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- CHRONICLE 16
From 4 July to 3 October 2010

Special Editor: Thomas Bremer

Religiosity in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan

By Robia Charles, Tbilisi

Abstract

This article examines the nature of religiosity in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Annual nationwide survey data results from the Caucasus Barometer (CB) in 2008 and 2007 show that religious practice as measured by service attendance, fasting and prayer are low throughout the region, similar to levels found in Western Europe. However, religious affiliation, the importance of religion in one's daily life and trust in religious institutions is high in all three countries. This provides support for understanding religiosity as a multidimensional concept.

Little Practice, But Strong Affiliation

This article examines religiosity among populations in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. It also provides support for understanding religiosity as a multidimensional concept.

Many countries of the post-communist region, including the three countries of the South Caucasus, have populations with low levels of religiosity as measured by religious practices such as attendance at religious services, fasting and prayer. Nevertheless, many of these countries have high levels of subjective forms of religiosity, including religious affiliation, trust in religious institutions and the importance of religion in one's daily life. Therefore, different indicators of religiosity measure different aspects of the same concept. The seemingly contradictory nature of religiosity in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan is a common feature throughout the post-communist region and it also sets the region apart from the rest of the world.

The combination of low levels of religious practice with high levels of subjective forms of religiosity is a Soviet legacy and is partially due to the nature of Soviet state policies toward religion over time. There is not room here to discuss the current character of states in the South Caucasus, which each have their own variety of state secularism and relationship with religion (I will examine this issue in a forthcoming article). However, a brief discussion of Soviet state policies toward religion is necessary to understand how the past affects the present.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) worked to eradicate religion; however, constantly changing social, political and economic considerations influenced the formation and execution of religious policy. Thus, initially the Soviet state sought to extirpate religious institutions and belief, especially from 1929 to 1939. However, the state subsequently established a compromise with religion under Stalin as the Soviet Union sought to use religion as a mobilization tool following its entry into World War II in 1941. A mix of religious freedoms, anti-religious activities and divide-and-rule policies defined the period from Stalin's death in 1953

until 1985. The results of perestroika in the religious sphere under Gorbachev were a body of state-religion relations that was almost a total reversal from previous Soviet policies. It thus became possible for religious activities to increase and become more visible than they had been in the past. However, while Soviet policies had failed to extinguish religious belief and religious institutions, they still were successful at reducing visible and public religious life. Thus, practices such as religious attendance and fasting became obsolete over time even though many people continued to identify themselves as religious believers in other more intrinsic ways. While these religious practices have become more common in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, especially since 1991, their rates are still lower than rates of religious affiliation, trust in religious institutions and the importance of religion in one's daily life.

The first section of this article provides an overview of the religious composition of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The second section presents survey data on religiosity as defined by religious practice (e.g., religious attendance, fasting and prayer) in all three countries. The third section discusses two subjective forms of religiosity: the importance of religion in one's daily life and trust in religious institutions.

This article primarily employs data from the 2008 Caucasus Barometer (CB)—a nationwide survey that is annually conducted in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRRC). Data on rates of prayer and the importance of religion in daily life are taken from the 2007 CB. This is not problematic because the results of questions on religion do not change drastically from year to year because such questions measure slow-moving variables. The CB uses multistage cluster sampling with preliminary stratification on nine geographically defined units in each country: capital, urban-Northeast, urban-Northwest, urban-Southeast, urban-Southwest, rural-Northeast, rural-Northwest, rural-Southeast and rural-Southwest. The sampling frame in 2007 and 2008 was the census in Azerbaijan and Georgia and electricity records

in Armenia. The number of primary sampling units (PSUs) in each stratum was proportional to the population of each stratum. Fifty households on average were randomly sampled in each PSU for an interview. The rough number of individual interviews per country was 2,082 in 2008 and 2,458 in 2007 in Armenia; 1,611 in 2008 and 3,306 in 2007 in Georgia; and 2,014 in 2008 and 2,146 in 2007 in Azerbaijan.

Religious Composition

There are many religions found in the South Caucasus region, yet there is also a general congruency between state boundaries and the religious characteristics of their populations. To understand religious affiliations in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan the CB asks, "Which religion or denomination, if any, do you consider yourself belong to?" Eighty-five percent of people consider themselves to belong to the Orthodox Church in Georgia (10% of the population is Muslim), 95% to the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia, and 99% to Islam in Azerbaijan (approximately 65% of adherents are Shi'a and 35% are Sunni).

Thus, the majority of people in each country see themselves as belonging to a particular religion or denomination despite varying levels of religious practice and other forms of religiosity. This is a common feature found in many parts of the world. The following section discusses far lower percentages of people who practice different aspects of the religions to which they see themselves belonging. Certainly, there are differences in the nature of religious attendance, fasting and prayer between each of these religions. However, the purpose of this article is not to explain differences in the rates of religiosity between populations, but rather to provide an overview of the empirics and identify general patterns.

Religious Practice: Religious Attendance, Fasting and Prayer

To measure the rate of religious attendance the CB asks, "Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays?" Responses range from 1 (every day) to 7 (never). To provide a more concise and intuitive understanding of attendance at religious services, the scale has been reversed so that higher numbers correspond to more frequent religious attendance and lower numbers correspond to less frequent religious attendance. Scores have also been collapsed into four categories: 1 (never), 2 (only on special holidays or less often), 3 (at least once a month) and 4 (once a week or more).

Figure 1 shows that religious attendance is low with less than 17% of people attending services once a week or more and 20% attending at least once a month in each

country. Over 50% of people in each country attend religious services only on special holidays or less often which attests to the symbolic nature of these religions among the populations in Armenia, Georgian and Azerbaijan.

The CB also asks about rates of fasting for religious purposes: "How often do you fast when it is required by your religious traditions?" Responses vary from 1 (always fast) to 5 (never fast). To provide a more concise and intuitive understanding of fasting for religious purposes, this scale has been reversed so that higher numbers correspond to more frequent fasting and lower numbers correspond to little or no fasting. As with religious attendance, scores have been collapsed into fewer categories: 1 (rarely or never fast), 2 (sometimes fast) and 3 (often or always fast).

Figure 2 shows that the majority of respondents in Armenia (91%) and Georgia (73%) rarely or never fast. Although 52% of people in Azerbaijan rarely or never fast, this country has the largest percentage of people who often or always fast (24%) among these three countries (9% in Georgia and 3% in Armenia often or always fast).

Finally, the CB from 2007 asks about rates of prayer: "Apart from religious services, how often does respondent pray?" Responses range from 1 (every day) to 7 (never). As with religious attendance, the scale has been reversed and collapsed to provide a more intuitive understanding of prayer: 1 (never), 2 (only on special holidays or less often), 3 (at least once a month) and 4 (once a week or more). Figure 3 demonstrates that in Armenia and Georgia almost as many people pray once a week or more (42% in Armenia and 49% in Georgia) as they do less often, only on special holidays or never combined (50% in Armenia and 43% in Georgia). Thus, the data presents a u-shaped curve where people either pray often or hardly at all. In contrast, only 18% of people pray once a week or more in Azerbaijan, while the majority (76%) prays only on special holidays, less often or never.

Results from Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan show that while there are generally low levels of religious practice in the region, there is also variation between countries. Azerbaijan, listed as one of the top eleven least religious countries in the world by Gallup in 2008 (as measured by how important people considered religion to be in their daily lives), has the least amount of religious practice, followed by Armenia and then Georgia with the highest level of religious participation in all three indicators.

Subjective Forms of Religiosity: Trust and Importance

In contrast to the low levels of religious practice found in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the populations

within these countries display high levels of religiosity with respect to trust in religious institutions and the importance of religion in one's daily life.

To measure trust in religious institutions the CB asks, "Please tell me how much you trust the religious institutions to which you belong?" Responses are located on a 5-point scale from 1 (fully distrust) to 5 (fully trust). The concept "religious institution" can have different meanings to different people in the region. It may pertain to the religious denominations and associated institutions to which Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians belong (e.g., the Armenian Apostolic Church, mosques, masjids or the Georgian Orthodox Church). The concept may also be perceived as referring to religion as a whole (Georgian Orthodoxy, Islam or Armenian Apostolicism). It may also be thought of as a religious figurehead such as Patriarch Ilya II of the Georgian Orthodox Church, or important figures in the Armenian Apostolic church in Armenia or within Islam in Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijan, the concept can also refer to the Caucasus Muslim Board (CMB) which is a state-associated muftiate inherited from the Soviet era that appoints clerics to mosques and monitors sermons. The CB has refined this instrument for 2010 to include two different questions regarding trust—one with regard to trust in religious institutions and another with regard to the clergy of religious institutions.

Figure 4 shows the combined figures for "fully trust" (5) and "somewhat trust" (4) to form a joint category

of "trust". The figure shows that all three countries have trust in religious institutions: 63% in Azerbaijan, 80% in Armenia and 86% in Georgia. The fact that these countries have relatively low levels of religious practice, yet high levels of trust in religious institutions is another common feature throughout the post-Communist region. Furthermore, religious institutions are often the second most trusted institution after the military in this region (see Mishler and Rose 2001).

In addition to trust in religious institutions, the 2007 CB asks respondents to gauge the importance of religion in their daily lives. The CB asks, "To what extent do your own religious beliefs help you make decisions in daily life?" Responses range from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important) and the results in Figure 5 show that a majority of people in all three countries say that religion is important in their daily lives (48% in Armenia, 52% in Azerbaijan and 74% in Georgia). This is yet another indicator of one aspect of religiosity that is relatively high throughout the South Caucasus, while other aspects (religious practice) are low.

This overview of religiosity in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan has shown that the term religiosity has a variety of meanings. On one hand, religious practices such as attendance at religious services, prayer and fasting are low. On the other, trust in religious institutions and the importance of religion in one's daily life are high in the South Caucasus.

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Recommended Reading:

- Robia Charles (2010). "Religiosity and Trust in Religious Institutions: Tales from the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia)." *Politics and Religion*, 3, pp. 228–261 doi: 10.1017/S1755048310000052.
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Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) Georgia will have a forthcoming report on religious practice in Georgia using data from the 2009 and 2007 Caucasus Barometers: "Religious Practice in Georgia" by CRRC Georgia Fellows Ketii Chubinishvili, Elene Japaridze and Jesse Tatum will be available in October 2010 at <http://www.crrccenters.org/activities/papers/>.

GRAPHS

Religiosity in the South Caucasus in Opinion Polls

Figure 1: Attendance at Religious Services (%)

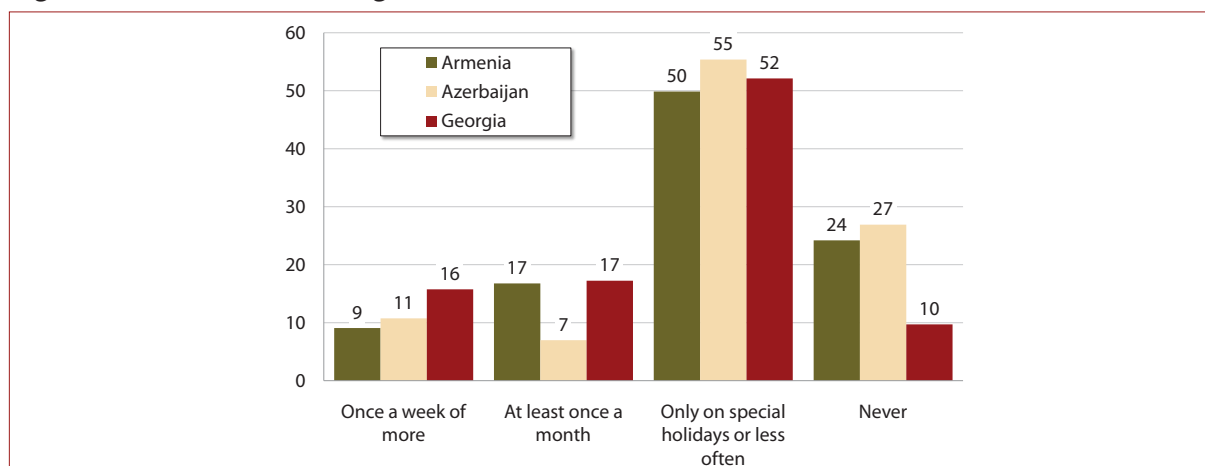


Figure 2: Fasting (%)

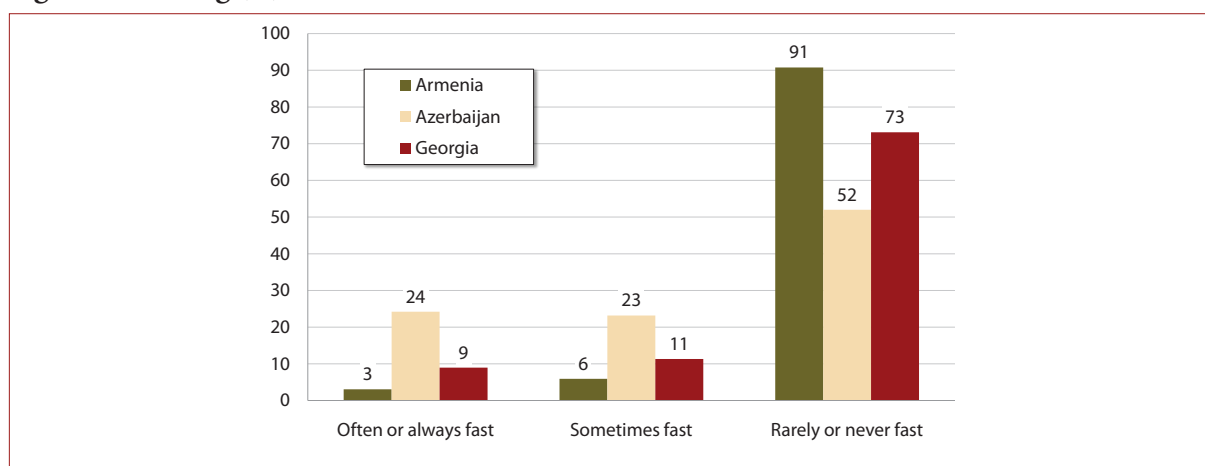
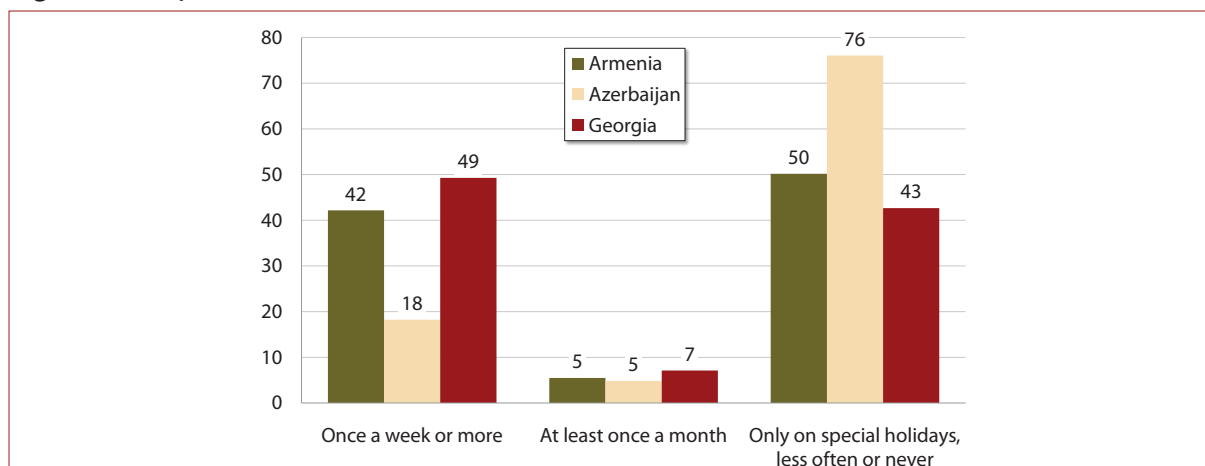
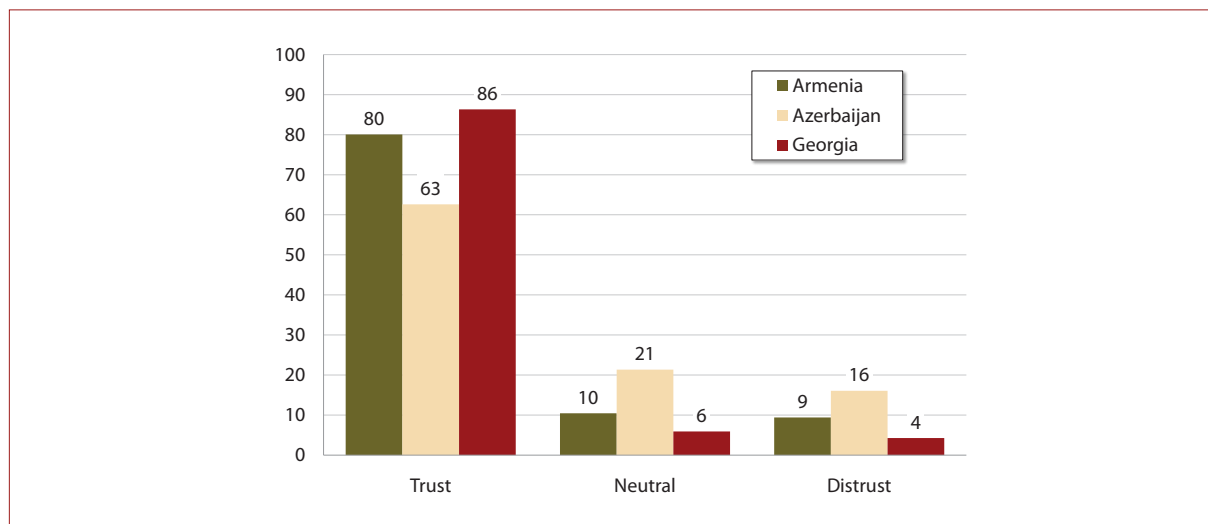
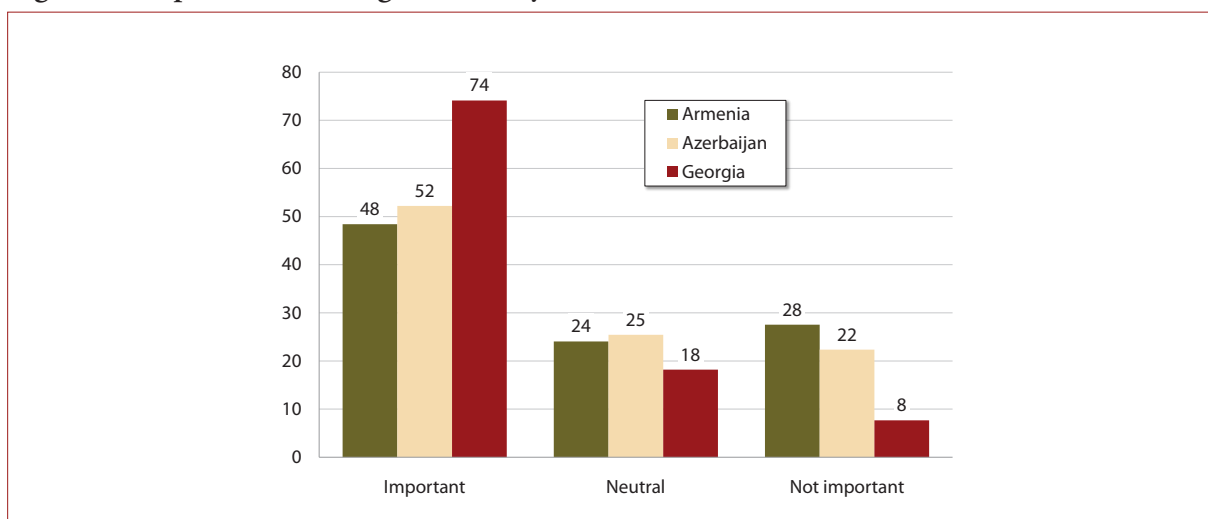


Figure 3: Prayer (%)



Source: representative opinion polls by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2007 and 2008, *Caucasus Barometer*.
<http://www.crrccenters.org/caucasusbarometer/>

Figure 4: Trust in Religious Institutions (%)**Figure 5: Importance of Religion in Daily Life (%)**

Source: representative opinion polls by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2007 and 2008, *Caucasus Barometer*.
<http://www.crrccenters.org/caucasusbarometer/>

The Role of the Armenian Church During Military Conflicts

By Harutyun Harutyunyan, Yerevan

Abstract

Throughout its history, Armenia frequently has been a battlefield for foreign forces. Consequently, Armenians have repeatedly been forced to fight for their freedom. Society highly valued such resistance and Church leaders glorified these combatants as heroes. During the Armenian–Persian war in the 5th century, the death of Christian soldiers was defined as self-sacrifice and the Church canonized them as “fighting martyrs.” This attitude towards sacred militarism continued to be evident from that time through the present. The main focus of the following article is to examine how the Armenian Church legitimized the use of violence, especially during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (1988–1994). For the future, it suggests a critical analysis of traditional Church–State relations and a complete separation between politics and religion.

A History of Invasions

Since the beginning of the first millennium, Armenia has struggled to preserve its existence between powerful empires. For this reason, every century of Armenian history is filled with armed conflicts. In the 4th century, Eastern Rome and Sassanid Persia divided the kingdom between them. After a long period of resistance, the Armenians faced a new enemy with Arab invaders. In medieval times, Armenians suffered under the attacks of Mongolian Tartars, as well as Byzantine forces and Seljuk Turks. Later it was controlled partly by Persia and partly by the Ottoman Empire. In the 20th century, Armenians unwillingly became involved in World War I because some were living in tsarist Russia while others were in Turkey. During this confrontation, the genocide of 1915 took place, during which more than 1.5 million civilians lost their lives. However, even that terrible ordeal was not the end of their disasters, because after the collapse of Soviet Union, Armenia was forced to fight Azerbaijan for the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Armenian Apostolic Church always stood close to its flock and therefore was directly involved in every single military confrontation. Because of the unrelenting foreign invasions, the Church leaders generally define their own history as a long chain of victimization. However, early in this tragic journey, they started to justify armed self-defense and developed the ideologies of “Fatherland War” and “Holy War. But how is it possible to legitimize theologically any military conflict and glorify the fallen fighters as “martyrs”? Other important questions are: Have these sanctified conflicts influenced the formation of national identity and do they still play a significant role in the present?

The Battle of Avarair in 451—the First “Holy War” for the Christian Faith?

Church leaders justified the use of force in Armenia’s domestic policy as early as the beginning of the 4th century, when King Trdat III proclaimed Christianity as

the state religion and, with the blessing of the bishops, started a campaign of compulsory conversion. One hundred years later, Armenian clerical historians started to write about “defensive and liberating wars.” Such resistance was glorified as heroism. In contrast, foreign conquerors were demonized and classified as fiends and brutes. This attitude was especially prominent after the battle of Avarair in 451. Archimandrite Elishe and Lazar Parpeci, historians from the 5th century, tell us that the Persian King Yazdegerd II at that time ordered the compulsory conversion of Armenians, Georgians and Caucasian Albanians to Zoroastrianism. One year later revolt broke out because Armenian princes and clergy answered with armed resistance.

Parpeci describes their readiness to fight by reproducing a prayer: “Let us await with desire the day of our martyrdom, on which, if we are worthy to share the lot of the saints, our virtuous death will crown us.” According to Elishe, before the main battle in Avarair, the bishops and priests were celebrating holy mass and preparing soldiers spiritually for the upcoming self-sacrifice. One of the famous preachers was pastor Gevond. His theological views were mostly based on the Old Testament. He even used the name of Christ and his death on the cross in a militant way: “If death is destroyed by death, let us not fear to share Christ’s death; for with whom we die, with the same shall we also live.”

Even the chief commander Vardan Mamikonian repeated the clergymen’s words to spur on his troops: “Let us hasten without delay, and let no one be found like Judas, who was rejected from the apostolic band. And if the time has come to end our lives in this battle with a holy death, let us accept it with joyful hearts.” According to this narrative the whole army accepted the idea of self-sacrifice without any hesitation: “May our death equal the death of the just and the shedding of our blood that of the blood of the holy martyrs.” The adoption of these sentiments put in place a shift toward a paradigm of “fighting Christians.”

In spite of the soldiers' courage, the resistance was broken after the final battle of Avarair in 451. Nevertheless, Armenian historians described that event as an "unequaled act of defense," where Armenians tried to protect both "their fatherland and Christian faith," and in doing so, the fallen fighters earned eternal life. Therefore, this extraordinary attitude towards the heroes of Avarair remained as a defining moment in the national memory.

The Later Image of the Battle of Avarair

"Death not understood is death, death understood is immortality!" This ancient wisdom was soon adopted as a strategic ideology by the Church fathers. The memory of Avarair started to shape the identity of new generations. The fallen commander and his slain comrades were canonized. Their deaths still are commemorated every year with a divine liturgy on the Shrove-Thursday before Fasching-Sunday. The glorification of military saints was intensified especially in the 19th century, when Armenians suffered under the yoke of Ottoman Turkey and tsarist Russia. In this period, liberation movements and a newborn nationalism rose inside several intellectual circles. The heroic story of Avarair became the focus of many writers and artists. Several Church leaders and intellectuals tried to use this event as an important motivator in building up Armenian patriotism. New Churches and chapels were consecrated with the name of St. Vardan to commemorate the fallen commander.

In 1950 Catholicos Gevorg VI wrote a patriarchal encyclical about the upcoming 1500th jubilee of the battle of Avarair. He named that conflict as "the most distinguished and venerable" in Armenian history because it was "the heroic expression of high morality, patriotism and the love of one's own nation, loyalty to an ecclesiastic vow, selfless heroism, spiritual culture, dedication and the martial valor of the Armenian nation." Bishop Eznik Petrosyan, currently the best-known specialist of Church history, is convinced that: "The battle of Avarair was the first example of armed self-defense of Christianity in world history, when light and darkness, life and death, faith and renunciation battled each other." He believes consequently that Armenians have fulfilled the biblical message, that "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Of course, many modern academics have criticized this exaggerated and obsolete interpretation. Nevertheless, Church leaders both in Armenia and among the Diaspora have yet to demonstrate any notable change in their attitude toward this controversial topic. The reason is that the glorification of fallen fighters was evident not only in ancient Christianity, but also in the present. In both world wars Armenian officers and intellectuals motivated their soldiers with the name of St.

Vardan. But let us just look at the latest example from Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Role of the Armenian Church in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

In August 1992, when this conflict was at its height, Vazgen Sargsyan, the first Minister of Defense of Armenia, formed a special commando unit from volunteers and called them "Arciv-Mahapartner," which means "Eagles Sentenced to Death." The unit consisted of about 450 men who were sworn either to defeat all enemies and only after that return home or to die on the battlefield, as St. Vardan did 1500 years ago. Many other regiments also used religious nicknames and other symbols. Most of them drew the sign of the white cross on their uniforms and vehicles. Priests who were with the soldiers claimed after the battle that the fighters had drawn the crosses in order to secure God's protection. However, many soldiers denied this interpretation, saying that they were using this symbol only to distinguish themselves from their opponents, since both armies wore the same Soviet uniforms. Did the clergy claim that it was a religious war? No. But religion was exploited in order to make the acts of killing and dying more tolerable.

In the beginning, Catholicos Vazgen I sought to condemn and stop any nationalistic and liberation movements. Under pressure from the Kremlin, he participated in interreligious dialogue with Islamic leaders from Azerbaijan and encouraged brotherly and peaceful relations between the two Soviet nations. Later, when Armenia's independence was an unavoidable reality, he called this conflict a "holy struggle for freedom." In 1989, according to the wishes of the Armenian population of that region, he reestablished the diocese of Karabakh, which was dissolved in 1930 by Azerbaijan's communist rulers. Archbishop Pargev Martirosyan since then has served as the new primate. A charismatic leader, he still enjoys great popularity there. The people particularly were impressed by his attitude during the war. In his speeches, he talked many times about the importance of peace; however, at the same time, he described this conflict as a "just war." He is confident that "the blessing of God helped Armenians to achieve victory." In his booklet "Heavenly Help to the Christian Soldier", he explains how they could win against a much stronger enemy. In order to justify the use of force, he frequently quotes from the Old Testament.

Obviously, the Church leaders were not able to stop this confrontation. Physically they suffered together with their flock under the violent attacks of the contemporary enemy; psychologically they were not able to forgive the ancient conquerors. Therefore, they decided simply to support their troops. The argumentation remained the same

as it was 1500 years ago: All selfless heroes were fighting in order to protect their sacred fatherland and their Churches; therefore, they were in a “holy war” now. If someone died, he was regarded as a “new martyr.” Many such fallen soldiers were buried in the “Yerablur-Pantheon” military cemetery in Yerevan. On the website of the Ministry of Defense one can find the following description: “Armenia’s brave sons are buried here. Yerablur became the symbol of the young Armenian army, Armenian patriotism, heroism and steadfast determination to decide one’s own fate. Yerablur is a sacred and symbolic to every Armenian.” The main chapel of this cemetery was consecrated with the name of St. Vardan, who has become since then the protector-saint of the Armenian Army.

The government uses such religious terms and symbols with the blessing of the Church leaders. Together they glorify the recent military actions and work to ensure that the entire nation supports this issue. So if we try to define the role of the Armenian Church in regulating the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the appropriate characterization could be that, unfortunately, it remained somewhere between the gospel and the nation.

Rethinking Current Church–State Relations

The present close relations between the Church and the state are a historical legacy of the past. After the Christianization of Armenia, the loyal clergymen regarded their sacred institution as a “national Church” and have since then worked in close cooperation with the existing rulers. During the periods of foreign invasions, when the monarchy was withdrawn, bishops remained in charge of local government and education. The parliament of independent Armenia mentioned this in Article 8.1 of the national constitution: “The Republic of Armenia recognizes the exclusive historical mission of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church as a national church, in the spiritual life, development of the national culture and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia.”

Although the state officially accepts the right of religious freedom according to European principles, the Armenian Church de facto enjoys the status of a national Church, which gives it many privileges, such as the right to provide religious education in public schools and universities, pastoral services in hospitals and prisons, and

chaplains in the Army. There is a special law and a study program confirmed by the Ministry of Defense regulating the status of chaplains. Mostly they are young deacons and priests who serve in the armed forces without any special training for two years. They arrange bible study circles, catechetical lessons, baptisms and other liturgical events. However, their main task is to convince the 18–20-year-old soldiers “to love their fatherland as real patriots with their whole hearts and to protect its borders responsibly with weapons in their hands.” One of their beloved religious feasts is, of course, the celebration of St. Vardan’s day. The presence of the clergy in the army today essentially serves a propaganda role.

It is evident, that such a tight model of Church–state cooperation is semi-legal, if we consider the general principle of religious freedom. Unfortunately, in practice, everything continues on in the traditional way of political and religious unity. This frequently leads to the manipulation of religion by the current political rulers and brings the Church consequently under the control of the state, as it was during the times of monarchic absolutism. How long it will take the Church to reject completely this conformist attitude is difficult to say. Clerics and politicians have to admit that there is an unresolved, “medieval” problem: The state has always needed legitimization by the Church for the justification of its military conflicts. Especially after unsuccessful wars, it was easier to accept the death of religiously-motivated volunteers. The clergy accepted this task because they were loyal to their respective government. And so they were engaged in supplying a pseudo-theological justification. In doing so they typically relied on arguments from the Old Testament and proofs from national history. Certainly, it was easier to mobilize everybody to take part in or to support a “Holy War.”

For the future, it is necessary to raise a sensible question: Is it not time for theological and political enlightenment? The state and the Church have to rethink and reshape their tight cooperation. A complete separation between politics and religion would be the best solution. Conservative forces may protest against such changes. However, if the Armenian Church and the government do not proceed with this reform, then the sanctified militarism will not disappear from their country.

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For Further Reading:

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- “Nagorno-Karabagh” Eastern Diocese of Armenian Church of USA. <http://www.armenianchurch-ed.net/armenian-heritage/nagorno-karabagh/overview/>
- “Yerablur” Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Armenia. <http://www.mil.am/eng/index.php?page=23>

Canonization, Obedience, and Defiance: Strategies for Survival of the Orthodox Communities in Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia

By Kimitaka Matsuzato, Hokkaido

Abstract

Against a background in which the Russian Orthodox Church refuses to support “schismatics,” the churches of Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia have taken different approaches in establishing themselves in the Orthodox community. The Transnistrian Orthodox community today enjoys canonical status in the unrecognized state of Transnistria because the Transnistrian conflict was a conflict within the Russian Orthodox Church and its Chisinau-Moldovan Metropolitanate. Abkhazia’s church leaders initially pursued a path of “obedience,” but in 2009 switched instead to “defiance” but nevertheless seek to maintain ties with both the official Russian and Georgian churches. The South Ossetian church has, by contrast, pursued a more aggressive strategy in setting up an independent church and seeking support for an official status.

Orthodox Politics

Will states continue to be the main actors in twenty-first century geopolitics? Will military and economic resources continue to be the main factors? Or will transnational actors adept in epistemological crafting hold sway on the international scene? The Black Sea rim’s two decades of experience after the Cold War supports the latter scenario, but this does not release us from substantially the same question: Is the Black Sea rim a harbinger of broader changes to come or an anomaly in twenty-first century world politics? Leaving the answer to this question to the future, let us examine a fascinating case in which transnational epistemological crafting plays a decisive role—Orthodox politics in and around the unrecognized states in the Black Sea rim. This issue has additional relevance because existing studies regard the politics surrounding unrecognized states as a typical interstate phenomenon and interpret them in a bipolar scheme of a new cold war between the trans-Atlantic and pro-Russian forces. This study is an attempt to “localize geopolitics” following the work of Gerard Toal.

A remarkable feature of the unrecognized states in the post-Soviet territory is that they are located between the jurisdictions of local (*pomestnye*) Orthodox churches. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are located between the jurisdictions of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Orthodox Church of Georgia (OCG). The field of competition between the ROC and the Romanian Orthodox Church (RomOC) has been the right bank of the Nistru River, or Bessarabia, rather than the left bank, or Transnistria. Nevertheless, competition between the two churches in Bessarabia cannot but affect the religious situation in Transnistria.

A Long History

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the ROC expanded its religious jurisdiction by incorporating

Georgia and Bessarabia immediately after the Russian Empire conquered the Kartli-Kakheti Principality (eastern Georgia) and Bessarabia. The incorporation of eastern Georgia was particularly valuable for the ROC, because the Georgian Church was not only apostolic, but also one of the earliest autocephalous churches in the world. In contrast, Prince Vladimir’s conversion in the tenth century, as the beginning of Russian Orthodox history, implies that the ROC has a low status in the Orthodox world. Emphasizing the apostolic features of the Georgian Church (now incorporated into the ROC), the ROC tried to raise its own prestige. Therefore, the ROC gave Tbilisi the high status of exarchate, which even Kazan and Kiev, though already members of the empire for a long time, did not have.

The present ROC does not seem to intend to repeat this expansionist policy. Even after the Russian government recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states after the war in August 2008, the ROC, to the chagrin of Ossetian and Abkhazian Orthodox leaders, repeated its official view that South Ossetia and Abkhazia belong to the canonical territory of the OCG. The official Orthodox world is composed of fifteen local churches, which share the rule of mutual nonintervention, according to which they should never assist schismatics within other Orthodox churches. If the ROC incorporates the Orthodox congregations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia into its jurisdiction, it will lose the legitimacy to criticize what it calls “violations of canonical law” in several countries, including the Kiev Patriarchate (an unrecognized, though large, church that separated from the ROC in 1991–92) in Ukraine, the RomOC in Moldova, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (EPC) in Estonia. Moreover, the OCG might possibly take revenge on the ROC by recognizing the Kiev Patriarchate.

Differentiation among Three Strategies

After the civil wars at the beginning of the 1990s, Orthodox congregations in Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia pursued differing strategies for their survival and recognition. In 1988, the ROC decided to raise the status of its Moldovan bishopric to the **Chisinau-Moldovan Metropolitan See** (not to be confused with the Bessarabian Metropolitanate of the RomOC, reestablished in 1992) to prevent its pro-Romanian tendencies. This newly-formed metropolitanate's priests serving on the Left Bank (Transnistria) were predominantly pro-Moldovan (pan-Romanian) despite their belonging to the ROC. During the Transnistrian conflict in 1992, they even refused religious services to "separatist" victims (volunteers and Cossacks), accusing them of being the same as bandits. The bereaved had to bring the bodies to Odessa for their funerals. Offended by this attitude, some Transnistrian Christians petitioned the Moscow patriarch to set up an independent diocese directly subordinated to him (bypassing the Chisinau-Moldovan Metropolitanate). Despite these unpleasant memories, when the Moscow Patriarchate introduced a vicariate in Transnistria in 1995, this vicariate agreed to be subordinated to the **Chisinau-Moldovan Metropolitanate**. In 1997, this vicariate developed into a full-fledged diocese. Thus, the Transnistrian Orthodox community today enjoys canonical status in the unrecognized state of Transnistria. This strategy, which I call "canonization," was possible because the Transnistrian conflict was a conflict within the same ROC and the same Chisinau-Moldovan Metropolitanate. This solution barely seems applicable to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where local clerics are not ready to accept the OCG's supervision at all, but continue to regard Ilia II, the Georgian patriarch-catholicos, as a major provocateur of Georgian nationalism.

In the Russian Empire, the ROC placed Abkhazia under the jurisdiction of the Georgian exarchate, as noted above. In the 1880s, the ROC introduced the Sukhum Diocese to separate Abkhazia from the Imeretian (western Georgian) Diocese and thus to limit the Georgian clergy's influence on the Abkhazians. After the February Revolution in 1917, the Georgian Church unilaterally declared that it would resume the autocephaly that it had enjoyed before 1811 and subordinated Abkhazia to its jurisdiction during the Menshevik occupation of Abkhazia. The ROC did not recognize the OCG's independence, and pro-Russian parishes continued to exist in Abkhazia. In 1943, Stalin forced the ROC to recognize the OCG and Abkhazia's subordination to the OCG. During almost the whole period of this subordination, the OCG ordained no Abkhazian priests to serve the Abkhazians. After Perestroika started, Cathol-

icos Ilia II started negotiations with the EPC, which in 1990 recognized that the OCG had been continually autocephalous since the fifth century.

During the same Perestroika, religious contradiction between the Georgians and Abkhazians intensified because the OCG began to use the Sukhum-Abkhazian Diocese as a bastion of Georgianism in Abkhazia. On the other hand, Ilia II needed to show goodwill to the Abkhazians and ordained Vissarion (Apliaa) as the first ethnic Abkhazian deacon in 1989 and, a year later, as priest. At that time, Vissarion was already more than forty years old. He is a unique person; in his youth, he was an outlaw and was even jailed repeatedly. During the civil war, the Abkhazian Church split. Even today, OCG's Sukhumi Diocese continues its virtual existence in exile in Tbilisi, while Vissarion's group established a "Sukhum-Abkhazian Diocese" after the war. Vissarion pursued a strategy of modesty and "obedience," carefully avoiding causing problems in the official Orthodox world. For example, after the ROC rejected the incorporation of Abkhazia into its jurisdiction, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA), competing with the ROC in the territories of the former Soviet Union, proposed that Abkhazian Orthodox leaders be included in the ROCA. In contrast to his South Ossetian colleagues, Vissarion refused this proposal. This strategy of "obedience" helped the Abkhazian Church, in contrast to the South Ossetian Church, to preserve more or less normal relations with both the ROC and the OCG, but the other side of the same coin is its uncertain canonical status without even a self-proclaimed bishop.

If the Georgian Church (both the ROC's exarchate during the tsarist period and the OCG during the Soviet period) contributed to the Abkhazians' spiritual life to some extent, there had been no church in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast in the Georgian SSR. During Perestroika, a church located in Nikozy, which is near South Ossetia's capital Tskhinval, but nevertheless in Georgia proper (outside the South Ossetian autonomy), functioned to satisfy the spiritual needs of ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia. Today, Nikozy is the site of the virtual OCG bishopric formally responsible for the "Tskhinval region" (South Ossetia). The OCG's neglect of the Ossetians provides a powerful reason for South Ossetian clerics to argue that the OCG has no right to claim jurisdiction over South Ossetia. According to them, the OCG regarded the South Ossetians as "helpless, wild Pagans," and did not build even a chapel as long as South Ossetia was an obedient constituent of the Georgian SSR. Once South Ossetia began to seek independence, the OCG loudly reaffirmed its canonical authority over South Ossetia.

In contrast to the aged and tactful Fr Vissarion in Abkhazia, the South Ossetian Orthodox revival has been initiated by Aleksandr Pukhate (with his monk's name of Georgi), born in 1973 and having finished higher education at the South Ossetian Pedagogic Institute after the civil war. The enthusiastic Pukhate pursued, first of all, gaining the appearance of a full-fledged church, which is capable of baptizing, practicing the sacraments, and independently ordaining priests. As a result, the South Ossetian Orthodox community broke out of the confines of official Orthodoxy and roamed in quest of a patron who was ready to give it the appearance of having canonical status. The South Ossetians were inevitably tossed about in a great realignment in the Orthodox world after 2001, caused by the reconciliation of the ROC and the ROCA. This reconciliation split the ROCA and orphaned the South Ossetian congregation, which in turn changed affiliation from the ROCA to the Holy Synod in Resistance, one of the Greek Old Calendarist factions, in 2003. Currently, the South Ossetian Orthodox community identifies itself as being "Alan Diocese," a prestigious bishopric in the medieval Caucasus. The Holy Synod consecrated Pukhate as "Bishop of Alania," when he was as young as thirty-two years old.

The Abkhazian Congregation's Conversion to a Strategy of "Defiance"

Despite their painful strategy of "obedience," Abkhazian clerics enjoyed neither compassion nor assistance from the official Orthodox world. Due to the absence of a legitimate bishop and hierarchy, the Abkhazian clergy suffers from a lack of discipline. Each ordainment of a priest requires tremendous tact and diplomacy, often uselessly expended, to evade the OCG's accusations, with nervous tension rising in the process. To the young clerics of Abkhazia, educated in Zagorsk, Thessalonica, and other foreign Orthodox centers during the 1990s, Vissarion's leadership appeared excessively appeasing to the OCG. The Abkhazian clergy split in 2005–07 between Vissarion's old guards and young reformers. Vissarion won out in this struggle, while the leader of the young reformers, Fr Dorofei (Dbar), decided to leave Abkhazia for Thessalonica "to complete his doctoral dissertation."

After this victory, Vissarion took the initiative of guiding the Abkhazian Orthodox community from

an "obedience" to a "defiance" strategy. On September 15, 2009, an episcopal meeting of the Sukhum-Abkhazian Diocese unanimously adopted a resolution that terminated its existence as part of the OCG and instead declared the creation of the "Pitsunda-Sukhum Diocese of the Abkhazian Orthodox Church" and to ask the local Orthodox churches, particularly the ROC, for help in resuming the Abkhazian autocephaly that existed until 1795.

Here, we need to take a tour of the religious history. In the ninth-tenth century, the Byzantine Empire strengthened its influence in the North Caucasus to build a defense line to prevent the Nomads migrating from the Central Eurasian Steppe from flowing into the heartland of the empire. For this purpose, the EPC Christianized the Abazgians and Alans (whom the present Abkhazians and Ossetians believe to be their respective ancestors). The EPC recognized the Pitsunda Catholicos in Abkhazia, independent from the Mtskheta Catholicos in eastern Georgia under the Antioch Patriarchate's influence. Thus, in the territory of the future Georgian SSR, two catholicos coexisted until the demise of the Pitsunda Catholicos in 1795. Likewise, Ecumenical Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos (patriarch in 901–906 and 912–925) founded the Alan Diocese, which would develop into a metropolitanate, prestigious enough to be invited to the Constance Council (1414–15) as a representative of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Tamerlane's (Timur's) invasion of the Caucasus resulted in a general decline of Christianity in this region, and the Alan Eparchy met its demise in the sixteenth century. The South Ossetian and Abkhazian Orthodox communities argue that they reestablished this historical bishopric and this catholicos.

Although sharing a logic of defiance to legitimize their congregations by reference to historical churches, the Abkhazians are more modest than the South Ossetians because, while the South Ossetians unilaterally declared the rebirth of the Alan Diocese, the Abkhazians are asking for help to reestablish the Pitsunda Catholicos. While the South Ossetians did not care about the canonicity of their possible patron, the Abkhazians addressed their request only to official Orthodox churches, including the OCG.

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Ethnic Georgian Muslims: A Comparison of Highland and Lowland Villages

By Ruslan Baramidze, Tbilisi

Abstract

This article examines the differences among Muslim communities in highland and lowland areas of Adjara. The Muslims of the highland area tend to be more devout, while those in the lowland are more heavily influenced by the nearby urban culture of Batumi. Residents of the highland areas tend to have more free time to engage in religious activities, and often see religious educational institutions as a way to earn a living, while those in the lowland areas are more focused on secular education and careers.

Varieties of Muslims in Georgia

In an everyday discourse, Muslims living in Georgia are considered to be bearers of a homogeneous ethno-cultural and behavioral tradition. However, Muslims who live in Adjara are ethnic Georgians and they differ in their traditions from Muslims living in other parts of Georgia. There are even differences among the ethnic Georgian Muslims living in Adjara: depending on where they live and how close their homes and villages are to urban areas, a variety of local differences and peculiarities in the belief systems arise.

This article examines key aspects of the history, life and culture of ethnic Georgian Muslims using two ethnic Georgian Muslim communities in Adjara as case studies. These two communities—Ghorjomi and Khelvachauri—differ from each other not only in their locations, but also in their traditions and belief systems. Ghorjomi is a village in the high mountainous district of Khulo in Adjara, where Islam and its religious traditions are strongly preserved. Khelvachauri (comprised of the town of Khelvachauri and its adjacent villages) is a community in lowland Adjara close to the city of Batumi. Proximity to this urban area affects the attitudes and beliefs of the local inhabitants.

A Long History

To understand recent tendencies and differences among the Muslims in Adjara, it is important to briefly describe the evolution of Islam in this Georgian region. Islam spread to Adjara during the Ottoman Empire's occupation from 1552–1563 through 1878. Initially, the nobles were converted to Islam under the influence of various socio-economic and political factors. Islam then spread relatively slowly through the lower levels of society. The process of Islamization gathered momentum from the 18th century, when believers began to establish mosques in the region. An intense period of building mosques throughout Adjara started from the beginning of the 19th century.

From 1878, Adjara reunited with Georgia within the Russian Empire. One of the factors that hindered the consolidation of the Russian Tsarist regime in the Caucasus was religion. In this period, a significant num-

ber of mosques were built in Adjara. From 1921, when Georgia was occupied by the Soviets, until the strengthening of the Soviet government in the country during the 1930s, the Muslim spiritual organization along with religious schools and mosques continued to function. In the early Soviet period, the anti-religious campaign, which was gathering strength throughout the country, met with some resistance from the population. However, during the 1930s, the Soviet regime managed to wipe out the Muslim spiritual organization, forbid the performance of religious rituals and started to solidify observance of new Soviet traditions and rules. In parallel, at the “request of people,” the Soviet regime closed down spiritual institutions and buildings. From that time forward, they were used for economic purposes. During the 1940s, the Soviet government allowed the reconstruction of the mosque in Batumi. This was done in order to demonstrate to foreigners visiting that port town that the Soviet regime was tolerant of religion. Religious life across a variety of faiths revived from the end of the 1980s. In this period, many religious buildings were reconsecrated. The reconstruction and revitalization of religious life proceeded differently across communities. Most recently, many Turkish organizations have been active in financing mosques and religious education in Adjara.

The construction of the central mosque in Ghorjomi took place after the number of worshipers in the community grew. Local residents believed that building a large, ornate and distinctive mosque brought honor to the community. The inhabitants of this and adjacent villages built the mosque in Ghorjomi in 1900–1902. For a long time, it played a significant social and religious function. During Soviet rule, the mosque was closed down at “the request of the people.” The minaret was demolished and the building at various times was used as a club, a warehouse and finally, again at “the request of the people,” it was turned into a museum. In the 1990s, it resumed functioning as a mosque. Since then, several additional mosques have been built in the community.

The history of the Khelvachauri mosque is hard to reconstruct because during the Soviet era, the building

was used for a variety of purposes. What is known is that the mosque was built during the intense period of construction of Batumi mosques (1863–1866) at the initiative and with the participation of local nobles taking into account the interests and requests of worshippers. Other references to the history of the mosque have been lost over time. Under Communist rule, the building was used as a military installation, an office, a shop and a club. The building steadily lost any sign that it had once been a mosque. During the 1990s, religious services were restored and during the 2000s, renovations restored the building's appearance as a mosque.

Differences in the Two Communities

To better understand the different evolutions of the two Muslim communities, it is useful to briefly describe the two communities in which they are embedded. Both communities are comprised of several villages, but Ghorjomi is populated mostly by Muslims of Georgian ethnicity; whereas people of different nationalities and religions and families from various parts of Georgia live in Khelvachauri. The local inhabitants in Ghorjomi have limited contacts with the nearby town, due to the difficult terrain and the great distance involved. On the other hand, Khelvachauri does not have these problems; it is close to Batumi and the road is in good shape.

Locals in Ghorjomi mainly depend on semi-nomadic cattle breeding for their livelihoods. Such a lifestyle is dictated by the difficult climate and limited land resources, which also influence family incomes in the community. Living in Ghorjomi requires hard physical labor. Trade only has an supplementary significance. Neighbors and family play an important role in day-to-day life and problems are predominantly solved with the help of relatives and friends. The community is populated mainly by one ethno-religious group and endogamous marriages are commonplace. It could be said that “public opinion” in Ghorjomi is determined by the influence of respected individuals in the community, including spiritual leaders and local officials. Cultural life in the villages is mainly limited to religious, traditional and national celebrations. There is little diversity since everyone has the same background.

Such traditional economic activity does not play a major role in lowland Adjara. Here, the main income of the local population consists of salaries, pensions and other means. The life strategies of the local inhabitants are oriented towards receiving an education and finding a job. Family and neighborhood connections are insignificant and problems are resolved through formal mechanisms (legal and governmental institutions). Informal institutions also exist (respected public figures, widely-held beliefs), but mainly the mass media influences the

formation of public opinion. Khelvachauri is heavily influenced by the city of Batumi's cultural life and religious celebrations are not widespread here.

Differing Institutions

Religious education is one of the most important instruments for the development of religious institutions. The strong interest among the inhabitants of Ghorjomi to participate in religious services is driving increased demand for religious education. Moreover, such education has secured jobs and income for the local youth. Children become familiar with religious rites and rituals from an early age, especially during fasts and celebrations. Receiving a religious education is now common in the Ghorjomi community, where from the 1990s the majority of the male inhabitants received basic religious training. Since 2000, however, when the majority of the population had already received religious education, the number of pupils at religious schools gradually decreased. There are also boarding schools for more advanced levels, financed mainly by financial contributions received from Turkey. These schools fully cover the living expenses of the enrolled students; this is why demand is always high to enroll in these schools. Students there receive training for religious careers. After graduating from these schools, the students are sent to complete their education overseas, where they also acquire necessary social skills.

In Khelvachauri, a number of factors hinders the functioning of such Muslim spiritual institutions. Recently, a school opened at the mosque, but the majority of the students are not local residents. Local inhabitants in Khelvachauri have only a superficial or poor knowledge of religious rites and rituals. When there is a need, they are forced to invite and to pay religious clergy or other experienced people. Usually, such services are expensive. In Ghorjomi, people consider it a matter of honor and gratitude to perform religious services voluntarily and free of charge.

The operation of religious institutions requires relevant financial and material resources. Religious contributions in Adjara are completely voluntary and the residents of the region are in no way obliged to donate. The main sources of income for the clergy are charitable donations from the parish, payments for performing religious rituals, gifts from local and foreign philanthropists (usually from Turkey), sums offered by state institutions to rebuild religious buildings, income received during various religious celebrations and the religious tax. The more religious the person, the more obligations he takes to support the community's spiritual leaders, the mosque and the religious schools. For example, in Ghorjomi, community members are charged an unofficial tax called “vezife” or “shepherd of Jama” collected by the mejlis (assembly) of the mosque. Part of its income,

the mosque receives from contributions during religious celebrations and another part is donated in the form of charitable contributions. In lowland Adjara, there are no religious taxes at all. The main income of the mosque here is the cattle skin donated by worshipers during the Kurban-Bairam celebration. Recently, though donations to the Khelvachauri mosque have also increased and the Adjarian Muftiat supports it.

These days, mosques in Adjara have acquired not only religious significance, but also play an important social function. In Ghorjomi for example, the mosque represents a place where middle-aged and elderly men gather regularly to discuss problems of the community, and socio-economic and political developments in the country. Periodically, politicians also use mosques as political tribunes. In Khelvachauri, the mosque does not have such strong social functions. The parish is small and the role of the mosque in political processes is insignificant.

A minaret is a distinctive architectural feature of the mosque, from where the worshipers are called to prayer (Azaan). In Adjara, minarets are built mainly in the highland, although recently minarets have also appeared in the lowland. The minaret in Ghorjomi is used not only for calling to prayer, but also for disseminating important news within the community (for instance, news about a death and the day and time of a funeral). In Khelvachauri, construction of the minaret was accompanied by a whole range of problems and even provoked protests by the local residents. The local community was unhappy about the noise and the loud reading of Azaan or its poor performance. In some cases, protests led to a variety of incidents and sporadic violence. As a result, now Azaan is only recited in a relatively low voice during religious celebrations.

The worshipers usually are middle-aged or elderly men striving to perform all religious services and meet all requirements. The reason for such active religious and spiritual life lies in the copious amounts of free time that the local inhabitants have. At the same time, it is common in Adjara to start an active religious life after one reaches middle age. In some cases, we see former free spirits turning into very pious individuals. Some members of the community do not understand this transformation and such changes among their relatives and friends provokes their anger. The youth devotes itself to an active religious life only in highland Adjara. In Khelvachauri and in the lowland, young people are less interested in Islam.

Women are also a part of a parish. They mainly pray in the inner gallery of the mosque or in a place divided from the main prayer hall with a curtain. In general, women

pray at the mosques only during periods of fasting. During this time, they attend night prayers. In Ghorjomi, women go more often to the mosque, which is not the case in Khelvachauri. In Ghorjomi, women usually pray at home or make sure that conditions for performing religious services are met. There are several women's groups in the region that are well-trained in performing different religious services. In Khelvachauri, women less actively participate in the religious services and if they take part, it is only in their homes. In Ghorjomi, a woman's place in society is clearly determined, whereas in Khelvachauri gender roles are less well defined.

There are two groups of Muslim religious clerics in Adjara. The traditionalists usually are men past middle age, who received their religious education in the Soviet period. Usually, Soviet atheist propaganda, restrictions and repressions have deeply influenced their views and beliefs. These individuals received additional education and training only after Georgia's independence. The second group is the young generation, which has received the basic, as well as special religious education. It is equipped with the theoretical and practical knowledge that is highly popular and influential among worshipers. The majority of these young people are against preserving the folklore-type Islam of their fathers. Most of these young people reside in highland Adjara and preach there. It should be noted that in recent years they are also very actively working in the lowland villages.

Despite the fact that religious education is widespread, the majority of the religious clerics do not possess relevant theological knowledge. As a result, these religious leaders limit themselves to performing the religious rituals necessary for the village (weddings, funerals, prayer sessions). Very often, religious figures in the villages perform various functions at the same time (as a muezzin, cashier, guard etc). The bigger mosques employ several people to fulfill these different functions.

Often, the religious leaders participate in resolving community problems. For instance, in Ghorjomi, the local Imams are invited to work out agricultural or family disputes. In Khelvachauri, religious rituals are observed less frequently and religious leaders are preoccupied mainly with prayers, the performance of religious rituals, and participating in religious celebrations (mainly Mawlid).

Such is religious, everyday and cultural life in two Georgian communities where Muslims of Georgian ethnicity reside. The picture of these two communities, with only small deviations and variations, can be generalized to the majority of the populations in the highland and lowland districts of Adjara.

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CHRONICLE

From 4 July to 3 October 2010

4 July 2010	U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visits the South Caucasus
8 July 2010	A French warship arrives at Georgia's Black Sea port of Batumi for exercises with the Georgian coast guard
14 July 2010	The EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Peter Semneby meets with Abkhaz leader Sergey Bagapsh and prime minister of the breakaway region of Abkhazia Sergey Shamba in Sukhumi
15 July 2010	French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner visits Tbilisi
16 July 2010	EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton meets with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia's Black Sea port of Batumi
23 July 2010	The leaders of the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia Sergei Bagapsh and Eduard Kokoity meet with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in Caracas
23 July 2010	Georgian Prime Minister Nika Gilauri visits Azerbaijan
26 July 2010	The EU extends the mandate of the EU monitoring mission in Georgia (EUMM) by one year until 14 September 2011
27 July 2010	The twelfth round of the Geneva international talks is held
29 July 2010	The World Bank approves a 50 million dollar loan for Georgia
4 August 2010	Russian colonel Valery Yakhnovets becomes Defense Minister of the breakaway region of South Ossetia
7 August 2010	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili visits Colombia to attend the inauguration of President-elect Juan Manuel Santos Calderón
8 August 2010	Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visits Abkhazia on the anniversary of the 2008 Russian–Georgian war
10 August 2010	Georgian economy minister Vera Kobalia says that the first free industrial zone in Tbilisi will open in two years
11 August 2010	Russia deploys long range S-300 air defense missiles in Abkhazia
12 August 2010	Several hundred displaced persons from the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia protest a police attempt to evict them from a former Soviet military building in Georgia's capital Tbilisi
12 August 2010	BP Azerbaijan announces that Turkmen oil is flowing through the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline
13 August 2010	Abkhaz leader Sergey Bagapsh dismisses Interior Minister of the breakaway region Otar Khetsia
15 August 2010	Moldovan acting President Mihai Ghimpu visits Georgia
16 August 2010	Turkish President Abdullah Gul meets with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on a visit to Azerbaijan
20 August 2010	Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian sign a deal extending Moscow's lease of a military base on Armenian territory by 24 years
20 August 2010	Georgian private airline company Airzena starts chartered flights from Tbilisi to Moscow
1 September 2010	The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry says that three Armenian soldiers and two Azerbaijanis were killed during a clash on the border of the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh
2 September 2010	Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visits Azerbaijan
3 September 2010	Azerbaijan's state energy company SOCAR and Russia's Gazprom sign an agreement under which Azerbaijan will double its natural-gas exports to Russia
6 September 2010	Deputy head of the Interior Ministry's unit in the North Caucasus Federal District Nikolai Simakov says that Georgia has camps on its territory to train militants to join insurgents in the North Caucasus
8 September 2010	U.S., Russian, and French mediators with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Minsk Group meet with leaders of the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh in Stepanakert
13 September 2010	The International Court of Justice (ICJ) begins hearings on charges by Georgia of Russian human rights abuses in the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia
14 September 2010	Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary sign a joint declaration in Baku on the implementation of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) transportation project
16 September 2010	Armenian Energy Minister Armen Movsisian says Iran and Armenia will start building two major hydroelectric power stations on the Armenian–Iranian border

(continued overleaf)

22 September 2010	Abkhaz leader Sergey Bagapsh appoints Leonid Dziapshba as the new Interior Minister of the breakaway region of Abkhazia
24 September 2010	U.S. President Barack Obama meets with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York and calls on him to improve Azerbaijan's record on human rights
25 September 2010	Emergency Situations Minister Armen Yeritsian says that Armenia is receiving thousands of tons of grain and cooking oil from Russia to help the country cope with a sharp increase in international prices
1 October 2010	NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen visits Georgia
1 October 2010	Georgian State Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration Giorgi Baramidze and head of the EU delegation to Georgia Per Eklund sign a memorandum of understanding on a EU-funded Comprehensive Institutional Building Program to help the institutional strengthening of Georgian state agencies
1 October 2010	The Georgian Ministry of Defense says that four Georgian military servicemen were killed in Afghanistan
3 October 2010	Russian President Dmitry Medvedev criticizes Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko's statement explaining the motives for Minsk's decision not to recognize the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as Moscow was not ready to share the negative consequences of such a decision

ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Iris Kempe, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Lili Di Pippo

The Caucasus Analytical Digest (CAD) is a monthly internet publication jointly produced by the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Tbilisi (www.boell.ge), the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen (www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de), the Resource Security Institute in Washington, DC (resourcesecurityinstitute.org/) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich (www.css.ethz.ch) with support from the German Association for East European Studies (DGO). The Caucasus Analytical Digest analyzes the political, economic, and social situation in the three South Caucasus states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia within the context of international and security dimensions of this region's development. CAD is supported by a grant from the Heinrich Boell Foundation.

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Layout: Cengiz Kibaroglu, Matthias Neumann, and Michael Clemens

ISSN 1867 9323 © 2010 by Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, Bremen and Center for Security Studies, Zürich

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