

The role of Islam in political life in the North Caucasus

The cases of Dagestan and Chechnya

Introduction

With the collapse of the Soviet Union many political players in interethnic and interreligious republics have turned to religion for legitimization and political mobilization. This religious revival was especially felt in the Muslim Republics of the ex USSR, including the Republics of Chechnya and Dagestan, among the most 'Islamic' areas in the Union, in spite of 70 years of Soviet anti-religious rule and especially thanks to their strong Sufi character.

In spite of several common aspects, at the moment of transition Chechnya and Dagestan had also important differences, essential in the understanding of the evolution of the events from the end of the first Chechen war onwards. Firstly, while in Chechnya the socialist political elite was replaced, in Dagestan it remained in power retaining the typical soviet mistrust of anybody not under its full control and extreme hostility to, and suspicion of Islam. Secondly, Dagestan chose to remain part of the Russian Federation and not to declare independence as Chechnya did. Thirdly, we have to consider the multi-ethnic composition of Dagestan as opposed to the homogeneity of Chechnya that had a notable influence in the politicization of Islam since almost each major nationality seceded from the Dagestani religious board and established its own Muftiate.

However, politics had remained secular in both republics until the end of 1994 and only the first Chechen war changed the situation. This paper aims to analyze the Islamization of politics in both Dagestan and Chechnya and the role played by the radical movement of *Wahhabism*.

I will argue that, while in the 1990s the agenda in the region regarded ethnic separatism, at the switch of the century the threats arrived from radical Islam. In fact, the influence of religion increasingly grew after the collapse of the USSR, becoming almost the only form of interpretation of the external world. I will consider the arrival of foreign fighters with their radical ideology as a turning point in the conflicts in the North Caucasus and as the main subject of dialogue and confrontation for the local and the federal authorities, ending with a description of the role of religion in the current political and social life in Dagestan and Chechnya.

The role of Islam before the 1990s

The Caucasus has been part of the *Dar-al-Islam* since the end of the 8th century and Dagestan had become a major center of Islamic learning by the middle Ages. In the 18th century, the Sufi brotherhoods, as the Naqshbandi tariqa and the Qadiri tariqa, reached the region and obtained wide consensus, thanks both to their capability to adapt to changing political and social conditions, and to the importance of Sheikh Mansur's¹ *gazavat* to fight Russian infidels (Henze, 1995). If it is true that Sheik Mansur and his successor, Sheik Shamil, were religious leaders, it is also true that they understood the political potentiality of Islam, which provided a social equality base and unity of

purpose, transcending ethnic particularism, class differences and the characteristic tribalism. Moreover, the Russian conquest not only had no negative effect on the expansion and influence of Islam, but it made it a form of passive resistance (Henze, 1995).

Significant rebellions happened in late 1870s, in the first years of the 20th century and even after the 1917 Russian Revolution. The Soviets' attempts to secularize the society had the effect of accentuate the tendencies to resist communism and the Russian rule, which were seen as identical. If communists closed mosques and Islamic schools, religion went underground. The religious brotherhoods expanded their influence and reinforced locals' will to preserve their custom and traditions.

In Chechnya, this role of Islam became even more evident with the deportation of the population in 1944. The forced exile not only had serious social consequences as the loss of a third of the population (Dunlop, 1998), but also strengthened the influence of religion, helped by the strong social structure based on clan loyalty and family solidarity which allowed the transmission of religious practices. Moreover, in Kazakhstan Chechens became accustomed to relying on informal and secret meeting places. During the 1970s and 1980s religion, ethnic pride, anti-communism and anti-Russian feelings became completely interlinked and mutually reinforcing among Chechens.

In the Republic of Dagestan, the situation was even more complicated by the multi-ethnic environment (in Dagestan live dozens of ethnics groups). Already at the end of the Soviet period, the elite became divided along national lines and created parallel communities with their own political and economical structure that the central power had to consider, appealing to religious authorities as well (Gammer, 2008). At the end of the 1980s, Muslims moved toward greater political engagement: the 'young Imam' appeared on the scene, criticizing the low moral standards and the collusion with the Soviet establishment and organized a Congress of the Moslems of the North Caucasus in Makhachkala (Ware & Kisniev, 2010). Anyway, a regional Islamic organization was not realistic and each republic developed its own organizations. In Dagestan, the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Dagestan was created².

However, the turning point was the legislation permitting greater religious liberty of September 1990, which catalyzed Islamic revival with an increase of traditional rituals and the development of *tariqat* orders, but also the appearing of the austere Sunni Islamic movement of *Wahhabism*.

Politics and Religion in the Post-Soviet order

The collapse of the Soviet Union left a political and ideological vacuum, which was filled by the local political authorities. If at the beginning the influence of Islam was different in the two republics, nevertheless it gained a prominent role in both after the first Chechen war, also due to the greater relations and connections between Dagestanis and Chechens, which favored the spread of fundamentalist movements.

In Chechnya, if it is true that Islam and nationalism were deeply intertwined, as it is shown by the politicians' use of Islamic symbols and slogan, still Chechen nationalism remained a secular phenomenon till the 1994 - 6 war. In fact, even though being a Muslim was an essential part of being Chechen, ethnic identity took priority over the religious one. Dudayev took oath as president on the Qur'an and the republic was termed 'Islamic' (however with no definition of this term), but he remained until his death committed to a secular orientation (Gammer, 2005). Moreover, as Henze

(1995) rightly notices, the same Constitution of 1992 is entirely free of ethnic or religious particularism. He also underlines that among the about 50 movements existing by 1992, only six had a specifically Islamic character and only the Islamic Path Movement had well defined Islamic objectives. Nevertheless, Islamic ferment was growing and started exerting pressure on Dudayev to impose *Shari'a* rule. The president resisted all claims till April 1995 when he issued a decree establishing *Shari'a* tribunals in Chechen areas controlled by the Ichkeria government³. But the real Islamization of the state institutions was achieved by his successor, Yandarbiev. Islam was proclaimed the state religion, the existing civil legal procedure was officially substituted by a system of *Shari'a* tribunals placed under the control of so-called *Wahhabis*.

This term was a pejorative applied by the political and religious establishment in the Former Soviet Union to the austere Sunni Islamic movement that appeared in the Caucasus following the breakup of the Soviet state⁴. The first *Wahhabis* appeared in the early 1990s in Dagestan and not in Chechnya, due to the strong appeal of Chechen nationalism. They were mainly young and educated people, the 'young Imams' who opposed both the Russian government and official Muslim organizations in an effort to establish a *Shari'a*-based Islamic state in the North Caucasus (Ware&Kisriev, 2003). The claim that Dagestan had to become an Islamic state came also from Akhtaev, the chair of the Islamic Renaissance Party⁵, who also worked with the 'young Imams'. However, Akhtaev rejected jihad against Russia and sought a fundamental political transformation along Islamist lines, also collaborating with established political structures, gaining the definition of 'moderate' *Wahhabi*. The collaboration between the two brought to the raise of the *tariqa* Sufism to a position of institutional dominance, which meant a rapprochement with the Dagestani authorities, rejected by the 'radical' *Wahhabis* (Ware&Kisriev, 2003). In fact, the latter rejected political authorities, and this was one of the points that helped in their success among Dagestanis, who perceived the rulers and the traditional Sufi clergy as too compromised with the Russians and as morally degraded.

Furthermore, the attack to the Sufi leaders pushed these ones to enter politics and ally with the government, promoting a campaign to delegitimize their rivals. In the meantime, the first Chechen war gave to Dagestani volunteers the possibility to meet the 'real' *Wahhabis*, a group of Arab veterans of the Afghanistan war, who had come to help resist the Russian. They not only trained Dagestanis in guerrilla tactics, but also helped in the diffusion, legitimization and popularization of the use of Islamic language in politics (Gammer, 2005). Moreover, Dagestani *Wahhabis* built their own mosques and Islamic schools, also thanks to funds from Persian Gulf organizations, having a radicalizing effect upon the mild traditionalists. The tensions grow and from August 1996 to September 1999 there were numerous violent conflicts between the two approaches.

In 1996, many *Wahhabis* moved to Chechnya as a consequence of a wide protest in Makhachkala that accused them of the murder of the administrative head of the village of Kadar and the Office of religious Affairs of conspiring with the *Wahhabis* (Ware&Kisriev, 2003). The fact that the radicals opted for refuge in Chechnya while the traditionalists sought support in Makhachkala, can actually be seen as a prelude to the following event of summer 1999. Despite they moved, extremists continued their actions and proclaimed in the *jama'at*⁶ of Karamakhi an alternative order to that of the state and enforced it with militia patrols. The government's answer was both theoretical, with a strong propaganda, and practical, passing the law on the 'Freedom of Confession and religion Organizations' of 25 December 1997, which in reality was followed by the arrest of *Wahhabi* leaders and the closing of their organs (Gammer, 2008).

The year 1997 was also the year of new presidential elections in Chechnya which were conducted, according to the international organizations that monitored them, in a fair and democratic way. They were won by General Maskhadov, who declared his intention of building a Chechen Islamic state, which would have based on 'national' Islamic traditions (Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya Sufi brotherhoods) and not on the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam (Kudriavtsev, 2004). Still, Islamic radicalism was increasing influence. As with Dudayev, the state remained weak and Maskhadov was unable to handle the growing criminality consequence of the war and the Islamization of the country, even if he tried to reconcile '*adat*' and democratic political institutions (Kudriavtsev, 2004; Sokiranskaia, 2008). By 1997 all of the politicians used Islamic vocabulary in their speeches.

Of course the recent war favored a religious revitalization, but what was really influent was the Islamic revival promoted by the *Wahhabis*, not only for their call for a return to the pure origins of Islam but also for their militarization and capacity to exert force, persuading and mobilizing Muslim youth for armed resistance. Their methods and their Sudanese-type *Shari'a* code (Sorikianskaia, 2008) were alien to the locals who were stunned by behaviors as public executions, the harassment of women wearing short sleeves or the flogging of alcoholics. The *Wahhabi* opened a rift in the society: the youngs lost the respect for the elders and for the rules of '*adat*', resenting the older generation's negligence of Islamic culture.

This situation was favorable for warlords as Basayev, who quickly realized the organizational benefits of *Wahhabi* structures and the efficiency of their mechanism for generating support. Above all, after his defeat at the 1997 presidential election and the failure as Prime Minister in 1998, he became increasingly involved in their projects, managing to use Islam for his political ends in Chechnya, first of all to compete with Mashkadov (Sorikianskaia, 2008). In fact, Basayev emerged in the political scene consequently to the general Islamization of Chechen politics. Mashkadov's power was weak and he needed to maintain the unity of the political elite to prevent the Republic from falling apart and that implied the acceptance of its opponents' claim. Indeed, the pressure on him was so high that on 3 February 1999 he issued a decree introducing direct *shari'a* rule in Chechnya and stipulated a reform of the constitution that practically jeopardized the political institutions: the Republic was going toward anarchy (Kudriavtsev, 2004).

In fact, the support of field commanders as Basayev to the *Wahhabis* made their position much stronger than in Dagestan, even if in Chechnya both the political and religious establishments were in unison in their opposition to the movement. Already in 1996 Basayev allied with *amir* (commander) Khattab, a Saudi activist who had already fought in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and in the Balkans, and who embodied the new wave of '*neo-jihadis*' (Williams, 2008). He was the one who started introducing a new way of fighting against the Russian *kafirs* (infidels), based on bloody massacres and fight up to death similar to the guerrilla tactics of the Afghanistan war, radicalizing elements in the local army. Actually, we can identify the seeds of Chechen terrorism to be planted at that time since terrorism was a consistent part of the Afghan-Arab tactic.

After the war, many moderate Chechens called for Khattab to depart to other lands as he did at the end of the Balkans war, but he and his fellows interpreted this new victory as a demonstration of their invincibility and decided that the moment to pass to the offensive stage of the *jihad* had arrived. Indeed, their goal was now to create in the Caucasus an Islamic Republic including Ichkeria, Dagestan, Kabarda, Balkarya, Ingushetiya, Karachayevo-Cherckessia and Azerbaijan (Williams, 2008). In this case, a fundamental error by the Chechen authorities was not to include the expulsion of the

Arab volunteer fighters from the country in the Khasavyurt peace Treaty, as had been the case in Bosnia's Dayton Peace Accord.

Armed clashes happened in Chechnya too, but Mashkadov couldn't follow the Dagestani example and ask Moscow for help. In effect, after the assassination of the Chief Mufti in 1998, the Federal Minister of Interior went to Makhachkala promoting a treaty between the *Wahhabis* of the Karamachi *jama'at* and Dagestani authorities. The former obtained great advantages on the local government as Moscow policy under Yeltsin was to maintain quiet and peace and not to find a concrete solution to the ongoing tensions. Moreover, he didn't identify in them such a serious threat as the Dagestani rulers.

The situation deteriorated in July 1999 when another conflict between *Wahhabis* and district authorities erupted in the Tsumada area of Dagestan. In August a large number of Chechen and foreign *Wahhabis* commanded by Basayev and Khattab invaded the district. Both Dagestanis authorities and population saw this as an invasion aimed at overthrowing the regime and organized an armed resistance supported by Russian air force (Gammer, 2005). The *Wahhabis* were defeated and repulsed, even if after a heavy fighting. Moreover, the Dagestano-Russian forces attacked and conquered the *Wahhabis* of Karamakhi.

From a theoretical point of view, Basayev had in a sense hint at the invasion already in 1997, when he used the slogans of *imama*⁸ and *shari'a* to promote a de-colonization of the Russian Republics of the North Caucasus, first of all Dagestan. In 1997 the 'Islamic *Umma* Party' was created, uniting a number of political movements in Chechnya and Dagestan with the goal of creating a single Islamic nation. This party was then supplanted in 1998 by a 'Congress of Peoples of Dagestan and Ichkeria', headed by Basyev himself, aimed to unite the Muslims people of Dagestan and Chechnya in one free state. The desire to free from the Russian domination was the common element of all the numerous political and para-military organizations that developed in Dagestan in that period. Even the 'Alliance of the Muslim of Russia', that only two years before supported one undivided Russia, agreed on this point (Gammer, 2005). In July 1998, in Karamakhi took place the 'Congress of the Military and Political Leadership of the Central Force for the Liberation of Dagestan', which declared independent political authority.

While the fights between Chechen *Wahhabis* and Dagestanis were happening, in Moscow the climate changed. Putin was appointed to the post of Prime Minister and immediately promoted an 'anti-*Wahhabis*' policy all over the Caucasus, military re-conquering Chechnya and issuing the 'Law on the Prohibition of *Wahhabite* and other Extremist Activity on the Territory of the Republic of Dagestan' on 16 September 1999. Indeed, in September Russian forces entered Chechnya but, even if they captured the major settlements, they failed to eliminate neither the nationalists nor the *Wahhabis*. On the contrary, resistance to Russia seemed more and more to be Islamic, with *Wahhabism* becoming the dominant ideology not only of the war, but also of peacetime. Russian harsh policies had the effect to spread *Wahhabi* resistance all across the Northern Caucasus. Actually, one of the warnings against the law against *Wahhabism* in Dagestan was exactly that a possible effect would have been the Islamization of politics in the country (Gammer, 2008).

Basayev's and Khattab's invasion of Dagestan allowed Putin to realize his anti-*Wahhabis* policy, giving him the justification to invade Chechnya, starting the second Chechen war (1999 - 2000). The climate had completely changed in comparison to the first one: warring parties were all radicalized and internally fragmented, while powerful ethnic actors pushed on both sides; moreover, this time foreign field commanders were involved. In some way, this was also a civil war with the pro-federal

and the anti-federal Chechen fractions facing each other. This internalization was also promoted by the Russians, who managed to implement a 'chechenization' of the conflict that also allowed them to exclude the separatists from the negotiations (Sokiranskaia, 2008). Furthermore, the federal side also 'externalized' the conflict, presenting it as a war against international terrorism with counterterrorist operations, not only in Chechnya, but also in the neighboring republics.

On the one side, it is true that more than 40 acts of terror have been carried out in Russia since 1999 and many of them can actually be attributed to the separatists headed by Basayev, but on the other side Russian terrorism was a 'home' terrorism, consequence of the prolonged and violent separatist war. Moreover, there was a consistent moderate wing also among the anti-federalists that Putin's policy managed to jeopardized, deepening the process of radicalization, first of all with the assassination of Mashkadov in 2005, which represented a turning point in the conflict⁹. In fact, even if he didn't managed to avoid the split between Chechen nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists, Mashkadov acted as a bridge between the two, containing the total political radicalization: indeed, the radical anti-federalists weren't yet properly politically organized.

The presence of foreign fighters was useful for Russian to justify the invasion as a campaign against international terrorist networks to have if not the support, at least the approval of Western countries, especially after 9/11. In reality, the numbers and the international links claimed by the Russians were exaggerated: not only the foreigners were few, but they were acting on a local scale. The Chechen extremists made little effort to link up with radicals in the Middle East and Central Asia. Moreover, the foreign preachers represent themselves personally and not by any organizations or structure (Markedonov, 2010) and quite often their aims and mentality are considerably different from the Caucasian's one. Of course *Wahhabis* share a certain degree of extremism, but it would be a big mistake to consider them as all similar.

But how did the society perceive the *Wahhabis*? Ware, Kisriev and others (2003) conducted a survey among Dagestani in 2000 to study their attitude toward religion and politics. Interesting is that more than three quarters of Dagestanis shared their government's judgment that Wahhabis were extremists behind a religious façade, and the majority of them rejected this radical approach. Moreover, in Dagestan the same elite perceives *Wahhabism* as a variety of social pathologies more than in terms of an authentic spiritual and ideological alternative, allowing to say that in 2000 this phenomenon was not perceived as a immediate threat to Dagestan's stability.

However, this opinion changed in the aftermath. In 2005, another survey was conducted in the region (Hollande & O'Loughlin, 2010) and this time the rise of radical Islam and the increased activity of organizations as *Shariat Jamaat*, the largest Islamist militant organization in the Republic, is put toward as the growing challenge to Dagestan's political future. This is interlinked with the lack of economic opportunities, that also the 2000 survey identifies, but now this lack receives a higher identification as source of destabilization. Furthermore, the interviewed identify an interconnection between Russia's regional tactics in response to the Islamic movement's actions and the lack of law enforcement and difficulty to fight against organized criminality and corruption by the local government, diminishing the latter's efforts.

Current political and social life

The current situation in Dagestan and Chechnya is, in the general aspects such as the absence of a secular alternative to the existing political order or the lack of alternatives in the social environment, similar to that of the others Northern Caucasus Republics, but still the perception and influence of Islam in each of them is different.

The growing religious factor produces various social restrictions and creates psychological pressure on individuals. At present there is no coherent discourse or political movement towards secular independence in the North Caucasus, implying weak links between security problems and nationalist sentiment. Rather, ideological elements prevail in the still ongoing attacks. Radicalisation, which had happened as a result of the wars in Chechnya, weakened the connection to the original cause, but created linkages between groups developed during the fighting.

Regarding the Dagestan Republic, it is characterized by a religious patchwork. The two main tendencies remain the *Wahhabis* and the *Sufis*. One of the major problem is that in the last 20 years, *Wahhabis* lost intellectuals who had a political platform and who could co-operate and debate with the republic's authorities. This leads to the rise of unsystematic violence from them, and the simplification of their battle to the level of terror against security and power structures. Nowadays Dagestan is the Republic with more clashes in the region; however they still do not reach the level which would justify the application of the term 'war' (Yarlykapov, 2012). Spaces for dialogues exist such as the Congress of Nationalities convened recently, and the media remains relatively free. Dagestanis are highly religious and this is reflected in the socio-political life of the republic that appreciates the constructive role religion can have.

However, respect for the Sufi-adherent DUM (official Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan) has been undermined, whereas the *Wahhabis* movement and forces of radicalisation have grown stronger. Muslim scholars and the DUM call for the use of force against *Salafis*, which only widens the gap between the two Muslim constituencies. Moreover, religious authorities are actively engaging in polemics with secular figures and try to become involved in areas which are not necessarily related to religion, for instance scientific discussions, and try to impose monitoring of literature. Nowadays Russian pop stars cannot have a show in Dagestan. It is still possible to drink and sell alcohol, but the country is quickly following Chechnya and Ingushetia, were it is not allowed. Regarding religious education, if it was a real threat in the 1990s, now there are few communities which favor a system of Islamic education (Yarlykapov, 2012).

In Chechnya, the religious panorama is simpler, also due to the more homogeneity of the Republic. Here, *Wahhabism* has not many supporters, do not have separate mosques, even a prayer house, or a well-known spiritual leader, and generally do not make it known. In fact, the society has a negative view of it and there are programs to prevent young people turning to *Wahhabism* and extremism (Yusupov, 2012). The republic's authorities and the Islamic High Council of the Chechen Republic do not yet allow the existence of a platform for their 'ideological opponents', i.e. the *Wahhabis*.

Like in Dagestan, Islam is actively developing and religion has become the reference point of social, political and ideological life. Religious infrastructures are highly developed, including the Russian Islamic University in Grozny, which demonstrated the republic federal authorities' loyalty to religion. President Kadyrov managed to combine Islamic and secular's ways of life, gaining him respect also in Dagestan, where some believe that his methods of fighting violent extremism are

more effective than the ones used by the republic's authorities and should be adopted instead (Yusupov, 2012).

According to the Saferworld 2012 report, people across the region recognize the need to combat violent extremism, but a majority disagrees with the way this is pursued by security authorities, or finds it ineffective. In fact, the methods used by security agencies are perceived not only as unlawful, but also cruel, including shooting and tortures, leaving local society suspicious of their fairness and making it hard to solicit community co-operation. Moreover, since some extremists lead a normal life, it is difficult for the authorities to identify them, so the whole population, especially young men, come under suspicion. This doesn't help to create an environment of transparency and trust.

The climate in Dagestan and Chechnya is still tense and violence can develop in several directions. In Dagestan the religious factor is undoubtedly the leader in destabilizing the republics as it functions as main ideological banner to unite different dissatisfied groups under one wing. In Chechnya, even if the security situation highly improved since 2008, the discontent with the social situation, which carries tensions between the population and the authorities, is still very high. In both cases, the more dissatisfied and willing to change are the youth, especially the educated ones, who don't see how they can realize themselves in a rigid and corrupted society.

Conclusions

Since the beginning of transition, Islam played a dominant role in the social and political life of both Dagestan and Chechnya, especially after the first Chechen war, even if with different outcomes. The radical movement of *Wahhabism* spread in the area from Dagestan, but it was the arrival of foreign *Wahhabis* in support of Chechen fighters during the 1994-6 war that made of it a serious threat for the stability of an already instable region. Moreover, the combatants' ideology greatly differed not only from the one of the traditional Sufis, but also with local *Wahhabis*, promoting a break in the society and the creation of a gap between generations.

The role of the federal government moved from Yeltsin's casualness to Putin's engagement, but in both cases it appeared not only unable to solve the situation, but had the effect of deteriorating it. The pretext of the campaign against international terrorism made Chechens identified with terrorists, an unjustified discrimination which greatly simplifies the task of separatists and extremists to replenish their ranks while Russians lose support. Furthermore, the society doesn't support *Wahhabis*: in Chechnya they are almost not present (the few are underground) and in Dagestan both Sufi religious leaders and the secular authorities work for limiting their influence.

Religion is the epicenter of every aspect of the social and political life and it is the main lens through which people see the world. Selling and drinking alcohol is forbidden in Chechnya, and Dagestanis cannot go to pop concerts. The rulers try to delimitate the influence of the religious authorities, but they are also aware of the positive influence, for instance in preventing the young to militate with the *Wahhabis*: in fact, Sufi moral code prohibits armed struggle and extremism.

However, some young people still decide to follow the *Wahhabis*. This happens because Islamism offered and offers ready responses to whom feel moral collapses of society, who are frustrated with

poor performance of governing institutions, and who look for political participation and for opportunities to connect to likeminded groups worldwide and perform heroic deeds. The multi-faceted nature of the problem, show us that the answers to the Islamist challenge do not lie exclusively in the security or religious spheres, but also in a combination of accessibility of political alternatives, understanding of social psychology and the development of attractive images and accessible language. Young people should be treated on their own terms and in ways which are interesting and engaging for them: ideology and mind are equally important as material needs.

In a society with strong morality as are the ones of the Muslim republics of Dagestan and Chechnya, where Islam is an intrinsic elements of their being, authorities should present themselves as examples and points of reference for the citizens, encouraging people's ability to solve their problems through civil and legal mechanisms and to form social institutions bringing to social consciousness.

Notes

¹ Sheikh Mansur was the first great leader of resistance against the Russians in the name of both freedom for the mountain peoples and of Islam. In 1785 he proclaimed holy war against Russia, defeating Russian brigades up to his capture in 1791. He had great impact on the people of the Caucasus who consider him a hero and a source of inspiration.

² It will be recognized only in 1994, a few months after the adoption of the Dagestani democratic constitution.

³ The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria is the unrecognized secessionist government in Chechnya. It was proclaimed in late 1991 by Dudayev, and fought two devastating wars with the Russian Federation, which denounced the secession. Only Georgia recognized its existence. In late 2007, the president of Ichkeria Dokka Umarov converted it into a province of the much larger Caucasus Emirate, with himself as Emir. Both the Russian Federation and the United States have designed the Caucasus Emirate as a terrorist organization.

⁴ The labeling of opponents as *Wahhabis* was not new, in fact it was used in this way from the very beginning by the opponents of the movement. The word "al-Wahhabiya" derives from Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of a conservative branch of Islam who was born in 1703 in Najd, in the central part of today's Saudi Arabia. It tried with all means, including force, to purify Islam. In 1807 the *Wahhabis* conquered Mecca, and shocked the entire Muslim world by removing the black rock from the Ka'ba and preventing non-*Wahhabis* from performing the *haj*. His teachings later became the official ideology of the Saudi state. Normally *Wahhabis* don't call themselves in this way. In the Caucasus, often the term *Salafism* was, wrongly, used as a synonym for *Wahhabism*.

⁵ The Islamic Renaissance Party, with its headquarters in Moscow, held its founding convention in Astrakhan in 1990. An all-Union organization, it aimed to obtain the same concessions and freedoms as the Orthodox Church, to the political awakening of all Muslims and to the construction of their life on the basis of the Qu'ran.

⁶ *Jama'at* or *djamaat* is a politically organized community in Dagestan, usually a village or a group of villages with a historical connection. The *jama'at* of Karamakhi consisted of the *auls* (villages) of Karamakhi, Kadar and Chabanmakhi.

⁷ *Adat* is the *Shari'a* customary law.

⁸ *Imama* is an united *shari'a*-based state.

⁹ The television exposure of his half naked body and the award given by Putin to the responsible for the killing strongly augmented the hate towards the Russians.

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