polish sociological review 3(175)'11
ISSN 1231 – 1413

DOBROSŁAWA WIKTOR-MACH
Jagiellonian University

On Secularization, Modernity and Islamic Revival in the Post-Soviet Context

Abstract: The paper reveals contemporary developments in post-Soviet Islam that challenge the predominant juxtaposition of Islam against secularization and modernization. I argue that the question Gellner has posed: why is Islam so secularization-resistant, is based on inappropriate assumptions. As the anthropological data from field research among Muslims in post-Soviet regions show, there are trends and processes in contemporary Islam that do not fit into "Islam as a secularization-opposed force" thesis. When the problem is approached from a perspective of diversity inside a religious field (Bourdieu) and competing "discursive traditions" then it's possible to identify religious groups that have positive attitudes towards secular institutions and modern solutions. Next, problems with Gellner's vision of contemporary Islam are discussed, particularly concerning the shift in power relations between "folk" and "pure" (or "fundamentalist") Islam. Finally, I argue that overcoming the notion of one homogeneous modernity enables us to understand the modernizing forces in Islam.

Keywords: religion; Gellner; Islam; secularization; modernity; reformism; Caucasus and Central Asia.

Introduction

The central idea of the secularization paradigm was that under conditions of modernity religion would inevitably limit or even loose the functions it had previously fulfilled. Modern society was expected to flourish with the support of science and secular ideologies, with no place for religious vestiges or, in a more moderate version, with religion that has become "privatized" and has no power to influence the public sphere or to shape key social and political events. Further, in the Western discourse it is often argued that secularism is a crucial precondition for the development of liberal democracy.

In this work I focus on one of the most crucial dimension of the secularization theory, namely—the process of institutional differentiation of the social systems, such as the state, education, health institutions, economy from the influence of religious authorities, religious norms and values. Religion, it is argued, is gradually lessening its influence over societies. It should be, however, underlined that the concept of secularization, like many other popular concepts in social sciences has much wider scope and, depending on the perspective, has many additional meanings. Other processes analyzed by some researchers under the secularization thesis include, among others,

the decline of religious beliefs and practices alongside modernization trends (see, e.g., Swatos 1999, Zielińska 2009).

One of the most visible signs of incompatibility of the secularization theory with the empirical reality is the vivid presence of Islam in the public sphere. Islamic symbols, rhetoric, dresses are visible in the everyday life. Islamic norms and values influence politics, economy and business. The rising strength of Islam is seen in various spheres of social systems in the Muslim world. For a surprisingly long time, sociologists of religion passed round the problem by simply leaving it unexplored (Colona 1995). Additionally, the gap that exists between sociology and social anthropology has hindered the flow of ideas and empirical data. While first generations of anthropologists preferred exploring "primitive" religions with less abstract religious concepts than world monotheistic faiths, around the 1960s a shift in paradigms took place; after the publication of Clifford Geertz's *Islam Observed* (1968), the birth of an anthropology of Islam was heralded. Besides the theoretical discussion on the status and extent of this emerging field of scientific inquiry, most anthropological research dealt with Muslim communities in remote corners of the world and gathered ethnographic materials on Muslim rituals, symbols and practices. Avoiding a wider debate on Islam and on the implications of their studies, anthropologists "ghettoized themselves in the villages" (Marranci 2008: 34).

The far-reaching resurgence of the religious dimension in the contemporary Muslim (and increasingly in the Western) world could not, however, passed unnoticed. The sociological research on religion only in the late 1990s expanded its focus of interest and analysis to encompass non-Western religions and cultures (Tayob 2004: 101). The new "globalized" sociology of religion eagerly engaged in the debate on Islam, but having little experience with Muslims, underestimated the diversity inside Islamic civilization and, in many cases, reenacted popular dichotomies.

In the discussion on the secularization paradigm essentialized Islam is often regarded as an exception to the general trend of the declining social and political role of religion. In this respect, the Islamic revival that we observe since the last decades comes as no surprise. The popular thesis of secularization-resistant Islam is supposed to explain the fact that, after the end of communist repressions of religion, when external barriers no longer stood in the way of practicing religion, suddenly the "religious boom" occurred.

The long prevalent view of Islamic revival as a simple exception to the secularization-modernization thesis becomes much more blurred and ambivalent when we approach it from an anthropological perspective, sensitive to diversity, complexity, and empirical ethnographic data. The overall aim of the paper is to counter the overly theoretical perspective to the problem of public religion in contemporary world through discussing the case of post-Soviet Islamic resurgence. I will show that in Central Asia and the Caucasus there is a support for political secularism, which stresses the need of secular law and secular governance and regards religious freedom as a basic right. Besides, Muslim societies are open to some modern ideas, understood sometimes as simply Western ideas, sometimes as modified and reinterpreted modernism.

Of the 15 states that emerged after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, six have predominantly Muslim populations (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), amounting in approximately 65 million people. According to the data from 2004, 80 percent of the region's population consider themselves to be Muslims. In Azerbaijan, the most secularized Muslim republic, the "bridgehead of secularism" (Shaffer 2004), this percentage was higher—at least 93 percent (De Cordier 2008). However it must be remembered that the Soviet experience not only shifted Islamic practices to the private sphere, but also influenced religious worldviews. The meanings attached to Islam differ to various extent from those found in Arab cultural sphere or other Muslim communities.

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, the topic of Islam and its characteristics provoked new wave of interest among the public, political leader, and social scientists. In the new scholarship on Muslims that followed, a lot of attention has been given to fundamentalist movements in Islam and to some phenomena in the Muslim world that are clearly opposing Western values such as human rights, gender equality, separation between the state and religion. Sociologists speaking on Islamic issues tend to exaggerate the "Islamic danger" by relying on the assumption that this particular religion has neither undergone Reformation similar to the one in the Christian world, nor the Enlightenment. For that reason, Islam in its "essence" is seen as incompatible with progress, secular worldview and modernity.

This essentialist approach to Islam, which seems to be still a dominant perspective among Western sociologists, is best epitomized by works of Ernest Gellner. He has created a model that is supposed to explain the Muslim world in general in all places of the world in all historical periods. In Gellner's view, Islamic religion has some "essential" characteristics that are insusceptible to changes. Especially his *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, published in 1992, has been widely cited and is regarded as a fundamental work on Islam in the modern world, mostly because it summarizes Gellner's thinking of Islam (see, e.g., Shankland 2003). Bryan S. Turner (1999) evaluates the scientist's influence in the following words: "[s]ociological understanding of the contours and dynamic of Islamic social structures has in the second half of the twentieth century been significantly influenced, at least in the Anglo-Saxon academic world, by the political anthropology of the late Ernest Gellner." This statement holds true also for other countries, including Poland. Many sociologists when thinking of Muslims tend to repeat Gellner's ideas and reflections. Although many of Gellner's theses and ideas have been thoroughly discussed in the literature, not enough attention was given to challenging his theoretical propositions concerning Islam, secularization and modernity.[1] These, however, do not pass the test of confrontation with anthropological and ethnographic field studies on Muslim societies with secularist experience, such as post-communist Central Asia and Caucasus.

I argue that Gellner's question (1992/1997)—why is Islam so secularization-resistant—is based on inappropriate assumptions for a number of reasons. First of all,

---

[1] For some works dealing with Gellner's Islamic theory, see, e.g. Kraus (1998), Mardin (1989), Munson (1993), Roberts (2002), Zubaida (1995).

such perspective does not take into account the widespread phenomenon of "cultural Islam," which constitutes a key frame of reference for a large part of Muslims in the region. Secondly, the different Islamic traditions (or discursive traditions, using Asad's [1986] concept) vary regarding the socio-political role of Islam and the extent of the secular order they are willing to accept. The proponents of secularization thesis did not predict, for example, the recent trends in Central Asia such as the overlapping of religion and state-promoted nationalism. Moreover, in analyzing Islam, a distinction has to be made between religion per se and social aspects of religion. For social scientist only the latter side shall be interesting, as it is the only way social methods can approach the phenomenon of religion. If so, then it should be obvious that religion in the social world exists only in the diversity of people's practices and interpretations.

In the next section I examine the thesis proposed by Gellner about the correlation between the projects of modernity undertaken by Muslims and the change in the hierarchy inside the "Islamic field" in Muslim societies. Thanks to modern conditions, he argues, a shift has happened in the power relations between representatives of two basic forms of Islam: "folk" Islam and "fundamentalist" Islam. The latter began to fulfill a function similar to nationalism—providing points of reference for a new, wider identity and ensuring solidarity between members of the same state. The high culture, created by an urban minority, became the pervasive culture and was accepted by the entire society.

Two things are problematic in Gellner's vision. First of all, although at the first sight the salience of contemporary fundamentalist movements may seem to confirm his thesis, even the rough analysis of the meaning of "fundamentalism" in both cases show serious discrepancy. For Gellner, the "fundamentalist" Islam is not associated with violence, jihad as a militant fighting, or with fanaticism on the verge of religion. On the contrary—fundamentalism for Gellner is the religion of the city, i.e., scholarly, scholastic and puritanical form of the faith, defined in opposition to ecstatic rituals of the rural tribes. Currently, some revivalist movements have fundamentalist features in Gellner's sense. For instance, the increasingly popular global networks of Salafism focus on "pure" faith and underline the necessity to come back to "fundamentals" of Islam. In the light of the problems with the misleading meaning of the term fundamentalism and the implication of its use, I prefer to follow the suggestion of Bryan S. Turner, who develops the alternative in the form of "piety" or "pietization" concept (2008: 6). Therefore, in the contemporary vast field of Islamic religion we can distinguish a "pious" discursive tradition, which has little, if any, connections to the important, albeit marginal in terms of numbers, militant "fundamentalists." Salafism will be a good example here. Salafi Muslims center their attention around morality and shape a habitus of piety in their daily life. Another problem is that the empirical data gathered by researchers, mainly anthropologists, on the post-Soviet Islam, undermine Gellner's thesis of the victory of one variant or one tradition of Islam among other(s). On the contrary, globalization forces only increased plurality of options and gave new impetus to the traditional models of Islam, such as Sufi Islam, which, according to Gellner, was a kind of vestige with no prospects for the modern future. Ethnographic research in Central Asia provide numerous examples of Islamic practices, groups and

movements. Folk beliefs embedded in local contexts are still strong; pious, revivalist Muslim ideas spread among younger generation; Islamist political ideologies are also having lots of supporters.

Next, I will refer to the issue of Islam and theories of modernization. It is often argued in social sciences that, for a number of reasons inherent to this religion, Islamic beliefs and values do not allow for acceptance of modernity. Another assumption that is made by sociologists is the opinion that Western modernity is the only trajectory for every society. Classic sociologists such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim believed that the project of modernity as it emerged in Western Europe and the institutional and ideological consequences that correlated with this phase would ultimately expand to all forms of societies that embark on the path of modernization. This view of a single and homogeneous modernity has recently been challenged by an approach named by the Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt "multiple modernities" (2000). The proper analysis of the relationship between the dynamics of Islam and modernization should, in my view, start from this concept. If types, forms and extent of modernity can differ, as Eisenstadt assumes, then it is possible to think of modernizing processes in Muslim societies not as leading definitely to Western-type modern structures. Although the trends towards structural differentiations (separation between religion and other spheres of social life) appeared in some of Muslim societies, which is certainly the case of post-Soviet republics, religious identity did not cease to influence in some way social institutions or individualistic orientations. It is quite likely that the influence of religious values and norms has to be taken into account in developing alternative models of modernities. The re-appearance of religion in the public sphere raises many challenges for especially secular (or post-secular) societies, but, as Casanova (1994) has rightly argued, the deprivatization of religion does not have to be analyzed as leading to non-modern, non-secular, and undemocratic solutions. Indeed, religion can play various, often contradictory role in a public life. Only if we accept such a possibility can we analyze Islam as a modernizing force, which, as some works suggest, in not an uncommon phenomenon.

Islam and Secularization

In his book *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, Ernest Gellner argues that Islam is the only civilization that is resistant to the ongoing secularization processes. At present the statement is being challenged from various perspectives and with reference to a number of religions, nevertheless the alleged juxtaposition of Islam against secular systems is still upheld in scientific and popular discourses. He goes even further to suggest that Islam is not only present, but had undergone profound reformation, which contributed to its popularity. The thesis of Islam's exceptionalism is really puzzling and the problem is still far from being solved. Gellner proposes a few interpretations, claiming to present a coherent answer.

"Islam is the blueprint of a social order"—this sentence opens Gellner's book *Muslim Society* (1980: 1). He goes on, "it holds that a set of rules exists, eternal, divinely

ordained (…), which defines the proper ordering of society" (ibid.). In its essence, Islam does not allow for separation of life into different domains, private and public, that are regulated by independent systems of law, divine and secular. Therefore, Islamic scholars are at the same time specialists in law, which in Islam means a kind of "way of life." The fact that the law in Islam relates to all spheres of life, not only individual but also public, implies that no secular order can be tolerated. The norms governing politics and social life are rooted in the sacred order and for that reason no separation between religion and other systems can be thought of in the Islamic world.

Another explanation of unique position of Islam draws upon the latter argument, claiming that Islamic civilization did not develop a model of state-Church dualism (Gellner 1992/1997: 18). Since its beginning, the Muslim community itself constituted some sort of Islamic political entity, in a way similar to the contemporary meaning of a "state." It is especially true about Sunni Islam, which developed the political concept of the caliph ("the successor" or "representative" of the Prophet)—the leader of a theocratic regime. Caliph's functions included military, legal, political as well as religious spheres.[2] Its prototype was the polity in seventh-century Madina, based on shared religious beliefs, rituals, ethics and law, which transcended the traditional social divisions rooted in family and clan ties. The brightest examples of this new Islamic institution were the Islamic empires: Mongol, Persian, or Ottoman.

Nevertheless, the most inspiring thesis Gellner proposes refers to the unique characteristic of Islam to respond to rapidly changing social and economic conditions (urbanization, breakthroughs in communication and technology, etc.). At the moment of crisis that Muslim civilization experienced as a result of encounter with the West, Muslims were able to face the challenges without abandoning or diminishing the role of religion. Such a response was possible due to the exceptional feature of Islam, which Gellner finds as the most crucial—the internal division inside the Islamic field (in Bourdieu's sense) into two subfields: "high" and "low." The "high Islam" is associated with the urban Muslim classes (merchants, entrepreneurs, etc.) that adhered to the scriptures of Islam and engaged in theological disputes, while the "low Islam" denoted religion of the illiterate tribes that valued oral traditions, ecstatic rituals and the cult of saints. The former model was based on the "instrumental rationality," which focuses on the most functional, at least in the actor's eyes, means to achieve a specific aim and can be put in terms of efficiency, as opposed to "coherent rationality," with focus on equity, conformity to binding rules. For many centuries the relationship between those two variants was in a relative balance, and it was in the course of the last century that "high" variant, called also the "Great Tradition," took the lead. When crisis began, Islamic world instead of choosing "Western modern" model of development with its secular dimension, had its own cultural variant that was accepted by the majority of Muslims. The "pure," scriptural Islamic tradition turned out to provide attractive frames of reference not only for urban, but also for rural believers. In that way the "fundamentalist" Islam acted in a similar way to ideologies, such as nationalism, uniting members of a community on the basis of common values.

---

[2] On the role and function of the caliph, see, e.g., Zaman, M. Q. (1997).

The arguments outlined above seem quite convincing until we approach the question from an anthropological perspective. Basically, instead of deducing actions of people on the basis of assumed principles, anthropological research begins with a fieldwork among a specific group of people and consists in gathering empirical material documenting actual behaviors, beliefs and discourses. Although such an approach has also limitations, in the case of Islam, surrounded by a great number of stereotypes, integration of sociological and anthropological research can give our analysis further stimulus. Let us thus examine some issues that emerge from a new generation of anthropological scholarship, employing a "bottom-up" perspective on the expression of Islam in the post-Soviet republics. Instead of assuming the practices of Muslims, social scientists should explore real strategies and discourses of believers. It will be then evident that the question: why is Islam so resistant to secularity, should be preceded by other: is Islam secularization-resistant? As we will see, the answer to that question is not straightforward.

One of the most challenging cases against the widespread juxtaposition of Islam against the secular state is the activity of the Nurcu movement, led by Fethullah Gülen.[3] Rooted in the Turkish experience with secularism, Nurcu Islam is in the forefront of creating the new modern Muslim culture, accepting and integrating, to some extent, secular values and law. The founder of this faith movement—Said Nursi—worked on reconciliation of religion and science and on promoting human rights and freedom of choice, thus creating the basis for secular Islamic culture. His followers are advised to seek knowledge on their own in the holy scriptures of Islam—knowledge should be democratized and the role of imams should be limited. This Turkish movement which emerged in the 1980s of the XX century is gaining increasing popularity, not only in Turkey, but also in the newly independent post-Soviet secular republics (and also in the West). It goes along the endeavors of Turkic republics in Central Asia to use Turkey as a model to shape relations between Islam and the secular state and promote a kind of moderate religion (Yavuz 2008: 116).

Berna Turman (2004), who carried out research on Gülen movement in Turkey and Kazakhstan, found out that inside the community there is not a simple dichotomous opposition, but a continuum of engagements between this Muslim variant and the secular states. Most of the Muslims she interviewed during her field research expressed an unanimous opinion that civil society in Muslim countries can develop through "revitalization of faith under the conditions of secular democracy and not in opposition to secular political institutions" (ibid., p. 261). The Turkish model of "secular democracy" is being spread in many ways. Since the 1990s, 10,000 students mostly from Turkic republics in post-communist region (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and from other Turkic groups in the Russian Republic) were offered scholarships from Ankara to study at Turkish universities. Furthermore, a significant number of high schools was established by the Turkish

[3] Gülen's tradition is sometimes referred to as the "neo-Nurcu" movement in contrast to the original Nurcu movement organized around Said Nursi's teachings; see, e.g., Yavuz (1999).

state and nongovernmental organizations. The Nurcu movement itself opened 129 high schools and some universities in the region (Yavuz, 2008: 126).

Close ties have been created between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Interestingly, Shiite character of Azerbaijani Islam wasn't an obstacle in developing cooperation with a Sunni state. Despite the revivalist feature of the Nurcu movement, its schools' main focus is on science, not on religion. Moreover, the trend that is observed in the Nurcu development is towards transforming Islam into more universal religion, diminishing differences between Sunni and Shiite variants.

How do Muslims justify the division between the sacred and the secular? My field research in Baku has shown a visible trend towards minimizing the role of sharia in Islam. Some of my informants systematically contrasted "moderate" attitudes and ideas of Azeri Muslims versus those seen in Iran. Even Shiite Muslims in general do not consider Iranian theocratic model of the state as an ideal. Common discourse in Azerbaijan interpret religion as a force more powerful than sharia rules. When I asked religious people about their understanding of religion, not many people mentioned the religious law. Here is one of the explanation given by a Sunni young man from Baku, which I found to be quite typical:

> Religion is a way—it's a constant need to study, improve oneself, be closer and closer to the God. It's not about rituals nor law that religion is about. Islam is not about details. A crucial thing is to hear God's words and to follow his will, to transform oneself to become a better man. Following the God's commands a person shall be more and more honest, just. A true Muslim is someone that is constantly striving to change himself.

Many Azeri Muslim intellectuals also write and teach about the moral side of religion. They take for granted the limits of religious law in the contemporary world. The existence of secular democracy is not questioned; on the contrary, this group of elite does not see any contradiction between Islam and democratic regime. Among Shiite communities of Azerbaijan, there is a visible trend of religious reformism (Wiktor-Mach 2010). One of the most prominent Islamic Shiite scholar who represents reformist democratic tradition is Haji Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, who was heading the Juma mosque in the old center of Baku until the ban imposed on him by state authorities. This Muslim scholar, who studied theology in Iran, was included on the list of 500 most influential Muslims of the world (a listing issued by The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center (in Jordan) in concert with Georgetown's Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding) (500 Influential Muslims, 2009). Haji Ilgar's community holds meetings in a private apartment. Every week men and women separately come to pray and discuss with their leader some religious issues and their social and political implications. During the focus group with female members of this religious community I mentioned the topic of the division between religious and secular spheres that is sanctioned by the Azerbaijani constitution. Quite surprisingly, they replied that democracy is among the most cherished values for them. One woman said:

> According to Islam, law must be obeyed. Law is better than anarchy. It must be accepted, but at the same time we shall remind the government to grant us the laws that we deserve due to, e.g., international

conventions signed by our country. The governing politicians create many problems for religious people, but nevertheless the law [secular law] must be followed.

Imam Ibrahimoglu works on popularizing secular as well as democratic ideas in society. He endeavors to reconcile democracy and Islam on the basis of Shiite rationalism. The Imam argues that it is the duty of Muslims to use the mind given by Allah in order to interpret the Quran. In his view, Shiism is more open to logic, rationality and debates than Sunnism. On the platform of Shiite rationalism one can find democratic ideas directly in the Holy Book. The role of imams is to guide people in finding the right answers directly in the Scripture and to analyze it using one's own mind. Ibrahimoglu's interpretations of Islamic scriptures results in his teachings about the right of people to have such laws that they want. Nobody should impose his will on people. On that secular ground democracy is possible; good governance, Ibrahimoglu argues should not force people to embrace religion. Democracy is rooted in "true" Islam, he often underlines.

Similar attitude towards democratic regime is shared by a class of "state clergy," i.e., Islamic figures, imams, akhunds that are officially accepted by state authorities. They are affiliated with the state mosques and expected to conform to political demands. Those clerics that I met display pro-secular orientations. When asked about the emancipation of secular state that took place in Azerbaijan and other countries from the region, they do not question this process and status quo. State clerics approve of democratic constitution and the functional separation between religion and the state. In case of doubts or questions they refer to the sheik-ul-islam, the highest official religious authority in Azerbaijan, who is a close collaborator of the political elite.

A lot of Azeri Muslims accept democracy with secular law and government. The common view is that in Muslims countries there should be a democratic regime. People often do not reflect upon the links between Islam and democracy but simply can not imagine having theocratic country. I inquired about some specific Islamic laws, such as the law of polygamy. According to my respondents, the lack of such rules in a democratic constitution is not a problem for Muslim people. Some Islamic laws, they argue, are reserved for very exceptional cases. To have more wives than just one, a man must fulfill so many conditions that it is almost impossible. "Islam teaches us to have one wife and only in some very special conditions, such as a war, polygamy can be accepted," one Shiite woman said.

Another phenomenon that has escaped the attention of many scholars is the so-called "cultural Islam." This term will be applied to the identity of people who while regarding themselves as Muslims have little interest in religious knowledge and religious law. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are not religious. In many cases those "cultural Muslims" display signs of religiosity and admit to believing in Allah. Their religiosity is, however, not rooted in orthodox concepts based on the Quran and the Sunna. In reference to Central Asia and the Caucasus this form of identity is partly a product of Soviet anti-religious campaigns which, contrary to the dominant myth, had affected the cultural and religious forms in the region. Indeed,

under Soviet scientific atheism, "Islam was redefined as a cultural and moral legacy, but not as a religious force (…) [and] became an ethnic marker and a core for local nationalism" (Yavuz 2008: 111). Being a Muslim is in many cases a label which enables to create symbolic boundaries between social groups. This fact I observed for instance among Muslim Chechen community settled in Georgia, where people used to stress that they are Muslims to differentiate themselves from the culture of the Christian majority of Georgians and from the Russians. Even though no judgment about religiosity can be made in this way, from the perspective of a sociologist or an anthropologist it's important to note that the declaration about being a Muslim is some cases does not imply any visible engagement in religious rituals, such as the five pillars of Islam, nor is the Muslim identity expressed by the means of common Islamic symbols, such as a hijab in case of women. Although this phenomenon refers only to a part of the Muslim community, while Islamic revival is also clearly visible, it indicates that some caution is needed in dealing with the label "Muslim."

Secularization is not a one-way process, so we may expect to observe, as a result of worldwide Islamic renewal, changing patterns of religious activities, but the process should be analyzed in a systematic way, not simply assumed. Having outlined the case of Islam in post-Soviet republics, we clearly see that the thesis of secularization-resistant "essence" of Islam has to be challenged and replaced by the conceptualization of Islam as diverse religious (sub)traditions with various meanings attached to the secular world and public role of religion.

Islam and Modernity

Another problem posed and analyzed by Gellner was the shift in power relations between two basic variants of Islam: "folk" and "urban" that allegedly accompanies the rise of modernity. The modernization processes in Muslim countries, he argues, led to the strengthening of scripturalists' status (of urban Islam) and their approach to religion with focus on holy books and theological debates instead of emotional pilgrimages to shrines and tombs. Even though Gellner is from time to time being skeptical about employing the term "fundamentalism" to the form of Islam based on scriptures, one of his main books, "Postmodernism, Reason and Religion" draws upon this variant of Islamic practice as an example of fundamentalism. This concept is quite misleading when we refer to the contemporary discourse on "political Islam," or "Islamists," who in some cases are eager to engage in violent struggle to achieve their aims. For Gellner, the terms did not underline the political dimension, rather he stressed the idea of Islam hold mainly by the educated strata who reject compromises in faith. Fundamentalism acquires the meaning of strict adherence to the "fundamentals" of faith as they are explicitly expressed in religious scriptures. This version of fundamentalism represents a more demanding ethos of jihad, understood as a struggle with one's own weaknesses and moral evil. The norm for them is the literal, not symbolic, reading of the Qur'an and hadiths. Religious knowledge is valued higher than the "expressivist" way of Islam.

With the emergence of modernity and the sudden crisis it caused, the enlightened "high" Islam provided an excellent ideology for filling the void after the demise of traditional social structures with local authorities. Muslims from a village did not reject, at least to some extent, their tradition, and took part in the revolution in Islam that was, in a way, an equivalent of the Reformation in the Christian church. The more proper, puritanical, scholar Islam became an alternative to a secular liberal model of the West. Therefore, according to Gellner, in the modern world Muslim societies became committed to the "fundamentalist" Umma.

But, is is really the case in contemporary, more and more modern world? Let us again turn to the case of Muslim republics in post-communist region. The break-up of Soviet Union, although preceded by *perestroika*, brought the entire non-Russian republics in the state of chaos and crisis. In a very general way, we can compare the experience of Muslims societies in the late XIX century, described by Gellner, with the new situation of Muslim post-Soviet republics; in both cases the societies were confronted with a dilemma—which model of development to choose? In these attempts to redefine own identity, Islam plays nowadays a significant role. Popular, superficial analysis confirm Gellner's opinion—Muslim societies in the developing world turn to "fundamentalist" ideas. Indeed, a great part of literature dealing with Central Asia and the Caucasus point to fundamental Islam as the major force in the region.

There are two aspects of this problem that need to be discussed more thoroughly. First of all, most analytics deliberately wrote about the "Islamic threat," since they were concerned with political stability and security issues. Although the militant Islam did pose a real threat to the newly independent secular states, it was a marginal issue in the whole diversity and complexity of religious landscape. However, the military conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia and in Chechnya supported the stereotypical view of Islam: there is a Sufi—non-militant, and Wahhabi Islam. The former was considered to be traditional, moderate, compatible with secular states, while the latter was an alien product exported from abroad, mainly Arab countries. As it was argued elsewhere (Wiktor-Mach 2008), the discourse of an opposition of Wahhabi versus Sufi Islam does not take into account the real diversity inside the religious field and presupposes the homogeneity within each of this groups. For the governments the term "Wahhabi" does not relate to the religious ideology of Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab that was created in the eighteenth century on the Arabian Peninsula. This label is used as a synonym of "terrorists," "extremists," "Islamists," "Islamic militants," etc.

Contemporary world-wide Islamic revival encompasses various processes. A prominent place in it plays the "pietization" (Turner 2008). The new movements that emerged in post-Soviet areas, to some extent influenced by foreign missionaries, emphasize piety norms and life styles. They may be understood by reference to Weber's writing on religion. In Bourdieu's interpretation (1987), Weber saw religion as a field of constant struggles between actors and institutions, which led to recurrent purification of religion. While at some periods the worldly needs prevail, in others, during religious revivals, the more morally demanding ideas predominate. I argue

that part of the phenomenon commonly referred to as Wahhabism is the increasing popularity of new forms of "piety." Instead of treating all Muslims behaving in a way the Quran prescribes (e.g., praying in public places, abstaining from alcohol, men wearing beards, women with hijab and long sleeves) as fundamentalists and potential terrorists, more attention should be given to the meanings Muslims attach to religion. For many of them, the pious practices are in fact limited to private sphere, and can be studied as seeking religious excellence; for others—have some impact on their social decisions, lastly, there are groups who combine religious meanings with political. Nevertheless, an increased focus on religion under the form of "pure," demanding religion is a different story than fundamentalism, at least in the most common understanding. This persistence of Sufi-Wahhabi discourse with a relatively little attention given to other forms of Islam confirms the thesis of Grace Davie, who says that (1998: 487) "sociologists know far more about the exotic edges of religious life than they do about the beliefs of ordinary people." This certainly is true in regard to Western view of Islam.

The Victory of the "Great Tradition"?

What is the future of Muslims and Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus? Will the reformist, scholar, orthodox version of Islam take a lead, as Gellner suggested? While the answer cannot be given at the moment, as the developments in post-Soviet states are rather dynamic, some issues about current situation can be raised. There are some researchers whose data seem to support Gellner's claim about the victory of the scriptural tradition. For instance, M. Hakan Yavuz, who conducted field research on Islam in Central Asia, refers to the new developments as a "second conversion" into textual Islam. Even though the saints veneration and pilgrimages to shrines that are typical of Sufi Islam are still quite common, the new trend emerged in recent years and a gradual shift from a "narrative-based 'expressivist'" way of Islam to more "scripturalist (mosque-, madrasa- and ulama-centric) Islam" (2008: 115). But at the same time, he notes that this sudden upsurge of religiosity became less evident in the mid-1990s.

Some researchers accustomed with the local contexts point to a phenomenon in some reformist Islamic communities that is in contrast with Gellner's optimistic vision of Islamic reformation and enlightenment. Analyzing existing unofficial and official religious literature, in printed and electronic form, Babajanov (2008) has found out that, although in public an image of toleration is presented, the writings of main theologists for their own audiences contain severe attacks on non-Muslims. Such interpretation of Islamic scripture becomes a justification for intolerant attitudes of many young Muslims.

On the other hand, an increase in piety or other scripturalist movements is counterweighted by the current revival of Sufism. This Islamic tradition does not generally desire to preach a political cause but insists on performing rituals, such as *zikr* (reciting the names of God) or *ziyarat* (visit or pilgrimage to a shrine or a tomb). The unique historical development and specific conditions in Central Asia led to legitimization

of Sufism even in the "urban Islam," so there was no pressure on the nomads to transform their Sufi tradition. The settlers adhering to "high" Islam did not challenge the authority of Sufi *ishans* on the basis of differing religious patterns and therefore accepted other forms of religion of the followers of holy men (Zapaśnik 2006: 28).

I would rather argue that the confrontation or coexistence of various interpretations of Muslim faith lasts, and no definite outcome is visible at the moment. The post-Soviet states and societies seek new paradigms and identities, looking for inspirations in the West, in Muslim countries, in the Turkish experiments wih secularity and Islam, etc. External factors in shaping local Islam are also important. At least a few foreign actors are interested in establishing close ties with the Muslim states. Arabic countries, Iran, Turkey, Russia and Western countries compete among themselves on the state and lower levels. State-based activities are accompanied with waves of religious missionaries propagating their way of practicing and understanding Islam. This intense competition inclines actors to greater creativeness in means of action. The dynamic, competitive religious markets (or "fields" in Bourdieu's terminology) are offering various identities to local Muslims. This new development suggests some similarities with the Western situation where the plurality of religious options created a phenomenon called "religion a la carte," because people choose elements of beliefs, values, practices to incorporate them in a new kind of religious configuration. However, the community structures are very strong and the choices are rather group than individual choices.

Pluralism has always characterized the religious landscape of Asian Muslim societies (ibidem, p. 23–42). Islam coexisted with other religions and religious traditions—Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Shamanism. The isolation from Arab centers of Islam contributed to the development of syncretic variants of Islam, which were more common than orthodox attitude. The diversity and variations in religious expressions are still visible today, and there are no common symbols that could act as unifying force and create the feeling of religious unity among the peoples of Central Asia (ibidem, p. 28).

Towards Reconciliation of Religion and Modernity

Contrary to common views propagated in Europe and in the United States, Islamic civilization does not necessarily entail opposition to progress. Gellner credibly argues that in many ways Islamic movements are modernizing and rationalizing force. For example, he raises the controversial issue of hijab (1992: 27),

> Contrary to what outsiders generally suppose, the typical Muslim woman in a Muslim city doesn't wear the veil because her grandmother did so, but because her grandmother did not: her grandmother was far too busy in the fields, and she frequented the shrine without a veil, and left the veil to her betters. The granddaughter is celebrating the fact that she has joined her grandmother's betters…

The view of homogeneous modernity that takes Western frames has been recently challenged by alternative concept of "multiple modernities" by Shmuel Eisenstadt and other sociologists. If we assume that types and forms of modernity can indeed differ then it is possible to think of the modernizing processes in Muslim societies not as

leading definitely to Western-type modern structures and secularization. Sociologists must be attentive to empirical dimension of religious phenomenon, which turns out to be rather ambivalent.

Although the trends towards structural differentiations appeared in some Muslim societies, which is certainly the case of post-Soviet republic, religious identity did not cease to influence in one way or another social institutions or individualistic orientations. Islam in Central Asia and in the Caucasus is, from a sociological perspective, a collection of forms of habitues encompassing diverse, sometimes contradictory orientations, which are intensified by the on-going globalization processes.

Ideas about civil society, the constitutional system, secular education, and the separation between the state and religion, which are primarily of European origin, have been adopted to a various extent as reference points in most post-Soviet states. However, the resurgence of religious values is adding a special flavor to this situation. In particular, it has given rise to open and latent conflicts and competitions between various Islamic movements and the supporters of secular order who represent the political establishment of the region.

In this conflict, a new type of actors participate. The Nurcu movement, led by Fethullah Gülen, that has already been mentioned, is one of the brightest example of the novel tendency. The Muslim actors look for strategies that enable them to consolidate in their habitues both religious aspects and elements of modernity, technological progress and to take advantage of globalization opportunities. For instance in Baku (Azerbaijan), the segment of practicing Muslims is increasingly enlarged by the youth, who in many cases are better educated than average Azeris and more open to the world. For them practicing religion in not a matter of tradition, as in many cases their families were not particularly attached to religion, but a conscious choice (De Cordier 2008). The focus on education and science is underlined by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO); in 2008 it organized a conference in Azerbaijan, where a new "Strategy for the Science, Technology and Innovation in Islamic Countries" was adopted. The conference proclaimed also the year 2009 as the year for renewal and innovation in the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) 57 member states. A lot of projects are being launched with an aim at reconciliation of religion and modern education and science. Some authors even suggest that Islam could survive in the USSR with a strong atheist ideology only by negotiating religious outlook with secular pressures (e.g. Yavuz 2008). This form of "secular-friendly" Islam is more appealing to the younger generation in Azerbaijan and Central Asia, reconstructing their identities and enabling at the same time to take advantage of modern developments.

Conclusion: Secularization Reconsidered

The article presents a discussion of secularization thesis in the light of contemporary trends in the Asian part of the Islamic world. Gellner claimed that Islam is a world religion that has so far successfully contradicted the secularization thesis

(1992/1997). According to him, the popularity of Islam among various strata of a society was strengthen by the confrontation with the West and the unique solution that the "pure," "enlightened" Islam provided for the whole nations. The ethnographic evidence illustrated the phenomena inside Muslim communities that are challenging the view of essentially anti-secular values and norms of Islam. I argued that the Gellner's question: why is Islam so secularization-resistant is based on a false premise. The key questions to explore by sociologists are: what is the real role of Islamic beliefs and practices in their societies? How is Islam reinterpreted in the context of deep social and political changes? What kind of resources and strategies Muslims use to make Islam more consonant with modernity? And finally, what does "modernity" and "secularization" mean to Muslims?

It is however still quite common in social sciences to analyze Islam from the perspective of juxtaposing it against secularization and modernity. Essentialist thinking of Islam as a unified system has probably become stronger after September 11, or at least more visible. However, more promising in coming to grips with the current "Islamic boom" is the second approach, which conceptualizes Islam as a diversity of traditions. This view is emphasized, among others, by Talal Asad (1986), who is one of the main proponents of the quite recent field of inquiry, anthropology of Islam. Asad defines religion as being contextual and shaped by the product of particular historical developments. In order to understand Islam, we should take into account the diverse processes of contextualization of a universal religion and their outcomes.

The key challenge that emerges in the encounter of sociological theory with Islam is to find an appropriate analytical framework. Instead of making assumptions about (in)compatibility of Islam with various forms of modern structures, we should explore empirical reality of Muslim societies and their real responses to the problems and tensions that globalization brings. Thus, the cooperation between sociological and anthropological scholarship should be encouraged. Anthropological "bottom-up" perspective and interest in diversity enables to counter an essentialist version of Islam as the main source of identity that guides the practices and actions of all Muslims.

The recent shift in the sociology of religion resulting in increased interest in non-European religions and cultures is both promising and challenging. It is evident now that the secularization paradigm in its classic form, assuming the change of a function religion plays in society, is applicable, to some extent, to the Judeo-christian religions and is grounded in the particular Western experience of modernity. Peter L. Berger (1999), a former proponent of "secularization theory," argues that the world today in to a large extent a religious one with (Western) Europe as an exception, and moreover that modernization more often strengthens religion.

One way to move forward sociological scholarship of religion, secularization and Islam is to reconsider Casanova's approach to understanding the secularization as limited to the differentiation process (1994). Once we reduce the concept of secularization to the acceptance of different spheres in social life and emancipation of secular institutions from religion's control, it may be possible to find such meanings inside some of the Islamic discursive traditions.

Another emerging perspective that could be fruitful in researching Islam, secularism and modernity are the recent cross-cultural surveys of public opinion in Muslim-majority countries. Such studies also suggest the need for re-examining the secularization thesis. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris used evidence from empirical research of World Values Survey/European Values Survey carried out in eighty societies, including Islamic ones, to reconcile facts about vitality of religion and the spread of secularism. They found out that the difference in political attitudes and in support for democracy in the Western and Muslim world is minimal. More positive attitudes towards democratic values can be found in Islamic societies than, e.g., in Russia. Factors other than cultural or religious may seem to be crucial; Inglehart and Norris suggest that this pattern can be explained by historical experience (legacy of the Cold War) and evaluation of everyday performance of democratic regimes. They conclude that the deepest division between the West and Muslim countries is neither in views about secularization nor modernity, but in values and norms regarding gender roles and sexual liberalization (Inglehart, Norris 2004, p. 154).

The structural trend of differentiation took place in the Muslim countries, particularly in those that were once part of the Soviet Union. The question is then: how do the societies respond to such processes, and, do they accept the separation of secular law and order from the rule of Islam. The promise for the sociological theory of religion lies in researching "lived religion" from a "bottom-up" perspective as well as in combining qualitative research with systematic quantitative projects.

References

500 Influential Muslims in the World, 2009, first edition, ed. by Ed Marques, Usra Ghazi, the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre.

Asad, Talad. 1986. "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Center for Contemporary Arab Studies Occasional Papers*. Washington DC: Georgetown University.

Babajanov, Bakhtiar. 2008. "Secularism and the Inter-Confessional Ritf. (Central Asia's experience)," *Central Asia and the Caucasus Journal* 2(50).

Berger, Peter L. (ed.), 1999. *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1987. "Legitimation and structured interests in Weber's sociology of religion," in: S. Lash; S. Whimster (eds.), *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity*. London: Allen and Unwin, pp. 119–136.

Casanova, Jos. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Colona, Fanny. 1995. "Islam in the French sociology of religion." *Economy and Society* 24(2): 225–244.

Davie, Grace. 1998. "Sociology of Religion," in: W. H. Swatos, P. Kivisto (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*. Landham MD: Rowman Altamira.

De Cordier, Bruno. 2008. "A Eurasian Islam? Central Asia and the Caucasus." *Journal of Social and Political Studies* 5(53): 129–139.

Eisenstadt, Shmuel Noah. 2000. "Multiple modernities." *Daedalus*, Winter: 1–29.

Fethullah Glen's movement, http://www.fgulen.org.

Geertz, Clifford. 1968. *Islam Observed. Religious development in Morocco and Indonesia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gellner, Ernest. 1992/1997. *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London and New York: Routledge.

Gellner, Ernest. 1981. *Muslim Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Inglehart, Ronald; Norris, Pippa. 2004. *Sacred and Secular. Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESC), http://www.isesco.org.ma.
K r a u s, Wolfgang. 1998. "Contestable Identities: Tribal Structures in the Moroccan High Atlas." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1: 1–22.
M a r d i n, Şerif. 1989. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: the Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. New York: State University of New York.
M a r r a n c i, Gabriele. 2008. *The Anthropology of Islam*. Oxford: Berg.
M u n s o n, Henry. 1993. "Rethinking Gellner's Segmentary Analysis of Morocco's Ait Atta." *Man* 2: 267–280.
Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), http://www.oic-un.or.
R o b e r t s, Hugh. 2002. "Perspectives on Berber politics: on Gellner and Masqueray, or Durkheim's mistake." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1: 107–126.
S h a f f e r, Brenda. 2004. "Republic of Azerbaijan," in: V. Babak; D. Vaisman, and A. Wasserman (eds.), *Political Organization in Central Asia and Azerbaijan*. London: Portland Frank Cass.
S h a n k l a n d, David. 2003. "Gellner and Islam." *Social Evolution and History* 2: 118–142.
S w a t o s, William H. Jr; C h r i s t i a n o, Kevin J. 1999. "Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept." *Sociology of Religion*, Fall.
T a y o b, Abdulkader. 2004. "The Study of Religion and Social Crises: Arab-Islamic Discourse in Late Twentieth Century," in: P. Antes; A. W. Geertz; R. R. Warne (eds.), *New Approaches to the Study of Religion*. Volume 1: "Regional, Critical, and Historical Approaches." Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 101—145.
T u r a m, Berna. 2004. "The Politics of Engagement between Islam and the Secular State: Ambivalences of 'Civil Society'." *The British Journal of Sociology* 55(2): 259–281.
T u r n e r, Bryan S. 1999. "The Sociology of Islamic Social Structures." *Sociology* 33: 199–202.
T u r n e r, Bryan S. 2008. "Introduction: the Price of Piety." *Contemporary Islam* 2: 1–6.
W i k t o r - M a c h, Dobrosława. 2010. "Competing Islamic Traditions: an Anthropological Perspective." Ph.D. dissertation.
W i k t o r - M a c h, Dobrosława. 2008. "Competing Islamic Traditions in the Caucasus." *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, pp. 63–69.
Y a v u z, Hakan M. 2008. "The Trifurcated Islam of Central Asia: A Turkish Perspective," in: J. L. Esposito; J. O. Voll; O. Bakar (eds.), *Asian Islam in the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 109–144.
Y a v u z, Hakan M. 1999. "Towards an Islamic liberalism?: the Nurcu movement and Fethullah Glen." *Middle East Journal* 4: 584–605.
Z a m a n, Muhammad Qasim. 1997. "The Caliphs, the Ulama, and the Law: Defining the Role and Function of the Caliph in the Early Abbasid Period." *Islamic Law and Society*.
Z a p a ś n i k, Stanisław. 2006. *Walczący islam w Azji Centralnej. Problemy społecznej genezy zjawiska* [Fighting Islam in Central Asia]. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
Z i e l i ń s k a, Katarzyna. 2009. *Spory wokół teorii sekularyzacji* [The Quarrels on Theory of Secularization]. Kraków: Nomos.
Z u b a i d a, Sami (1995). "Is there a Muslim Society? Ernest Gellner's Sociology of Islam." *Economy and Society* 24(2): 151–188.

Biographical Note: Dobrosława Wiktor-Mach is a sociologist specializing in contemporary Islam in Europe and in the Caucasus, where she has been doing field research. She holds a PhD in Social Sciences from the Jagiellonian University. Her dissertation "Competing Islamic Traditions: an Anthropological Perspective" deals with diversity in Islamic trends in Baku, Azerbaijan. Her recent publications include: "Everyday life in Baku" (2011) (in Polish), "Religious Pluralism among Muslims in Azerbaijan" (2010), *Azerbaijan in the World*, "Muslim Organizations in Poland" (2008), *ISIM Review* and "Measuring Muslims: The Problem of Religiosity and Intrareligious Diversity," *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, 2011.

Address: E-mail: dobroslawa.wiktor@gmail.com