

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Where Islamism Fizzled

THE SOURCE: "The 'Islamic Revival' in Daghestan Twenty Years Later" by Vladimir Bobrovnikov, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2, 2007.

WHEN THE SOVIET UNION collapsed in 1991, the Russian constituent republic of Daghestan experienced a dramatic religious awakening. Islamic schools and mosques opened, new periodicals and political parties sprang up, and ubiquitous portraits of Lenin were ripped down and replaced with images of Imam Shamil, a 19th-century Muslim war hero. With the establishment of more than 1,600 mosques, even the appearance of Daghestani villages was transformed, writes Vladimir Bobrovnikov, a senior researcher at the RAS Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow. It took the Soviets 40 years to open only about 200 public high schools in the republic. Within a decade, private Muslim donors had started nearly 700 Qur'anic classes in mosques, in addition to 38 Islamic colleges and other institutions of higher education.

Then the Islamic awakening began to fizzle. The post-Soviet Islamic parties that had arisen in the early 1990s disappeared. Some mosques and schools were

shuttered. Religious donations continued, but some of the donors were tarnished by profits from the manufacture of alcoholic beverages, the drug trade, and banking. A handful of new Islamic institutions opened, but this did not "lead to perceptible results," according to Bobrovnikov.

What stunted the Muslim spiritual revival in the seemingly fertile soil of Russia's southernmost republic? Part of the explanation may well lie in the

history of the poor and mountainous region's 30-odd ethnic groups. They speak 30 different languages and have been so independent that even Imam Shamil struggled to keep them together. While the republic is at least 90 percent Muslim, its leading sheikhs don't get along.

Daghestan has long been a bastion of the Islamic mystical tradition of Sufism, deemed sacrilegious by the ultraorthodox Wahhabi sect. In turn, Wahhabism, with its roots in Saudi Arabia, is denigrated as "dollar Islam." Bobrovnikov says that Wahhabi imams have been (falsely) accused of accepting money from Arab missionaries for every newly converted

person. After the outbreak of the war in Chechnya—Daghestan's immediate western neighbor—Russian authorities blamed the Wahhabis for inciting the violence. And when Chechen rebels raided some Daghestani villages in 1999, government authorities shut down Wahhabi mosques and schools, killing their leaders and forcing others to leave the country. The Wahhabis have been driven underground, where they threaten to create new splits among the faithful, Bobrovnikov writes.

The real cause of the failure of Islam in Daghestan lies in seven decades of Soviet rule, according to Bobrovnikov. The Muslim spiritual elite of the past century died in Stalin's

EXCERPT

Heretics Unmourned

It is extraordinary that the bombings in Iraq, including in mosques, that kill so many Shia noncombatants draw almost no condemnation in other predominately Muslim countries. To many Sunnis, the Shia are heretical Muslims; the late archterrorist Abu Musab al Zarqawi, who was responsible for the Jordanian hotel bombings [that killed 60 wedding celebrants and others, said,] . . . "Any government made up of rejector or godless Kurds or people who call themselves Sunnis is only a 'collaborators' government." . . . Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda . . . will not be discredited by non-Muslims. They will only be discredited by moderates within the Muslim world who take them on and describe them for what they are—the true enemies of Islam.

—DENNIS ROSS, envoy to the Middle East under Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, in *World Policy Journal* (Spring 2007)

prison camps, and no new scholars were allowed to arise. At the start of the Soviet era, roughly 10 percent of Dagestanis were sufficiently well versed in the Qur'an to be among the spiritual elite. The figure is now less than 0.1 percent.

The new Muslim institutions of higher education have cobbled together curricula that are neither

strongly religious nor rigorously secular. Students at the North Caucasian Islamic University, for example, take 432 hours of Qur'anic exegesis, 360 hours of physical education, and 72 hours each of information technology, homeland history, international relations, and astrophysics. "Many of them are forced to obtain a second secular education

when looking for a job."

The Dagestan "Islamic spiritual revival" has been stillborn, Bobrovnikov says. Even Muslim students who have gone abroad to study at religious centers in Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia have "long ago given up their studies and gone into the Russian-language tourist business."

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

He Said, She Said

THE SOURCE: "Are Women Really More Talkative Than Men?" by Matthias R. Mehl, Simine Vazire, Nairán Ramírez-Esparza, Richard B. Slatcher, and James W. Pennebaker, in *Science*, July 6, 2007.

NOT TO MINCE WORDS, BUT women have a reputation for being much chattier than men. In 2006, neurobiologist Louann Brizendine, in *The Female Brain*, attached some numbers to the stereotype, estimating that "a woman uses about 20,000 words per day while a man uses about 7,000." Those numbers poured into the media, cited in *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*, and were also reported on CBS, CNN, and National Public Radio, taking on the stature of scientific fact.

But according to Matthias R. Mehl, a psy-

chology professor at the University of Arizona, Simine Vazire, at Washington University in St. Louis, and their colleagues at the University of Texas, Austin, up to now "no study has systematically recorded the natural conversations of large groups of people for

extended periods of time." Mark Liberman, a University of Pennsylvania linguistics professor, attempted last year to fill the void, analyzing tape-recorded conversations of 153 participants he discovered in a British archive. He found that the women spoke 8,805 words per day versus the men's 6,073, but noted that his findings were not conclusive, since his subjects were free to turn the recorders on and off.

Mehl and his colleagues tested 396 university student volunteers using an electronically activated recorder that "operates by periodically recording snippets of ambient sounds, including conversations, while participants go about their daily lives." Data from the study reveal that women spoke on average 16,215 words per day and men 15,669, a statistically insignificant difference. But the most talkative 17 percent were equally split between men and women. And the three biggest chatterboxes, gushing

EXCERPT

A Trillion Stars

Earth is a clump of iron and magnesium and nickel, smeared with a thin layer of organic matter and sleeved in vapor. It whirls along in a nearly circular orbit around a minor star we call the sun. . . . There are enough stars in the universe that if everybody on Earth were charged with naming his or her share, we'd each get to name a trillion and a half of them.

—ANTHONY DOERR, author of *Four Seasons in Rome* and other books, in *Orion* (July–Aug. 2007)