

Social status of ‘Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi’ in present-day Azerbaijan

‘Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi’ as counter-balance

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● **Research background**

Azerbaijan is a country comprising approximately 70% Shia and 25% Sunni Muslims, while the national majority are Azerbaijanis (descended from the Turkic people). We can see the authority of secularism through the government’s control policy on Islam and ‘Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi’, which is a society organization that controls Ulama (Islamic law scholars) and mosques.

In fact, when walking around an Azerbaijani town, we can observe women not wearing headscarves, alcohol and pork being sold and consumed, and other examples of non-Islamic practices. Conversely, despite government and ‘Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi’ policies, uncontrollable Islamic social organizations are active. To limit them, laws and police powers are exercised to manage the current situation.

● **Research purpose and aim**

Prior research on the management of uncontrollable Islamic social organizations has either neglected or ignored the roles of the government and ‘Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi’. Unlike prior research, this study focuses on the policies of ‘Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi’ on Islam and social status.

Focusing on these points, it is possible to provide the government’s perspectives, rather than only the perspectives from outside the government, on the nature of Islam in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, I consider that this research can contribute not only to policies in Azerbaijan but also to enhancing understanding of the relationship between Islam and the governments of former Soviet and socialist bloc nations.

● **Results and achievements by fieldwork**

I stayed in Azerbaijan from 25 January to 26 March 2016. I principally engaged with my counterparts at the Azerbaijan Diplomacy University, researching the literature collection in their library and archives. I also observed activities and conducted interviews in mosques and at shrines around Azerbaijan. In addition, I participated in celebrations for Nowruz (the New Year of the Iranian calendar).

Through this research, I discovered that the Azerbaijan people consider ‘Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi’ to be both a corrupt organization and a counter-balance to the radical Shia and Iran. In particular, people living in urban areas and the Sunni people in the north of the country are considered as such. In addition, few people value the newly established and repaired mosques and holy shrines.

● **Implications and impacts on future research**

Through fieldwork and interviews, it is possible to obtain a variety of information and resources pertinent to my research interests. In particular, It is large, I know ‘Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi’ of social status. However, given that the Azerbaijani language does not talk as well in interview, there are often many reflection points. I want to take advantage of this reflection in my next study.



Bonfire for Nowruz (New Year, Iranian calendar): originally a national holiday of Zoroastrianism.



People dancing at Nowruz celebrations



Posters of former President Heydar Aliyev: the current outline policy on Islam was settled in the Heydar Aliyev era.



Friday Salah in Taza Pir Mosque (Baku) : ‘Qafqaz Müsəlmanları İdarəsi’ of headquarters.



Holy Shrine of Ganja : most of the pilgrims appear to be lone women..