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TRANSFORMATION OF DAGESTAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY: BETWEEN ISLAMIC GLOBALIZATION AND LOGIC OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

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Abstract

The focus of this study is an analysis of the factors that determine the change in the image of Dagestan Islam in the post-Soviet period. The authors overcome the old stereotype, according to which the Islamic-political situation in post-Soviet Dagestan is assessed as an endless struggle between armed Salafis and the state. In fact, the situation was developed much more complicated and dramatic. An important feature of Muslim politics transformation in post-Soviet Dagestan can be emphasized by unconditional transformation from religious-political polarization to the politicization of Islam to the complication of regional policy in 2000-2010. To reveal this complicated evolution, the authors have chosen the methodology of neoinstitutionalism as a conceptual basis for research. The concept of “a constellation of actors” made it possible to identify the destructive role of numerous subjects. Since 2006, the political discourse, which consisted in contrasting the “traditional” and Salafist versions of Islam, began to lose its persuasive force. The main reasons for this turn are the following. The first is the internationalization of Dagestan Islam. The second is the growing mistrust of the population towards the secular authorities against the background of the painful social economic situation in the region and indiscriminate “counter-terrorist operations”. The globalization of Islam and quantitative changes in Muslim community of Dagestan in an atmosphere of incomplete state-building and shortcomings of political institutions led to a sharp politicization of Islam. Ultimately, a multisubject system of the politicization of Islam emerged in Dagestan.

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1. Introduction

The post-Soviet development of Islam in Dagestan took place in specific political conditions, rather than, for example, in another large Muslim republic - Tatarstan. The differences were due to the development peculiarities of the North Caucasus and, most important, the political situation in the region in the 1990s. In an atmosphere of rapid social economic changes in the country, as well as in the conditions of military-power escalation, associated primarily with two wars in neighboring Chechnya, Islam turned out to be heavily politicized (Makarov, 2000). We are exploring the factors that have determined the change in the image of Dagestan Islam in the post-Soviet period and the transformation of the fight against terrorism into an element of the republic internal policy. At first it is useful to note the main characteristics and features of the political evolution and Muslim transformation in the region. Many researchers, both native and foreign, have repeatedly pointed out that Dagestan is the most Islamized region of Russia (Malashenko, 2001; Abdulagatov, 2013). Islam began to spread in the 7th and 8th centuries in Russia precisely through the southern Dagestan city of Derbent. Post-Soviet decades have become a period of rapid Muslim development for the republic. 23 sheikhs of various tariqahs (Sufist traditions) live here, 13 Islamic theological universities, more than 2245 mosques function, that is over 80% of all religious Muslim buildings in Russia. The following facts look even more impressive: 80% of pilgrims and the same number of cult constructions and universities account for the republic where only 7% of Russian Muslims live. Owing to early Islamization, only in Dagestan, as well as in Chechnya and Ingushetia, Islam of early Shafi'iyah was established. This gave grounds for many local religious leaders to talk about the uniqueness and purity of Dagestan Islam, adopted almost from the associates of Prophet Muhammad himself. (Ibragimov & Matsuzato, 2005; Magomedov, Mutsuzato, & Victorin, 2006). However, two post-Soviet decades literally changed the nature of Muslim development, and the overall image of Islam in the republic.

2. Problem Statement

Outside observers were inclined to view the situation in modern Dagestan as an endless struggle between armed Salafis (who are otherwise called “Wahhabis”) and the state (in the face of secular authorities, security forces and “official” Islam). In practice, the situation evolved much more complicated and dramatic. The key feature of the evolution of Muslim politics in post-Soviet Dagestan can be emphasized the unconditional transformation from religious- political polarization to the politicization of Islam and the increasing complexity of regional policy. The task of this study is to identify the causes and main characteristics of the above transformation

3. Research Questions

How productive can be the use of “a constellation of actors” concept in the paper involved in the uncontrollable politicization of Islam in the republic?

To what extent has the globalization of local Dagestan Islam, on the one hand, and the antiterror policy pursued by the Russian state, on the other hand, changed the nature of the post-Soviet

Dagestan Muslim community? What are the key trends that determine the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of Dagestan?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is identifying and analyzing the key features of the transformation of Dagestan Muslim community to understand the risks and destructive consequences of this process.

5. Research Methods

The study is based on the methodology of neoinstitutionalism, which allows revealing the specific characteristics of the subjects politicizing Islam. Within the framework of this methodology, the use of “a constellation of actors” concept makes it possible to discover the destructive role of numerous subjects involved in the uncontrollable politicization of Islam in Dagestan.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods compiled the array of empirical data to identify features of Islamic-political transformation of the republic. The main quantitative method was the apartment survey of the population by the method of standardized semi-formalized interviews on the quota route sample, conducted in 2016. This survey of representatives of the Islamic community allowed us to empirically identify typical social practices of Islamic self-organization and politicization, as well as the social attitudes and values of territorial Islamic communities in Dagestan. In the framework of the study this method solved the following tasks: main social demographic characteristics of local Islamic communities of the republic were determined; standard ideological attitudes and value reference points of Muslim community representatives were identified; typical social practices of self-organization and politicization of Islamic communities in post-Soviet Dagestan were established. The continuation of this project in the form of the author representative sociological survey conducted in 2018 was also significant for the research results. Both studies were conducted within the confines of the project “The State of Islamic Politicization and Self-Organization in Modern Russia” in four regions of the Russian Federation with Muslim population: in the republics of Dagestan and Tatarstan, in Astrakhan and Ulyanovsk regions. The survey showed the high level of interest of Russian Muslims in politics as an instrument for solving the most important problems of society. As for the qualitative methodology, it included the method of focus-grouped discussions. It provided an opportunity to identify the main mechanisms of intraregional communication in Islamic environment, expanded and supplemented the knowledge gained in the course of a quantitative research on typical social practices of Islamic self-organization and politicization, as well as social attitudes and values specific to the regional Islamic community.

In our opinion, the evaluation of the term “Islamic Revival”, which is quite often used in scientific literature, is important for understanding the problems of native Muslim transformation. Moreover, this phrase caught on Islamic studies. Nevertheless, we consider it fundamentally necessary in assessing the state of Russian Islamic development to build on the understanding of the conventionality (metaphoricity) of this definition. Why? The fact is that the term “revival” means the restoration of what was once in the past. And Muslim community of post-Soviet Russia, as well as modern Russian Islam, reminds little of pre-revolutionary or Soviet Islam. As well-known Dagestan Islamic scholar Shikhsaidov (1999) noticed on

Muslim education in Dagestan, “Islamic universities of the early 21st century are only a shadow from famous 18th century madrassahs, in virtue of which Dagestan was nicknamed as “the sea of sciences”. A similar conclusion was made by famous Russian historian Bobrovnikov (2004). This suggests that, in fact, it is not so much “Revival of Islam” that takes place as the emergence of post-Soviet Muslim community as a new phenomenon with its own special characteristics. Therefore, in our opinion, it would be more correct to use the terms “rise”, “development”, “wakening” in relation to post-Soviet Islam.

6. Findings

The period after USSR collapse, spanning the period from 1991 until 2006, was characterized by uncontrolled polarization of the Muslim community of Dagestan. This was due to the fact that Salafism came to the territory of Russian Islam, and influential Salafist communities were created in Dagestan. Ideologists of Islamic radicalism declared themselves in Dagestan, such as the former amir of the Islamic Revival Party in the early 1990s, Akhmedkadi Akhtaev (died in 1998), the supporter of the creation of an Islamic state in the North Caucasus, sheikh Bagautdin Kebedov (on the federal wanted list), the head of the “Union of Muslims of Russia” Nadirshakh Khachilaev (killed in 2003). The dramatic effect of Dagestan Muslim development of that time was in the fact that ideas of Islamic social and political alternative crystallized precisely in the republic. It was in this republic in 1997 that a powerful, as it was customary to say, “Wahhabite” Jamaat was formed in the villages of Karamakhi Chabanmakhi, Chankurbe and Kadar - the so-called “Kadar zone”, which local Islamic leaders declared “Islamic territory”. The attempts to establish Sharia law took place in this territory. In an atmosphere of political uncertainty, when the official power lost many features of legitimacy, and the opinion about the injustice of the established social order prevailed among people, Dagestan Muslim community developed in the direction of raising acute issues to the authorities and demanding their solution. Speaking essentially, intra-Muslim confrontation took place along the opposition lines between aggressive Salafist minority and rather inert “traditionalist” (Sufi) majority (Akaev, 2008). The secular authorities and the official clergy (in the person of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan - SAMD) willingly called the Salafis as “terrorists”. At this stage, such a characteristic had a convincing force for Dagestan society and was easily accepted by the latter. This was largely due to the fact that in the atmosphere of the beginning of the second Chechen war in 1999-2000 the infamous Karamakhin Wahhabite enclave, closely connected to the activity of the Chechen field commanders Basaev and Khattab, was defeated.

The globalization of Dagestan Muslim community and the complication of Islamic politics. In the 2000s new realities of Dagestan Islamic policy began to be seen. The globalization of Islam and the quantitative changes in Muslim community of Dagestan in an atmosphere of crisis of political institutions led to the fact that the republic began to turn into one of the epicenter of not only the Russian, but also the world Islamic rise. Since 2006, the political discourse, which consisted in contrasting the “traditional” (in the sense of “good” and “correct”) and Salafist (in the sense of “bad” and “incorrect”) versions of Islam, began to lose its persuasive force. The main reasons for this important turn are the following.

The first is the internationalization of Dagestan Islam, which was expressed in active international contacts of Dagestan Muslims. Here it is necessary to note the following facts. The overwhelming majority of Russian pilgrims performing the Hajj to Mecca are residents of Dagestan. Hajj is carried out from 12 to

15 thousand people from the republic to Saudi Arabia every year, the official religion of which is Wahhabism - the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. (Ibragimov & Matsuzato, 2014). We should add that, as of 2010, more than three thousand Dagestanis were taught in Islamic schools in Arab countries, despite the opposition of secular authorities, official clergy and security forces (Abdulagatov, 2011).

In addition to the above direct contacts of local Muslims with foreign co-religionists, the globalization of Dagestan Islam was also promoted by the fact that in modern conditions everyone had access to what the ancestors of the current young believers did not have: Internet sites, materials of scientific conferences, electronic libraries in different parts of the world. The most important feature of the internationalization and globalization of Islam can be considered the emergence of network forms of Muslim activity and communications implemented by Muslim youth during the 2000s (Kurbanov, 2010). As Iarlykapov (2012) writes, the given form of Islam got the name of “new Islam” in the North Caucasus - as opposed to the so-called “old Islam” in the person of local Sufi variety. The essence of the clash between local Dagestan Islam and the global Muslim world is well described in an interview with Makhachkala newspaper “Chernovik” by Khadzhimurad Damadaev, a young man who received an Islamic education in Syria and worked in a rural mosque in the mountainous Shamil region of Dagestan. According to him, the drama of the situation was the following “if some come to Syria for knowledge, others to find evidence of their convictions, trying to drive the ocean of Islam into the narrow Dagestan tariqah”. Contrasting the “new” and “old” Islam has become one of the most important lines of Islamic-political confrontation in Russia. The globalization of Islam, the network forms of Muslim activity developed by Islamic youth, and the changing image of Dagestan Islamic community were alien and unacceptable for leaders of local tariqatism, which created an additional field for conflicts. Nevertheless, these changes, which led to the contacts of Dagestan Muslims with foreign co-religionists, began to undermine the aforementioned dominant discourse opposing, as already said, “traditional” (good) Islam to “fundamentalist” (bad) (Suleimanova, 2015). And network activity and network practices have determined the promotion of new Islamic knowledge in various regions and communities (Pochta, 2012). This was the moment when the narrow Dagestan tariqah faced the “ocean of Islam”. As a result, all mentioned processes led to the internationalization and globalization of Dagestan Islam. According to the Vice-Minister on the national policy of the Government of Dagestan Rasul Gadzhiev, being interviewed by Ibragimov and Matsuzato (2014), about half of the participants in the Friday prayer in the central mosque of Makhachkala do not practice traditional Dagestan rites. Instead, they use rites that they have learned during the Hajj and other international contacts. As a result, the Muslim quantity has begun to turn into quality: a globalization of Dagestan Islam and a change in its image through overcoming its local distinctive nature are happening. All this has led to the fact that local Muslims find it increasingly difficult to convince that Wahhabism is a threat to regional stability. It was shown that active Dagestan Muslims began to realize that Dagestan Islam, which they perceived as traditional and “pure in the world,” was nothing more than a local variant and historical incident. This awareness began to destroy the previously polarized perception of Islamic politics along the lines of “good” tariqahs and “bad” Salafis. The secular authorities and SAMD found themselves in a difficult situation, since, as already mentioned, their thesis that Salafis were “terrorists” began to lose convincing force.

The second reason was the growing mistrust of the population to the secular authorities, both republican and federal, against the background of the painful social economic situation in the region. Local authorities discredited themselves with corruption and inefficiency in solving pressing problems. In turn, federal authorities undermined their weight by the arbitrariness of the security forces and indiscriminate “counter-terrorist operations”, both against individuals and entire villages in the republic (Dzhemal & Polonskii, 2014). This caused great disappointment of ordinary Dagestanis in their policies. The disappointment was especially strong because the people of Dagestan remembered 1999 when they were subject to risk, opposing the invasion of the Khattab and Basaev squads from Chechnya, objectively fighting for the unity of Russia. The situation began to cause indifference among people regarding the official propaganda about the “Wahhabite threat”.

Islam and politics in Dagestan in the logic of anti-terror (2000-2013). In the 2000s “forest theme” became the part of Islamic political life of Dagestan associated with the transfer of Islamic politics into antiterrorism policy, and determined the nature of the regional political process. The most important aspect of the problem under investigation is the combination of actors involved in this process. This configuration is very complicated and includes a system of relationships between the following participants: 1) republican authorities; 2) FSS-MIA-National Anti-Terrorist Committee (NAC); 3) Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Dagestan (SAMD); 4) moderate Salafis; 5) radical Salafis (“forest”); 6) the intrasufi opposition of SAMD. A new trend has emerged with the advent of the “forest” theme in Islamic-political life of the republic: the fight against terrorism has become a factor in the political and civil life of Dagestan and part of the local political discourse. Another unique feature of Dagestan was the entry of Islamic leaders into public policy, who challenged the official authorities through the electoral nomination of official Muslim leaders in the 2016 parliamentary elections.

7. Conclusion

Thus, our research proves the heuristic value and productivity of the used concept of “a constellation of actors”, drawn into the uncontrollable politicization of Islam in the republic. The globalization of Islam and the quantitative changes in Muslim community of Dagestan in an atmosphere of incomplete state-building and the shortcomings of political institutions led to an acute politicization of Islam. Unlike other major Muslim republics - Tatarstan, where the main subjects, politicizing religion, are secular authorities (which can be conceptualized as a “dominant institution”), and ethnic movements controlled by them. Ultimately, a multi-subject system of Islam politicization was set in Dagestan (conceptualized in the concept “a constellation of actors”).

The transition from the religious-political confrontation to the complication of Islamic-political relations is expressed in the following: 1) the emergence of the so-called “forest theme” - the transfer of Muslim subjects into the subject of antiterror, and an attempt to implement the forceful suppression of “forest” underground (2006-2010); 2) an attempt to implement a “soft” line of fighting terrorism, namely, a civil dialogue aimed at assisting in the adaptation to peaceful life of people who decide to stop extremist activities (2010-2013); 3) from 2013 - a new return to the hard line, associated with fears to ensure the safety of the 2014 Sochi Olympics and continued due to the growing influence of ISIL in the world. 4) the emergence of a new political discourse that has turned the topic of violence and the “fight against terrorism”

into an important factor in the political and civil life of Dagestan; 5) stabilization of all these constituents in the “new course” by next head of Dagestan V. Vasilev (from 2015 to the present).

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