

**ALIEN BUT LOYAL:
REASONS FOR THE “UNSTABLE STABILITY”
OF DAGESTAN, AN OUTPOST OF SLAVIC EURASIA¹**

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The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to the conceptualization of a meso-mega approach to Slavic Eurasia through a case study of Dagestani politics.² Dagestan is an extreme case since it appears very alien to Slavic Eurasia and closer to the Islamic Middle East. The only reservation to this assertion would seem to be that religious leaders in Dagestan boast that Dagestanis are more pious than Arabic peoples. Actually, Dagestan today is seething with Islamic revival. As of December 1, 2004, 1766 mosques (among them 1107 Friday mosques), 13 institutes of Islamic higher education with 43 local branches, 132 madrasah, and 278 mosque primary schools were in operation in Dagestan, which as a multi-confessional population of only a two and half million.³ The numbers of pilgrims to Mecca was about 1200 in 1991, 6000 in 1992, 9398 in 1995, 12,525 in 1996, 12,208 in 1997, and 13,268 in 1998.⁴ 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, while (for example) Bashkortostan sends only tens of pilgrims. In many cities and villages of Dagestan the adhan (call to prayer), transmitted by powerful

¹ This chapter is one of the results of the research project “Islam and Politics in Russia: Multi-Layered and Comparative Approach” (2003 - 2006) financed by the Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technology. The phrase “instable stability” was taken from brochure, *Russia's Soft Underbelly: The Stability of Instability in Dagestan*, by Edward W. Walker (Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series, Winter 1999-2000).

² Dagestan has a population of 2,580,000 (data from the 2002 census). The republic is characterized by a low level of urbanization (about 60 percent of the population still live in rural areas) and the highest birthrate and natural demographic growth among all of Russia's regions.

³ Data provided by the Dagestan Government Committee on Religious Affairs.

⁴ *Religii i religioznye organizatsii v Dagestane*, 2001, pp. 72-73.

loudspeakers, wakes up the population at about four o'clock every morning. Many signboards of shops and gas stations are written in Arabic, which is taught in elementary schools if the parents wish it. Even among village mosque imams one can easily find young people who studied Islam for several years in Arabic countries, while in the Volga regions those who finished three-year courses in madrasah often become imams.

The decisive resistance of the Dagestan population to the invasion, under the slogan of building an Islamic state, by Chechen militants commanded by Shamil Basaev into Eastern Dagestan in August 1999 provided an example of the unexpected coherence of Slavic Eurasia. We tend to think from hindsight that Basaev committed a suicidal mistake by invading Dagestan, because this adventure resulted in the liquidation of semi-independent Chechnia, which had become an international military and proselytizing base of radical Islamism. However, if we consider the growing influence of Salafism in Dagestan during the 1990s (see Chapter 10 of this volume), caused both by this republic's painful social situation and influences from outside, and the successful precedent of transborder Islamic radicalism in Central Asia,⁵ it is possible to suppose that the Chechen warlords made a "rational choice." What remains to be explained is why Dagestanis resolutely resisted the invasion, even at the cost of hundreds of victims. By this action, objectively, Dagestan not only chose to remain in, but also to defend the integrity of Slavic Eurasia as an outpost region. This choice can be attributed to the "unstable stability" of Dagestan society, which in the 1990s proved to be capable of overcoming the furious challenges of radical Islamism from both outside and within..

NESTED CLEAVAGES OF DAGESTAN SOCIETY

The authors of this chapter are not the first scholars to attempt to explain Dagestan's "unstable stability." Enver Kisriev and his fellow scholars criticized ethnocentric interpretations of Dagestani politics.

⁵ See, for example, Vitaly V. Naumkin, *Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series, Spring 2003).

Despite the vast behavioral differences among the ethnic groups of Dagestan, they have developed a common structure of settlement – jamaats (territorial communities).⁶ Severe natural, topographical and geopolitical conditions had already forced pre-Islamic Dagestani peoples to stand together devotedly around their territorial communities. This tendency was strengthened by the Shafii school of law⁷ followed by Dagestani Sunnites,⁸ because this school strictly requests solidarity of territorial religious communities (see below). V. O. Bobrovnikov remarks that Imam Shamil's war against the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century, the merger of jamaats with the system of village soviets after the revolution of 1917, and the Collectivization during the 1930s wiped out the inter-ethnic differences (which had already been insignificant in the nineteenth century) of the jamaats. Paradoxically, in such mountainous raions as Akhvakhskii, Akhtynskii, Rutul'skii, Tabasaranskii, and Tsumadinskii, where the population's resistance to Collectivization was most furious in the 1930s, the collective farm system enjoyed strong support among the population in the 1990s.⁹ The revival of Sunnite Islam with the Shafii interpretation in the post-communist era strengthened the social functions of the jamaats. According to Kisriev, it has been the jamaats, not ethnicities, to which the Dagestani people feel most loyal.¹⁰

⁶ M. A. Aglarov, *Sel'skaia obshchina v Nagornom Dagestane v XVII - nachale XIX v.* (Moscow, 1988).

⁷ One of the four schools of law of Sunni, established by Idris al-Shafii in the eighth – ninth centuries. This school was very influential under the protection of the Seljuq Turk and one of the most important Sunnite jurists and Sufi philosophers, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) was from this school. Later, the Shafii school declined mainly for political reasons. Today this school continues to be dominant only in the peripheries of the Muslim world, such as Eastern Africa, Southeast Asia and Dagestan.

⁸ The only exception is the Nogais settling in the north of the republic, who follow the Hanafi school of law. In addition, Azerbaijanis in Derbent City (southern Dagestan) practice Shiism.

⁹ V. O. Bobrovnikov, "Sovremennoe Dagestanskoe selo," S. A. Artiunov, A. I. Osmanov, G. A. Sergeeva, eds., *Narody Dagestana* (Moscow, 2002), pp. 90-91.

¹⁰ E. F. Kisriev, *Natsional'nost' i politicheskii protsess v Dagestane* (Makhachkala, 1998), p. 32. Kisriev even argues that in Dagestan tribal identities gave place to political identifications with territorial states, such as Serir, Khaidak, the Emirate of Derbent, and others. It was this political/territorial (not tribal/ethnic) identification that made the Dagestan ASSR survive since its establishment in 1920 to the present, while another autonomous republic of the North Caucasus established at the same time, Gorskaia ASSR, split into eight ethno-territorial units within only two years after 1920 (*Ibid.*, pp. 31-32).

The second argument Kisriev makes to challenge ethnocentric interpretations of Dagestani politics is that ethnicities per se cannot be the units of political actions. According to Kisriev, we should term the units (actors) in Dagestani politics "ethnic parties." These parties are composed of leaders belonging to the same ethnicity, but it is absolutely possible, for example, that a Dargin party will ally with a Kumyk party in its rivalry with another Dargin party.¹¹ Kisriev's argument has an interesting parallel with our understanding of the relations between macro-tariqa and concrete Sufi brotherhoods in Islamic politics in Dagestan.¹² Kisriev's argument is exemplified by the fact that Makhachkala mayor Said Amirov (a Dargin) has been supported by his own clan based on the people from his home village in Sergokalinskii Raion (Central Dagestan close to Caspian Sea), the Karachev brothers (Kumyk by ethnicity),¹³ and "khadzhal'makhintsy" (a Dargin community in Makhachkala composed of the migrants from Khadzhal'makhi, a huge center of fruit cultivation in Central Dagestan). This coalition, as well as any other, is based on common interests, not ethnic loyalties.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 33.

¹² Tariqa is a key concept of Sufism, originating from a word meaning "way" in Arabic. In early Sufism (the ninth - tenth centuries) tariqa meant the "method" to achieve a certain spiritual condition (tariqa-method). After the rapid spread of Sufi institutions of "teacher (sheikh, murshid, ustaz) - disciple (murid)" in the Muslim world during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, tariqa began to mean these institutions as well (tariqa-orders). During this period the tariqa-method was qualified to imply "mythic methods of cognition of truth." However, the worldwide expansion of Sufism has made classic overreaching orders meaningless as political actors. For example, the Naqshbandi, stretched from Gibraltar to Indonesia allegedly with hundreds of thousands of disciples, but without regular organizational connections among themselves, it can hardly be seen as any unit of concrete political action. Instead, coherent collectives-brotherhoods, each composed of a sheikh and his disciples, have become the units of Sufi politics, on which this chapter focuses. For more detail, see our coauthored essay, "Islamic Politics at the Subregional Level of Dagestan: Tariqa Brotherhoods, Ethnicities, Localism and the Spiritual Board," forthcoming in *Europe-Asia Studies* 57: 5 (2005).

¹³ The eldest son, Khairulla (b. 1943), is the head of the construction department of the Dagestan government. The second eldest son, Murtazali (b. 1952), is one of the sheikhs in Dagestan who founded the oldest Islamic university in Dagestan as early as 1989. The third son, Sapiiulla (b. 1957), is the chief administrator of Kumtorkalinskii Raion of Dagestan. The youngest son, Nabiulla (b. 1963), is the head of the Administration "Western Caspian Fishery" (in practice, the minister of fisheries of Dagestan).

Peoples in Dagestan, irrespective of ethnicities, share strong solidarity among relatives, famous under the name of *tukhum*, covering relatives within seven or eight degrees of relationship. Though political scientists and anthropologists have often overestimated its significance, *tukhum* can actually be used as an instrument for political mobilization.

Edward W. Walker explains the "unstable stability" of Dagestani politics by examining the nested structure of ethnic, religious, local, clientelistic, *tukhum*, and other cleavages. Actually, in this society coalitions and confrontations of various groups may have different patterns in response to specific issues. For example, Dargin Islamic leaders are discontent with the pro-Avar DUMD's monopoly over religious resources, but the Dargin secular politicians cannot but ally with Avar politicians, since Avars are most populous in the republic and might possibly challenge the present Dargin hegemony in secular politics of Dagestan. Likewise, Russians are Orthodox Christians, Nogais and Kuckyks practice the Hanafi and Shafii school of law of Sunni respectively, and Azerbaijanis are Shiites, but they are all allies when they encounter the massive migration of Mountain Caucasians' (Avars, Dargins, Lezgins and Tabasarans') to lowland Dagestan, though these Caucasians share the Shafii school of law with Kumyks. In contrast to the situation in Dagestan, in other countries where various cleavages of a society overlap each other and the society is separated clearly into two parts, there is a greater possibility of civil war, as was shown by Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia.¹⁴

An antipodal situation is observed in Dagestan, where the ethno-confessional "impurity" of one or another group often strengthens its legitimacy. For example, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan (*Dukhovnoe upravlenie musulman Dagestana*, DUMD) under the influence of Said-Afandi Chirkeiskii (an Avar) has been criticized for its attempts to "Avarize" the religious life of the republic. Said-Afandi's supporters can refute this criticism, referring to his strong influence on ethnically Kumyk Buinakskii raion. This influence was realized by Said-Afandi's Kumyk disciple, Arslanali Gamzatov, who is the chairman of the Council of Ulama of Dagestan and the rector of Imam Saipully Kadi Islamic University in Buinaksk City. By the same token, the presence of

¹⁴ Walker, *Russia's Soft Underbelly*, p. 18.

Magomedsaid Abakarov, a respected Avar alim (who died in 2004), in the anti-Chirkeiskii opposition raised its authority, since the opposition could demonstrate that Said-Afandi was criticized even among his own people (Avars).

Robert Bruce Ware, Kisriev and Walker argue that the political regime functioning in Dagestan is a kind of consociationalism, a concept elaborated by Arend Lijphart in the 1970s to describe a non-majoritarian political system with formal and informal rules for power-sharing between ethnic groups, as in the Netherlands and Belgium. The most famous element of formal consociationalism, prescribed by the Dagestan Constitution adopted by the Constitutional Assembly on July 26, 1994, are a collective presidency (which would emerge again in the Bosnian Constitution) under the name of a State Council composed of 14 representatives of the same number of state/indigenous ethnicities. Moreover, 64 of the 121 single-mandate electoral districts of the republican parliament were defined by the republican electoral law as "national." In other words, the right to run for deputyship in these districts is limited to the members of a certain nationality.¹⁵ During the mid-1990s similar systems were introduced at the municipal level. Needless to say, the existence of these national electoral districts is problematic from the viewpoint of equality of citizens. Putin's centralizing reform put an end to these consociational arrangements. In accordance with the Federal Law on General Principles of Organization of Legislative and Executive Organs of State Power in Federal Constituents, but against the popular will to reject individual presidency expressed by two separate republican referenda in 1992 and 1993, the federal authorities forced the Dagestan authorities to introduce an individual presidency and hold the first presidential elections in 2006.¹⁶ National electoral districts were

¹⁵ Walker, *Russia's Soft Underbelly*, pp. 20-22; Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, "Political Stability and Ethnic Party: Why Is There Peace in Dagestan?," Mikhail A. Alexseev, ed., *Center-Periphery Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia: A Federation Imperiled* (Houndsmills, London, 1999), pp. 107-112.

¹⁶ The new constitution which introduced the individual presidency was adopted by the constitutional assembly, composed of 121 parliamentarians of the republic and 121 delegates from raions and cities, on July 10, 2003. *Konstitutsiia Respubliki Dagestan* (Makhachkala, 2003).

abolished at the both republican and municipal levels.¹⁷ In other words, the federal center forced Dagestan to shift to a purely majoritarian, quota-free democracy.

Unofficial consociationalism has typically been demonstrated by the genius of the State Council Chairman Magomedali Magomedov (a Dargin), who has managed to reshuffle profit-making posts among representatives of all major ethnic groups. As Ware and Kisriev note, if a Dargin replaces an Avar in a ministry, "then another Avar must receive a compensatory post. If this results in the displacement of a Kumyk, then the latter must be given another position even if it displaces a Lézgin or a Lak..."¹⁸ In 1998 Murtazali Karachayev, sheikh-entrepreneur and one of the leaders of the Kumyk nationalist movement, started to produce bottled mineral water and other non-alcohol beverages.¹⁹ Recognizing that mineral water makes a great deal of money, the State Council Chair M. Magomedov practically proposed Karachayev to sell his company to the republic. Karachayev could not reject this proposal and M. Magomedov gave this "republican property" to his own son. In compensation, Magomedov fired the head (an Avar) of the public enterprise "Western Caspian Fishery" and gave this post to Murtazali's younger brother, Nabiiulla (who was vice-mayor of Makhachkala, namely mayor Amirov's then right hand man) in 1999. This post, in practice the minister of fisheries of Dagestan, is extremely profitable because of its connection with the caviar business. Officially earning only a few hundred US dollars a month, Nabiiulla is able to hire twelve armed bodyguards. Arriving at the post, Nabiiulla immediately de-Avarized the "Western Caspian Fishery" by firing tens of staff members. Enraged Avars surrounded the head office of this enterprise armed with machine guns, while Nabiiulla and his men entrenched themselves in the office, holding the same weapon.²⁰ For the final solution of this situation

¹⁷ The last republican parliamentary elections based on national electoral districts were held in 2003.

¹⁸ Ware and Kisriev, "Political Stability," p. 118.

¹⁹ *Makhachkalinskii izvestiia*, 7 August 1998, p. 7.

²⁰ Nabiiulla Karachayev, interviewed by K. Matsuzato in Makhachkala on 25 February 2004. Nabiiulla's elder brother, Sheikh Murtazali, said that "it would be wrong to see the problem from such a point of view, but the two events coincided chronologically" (interviewed by M.-R. Ibragimov in Makhachkala on 10 February 2005).

EMERGING MESS-AREAS IN THE FORMER SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

M. Magomedov is proposing the Avar leaders a newly (artificially) created position of minister of public services.

To sum up, the unexpected stability of Dagestan society is explained by (1) the coherence of territorial communities (jamaats), which neutralize conflicts at the republican level; (2) the nested structure of cleavages, which neutralizes a serious conflict around one issue by a different constellation of interests around another issue; (3) the tradition of ethno-confessional tolerance, which discourages "ethnic purity" of one or another political camp and encourages inter-ethnic alliances; and (4) consociational arrangements, which console a loser with the anticipation that the loss will be compensated by a gain in another sphere and thus prevent him from resorting to arms. Further, we will examine these mechanisms of tolerance in the confessional and ethnic spheres.

SUFI BROTHERHOODS AND JAMAATS: CONFESSIONAL STABILIZERS IN DAGESTAN

Remarkably, most harsh religious rivalry in post-communist Dagestan has taken place among Sunnites (as was shown by the confrontation between the Salafites and "traditional Islam" during the 1990s) or even within the Shafii school of Sunnites (that is, among tariqa brotherhoods), while the relationship between Muslims, Christians, and Judaists, as well as between Sunnites and Shiites has traditionally been amicable. This situation distinguishes Dagestan from conflict-ridden regions in Middle East and South Asia.

It is true that the rivalry between the "traditional (Sufi) Islam" and Salafites during the 1990s was liquidated in a compulsory (sometimes even coercive) manner. In Dagestan the so-called "Wahhabism" was made illegal by law after the military conflict in 1999, although Russian federal law does not prohibit it. However, the prohibition of "Wahhabism" in Dagestan was a result of a global geopolitical rivalry, which actually caused victims among citizens. Before the military conflict in 1999, traditionalists often criticized

Dagestan's secular authorities for their appeasement towards the Salafites.²¹

One reason why Dagestanis rejected the Chechen militants' call for a jihad against the Russian authorities in 1999 was their deeply rooted self-image as pious Muslims. The Dagestani intelligentsia has often been irritated by the fact that Russian scholarship starts the description of the Christian and Islamic histories of Russia from the conversions of Kievan Rus' and the Volga Bulgar respectively. As a matter of fact, Southern Dagestan accepted Christianity as early as the fourth century (under the influence of the Byzantine Empire) and Islam in the seventh-eighth centuries (because of the expansion of the Umayyad Caliphate), though it took almost eight centuries for Islam to penetrate Central and Mountain Dagestan. It was because of this early conversion that only Dagestan and Chechnia follow the Shafii school of law, while the other Muslim territories in the former USSR practice the Hanafi school. This fact is a source of pride for the Dagestani Muslims since it implies that the Dagestani peoples accepted Islam almost directly from the Prophet Muhammad, in contrast to the other Muslim peoples in the former USSR, who became acquainted with Islam through the Golden Horde or the Ottoman Empire (both sponsored the Hanafi school). Even within the same Shafii school, the history of Islam in Dagestan is much more ancient than that of Chechnia. In 1999, therefore, it was unconceivable for the Dagestanis to make a life-or-death decision dictated by Chechnia's "superficial" Muslims.

The rivalry within the traditional, Sufi Islam (among tariqa brotherhoods), no less harsh than that between the Salafites and traditionalists, has intensified only to the brink of bloodshed. In religious life in Dagestan, among the four conditions of "unstable stability" listed in the previous section three (autonomous jamaats, the nested structure of cleavages, and the discouragement of "ethnic purity") have been secured. The only condition absent has been the consociational

²¹ Dmitrii Makarov and Rafik Mukhametshin, "Official and Unofficial Islam," in Hilary Pilkington and Galina Yamelianova, eds., *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia: Public and Private Faces* (London, New York, 2003), pp. 145-149. The chairman of the Dagestan Government Committee on Religious Affairs, A. Magomedov, justifies his behavior during the critical period of 1998-99 by his consideration that "someone needed to contact them" to prevent them from becoming uncontrollable (interview by the authors, Makhachkala, 20 August 2003).

arrangements of ethno-confessional interests, because of the DUMD's penchant for monopoly under the hegemony of Said-Afandi Chirkeiskii's brotherhood and Avar leaders. This behavior distinguishes the DUMD from that of the secular authorities of Dagestan under the brokering leadership of M. Magomedov. Nevertheless, Chirkeiskii's DUMD has been restricted by certain rules of the game. Why has this restriction become possible? We will explain it by the interaction of three factors: (1) pluralism inevitably generated by the interactions amongst Sufi brotherhoods, (2) attempts made by Said-Afandi's ruling brotherhood to renew the tradition of state Islam in Russia, and (3) the autonomy of jamaats.

PLURALISM AMONGST SUFI BROTHERHOODS

In Dagestan Sufi brotherhoods operate as if they were the substitutes of political parties, representing clientelist, ethnic, and local interests. This is not only because influential sheikhs in Dagestan, such as Said-Afandi Chirkeiskii (b. 1937), Magomed-Mukhtar Babatov (a leader of the Kumyk opposition to Chirkeiskii, b. 1954), Sirazhudin Ispafilov (the leader of the Southern opposition to Chirkeiskii, b. 1954), Arslanali Gamzatov (Chirkeiskii's rare Kumyk disciple, b. 1956), Magomed-Gadzhi Gadzhiev (a Dargin sheikh allied with Kumyk leaders against Chirkeiskii, b. 1956), have several thousands murids (disciples) and thus objectively deserve to pretend to be leaders of "mass parties," but also because the Islamic revival in extremely pious Dagestan generated an ideal type of Islamic politics based on the famous principle of indivisibility of social/material and spiritual life.²² Once spiritual life is indivisible from political life, ethnic, social, and local cleavages of the society cannot but be transferred into religious (but not necessarily theological or canonic) rivalry, the organizational basis of which in Dagestan is the Sufi brotherhoods.

Remarkably, in this peculiar competition the judicious fear among actors of "ethnic purifying" (or ethnicizing multi-façade conflicts)

²² In this sense, the Islamic revival in Dagestan has manifestly differed from that in the once completely secularized Tatarstan, where the problem of whether Islam should be placed at the center of social-political life or whether Islam is only a component of the regenerated Tatar identity has constantly been an issue of public and theological debate.

continues to be effective. To our question why the religious oppositions had been so hesitant to struggle against Said-Afandi's brotherhood, a visible leader of the Kumyk opposition, Il'ias Il'iasov responded: "Today there are many religious authorities of other nationalities who are able to rally around themselves a large number of their supporters. But they fear that, by this path, problems of inter-ethnic relations, land questions and others are resolved within the framework of 'Saidism.' Such a state of affairs does not contribute to the consolidation of inter-ethnic peace and stability in the republic."²³

On the other hand, in this pluralist competition, Chirkeiskii's DUMD cannot but behave flexibly by differentiating its policies towards the uncompromising Kumyk opposition and the more compromising actors, such as the localist opposition of Southern Dagestan. In particular, the DUMD has gained a certain influence on Lezgins settling in the South. Moreover, the DUMD has maintained more or less cooperative relations with the secular authorities of Dagestan under the hegemony of the Dargin elites, renowned for their opportunist behavior. Last but not least, the DUMD has built a good relationship with the Nogais settling in the north of the republic, practicing the Hanafi school of law, and pretending to a territorial change to reunify the Nogai people, divided presently in three regions (see below).

RENEWAL OF STATE ISLAMISM

Said-Afandi Chirkeiskii's religious hegemony in post-communist Dagestan has been consolidated, first, by the coercive liquidation of the legitimate DUMD and the creation of the pro-Avar DUMD in 1992 and, secondly, by the prohibition of alternative spiritual boards in 1997. The third stage of this consolidation was the "struggle against Wahhabism" after the military conflict in 1999. Under this pretext, the DUMD tried to professionalize Muslim higher education by the establishment of the North Caucasian Islamic University and to introduce an ecclesiastical hierarchy. All these attempts are targeted at gaining the secular authorities' guarantee of Said-Afandi's monopoly of religious resources.

This strategy to make Islam state-protected is neither new nor unique. The DUMD is an example of spiritual boards of Muslims, which

²³ Interviewed on 21 August 2003 in Makhachkala.

have been historically practiced in Russia. After Catherine II, such an institution had managed the Muslims incorporated into the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. This institution was a semi-bureaucratic, monopolist channel between the state and the Muslims. The chief of this institution began to be called mufti, which in Arabic originally meant only the one who has the right to issue fatwa (judgments based on sharia). After the collapse of the Soviet Union this system diversified. On the one hand, Central Asian countries, Tatarstan, and the Northwest Caucasian republics of Russia continue to resort to or have renewed Catherine II's principle of state Islamism. This state Islamism strives to have only one spiritual board in each country or federal constituent; and these spiritual boards are to be very obedient to the secular authorities. Moreover, in many of these countries and republics the spiritual boards, *de facto* or *de jure*, began to appoint local and even mosque imams. At the other extreme, in the Volga and Siberian regions of Russia (such as Bashkortostan, Perm' and Orenburg Oblasts), spiritual boards split under the influence of the nationwide schism of umma between the traditional Central Spiritual Board, under the leadership of Talgat Tadzjudin, and nationalist/regionalist Muslim leaders (who created the Council of Muftis in Moscow in 1996). The fragmented spiritual boards were transmuted into a kind of voluntary association, which can be created, split, and abolished. Both approaches, divisions according to the state boundaries and pluralization, facilitated the increase of the number of spiritual boards. There were only four spiritual boards in the Soviet Union, and now "43 spiritual boards of Muslims" are operating in Russia alone.²⁴

Struggles for hegemony over the DUMD might appear to demonstrate that Dagestan, having vacillated constantly between the single and plural principles of spiritual boards, seems to lie between the state Islamism and pluralist voluntarism. But this impression is not correct. The state Islamism and the endless split of spiritual boards are the two sides of the same coin; in these territories the "revival of Islam" was an artificial phenomenon initiated from above. The development

²⁴ Kafan M. Khanbabaev, deputy chairman of the Dagestan Government Committee on Religious Affairs, interviewed by K. Matsuzato in Makhachkala City on 18 February 2004.

of Islamic politics in Dagestan, which allowed neither overt state Islamism nor the emergence of an alternative Spiritual Board after the mid-1990s is an alternative model to the post-Soviet "revival of Islam."

AUTONOMY OF JAMAATS

The Shafii school of law is characterized by its strict interpretation of sharia (divine law) in regard to the territorial solidarity of Muslims. According to this interpretation, only inevitable circumstances allow a settlement to build the second Friday mosque (in which all Muslims of the settlement are expected to gather at Friday prayers). This is allowed, for example, when the settlement has grown to the extent that it is impossible for one Friday mosque to seat all the Muslims in the settlement on Friday prayers, or when a bridge combining two parts of the settlement was destroyed by a flood. A Friday prayer conducted separately from the rest of the community without these legitimate reasons is regarded as not being acceptable to Allah.²⁵ The Hanafi school, dominant in the other territories of the former USSR, shares this rule but interprets it very "flexibly." The importance of jamaats for the Shafii school is testified by the fact that in the religious statistics in Dagestan Friday mosques are categorically distinguished from "quarter mosques," while the similar statistics in the Volga-Ural region only boast of the total number of mosques without this distinction. The Dagestani religious authorities try to build gigantic Friday mosques in populous cities so that the Muslims of the city can actually enjoy the possibility to gather on each Friday, while, for example, the Friday mosque (*Lya-lya Tiuripan*) of Ufa City with a million people (more than half of whom are formally Muslims) does not respond to this request at all, despite its post-modernist, luxurious architecture.

Likewise, the Islamic principle of the rejection of professional clergy is interpreted quite "flexibly" in the other Sunnite regions of the former USSR, where the clergy (receiving salaries from the state in

²⁵ Magomed-Mukhtar Babatov, a theological leader of the Kumyk opposition, and Mavludin Netifov, imam of the Belidzhi mosque, interviewed by the authors in Kakhilai Town, Makhachkala (23 February 2004) and Belidzhi Town, Derbent Raion (26 February 2004) respectively. Shamil Shikhaliev, a former expert of the Dagestan Government Committee on Religious Affairs, interviewed by M.-R. Ibragimov in Makhachkala (31 December 2004).

various hidden forms) has transformed itself into something like a subdivision in charge of ideology of the presidential or executive organ of power. In Dagestan the non-professional principle of Muslim leaders is still viable. In the other post-Soviet Sunnite regions mosques have often been built by donors ("businessmen") and the state, with the result that mosques are rarely connected with communities. In contrast, in Dagestan it is the jamaats that build and manage mosques and pay salaries to imams. This is why in Dagestan religious elites at the republican level, both the DUMD and the opposition, are unable to control religious communities in terms of cadre policy; they must respect the imams elected by the communities or recommend candidates for imams who are attractive to the communities. Our fieldwork identified only several examples of the construction of the "second Friday mosques" by the DUMD – a measure the DUMD resorts to when it is not able to establish hegemony over a community.²⁶ Even these few cases provoked furious protest of the opposition.

On the other hand, there are cases in which the DUMD attempted to appoint its own candidate to the imam position in a community but failed because of the community's rejection (Belidzhi Town of Derbent Raion), while an imam in an apparently anti-DUMD community became a sympathizer of the DUMD because of the latter's daily assistance to his services (Kullar Village of the same raion). Moreover, our fieldwork demonstrated that an almost ideal example of the realization of the triad of the domination of Said-Afandi, Avar, and DUMD in the mountainous Untsukul'skii Raion did not imply the sterile bureaucratization of religious life, but rather it revealed lively community activities and the presence of religious leaders enjoying genuine public respect. The strength of territorial religious communities in Dagestan has generated a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, Said-Afandi, thirteen years after obtaining his hegemony over the DUMD, has barely been able to extend his influence over the border of Avar, Dargin, and Nogai raions. On the other hand, however, the DUMD has been able to penetrate communities of oppositional raions, if it recommends an attractive candidate for imam or builds good relations with the imam elected by the community. The same is true for the opposition.

²⁶ The most serious case of these took place in Derbent City. See our "Islamic politics..."

DAGESTAN AS THE LAST TEST SITE
OF ETHNO-TERRITORIAL FEDERALISM

The Dagestani population has been composed of three linguistic families. One is the Nakh-Dagestan branch of the North Caucasian family (we will call them "North Caucasians" for simplification). The branch of North Caucasians includes Avars (who compose 29 percent of the total population of the republic), Dargins (16.5 percent), Lezgins (13 percent), and Laks, Tabasarans, and Chechens (approximately 4 - 5 percent each). The second linguistic family is the Turkic-speaking groups of the Altaic language family, who are represented in Dagestan by the Kumyks - 14.2 percent, Azerbaijanis - 4.3 percent, Nogais - 1.5 percent, and Tatars - 0.2 percent. The third, Indo-European, family is represented by the Russians (4.7 percent) and other small populations of Ukrainians, Mountain Jews (or Tats), and Armenians.

From the ethno-political point of view, the political system functioning in Dagestan before Putin's centralizing reform might be called "ethno-territorial federalism with some elements of consociationalism." It is true that Dagestan was (and continues to be) one of the only two republics in the USSR which are named after the place but not the titular nation(s).²⁷ However, this fact does not imply that Dagestan was an exception of ethno-territorial federalism established by V. I. Lenin and later popularized among socialist countries.²⁸ As is well-known, there have been two approaches to resolve the problems of national minorities. One is the attempt to promote the members of the minority in education and careers individually, without territorial autonomy. The Austrian Marxists' request for cultural autonomy belonged to this category and most of the contemporary ethnic affirmative actions in North America and Western Europe target individuals, not territorial communities. The other group, Lenin above all, argued that individual affirmative actions

²⁷ Another example is Crimea, the titular nation of which is Crimean Tatars. As already mentioned, the Gorskaia ASSR could have become the third example, but it existed too briefly.

²⁸ A number of scholars confuse the numerousness of titular nations with the lack of titular nations. See E. F. Kisriev, *Islam i vlast' v Dagestane* (Moscow, 2004), p. 45; Aleksandr Kynev, "Izbitatel'naia reforma v Dagestane" (October 2003; <http://intellectuals.ru/cgi-bin/proekt/kynev/kynev.cgi?action=articul&statya=viewstat&id=id26>).

without territorial independence (or autonomy) would remain fictive. Ethno-territorial federalism generated a peculiar concept of titular nations, the members of which were to be privileged in education and promoted in "their" territory.

Dagestan was named after the place simply because it contains too many titular (state-forming) ethnicities, of which 14 ethnicities are classified today. Dagestan is not an exception of ethno-territorial federalism but rather its extreme example; in this republic the most radical experiment in ethno-territorial federalism, the indigenization policy (*korenizatsiia*) of the 1920s, has practically continued to this day. During the 1920s the concept of titular nations was adopted not only for union and autonomous republics, but also for raions and villages. For example, there were many Polish raions and villages in Ukraine during the 1920s, where the official documentation was in Ukrainian and Polish. This costly policy was abandoned by the end of 1920s, but in Dagestan the indigenization policy continues to function in order to handle its ethnic mosaic-ness.²⁹

Today, Dagestan's "ethno-territorial federalism with some elements of consociationalism" faces serious challenges, not only because (as mentioned above) Putin's centralizing reform liquidated the consociational elements, but also because ethno-politics in post-communist Dagestan actually revealed the limits of this approach. We will examine this situation through the issues of (1) Mountain Caucasians' immigration to lowland Dagestan, (2) divided nations and attempts to create mono-ethnic republics, (3) representation of extremely small nations, and (4) inequality between the "repressed peoples" and "compulsorily migrated peoples."

MOUNTAIN CAUCASIANS' IMMIGRATION TO LOWLAND DAGESTAN

Before 1917, the North Caucasians settled in the mountainous parts of Dagestan, while Turkic-speaking and Indo-European peoples lived in the foothills and plains. The policy of shifting highlander Caucasians to the plain lands, which was continuously pursued by the Soviet authorities from the 1920s to 1970s, has shaped the present interethnic

²⁹ For example, raion newspapers in Dagestan are published in the languages of the ethnicities dominant in the raion.

relations in Dagestan. During these years about 300,000 Mountain Caucasians migrated to the plains. For them 76 new settlements and more than 100 collective and state farms were organized. The Soviet authorities in Dagestan (dominated by Avars and Dargins after the 1930s) tried to resolve the problem of land shortage in mountainous areas at the expense of lowlanders' interest. After the reform of land and water use in 1927-1934, stockbreeding collective farms in mountain areas obtained the right to use land on the plains for winter pasturage. For 280 stockbreeding collectives in 21 mountain raions 1.5 million hectares of arable land on the plains were secured.³⁰ As time passed, the mountaineers began to live there.

After the Chechens were deported in 1944, the Soviet authorities made Mountain Caucasians in Dagestan migrate to part of Chechnia's territory. After the Chechens were rehabilitated and returned to their homeland to renew the Chechnia-Ingush ASSR, the Soviet authorities made these mountaineers migrate to Kumyk lands, not to their former territories. During the 1960s viticulture began to develop in Dagestan, the labor force for which was partly provided from mountainous areas. The catastrophic earthquakes in 1966 and 1970 accelerated the massive migration of mountaineers to the plains.

As a result, lowlanders (Kumyks, Nogais, Russians, the Terek Cossacks settling in Kizliarskii Raion, and Azerbaijanis settling in Derbent city and raion) have been deprived of a significant part of their land and mono-ethnic environment. They have become the "minorities in what had been their own ethnic territories from time immemorial."³¹ This situation is particularly humiliating for Kumyks and Azerbaijanis, because 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

³⁰ A. I. Osmanov, *Agrarnye preobrazovaniia v Dagestane i pereselenie gortsev na ravninu (20-70-e gody XX v.)* (Makhachkala, 2000), p. 95, *passim*.

³¹ A. I. Osmanov, A. C. Gadzhiev, G. A. Iskenderov, *Iz istorii pereselencheskogo dvizheniia i resheniia agrarnogo voprosa v Dagestane* (Makhachkala, 1994), p. 26. On the ethno-demographic situation in Dagestan see Magomed-Rasul A. Ibragimov, "Naselenie (etnodemograficheskii obzor)," S. A. Arutiunov et al., *Narody Dagestana* (Moscow, 2002), pp. 36-49; Enver Kisriev, *Respublika Dagestan: Model' etnologicheskogo monitoringa* (Moscow, 1999), pp. 19-23.

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 Avars and Dargins. The same situation can be found in Southern Dagestan. Azerbaijanis in Derbent City are anxious about the massive immigration of Lezgins and Tabasarans during the last few decades, significantly "Sunni-fying" this city, which has an ancient tradition of Shiism.

Aleksandr Kynev argues that the mountaineers' migration to the lowlands have, in fact, enhanced inter-ethnic coexistence, since it changed the geographic distribution of ethnicities in Dagestan from the previous "patchwork-type" to the present "network-type;" major cities in Dagestan have become multi-ethnic.³² But Kynev ignores the fact that this process was asymmetrical: while the tradition of "title nations" at the subregional levels was destroyed for lowlanders, mountaineers continue to enjoy it. The lowlanders have become unable to make their ethnic representatives win the mayoral elections in "their" cities and raions. This situation led the representatives of the lowlanders to propose to institutionalize *de jure* the system of "title nations" at subregional levels, but this proposal contradicts federal law completely and will hardly persuade Putin.

*PROBLEMS OF DIVIDED NATIONS AND ATTEMPTS
TO CREATE MONO-ETHNIC REPUBLICS*

The nationalist movements in Dagestan during 1990-1992 were characterized by a tendency to demand that Dagestan as a multiethnic republic be dismantled in order to create mono-ethnic republics, such as Avarstan (combining the Avar territories of Dagestan and Chechnia; Avars are ethnically close to Chechens), Kumykstan (covering lowland Dagestan), and Lezgistan (covering Southern Dagestan and part of

³² Kynev, *op. cit.* For example, Makhachkala is composed of all ethnicities of Dagestan; Khasaviurt is composed of Kumyks, Chechens, Avars, Chechens, and Lacks; Buinaksk located in Central Dagestan are settled by Kumyks and Avars; Izberbash by the Caspian Sea - by Kumyks and Dargins; Derbent in Southern Dagestan is settled by Azerbaijanis, Lezgins, and Tabasarans; and Kizliar in Northern Dagestan is settled by Russians, Avars, Dargins, Kumyks, and Nogais.

northern Azerbaijan). Though this tendency has lost its acuteness and violent characteristics, the problem of "divided nations" continues to be a convenient card for politicians to play.

For example, the Lezgins' movement to request their own autonomous republic existed already in the late Perestroika period, as was represented by the Lezgin organization, "Sadval" (meaning "unity," established in 1989). But the collapse of the Soviet Union made this movement much more radical, because the Lezgins then became a nation divided by Samur River (which borders Russia and Azerbaijan). Friends, neighbors and relatives abruptly became "foreigners."³³ However, since 1998, the Lezgins' movement became more parliamentarian, targeted at gaining deputy seats at the federal and republican levels. The present leader of "Sadval," R. Ashuraliev, emphasizes not the creation of territorial autonomy, but the cultural and economic development of Lezgin raions. This moderate position made the Lezgin movement split and the radical part allies with the nationwide Lezgin organization named the Federal Lezgin National-Cultural Autonomy. This organization is mainly composed of the Lezgins living outside Dagestan (mainly Moscow) and tries to influence the Lezgins in the Azerbaijan territory.

In northern Dagestan (Kizliar City and Raion, Tarumovslii Raion), which has traditionally been ethnic Russians' territory, Russians have become the minority because of their massive emigration since 1991 and the continuing immigration of Mountain Caucasians. In this territory the Kizliar Okrug (Division) of the Terek Cossack Army functions. This Cossack organization was admitted as a border defense force by the Russian government in 2000. Allied with the most radical part of the Russian Cossack movement of Stavropol' Krai and based on the Russian Federal law on the rehabilitation of repressed nations, the Kizliar Cossacks requested the re-establishment of the Terek (Cossack) Oblast, which had existed until 1922. Another part of Cossacks and the Russian population demand the transfer of the northern Dagestan to Stavropol'

³³ *Respublika Dagestan: sovremennye problemy natsional'nykh otnoshenii. V dokumentakh Verkhovnogo Soveta, Soveta Ministrov i obshchestvennykh ob"edinenii* (Makhachkala, 1992), p. 197; A. G. Agaev, *Kontseptsia natsional'nogo razvitiia lezginского naroda* (Makhachkala, 1994); M. R. Kurbanov, G.I. Iusupova, *Lezginy: problemy razdelenogo naroda* (Makhachkala, 1996), pp. 25-26.

Krai. Somewhat strangely, the Kizliar Cossack movement has common interests with Nogais (settling in the same northern Dagestan) since both of them request a territorial change in the northern Dagestan. The territory in which Nogais settle was divided into three parts, Dagestan, Stavropol' Krai and Chechnia, by the decree of the Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet on January 9, 1957, which reestablished the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic.³⁴ The Nogais' national movement, "Birlik" ("Unity"), calls for the cancellation of this decree in order to reunify the Nogai territory and create a new constituent of the Russian Federation, though "Birlik" also pursues a more moderate policy of cultural autonomy without territorial change.

The examples referred to here reveal the "traditionalism" of various Dagestani nationalists' discourse. They construct their policy within the classic framework of national policies such as ethno-territorial federalism (more radical) and cultural autonomy (more moderate). On the other hand, the issue of divided nations demonstrates the nested structure of the constellation of ethno-confessional interests in Dagestan. For example, the Kizliar (Terek) Cossacks and Nogais, uncompromising foes historically, have become allies requesting territorial changes in northern Dagestan.

REPRESENTATION OF EXTREMELY SMALL NATIONS

In April 1999, after protracted discussions the Russian parliament adopted a Law "on the Guarantees of Rights of Native Small Nations in the Russian Federation."³⁵ Article One of this law prescribes that "Considering the uniqueness of the ethnic composition of the population of the Republic of Dagestan, in terms of the number of the nations settling in the territory, the State Council of the Republic of Dagestan determines the numbers and other specifics of the native small nations and also compiles the list of these nations to be included into the United List of the Native Small Nations of the Russian Federation." Thus, the Dagestan

³⁴ Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Respubliki Dagestan, f. 22, op. 39, d. 88, l. 5; A. Kazanbiev, *Sozdanie i ukreplenie natsional'noi gosudarstvennosti narodov Dagestana* (Makhachkala, 1970), p. 364.

³⁵ Federal'nyi zakon "O garantiakh prav korennykh malochislennykh narodov RF" promulgated on 30 April 1999.

leadership unexpectedly obtained the right to define which of the nations of Dagestan should and should not be included in the United List of the Native Small Nations.

The present Dagestan constitution admits only four "small nations": Aguls, Mountain Jews, Rutuls, and Tsakhurs. This is explained by the fact that small ethnicities in Dagestan, since the end of the 1930s, have been merged into more numerous ones. For example, fourteen smaller ethnicities (such as Andis, Archis, Akhvaks, Bagulals) began to be classified as Avars. Likewise, Kaitaks and Kubachis have been classified as Dargins. In other words, the existence of these small ethnicities was denied in both legal and statistical senses. These policies of Avarization and Darginization were conducted to consolidate the hegemony of these two largest mountaineer nations over the republic's party and government organs.

It is necessary to remark that a fundamental prerequisite for the normal functioning of ethno-territorial federalism in the Soviet Union was the Communist Party's monopoly on the right to determine ethnic categories.³⁶ Moreover, the right of these ethnicities, for example, to be educated in their native language, depends on whether they have territorial autonomy and titular (state-forming) status.

The ethnic minorities forcibly merged into the larger ethnicities continued to preserve their ethnic consciousness, which quickly came to the fore after Perestroika. Today, some representatives of these ethnicities want to restore their previously independent ethnic status and representation in the State Council. Unsurprisingly, the promulgation of the aforementioned Russian Federal Law on "the Guarantees of Rights of Native Small Nations" intensified their claims to obtain the status recognized by the state. For example, Andis, who established the National Council of Andis in May 1998, intensified their activities after the military conflict in August-September 1999, in which Andis fought heroically and were officially praised by the republican authorities. In April 2000, Andi activists organized a "convention of the assemblies of villages settled by Andis," in which they requested to

³⁶ On a similar situation in the Volga Region, in which Teptiary and Mishary lost their status as ethnicities during the 1920s, see Dmitry Gorenburg, "Identity Change in Bashkortostan: Tatars into Bashkirs and Back," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22: 3 (1999).

create an Andis' town in the territory of Khasaviurt City and to recognize them as a nation equal with the other nations in Dagestan.

*INEQUALITY BETWEEN THE "REPRESSED PEOPLES"
AND "COMPULSORILY RESETTLED PEOPLES"*

The rehabilitation of the nations repressed during the 1940s seemed a proof of democracy during the Perestroika period. But this measure ignored the rights of the populations compulsorily resettled to fill the vacant territories that had belonged to the deported nations. As a result, the authorities began to request that the compulsorily resettled peoples leave the territories, in which they had lived for more than half century, to the former inhabitants, i.e. the "repressed peoples," without guaranteeing new settlements to the former. In Dagestan, this paradoxical situation took place between Chechens and Laks.

In 1943, the southeastern part of Khasaviurtovskii Raion (bordering Chechnia) was divided in order to create Aukhovskii Raion, the titular nation of which was Chechens-Akkins. However, at the beginning of the next year they were deported to Central Asia and the most of the vacant territory was filled by Laks, who formed Novolakskii Raion, while two large villages in the territory were settled by Avars and passed to the neighboring (Avar) Kazbekovskii Raion. On April 26, 1991, the RSFSR Supreme Soviet adopted the Law on "the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples." Responding to this law, as early as July 23, 1991, the Third Convention of People's Deputies of Dagestan decided to recreate Aukhovskii Raion within five years (by 1996) by making the Laks living there move to the plains, in particular to Kumyk territories,³⁷ which unsurprisingly provoked strong protests from the Kumyks.³⁸ However, this decision was not realized for financial reasons; it was not easy to build houses and other social infrastructure for the fifteen thousand Laks. Moreover, the military conflict in 1999 changed the Laks' attitude towards this issue. Having

³⁷*Respublika Dagestan: Sovremennye problemy...; Dagestan: chechentsy-akkintsy* (Makhachkala, 1993), pp. 99-102; *Chechentsy-akkintsy Dagestana: k probleme reabilitatsii* (Makhachkala, 1993), pp. 30-42.

³⁸*Dagestan: kumyiskii etnos* (Moscow, 1993), pp. 36-42.

defended the Novolakskii Raion from the Chechens' invasion at the cost of their lives, they no longer wish to abandon it. On the other hand, Chechens-Akkins not only protest against the delay in realizing the decision of the Convention of People's Deputies in 1991, but also demand a complete "territorial rehabilitation," requesting two villages of the neighboring Kazbekovskii Raion, which belonged to the Aukhovskii Raion in 1943-44 but now are settled by Avars. This demand provoked serious conflicts between Chechens and Avars during the first half of the 1990s.

Recognizing the unequal treatment of repressed and compulsorily migrated nations, the Dagestan Ministry of National Policies, Information and International Relations prepared two bills "on Rehabilitation of Repressed Chechens-Akkins of Dagestan and the State Support for Their Revival and Development" and "on Compulsorily Resettled Peoples" for the consideration of the Russian State Duma; both of them have not been discussed in the Duma.³⁹

The four issues analyzed here (Mountain Caucasians' migration to lowland Dagestan, divided nations, extremely small nations, and inequality between the "repressed peoples" and "compulsorily resettled peoples") reveal how strongly Dagestani peoples have been ruled by ethno-territorial discourse and thinking. All of these actors, Lowlanders who have become minorities "in their historical territories," divided nations, extremely small nations, repressed nations, and compulsorily resettled nations, demand their own territories and titular (state-forming) status, rather than individual affirmative action. This way of thinking not always facilitated the reasonable resolution of nationality problems in Dagestan. But we need to recognize that the four conditions of "unstable stability" of Dagestani ethnopolitics (autonomous communities, the nested structure of cleavages, the discouragement of "ethnic purity," and consociational arrangements of ethnic interests) have been secured within the framework of ethno-territorial federalism.

³⁹ N. T. Shcherbakova, head of the department of national policies of the Dagestan Ministry of National Policies, Information and International Relations, interviewed by M.-R. Ibragimov in Makhachkala on 12 May 2004.

CONCLUSION

This essay revealed that the present “unstable stability” in Dagestan is the product of a time-honored tradition of multi-ethnic and multi-confessional coexistence, which was supplemented by institutional arrangements of Catherine II’s Muslim Spiritual Board and V. Lenin’s ethno-territorial federalism, however problematic those policies have otherwise been. We might find an important centripetal force of Slavic Eurasia in this combination of local tradition of tolerance and Russian-Soviet innovations; we may also uncover the reason why the Dagestani people eventually rejected the Middle Eastern model of ethno-confessional development, which lacks effective mechanisms for preserving inter-ethnic and inter-confessional peace.