

Islamic Politics at the Subregional Level of Dagestan
Tarika Brotherhoods, Ethnicities, Localism and the Religious Administration

Kimitaka Matsuzato and Magomed-Rasul Ibragimov¹

Introduction

As was shown by the Karamakhi conflict in 1999, Dagestan has been the scene of one of the most fervent examples of Islamic revival in the world. Unsurprisingly, fervent faith has not freed the believers from politics. After the Salafits (so-called Wahhabites) were made illegal in Dagestan in the aftermath of the military conflict in August-September 1999, Islamic politics in the republic developed among traditional Sufi Muslims along four axes:

1. Said-Afandi Cherkeiskii and his *myuridy* (disciples), the most influential *tarika*² brotherhood³ in Dagestan, versus other *tarika* brotherhoods.

¹ Kimitaka Matsuzato is professor at the Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, Japan. Magomed-Rasul Ibragimov is associate professor at Dagestan State University, Russia. This essay is one of the outcomes of the research project "Islam and Politics in Russia: Multi-Layered and Comparative Approach" (April 2003 – March 2006) financed by the Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technology.

² *Tarika* is a key concept of Sufism, originating from a word meaning "way" in Arabic. In early Sufism (the 9-10th centuries) *tarika* meant the "method" to achieve a certain spiritual condition (*tarika*-method). After the rapid spread of Sufi institutions of "teacher (sheikh, *murshid*, *ustaz*) – disciple (*myurid*)" in the Muslim world during the 11th and 12th centuries, *tarika* began to mean these institutions as well (*tarika*-brotherhood). During this period *tarika*-method began to mean "mythic methods of cognition of truth" (*Islam: entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, Moscow, 1991, pp. 224-225). The contemporary usage of this word in Dagestan follows this duality, *tarika*-method and *tarika*-brotherhood. In this paper, Sufism, tarikatism and myuridism are used as interchangeable terms. On the general history and the present situation of Sufism in Northeastern Caucasus see Aleksei Malashenko, *Islamskie orientiry Severnogo Kavkaza* (Moscow, 2001).

³ By the term "*tarika* brotherhood" we mean not overarching macro-*tarika*, such as *Nakshbandiya*, *Shaziliya*, and *Kadiriya*, but concrete and coherent collectives composed of a sheikh and his disciples. This usage of the word will be justified if we consider that there is no conflict between such macro-*tarika* in Dagestan. Moreover, even the genealogy of smaller *tarika*, which should be extremely important for Sufism, does not always matter. For example, Said-Afandi came into conflict with his former senior disciple, Tadzhuiddin Khasavyurtovskii, with whom Said had learned Islam under the same sheikh. Confrontations, intrigues and alliances among Muslim leaders in Dagestan have taken place between concrete collectives-brotherhoods. Moreover, sheikhs, as a rule, are not satisfied with their first *idzhaza* (permission to organize one's own brotherhood and teach *tarika*-method) but try to obtain a second one, often even with dubious means. (This mentality reminds us of the practice of the Soviet nomenklatura, whose members regarded it as prestigious to have a second higher education qualification.). For example, Said-Afandi received the *idzhaza* of *Shaziliya* first from his own teacher, but later obtained the *idzhaza* of

2. *Pro et contra* the Religious Administration of Muslims of Dagestan (*Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man Dagestana*, DUMD), whose leadership has been monopolized since 1992 by Said-Afandi Cherkeiskii and his disciples, supported by Avarians.

3. Avarians, who dominate the DUMD, versus other ethnicities, in particular Kumyks. To an extent, this confrontation tracks the traditional rivalry between highlander Caucasians and lowlander Turkis in modern Dagestan history.

4. Mountain and Central raions and cities of Dagestan, which accept the present DUMD leadership, and the opposition of the Kumyk-inhabited and the Southern territories of Dagestan.

Although this situation was brilliantly described by Dmitrii Makarov in *Ofitsial'nyi i neofitsial'nyi islam v Dagestane* (Moscow, 2000), Makarov's study does not go below the level of the republic. In order to analyze the complex interrelations among the four axes of confrontation, however, we need to focus on Muslim politics at the subregional level. At the beginning of this paper, we will describe the general situation of Islam in Dagestan. After that we will provide an ideal type of the domination exercised by the triad of Said-Afandi – DUMD – Avarians, referring to the example of a typical mountain raion mainly inhabited by Avarians, Untsukul'skii. Further, we will examine local religious politics in Southern Dagestan carried on by groups which do not accept the DUMD's leadership. At the end of this paper we will survey the remnants of the Salafiya movement in Southern Dagestan, which was one of the two epicenters of the Salafiya movement during the second half of the 1990s (the other was the Karamakhi zone).

The Ethno-Confessional Situation in Dagestan

Nakshbandiya as well. Likewise, Siradzhudin Khurikskii, the most influential sheikh in Southern Dagestan, received the *idzhaza* of *Nakshbandiya* from his teacher and afterwards began to pretend that he had obtained the *idzhaza* of *Shaziliya* as well (the authors' interview with Siradzhudin Israfilov Khurikskii, 21 February 2004, Khurik Village, Tabasaranskii Raion). As a result, Said-Afandi and Siradzhudin share common *tarika*, i.e. *Nakshbandiya* and *Shaziliya*, but this fact does not soften the conflict between them at all. Caucasian Islam studies would not seem to have found a common term to convey the meaning of these concrete collectives-brotherhoods. Dmitrii Makarov and Aleksei Malashenko rely upon the word "*virdy*" (Makarov, 2000, p. 7) This word originally meant "tasks for self-accomplishment which a sheikh gives his disciple" (*vird*-method) but mainly in Chechnya it began to mean concrete collective-brotherhoods (*vird*-brotherhood), exactly as *tarika* changed its meaning a

Dagestan is seething with Islamic revival. In May 2000, 1585 mosques were in operation (among them 917 were assembly ones, namely *dzhuma-mecheti*, in which Friday prayers are conducted) in Dagestan.⁴ In 2001, there were 17 institutes of Islamic higher education and 132 madrasah in Dagestan.⁵ The numbers of pilgrims to Mecca (*Hadji*) was about 1200 in 1991, 6000 in 1992, 9398 in 1995, 12,525 in 1996, 12,208 in 1997, and 13,268 in 1998.⁶ Although the number of pilgrims began to decline after 1999 for political and practical reasons, Dagestan continues to send more than five thousand pilgrims to Mecca each year.

In many cities and villages of Dagestan the *azan* (call to prayer), transmitted by powerful loudspeakers, compulsorily wakes up the population at about four o'clock every morning. Arabic is taught in elementary schools if the parents wish it. Not only religious leaders but also officials working at the Nationality Ministry and the Government Committee on Religious Affairs often read Arabic texts and are well grounded in Oriental studies (otherwise, they would not have been able to debate with the Salafits). Even among village mosque imams one can easily find young people who studied Islam for several years in Arabic countries. Almost all the interviews conducted by the authors of this essay ended with the informants (irrespective of whether they were Salafits or Sufi, supporters or opponents of the DUMD) attempting to convert Matsuzato to Islam. Except for secularized Derbent City, in Dagestan it is very rare to see women wearing short skirts or trousers even during mid-summer. In rural areas almost all the women wear traditional clothes.

Il'yas-khadzhi Il'yasov, one of the most influential Islamic leaders of Dagestan, an opponent to the DUMD and a leader of the Kumyk nationalist movement, attributes the fact that Muslims in Dagestan are devoted to Islam "even more strongly than in Arabic countries" to its tenacious Sufi tradition.⁷ Ironically, Il'yasov's opponent, Akhmed-khadzhi Abdulaev, *muftii* (head)⁸ of the

thousand years ago.

⁴ Makarov, 2000, p. 5.

⁵ *Religii i religioznye organizatsii v Dagestane* (Makhachkala, 2001), p. 100.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

⁷ The authors' interview with Il'yas-khadzhi Il'yasov, 21 August 2003, Makhachkala City. In addition, Il'yas-khadzhi explained the strength of Islam in Dagestan by the passionate mentality of the Dagestani people and the predominance of the Shafii school of law, which, according to Il'yasov, is the most "strict" among the four Islamic schools of law. Here, obviously, Il'yasov is not measuring "strictness" in terms of

DUMD, expresses a similar opinion: “We should thank the Almighty ceaselessly for giving us such a pure Islam and such religious freedom as do not exist even in many Arabic and Muslim countries” (*Dagestanskaya pravda*, 5 September 2001, p. 1). Thus, both the *muftii* and his opponent ignore the fact that Sufism is nothing but a local deviation of Islam.

Why, then, is Sufism so strong in Dagestan? Dmitrii Makarov explains this by three factors.⁹ First, the Dagestan population associates Sufism with the national liberation movement of the 19th century led by Imam Shamil’ (1797-1871). In fact, during our research trip in Untsukul’skii Raion, the birthplace of Imam Shamil’ (August 2003), we encountered a number of popular legends based on Shamil’s life during the Caucasus War. However, as Makarov remarks, this popular association between national dignity and Sufism is quite problematic. Although he had grown up in the myuridist tradition, Shamil’ tried to build a *sharia* (divine law) state and, accordingly, was critical of the ‘*ada* (local customary law) characteristics of Sufism.¹⁰ However paradoxical it was, what consolidated myuridism-tarikatism in the Northern Caucasus was the tsarist government’s de-Shamil-ization policy which promoted ‘*ada* as a counterbalance against *sharia*. According to Makarov, the second reason for the strength of Sufism in Dagestan was the physical elimination of Islamic intellectuals under Soviet rule. In this situation, only “popular Islam” in the form of Sufism could transmit the Islamic tradition to the post-communist era. The third reason Makarov notes is that Sufi brotherhoods are firmly integrated into the clientelist tradition of the Dagestan society.

The policy of shifting highlander Caucasians (such as Avarians, Darginians, Lezginians, Laktsy, and Tabasaranians) to the plain lands, which was continuously pursued by the Soviet government and the CPSU during the 1920s – 1970s, has shaped the present interethnic relations in Dagestan. Before the 1917 revolution its plain lands were inhabited mainly by three Turkic nations (Kumyks, Azerbaijanis, and Nogais) and Russians. Because of the massive and continuous immigration of highlander Caucasians, lowlander Turki have become the “minorities

the school’s emphasis on a literal (not allegorical) interpretation of Koran and Hadith. According to this criterion, the Hanbal school is widely recognized as most strict.

⁸ Literally, *muftii* means the one who has the right to issue *fatva*.

⁹ Makarov, 2000, p. 7.

¹⁰ Malashenko, 2001, pp. 28-29.

in what had been their own ethnic territories from time immemorial.”¹¹ This is particularly humiliating for Kumyks and Azerbaijanis, since they continue to regard themselves as “more civilized” than highlander Caucasians. Until the 1920s, the Kumyk and Azerbaijani languages were lingua franca for Central and Southern Dagestan respectively (Azerbaijani, to a significant extent, continues to be so for the South even now). As might be expected, there are a number of anecdotes among Kumyks making fun of the provincial behavior of Avarians and Darginians. The same situation can be found in Southern Dagestan. Azerbaijanis in Derbent City are anxious about the massive immigration of Lezginians and Tabasaranians during the last few decades, significantly “Sunni-fying” this city which has an ancient tradition of Shiism.

Avarian, Darginian, and Tabasaranian polemicists emphasize the other side of the same coin. According to them, lowlander Turki had been secularized to a significant extent even before the 1917 revolution because of their active contacts with Russians. Lowlander Turki were more vulnerable to Soviet atheist policy and modernization than Avarians, Darginians, and Tabasaranians living in remote mountains. And indeed, relatively more *alimy* (*ulama*: Islamic scholars) survived among the latter nationalities. It seems hypocritical to highlander Caucasians that the significantly secularized Kumyks and Azerbaijanis suddenly requested religious hegemony over Dagestan after the collapse of the communist official ideology.

Lezginians would seem to be exceptional among the highlander Caucasians. Lezginians were damaged by Soviet atheist policy more than any other ethnic group in Dagestan. At the same time, Lezginians are the most modernized ethnicity in Dagestan, as indicated, for example, by the spread of higher education. As a result, a confessional (ideological) vacuum emerged in the Lezginian raions after the collapse of communism. This is why the Salafits targeted Lezginians. At present, the DUMD, unable to compete with the local *alimy* in pious Tabasaranskii Raion, is trying to penetrate the Lezginian raions.¹² The Tabasaran factor is another issue which demands

¹¹ A.I. Osmanov, A.C. Gadzhiev, G.A. Iskenderov, *Iz istorii pereselencheskogo dvizheniya i resheniya agrarnogo voprosa v Dagestane* (Makhachkala, 1994), p. 26.

¹² This is exemplified by the affirmative action policy directed at Lezginian youth in entrance examinations for the North Caucasian Islamic University, which belongs to the DUMD. The same policy is pursued by the Imam Shafii Islamic University (which belongs to the Kumyk opposition) in Makhachkala.

special attention. Among nationalities in Dagestan Tabasaranians are characterized by the highest birth rate, as well as the highest level of unemployment. Tabasaranians often regard themselves as a deprived nation. This sense of deprivation takes on serious significance when they migrate to cities and form closed communities, which often turn into a nurseries for both Salafiya and radical Sufism.

Saidism and Its Limits

The religious situation in post-communist Dagestan cannot be understood without considering the decisive role played by Said-Afandi Cherkeiskii, sheikh of *Shaziliya* and *Nakshbandiya tarika* and the universally acknowledged king-maker, who dictates the appointment and removal of *muftii* of the DUMD. He was born in 1937 in an Avarian village called Cherkei, in Buinakskii Raion, where he continues to live. His first teacher of Islam was his father, whose early death deprived his seven-year-old son of any alternative but to become a herd boy. With an interruption for military service, Said continued to be a herdsman until he was almost thirty years old,¹³ a career unlikely for a “young man of genius with mythical power” – though Said’s biographers and image makers try to portray him as such to the population. At last, Said began to learn *Shaziliya tarika* and became a favorite of his teacher Mukhammad-Afandi from Nechaebka, who eventually gave Said the *idzhaza* and even the *khirka* (gown which symbolizes that the receiver is the most legitimate successor of the teacher).¹⁴

Said-Afandi completed only seven years of secular education, and never studied Islam at the Bukhara Madrasah or Tashkent Islamic University, let alone in Damascus or Cairo. This is not a subject for shame for a Muslim leader of his generation, unless he is claiming to be a Muslim scholar with worldwide significance who has much deeper knowledge of Islam than any other sheikh in Dagestan. He has published only four books, three of which are written in verse; the only “prose” he has published is a collection of his oral preaching written in a question-and-answer style to popularize the elementary principles of Sufi Islam.

¹³ Said-Afandi al'-Chirkavi, *Sokrovishchiitsa blagodatnykh znanii*, 2-e izdanie, Moscow, 2002, pp. 4-6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

The opponents of Said-Afandi remark that his “arrogance” began to be tangible after he became a sheikh in the 1970s, but under the Communist rule the “arrogance” of one or another sheikh could not have political significance. In 1986, there was serious tension between Said-Afandi and another influential sheikh, Mukhammad-Amin Deibukskii (who died in 1999), since Said-Afandi headhunted one of Mukhammad-Amin’s disciples, Arslan-Ali Gamzatov, a Kumyk.¹⁵ Apparently, Said-Afandi desperately needed a competent Kumyk disciple to widen his influence beyond the ethnic borders of the Avarians. After only five years (1991) Gamzatov received the *idzhaza* from Said-Afandi.¹⁶ After the armed seizure of the DUMD by Avarian militants in 1992 (see below), Gamzatov, who was only 36 years old then, was “elected” as the chairman of the Council of *alimy*, a key institution of the DUMD. In 1993, he became rector of the Imam Saipully Kadi Islamic Institute (at present university) in Buinaksk City, the foundation of which was initiated by Said-Afandi.

The opponents of Said-Afandi criticize him for “arrogance” and nationalism aimed at total Avarian-ization of Dagestan’s Islamic institutions. In fact, our fieldwork confirmed Dmitrii Makarov’s observation that Said-Afandi’s disciples share a specific mentality which leads them to call all sheikhs but their own “*mutasheikhy* (false sheikhs),” even without reading any writings or listening to any sermons of these “false sheikhs.”¹⁷ Responding to a question on what prevents the unification of Muslims in Dagestan, Said-Afandi answered explicitly: “ignorance and misunderstanding of Islam” which leads to people “committing the most negative deeds.”¹⁸

It is amazing that Said-Afandi has been able to secure his disciples’ unconditional loyalty, although he has a large number of disciples¹⁹ and can afford to devote only tens of minutes to

¹⁵ The authors’ interview with Murtazali-khadzhi Karachaev, rector of the Shafii Islamic University, 23 February 2004, Makhachkala City; Mukhammad-khadzhi, vice-rector of the Shafii Islamic University, 25 February 2004, Makhachkala City.

¹⁶ The authors’ interview with Arslan-Ali Gamzatov, chairman of the Council of *alimy* of Dagestan, rector of the Saipully Kadi Islamic University, 23 February 2004, Buinaksk City.

¹⁷ Makarov, 2000, p. 11.

¹⁸ Said-Afandi, 2002, p. 72.

¹⁹ A. Malshenko relies upon a source, according to which Said-Afandi has 5038 disciples (Malashenko,

each disciple personally, when giving them *viridy* (tasks for self-accomplishment) once a year. Although this is common for other sheikhs to some extent, Said-Afandi seems to exert almost mythic powers of mind control. It is very important for any sheikh to have disciples with a good secular education (not only religious education) and positions in secular institutions. However, Said-Afandi's "cadre policy" is salient in this regard. He prefers to have young, educated disciples. He has built a solid network of disciples among government circles, and in law enforcement and security organs in particular. (Avarians are disproportionately represented in law enforcement in Dagestan in any case.) An observer satirically compared Said-Afandi's selection of disciples to the "cadre policy of the CPSU but without any quota for worker- and peasant-communists." This does not mean that Dagestan has actually become a theocratic state which reminds us of the Soviet Union. Rather, religion has become a convenient "card" for the secular politician, who will continue to call on religious leaders as long as that consultation increases his prestige and political resources.

As is well known, the liberalization of religious policy in the late Perestroika period opened the way for multiple splits in Muslim religious administration. There were only four religious administrations in the Soviet Union, and now "43 religious administrations of Muslims" are operating in the same territory.²⁰ Every national or regional president in the Muslim territories wanted to have "his own" religious administration. On the other hand, the Muslim religious administrations have lost the function that such institutions had since the time of Catherine the Great, namely as the monopolist channel between the state and Muslims,²¹ and transmuted into a kind of voluntary association which can be created, split, and abolished. D. Mikulski notes that a reason for this endless splitting of religious administrations is the emergence of young mullas who oppose the "former Soviet Muslim establishment."²²

2001, p. 62), though one can question whether the number of disciples is countable in this exact manner.

²⁰ Matsuzato's Interview with Khanbabaev K.M., deputy chairman of the Dagestan Government Committee on Religious Affairs, 18 February 2004, Makhachkala City.

²¹ On the functions of the religious administration during the early period see: D.D. Azamatov, *Orenburgskoe magometanskoe dukhovnoe sobranie v obshchestvennoi i dukhovnoi zhizni musul'manskogo naseleniya Yuzhnogo Urala v kontse XVIII-XIX vv.* Dissertatsiya...kandidata istoricheskikh nauk (Ufa, 1994).

²² Dimitry Mikulski, "Muslims and Their Organizations in Russia"

In Dagestan, the liberalization of religious policy intensified the ethno-clientelist characteristics of Sufi Islam. In January 1990, the DUMD split from the Religious Administration of Northern Caucasus which had been under the control of the CPSU. The first congress of Muslims of Dagestan elected Bagauddin-khadzhi Isaev, a Kumyk, as *muftii*. The nationalist movement in Dagestan during 1990-1992 was characterized by a tendency to demand that Dagestan as a multiethnic republic be dismantled in order to create ethnic republics, such as Avarstan (combining the Avarian territories of Dagestan and Chechnya), Kumykstan (covering the lowland Dagestan), and Lezginistan (covering Southern Dagestan and part of Azerbaijan). During the last years of Perestroika, the regional CPSU leadership was controlled by Avarians, which the DUMD under the Kumyk *muftii* opposed. The leadership of the DUMD sympathized with the Kumyk nationalist organization "Tenglik," which requested the formation of Kumykstan.²³ Thus, there was a balance between the three main nationalities of Dagestan: The party and DUMD were controlled by Avarians and Kumyks respectively, while the republican Supreme Soviet was chaired by Magomedali Magomedov, a Darginian. The collapse of the CPSU destroyed this balance.

In February 1992, a group of armed Avarians under the banner of the Islamic Democratic Party seized the building of the DUMD. These activists did not convene a congress of Muslims, the only legitimate organ to elect *muftii*; instead, the reshuffled Council of *alimy* "elected" the *muftii*. Since this incident, the congress of Muslims has never been convened in Dagestan and all five *muftii* elected since 1992 have been ethnic Avarians. It is no secret that Said-Afandi was one of the initiators of this *coup d'état*. Siradzhudin Khurikskii, a rival of Said-Afandi, remarks that after this event Said's clique also planned to overthrow the republic's secular authorities and create a Republic of Avarstan.²⁴ This view would seem to be somewhat exaggerated, but it was well known among contemporaries that Avarians were dissatisfied with the Darginians' hegemony over the republican secular authorities.

(www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/soc-swk/ree...)

²³ Makarov, 2000, pp. 9-10.

²⁴ The authors' interview with Siradzhudin Khurikskii, 21 February 2004, Khurik Village, Tabasaranskii Raion.

Once the legitimate, elected DUMD ceased to exist, ethnic and local groups began to establish their own religious administrations on the basis of locality or ethnic identity: Kumyks as early as 25 April 1992, Darginians and Southern Dagestan in 1996, etc.²⁵ The Dagestan Law, adopted on 30 December 1997, on “The Freedom of Conscience, Freedom of Religions and Religious Organizations” prohibited alternative religious administrations, as well as religious administrations organized on ethnic criteria (Art. 10, cl. 6). This provision obviously contradicted Russian law and provoked a protest by the republic’s procurator. Nevertheless, during the following years the ethnic and local religious administrations of Muslims were liquidated and the pro-Avarian DUMD remained as the only official organ of Dagestan Muslims. This event reveals a specific coalition between Darginian and Avarian elites. Darginians controlled the republic’s secular authorities but feared the Avarians’ attack on them, while Avarian elites tried to consolidate their monopoly of religious authorities, exploiting Darginians’ appeasement policy toward them. At the cost of democratic principles of religious life (which are incompatible with the endless postponement of the Congress of Muslims) and the interests of other nationalities, this coalition of the ruling nationalities has been secured.

Part of the background to the harsh battle over the religious authorities is the huge profits that the control of the DUMD makes possible. For example, the monopoly of tourist service to the pilgrims to Mecca produces hundreds thousands of US dollars each year.²⁶ The unimaginable scale of financial intrigues that the DUMD involved itself in was partially testified to by the tragic death of *muftii* Seiidmukhammad Abubakarov in August 1998 (he was bombed to death together with his brother and driver), although Avarian nationalists tried to show that Abubakarov was a martyr killed by “Wahhabites.”

A decisive landmark in the consolidation of the monopolistic position of the DUMD and Said-Afandi’s brotherhood was the so-called “struggle against Wahhabism” after 1999. In what follows, we will examine two aspects of this consolidation: the establishment of the North

²⁵ A.-G. Abdullaev, “K istorii KDUMD,” *Kumykskoe nauchno-kul’turnoe obshchestvo – Vesti*, 2000, Vyp. 4, p. 56.

²⁶ This “monopoly of pilgrimage” was strengthened each year and eventually, in 2004, private tourist companies were deprived of the possibility of obtaining visas for pilgrims.

Caucasian Islamic University under the aegis of the DUMD and the introduction of an ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The Professionalization of Muslim Education

In the aftermath of the military conflicts in 1999, the DUMD decided to establish an official Islamic university on the site of the Assembly Mosque of Makhachkala, which would train religious cadres not only for Dagestan but also for the whole Northern Caucasus. The North Caucasian Islamic University (Severo-Kavkazskii Islamskii universitet, SKIU) was officially opened in January 2002, but education at the madrasah began as early as September 2000. In comparison with other existing Islamic universities, the SKIU attaches special importance to secular education, such as Russian language and literature, history, psychology, economics, etc. The SKIU encourages the students to receive secular education through correspondence courses offered by the secular universities of Makhachkala. The SKIU is trying to gain the status of ordinary (secular) institute of higher education, which will make it possible to receive financial support from the state and give its students the right to be exempted from military conscription. The buildings and dormitories of the university are ideal, equipped with computers and a gorgeous sports hall.²⁷

Almost the half of SKIU students are Avarians, followed in numbers by Darginian and Lezginian students. Chechen students occupy the fourth place, and only after Chechens are Kumyk students represented.²⁸ This ethnic composition of students would seem to correspond to the DUMD-Avarians' national stereotypes: Darginians – the opportunists in the antagonism between Avarians and Kumyks; Lezginians – a bridgehead to Southern Dagestan, Chechens – to fortify the adjacent area with Chechnya and as a bridge to expand the DUMD's influence to the whole Northern Caucasus.

²⁷ The authors' interview with M. Murtazaliev, managing officer of the North Caucasus Islamic University, 21 August 2003 and 25 February 2004, Makhachkala City.

²⁸ The authors' interview with M. Murtazaliev, 25 February 2004.

The rector of the SKIU is *muftii* of Dagestan, A. Abdulaev. The managing officer (*upravlyayushchii delami*) of the university is Murtazali Murtazaliev, who was born in 1980 and is still a graduate student of the Dagestan State University. Having demonstrated his brilliant command of Arabic and organizational skills in his work at the international department of the DUMD, Murtazaliev was appointed to his present position. The talk with Murtazaliev and other young managers and lecturers of the SKIU left us with the impression that we had been talking with Komsomol leaders in the late socialist period, and indeed with the brightest ones. They do not show the rashness and ambition characteristic of ordinary youth, but just know their job and are doing it. It seems that they understand Islam, first of all, as profession.

The Shafii Islamic University (SIU), the oldest Islamic university in Dagestan established in 1989 by Murtazali Karachaev (a high-profile leader of the Kumyk nationalist movement, at present sheikh of *Nakshbandiya*), is in striking contrast to the SKIU. Fuelled by donations and the voluntary labor of imams and *alimy* from various parts of Dagestan,²⁹ the SIU has a building and equipment that look far from ideal. The contents of the lectures are mainly religious matters and Arabic. About 30 percent of the graduates get jobs of a religious nature, such as being imams and teachers of madrasahs. This percentage indicates that the education provided by the SIU is relatively effective, if we consider that the SIU is in opposition to the DUMD and this should make it difficult for its graduates to find religious positions. Nevertheless, the leaders of the SIU have to emphasize that the main purpose of the SIU is to give youth spiritual education, not to make them professional religious leaders.³⁰

The Making of an Ecclesiastical Hierarchy

Under the pretext of the “struggle against Wahhabism” the DUMD has tried to build an ecclesiastical hierarchy. An office called “chairman of the raion/city councils of *alimy* and imams” was introduced.³¹ This position is also called raion/city imam or, more overtly, the

²⁹ For example, the Dean of the SIU, Isulamutdin Agarogimov is not a full-time officer but the imam of Talki Town (part of Makhachkala City).

³⁰ *Makhachkalinskie izvestiya*, 7 August 1998, p. 7; the authors' interview with I. Agarogimov, dean of the Shafii Islamic University, 21 August 2003.

³¹ The ordinance of the DUMD introducing this organ, like other important rulings issued by the DUMD,

representative of the DUMD. Raion/city imams chair the councils composed of the imams of village mosques, for example, once a month and discuss various problems of secular and religious life of the territory. Raion/city imams audit the activities of village mosque imams. The DUMD appoints these raion/city imams (if a raion/city is very weak from the religious point of view, the DUMD even dispatches an imam from another territory),³² although the DUMD emphasizes that it considers the views of the *alimy* and imams of the territory. Raion/city imams, in turn, began to affect the elections of the village mosques imams. This influence does not always have political purposes. For example, Untsukul'skii raion imam Ramazan-khadzhi_Gazi-Magomedov, a renowned Islamic leader of Dagestan, is trying to progressively replace the old imams, who learned Islam only within the borders of Dagestan, with young people who often studied Islam in Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia and "have a broader view."³³

Thus there has emerged an ecclesiastical hierarchy, which should not exist in Islam. While there are 42 administrative territories in Dagestan, eight Kumyk-inhabited raions and 15 territories (12 raions and 2 cities) of Southern Dagestan do not allow these representatives of the DUMD to operate. Therefore, the hierarchy exists in no more than twenty territories. An expert of the Dagestan Government Committee on Religious Affairs speculated that the hierarchy exists in "only ten and a few more" territories.³⁴ We asked Ramazan-khadzhi whether this hierarchy contradicted the organizational principles of Islam. Ramazan-khadzhi and the leaders of the Untsukul'skii raion administration answered that the relationship between the raion imams and the DUMD was "consultative" and therefore the system functioning in Dagestan is different from (for example) the Catholic hierarchy.³⁵ Ramazan-khadzhi is trying to raise the income of village mosque imams. Since Islam does not allow the existence of a professional clergy, the raion imams needed to find an indirect way to distribute the rewards among village imam: The

has not been made public. This is why we are not able to identify the date of its introduction. Apparently, this organ took shape step by step, territory by territory, rather than by a single, systematic provision.

³² The authors' interview with Arslan-Ali Gamzatov, 23 February 2004.

³³ The authors' interview with Ramazan-khadzhi, chairman of the Untsukul'skii raion council of *alimy* and imams, 23 August 2003, Kakhabroso Village, Untsukul'skii Raion.

³⁴ The authors' interview with Murtaz-Ali Yakubov, leading specialist of the Dagestan Government Committee on Religious Affairs, 18 February 2004, Makhachkala City.

³⁵ The authors' interview with Ramazan-khadzhi Gazi-Magomedov, Gusein-gazi Magomedov, head of the social welfare department of the Untsukul'skii raion administration, and Abdula Magomedov, chief of Gimry Village, 23 August 2003, Kakhabroso Village, Untsukul'skii Raion.

government of the republic pays additional salaries to the executive chiefs of the raions/cities where this hierarchy exists, and the chiefs donate this additional sum to the raion imams, who in turn distribute the money among village imams.³⁶

In parallel with subregional organs of the DUMD, the Dagestan Government Committee on Religious Affairs began to introduce its own subregional organs. In May-June 1999, on the eve of the military conflicts, raion/city commissions “on relations with religious associations and organizations and counteracting religious and political extremism” chaired by the raion/city chiefs or their deputies, were introduced. The representatives of raion/city organs of law enforcement, education and culture, as well as local religious leaders and intelligentsia, participated in these commissions. During the military conflicts these commissions were given responsibility for a number of extreme measures; for example, the commissions identified the sympathizers of “extremists” in their territories. In 2001, the chairman of the government committee on religious matters, Akhmed Magomedov, remarked that the most important task of these subregional organs is “ideological and educational” work: ensuring that the state registration of religious organizations is comprehensive, research on religious schools and universities, creation of a data bank of people who studied Islam abroad, “prophylactic” measures against citizens sympathizing with “Wahhabism.” These tasks required close collaboration between secular and religious authorities. For example, the administration of Untsukul’skii Raion was praised for successfully mobilizing *alimy* to give speeches to the mass media and communicate with the population (*Dagestanskaya pravda*, 16 June 2001, p. 2).

In contrast to multiconfessional Southern Dagestan, where state and municipal institutions cannot but be secularized, in the mountain and central plain territories of Dagestan (irrespective of their ethnic composition: Kumyk, Avarian or Darginian) almost all the population belong to Sunni Islam. In this situation, the secular and religious authorities function in tandem with each other. Moreover, even judicial power and religious authorities cannot avoid cooperating. For example, when a conflict over the use of land or water takes place, *alimy* are often in charge of

³⁶ The authors’ interview with Ramazan-khadzhi, 23 August 2003.

preventing this conflict from developing into violence. When a homicide occurs, *alimy* persuade the victim's relatives not to resort to '*ada*, or bloody revenge.

As already mentioned, Untsukul'skii Raion is a typical mountain and mainly Avarian raion. Being the birthplace of the two renowned imams – leaders of the national liberation movement in the 19th century, Gazi-Magomed (1795-1832) and Shamil' (both born in Gimry Village), this raion is quite pious and abundant in "social capital." There are 12 rural Houses of Culture, the House of School Pupils, and several People's Theaters. Many citizens are organized in folklore and sports circles, and musical ensembles. As an important device of temperance policy, cultural and sports festivals are organized in villages in turn.³⁷ All of these activities are organized by the religious and secular authorities. During the first half of 2003, the raion imam Ramazan-khadzhi organized three contests with monetary rewards: contests among kindergartens and schools around religious education and a Koran reading contest for school pupils and young people. Village imams preach in schools once a month.³⁸ Ramazan-khadzhi is a "member of the administration" (the former ispolkom). When interviewed in August 2003, the religious and secular leaders of Untsukul'skii Raion emphasized the cooperative relations between them, though it appeared that Ramazan-khadzhi's authority was overwhelming the secular administration.

The struggle against social problems in Untsukul'skii Raion has not always been conducted using educational methods. For example, in Gimry Village until a few years ago anyone found drunk in a public place was taken to the mosque and whipped. The village council gives repeated polite warnings to the owner of a kiosk which sells wines and spirits. If the owner does

³⁷ D. Dzhabulaev, "U naroda est' ideologiya," *Dagestanskaya pravda*, 27 October 2000, p. 1. For example, on the day of our research trip to Untsukul'skii Raion (23 August 2003), a festival commemorating Avarian national poet Makhmud (1870-1919), which at the same time aimed at celebrating the opening of a volleyball gym, was held in Kakhbroso, the birthplace of the poet, with the participation of raion and village leaders of the raion. We therefore had to pursue Ramazan-khadzhi and other Gimry leaders from Gimry, the "entrance" to the raion, up to Kakhbroso, almost its highest point, urging our Opel along the rugged path.

³⁸ The authors' interview with Ramazan-khadzhi, 23 August 2003.

not comply, pointing out that he has state license to sell alcohol, someone sets fire to the kiosk. After experiencing such an arson twice, no one dares to sell wines in Gimry.³⁹

As seen above, it is meaningless to talk about the secularization of government in homogeneously Sunni territories. On the other hand, however, the relations between the secular and religious authorities have been determined by personal factors. For example, when the present (2003) Gimry village chief, Abdula Magomedov, a former schoolteacher, was first elected in 1990, the then village imam's recommendation had a decisive significance. However, he belongs to an influential *tukhum* (clan) of the village and has now governed the village for a sufficiently long time. When he ran for a fourth term as village chief in 2002, a personal conflict with the village imam (successor to the imam who had recommended Magomedov in 1990) developed. The imam called on people not to vote for him, but Magomedov won and the next year the imam was replaced with a 32-year-old youth who had studied Islam at Abu-Nur University (Damascus).⁴⁰

Southern Dagestan: An Opposition to the DUMD

Contemporary Derbent, the center of Southern Dagestan, is not only the second city of the republic in terms of population and economic potential, but also an extremely important border city, in which a huge number of law-enforcement, security, and border guard organs are concentrated. Moreover, Derbent, recently recognized as a world heritage site by UNESCO, has historical and cultural prestige. It was not by chance that this city has been a focus of competition among various religious groups throughout 1990-2004.

Derbent is one of those rare places in the world where the border between two macro-regions (civilizations) (in this case the Eurasian and Iranian) is visible -- here in the form of the fortress and the Great Wall built by the Sassanid Iran in the 5-6th centuries. Derbent is the place where

³⁹ The authors' interview with Gazi-Magomed Kamilov, Director of the Gimry Village House of Culture, 23 August 2003, during driving.

⁴⁰ The authors' interview with Magomednabi A. Ibragimov, teacher, director of the Museum of Imams of Gimry Village, 23 August 2003, Gimry Village, Unstukul'skii Raion.

Caucasus Mountains come closest to the Caspian Sea. Therefore, this city has often been called a “gate” by its rulers in the past,⁴¹ the fortification of which guaranteed the defense from intrusions of Eurasian nomads. Having been a typical contact zone, Southern Dagestan is distinguished by confessional variety and tolerance. Sunni, Shiism (mainly professed by Azerbaijanians), Judaism (professed by Mountain Jews or *taty*), and Orthodox Christianity are practiced there. Theocratic and conformist forms of government, typical for homogeneously Sunni Mountain and Central Dagestan, do not work here. The Assembly Mosque of Derbent, founded in 1309, enjoys international prestige as one of the five most ancient mosques in the world and has been managed by Sunnis and Shiites jointly, independent of the DUMD.⁴² This mosque is a powerful stabilizing force which prevents skirmishes between Said-Afandi and his opponents from being transferred from Central to Southern Dagestan. Another pivotal actor in religious life in Southern Dagestan is Siradzhudin Israfilov (b. 1955), sheikh of *Nakshbandiya tarika*, who lives in Khurik Village in Tabasaranskii raion. Despite his opposition to Said-Afandi and persistence in the seeking autonomy for Southern Dagestan, his behavior is distinguished from that of the more aggressive Kumyk opposition, such as Il’yas Il’yasov.

After the death of his grandfather, who was his first teacher of Islam, Siradzhudin became a disciple of Sheikh Abdulaev of Derbent (1977). When Abdulaev died in 1989, Siradzhudin succeeded to his sheikh status. Until then, he had spent only one year studying official Islam in Tashkent (1984-85). Although he endeavored to improve his scholarship during the 1990s, studying at the Shafii (Makhachkala) and Saipully Kadi (Buinaksk) Islamic Universities,⁴³ it is difficult to deny that Siradzhudin attracts people by his unique personality rather than by canonical knowledge. His brotherhood is distinguished by his disciples’ unconditional loyalty to him. There is a rumor in Derbent that some of his disciples drink the waste water after Siradzhudin has washed his body before prayer (*omovenie*).⁴⁴ Needless to say, even Prophet

⁴¹ Derbent was called “Bab al-abvab (the Gate of the Gates)” in Arabic, “Temir-kapy” (the Iron Gate) in Turkic. See N.K. Kasumov, *Gorod, perezvivshii veka. Derbentu – 5000 let*, Makhachkala, 2003, pp. 8-9.

⁴² The authors’ interview with Said-Gashcham S. Mirtaibov, chair of the Council of the Derbent Assembly Mosque, 20 February 2004, Derbent City.

⁴³ The authors’ interview with Siradzhudin Khurikskii, 21 February 2004.

⁴⁴ The authors of this essay thought it impolite to ask Siradzhudin and his disciples whether this rumor was true. However, a reliable source testifies that Siradzhudin does not deny the rumor, answering that he does not request it, but his disciples do it voluntarily.

Mohamed did not ask his disciples to do that. Siradzhudin enjoys generous financial support from Turkey.⁴⁵

As mentioned above, Siradzhudin is a compromiser. Even after the Avarians' armed seizure of the DUMD in 1992 he continued to work as a member of the Council of *alimy* until 2000. Although he tried to create his own "Southern" religious administration in 1996, after the failure of this attempt he continued to work as the representative of the official DUMD in Southern Dagestan until 2000. He enjoyed normal relations with the late *muftii* Abubakarov (who was assassinated in 1998) because Abubakarov "did not intrude in the South." While studying Islam at the oppositional, pro-Kumyk Shafii Islamic Institute and simultaneously opening a branch of the Institute in his own home, Siradzhudin also entered the (pro-Said-Afandi) Saipully Kadi Islamic Institute and tried to build a good relationship with its rector Arslan-Ali Gamzatov, Said-Afandi's disciple. Siradzhudin even began to say publicly that he had received the *idzhaza* of *Shaziliya tarika* from Gamzatov, who, however, does not confirm it.⁴⁶

The fact that Siradzhudin passed the status of representative of the DUMD to Makhmud Piriev, A. Gamzatov's *myurid* and the imam of "the second assembly mosque" of Derbent (see below), was a significant landmark in the Avarian-ization of Islam in Southern Dagestan. Nevertheless, Siradzhudin boasts that the attempt made by the DUMD to appoint its raion/city imams (representatives) in Southern Dagestan ended in complete failure. Imams and executive chiefs in Southern Dagestan continue to consult him, even visiting the remote Khurik Village (this is at least partially true, since we witnessed such visits when we visited his house on the Islamic New Year Day, 21 February 2004). Moreover, according to Siradzhudin, he continues to influence the elections of imams in Southern Dagestan since religious communities (*dzhamaaty*) and executive chiefs consult him in times of elections. On the other hand, Arslan-Ali Gamzatov, the chairman of the Council of *alimy* of Dagestan, argues that Siradzhudin's popularity in Southern Dagestan and the DUMD's compromise with it are only a temporary phenomenon. Both the

⁴⁵ Matsuzato's interview with G.-B. Ya. Guseinov, Head of the Department of Culture, Publishing, and Religion of the Derbent City Hall, 24 February 2004, Derbent City.

⁴⁶ The authors' interview with Siradzhudin, 21 February 2004, and with Arslan-Ali Gamzatov, 23 February 2004.

North Caucasian and Saipully Kadi Islamic Universities are preparing young cadres from the South (mainly Lezginians) to progressively replace the imams who are under Siradzhudin's influence.

Our fieldwork has revealed that this competition for religious influence in Southern Dagestan has quite individual and personal characteristics and, therefore, one needs to analyze each religious community concretely. It is possible that imams in Southern Dagestan are under a "dual subordination"; Siradzhudin proposes policies for implementation, while Piriev audits the imams. In the next sections, we will describe two important events which shaped the development of the religious situation in Southern Dagestan and consider two cases of Islamic politics at the community (*dzhamaat*) level.

(1) The Split in the Derbent Assembly Mosque

The grandiose Assembly Mosque in Derbent served as a reason for granting the city the status of world heritage site. Its appearance is not particularly Islamic and there is a hypothesis that the building was inherited from pre-Islamic Coptic Christianity. This mosque functions as a symbol of religious tolerance and coexistence in Southern Dagestan since Sunnis and Shiites use it jointly. The two religious communities have their own imam and *akhund* (the *Shiah* analogy of imam) respectively, but make up a common Council of the mosque and elect its common chairman, although Azerbaijanian Shiites have served as such traditionally.⁴⁷

Because of the nationalist movements during the late Perestroika period, Tabasaranian Muslims (Sunnis) began to demand hegemony in managing the Assembly Mosque and came into conflict with Azerbaijanis (Shiites). At the same time, the rivalry between two candidates hoping to be the next Sunni imam of the Assembly Mosque, Akhmed Gasanov (Tabasaranian by ethnicity, b. 1959) and Mavludin Netifov (Agulian, b. 1956), became almost uncontrollable. They were the deputy imams of the Sunni community of the Assembly Mosque and had been roommates when studying Islam at the Bukhara Madrasah. *Muftii* (before the DUMD's split in 1992) proposed

⁴⁷ The authors' interview with G.-B. Ya. Guseinov, 25 August 2003, Derbent City.

that both resign their positions as deputy imams. A. Gasanov collected signatures among not only Tabasaranian but also Azerbaijani Sunnis to help him get his job back and become the imam, while M. Netifov, supported by a group of Tabasaranian Sunnis, founded a new “assembly mosque” at a site of the former veterinary hospital. This was almost a *kharam* (breach of taboo) since pigs had been treated there. To build a new mosque, M. Natifov enjoyed the generous financial support of the international organization “Islamic Salvation,”⁴⁸ which some years later would be accused of promoting Wahhabism in Dagestan. Although Netifov’s group called their mosque “the second assembly mosque,” the population called it “the Tabasaranian mosque.”

Being a representative of the Agulian ethnic group, which was not influential in Derbent, M. Netifov paid attention to inter-ethnic balance in his management of the new mosque. Nevertheless, a group of Tabasaranian parishioners began to criticize him for financial abuses, even sending letters to the militia. This resulted in the intervention of the city Chief of Internal Affairs Adilgirei Tagirov (Avarian by ethnicity, the future Minister of Internal Affairs of Dagestan). Netifov abandoned the imamship of the “second assembly mosque” of Derbent and became imam of the mosque of the neighboring city, Ogni.

The DUMD and A. Tagirov decided to use the “second assembly mosque” as a long-awaited outpost of the DUMD in the South. In 1995, the DUMD dispatched an Avarian of Azerbaijan origin, Makhmud Piriev, who graduated from the Saipully Kadi Islamic Institute and had already been a *myurid* of its rector Arslan-Ali Gamzatov. A decisive reason for this selection was that M. Piriev knew one of the local languages, Azerbaijani. Within several years Piriev almost completed the construction of the mosque and increased the number of parishioners. At present, 200-300 Muslims participate in Friday prayers, although this number is much smaller than that of the real Assembly Mosque. Piriev’s group offers a curious rationalization for the

⁴⁸ The authors’ interview with G.-B. Ya. Guseinov, 24 February 2004; Said-Gashcham S. Mirtaibov, 20 February 2004; M. Netifov, imam of the Belidzhi mosque, 26 February 2004, Belidzhi Town, Derbent Raion.

division among Derbent's Muslims; it is allegedly difficult for elderly parishioners to climb up each Friday to the "higher" Assembly Mosque, since it is located at a high place on the hill.⁴⁹

(2) The Arafat Incident (2001)

In 1996, a Lezginian family named Velikhan received permission from Derbent City Hall to organize a religious organization named "Arafat" and develop a construction site in Gagarin Street to build a mosque. When the foundations of the mosque had been laid, the Velikhans' financial resources were exhausted. The foundations lay unused for a while. In 1997, the then vice-mayor of Derbent, future mayor Feliks Kaziakhmedov, proposed to Sheikh Siradzhudin that he finish the construction. Siradzhudin himself had a penchant for architecture, largely funded by Turkish money; up to that point he had built several beautiful mosques in Southern Dagestan. At the same time, Siradzhudin feared that his (a Tabasaranian leader's) participation in the management of Lezginians' construction site might provoke ethnic conflict. In this context the Velikhans' participation in the Council of the religious community "Arafat" was important since it should have prevented conflict. By 2000, Siradzhudin had built a beautiful mosque. However, witnessing the influx of a huge sum of money, both the Velikhans and the City Hall changed their attitude towards Siradzhudin. Thus an impasse emerged; Siradzhudin spent money to build the mosque but could not legalize it as his own property, while the Velikhans continue to claim ownership of the site, on which they had hardly spent any money. It is possible that this situation was created artificially to damage Siradzhudin's brotherhood.⁵⁰

Even without a solid legal status, "Arafat" was becoming a dependency of Siradzhudin's brotherhood. In 1998, "Arafat" opened a branch of the (anti-DUMD) Shafii Islamic Institute. This was an important step since there had been no institute of Islamic higher education in

⁴⁹ The authors' interview with M. Piriev, imam of the "second assembly mosque" of Derbent City, 20 February 2004, Derbent City.

⁵⁰ The authors' interviews with Isamutdin Saidov, Imam of the mosque "Bab al-abvab" (the former "Arafat"), 19 February 2004, Derbent City; Siradzhudin, 21 February 2004; G.-B. Ya. Guseinov, 24 February 2004. In fact, a degree of mystery surrounds the Velikhan family. When M. Netifov split the Assembly Mosque, Velikhan Senior worked as cashier of the "second assembly mosque." When the DUMD dispatched M. Piriev to the second assembly mosque, Piriev lived with the Velikhans in their home for a few months (The authors' interview with M. Netifov, 26 February 2004). Thus in all cases of

Southern Dagestan because of the DUMD's discriminatory policy. Students, pupils, and parents began to live on the site of "Arafat" and constructed outbuildings with their own hands. For example, they worked as laborers to pull down buildings and instead of wages they asked to salvage the stones for use in their own constructions. Recognizing the importance of "Arafat," Siradzhudin sent his best disciple, Isamutdin Saidov (b. 1966), as its imam. This was a difficult choice for the sheikh since I. Saidov was an influential religious leader of Khochni Village, the capital of Tabasaranskii Raion.⁵¹

With an interruption for service in the Soviet Army in Afghanistan (1984-87), Isamutdin Saidov studied at the Rybinsk Aviation Institute and the Perm Polytechnic Institute. Inspired by a mythical event in Afghanistan, during his studies in Perm Saidov resumed the practice of prayer which he had learnt from grandfather in childhood and began to study Arabic independently. In 1990, he returned to his native village of Tabasaranskii Raion, became Siradzhudin's disciple, and began to teach children Islam in his village. During this period (1990-95) Saidov finished a correspondence course offered by the Baku Pedagogic Institute. Having only intermediate secular education himself, Sheikh Siradzhudin appreciated and favored his highly educated young disciple. In 1995, Saidov was invited by the Khochni's Muslim community to teach Islam. To secure his income, the community gave him a job as teacher of Azerbaijani in a secular school. In 2000, the religious community "Arafat" asked Siradzhudin to send Saidov as their imam. Saidov's arrival in Derbent consolidated the triumph of "Arafat." The number of students and pupils of the Islamic institute and madrasah reached 300; they came from not only Southern Dagestan, but also the whole CIS.⁵² The DUMD and Adilgirei Tagirov (now the Minister of Internal Affairs of Dagestan) were not ready to resign themselves to the idea that Siradzhudin, an opponent to Said-Afandi and the DUMD, might have a solid base in the strategically important Derbent City.

splits of the Muslim community, there was a shadow of the Velikhans.

⁵¹ The authors' interview with Saidov, 19 and 20 February 2004; Siradzhudin, 21 February 2004. The authors' talk with the teachers, students, and the parents of the Islam Institute "Bab al-abvab," 25 August 2003, Derbent City.

⁵² The authors' interviews with Siradzhudin; Saidov. The authors' talk with the teachers, students, and the parents of the Islam Institute "Bab al-abvab," 25 August 2003.

At first, the DUMD - MIA of Dagestan tried to label "Arafat" a Wahhabite, since Wahhabism was already illegal in the republic. However, it was difficult to confuse the theological antipodes, Wahhabism and Sufism (although this propaganda was quite effective among ordinary citizens of the city). Therefore, the militia began to prosecute "Arafat" for violating sanitary, construction, and fire regulations. On October 11, 2001, a militia detachment broke into "Arafat" and found a number of non-local minors of school age living there unregistered. The militia sent the minors by buses to their native villages, and detained the core members of "Arafat" for a while, but eventually released them. The core members returned to "Arafat" and staged a sit-in. During the night of October 12-13th, they performed *zikr* (endless repetition of the names of the God or prayers; a crucial ritual for Sufism). On October 13th, early in the morning, the militia's final assault began. They beat women and children with nightsticks and detained almost all "Arafat" members (including children). This overt violation of human rights immediately provoked a republic-wide scandal. The chairman of the State Council, M. Magomedov, and the FSB intervened and the "Arafat" members were released after a few days.⁵³ At present, "Arafat" has renamed itself "Bab al-abvab" (Derbent's Arabic name) and is trying to be licensed as an institute of Islamic higher education.

(3) Case Studies: Belidzhi and Kullar

Let us introduce two cases of Islamic politics at the community level in two Lezginian communities: Belidzhi Town, with a population of 16,000, and the neighboring Kullar Village, with a population of 2200, located in the southern part of Derbent Raion. As already mentioned, Lezginians were damaged by Soviet atheist policy more than any other ethnic group⁵⁴ and, therefore, the competition between Salafits, the DUMD and its opponents to influence Lezginians has been fierce.

⁵³ *Derbentskie novosti*, 19 October 2001, pp. 1-2; The authors' interviews with Saidov, 19 February 2004; Agarogimov, 26 August 2003.

⁵⁴ Surprisingly, in the two communities analyzed here the mosques are open only on Fridays. This is unconceivable in Mountain and Central Dagestan.

Since the present (since 2001) imam of Belidzhi is the former imam of the “second assembly mosque” of Derbent, Mavludin Netifov (b. 1956), let us start by introducing his personal history. Even after Netifov was forced to move to Ogni City and became the imam, his hardship continued. As in Derbent, he was not able to build good relations with Tabasaranian parishioners (the largest group of Ogni’s population) and was forced to resign after serving as imam for only eleven months. The DUMD’s constant accusations against Netifov enhanced this process. The representatives of the DUMD even declared in the presence of Natifov’s parishioners in the mosque that anybody who had received Islamic education under the Soviet Union was a KGB spy. The problem was that Netifov had had a standard (non-local and non-Sufi) Islamic education at Tashkent Islamic University under the Soviet Union and, after he came back to Dagestan, did not try to join any *tarika* brotherhood.⁵⁵ He is very critical of both the DUMD and Siradzhudin. It was unsurprising that the DUMD labeled this anti-Sufi figure as Wahhabite and constantly vilified him.

After resigning as imam of Ogni mosque, Netifov lay sick in hospital for three years. Only in 2001 did he eventually find a place where he could live in peace. After the death of the previous imam, Belidzhi’s Muslim community (mainly old people) began to contact him. Although Netifov is Agulian by ethnicity, he speaks Lezginian fluently.⁵⁶ On his first Friday visit to Belidzhi, he was met and welcomed by the members of the community. On the next Friday, the Southern representative of the DUMD (M. Piriev) sent his man with two candidates (one for the post of imam, the other for that of religious teacher) to the Belidzhi mosque and introduced them to the community. The community answered that they already had a desirable candidate (Netifov) in mind and would agree with the DUMD’s proposal only if Netifov declined to become the imam. On the third Friday, Natifov preached before the community, indicating his desire to become the imam. A young DUMD official began to criticize Netifov for his deviation from “real Islam.” Some elderly people took offense and asked the official how long he had been studying Islam. The DUMD official answered “five years” (Netifov commented that this man had actually studied Islam for only three years at Saipully Kadi [Said-Agandi’s]

⁵⁵ The authors’ interview with M. Netifov, 26 February 2004.

⁵⁶ The authors’ interview with P.M. Magomedov, manager of the Belidzhi Town Administration, 26 February 2004, Belidzhi Town, Derbent Raion.

University). The old people said: “You have no *'ada* [morality]. Get out of here!” This is the story of how Netifov, after many years of hardship, became the imam of Belidzhi.

The Islamic revival in Kullar Village owes much to Imam Mogamedmirza Sefibekov (b. 1964), if one does not count the Salafits. Sefibekov was unable to fulfill his potential in school. After finishing intermediate education, he often changed jobs.⁵⁷ In 1996, when he was 32 years old, he began to study Islam at a madrasah in Ogni City. In 1997, he got acquainted with M. Piriev and shifted to the madrasah attached to the “second assembly mosque” of Derbent, from which he graduated in 1998. Sefibekov’s first task was to reopen the mosque, closed under communism, in Kullar. However, there was another influential figure in Kullar. In November 1997, on the active intervention of the Southern representative of the DUMD (at that time under Siradzhudin’s control) the Kullar religious community adopted a strange decision: it elected Sefibekov as the imam of the soon-to-be-reopened mosque, and made the other influential figure the chairman of the religious community, with the job of managing the community’s budget.⁵⁸ However, this figure did not contribute to the religious life of the community and eventually emigrated to another village. It is Sefibekov that has regularly officiated at funerals and other rituals of the village, reopened the mosque, and is planning to build a new one and transform the old one into a madrasah, without any assistance from the community treasury controlled by its chairman. Sefibekov has requested that the village assembly of Muslims be convened and elect him as the only imam of the village, but this proposal has been blocked by the chairman.⁵⁹

In this unpleasant situation Sefibekov has been supported by the representative of the DUMD, M. Piriev, to whom he feels loyalty. Another remarkable point is that Sefibekov is not a disciple of any sheikh. He gave his nephew elementary Islamic education and sent him to the Saipully Kadi Islamic University, where the nephew has become a disciple of Said-Afandi and is already working as a teaching assistant. It is quite possible that when the nephew graduates from the

⁵⁷ The authors’ interview with B. M. Mamodov, Kullar village chief, the former teacher of the village school, 26 February 2004, Kullar Village, Derbent Raion.

⁵⁸ Minutes of the assembly of the Dzhamaat of Kullar Village, 27 November 1997.

⁵⁹ The authors’ interview with M.G. Sefibekov, imam of Kullar Village, 26 February 2004, Kullar Village, Derbent Raion.

university, the DUMD will advise Sefibekov to pass the imam position to him, though everything Islamic in the village was created by Sefibekov.

Remnants of the *Salafiya* Movement

After “Wahhabism” was made illegal in Dagestan in 1999, *Salafiya* mosques were closed and official mosques in Derbent banished Salafits, who, strangely enough, began to gather at the Assembly Mosque. Many of them are marginalized youth working as merchants. They participate in five prayers, but do not listen to the imam’s, i.e. A. Gasanov’s sermons. Instead, they defy and ridicule him, lying on the floor and chatting during sermons. When a prayer finishes, they begin to sell books “with Wahhabite nuances” in the square in front of the Assembly Mosque and agitate for their faith on the streets. The authors of this essay, unsurprisingly, became a target of their agitation. They repeated the same criticism that the Salafits addressed to Sufism during the 1990s. According to them, the DUMD and “Arafat” are two sides of the same coin. The Dagestan MIA harassed the “Arafat,” while the FSB released its members from the jail, just to keep Muslims split. They never identify themselves as Salafits, presenting themselves only as “real Muslims.”⁶⁰

The tolerance of the Assembly Mosque towards “Wahhabites” provided Said-Afandi’s supporters with a good reason to criticize the mosque and justify the split of Muslims in Derbent. Nevertheless, the chairman of the Council of the Assembly Mosque, Said-Gashcham Mirtaibov, argues that if the Assembly Mosque banishes “Wahhabites,” they will never admit that they were banished because they are “Wahhabites,” but will claim that it was a case of Shiites harassing Sunnis. This agitation might undermine the confessional tolerance in Derbent. Moreover, once the mosque presents itself as assembly (*dzhuma*), it does not have the right to reject any person who regards himself as Muslim.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Talk with A.A. Guseinov, merchant and other “lay Muslims,” 20 February 2004, Derbent City.

⁶¹ The authors’ interview with Said-Gashcham Mirtaibov, 20 February 2004.

Salafits in Belidzhi were under the influence of Akhmad-Kadi Akhtaev, an Avarian and one of the most famous Salafits in Russia, who guided the movement from Astrakhan. In Belidzhi, the Salafit propaganda began as early as 1992, when a Russian from Voronezh, Oleg Marshkin (b. 1974), received permission from the administration to organize a religious club in his apartment. The popularity of his club rose rapidly and by the mid-1990s almost 40-50 believers, mainly young people, often unemployed, gathered in their prayer house (they refused to pray at the mosque). They began to criticize and even physically attacked local customary practices, such as funerals and weddings. When the chief of the militia of the Belidzhi precinct visited Chechnya in 1995, he was frightened to find that Chechen activists knew the situation in Belidzhi very well. This made the law enforcement organs in Belidzhi begin to prosecute “Wahhabites” earlier than in other territories. In 1998, exploiting a dubious incident in which someone fired machine guns late evening, the militia searched the club and confiscated “Wahhabite” literature. The military conflict in 1999 intensified the repression. The meetings of Salafits were prohibited and “prophylactic measures” were introduced. Thus, the militia at least succeeded in dissolving the Salafit community, if not converting them. Most active Salafits left Belidzhi for Astrakhan.⁶²

Nizam Razakhanov (b. 1970), the leader of the Salafit movement in Southern Dagestan during 1996-98, forsook the movement in 1998, long before the military conflict. The Salafit club recruited him in 1995. After nine months of training in Astrakhan he became the leader. However, he and other activists from Southern Dagestan began to question Akhtaev’s theology, consciously aimed at provoking discord within families and local communities. In addition, Razakhanov suffered from poverty since his comrades interpreted any attempt to earn normally as illegitimate materialism. Razakhanov began to feel that he was not serving Allah, but just acting out of fear of what those around him might think. In Astrakhan Razakhanov and about ten activists from Southern Dagestan declared their resignation from the movement, criticizing Akhtaev. Akhtaev and his disciples ganged up on them completely.⁶³

⁶² The authors’ interviews with S.B. Agaev, chief of the militia of the Belidzhi precinct and R.M.Egibekov, major of the militia, 26 February 2004, Belidzhi Town, Derbent Raion.

⁶³ The authors’ interview with N. Razakhanov, merchant, 26 February 2004, Belidzhi Town, Derbent Raion.

Conclusions

Islam makes no distinction between social/material and spiritual life. In this sense, Islam differs sharply from Christianity and Buddhism. This is why it is extremely difficult to secularize Muslim states.⁶⁴ For the same reason, Islamic organizations cannot but reflect the ethnic, social, and political interests of the society at large, as was shown by the examples of *tarika* brotherhoods in this essay. Islam is by nature a political religion. This is why twenty million Muslims in the Russian Federation may prove to have no less political significance than a hundred million Orthodox believers.

From the organizational point of view, Islam has a tendency towards decentralization. In contrast to Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, built on ecclesiastical hierarchy and a professional clergy, in Islam the principle of selection of imams by the religious communities (*dzhamaaty*) continues to be viable. As this essay has shown through case studies of local religious politics in Dagestan, this democratic tradition of Islam poses insurmountable limits on Said-Afandi's ambition. By the same token, despite its doctrinal universalism, Islam cannot be immune from nationalism and localism. The system of religious administration and *mufyii* (which significantly changed its meaning from the Arabic original), devised by Catherine the Great, was a challenge to this decentralizing characteristic of Islam.

Paradoxical though it may seem, it is Said-Afandi who has made the desperate attempt to renew and preserve Catherine the Great's state Islamism at the regional level, while Muslims in other regions of the CIS have been looking for a new organizational model for their religious life. Said-Afandi's hegemony has been consolidated in three stages: first, by the coercive liquidation of the legitimate DUMD and the creation of the Avarian DUMD in 1992; secondly, by the prohibition of alternative religious administrations in 1997; finally, by the creation of an

⁶⁴ On the dangers of secularizing Muslim political systems according to the European model of secular states, see Kushnirenko Volodymyr Oleksandrovych, *Reformuvannya shariatu yak osnova modernizatsii islams'koi derzhavy v konteksti teorii konstytutsionalizmu*. Avtoreferat dysertatsii ... kandydata politychnykh nauk (Kyiv, 2004).

ecclesiastical hierarchy and the professionalization of Muslim education under the pretext of the “struggle against Wahhabism.” It is obvious that a key factor in this process was the “statification” of Islam. In the Dagestan context this meant a coalition between the two strongest ethnic elites: Avarian and Darginian. However, the more Said-Afandi’s DUMD was centralized and “statified,” the narrower the scope of its influence became.

It is not by chance that the current strategy of the religious opposition in Dagestan is to convince the Russian federal authorities that the prohibition of alternative religious administrations in Dagestan is a violation of federal law. The opposition anticipates that President Putin, elected repeatedly and overwhelmingly, will be able to “harmonize” the Dagestan law with federal norms. Then, several ethnic and local religious administrations will emerge again. The opposition assumes that the monopoly of resources held by the Said-Afandi’s DUMD must be broken before Said will accept democratic norms and convene a Congress of Muslims, which will elect a legitimate *muftii* and form a single, unified DUMD.⁶⁵

It hardly seems fair that, while criticizing one violation of Russian federal law, the opposition does not question another overt violation of federal law – the legal prohibition of “Wahhabism.” The rise and fall of “Wahhabism” in Dagestan during the last decade testified that, despite the strong influence from the Arabic world, Dagestan will remain in Eurasia and its Islam will preserve local peculiarities for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, these peculiarities are not uncontested; how long will Dagestan be able to remain a Sufi island in the ocean of a pluralized Islamic world?

⁶⁵ Matsuzato’s interview with Il’yas-khadzhi Il’yasov, 25 February 2004, Makhachkala City.