

RELIGIOUS STUDIES



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Original Theoretical Research



Patriotism and Separatism as Ideological Aspects of Intra-Confessional Confrontation in Dagestan

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Abstract

Introduction. Russia's geopolitical opponents today persistently continue their activities to destabilise interethnic and inter-confessional relations, and primarily to clash the followers of Islam and Orthodoxy. In this regard, studies of the religious situation in the regions of Russia are actualised. Using the example of the Republic of Dagestan, we consider the increasing information pressure on the official clergy, which calls Muslims to patriotism and responsibility for the future of the country.

Materials and Methods. The empirical basis of the research consists of statements by political, public and religious figures, official documents, materials of scientific publications and mass media. The main methodological foundation was the scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, the application of which is caused by the modern requirements of humanitarian reflection.

Results. According to different interpretations of the provisions of sacred Islamic sources, the canonical views of 'traditional' and radical Islam differ with regard to the issue of the secular structure of the state. Radicals aim to develop a separatist discourse in Russian society by opposing religion to the secular structure of the state.

Discussion and Conclusion. Since the early period of the establishment of the Russian Federation as a democratic state based on the rule of law, the official Muslim clergy of the Republic of Dagestan has been engaged in ideological confrontation with radical currents of Islam. This confrontation is conducted not only over canonical issues, but also with the aim of preventing the planting of an ideology of religious and national intolerance and hostility in Dagestani society. The success of this work depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of State national policy, whether in the course of its implementation nationalist prejudices will be overcome in the minds of citizens and the idea of harmonious coexistence and unity of the Russian peoples will be disseminated.

Keywords: religion, traditional Islam, Wahhabism, Salafism, intra-confessional relations, patriotism, separatism, Sharia law

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Оригинальное теоретическое исследование

Патриотизм и сепаратизм как идеологические аспекты внутриконфессионального противостояния в Дагестане

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Аннотация

Введение. Геополитические оппоненты России сегодня настойчиво продолжают деятельность по дестабилизации межнациональных и межконфессиональных отношений, и в первую очередь по столкновению последователей ислама и православия. В связи с чем актуализируются исследования религиозной ситуации в регионах России. На примере Республики Дагестан рассматривается усиление информационного давления на официальное духовенство, которое призывает мусульман к патриотизму и ответственности за будущее страны.

Материалы и методы. Эмпирическую базу исследования составляют заявления политических, общественных и религиозных деятелей, официальные документы, материалы научных публикаций и СМИ. Основным методологическим фундаментом выступили научные методы анализа и синтеза, применение которых вызвано современными требованиями гуманитарной рефлексии.

Результаты исследования. В соответствии с разными интерпретациями положений священных исламских источников различаются канонические точки зрения «традиционного» и радикального ислама относительно вопроса светского уклада государства. Радикалы нацелены на развитие сепаратистского дискурса в российском обществе через противопоставление религии светскому устройству государства.

Обсуждение и заключение. С раннего периода становления Российской Федерации как демократического, правового государства официальное мусульманское духовенство Республики Дагестан ведет идеологическое противоборство с радикальными течениями ислама. Это конфронтация ведется не только по поводу канонических вопросов, но и с целью недопущения насаждения в дагестанском обществе идеологии религиозной и национальной нетерпимости и вражды. Успех этой работы во многом зависит от эффективности государственной национальной политики, будут ли в ходе ее реализации преодолены националистические предрассудки в сознании граждан и распространена идея гармоничного сосуществования и единства российских народов.

Ключевые слова: религия, традиционный ислам, ваххабизм, салафизм, внутриконфессиональные отношения, патриотизм, сепаратизм, шариат

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Introduction. Even Roman thinkers and philosophers, of all types of patriotism, singled out state patriotism as the central category, where the object of people's loyalty is the state. It is the feeling of patriotism towards one's country that is an important unifying idea of numerous Russian ethnic and religious groups.

The active participation of Dagestanis in the special military operation together with representatives of other confessions shows that the official centralised republican religious organisation (Muftiyat RD), like other Russian Muftiyats, has become an important institution opposing the insularity of Muslim communities. It can be said that Islam in its traditionalist understanding in the region does not oppose the secular way of life of Dagestanis, unlike the ideology of radical currents.

Muslim religious organisations oriented towards traditional Islam adhere to educating believers not only in humanistic traditional Islamic identity, but also in all-Russian patriotism harmoniously integrated with it [1, pp. 54–56].

In the context of the research topic, the issues of intra-confessional confrontation in Dagestan are relevant.

Materials and Methods. Within the framework of the emerging in the region's information confrontation of high intensity between the official clergy and extremist currents of Islam, the issue of strengthening the national identity of Muslims and the formation of their personality of a patriot of Russia is being solved. The initial methodological idea of the research for solving the set tasks are dialectical and systemic approaches, analysis and generalisation of scientific sources and periodicals.

Results. It should be noted that Islam, which is traditional in the region, today does not represent a hierarchically organised monolithic structure. Unlike Christianity, Islam has not developed a strict church hierarchy of administrative power, while the principles of obedience to God and following the spiritual leader of Muslims are inviolable. But the principle of following the official religious leader does not always dominate over the feelings of ethnic and jamaat (community) solidarity; in these cases, the religious life of ethnic enclaves is led by local imams. Therefore, to some extent, the decisions of some 'ethnic' mosques to follow their own prayer calendar (ruznama) or to celebrate religious holidays on days other than those officially approved by the Muftiyat have a negative impact on the unity of the Muslim Ummah of the republic.

At the same time, neither Russian nor Dagestani legislation represents the right of a centralised religious organisation to appoint imams in the municipalities of the republic. The influence of the head of a religious organisation among Muslims spreads on the basis of authoritative law, as well as due to the special piety of murids (followers of Sufism) towards the mufti, who is the Sheikh of the Naqshbandi tariqat.

In the minds of a part of the population of Dagestan, a simple paradigm of Islamic values, accessible to the perception of ordinary Muslims, has been formed, a kind of matrix on which are superimposed ideas about a just and prosperous society in which they can find personal well-being and general social stability [2, p. 74].

While traditional Islam works in cooperation with the authorities to instil spiritual values in society, it is Salafism (after the discrediting of Wahhabism in Russia, its followers prefer to call themselves Salafis) that has managed to establish

itself as a force that advocates the restructuring of society on Islamic grounds. The political aspect of Wahhabism attracts attention because of its protest against existing social injustices in society and its appeal to the ideals and values of Islam.

In the opinion of A.M. Buttaeva, the activities of Dagestani Wahhabis are based on: spreading religious discord and intolerance towards other religious confessions; forming religiously militant communities (jamaats), preaching Wahhabi doctrine and training their adherents in methods of subversive and terrorist warfare; recruiting supporters in traditional Islamic structures into their ranks; strengthening separatist sentiments in the republic and seeking to transfer them into a local conflict with the aim of creating a separate Islamic state with Sharia rule [2, p. 80].

With the tightening of anti-extremist legislation and the closure of a number of 'pro-Wahhabi' mosques, the aggressive rhetoric of radicals continues exclusively on the virtual platforms of the Internet. Thus, pro-Wahhabi preachers and bloggers living in European countries, Turkey and Ukraine are engaged in uncompromising confrontation with the authorities, with the Muftiyat and with opinion leaders (sportsmen, journalists and politicians) appealing to all-Russian values. Thus, we can conclude that their main goal is not to solve the socio-economic and ethno-cultural problems of Dagestanis, but to separate Dagestan and the entire North Caucasus from Russia.

Some experts divide Salafi currents into moderate and radical ones (youth jamaats of 'new Muslims', 'bezmazkhabniki', Dagestani Salafis of the association 'Ahl as-sunna wal-jamaa', Madhalis and so-called 'ikhvanised' Salafis) [3]. It should be realised that the division of the Salafi movement does not indicate any significant ideological disagreement between them. Others are insistent in asserting that 'Salafism' is an uncontroversial ideology whose goals cannot be achieved by peaceful means. They are peaceful and moderate only as long as they are weak and cannot break society [4].

There is no example in the world today where the Wahhabis have peacefully achieved their goal of establishing a Sharia form of government. On the contrary, Wahhabi activism has led to civil war, destruction, and political crisis in many Muslim countries (Syria, Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, etc.). In fact, in the hands of the world powers, the Salafiyya has turned into a tool in defence of their geopolitical and national interests.

In accordance with the ideology of Wahhabism, the struggle for the establishment of the Shariah is of an unquestioning nature, regardless of the conditions of religion and the social well-being of Muslims. Consequently, the constant appeal of radicals to the theme of social injustice, to the infringement of the rights of Muslims in Russia, is most likely just a pretext for their involvement in the civil conflict. In this case, radical religious ideology is a breeding ground for the growth of both Islamophobia and Russophobia.

It should be particularly noted that with the beginning of the special military operation these preachers and bloggers have increased information pressure especially on the Dagestani Muftiate in order to undermine its authority and to rock the socio-political situation in the republic. Since it represents 'traditional' Sufi Islam, which remains loyal to Russia and fosters a sense of patriotism towards the Motherland. They are also trying to undermine the position of the official religious organisation of the republic through the constant maintenance of the heat of Islamic themes. For example, in their numerous video posts, they condemn the Muftiyat for legitimising the participation of Dagestanis in the SWO in Ukraine and for its moderate stance on supporting the Gaza Strip.

It should be noted that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that broke out in October 2023, especially against the backdrop of huge civilian casualties, is becoming one of the most pressing topics on the socio-political agenda of the region. These bloggers, using the high degree of religious indoctrination of Dagestanis, managed to induce and skilfully coordinate the activities of some young people in a protest action against the arrival of a plane from Israel, which resulted in a pogrom at the airport.

The Muftiyat appealed to the protesters for restraint and later dismissed from its ranks two well-known theologians in the republic who arbitrarily spoke about the events in the Gaza Strip from a position not in line with the decision of the official religious organisation [5]. It should be noted that at first there was a lot of criticism of the Muftiyat of Dagestan for its position on the issue of jihad in Palestine. Then, when all Muslim countries came to a similar opinion, none of the bloggers- 'adherents' of Islam, who insistently argued that there is a jihad in Palestine and all Muslims of the world are obliged to participate in it, went to this very 'jihad'.

The same scenario is repeated with the fatwa of the Muftiate of Dagestan on the temporary prohibition of the niqab. Subsequently, more and more regional clergy in Russia and abroad came to the same conclusion. With this temporary ban on the niqab, the Mufti of Dagestan removed the general label of potential terrorists and radicals from ordinary Muslims.

This fatwa was adopted against the backdrop of a growing trend of anti-migrant (anti-Muslim) sentiment in Russia following the terrorist attacks in Crocus City Hall in Moscow and in the Dagestani cities of Makhachkala and Derbent. No terrorist organisation has officially claimed responsibility for the attack in Dagestan, which killed a priest, four civilians and 17 police officers. But the director of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) said at a meeting of the National Anti-Terrorist Committee (NAC) that the attacks on temples and policemen were carried out by followers of the Salafi movement [6]. Later it turned out that all the eliminated militants (six people) were members of a sleeper cell of the terrorist organisation.

The Muslim organisation itself attributes the intensification of information pressure in several directions (for supporting Sufism as the current of the Muslim religion it represents, for neglecting the traditions of Sufism, for not wanting to eradicate Salafi communities in the republic by force, for moderation on the issue of support for the Gaza Strip, etc.) to the understanding that the Muftiyat is the body that consolidates the Muslims of Dagestan. 'Who is behind it and for what purpose it is being done, and with whose help from within, it has long been clear to us. It is not one, not two people, it is a whole group of people with their unrealised ambitions [7],' the Mufti notes.

The Muftiyat has gained a lot of experience in polemics with radicals, but critical attacks on the religious organisation by its former employee, who is the son of an authoritative Dagestani theologian who was killed in a terrorist attack, came as a surprise. The latter is supported by Salafi bloggers on their resources, despite ideological differences in their views. Initially in his online resources he criticises only the Mufti's 'entourage' and then the Mufti himself. He puts forward the following claims against the religious organisation and its head: 1. notes that the Mufti is not the ruler of Muslims according to the Shariah; 2. disputes his right to mentor in the tariqats of naqshubandiya and shazaliya; 3. claims that the Muftiyat declares those who disagree with its policy of work as munafiks (hypocrites), etc.

It should be emphasised that the humanistic interpretation of Islam by the official clergy of the North Caucasus implies its compatibility with both regional and all-Russian patriotism. The presence of Muslims in the front ranks of the NWO fighters is based on the understanding that it is within the framework of Russia's multi-ethnic, multi-confessional civilisation that it is possible to preserve Islamic identity.

The practice of opposing religion to the secular structure of the state in order to deepen separatist tendencies still takes place in Russian society, and especially in the information field of Dagestan. And if we take into account that the weakening of the main core element of the religious system of the region (the Muftiyat), which in the most difficult and extreme situations stands for the integrity of the common Motherland, i.e. Russia, it means that the religious situation is changing towards radicalisation rather than moderation. Consequently, it is not difficult to understand the danger of this movement not only for Dagestani, but also for Russian society in general.

Therefore, attempts to introduce into public consciousness the possibility of applying Sharia law instead of secular laws and the displacement of traditional Islam by its radical currents are under close scrutiny by the structures that ensure the country's national security [8].

The republic's authorities are taking the initiative to revive the law on the prohibition of Wahhabi and other extremist activities in the Republic of Dagestan [9]. It is a question of updating and supplementing the law in accordance with the new federal legislation, which adjusts state policy in this area. Previously, some officials, journalists and human rights activists had asked for the law on Wahhabism to be cancelled altogether because of its weak legal justification. They also put forward the thesis that Wahhabism is an ideology, and that if someone considers it harmful to Dagestan and Russia, he should fight it with non-repressive methods.

But the republican authorities obviously proceed from the fact that Wahhabism is an ideology that cannot be agreed upon due to its open separatist orientation. Salafist preachers openly declare the 'de-occupation' of the North Caucasus as the ultimate goal of their movement in their broadcasts.

The official clergy believes that the Law on the Prohibition of Wahhabism adopted in 1999 has played a huge role in the prevention of extremism and terrorism. Since only a narrow circle of specialists and experts pay attention to the legal difficulties for law enforcement practice, and in the minds of the majority of the population of the republic Wahhabism as a religious and socio-political phenomenon thanks to this law is removed from the legal field. And, therefore, the cancellation of this law will have the effect of legitimising Wahhabism in the eyes of Dagestanis.

Discussion and Conclusion. The cohesion and consolidation of ethno-national and religious communities of the multicomponent Russian society in conditions of existential military confrontation between Russia and the countries of Western civilisation is of great importance.

Some religious scholars and specialists note that Wahhabism itself does not carry a threat, and secular authorities should be guided only by whether or not citizens violate the laws of the state. But one should not forget that Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Wahhabism in a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional secular state may have different socio-political messages. Wahhabism perceives the secular nature of the Russian state as the dominance of the laws of people over the laws of the Almighty, and accordingly offers a model of minimal relations between society and the state (especially condemning work in the government, law enforcement agencies, the armed forces, etc.). With the exception of cases of introducing their agents into power and big business to lobby their own interests.

As a rule, Salafi preacher bloggers deal in detail with cases of nationalist manifestations and insulting the feelings of believers in Russian society, which are widely circulated in social networks. And, if they remain outside the field of legal response, it is not difficult to predict a certain success of their extremist and separatist discourse among young people.

Thus, for the effectiveness of patriotic education and the reduction of extremist attitudes in the North Caucasus, we believe it is necessary to pay special attention in the law enforcement system of the Russian Federation to violations of citizens' rights on the grounds of national (ethnic), religious and racial affiliation.

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