



Political Identity of Dagestanis

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Abstract: This article studies Political Identity of Dagestani people in the North Caucasus. At the first, I have defined a true theory of political identity, which is compatible with Dagestanis. This theory defines political identity in two aspects: grounded aspect, which is geography and history, and the social-environmental aspect, which includes culture (especially religion, costumes and ethnicity), modernity and economics. I have discussed any of these factors on Dagestan republic. Then I have seen Dagestani political identity as non-modern, costumed (under “Adet”s) and ethnics. I have used other studies which worked on the political sociology of Dagestanis, interviewed with the people who worked with Dagestanis (especially Iranian diplomats, scholars and university professors) and Russian and Dagestani online data (magazines, itinerary...).

Keywords: Central Asia, Caucasus, Identity, Russia, Dagestan

Introduction

Russian Muslims are 2 sects up to cultural, ethnical, historical, political and social factors: the first are the Muslim population of central Russia (Volga-Ural sect) and the second are southern Russia’s Muslim population (North Caucasus/ N.C.). These sections are geographic, in fact, as we see the Muslim population of the west southern Russia (North Caucasus) are not Russian but almost all are non-Russian, who are enclosed to Russian different from central Russian Muslims. The difference is an introduction to sectionalism of Russian Muslims in the other sects like cultural and identical elements. The Caucasians do not believe they are Rus-

sian, especially racially, ethnically, historically and in religion. The huge group of Russian Muslims, Tatars and Bashkirs, live in Volga-Ural, who are too numerous than the second part of Russian Muslim population (Caucasians). After the collapse of Russian Soviet, the deepest identification movements of Russian Muslim have grown in Caucasus, who is trying their traditions again (Gusejnov, 2005: 116). North Caucasian Muslims (like Chechens and Dagestanis) are more traditional and religious than Volga-Ural Tatars and Bashcorts. In all Russia, there is a real difference between rural Caucasian and urban Muslims which most of them live in central Russia.

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Dagestan, land of numerous ethnics

The most important republics of south Russia (N.C.) are Dagestan, Chechen and Ingushetia, whose are thickly populated and most of them are non-Russian. Also, the most radical Islamic groups grow up in this area. 80% of 1.802.183 Dagestanis are local ethnics and 9% of them are Russian and another ethnics (Slocum, 1995: 51). Even more, 90% of Dagestanis are Muslim (88% Shafeyi Sunni and the others, Azeri Shia) and 9% are Christians. There are a few Jews in this country. In 2001, 39.9% of Dagestanis were urban (Bell, 2003: 70). In 1980s, there was a 25% population growth in Dagestan and between Dagestani ethnics; Lezgis were on top with 22% (Chenciner, 1997: 56).

Dagestan is a land of different ethnics, which are gathered by decades. 102 ethnics and nations live in Dagestan which all have relevant power (Stepaniants, 2005: 35). 17 dominant ethnics include Avars, Dergins, Kumiks, Lezgis, Russians, Laks, Tabasarans, Azeris, Chechens, Nogays, Jews, Rutuls, Aguls, Tsakhurs, Ukrainians, Armenians and Tatars (Akiner, 1366: 150). The first 5 ethnics are the prevail population in Dagestan. Governmental and ministerial authors almost are from 14 ethnics (Arukhov, 2005: 123). There are 14 religions in Dagestan. The after majority of Sunni Muslims and the minorities of Shias (Azeris), Orthodox Christians (Rus-

sians) and Jews (Tats) and a few other unimportant minorities. Avars (more than 30% of Dagestani population) and Dergins (more than 15%) compete on gaining governmental and administrable posts (Gammer, 2008: 180). The only factor of correlation and union is Religion. Even if there is not Islamic Ummah in Dagestan, because none of Ummah basics are not exist in this republic. For example, Avars are more religious than the other ethnics but some ethnics like Legis totally are not a religious community. In 1990s "Gubden" with 10.000 Dargins had 25 mosques, but Lezgian "Akhti" with the same population had only one mosque (Khalidov, 1372: 131). Dergins are famous to be clever (Omel'Chenko et al, 2003: 215) and in Islamic faiths, they are moderated. By these factors, we cannot classify Dagestani ethnics by their religion, because in this faction they are thoroughly different from each other. Although ethnical factors are more powerful and prevalent (Bruce Ware & Kisriev, 1381: 220-221). Up to prominent role of Avars in Dagestan (Akiner, 1366: 163) some scholars thought that most Dagestanis are Avars, especially because when Russians conquered Central Asia (C.A.) and Caucasus in 18 century (Kolae, 1376: 99), Avars fight with them (Khan, 1996: 41). After this era, in 2 centuries, resistance in front of Russians is one of the most important factors of Dagestani identity (centralasia.imb.org).

Dagestani Ethnics (Gammer, 2008: 180)

Ethnics	1989		2002	
	Number (Thousands)	Percent	Number (Thousands)	Percent
Mountainers				
Avars	524	25.8	815	31.6
Dergins	314	15.5	425	16.5
Lezgies	231	11.4	336	13
Laks	98	4.8	140	5.4
Tabasarans	94	4.6	110	4.3
Rutuls	19	0.9	24	0.9

Aguls	18	0.9	23	0.9
Tats	11	0.5	3	0.1
Tsakhurs	8	0.3	8	0.3
Fielders				
Kumiks	249	12.3	336	14.2
Nogays	22	1.6	38	1.6
Foreigners				
Azeris	84	4.1	111	4.3
Chechens	62	3	88	3.4

The Role of Language in Dagestani Ethnical factions

After ethnical contacts and warfare, which improve with religious, ritual, traditional and local contrasts, there is other important contact between mountaineers and fielders. Mountaineers are the old Dagestanis who are same in some cultural nomos (Omel'Chenko et. al, 2003: 215). Their language is of Caucasian sect (Bruce Ware & Kisriev, 1381: 221). The fielders (Kumiks and Nugais) are immigrants whose language is from Turkish sect (Gammer, 2008: 183) & (Akiner, 1366: 151-152). Dagestani Ethnics can be classified up to their language and location:

1. Turkish cultivators who live in low high regions (Kumiks, Terkemeis, Azeris)
2. Mountaineers who work as shepherds and artisans (Avars, Dergins, Lezgis, Russians, Laks, Tabasarans, Rutuls, Aguls, Tsakhurs)
3. Jews who speaks Persian, live in Mountains and work as traders (Persians and tats) (Arukhev, 2005: 125)
4. Azeris, Ossetians and Tats whose language and race is Indo-European (Iranian) (Chenciner, 1997: 320).

Up to language and dialect of Turkish ethnics which usually is the most important factor in their classification, we can classify Dagestani ethnics to 3 language family:

1. Dagestan-Nakh group from sect of language family of Ibro-Caucasians which are Dergins (Kubachins & Kajtags),

Lezgis, , Laks, Tabasarans, Rutuls, Aguls, Tsakhurs, Chechens and Avars languages and dialects

2. Turkish group of Altai language family which are Kumiks, Azerbaijanies and Nugais

3. Indo-European language family, which are Russians, Tats and mountain Jews (Gorskie Evrei) (Arukhev, 2005: 125), & (Akiner, 1366: 158).

The Role of Geography in Dagestani Ethnical factions

Dagestan is a land of mountaineer villages. Many of them have lots of population but many others are not populous (Akiner, 1366: 152-153). "Kuli" is the biggest village in the republic with 10.000 population. The most elevated village, "Kheleturi" is not a populous one (Chenciner, 1997: 208). Up to the mountaineer, hard-life geography of Dagestan, Dagestanis are rationalist and sectionalists. The ethnics whose race is from western Dagestan (Avars, Dergins and Chechen-Akhins) are more traditionalists and have desires to Vahabism and Selefism. But the ethnics whose race is from eastern Dagestan (Kumiks, Lezgis, Russians, Laks) are modernized and so, do not desire to fundamentalism (Bruce Ware & Kisriev, 1381: 226). The most traditionalist area in Dagestan is "Tsunta-Akhvakh" (Chenciner, 1997: 52). Although however Dagestan is a mountaineer land and life is hard there, the people live in a family style. Mentally they are liberated, es-

pecially from governmental powers. Mountaineer geography of Dagestan has captured people in a canyon. Earning fuel is difficult especially in winter. Also in the cold, snowy winter the ways get block.

The Gap of Tradition-modernity and Facing Mountaineers with Fielders

Dagestanis believe in Turkish-Islamic traditions. Yet, they have some old Iranian-Zoroastrian rituals, too. In Dagestan (plus Chechnya) as the more traditionalist republics of Russian Federation (Stepaniants, 2005: 35) people speak on their own village and local dialect and live on their ethnic rituals (Omel'Chenko et. al, 2003: 215). They also have affected by communist and socialist ideas. Today in a globalized and liberalized world, they counter with fundamentalism, in one hand, and with the cultural modernity and Americanization of life style on the other hand. Then, Dagestanis who were on the rule of communism for about one decade confront with the identity crisis resulting facing communism, Islamic-Turkish religio-culture and new western modernization. They fight for their traditions, which are live in the shoes of old music, dance, rituals, cloths and wears. Life style of Dagestanis which has limited by economic, cultural, historical, political and literal elements, loving traditional stories (Nagils), friends and old enemies (specially Russians) are the most important factors of the Dagestani traditions. Most of the Dagestanis are Sufis who believe in traditional rituals (Stepaniants, 2005: 35).

Dagestani academician and intellectuals has grown up in the sphere of communist soviet or affected by it. They emphasis on internationalism that makes ethncialism and nationalism is indecent. This thought sphere

in not for common people as an ideal type (Omel'Chenko et. al, 2003: 219) and (Ware & Kisiriev, 2000: 23-33).

Encountering Russians and Dagestanis

Resistance of Dagestanis in front of Tsarist Empire is one of the longest cruel, rough, rude, and harsh battles Russia had ever (Bennigsen Broxup et.al, 1996: 20). Dagestanis had fought with Russians especially in 1880s (McLean, 1370 (1991): 7). Imam Shamil in 1859-1831 (Kelly, 2003: 123-126) and before him Sheikh Mansur, Naqshbandi Sufi, at the beginning of 1800s has fought with Russians (Zürcher, 2007: 14-15). So, Soviet Russia (S.R.) had a big program for Dagestanis which concerted on annihilation of religious and Islamic symbols like teachings, rituals, places (Mosues, Medresas...), teachers (mullas) and Islamic foundations. So, S.R. had expanded unbelievers (Akiner, 1994: 146). They changed the name of "ShamilQala" village, where Imam Shamil lead his fighters, to "Svetagorsk", means the light of mountain. Nevertheless, after collapse of Soviet in all Dagestan, people start to renew his memorials (Chenciner, 1997: 17-20). Nowadays Imam Shamil is a national character in Dagestani and even all Caucasian identities (Omel'Chenko & Sabirova, 2003: 183-184).

On the Bolshevik revolution, there were 2000 mosques in Dagestan. 800 villages had one or two mosques and some rural districts and towns had more. After revolution most of them had used as clubs, cultural or sport centers, cafés, restaurants and cinemas (Chenciner, 1997: 208, 212). Now in Dagestani history, Christians or Russians is equal with enemies and terminators. Even so, Islam for Dagestanis especially Avars

who fight with Russians is an identical factor since Churchly foundations had disappointed of their “guidance” (Christianize) (centralasia.imb.org).

The bid motherland war (as S.R. Called world great war II) for Dagestanis and many other Muslim ethnics and non-Muslim Russians was a great disaster, as well as, in some Dagestani villages half of men has killed in the frontiers (Chenciner, 1997: 14).

In S.R. era there were great changes, too. The start of soviet was a massacre, which the people have killed for 20 bloody revolutionary years. In Stalin era, many others especially Muslims has killed or exiled (Akiner, 1994: 176) & (Chenciner, 1997: 280). After all, there were the construction period, which literacy has limited, some ethnics entered to Politburo and grew up in the government. Welfare in many areas emerged, in spite of their poverty. Universities, factories, operas, towns and ... has built and the Soviet government tried to change traditional culture to a modern, Russian one.

After the collapse, the adornness of local and historical treasure made people to reopen and fix many old constructs. As only 27 open mosques had remained in Soviet Dagestan until 1985, at 2001, they reached to 1600. Today there are more than hundreds of Medresas and Islamic educational institutes (Stepaniants, 2005: 36). In 1997, 95% of population has told they are believers and half of them have told they use to do Islamic Ahkam (Bobrovinkov, 2001: 2, in: Omel'Chenko & Sabirova, 2003: 167). As from 1920s, Hajj was forbidden but at 1990, the first Karvan has departed to Mecca. The holy places has reopened, one of them was the cave which Imam Shamil had hidden there, near “Gunib” and the other was the Russian fort calls “Priyablijenski” (Пряближенски) which Dagestanis had conquered it in Imam

Shamil era (Chenciner, 1997: 221). Today general appetite to learn Quran, leads people to learn Arabic in this purpose. The holy Quran has translated to Dagestani languages and Arab countries send Qurans to the republics (Chenciner, 1997: 215, 217).

Dagestani Identity

Up to what we Glance here, Dagestanis identity has emerge from 3 sources:

1. Iranian rituals and symbols back to Achaemenian and Sassanid age (Minorski, 1375: 20-22) & (RayisNia, 1380: 10-27,36);
2. Pagani symbols, back to old Turkish creeds (Wiktor-Mach, 2009: 66) & (Bartold, 1366)
3. Islamic symbols and believes (Minorski, 1375: 26-29) & (RayisNia, 1380: 28)
4. All this factors in new Dagestan has mixed with modern Russian culture.

The effect of these factors was continuous. In Dagestani historical culture, for example, the light, water and fire are holy, all are Zoroastrian symbols. The importance of Arabic language and alphabet which was common especially before Russians come (Kelly, 2003: 124), and commonness of Turkish and Persian literature (Chenciner, 1997: 43) are another parts of this mixed identity. Symbolic influence of ancient Turkish faith appears on the depth relation with the Nature-God and pray for Tengre (or Tari or Tanri) (Khurmatullin, 2009: 106), believe on a life, powerful nature which they interact with it in a systematic organ that challenges to define a positive relation with Nature-God and the powerful soul of the nature in purpose to prevent immolate men for it with shifting natural powers to lead them in powerful way (Hosseini & Koolae, 2011: 41).

Iranian-Zoroastrian treasure and ancient Turkish customs has mixed with Islamic believes and now almost all Dagestani traditions has Islamic signs. There are no obvious non-Islamic factor in Dagestani culture, maybe because of Islam itself that when enter to a society, incorrect their culture and believes and learn new faith but do not destroy all old civilization. For example, in Dagestan there is a few Manavi (a sect of Zoroastrian) who marry with intimate families (Mahram), but Dagestanis hate this costume. Dagestanis call God as Allah or Tanri, try to pray him and happy his lord. There are lots of peoples and places have Pahlavi (ancient Iranian language) names, like "Kurush" village (a name of Achaemenian king (Shah)) in Alpine Dagestan. Even if polygamy is Halal in Islam, there is a few families who regard this nomos and most Dagestanis prefer monogamy. Divorce in Dagestan is very low and gay-lesbianism is a little (Chenciner, 1997: 54, 64-65).

We have to add Russian elements to this cultural and identical collection (*Lemercier-Quelquejay*, 1377: 41, 63). In some regions, especially at the cities, borders that are near to Russia, or Russian population and Christians, there are bold Russian-Christian's costumes that live up on the shoes of modernity. In the communist regions, like "Clubs" as the central communist village of Dagestan, the role of modernity as Russian orthodoxy culture is obviously bold. The Russians were the biggest opposition, rationally, ethnically, by religion and language, in Dagestan till 1990, but now consist only 9% of population (Bell, 2003: 70). Most of them who remained in Dagestan, now culturally has become Dagestani but racially and by religion they continue to be

Russian-Orthodox (Omel'Chenko et. al, 2003: 222). Yet the un-Russian ethnics, almost Muslims, in Dagestan are more believers in their religion and traditions than Russians (Lehmann, 1998: 483) are.

Today Dagestan: Anti-modernity or Try to exist?

After collapse of S.R. north Caucasus drained in gaps and uncontrollably, the ethnical gaps avec bankrupt of Soviet economy (Stepaniants, 2005: 35) which enforced hundreds of Dagestanis to depart another republics seeking a job (Emerson & Tocci, 2000: 43-44). Nowadays the range of unemployment in Dagestan is very high (Bruce Ware & Kisriev, 1381: 220), official-fiscal corrupt even in comparison with Russia itself (as a topper in this stage) is too high (Musez, 1381: 160). People are Grumbling of Power outage, in MakhchQala and Derbent, capital and the biggest city; they waste their electric utensil by this problem (Zalasky, 2010). Russia prevents foreigners to invest in Caucasus and itself has leaved this region. Today, the people of N.C. have 2 choose:

1. Fight with Russia, that will bring disaster and slaughter for them;
2. Continue living in this situation that is another chooses for disaster and Diaspora (Chenciner, 1997: 84).

What modernity has brought for Dagestanis The first achievement of it was Imam Shamils fights (Kolae, 1377: 248) which had ended to deception of Dagestanis by Russians and enslavement of Imam, lead to slaughtering of Dagestanis (Kelly, 2003: 82,123-126,160). "Magomedsalam M. Magomedov" a state criticizer believes that force and contrast in Caucasus region makes

instability. The violence in Dagestan has root in the undemocratic participation of big ethnics (Avars, Dergins, Kumiks and Lezgies) (Akiner, 1366: 169-190) & (Bruce Ware & Kisriev, 1381: 221-222).

In these years some Islamic militant like "Jamaat Islam" are the new character of tension in Caucasus. Up to common borders and culturally and historically close community destination of Dagestanis and Chechens, the effect of Chechen 2 wars on Dagestan is more than other republics. "Jamaat Islam" group is close to Chechen independence movements, who attack to government officials, religion leaders, police, ministerial departments, economic bases and ways (Zalasky, 2010). About the influence of Chechen unrests, we saw that "Shamil Basaev" leader of Chechen militants get the leader of Dagestani radicals (Emerson & Tocci, 2000: 42) and used Jordanian "Khattab" and his forces in Dagestan (Zürcher, 2007: 70-100). Pro-Vahabism Dagestanis, who generally are youth, educated and urban (Bruce Ware & Kisriev, 1381: 228), live in mountains, "Kalakhmakha" village is in the focus of it (Maryniak, 1999: 53). So "Jamaat Islam" and "Hizb-ul Tahrir" improve in Caucasus and C.A. but in big and rich cities like Moscow and Kazan, they cannot obviously show up (Силантьев, 2008: 415).

After Chechens wars, Vahabism collected in "KizilYurt", KhasavYurt" and "Buinask" and made 2 groups: "Nihzah" and "Jamat Muslimin" who have TV channel, satellite and press co. Then they gathered in Jamaat (community) of "Karamakhi" in Dagestan. This Jamaat is from Chechen "Auls" in Buinask region. In 1996 this Jamaat was ruling in the region in space of the state: they notice the alcoholics, smokers, prostitutes, drunks and druggers to stop, and if they do not notice Jammatis punish them on the Is-

lamic rules (Hadd). Even more inattentions by these unbelievers may make them to leave the region (Gammer, 2008: 185). It shows that the lack of central powerful state with expansion of corrupt has let Vahabism as a traditionalist faith to make people safe. Although American army in the region along with security forces of Russian army has increased the unsafe feeling of live which let the radical groups expand their rule (Deters-Schneider, 1381: 200); Even if whom work with Vahabism are a few (just 3% of Dagestanis has introduced themselves as Vahabism (Bruce Ware & Kisriev, 226)), because most of Dagestanis are Sufies who in thoughts and rituals are completely different from Vahabism (Chenciner, 1997: 280). After Putin first era, central power of state has potentiated and administration has expanded. In this period, "Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Dagestan (Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Dagestana (DUMD))" in the supervision of "Russian Religious Council" has improved, then activities of Vahabism peeked and opponent leaders had arrested (Gammer, 2008: 187). But up to governmental relations in Russia and Dagestan which is on the base of family, party and clan's commendation and economic shares, there are a few real resulted reforms, there (Musez, 1381: 164). Even more, Dagestanis who never entered in Chechen wars were afraid of genocide and cruelty of Russian army. But they try their best to help Chechens by feeding and sheltering the refugees (Chenciner, 1997: 280).

Conclusion: the Influence of Politico-social gaps on Dagestani Identity

Dagestan as the traditionalist and religious republic of Russian Federation is places for dense gaps, which are aggregated by decades and make the society always live in all-aspect

tension and encountering. These gaps have shaped on ethnically and religious split between the mountaineers and fielders, villagers and burghers and deep by encountering historical enemies specially Russian and their culture and modernity, which try to obscure Dagestani localism and their Iranian-Islamic-Turkish culture. In this behalf, the basics of Dagestani identity is mixed, criss-cross and dense and the historical (tensions and wars especially with central states), geographical (living in mountains), social (ethnicalism) influence all aspects of Dagestani identity. For example, election is not a political affair in Dagestan, but an ethnical one. The ethnic powers determine what party or leader had to proceed and pay poll Bruce Ware & Kisriev, 1381: 234). The efficiency and successfulness of authors belong to this ethnical relation. How and how much people obey the authors is an ethnical affair, too (Chenciner, 1997: 270).

The ethnical structure which mixed with racial (Russian) ruling makes ethnical encountering in Dagestan. For example "Adelgeri Magomedtagirov" minister of internal affair and the main rival of president "Mukhu Aliyev" in a wedding at 2006 have killed (Zalasky, 2010).

Religion is the next identical characteristic which plays an important role. Up to this fact that Sufism is the main trend of Islam in Dagestan, the 2 grand branch (Tariqat); Qaderis and Naqshbandies (*Bennigsen Broxup et.al.*, 1996: 145) & (Taheri & HashemiNasab, 1389: 25-27) & (Westerlund & Svanberg, 1999: 409-410) play identical role. Naqshbandiye has a complex structure and then is more powerful. Even if Sufis do not interest in politics but sometime to support their followers and faction, they participate in political collu-

sions. Among them, we can mention "Sheikh Sa'id Efendi Chirkawi" from "Shirkei" El (tribe) who is the leader of Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Daghestan, too (Gammer, 2008: 185) & (Zelkina, 1996: 240-251).

Vahabism activities have increased and they are the other religious group who influence shaping identity. Some scholars have reported that Ulama, Sheikhs and Ishan/Hamans accompany with Vahabism leaders (Chenciner, 1997: 209-210), but originally the basics of Sufism are in contrast with Vahabism. Other scholars report that Vahabism force to hinder local Sheikhs and Ulamas and weaken them. Even "Sheikh Ahmed Akhtaev", the Salafi judge is in target (Gammer, 2008: 188). However, Vahabism and Sufis in some motifs like return to funds are unanimous but these exemplars are too contingent. The political interests compel radical leaders like "NafqulAllah Ashirov" the head of "The Union of Muftis of Russia (SMR)" and "Spiritual Board of Moslems in Asian Russia (DUM ASHR)" (March, 2009: 92) support Salafis and Vahabism. Naqshbandiye Tariqah who more than 200 years had fight with taskmaster powers has rituals like silent Zikr (Chenciner, 1997: 212), Tavassul, Ziyarat which facing them in front of Vahabism. However ethnicity is the most powerful factor which affects all this religious-faction elements.

Geography is the third factor that affect identity, in company with the 2 other cited factors. For example, Naqshbandiye as the most expanded Tariqah in Caucasus and C.A. has branched to 3 section by their location and ethnicity: followers of "Sheikh Hassan Avar" in "Kakhib"; followers of "Sheikh Ali Dargin" in "Akusha" and indus-

trial regions; and “Amay” group who had fought with communist and terminated (Chenciner, 1997: 213).

Fighting with Tsarist Empire and Soviet communism and their “modernity” is another processor factor that helped to fragile Dagestani identity to accumulate crisscross gaps.

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