channels and the major press. Meanwhile, Russia is home to about 20 million Muslims, or 14 percent of the total population. This is how official Moscow demonstrated its attitude toward the national minorities, including the Islamic minority.

The de-modernization processes are graphically illustrated by the so-called reforms in the sphere of education. Russia's newly formed educational system, open to commercialization, corruption, and degradation, is turning into a service sphere; it is no longer an institution of professional selection, social mobility, and realization of equal opportunities (we have already written about a direct connection between lack of knowledge and radicalization). Under these conditions, the Muslim youth is easily tempted by the Islamic educational alternative—pilgrimages under easy terms, free education abroad, and the prospect of coming back home an emir or a religious authority.[28]

Islamization is an answer to the ideological "impotence" of the leaders of "new" Russia and the state's inability to ultimately formulate a national idea and philosophy. By buying short-term political loyalty of the ruling clans of the Muslim regions, something that the Kremlin was doing throughout the 1990s, it pushed away the local people. They, in turn, rallied around the radical Islamic leaders

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[26] See: A. Kappeler, "Dve traditsii v otnosheniakh Rossii k musul'manskim narodam Rossiiskoy imperii," *Otechestvennaia istoria,* No. 2, 2003, p. 134.

[27] See: D. Glinskiy, op. cit., p. 17. In the past three years only one more ethnic Muslim—head of the Ministry of the Interior Rashid Nurgaliev—joined the government.

[28] State Duma Deputy from Daghestan M. Mammaev said in this connection that school education at the local level has been neglected for a long time. "Young people have no choice," said he (*Zavtra,* No. 28 (608), 2005, p. 5).

who could offer a much more comprehensible "truth." In a way it was the answer "from below" to the corrupt and crippled power in the center and the regions.

Islamic religious feelings grow out of the fact that the ethnic minorities are deprived of channels of vertical mobility and political representation of their interests at the all-Russia level; they are pushed out to the margins of the contemporary educational and information processes.[29]

The process of Islamization in the local enclaves (Astrakhan and the Karamakhi) has acquired a logic and dynamics of its own. The story of the Astrakhan "mukhmins" testifies that the local "Islamic alternative" has large mobilization potential; the Muslim self-administering communities have shown that they can survive and protect themselves against persecution and economic risks.

[29] See: D. Glinskiy has offered the most professional description of this aspect (see: D. Glinskiy, op. cit.).