

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

**ISLAM IN SOCIO-POLITICAL LIFE OF AZERBAIJAN: PART OF IDENTITY OR
AGENT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?**

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Introduction.....	iii
Literature Review.....	1
Research questions/Hypothesis.....	9
Theoretical Framework.....	9
Methodology.....	10
Islam in Azerbaijan: Historical Background.....	13
Chapter1: Islam in Political Life of Azerbaijan (2009-2013).....	20
Chapter 2: Islam in Social Life of Azerbaijan (2009-2013).....	32
Chapter 3: Islam in Azerbaijan as a Driving Force for Social Movement.....	47
Conclusion.....	55
Bibliography.....	58

List of Abbreviations

CMB	Caucasus Muslim Board
DEVAMM	Centre for Protection of Conscience and Religious Freedom
DV	Diyanet Vakfi (Turkish Religious Foundation)
DIB	Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Turkish Religious Affairs)
IPA	Islamic Party of Azerbaijan
IWPR	Institute for War and Peace reporting
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
SCWRO	State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations

Abstract

Given the current environment of Azerbaijan, latest repressions and religious protests, it is relevant to understand what role Islam plays or does it actually have any influence on the process of shaping the current developments in the country. In the age of turmoil, when we already witnessed Arab Spring, continuous disorder in Egypt and Syrian Civil War, it is relevant to look at different countries, where religious divisions are existent and moreover, where Islam is considered to be a part of national identity. The paper intends to examine the changes in the role of Islam¹ in Azerbaijan in a period of 2009 to 2013. It focuses on the status of Islam in social and political life of Azerbaijan, more specifically religiosity of Azerbaijani society, religious organizations and parties of the country, level of population mobilization around those organizations and the state policy on religion. The overall aim of the paper is to look at manifestations of Islam after the 2009 legal as well as administrative restrictions imposed on religion by the state, find out whether Islam is growing in the country and whether the revival of Islam in Azerbaijani society contributes to the emergence of social movement in the country.

¹ The term Islam and religion is used interchangeably in the paper

Introduction

“Islam in Azerbaijan is partly social/identity-glue, historically and culturally; it is also a fundamental aspect of patriarchal traditionalism and conservatism. Islam also provides possibilities for allegiances to other countries’ and groups’ interests”(Kotecha 2006, 3). Islam in Azerbaijan is a multilayer phenomenon, for about two-third of population is Shiite Muslims, while the rest are Sunnis. Still there is a divide between Sunni-Salafism, often called Wahhabism, and Sunni-Sufism, two different interpretations of Sunni Islam that has been the cause of various conflicts in the world. This division is mostly explained by the fact that today’s Azerbaijani territory historically was ruled by different powers, mainly Shiite Persian Empire and Sunni Ottoman Empire (Swietochowski 2002; Balci 2004; Kotecha 2006; Motika 2001).

In 1918 Azerbaijan was proclaimed a secular-nation state to avoid the breakup of the territory as a result of fostered sentiments and to unite the population of the area. For a long time Azerbaijan has been considered to be among the secular states in the Muslim community. The reasons underlying this phenomenon were mainly attributed to the seventy years, spent under the control of the proponent of state atheism Soviet Union. However, it is stated that Islam never vanished from the life and consciousness of the Azerbaijanis. It remained part of national identity and the feature distinguishing Azerbaijanis from the other Christian population in the Caucasus (Swietochowski 2002; Balci 2004). After gaining independence, influences of different Muslim countries bordering Azerbaijan deepened religious moods and in recent years, despite the government’s efforts to take the religion under control, an increase in the delivery of Islamic values and norms has been witnessed (Kotecha 2006; Cornell 2011; Motika 2001).

Literature Review

“Islamic revival refers to the support for an increased influence of Islamic values on the modern world as a response to Western and secular trends. Accordingly, a return to Islam in its purest form is seen as the solution for the ills of Islamic societies” (Oxford Islamic Studies 2014). Revival of Islam in most of Muslim countries emerged as a determinant and demander of changes in social reality of the country (Karcic 1997). Many scholars have argued that return to Islamic roots is a transnational phenomenon that possesses similar characteristics; such as polycentrism, persistence and pervasiveness. Islamic revival in most of the countries comes in similar manifestations; increase in religiosity of the society, emergence of religious institutions, mosques, Islamic schools, publication of Islamic books and newspapers, getting religious education abroad etc. (Karcic 1997; Dekmejian 1980; Nagata 1980; Howell 2001; Hasan 2002; Houben 2003; Naumkin 1992).

Recent evidence suggests that the causes of Islamic revival are multi-dimensional; Achcar and Warschawski (2007) argue that Islamic movements of 21st century have most of all been affected by Western interventionism, the revival of Islamic Republic of Iran and by the long legacy of Islamic civilizations, while Gunaratna (2002) and Pape (2005) explain the resurgence of Islam by political, economic and social impact of Western as well as Soviet “imperialism”, pressure by the introduction of “modern world” ideas and systems and by the failure of the governments of the Muslim societies to establish legitimate public order. Contrary to the aforementioned phenomena Islam offers its own version of legitimization, notion of social justice, belief that it provides just and fair social-economic order. This is the reason why in developing countries Islam appears as a means to solve political, economic and social problems and unites people around it generating social movements (Dekmejian 1980; Nagata 1980).

Social movements are defined as “broad, intentional efforts by organized collective actors who seek to alter patterns of authority, power, social values, or behavior” (Guidry, Kennedy, and

Zald 2000, 616). Diani and Bison present another definition of social movements, explaining them as “networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity” (Diani and Bison 2004, 282). However, the paper relies on the definition given by Amenta et. al (2000) that combines the two above mentioned definitions, “ Social movements are collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally biased, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part” (Amenta et al. 2004, 11). Fozi (2010) argues that Islamic movements are social movements directed to the quest for the identity, for finding ones place in contemporary world. Fozi (2010) in the same vein with many other scholars finds the causes of Islamic revival in Western colonization, domestic authoritarian regimes, and efforts of rapid secularization of Muslim society (Achcar and Warschawski 2007; Gunaratn 2002; Pape, 2005). He argues, though, that contemporary Islamic movements have multiple layers and manifestations and the above mentioned factors are not enough to generate social movement; the support of subjective factors and religious orders are strong determinants that add up to the causes of Islamic revival (Fozi 2010).

Considerable amount of literature has been published about Islamic revival in different countries. The review of these studies will shed a light on the main similarities and distinctions of Islamic resurgence outlined above. For instance, Nagata in his study conducted in Malaysia argues that Islam has been “an agent and a symbol” of most of social changes in Malaysia and lied at the centre of the crisis of legitimacy of Malaysian government. Islamic resurgence in Malaysia was foremost the direct result of its domestic politics; though the impact of external forces, mainly the Islamic republic of Iran cannot be neglected. Thus, combined impact of internal as well as external developments strengthened the resurgence of Islam in the country and the revival of Islam in

Malaysia led to the social mobilization, rise of social movement and penetration of Islam into Malay politics (Nagata 1980; Houben, 2003; Sundaram and Cheek 1988).

In Indonesia Islam as well became the fostering factor for the mobilization of the society. Howell (2001) argues that Islam in Indonesia not only attracted the society of lower class, because of hardships experienced like in many other Muslim societies, but inspired new enthusiasm even in the sectors of Indonesian society engaged in modernization and globalization processes. Islam in Indonesia, contrary to Malaysia, during its revival became utilized mostly as a discursive centre of different social movements rather than an end point (Howell 2001; Hasan 2002; Houben 2003).

Revival of Islam in the Balkans at the beginning of the 1990s was as well a part of the movement against the “illegitimate government”. It started simply by “revitalization” of usual functions of religion. In Bulgaria, state continuous efforts to restrict Islam, persecutions against Muslims gave rise to many social Islamic movements like “Movement for freedom and liberty”. Karcic (1997) argues that in Albania, one of the Balkan countries, increased popular interest in Islam and its revival in fact overthrew “the Communist oppressive regime” of the country. However, in Albania as well, everything started on societal level; public prayers and construction of mosques. The development of Islam in Balkans “was a part of greater social change in the former Communist countries,” (Karcic 1997, 578). The same happened in Central Asia, where Islam united the middle and lower classes. There many young people were perceiving Islam as a solution to their problems. (Eickelman 1993). The disappointed population of Central Asia turned its head towards religion, which gave birth to the radicalized Islam in the countries (Tazmini 2001; Akiner 2003). Tazmini (2001) argues that Islam can become “a vehicle of protests” against the Central Asian authoritarian regimes. He argues that in Central Asian countries if moderate Islamic movements are denied to be part of politics than the region may become vulnerable to extremism. This reasoning is explained by the fact that Islam in general is an enchanting ideology for the oppressed populace. In Kyrgyzstan,

for instance, Islam provides the organizational and ideological framework of for the opposition (Zelkina 1999). While in Tajikstan it is argued that Islam was one of the factors that led to the breakup of the civil war in the country (Akiner 2003). Scholars state that like in Central Asia in other former countries of the USSR Islam rose as a form of political protest. Naumkin (1992) posits that in these countries, after certain period Islam turned into a symbol of identity, force for social mobilization and change.

The revival of Islam in the former Muslim countries of the Soviet Union (Central Asia, Azerbaijan, and North Caucasus) possesses common traits particularly because of 70 years long socialist legacy. Authors argue that Islam slept deep inside the Muslim societies of the Soviet Union because of restrictions. That is the primary reason why it starts gradually swimming to surface during Gorbachev era, when Soviet opened up to the world, when external Islamic powers came to play a major role. Political forces in these republics, being well aware of the mobilizing potential of Islam, adopted it as legitimizing tool. Islam started to revive from society, restoring cultural roots then getting into politics (Anderson 1994; Pelkmans 2009; Yemelianova 2009).

Authors in the same vein argue that is not right to generalize as in each of the former soviet Muslim countries Islam revives in its particular way. Whereas in Central Asia the resurgence of Islam was somehow similar, in the North Caucasus and Azerbaijan manifestations of the religion differed a lot (Trofimov 1995; Balci 2004; Motika 2001; Naumkin 1992). Literature reviewed revealed that there is a consensus among some social scientists that Islam is intolerant and consequently conflict prone and possesses the ability to promote conflict by influencing the identity, loyalty and political goals of people. Toft et al. (2011) argue that “religion is a basic driver of politics in its own right” (Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011, 219). “Islam from its very foundation had marked reform and protest character,” (Waardenburg 1985, 21).

Some scholars posit that Islam is closely associated with political violence (Waardenburg 1985; Canetti et al. 2010; Karakaya 2013; Toft 2007). Toft (2007) argues that starting from 1940 to 2000 from overall 42 religious civil wars, Islamic factor was involved in 81% of the cases, far more than other religions. Islamic belief and Islam in general in contemporary world are assumed to be source of political protests and violence (Toft 2007). Based on his research carried out in Turkey in late 20th century Göle(1996) states that Islamic values and beliefs play a prominent role in defining the political protest. In Turkey since 1990s Islamist movements have appeared at the political as well as social centre by the way of the creation of symbols and values in the “course of change.” (Göle 1996; Kalaycioglu 2007). In other words, the world has experienced the rise of radical Islam, while the rise of Islamic sentiments in a myriad of cases correlates with the breakup of social movements (Dalacoura 2011; ;Hafez 2003; Huntington 1996; Toft 2007; Fozi 2010; Canetti et al. 2010; Fish et al. 2010).

Azerbaijan, like all the countries mentioned above, as well stands as a unique country when it refers to Islamic revival and to the aforementioned practices and theories. Numerous studies have attempted to explain the revival of Islam in Azerbaijan by connecting it with several factors; ideological disorientation, quest for national and cultural identity and Karabakh conflict (Lemercier-Quellejey 1984; Croissant 1998; Cornell 2006; Valiyev 2005). Valiyev (2005) argues that above mentioned factors are the ones, which define the place of Islam in modern Azerbaijan even nowadays. Conversely, Goyushov (2008) posits that revival of Islam in Azerbaijan cannot be regarded as the re-assertion of previously repressed religious sentiments, but as emergence of new religion that has been imported by outside powers and various actors. Meanwhile, other authors state that after the collapse of the Soviet Union both internal and external forces and political atmosphere have favored and supported to the revival of Islam in Azerbaijan (Geybullayeva 2007; Balci and Goyushov 2013). “The rise of radical groups in Azerbaijan over the last few years is no doubt an

outcome of corruption, poverty and semi-authoritarian government that contributed to the rise of Islamic activity domestically; disillusionment with the West and support for radical Islamic groups from countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the North Caucasus fuelled the rise of fundamental Islam.” (Geybullayeva 2007, 2).

Some scholars claim the Shia-Sunni division and “intruded” Wahhabism² in the country was not a concern in Soviet times, as the society of Azerbaijan was secularized. After the resurgence of Islamic belief the issue came into the arena (Cornell 2006; Geybullayeva 2007; Valiyev 2005). The religious elements and specific factors found in Azerbaijan in the 21st century are often associated with the ones that were present in Iran in 1970s, right 9 years before the Islamic revolution; specifically the hardships, disappointment society experiences and the growing religious sentiments (Valiyev 2005). Like in many other Muslim and former Soviet countries the revival of Islam in Azerbaijan initially occurred on societal and personal level; rise in religiosity of society, attendance to mosques, following religious traditions, publication of Islamic books, religious education abroad etc (Sattarov 2009; Cornell 2011; Motika 2001). Though some political Islamic forces emerged in Azerbaijan after its independence, later they have been banned by the government of Azerbaijan. The reason for that was the fact that those forces by making use of Islam and incorporating it into their agendas, in fact created a religious opposition, thus threatening the incumbent regime of that time. At the beginning of 1990s, when Islam was uncontrolled by the state, many foreign movements in the face of Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and North Caucasus entered Azerbaijan. Among those forces authors highlight the influential communities; Juma and Abu Bakr Mosques. The communities of those mosques enjoyed public sympathy, one among Shias, the other among Salafis. The latter one has often been associated with Muslim radicalism and extremism as it

² Wahhabism/Salafism branch of Sunni Islam that is considered to be radical one. The paper uses the term interchangeably

maintained certain ties with North Caucasus Salafis (Sattarov 2009; Bedford 2009; Souleimanov and Ehrmann 2013).

In the atmosphere of uncertainty and personalized Islamic sentiments in post-Soviet reality of Azerbaijan, the spread of Salafi movement in the country, “covert” character of Abu Bakr, in contrast to “overt” character of Juma Shia community, is explained by the latter’s ability to pass the message in a most appropriate way to the religious community of Azerbaijan (Bedford 2009; O’rear 2012). “The mobilization of Islamic activism in Azerbaijan is still going strong” states Bedford (2009) meanwhile positing that the mobilization of Shiite and Sunnis has become complete two different movements, though both of the streams in Azerbaijan get support from foreign actors and movements. This foreign support from diverse actors fosters mutual distrust and competition between the two movements contributing to the strengthening of both trends and failure of a secular state. Turkey’s impact makes Sunnis³ stronger and frustrates Shia missionaries. Salafi leaders refuse even the dialogue with Shia leaders. Almost any paper that has been written in Islam argues that there is no potential for Sunni movement in Azerbaijan, as there is a limited number of Sunnis and they don’t have a legitimate independent Sunni leader. At the same time this does not exclude the possibility of the Salafis’ resorting to violence or initiation of social movements, which could become a major problem and threat to the county’s secular nature. Big financial support from Middle East together with government’s rough approach to Salafis contributes to the emergence of Salafi movement that would most likely be of violent character (Balci 2004; Valiyev 2005; Wilhelmsen 2009; Nedeia, Jafarov, and Mamadov 2012). What comes to Shia branch, the authors argue that the increasing religiosity of the people belonging to this branch is directly attributable to Iranian influence. The population of Southern Azerbaijan bordering Iran is considered to be highly religious. The authors explain the development of Shia Islam foremost by the emergence of popular

³ Sufi

Juma mosque and Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (IPA), an illegal party created in Nardaran village. Shia protests are common in Azerbaijan. Absheron Peninsula, South Azerbaijan is the main spots of Iranian Shia Islam (Geybullayeva 2007; Nedea, Jafarov and Mamadov 2012)

Valiyev (2005) claims that if the situation doesn't change in Azerbaijan the religious organizations will foster Islamic moods in the country by the assistance of foreign donors. Whereas Balci in his article, written in 2004, opens up two scenarios of the development of the Islam in Azerbaijan; either the authority would succeed in tackling the growing religion, at least by creation of "national Islam" through its policy or the implosion of peaceful coexistence between these different religious groups would take place conditioned primary by activism of foreign missionaries (Balci 2004). Nedea et al. (2012) agrees with the first scenario of Balci, considering the first one to be unlikely. He states that in spite of this "uncontrolled radical Islamism" situation in the country, the government policies towards radicalism and Islam generally are inadequate, specifically the failure to gain legitimacy for the Supreme Board of Muslims of the South Caucasus, the religion institution set mainly to take control of religion in the country. Goyushov (2008) argues that the measures used by the government partially restrict Islamic sentiments and keep it out of politics. In addition, the author also states that it is temporarily as the history shows that after stagnation any phenomena reemerges with even stronger force. Goyushov states that in spite of "reawakened Sunni and Shiite consciences" Azerbaijani society still is "a very secularized society," (Goyushov 2008).

On the other hand, other scholars claim that as a result of the years following the independence and the revival of Islamic sentiments in the country, the Islamic ideology has become visible in Azerbaijani society. It is now usual to meet young men or women, who observe Muslim traditions and dress according to Islamic tradition. Different powers use religion to achieve the political ends they long for. Young generations in Azerbaijan are subject to uncontrolled radical Islamic propaganda in mosques as well as religious communities (Geybullayeva 2007; Goyushev

2008; Nedeia, Jafarov and Mamadov 2012). Bedford and Geybillaeva posit that Islamic influence is growing in the country and the only alternative to the current political environment is the radicalization of Islam (Bedford 2009; Geybullayeva, 2007).

Summing up the section, the paper brings the argument of Wiktorowicz (2004), who posits that Islam's not being studied as the only determining factor of the movements is a major loophole that prevents the scholars from explaining the rise of Islam. Based on Wiktorowicz's argument, the paper takes Islamic revival as a determining variable to predict the emergence of social movement in Azerbaijan.

Research Questions/Hypothesis

The paper will give an answer to the following research questions:

Research question#1: Has Islam been growing in Azerbaijan since the restrictions imposed on expression of religion in 2009?

Research question#2: Does the revival of Islam in Azerbaijani society contribute to the social mobilization in the country?

The paper will test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis1#: Revival of Islam in Azerbaijan serves as an alternative avenue for the emergence of social movements in the country.

Theoretical Framework

Political events in the Muslim world (Islamic Republic of Iran, Syria, Egypt, Libya etc.) in recent years drew attention to social as well as political potential of Islam. In late 20th and early 21st century religion hasn't receded in the Muslim countries, but on the contrary became as an inseparable part of both social and political life of the country. In recent studies on Islam two major

trends can be identified: the first one regards to the political Islam as a challenge to international order. The followers of this trend view Islam only in terms of violence and fundamentalism that threatens the international order (Wiktorowicz 2005; Esposito 2010). The followers of the second trend consider Islam not as an ideology but rather as cultural variant the significance of which depends on certain processes and timeframe (Linjakumpu 2007) “Islam therefore is not an ideology but a religious-cultural-political framework for engagement on issues that most concern politically engaged Muslims” (Fuller 2003, 193).

The paper uses the theoretical framework suggested by Ayoob (2009) and Deneux (2002), where Islam is regarded as a political ideology rather than a theology. The authors see Islamism ideology as a tool used by political parties or social groups to promote their economic, social and political objectives in various contexts (Ayoob 2009, Deneux 2002). The paper takes the definition of Deneux, according to whom political Islam “is a form of instrumentalisation of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives,” (Deneux 2002; p 61). In addition the paper takes Toft et. al’s (2009) and Wardenberger’s approach to Islamic religion, according to which Islam has protest nature and certain characteristics that help to mobilize society, “Islam from its very foundation had marked reform and protest character,” (Waardenburg 1985, 21).

Methodology

The research paper uses mixed (both quantitative and qualitative) method to answer the research questions and prove the hypothesis.

Certain indicators are developed to measure political as well as social dynamics of Islam in Azerbaijan in the period covered by the paper. In the paper also an attempt is made to understand whether those dynamics contribute to the emergence of social movement in the country. The

indicators were developed based on the definition of Islamic revival and social movement taken by the paper. The following are the indicators:

- In Azerbaijan the Muslims, who are more religious, are more inclined to participate in protest actions,
- In Azerbaijan there are more protest actions in religious regions of the county than in other parts,
- In Azerbaijan massive armed clashes are mostly generated by religious issues

The paper needs to meet all the indicators to prove the hypothesis.

Quantitative data: The dataset of Caucasus Barometer, a yearly nationwide representative survey conducted in the three republics of the South Caucasus, including Azerbaijan, (2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013), is used to conduct analysis and find out the relationship between Islamic revival and emergence of social movement in Azerbaijan. The following variables in the dataset are used as independent variables under the framework of the paper,

- Religiosity,
- The importance of religion,
- Following religious traditions (fasting),
- Attendance to religious services

The dependent variable is

- Participation in protest actions

Correlation and multiple regression analyses are carried out with the aforementioned variables, models are built to answer the research questions and meet the first indicator: There is a positive relationship between religiosity and protest orientation in Azerbaijani society.

Qualitative data: Content analysis of Azerbaijani state documents, international reports and media resources are conducted to collect and analyze the data for the period covered by paper. Protests

against religious restrictions, Islam promoting activities of religious communities, religious mosques and political parties, government policy towards religion are the categories of the content analysis.

Descriptors are presented below:

- How many protests in a period of 2009-2013 did take place in Azerbaijan?
- How many of those protests were in religious context?
- What religious issues specifically were people mobilized around?
- What form and shape did the protests have?
- How many religious communities and independent mosques operate in the country currently?
- What are their activities specifically focused on?
- What are the activities of the only Islamic party left (IPA) in Azerbaijan?
- What is the government's policy towards Islam in the country?
- Does the policy limit itself to only on official level or are there any unofficial means through which the government controls Islam?

The sources of media content analysis include

- The Russian language Azerbaijani sources (Haqqin.az, Turan, APA)⁴
- Russian language Russian sources (kavkaz-uzel.ru.ru)
- English language Western sources (EurasiaNet.org, IWPR)

Certain keywords were used to search for the data from the aforementioned news agencies and news portals:

- Islam
- Protest
- Clash
- Mosque

⁴ Azerbaijani websites were selected based on the knowledge of experts; the governmental as well as independent and opposition media sources were consulted

- Religious community

The content analyses are conducted to meet the next two indicators:

- In Azerbaijan there are more protest actions in religious regions of the county than in other parts,
- In Azerbaijan massive armed clashes are mostly generated by religious issues

To support the findings 5 face-to-face expert interviews were conducted with the specialists on Azerbaijani and Islamic studies. The length of each interview was from 1 to 1.30 hour. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions (See Appendix 1).

Islam in Azerbaijani Republic

Historical Background

The resurgence of Islam in Azerbaijan experienced an early awakening after the country gained its independence. Growth of religiosity among the Muslim population of the country as well as organization of religious structures was observed in newly independent Azerbaijan. As Motika notes, “the phenomenon of a religious renaissance taking place in parallel with a ‘national rebirth’ or ‘birth’ is a fact which cannot be ignored,” (Motika 2001, 11). Already in the early 1990’s more than hundred Azerbaijani pilgrims left for hajji to Mecca and several mosques (approximately 80) were opened in the country. The government engaged in organization of religious institutions in Azerbaijan; that is establishment of legal framework for religion, construction and restoration of mosques, publication of books on Islam, Islamic Studies and so on (Sattarov 2009; O’rear 2013). The government’s initial policy towards religion suggests that Azerbaijani authorities launched Islamization in the country primarily to fill the ideological gap aimed to consolidate people of the territory, create national identity and preserve the nation-state called Azerbaijan. The Caucasus

Muslim Board (CMB), which has operated in the territory of Azerbaijan since Tsarist times⁵, became the official state-sponsored organization to oversee Muslim religious institutions and activities in Azerbaijan. Under the head of CMB Allahshukur Pashazadeh first official religious newspaper “Islam newspaper” was published in the country and various programs, devoted to Islam, were launched on TV. In the same year the first official translation of Quran was published (Cornell 2006; Chobanyan 2013). However, the CMB didn’t enjoy popularity and respect among the Azerbaijanis, as its head Pashazadeh like in Soviet times, in the independent republic as well, continued to support the incumbent authorities and “serve as a tool in their hands for state propaganda” (Goltz 1999; Cornell 2006; Chobanyan 2013). In early 1990s different Islamic groups emerged in the arena such as Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (IPA), Azerbaijani Islamic Party of Progress, Islamic society of New Azerbaijan. Even an armed group of Islamists was created called Islamic Army (Sattarov 2009; Cornell 2006; Tohidi 1996). The state didn’t manage to keep the religion under its control from the very beginning, the wave of revival was so strong that it slipped out of hands of the government and started to develop on its own acquiring various forms and shapes. The neighboring Muslim countries, that is Iran and Turkey as well as other major Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and others took advantage of the newly born state and the revival of Islam in the country (Swietochowski 2002, Motika 2001). Thus, various branches and streams of Islam from those countries penetrated into Azerbaijan. Each country wanted to draw Azerbaijan closer to itself and make it its space of influence.

Under the first president of the Azerbaijani Republic, Ayaz Mutalibov the country was intensively islamized. Mutalibov tried to create good relations with the world Muslims; countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Egypt, Iraq, Syria etc) as well as organizations. Mutalibov, through the mediation of CMB, welcomed Islamic organizations such as Organization of Islamic Conference

⁵ In 1872 in Tsarist Russia Spiritual Administration of Transcaucasia Shia and Sunni Muslims was created, in 1959 it was renamed as Administration of Caucasus Muslims in 1990 got the name of Caucasus Muslim Board

and the World Muslim League into the country. However, at that time Azerbaijan, a newly created fragile state, had only two policy options, either it follows the model of its neighboring Islamic Republic of Iran or secular model of Turkey (Sattarov 2009; Cornell 2006).

The next president of the country, Abulfaz Elçibey introduced religious symbolism into Azerbaijan, meanwhile being more nationalistic, than religious. Emphasizing the role of Islam he opposed its interference into politics and mainly supported pan-Turkism ideology. A law on freedom of religion was adopted. The religious organizations became completely free and they were not supervised by CMB as before (Sattarov 2009; Motika 2001). From this time on Iran and Turkey started to influence the religion in Azerbaijan. The number of mosques, which were mainly built by Iran's and Turkey's support, increased intensively reaching to 900. This was the time, when Iran and Turkey were trying to reflect their own model on Azerbaijan, and achieve dominance over the newly created Muslim state.

Many foreign missionaries came to the country to educate the youth. The most influential movement that came from Turkey to Azerbaijan was Nurcular movement⁶, otherwise also called Gülen movement by the name of the spiritual leader of the movement Fethullah Gülen. In 1992, the movement opened its schools in Azerbaijan, and already in 1993 it actively began to build educational institutions and different companies in Azerbaijan. The movement differed from the other streams, as it spread its ideology through secular institutions, media and companies. In Azerbaijan it enjoyed high popularity among diverse levels of population, specifically among urban elites, who opened new opportunities to disseminate Nurcu ideas (Goksel 2011, Yavuz 2004, Aliyev 2005). The Sunni branch of Islam, because of Elçibey's pan-Turkism, developed in that period, in spite of the fact that the religious leader Pashazadeh and one-third of the population of Azerbaijan was Shia. DV (Turkish Religious Foundation) and DIB (Turkish Religious Affairs) made lots of

⁶ Stream of Sunni Islam

investments in Azerbaijan primarily directed to the construction of mosques, where preaches were read by foreigners, specifically by Turk Imams. DV contributed to the creation of Sunni oriented Islamic theology faculty at Baku State University in 1992. Turkish government supported young Azerbaijanis to study in Turkey. Consequently, because of comparatively liberal religious policy and Elicibey's pan –Turkism ideology Sunni's influence in the country was mainly observed from 1992-1993 (Balci & Goyushov 2013; Aliyev 2013).

Iran's Shia impact on Azerbaijan was not primarily connected with the president of the country, but had historical nature. It is stated that Iran's Islamic influence on the country started even from 1970s. Iran has been considered to be the supporter of IPA. Using disputed issue over the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and the problem of refugees, Iran became involved in Azerbaijan with an organization called Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, which was later accused of spreading Shiite Islam, primarily for dissemination of Shia literature in the country. Iran, analogous to Turkey carried out its religious propaganda through distribution of religious literature and mass media. Iranian Radio-TV Channel called Sahar has broadcasted its programs in Azerbaijani language in a frequent manner and especially in the time of political turmoil and instability covered the internal political developments of Azerbaijan. In Iran, bordering the Southern regions to Azerbaijan, the Channel has enjoyed quite high popularity. the Islamic Republic also supported Azerbaijani youth to study in Iran (Motika 2001; Rajaei 2000). Nevertheless, 70 years spent under the rule of the Soviet Union left its footprint on the population. Azerbaijan decided to build its state system based on secular model of Turkey rather than create an Islamic state.

Heydar Aliyev, the third president took Islam under the state control and used it as a legitimizing tool, primarily to consolidate his power. In 1995, new constitution of Azerbaijan was written, where the separation of state and religion was emphasized, freedom of religion and secular nature of education were also stressed. During 1995 parliamentary elections, a law was enacted

prohibiting religious officials to take part in elections. The primary aim was keeping Islam away from politics (Valiyev 2005; Al-Falah 2007; Sattarov 2004). An aggressive campaign broke out against IPA. The head and several members of the party were arrested. To curtail foreign influence on religion in Azerbaijan in 1996 a law was adopted prohibiting religious propaganda by foreigners. Many foreign Islamic organizations were closed. In one word, the government was consolidating its power by eliminating any religious sentiments. At that time political Islam became an insignificant phenomenon, because Aliyev limited the power of Islamic politicians through legal framework and started an intensive fight against religious organizations and parties. In 2001, the Azerbaijani Republic State Committee for the work with religious organizations (SCWRO) was established by the decree of the president, officially aimed to solve any problems regarding religion in the country. Conversely, the primary aim of the SCWRO was to suppress religion and take religion under state's full control (Balci 2004; Cornell 2006). In fact, Aliyev managed to distance and curtail Islam from the political life of Azerbaijan; he succeeded in keeping different streams of Islam balanced, capable of coexistence, thus reducing the potential threat coming from religion to state.

From 1991 till 2001 the number of mosques in Azerbaijan increased from 84 to 1236. The number turns out to be quite high for the secular country as the proportional difference between the number of mosques in Islamic republic of Iran and Azerbaijan is not big (Jahannews2014; Sattarov 2009). The growing number of mosques coincided with growing religiosity of the Azerbaijani population, where religiosity is defined as the state of one's belief in God, being characterized by his piety and religious zeal (Salleh 2012; 1). Overall, starting from the independence till the end of the 20th century Islam in Azerbaijan passed through 3 stages of development; revival of Islam, organization of Islam and stabilization of Islam under state control (Sattarov 2009; Grim and Karim 2011).

In the early 21st century, the growth of Salafism⁷ was witnessed in Azerbaijan. The expansion of this branch of Islam covered Baku and Northern regions of the country which are close to Dagestan and in general to North Caucasus, where Salafism is strong. As scholars argue, in early 21st century Salafism in Azerbaijan mainly illustrated itself on societal level, attracting young, poor and uneducated part of the population. Clashes that took place between Salafis, Shias and Sunnis in the Northern regions of the country, together with the growing number of people converted from Shiite to Salafism warned about the strengthening of the latter (Valiyev 2005; Heyat and Baku 2008).

By 2003, 65 new Salafi mosques were constructed in the country. Abu Bakr Salafi mosque became a very famous one attracting more than 5000 Muslims for Friday prayers. Those developments raised concerns in the government and it re-launched its policy of repressing religion. The government started to tackle the growing face of Salafism (Sultanova and Rajabov 2011; Cornell 2011). By 2006 many religious TV and Radio channels together with “Quran teaching courses” in mosques and some religious bookstores were closed. Abu-Bakr mosque, at that time the most known prayer house in Baku, was closed down in 2008. Some non-registered madrases and some recently constructed mosques were forced to shut down (Sattarov 2009; Cornell 2011).

As Goyusheva (2008) argues with the developing face of Islam in Azerbaijan the divisions became more vivid. The illustration of Islam came in three different forms, whether it was Turkey influenced Sunnis, Iran influenced Shia’s or Arab influenced Salafis. Cornell (2011) in his book brings anecdotal evidence that supports the argument. “In 2006 a businessman wondered how to handle his staff’s demands for a prayer room. Apparently the number of people performing the Namaz during office hours had grown to such an extent that employees were insisting on an assigned space for the purpose...”(Cornell 2011, 271).

⁷ Branch of Sunni Islam, which originated in Saudi Arabia and is as well widespread in the North Caucasus

The world events; the external developments, such as political and social movements in Turkey, the North Caucasus, Arabic world and Iran contributed to the strengthening and dissemination of Islam in Azerbaijan. The Western intervention in Iraq, the “Cartoon scandal” depicting prophet Muhammad in ridiculous character angered and intensified Islam in Azerbaijan, generating first Islamist demonstrations in Baku (Cornell 2011; Balci and Goyushov 2013). The Western values didn’t manage to fill the ideological gap of Azerbaijanis and take them out of the economic hardships they lived through, thus spurring them into the hands of Islam like in many other cases of different Islamic countries mentioned in the literature review section (Geybullayeva 2013; Kotecha 2006). The causes of Islamic revival identified by Gunaratna (2002), Pape (2006) and Fozi (2010) as well appeal to Azerbaijani case; that is in Azerbaijan Islam as well expressed its discontent against corruption, social injustice, authoritarian practices and so forth. In this way gradually passing from societal level to political one, Islam became a means for the society through which to look for the solutions of their problems and by the help of which to fight against authoritarian regime of in Azerbaijan.

Before Aliyev second came to power two mosques in Baku acquired great public support and made attempts to interfere into political life of the country. Those were Salafi Abu Bakr mosque and Shiite Juma mosque. The center of Shia Islam was Juma mosque with its leader Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, who was known for his ability to capture public’s attention. He expressed anti-government sentiments and with support of Islam, democracy and protection of human rights he attracted many young Azerbaijanis and engaged engaging them in oppositional politics. That was a renewed threat to the heads of the state, and after the 2003 elections, when Ilham Aliyev became the president, the mosque was immediately closed and Ibrahimoglu was arrested being accused of violation of Constitutional provision; for his contribution to interference of religion into politics (Balci and Goyushov 2013; Bedford 2009; Cornell 2011; Sattarov 2009).

Abu Bakr mosque was pictured as the hub of radicalism and extremism by the government and was considered a threat to the country. The primary reason for that was the fact that Salafi mosque attracted more than 5000 thousand people on Friday prayers. At the same time its leader Gamet Suleymanov enjoyed great respect and popularity among the society. In 2001, many people out of total 5000-8000 thousands, who went to pray in Abu Bakr were arrested being accused of plans to go and fight in terrorist groupings in Chechnya. In 2008 Abu Bakr mosque was attacked and as a result was closed down. Ilham Aliyev chose the same path left by as his father the former president of Azerbaijan: tackling religion through repressive means and not allowing any religious force to penetrate into politics and become a threat for the incumbent regime. Thus, Islam has never vanished from the life of Azerbaijani citizens and after the country became an independent republic, Islam revived and has been intensifying since then.

Chapter1: Islam in Political life of Azerbaijan (2009-2013)

Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan started right after the country gained its independence, when the old Soviet ideology was demolished and the Muslims of the territory longed for new ideology to cling to. The paper in its analysis relies on the definition of political Islam given by Deneoex (2002), “Political Islam is a form of instrumentalisation of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives,” (Denoex 2002, 61). Since 1990s, when Azerbaijan acquired its independence, many political activists have taken religion as a mechanism for social mobilization and their own legitimization. Different Islamic parties and communities came into arena, such as Azerbaijani Islamic Party on Progress, the Azerbaijani Islamic Democratic Party, the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, Repentance etc. Though the government from already mid-1990s started to tackle religion and took Islam under state control, from 2009 on the government of Azerbaijan, being concerned with the growing religiosity in the country, with new, more powerful

force re-launched its anti-religious campaign. The campaign has been carried out through legal restrictions, administrative appropriations as well as unofficial means.

Azerbaijani Government's Policy against Religion (2009-2013)

Legal restrictions on Islam

The restrictions on Islam in 2009 were first introduced in the legal framework of the country. Two provisions concerning the religion were amended in the main legal document of Azerbaijan, the Constitution. Those amendments limit religious propaganda and movements “humiliating people's dignity and contradicting the principles of humanism” (Article 18. II) and restrict the rights of religious officials to take part in presidential and parliamentary elections (Article 56, II). Other legislative document on political parties prohibits the creation of a political party aimed at religious strife as well as doesn't allow religious officials to become party members (law on political parties, 1992 cited in Sattarov, 2009). Since 2001 all the religious organizations have been required to register in the SCWRO (law on freedom of religion cited in Sattarov 2009).

The law on freedom of religion, adopted in 1992, another important legislative document regulating the religion in the country, was as well subject to amendments. According to the law stateless persons are prohibited to engage in religious propaganda and all Muslim religious communities are required to be subordinate to CMB (Law on Freedom of Religion 1992, cited in Sattarov, 2009). On May 31 of 2009, new amendments were introduced to the law on freedom of religion, passed by Milli Mejlis⁸ and got approved by the president. The amended law further restricted the system of registration for religious groups. All the religious groups were required to re-register by the end of 2009 and were prohibited to conduct religious activities out of foreseen places. The SCWRO announced that there would be additional requirements for the organizations to

⁸ Parliament in Azerbaijan

register and the failure of registration can be attributed only to the religious community's failure to submit the documents legally required (U.S. Department of State 2009; European Commission 2010).

In 2010, Milli Mejlis adopted new 19 amendments into the law on religious freedom. The amendments give even more power to Caucasus Muslim Board as they require all the registered organizations to report to the CMB. Burdened registration requirements were made stricter once more. Any religious group aiming at registration instead of previous 10 should now have 50 members to be able to register. Same year amendments were also adapted into the Criminal Code and Administrative Code of violation of Azerbaijan, stricter punishments were set for illegal production, distribution and importation of religious literature, literature declared so by SCWRO. Punishment can include fines ranging almost from \$6,329 to \$8,860 or up to two years' imprisonment for first offenses, and from \$8,860 to \$11,392 or imprisonment between two and five years for following offences (U.S. Department of State 2010).

In 2011, the Administrative Code increased fines for the offences. In 2013, the president of Azerbaijan approved amendments to law on freedom of religion. According to the amendments Azerbaijani citizens and organizations can only use, produce or distribute those religious books, audio and video products and other religious material, that are labeled with special control stamp by relevant authorities. Whereas sale of these materials should be done in specialized sale points established with the permission of the same executive authorities (Law on Freedom of Religion cited in APA Information agency, 2013).

To sum up, Azerbaijan's law on religion has been amended for 15 times since it was first adopted in 1992. With these changes the key religious organizations of Azerbaijan, Caucasus Muslim Board and State Committee for the Work with Religious Organizations have acquired additional leverage to control and suppress religion in the country. Almost all the changes were

directed to the restriction of religion in Azerbaijan. Those restrictions limiting the independent activity of religious groups include mandatory state registration, burdensome requirements for registration, comprehensive censorship of religious material and the right of dissemination of these materials by the government, requirement of government-approved religious leaders to lead religious ceremonies, requirement to permanently report about their activities and finances. Overall, through legal and administrative means the government has so far managed to suppress religious organizations and hinder their activities. However, it hasn't been able to curtail religion from growing and intruding into the politics.

Tackling Islam through unofficial means

Since 2009 the legal amendments have restricted the rights and freedoms of religious organizations and mosques and hindered their activities. Many of the previously operational organizations and parties not managing to comply with the requirements of the law lay low and continued operating illegally. Thus, they didn't cease to be a potential threat for the authorities. That's why the state clearly acknowledging that the threat of the society's Islamization hasn't been eliminated and that Islam can be used as a tool to challenge the ruling regime besides the amendments to legal framework, by unofficial means as well restricted and persecuted religion: arrests of religious prominent leaders and religious activists on alleged accusations, confiscation of religious literature, closure of mosques, harassments and persecutions towards Muslims.

In 2009-2010 restrictions were imposed on keeping long beard⁹, voicing azan¹⁰ and on wearing headscarf in educational institutions of Azerbaijan, including schools (APA 2009; Haqqin.az 2010; Turan 2012). Azerbaijani authorities ordered to remove all religious symbols and attributes from State structures. The spiritual songs were prohibited to be voiced on the Internet

⁹ Keeping long beards is a Islamic symbol of Salafis

¹⁰ Call for prayer voiced by mosques

websites, TV and as mobile ringtones. From several areas of the country police allegedly confiscated religious literature and reported it as “radical” one (Haqqin.az 2011). From 2009 to 2013 according to available data, 14 mosques were abolished and construction of Fatima Zahra mosque was frozen (U.S Department of State 2013; IWPR 2013, EurasiaNet 2013). See Table 1 below:

Table 1: Closed mosques in Azerbaijan 2009 - 2013

Name	Region	Reason	Year
Shahidlar	Sumgait	Salafi	2009
Mosque on oil rocks	Baku	Salafi	2009
Prophet Muhammad mosque	Baku	Sunni	2009
Mushfigabad	Garadagh	Sunni	2010
Mehdiabad	Mehdiabad	Salafi	2010
Juma (Shah Abbas)	Ganja	Shia	2010
Albanian	Ganja	Salafi	2010
Martyr’s mosque	Baku	Sunni	2010
Juma	Nakhijevan	Sunni	2010
Gumbash	Lenkoran	Shia	2010
Shamakhi Mosque	Shamakhi	Shia	2010
Ahli-mosque	Ganja	Sunni	2010
Shahsavvar Mosque	Shahsevar	Shia-Sunni	2010
Ismaili Mosque	Ismaili	Shia	N/A

The mosques, that got closed, were the ones, which to some degree enjoyed popularity and the leaders of which were respectful personalities in their communities. Most of the closed mosques were not given a registration by SCWRO on charges of not meeting the registration requirements (APA 2010; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2010; EurasiaNet 2012). As a result those mosques started to operate illegally and became susceptible to state policies, as without registration they had no right of property, no legal leverage to keep the mosque. As Table 1 illustrates most of the mosques closed were Salafi-Sunni prayer houses and mosques. They were located in the Northern regions of the country, where Salafis are majority, as well as in Baku. Though the state anti- religious campaign was directed to curtail Islamic sentiments in general, the main target group of the state policy was Salafis, because of their assumed radical nature and ability to attract large number of people, mainly

from lower classes of society. The justifications for the closure of the mosques given by the state were their illegal status, property issues and claims that those are gathering places of Wahhabis and disseminate radicalism in the country (APA 2010; Haqqin.az 2009; IWPR 2012).

Detention of religious people without any legal base, discrimination against believers became frequent phenomena in the country. In regard to detentions, once more, subjects of government's special treatment became Salafis. Abuses towards Muslims, who adopted Salafism and the detention of Salafis in Zaqatala, Quba, Khachmaz, Ismaili, Qakh, Lenkoran and Geychay regions took place in the course of the recent years (APA 2010; Turan 2010; IWPR 2011; EurasiaNet 2011). Moreover, in Zaqatala the Salafis, who kept long beards were forcefully taken to police and their beards were shaved. The believers became subjects of teasing and were beaten (Turan 2011). With the beginning of the sacred month for Muslims Muharram¹¹ the government started to use measures to avoid the celebration, in order to prevent mobilization of believers. In the region of Jalilabad the students were prohibited to attend mosques, the presidents of universities threatened to exclude them from university if they attempt to go (US Department of State 2011). See Table 2 below:

Table 2: Arrested Islamists 2009-2013

Detected Islamists	Regions	Year	Number
Salafis	Lenkoran	2009-2010	100
Salafis	Nisami	2011	10
Nursis	Sumgait	2011	80
Shia	Nakhijevan	2011	10
Salafis	Zakatali, Kachmaz, Quba, Imaili, Qakh, Geokchay	2009-2011	N/A
Muslims	Baku, Sumgait, Ganja, Zakatali, Sheki, Quba	2012	40
Muslims	Baku	2010-2012	N/A
Muslims	Ganja	2011	14

In 2011 the situation in the country escalated. The number of religious prisoners and detainees were constantly rising, confiscations of literature, persecution of unsanctioned Muslim organizations

¹¹ First month of Islamic calendar

that, according to government, politicize Islam were observed. Prominent theologians in Nakhijevan, Lenkoran were arrested and their literature claimed unsanctioned and confiscated. Muslims from Nizami district, Sumgait, Nakhijevan got arrested for diverse reasons; celebrating a religious holiday or conducting unsanctioned preaches. Overall, in the period of 2009-2011 up to 200 people were arrested and those who resisted were beaten and harassed, large amount of literature was confiscated (APA 2011; Turan 2011; Haqqin.az 2011).

Another state violent crackdown on religious population took place in 2012, as a result of protest action against hijab ban in front of Ministry of Education many people got arrested and accused of hooliganism, resisting arrest, disturbing public order (IWPR 2012; APA 2012). IPA head Movsun Samedov, many IPA members and religious leaders from different regions of the country got arrested, primarily for criticizing the government and calling on people to denounce the corrupt regime (Turan 2011; EurasiaNet 2011).

The subsequent activities of the state authorities, the timing and location of the events indicate that the government has its structured scenario how to liquidate popular religious leaders, who attempt to use Islam to achieve political aims. In almost all of the cases those leaders were first arrested on administrative charges then their apartments were raided and illegal weapons, unsanctioned literature and drugs “were found” there. The fact that the scenario is the same in almost all cases raises doubts about its credibility and variability. Year of 2011 in general by experts and international organizations was called year of state repressions towards believers in Azerbaijan (DEVAMM 2011, Human Rights Watch 2011). See Table 3 below:

Table 3: Imprisoned Religious Leaders 2009-2013

Name	Position	On charges	Year
Movsun Samedov	IPA Head	Illegal weapon possession/ coup attempts/terrorism	2011
Vagif Abdulayev	IPA Deputy head	Ibid	2011
Feramiz Abbasov	Head of Massali region	Illegal weapon possession	2011
Tale Bagirov	Imam of Nardaran	Illegal drug possession	2011
Haji Ilham	Imam of Bina district mosque		2012
Azer Jabiev	Theologian in Ganja	Hooliganism	2010-2011
Fakhri Izlyasev	Theologian in Ganja	Hooliganism	2010-2011
Seid Faramiz	Akhund	Hooliganism	2010-2011
Abgyul Suleymanov	Theologian /head of Jafari Heyat religious community	Illegal weapon possession, drug possession/Treason of country	2012
Unanimous	Theologian in Turan	Running underground school of Said Nursi	2013

In 2012 for the first time CMB that is official state trustee voiced its concerns about the spread of nontraditional religious groupings. CMB made a public announcement on the eve of the Islamic month of Muharram encouraging religious observation in mosques rather than in informal gatherings to prevent the spread of radical preaching (APA 2012). CMB's announcement once more confirms the fact that the rising religiosity of Azerbaijani society causes considerable worry to the authority. Same persecutions and harassments both legal and unofficial continued their course in 2012 as well: abuses of religious freedom, destruction of mosques, raids on religious communities, confiscation of literature and detentions. In 2012 almost 50 theologians, religious figures, journalists and heads of religious organization, communities and a party were arrested (IWPR 2012; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2012).

In 2012, the SCWRO won a legal case to demolish the only registered Muslim community in the town of Hirdalan, near Baku. 40,000 residents of the town remained with no legal place of worship (U.S. Department of State 2012). In 2013, despite the Azerbaijani governments' claim of tolerance, the religious situation has deteriorated. Registration requests were delayed or denied. Non-violent religious activists were detained, imprisoned, and fined. Azerbaijan for the first time

was moved from the countries monitored to tier 2¹² of U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (U.S. Department of State 2013). Some religious organizations such as the International Religious Liberty Association and DEVAAM have been denied registration. In 2013, a rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) issued human rights report on Azerbaijan, where there was a list of political prisoners of Azerbaijan. 23 individuals have been convicted in Azerbaijan for alleged membership in Islamist groups, organizations and political parties (Strasser 2013).

The government of Azerbaijan, observing the increasing Islamization in the country, and different streams of Islam acquiring force and popularity in the country, decided to launch strict restrictive policy to curtail Islam from politics, to keep it balanced and on the level appropriate to its needs. However, it miscalculated that the harsh crackdown on religion can create counter-reaction and contribute to radicalization of Islam in the country. In spite of state's policies, certain religious organizations and communities, particularly those who are backed by foreign powers, still continue their operations in the country. The only remained party in the country is Islamic Party of Azerbaijan.

Islamic Party of Azerbaijan

Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, known for its Shiite nature and strong affiliation with Iran, has been actively engaged in politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan. Since Azerbaijan acquired independence the party tried to place itself and its ideology vis-à-vis the government, and the West using Islam as a anchor point to mobilize people, to fill the gap left by the state religious organization and achieve its political ends (Sattarov 2009; Cornell 2011; Yunusov 2012). IPA's mission was defined as "the revival of lost traditions, including spread of religious values by means of literature and the reconstruction of old, neglected mosques," (Babek et. Al 2005, 51 cited in

¹² 2 tiers where tier 1 includes countries of particular concern

Sattarov 2009). In 1992 the party from traditionally Shiite village Nardaran, already had 74 local committees' countrywide and 50.000 members in total (Yunusov 2004). In 1995 already falling under State policy campaign of quelling the religion in the country, IPA was withdrawn from the list of registered parties in the Ministry of Justice and consequently became illegal. Since then it hasn't been registered and therefore is still considered illegal and therefore susceptible to state policies (Cornell 2011).

Since Azerbaijan gained its independence IPA has actively been engaged in various activities that meet its mission, such as publication of Islamic newspapers, organization of demonstrations against various "anti-Islamic" events, violation of religious rights and propaganda of Islamic values. For instance, in a period of 2009-2013 Islamic Party of Azerbaijan raised its voice against such events as beauty contests, International Women's day and New Year (APA 2013; EurasiaNet 2013; Turan 2013). It expressed its negative attitude towards the contest of Beauty, Miss Azerbaijan, stating that it contradicts to the moral of Islam as well as against celebrations of New Year and March 8 stating that those are not Islamic holidays and have nothing to do with Azerbaijani society. Those activities clearly show that the party tries to place its ideology vis-à-vis the Western values, rejecting the western values and prioritizing the Islamic ones. It uses this ideology to attract the people, who disappointed from the West, want to believe in something; want to express their discontent against the government.

After 2009 legal restrictions were imposed on religion and Islamic Party acquired renewed force. Making use of the growing irritation in the society caused by those limitations of rights, IPA became vocal and engaged in organization of anti- state policy demonstrations. Among those protests, the prominent and major one was against the hijab¹³ ban. The struggle against the restriction of wearing hijab in schools grew into a political coalition. In 2010, the Islamic Party of

¹³ headscarf

Azerbaijan united with opposition parties against hijab ban, which was an unprecedented event in Azerbaijan and could cause a potential political threat to authorities (Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2010). The counter –reaction of the Azerbaijani government didn't take long to arrive. The government employed certain measures to eliminate potential threats that could have caused by the so called “coalition”. So, IPA Chairman Iran-educated Movsun Samedov was arrested because of heading a rally on the last Friday of Ramadan to express solidarity with Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation. Samedov was released 10 days after his arrest. Hundreds of people gathered in front of Baku prison to celebrate the release of IPA leader. The police raided the demonstration and arrested 60-70 people on the spot (Turan 2010; EurasiaNet 2010). The event illustrated two sides of the coin: that Samedov enjoyed popularity among religious men and that the state authorities use harsh means to challenge the believers and won't let religion come out of their control.

In 2011, Movsun Samedov, went even further: he publicly criticized the Azerbaijani government and authorities for being corrupt and violating human rights. “We are against those who are against our religion. We have to destroy such a cruel regime and its head,” he said. (Radio Liberty 2011). Samedov called on people to rise against the authorities and put an end to the “despotic regime”. His speech was placed in Youtube and disseminated widely. Only few days later Samedov and other 6 members of the party got arrested and sentenced to long years of imprisonment on charges of illegal weapon possession, terrorism etc. (APA 2013; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2013).

After the first arrest of Samedov it was apparent that the party enjoyed support of the population as long as Samedov was there. The society saw the strength of the party in the image of its leader, not the party. The government deliberate to finish up with the party, during raids to Samedov's apartment launched its “favorite scenario” and reported about illegal weapons and unsanctioned religious literature found in his house. He was accused of spreading religious materials

that propagate radical Islam, of preparation of coup against the authorities of the country, of terrorist attack and of illegal possession of weapons. Other members of Islamic Party were also arrested on similar charges and sentenced to imprisonment for long periods (Turan 2013). The government won the battle and showed that it would use all the violent and non-violent means not to let religion acquire political leverage in Azerbaijan. However the Azerbaijani authorities as well illustrated that they failed in keeping Islam out of politics as Islam started to pose a threat to the regime and stability of the country.

After those arrests IPA didn't give up and continued its activities, its members at large in their announcements expressed their determination of continuing their struggle and not "putting down the weapons". Although understandably the party's power lessened as it lost its charismatic and popular leader. It continued organization of protest actions against hijab ban and arbitrary arrests expressing its discontent against the regime and its activities. IPA created Committee of protection of prisoners' rights, which would advocate and protect the rights of prisoners of conscience, among them IPA members and their leader (Turan 2013; Haqqin.az 2012).

However, the government was firm in its decision to completely destroy the party. Day after day the members of IPA got arrested on similar accusations: illegal weapon or drug possession, intention of terrorism etc. IPA continued its activities but those were limited mainly on vocal condemnations of the arrests calling them the violation of freedom of conscience and basic human rights (EurasiaNet 2013; IWPR 2013). In 2013, the Islamic Party during the campaign of presidential elections of the country the Islamic party supported the National Council¹⁴, common candidate Jamil Hasanali. The explanation given for the support of secular candidate was that the party wanted to change the political system and eliminate corruption. Devout supporters of the party actively participated in opposition rallies of pre-October presidential elections (Turan 2013; Haqqin.az 2013). Though later,

¹⁴ National Council is coalition of Opposition parties of Azerbaijan

in a sudden manner IPA for unknown reasons changed its opinion and started to support another candidate (APA 2013).

Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, though not registered and not eligible to participate in parliamentary as well as presidential elections because of legal constraints, has played and continues to play major role in politicization of religion in Azerbaijan. The party publicly challenges the authorities of the country, using the state's policies against Islam. It mobilizes people against not only the laws but the regime. The party has its representations all over the country, number of followers, has the sponsorship of Iran, which gives it an opportunity to continue its activities in spite of the state's crackdown on the party and its leaders. It is one of the organizations that unites Shiite Muslims of the country as Pashazadeh "being part of state apparatus" has no leverage over populace and, as it turned out, is not able to consolidate them around state religious organizations. As evidence shows after the arrest of its leader the party lost some of its supporters and the influence it has, it reduced its activities and kept a low profile. However, the fact that in the course of the recent years the party mobilized high number of people, posed a considerable threat to authorities and united with oppositional parties for common political purpose confirms that it has its firm role in political life of the country.

Chapter2: Islam in Social life of Azerbaijan (2009-2013)

The Azerbaijani authorities since 2009 liquidated several religious leaders, suppressed the activities of IPA. It could have been claimed that the government almost succeeded in elimination of rising Islam in the country, if not the facts clearly illustrating that the religiosity of the Azerbaijani society has been rising constantly since 2009. The Azerbaijani Muslims have been becoming more religious, more engaged in protests actions and religious disputes. The paper studies Islam in social

life in terms of society's religiosity, attendance to mosques, keeping Islamic traditions, society's involvement in religious protests and armed clashes.

Religiosity of Society

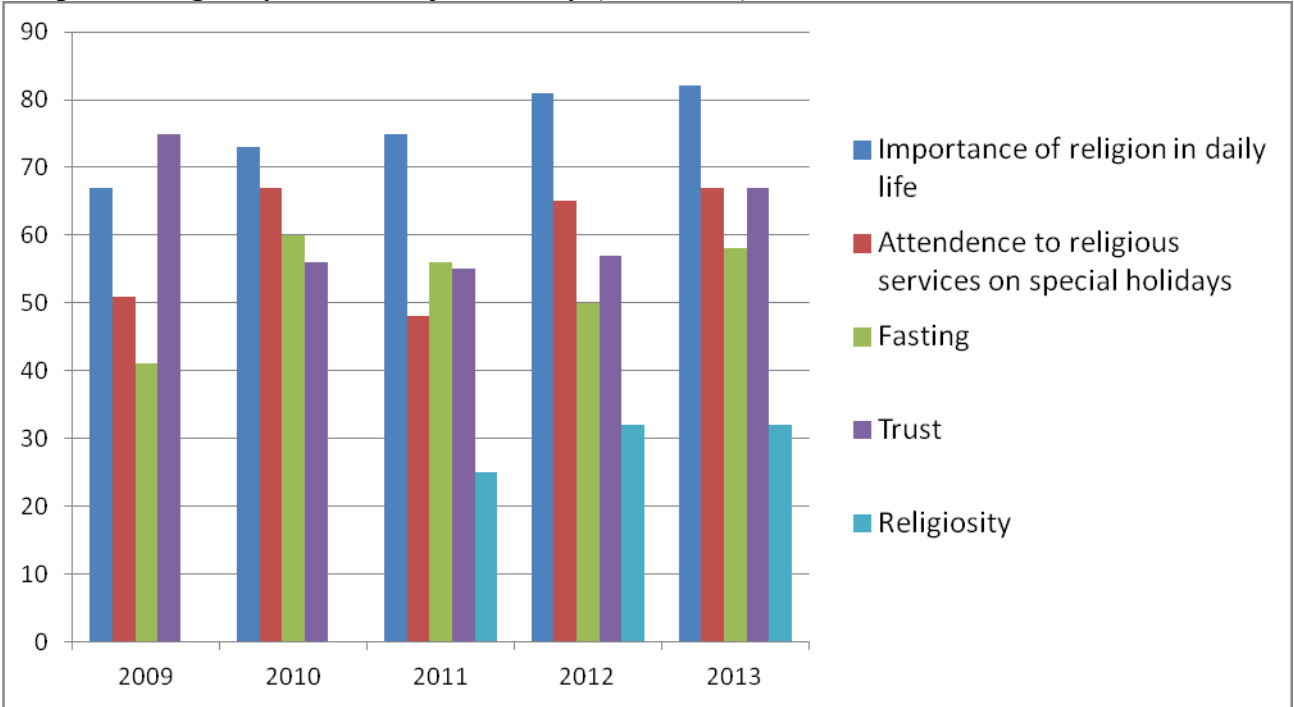
Religiosity of Azerbaijani Muslims has been increasing since Azerbaijan acquired its independence in 1991, since various streams of Islam have penetrated into the country (Valiyev 2005; Bedford 2009; Lemercier-Quelquejay 1984; Cornell 2006; Valiyev 2005). By saying religiosity the paper relies on the definition given by Salleh (2012) "religiosity may be referred to as the state of one's belief in God, characterized by his piety and religious zeal. The higher his piety and religious zeal are, hence the stronger his belief in God, the higher his religiosity is (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 2012; 1). Starting from 2009 the aforementioned trend has been intensifying year by year, influenced by international events (war in Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon etc.) as well as government's policy towards religion in the country. Different country-wide surveys conducted in Azerbaijan, which looked into the religiosity of the population, posit that there is an increase in religiosity of Azerbaijani society (Caucasus Barometer 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, Pew Research Center 2013, CRRC, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013).

Approximately 96-98% of Azerbaijani population is Muslims. According to the official statistics 65% of Muslim population is Shia, whereas almost 35% are Sunnis. Shias constitute majority in the South of the country, particularly in the border areas with Iran, Turkey and in the Absheron Peninsula, while Sunnis are mainly spread in the North of the country, in the border with North Caucasus, though their number in central parts of the country is also not small (U.S. Department of State 2013, Pew Research Center 2013, Stat Committee for work with religious organizations 2013). Though U.S State department in its annual reports has used to state that religious observance in Azerbaijani Muslim communities are relative and Muslim identity tends to

be based more on culture and ethnicity than religion, from 2009 on it as well has posited that there has been growth in number of observant Muslims in Azerbaijani community.

The paper conducts analysis of Caucasus Barometer country-wide survey 5 year data and confirms the argument that Azerbaijani society has become more religious. See Graph 1 below:

Graph 1: Religiosity of Azerbaijani society (2009-2013)



Source: Caucasus Barometer Azerbaijan 2009-2013

The analysis reveal that from 2009 to 2013 Islam has become more important in the daily life of Azerbaijani Muslims, there is a constant increase from 67% to 82% of Azerbaijanis who consider religion an important part of the their life. On the contrary, to their perception about the usefulness of religion, attendance of religious services in the course of the years remains comparatively low. In spite of up and downs in the attendance to mosques, an increase from 2009 (51%) to 2013 (67%) in the number of population who attended to religious services at least on special holidays is witnessed. The same scenario is observed in terms of following religious traditions (fasting). In 2009 41% of Azerbaijani society reported that they fasted because it is

required by religious traditions, while in 2013 already more than half of the population reported about their fasting customs (58%). In spite of the fact that more than half of the Azerbaijani population trust religious organizations from 2009 to 2010 a slight decrease in the percentage of people is witnessed. However, from 2010 to 2013 a constant increase is again observed. Finally, the religiosity of Azerbaijani society, the data of which is available only from 2011, from 2011 to 2013 increased from 25% to 32%. Thus, the trend of increase of religiosity in the society is eminent, in spite of the reported religious restrictions by the government and abuse of rights of believers (U.S. Department of State 2010). Azerbaijan for being a “secular” country, as identified by state officials, has rather high percentage of people, who put religion into priorities of their lives.

Overall, the findings posit that the Muslims in Azerbaijan have become more religious during recent years. However, the trend was not identical all over the territory of the Azerbaijani Republic. In those regions of Azerbaijan that have traditionally been under the influence of external religious countries (specifically Iran and North Caucasus influenced regions), orientation to religion is more intensified. So, in Iran influenced Shiite Nardaran village, not far from Baku the religiosity of the public compared to other regions is higher and Islamic traditions are highly respected. Tendency of not letting high-grade girls to attend schools because of sitting on the same desk with a boy and excluding young women from getting higher education have been observed. Many young girls in Nardaran as well as Baku have missed their classes because their parents didn't let them go to school without wearing hijab after the decision on headscarf ban had been enacted (Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2011).

More than 1000 people from Nardaran regularly attend Friday prayers to Hazrat Abulfaz Aga Mosque (Haqqin.az 2013). In all parts of the country, especially in Absheron Peninsula and the South the population goes to mosques to celebrate Ashura Shia holiday. On these days, mosques, particularly Sunni mosques of the country, are guarded by the police to avoid the

escalation between religious groups as well as religious groups and police (Turan 2012; EurasiaNet 2012). In the second largest city of Azerbaijan, in Ganja, believers and their leaders, gather to have Iftar¹⁵, though there is unofficial ban in Azerbaijan to hold Iftar (Haqqin.az 2013). As well in other parts of the country in Ismaili, Zaqatala, Qakh and Geychay northern regions of Azerbaijan believers, mainly Salafis follow the Islamic traditions and keep beards, again in spite of the unofficial ban and harassment against them by relevant authorities (Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2013; Turan 2013). According to different estimates, the number of Salafis during these years has also been rising and in 2013 equal to 20.000 (Yunusov 2012).

Among the followers of Nur movement of Fethullah Gülen, who are referred as Turkey influenced Sunnis, an increase has as well been witnessed. According to the different estimates, the branch has been taking into its sects primarily the political figures. Thus, Nur movement analogous to other branches as well can be regarded as politicized stream of Islam in Azerbaijan. Many high-ranking officials of Azerbaijan are reported to be part of this movement (Haqqin.az 2013).

Overall, in spite of the fact that Muslim society of Azerbaijan belongs to different branches and different streams of Islam and different regions of the country enjoy different degrees of religiosity, the overall picture is that the religiosity of Azerbaijani society has been gradually increasing from 2009 till the end of 2013, reaching to the point where more than half of the population is religious. Though the reported attendance to religious services weekly doesn't pass 10%, there is comparatively high trust towards religious organizations. More than half of the population on special holidays attends to services because it is required by religion, and more than a half of them from time to time follow religious traditions. All these developments occurred in the environment of state restrictive and repressive measures aimed at preventing people to exercise their

¹⁵ Muslim holiday of coming out of fast together in a community

religious freedom, not even given the illegal restrictions towards religious associations and persons, who have constantly become subject of harassment of the authorities.

Religious communities and mosques in Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, according to the latest available statistics, there are more than 1500 religious communities, only 794 out of which are registered in SCWRO and 1100 operational mosques, 300 out of which are not registered and consequently are considered as illegal (Yunusov 2012). The religious restrictions, that from 2009 on started to limit the capacities and activities of religious associations, have hindered the social religious organizations' and mosques' activities, which previously operated in the country.

Thus, the religious organizations and mosques that have continued to conduct their activities in Azerbaijan were considerably reduced in number. One of the active organizations that have remained in the arena is the Centre for Protection of Conscience and Religious Freedom (DEVAMM), with its leader Ilgar Ibrahimoglu. He was previously an Imam of Juma Shiite mosque, who has always been active advocator of religious rights as well as democratic rights. DEVAMM was created in 2000 with the community of Juma mosque and its head Ilgar Ibrahimoglu. The main official aim of the organization is the protection of religious as well as human rights of Azerbaijani society and promotion of civil society in the country. DEVAMM has had tense relationship with the government of Azerbaijan. It was refused a registration, primarily because of its nature and leader of the organization who was a proponent of pro-Iran ideology under the auspices of Juma mosque that according to some experts still remains such (Bedford 2009; Sattarov 2009). DEVAMM with its leader has actively been engaging in the struggle for the protection of human rights of religious people. In 2010, the organization in Azerbaijan started a series of round tables discussions in Azerbaijan devoted to various aspects of religion, particularly the restrictive amendments to the Law

on religion of Azerbaijan (Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2010). Ibrahimoglu was one of the actors expressing their dissatisfaction with the decision of the hijab ban, naming it undemocratic and potential cause of religious tensions. He publicly claimed that all religious people were arrested allegedly, only because of their religiosity. The organization has been engaged in the struggle against repressions and harassments towards believers, in activities pursuing release of religious prisoners; such as protest actions as well as legal proceedings (Haqqin.az 2012; Turan 2011; EurasiaNet 2012). Ibrahimoglu has also made use of innovative technologies and the Internet to be in constant touch with its followers and inform public about the activities of DEVAAM (IWPR 2012).

Shia Mosque of Hazrat Abulfaz Agha, which is situated near Nardaran, has also enjoyed respect and comparatively high attendance rate during these years, 1000 people regularly go on Friday prayers. The community of the mosque is a consolidated community with devotion to protection of their religious rights (Haqqin.az 2013). In 2013, when the police demanded the believers to leave the mosque, they didn't obey and expressed readiness to make a rally to defend their rights (Haqqin.az 2013; Turan 2013; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2013). The primary reason of police raid on the mosque was previous protests in Nardaran against the arrest of their theologian Haji Tale Bagirov (Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2013; EurasiaNet2013). The community of the mosque played its active role in organization and participation to protests actions related to ban on hijab and arrests of religious figures such as head of IPA, theologians and religious activists (Turan 2013; EurasiaNet 2013).

The religious community of Juma mosque in Evlakh region headed by Ramil Guliyev has also been actively operating in protection of people's religious rights. They have managed to prevent the construction of commercial community in the place of the mosque and have also been struggling with the hijab ban. Though Juma mosque of Evlakh was built in 1995 by DV religious ceremonies, there are mainly held by Shiites (Turan 2010; EurasiaNet 2010).

Another active religious organization is Khuseyniya is reported to be funded by Iran. This Shia organization has been operational in Azerbaijan since 1993. The nature of operation of the committee is humanitarian aid; it gives unconditional help in Baku, Ganja, Nakhijevan, Lenkoran to local population and refugees. However, with the humanitarian help it is reported that the organization disseminates Shia oriented Islamic literature that praises Shia and condemns the Sunnis. As reported by the newspaper “Ekho”, the committee has its representations in 19 regions and 415 villages of the country (Yunusov 2012).

Besides religious organizations, there are many Iran educated individuals who have acquired popularity and respect among Shiite population of Azerbaijan after they returned to the country. One of such personalities is Zulfugar Mikeladze that acquired popularity particularly in Absheron Peninsula. He is famous for his speeches, there are lot of videos of his preaches in the Internet on various themes religious as well as political. Other current prominent figures among Shias are Ilham Aliyev, Azer Jabiev, unofficial leader of Shiites in Ganja and Faramiz Abbasov, leader of Shiites in Masala (Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2011; EurasiaNet 2012). They are representatives of Marja-at –Taklid that is they have higher religious status than even official head of Azerbaijani Shiites Sheikh-ul-Islam Allashukur Pashazadeh (Yunusov 2012). Their popularity and status were the primary reason for their arrests and conviction. (See Table 3)

Another active religious Shia community is Meshedi dadash mosque situated in the centre of the capital. On Fridays in Mehseidi dadash more than 800 believers gather and pray, sometimes the number reaches to 3000. The community of Meshedi dadash has its own non-governmental organization called “Spiritual world”, which stands for the protection of religious rights. It was supporter of women’s right to wear hijab. Besides, it has its own periodical “Salam” (Yunusov 2012). The prominent head of Mehseidi dadash community Shakhin Khasanli was arrested during 2011 arrests but later released (EurasiaNet 2011; IWPR 2011).

Mosque of Shah Abbas in Ganja, community of Juma mosque in Baku, Rhemie Khanim Pir Shia mosque community in Nardaran and Lezgi Sunni mosque community in Baku, the religious community Jafari Heyat add up to the independent religious communities that mobilize people and actively pursue religious needs and raise their voice against violation of religious rights in Azerbaijan (Haqqin.az 2011; Turan 2013; APA 2013; EurasiaNet 2012; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2011).

Religious protests and radicalization of Islam in Azerbaijan

The restrictive measures directed against religion in the country was one of the causes that contributed to the awakening of the potential that rested in people; that is return to traditions, seeking justice in the religion and striving to preserve it. That potential mobilized people over common purpose, make them unite and struggle for the protection of their rights. After 2009 religious restrictions protest actions over religious issues have gradually become frequent phenomena in Azerbaijan.

Massive religious protests in Azerbaijan erupted and spread in various regions of the county starting from 2010, when the ban on hijab, forbidding wearing of headscarf in educational institutions of the country, was voiced. Initial protests against hijab ban erupted in Baku then acquiring chain reaction permeated into other regions of the country. The massive protest movement called “Freedom for hijab” started in May of 2010, demanding the annulment of the decision. Protest action took place in front of the Ministry of Education in Baku under its slogan “Freedom for hijab” (Haqqin.az 2010; Turan 2010; APA 2010; EurasiaNet 2010). It attracted populace of different ages, including children as well as their parents, who were displeased with the decision (US State Department 2010). The wave of protests reached to Ganja, where as well hundreds of people gathered in front of Shah Abbas mosque protesting against hijab ban (Turan 2010; EurasiaNet 2013). In Khiojasen village, the protests acquired violent character. Some believers broke the

windows of local school stating that in this way they protested against the ban. Mass protests in regard to the issue as well took place in Jalilabad, Masala and Lenkoran (IWPR 2010; Turan 2010; Haqqin.az 2010; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2010).

Though some conferences for the discussion of the cause were also organized like in 2011 by Committee of Protection of Hijab and Prisoners of Conscience, they were mainly concentrated in Baku and as compared to protests, were not widespread and didn't attract many people. They rather served as anchor point for the organization of further mass actions. The protests were immediately followed by government official as well as unofficial restrictions on religion and religious activists. In the course of "Freedom to hijab" protest series from 2010 to 2011 many religious leaders, theologians and religious activists, who criticized the law and government's policies in general were arrested. The arrests were carried out on the charges of hooliganism, illegal weapon and drug possession (Haqqin.az 2010; Turan 2011; Eurasienet 2010, 2011; IWPR 2011). However, human right organizations in Azerbaijan claimed that they were prisoners of conscience, nothing more (Haqqin.az 2011; Turan 2011; EurasiaNet 2011).

These arrests became one of the main impetuses for continuation and emergence of other kinds of protest actions. A vivid example of social mobilization and emergence of protest primarily caused by unjustified arrest was when residents of Askerbeili village, more than 100 people, gathered and marched towards the executive body of their village to demand release of religious activist from their village (Turan 2012). Generally, starting from 2011 the protest actions have acquired more organized character. Certain groups of religious activists started to make calls of "green revolution", they were giving leaflets in public transports of Baku with expressions "Today hijab, tomorrow mosque and then what?" They were justifying their demand by statements that hijab is not forbidden even in Europe. Anonymous leaflets were also disseminated and attached on the walls of house entrances calling for the abolition of the decision (Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2011).

The 21st century technological means such as the Internet, particularly social media were widely used in organization and implementation of the protests as well as disposition and spirit of the society. “IT Islamists” used their skills and their arena of operation to protest against the political arrests and express their disagreement with religious policies. Religious activists who called them web-engineers-Islamists from time to time attacked official websites of Azerbaijan, such as website of the President and Ministries placing threatening messages in websites and the photos, words of the leader of IPA (Turan 2012; EurasiaNet 2012).

The hijab issue kept people strained and mobilized not letting the civil disobedience fade away. Another major protest that gathered hundreds of people against hijab ban occurred in front of the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan in 2012 (Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2012; IWPR 2012; EurasiaNet 2012). The protest broke into violence after being raided by police on the basis that the protest was unsanctioned one. As a result many people were wounded from both sides, and lots of religious protestors were arrested. Among the arrested protestors was prominent theologian Abgyul Suleymanov, the head of the religious community Jafari Heyat, who was charged for treason to the country. Later from prison he called on believers to unite with opposition in order to become stronger (Turan 2012; EurasiaNet 2012). Same kind of protest erupted in village of Nardaran on the day of Shia holiday Ashura, when thousands of people filled the streets protesting against hijab ban (Turan 2012; Haqqin.az 2012).

Social mobilization of religious people as well occurred around another event that radical believers named “immoral and discordant to their religious beliefs”. Religious activists made attempts to prevent Eurovision 2012 taking place in Baku. They declared that they would use all the means to make Eurovision 2012 fail. Calls for an act of protest against Eurovision have been widely disseminated in social media (Haqqin.az 2012; EurasiaNet 2012). One the eve of Eurovision song contest almost 40 people were arrested in different parts of the country (Baku, Sumgait Ganja,

Zaqatala, Sheki, Quba), who were suspected in organization of terrorist attack on Eurovision day. The police as well confiscated Discs with anti-Eurovision content disseminated in Baku and Sumgait (IWPR2012; Eurasinet 2012).

In 2013, the arrest of theologian Tale Bagirov fostered another series of mass protests. Religious activists and some communities (DEVAAM, IPA) claimed that he had been convicted on “false accusation”, only for his harsh critique towards the authorities and for calling on international community to assess Azerbaijan objectively (Turan 2013; EurasiaNet 2013; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2013). Mass religious protests erupted in Baku, Lenkoran and Nardaran. In the protest against the arrest of theologian, Muslims and secular opposition united and together were demanding the release of Bagirov (Turan 2013; IWPR 2013). 2013 religious protests were mainly directed to the demands of to release people arrested only for their religious affiliation, only for protection of their religious rights.

Overall, the religious protests acquired force after the decision on hijab ban was enacted. It became an impetus for Muslims belonging to different streams of Islam to unite, mobilize around religious communities and mosques to struggle for collective purpose. The religious communities and mosques were the anchor points around which the believers were consolidated and from where acquired mobilization force. The demands of the protests were directed to preservation of Islamic traditions in the face of preservation of hijab tradition, against injustices, that is false accusations of religious people, and as well against western values in terms of Eurovision Song contest. The solidarity of the protestors manifested itself in the demonstration actions against the arrests of their theologians and religious activists.

Islamic sentiments intensified to such a degree that armed religious clashes between police and religious groups as well as intra religious streams took place in Azerbaijan. The domino effect comes in place: islamization of the society led the government impose restrictions on religion, which

on its turn boosted the religious sentiments and led people to protest for their religious rights. The harsh crackdown on those protest action even more escalated Islamic sentiments leading to armed clashes between religious groups and police as well as between different streams of Islam, thus posing a considerable threat to the stability and security of the regime and the country.

When religion in the country increases to the level that it can be a reason of violent clashes it means it is already politicized phenomenon and can be considered as threat to the regime, state and society (Fox & Sandler 2006). The growth in armed clashes between police and religious groupings has been witnessed from 2009 on. Skirmishes between police and religious groupings took place in Ganja for the voicing for azan from Shah Abbas mosque, in Lenkoran two mass clashes took place for the appointment for an Akhund that was not favored by city's population and shooting in front of the city's mosques occurred with a fatal outcome (Haqqin.az 2009; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2010; EurasiaNet 2010). The situation escalated to such a degree that the authorities declared unofficial emergency situation in Lenkoran and took it under direct control of police and Special Forces (EursaiNet 2010; IWPR 2010; APA 2010). The events and their follow-up activities illustrate that the declaration of emergency situation was primarily done to bring Special Security forces to the region and suppress the religiosity of local people of Lenkoran. With the coming years the situation was intensified. Massive clash between believers and police took place in Baku, Azerbaijan during the protest action "Freedom for hijab" in 2012. The police forces ranging from 100 to 150 people started to dissolve the action. In response, the protestors threw stones and sticks in their direction. People were wounded from both sides. The deputy head of police forces was seriously injured. In the course of the clashes many people as usual got arrested (Haqqin.az 2012; Turan 2012; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2012; IWPR 2012).

In most of the clashes Salafis played crucial part and were at the center of attention. In Ganja, Qakh, Zaqatala, Sheki, Gusar, Baku, Shirvan and Sumgait armed clashes broke out between

local Salafis and the police (APA 2010; Turan 2013; Haqqin.az 2011; EurasieNet 2013; IWPR 2013). Same year Azerbaijani authorities, presumably realizing the threat of militarization of already politicized Salafi Islam, launched a series of massive crackdown on Wahhabis in the northern districts of Azerbaijan. According to state statistics, Special Forces caught 20 members from jihadist organization “Forest Brothers”. The activities of this organization in Azerbaijan from 2009 to 2013 mainly included recruitment of Azerbaijanis into their group and sending them to fight in radical armed groups in North Caucasus, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria (Yunusov 2012; Haqqin.az 2013; Turan 2012; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2013; EurasiaNet 2013).

At the end of 2013 in social networks calls of sectarian strife as well as calls to kill Shiite leader Alashakur Pashazadeh and Imam of Meshedi dadash community Shahin Hasanli were disseminated by Salafis. Wahhabis called on military war against Shiites. Sheikh Mirzakhmat Al Gusari issued a Fatwa¹⁶ to religious radical activist Amir Farman Chetin to start jihad against Shiites of Azerbaijan (Turan 2013; EurasiaNet 2013; Haqqin.az 2013). Same month shooting occurred in Gusar region of Azerbaijan where, mayor of Gusar police died. All representatives of opposite side were killed, according to official sources they blew themselves up by grenades (APA 2013; Haqqin.az 2013; Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2013).

In Sumgait city in the same month clashes broke out already between two different “non-traditional” Muslim groupings of Azerbaijan; Khawarij¹⁷ and Salafis. According to official statistics the clash burst out from the disagreement over religious ideology. In the course of collision cold weapons as well as grenades were used. Both sides got wounded. Later it turned out that the groupings were quarrelling about whether it was necessary to take Azerbaijani youth to fight in Syria and whether war in Syria can be called jihad. It turned out that most of them already were in Syria and fought there. They had contacts with international organizations and they came back to

¹⁶ Religious order

¹⁷ Stream of Salafi Islam

Azerbaijan to recruit youth to go and fight in Syria (Haqqin.az 2013; EurasiaNet 2013; IWPR 2013). The number of Azerbaijanis fighting in Syria according to different estimates equals to 200. Many of those terrorists put videos on the Internet, where they call for jihad (Kavkaz-uzel.ru 2013; Balci 2013).

Thus, as analysis reveals the hotspots of the religious clashes in Azerbaijan were those regions and cities of the country (Lenkoran, Shirvan, Sumgait, Ganja, Gusar, Qakh, Baku and Zaqatala) where different streams of Salafis are widespread. The number and nature of the religious skirmishes reveal that it is primarily the Salafi branch of the Islam that refers to military means “to solve the problems.” Yearly data shows that from 2009 the religious clashes have become more frequent year by year, the number of Salafi Azerbaijanis fighting in Syria grows day by day. They have started to pose a weighty threat for the authorities, primarily because of their intolerant nature towards other streams of Islam, towards the state authorities as well as because of their propaganda and recruitment of the youth. The militarization of the Salafis, their open criticism and threats to high-ranking officials illustrate the fact that they have “sponsors” in the face of strong countries or illegal Islamic organizations (Saudi Arabia, North Caucasus, Al Qaida) that stand behind their back and support their activities: dissemination of the ideology among the populace, challenging the state and recruiting potential fighters through the various means, including the Internet. The rising number of Salafis confirms that the religiosity of the society of Azerbaijan has been increasing and acquiring deeper character. In this way it penetrated into the politics of the country, challenging its stability and the security of incumbent authorities and stability of the country.

Chapter 3: Islam in Azerbaijan as a Driving Force for Social Movement

The paper in previous chapters comprehensively discusses the role Islam plays in social life of the Azerbaijani population and the place it has in political reality of the country. The analyses of

the findings reveal that the religiosity of Azerbaijani Muslims has been constantly rising; the society has started to mobilize around religious institutions and protest for the protection of their rights and against the state crackdown on religion. In the course of those developments radical religious streams have been attracting more and more people leading to the radicalization of Islam and formation of armed groupings. In the period of 2009 to 2013 armed clashes between police and believers as well among believers themselves took place. The situation was escalated to such an extent that the threat the religious groupings have posed to the state was voiced on highest level.

Thus, considering the definition of social movement given by different authors particularly by Amenta et. al (2004) that is “social movements are collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally biased, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part” (Amenta et al. 2004, 11), and taking into account the increasing rate of religiosity of the Azerbaijani Muslims, their involvement in protest actions and clashes based on religion, it can be stated that the Islamization of the society in Azerbaijan can be referred as emerging social movement. The social mobilization of Muslims in Azerbaijan in the period of 2009 to 2013 took various forms: from peaceful demonstrations to violent clashes. Those were directed to defend their religious rights in courts, protest against authorities’ policies, and demand the release of allegedly arrested theologians, Imams and religious activists.

The hypothesis of the paper argues that Islamic revival in Azerbaijan serves as an alternative avenue for the emergence of social movements in the country. Therefore, this chapter of the study proves that the revival of Islam; that is increasing religiosity in Azerbaijan’s social and political life contributes to the mobilization of the society, emergence of social movement in the country.

Primarily for that reason the following indicators already mentioned in the methodology section are met:

- In Azerbaijan the Muslims who are more religious are more inclined to participate in protest actions,
- In Azerbaijan there are more protest actions in religious regions of the county than in other parts,
- In Azerbaijan massive armed clashes are mostly generated by religious issues rather than other ones.

Thus, to meet the first indicator: Azerbaijani Muslims who are more religious are more inclined to participate in protest actions, comprehensive analysis of Caucasus Barometer yearly data have been conducted. Pearson correlation reveals that in the course of 2009-2013 there is a positive significant correlation between religiosity of society and tendency to protest. However, the correlation only shows that there is positive relationship between religiosity and orientation to protests, it doesn't say anything about the impact of independent variables on dependent one¹⁸. To be able to measure the impact, to predict the change in dependent variable by the help of independent ones linear regression analyses have been conducted. In 2009 regression model frequency of fasting is taken as an independent variable and participation in protest actions as a dependent one. $P < 0.05$, Std. error = 0.19, is less than the value of coefficient and t-statistics= 2.309, higher than 1.96 which means that the model is significant at 5% level. The model shows that when all the other factors are kept constant one unit increase in frequency of fasting leads to 0.043 increase in participation in protest actions. See Table 4:

¹⁸ Independent variable: People should vs. shouldn't participate to protest actions
Independent variables: How important is religion in your daily life, How often do you attend to religious services, How often do you fast, How religious would you say you are

Table 4: Caucasus Barometer Azerbaijan 2009 Coefficients^a

Country	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
Azerbaijan	1	(Constant)	2,575	,072		35,932	,000
		Fasting	,043	,019	,064	2,309	,021

a. Dependent Variable: Participation in protest actions

2010 data is as well analyzed through multiple regression model, where independent variables are rate of attendance to religious services, importance of religion and frequency of fasting; dependent variable is participation in protest actions. $P < 0.05$, Std. error is less than the value of coefficient and t-statistics higher than 1.96 which means that the model is significant at 5% level. The model shows that when all the other variables are kept constant one unit increase in each of the independent variables separately: importance of religion, rate of attendance to religious services, and frequency of fasting predicts the change of .055, .057, .097 in participation in protest actions respectively. See Table 5:

Table 5: Caucasus Barometer Azerbaijan 2009 Coefficients^a

Country	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
		Azerbaijan	1	(Constant)			2,691	,115	
How important is religion in your daily life?	,055			,021	,042	2,645	,008	,095	,014
Rate of attendance at religious services	,057			,012	,078	4,741	,000	,034	,081
Frequency of fasting when required by religious tradition	,097			,013	,117	7,367	,000	,123	,071

a. Dependent Variable: Participation in protest actions

In 2011 multiple regression model analysis is conducted with independent variables of rate of attendance to religious services, importance of religion and frequency of fasting; dependent variable is participation in protest actions. $P < 0.05$, Std. error is less than the value of coefficient and t-statistics higher than 1.96 which means that the model is significant at 5% level. The model shows that when all the other variables are kept constant one unit increase in each of the independent variables separately: importance of religion, rate of attendance to religious services and frequency of fasting predicts the change of .039, .025 in participation in protest action respectively. See Table 6:

Table 6: Caucasus Barometer Azerbaijan 2011 Coefficients^a

Country	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Azerbaijan	1	(Constant)	1,932	,209		9,226	,000	1,521	2,343
		How important is religion in your daily life?	,125	,039	,123	3,233	,001	,049	,200
		Frequency of fasting when required by religious tradition	,079	,025	,118	3,155	,002	,030	,128

a. Dependent Variable: Participation in protest actions

In 2012, multiple regression analysis again posits that independent variables of frequency of fasting and importance of religion impact dependent variable of participation in protest actions. $P < 0.05$, Std. error is less than the value of coefficient and t-statistics higher than 1.96 which means that the model is significant at 5% level. The model illustrates that when all the other variables are kept constant one unit increase in each of the independent variables separately: frequency of fasting and importance of religion predicts the change of .117, .189 in participation in protest actions respectively. In 2012 model significant correlation is observed between independent variable of religiosity and dependent variable of participation in protest actions. Thus, when all other variables

are kept constant one unit increase in religiosity leads to .088 increase in participation in protest actions. See Table 7:

Table 7: Caucasus Barometer Azerbaijan 2012 Coefficients^a

Country	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
Azerbaijan	1	(Constant)	,879	,232		3,781	,000
		Frequency of fasting when required by religious traditions	,117	,028	,159	4,243	,000
		How important is religion in your daily life?	,189	,048	,144	3,977	,000
		How religious would you say you are?	,088	,016	,201	5,351	,000

a. Dependent Variable: People should VS People should not participate in protest actions

Finally, the regression model of 2013 confirms the findings of the analyses conducted with the data of previous years. In 2013 multiple regression model analysis is carried out with independent variables of importance of religion, frequency of fasting and religiosity; dependent variable is participation in protest actions. $P < 0.05$, Std. error is less than the value of coefficient and t-statistics higher than 1.96 which means that the model is significant at 5% level. The model observes that when all the other variables are kept constant one unit increase in each of the independent variables separately: importance of religion, frequency of fasting and religiosity predicts the change of .021, .015, .008 in participation in protest actions respectively. See Table 8:

Table 8: Caucasus Barometer Azerbaijan 2013 Coefficients

PROTEST	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
RELIMP	.1130072	.0218433	5.17	0.000	.0701864	.155828
RELFAS	.0423474	.0151908	2.79	0.005	.021269	.063426
RLGIOS	.045897	.0089289	5.14	0.000	.033008	.058786
_cons	1.948363	.0561119	34.72	0.000	1.838363	2.058363

Thus, the analysis of the Caucasus Barometer yearly data reveals that Azerbaijani Muslims who consider religion as an important part of their everyday life, demonstrate higher attendance rate to religious services, higher frequency of fasting and are more religious tend to participate in protest actions more. The religiosity of an Azerbaijani does correlate with his/her inclination to participate in demonstrations; more religious an Azerbaijani Muslim is, more inclined to be mobilized socially and be part of social movement he/she is.

The next indicator that gives answer to the paper's research questions and helps to prove the hypothesis is the following: in the period covered by the paper more protest actions took place in those regions of Azerbaijan where people are more religious. The study as a result of the discussion of the findings in the previous chapters reveals that the Southern regions, Absheron peninsula, the second largest city of Azerbaijan Ganja, capital city of Baku as well as the Northern regions are the ones that manifested higher adherence to religion in a period covered by the paper. Those are the following regions: Nardaran village and capital city of Azerbaijan Baku in Absheron peninsula, the second largest city of the country Ganja, the Southern regions of Jalilabad, Masalli, and Lenkoran and the Northern regions of Zaqatala, Qakh Geychay and Evlakh, where the population strongly adheres to religious traditions and strives for the protection of their religious rights. Baku and Ganja were the first cities where the population protested against hijab ban. Mass religious protests took place in all of the regions mentioned above and all were based on religious issues.

Protests based on other issues than religion, mainly of socio-economic character, as well took place in those same regions where religious protests erupted, where people are more religious: Zaqatala, Masalli, Nardaran, Ganja, Baku, and in general in Absheron peninsula and Northern regions of the country. The emergence of protests in Northern regions of the country may be as well attributed to the fact that most of the people there are minorities¹⁹ but the study doesn't take that

¹⁹ Lezgis, Tsakhurs, Avars etc.

factor into its analysis because of the following factors. Firstly, none of the protests addressed discrimination issues. Secondly, the protests were directed to elimination of harsh economic conditions, and finally the protests erupted not only in minority inhabited religious regions of Azerbaijan but as well in major cities of the country and in the regions inhabited by the Azerbaijanis. Thus, the analysis of the data reveals that in a period of 2009 to 2013 protest actions both religious as well as based on other issues erupted mainly in those regions of the country which has higher religiosity rate. The second indicator is met, which ones more confirm that in Azerbaijan religiosity of the society contributes to its mobilization and emergence of a movement.

The third indicator is that in Azerbaijan massive armed clashes are more frequently based on religious issues rather than other ones. The formation of armed groupings, recruitment of people, and making use of military means by those groupings to strive for the common purpose can as well be attributed to the concept of social mobilization; it is as well a form of protest but based on collective violence, and disobedience. Massive armed clashes in Azerbaijan in a period of 2009 to 2013 between armed groups and police as well as between those armed groups were of religious nature only. In Ganja believers clashed with police because of ban on azan. Confrontation between police and believers took place in Northern city of Lenkoran which ended with fatal outcome. In Lenkoran another armed clash took place between different streams of Islam. The protests escalated in the city to such an extent that the police declared emergency situation. Confrontations between different streams of Islam as well erupted in the Southern region of Shirvan, the Northern city of Gusar and in Sumgait. Thus, the findings reveal that the radical, armed groupings that pose a threat to state security base their mission and build their activities on Islam and Islamic values. Massive armed clashes that took place in Azerbaijan from 2009 to 2013 were based on Islamic sentiments. The Azerbaijani Muslims mobilized in radical groupings and in violent ways were pursuing “true Islam” in that way challenging the state.

Conclusively, three indicators: that is in Azerbaijan people more religious more protest oriented, religious regions tend to protest more in Azerbaijan than other regions and that massive armed clashes in the country took place only in case of involvement of religious radical groupings prove the fact that there is direct relationship between Islamic revival and emergence of social movement in Azerbaijan, where Islamic revival is an independent variable, which influences the changes of dependent variable; that is emergence of social movement.

Conclusion

The study has attempted to look at and understand the role Islam has been playing in socio-political context of Azerbaijan and to find out whether there has been an increase in delivery of Islamic sentiments since 2009 restrictions on religion. The literature review based on the experiences of other Muslim countries, including Post-Soviet ones has tried to prove that Islamic revival, intensification of Islamic sentiments contributes to the emergence of social movement in the county.

The paper in the historical background chapter has revealed that Islam in Azerbaijan since its independence past through different stages, that is revival of Islam, organization of Islam, suppression of Islam and again revival of Islam. In Azerbaijan Islam has constantly been developing since 1990s and it has been a subject of influence from external forces such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries and organizations. Primarily for this reason Islam in Azerbaijan has been divided into different branches and streams such as Sunni-Shia divide with their streams of Salafism, Nurcism, Khavarij and Sufism.

The study has revealed that Salafism has been the branch, which developed faster than others and attracted more population that other streams. The events around famous Abu-Bakr Salafi mosque which in 2008 got closed made the government of Azerbaijan acknowledge the growing religiosity of its population and the emergence of strong religious communities. Those communities politicized Islam and wanted to penetrate into politics of the country and challenge the regime.

Therefore since 2009 the government of Azerbaijan launched its anti-religious policy in the country with renewed force. Employing legal as well as unofficial means the state has tried to keep Islam away from politics by liquidating the only Islamic Party in the country, eliminate any intensive delivery of Islamic sentiments by closure of mosques and use Islam as legitimizing tool as before. On the one hand, it can be claimed that the Azerbaijani government succeeded as the strong

religious communities were abolished, comparatively popular mosques were demolished and their leaders arrested and convicted for long years of imprisonment. On the other hand, those restrictions fostered the counter-reaction of the population, whose religiosity has been constantly rising as the findings reveal. Protests directed against religious restrictions, particularly hijab ban and ban on voicing of azan, and alleged arrests revealed the mobilization force Islam acquired in the course of the events.

Mass protest actions in different regions of the country around religious communities, mosques or independently, armed clashes between religious groups and police as well as between different streams of Islam clearly illustrate that there is a development and deepening of Islam and Islamic feelings in Azerbaijani society. Moreover, the voicing of the threat Islam imposes on political regime of the country by the high-ranking officials posit that the Azerbaijani government was only partially successful in elimination of Islam. It reduced the number of religious communities, arrested charismatic leaders but at the same time boosted the already existent discontent and in fact contributed to the mobilization of religious people of the country.

Finally, the findings have revealed that in Azerbaijan there is positive relationship between protest orientation and religiosity of the society. Moreover, the regression analyses conducted confirmed that from 2009 to 2013 an increase in religiosity of Azerbaijani society led to an increase in its protest orientation. In fact, the analyses have revealed that Islam in Azerbaijan has mobilization force; more religious Azerbaijani Muslims are more prone to social movement they are. The findings illustrate that protest actions in Azerbaijan in a period covered by the paper mostly took place in religious regions irrespective of the issue people mobilized around and that the massive armed clashes in Azerbaijan occurred only in regard to religious issues. Thus, the research questions are answered: Islam has been reviving and developing in Azerbaijan since 2009 restrictions and revival of Islam in Azerbaijan contributed to the social mobilization of Muslims in

the country. Conclusively, the hypothesis of the paper is proved and accepted: *Islamic revival in Azerbaijan serves as an alternative avenue for the emergence of social movements in the country.*

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 iwpr.net
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²⁰ Due to the large amount of the links from the websites of content analysis the links are not included in the paper but are available upon request

Appendix 1

Expert Interview Questions

1. How do you think has Islam been growing in Azerbaijan after the 2009 legal restrictions? How is it manifested? What are the primary causes?
2. What can you say about religious organizations, communities operating in Azerbaijan (DEVAMM, Meshedi dadash etc.)? Which are the most active ones? Do they make a real change? Have they acquired strength in recent years? Is there any cooperation, solidarity among them?
3. It is a common knowledge that Islam in Azerbaijan is influenced by various forces, such as Iran, Turkey, Middle-East countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. What do you think after 2009 which country has been the most active and successful one?
4. What do you think what role does Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (IPA) play in the current political as well as social life of Azerbaijan? Does it have any serious political weight?
5. In various reports and media it is stated that IPA has affiliation with Iran, what can you say about this, how large is the support from Iran and how is this support manifested?
6. Do you think this party enjoys popularity among the society of the country?
7. In recent years many religious leaders and activists such as IPA head Movsun Samedov, Imam Tale Bagirov and others got arrested. Is this complete state crackdown on religion or do the accusations of weapon possession, radical literature possession or terrorism have grounds?
8. What conditioned the 2011 announcement of Samedov and the call to rebel?
9. In recent years different religious clashes occurred between religious groupings and police as well as between religious groupings themselves? What do you think, which groups are more active and radical and what are the main causes of such conduct?
10. What do you think can the above mentioned clashes be regarded as a form of social mobilization or a social movement?
11. In recent years many protests on religious issues occurred, concerning hijab ban, voicing of azan, celebration of religious holidays. What do you think, can it be claimed that Islam mobilized and united people?

12. Has radical Islam been growing in Azerbaijan since 2009?
13. What do you think about Salafism in Azerbaijan? Has it been growing in the country? How is the growth manifested?
14. What do you think about Nur movement? What has been its status in the country since 2009? In media reports it is said, that the followers of Nur movement penetrated into the country. What do you think about this? How strong is the movement in Azerbaijan, what it aims at?
15. Literature reviewed identified that there are cases where religion, particularly Islam becomes anchor point for mobilization of society for common goals and consequently driving force of social movement. What do you think can that be the case in Azerbaijan?