Authoritarian Patriarchy, Racism, and the Crisis of Knowledge: Towards a "De-Radicalization" of the Global Religious Space

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There has been much hype surrounding the alleged "radicalization" of Moslems, both across the post-Soviet space and globally. In recent years, the narrative of radicalization has tended to point to two underlying tendencies to vindicate its message: one, growing sectarian division and inter-sectarian violence within Islam and the militarist disposition of certain Islamist groups towards the governments of countries in which they operate; and two, ISIS' documented success in attracting Moslem recruits from both within the Western milieu and across Moslem-majority landscapes, including the post-Soviet space. While much of elite discourse on Islam today, associating the latter with radicalism and violence, is clearly flawed and has evidently been designed to serve the elite's political agenda (an agenda that varies from West to East),[1] there have nevertheless been signs of some limited radicalization, at least as evidenced by ISIS' recruitment success, even if one accepts the notion of ISIS itself (as a crude reality and as a concept) having been masterminded by certain forces in the West and thus the ISIS leadership—not unlike was (at least initially) the case with al-Qaeda—having been subservient to Western interests.

In the context of Azerbaijan, some limited groups within the broader Salafi community expressly critical of the incumbent regime have embraced violence as a principal tactic in their political struggle, a reality that has served to reinforce

Islam's association with barbarity, radicalism, and violence in the eyes of the broader public. Referred to as the *Khawarij* (Arabic for "the expelled") by the mainstream Salafi community, this group, which is geographically centered around the northern regions, as well as Sumgayit city, does not recognize the legitimacy of the incumbent regime and thus, unlike the vast majority of Salafis, considers it appropriate "to rebel against the existing government and all Moslems who do not act like them to be infidels."[2] According to Gamet Suleymanov, a long-time leader of the followers of the Salafi variant of the Moslem creed in Azerbaijan, they "belong to the Moslem Umma, but rebel against it."[3]

With the advent of ISIS and despite unequivocal and very strong opposition from moderates like Gamet Suleymanov, hundreds of members of Azerbaijan's Salafi community (particularly from Sumgayit and Zaqatala) left the country from 2013 to join the ISIS jihadist forces in Syria and Iraq, a reality that added a new layer of perceived threat from Islam to Azerbaijan's domestic security landscape (and thus to the negative representation of Islam across much of the population). With the numbers of ISIS recruits from Azerbaijan allegedly reaching one thousand in 2016, there has been concern that upon return to their home country these people, who will now "have access to the sources of weapons, terrorist network [and will have] accumulate[d] battle experience … will be a real threat."[4] This is a global reality, affecting all countries whose Moslem citizens have been recruited to ISIS or otherwise been successfully manipulated into joining other radical groupings.

While much of the current hysteria has been the product of Western and post-Soviet secular media apparently aimed at fueling Islamophobia to help legitimate elites' political agendas in their respective domains,[5] the individual cases of radical expression that exist, particularly as exposed by ISIS success in luring devout Moslems into their fold, must be addressed if one is to uncover deeper realities that require

attention, realities that have thus far been keeping members of the Moslem community from embracing a better version of themselves in the ideologically charged conditions of Western (and Western-like) modernity. An analysis of reasons for the recruitment success of the likes of ISIS should be the first port of call in any enquiry about "Moslem extremism," since other manifestations of alleged radicalization, including inter-sectarian tension and violence and militarist dispositions towards their respective governments, have in large measure derived from this latter reality, with many Moslems falling prey to the propaganda machine of the few extremist organizations that exist, either through online exposure thereto or upon return from a field engagement.

So, what has prompted Moslems to join organizations like ISIS over the past few years? What are the underlying causes of the phenomenon that has fed the narrative of alleged radicalization? While the cases of Western Moslems and their counterparts in the post-Soviet space diverge on a number of levels, they all also share some common features.

State Authoritarianism in the Eastern Context

For Moslem-majority states, whether in the post-Soviet space, in the Middle East, or in Eurasia more broadly, there is a simple explanation. The level of state oppression that exists in this part of the world, both in general and against the practicing Moslem population in particular, has worked to nurture a landscape where any opening that promises even the slightest possibility of change becomes welcome. Such, sadly, was the opening provided by the likes of ISIS.[6]

Symbolic Violence and Racism in the Western Context

The underlying situation in many Western countries that pushed a number of Moslems there to embrace ISIS in many ways parallels the authoritarian condition in the Moslem East. Here, the level of racism against first-generation immigrants and those otherwise classed as "the Other"—discrimination,

prejudice, and cultural bias based on both religious and ethnic categorizations of difference—has rapidly been progressing to reach a scale never before witnessed, a reality most vividly expressed in European attitudes towards Moslem refugees from the Middle East in recent years and the intensification of the Islamophobia narrative in the US since Trump has occupied the White House. A structural condition that amounts to oppression similar to that Moslems experience in the Eastern context, the dynamic of Western racism made Western Moslems similarly welcoming of the bogus opening presented by ISIS.[7]

Indeed, the prevailing narrative facing Moslem communities in the West today, one both aggressively promoted by the Western media and eagerly upheld by politicians, is that when Moslems kill, it is always a "hate crime" and terrorism, yet when Moslems are murdered, it is "the result of a dispute over a parking spot."[8] And when Christians plot (or actually commit) a murder, even on a massive scale, they are in no way terrorists, nor are they "culturally motivated;" rather, they are isolated "murderous misfits" "obsessed with killing."[9] That is, criminals and murderers across the globe are nothing but mentally disturbed disconnected persons ("lone wolves") in need of medical intervention—unless they are Moslems, in which case they are internationally embedded terrorists or politically-linked stiflers of freedom.[10]

Overall, the increasing reality of public negativity towards everything Moslem within which practicing Moslems in the West must learn to live is a prime factor breeding radicalism and nurturing intolerance among Moslems themselves. And the blindness underpinning these negative public attitudes is often striking. In a tea discussion prior to the beginning of a seminar on Central Asia in London, one of the more prominent London-based scholars on the region began to ardently argue that the majority of mosques in the UK should be shut down or at least closely monitored because, so the scholar's argument went, it is they that breed radicalism and religious

intolerance in the UK's otherwise secular context. "Wrong," was my immediate reply, for the opposite is true. It is in mosques that Moslem communities, in particular those that include recent immigrants, find a social safety net amid the negative attitudes and media coverage they face in an increasingly hostile Western secular context. It is in mosques that they find a community of like-minded believers, which keeps them away from heightened intolerance and radicalization.[11]

The negative attitude towards Islam, and religion in general, has increasingly found its way to Western scholarship. A recent international study conducted by the University of Chicago, for example, "concluded" that children from religious families – and thus with a religious upbringing – tend to be more "aggressive" and cling to more "radical" viewpoints than their secular peers, a statement that was apparently designed to serve as a "scientific" validation of many secularists' own pre-established perception of religion (and Islam in particular) as evil and religiosity as an inherently negative, undesirable phenomenon. The authors of the study also sought to denounce "the entrenched notion that children in pious families grow more kind and altruistic than their peers," indicating that "in [their] experiment, the children of atheists and non-religious parents turned out to be more generous."[12]

Patriarchy and Oppression in a Moslem Familial Context

Next, whether they come from West or East, for some (indeed, many) Moslems, joining the likes of ISIS has constituted a desperate attempt to flee from stifling realities at home, where authoritarian and patriarchal traditional culture continues to reign supreme. Indeed, the oppressive family dynamics that underpin the reality of Moslem existence today have been critical in inducing individual Moslem believers to look for an escape with any actor potentially able to offer one. In the Moslem East, in particular, the life of a young

person is often reduced to continuous attempts to escape the stifling authoritarianism and patriarchy of both family and the state, attempts conditioned by the structural reality of ignorance and despair that have landed many in the clutches of the likes of ISIS. Thus has the continuously reproduced inferiority complex of those elders who are meant to lead (a primary cause behind patriarchal entrenchment) brought society to the edge of the abyss, rendering it a mindless pawn in a fatal game and easy prey for manipulation.[13]

The Pervasive Ignorance of Faith Tradition Among the Faithful

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in a Western context and across the Moslem-majority East alike, Moslems' lack of genuine knowledge of their own faith tradition, including among practicing believers, has been a critical enabling factor behind the recent wave of seeming radicalization, as evidenced by their naïve embrace of the likes of ISIS, an embrace that has in large measure been a function of misguidedness rather than radicalization. Oliver Roy has made this point explicitly, arguing that one group of "new jihadists" were radical masses who turned to Islam to legitimate their radical disposition,[14] while the other group was comprised of pious followers of Islam misled into radicalism by the bogus calls of the jihadi leadership.

While religious knowledge offers the best antidote to radicalization and terrorist recruitment (and thus is key to larger-scale and longer-term de-radicalization), misperceptions about its effects abound. The mainstream narrative on Islam in post-Soviet societies like Azerbaijan has long been that sectarian (including Shia-Sunni) cleavages were less prominent back in the Soviet era due to the lack of genuine knowledge of Islam among the grossly secularized population; the rise of religious awareness over the past three decades, by contrast, is held to have gradually led to heightened sectarian intolerance and tensions within the Moslem community, thus serving to breed radicalization. The

truth, however, is more complex, for once a revert delves into religious learning and seeks to reach beyond the most basic level of religious understanding, radical thoughts and dispositions have no prospect of settling in his inherently inquisitive mind. Nor would such a person ever consider joining the likes of ISIS, for he would recognize in them the force of evil, not only because he would be better versed in the vast body of the Prophetic (SAAS)[15] *hadith**[16]* on the subject,[17] but also because he would know that anyone who claims to believe in God and His Messenger (SAAS) thus becomes, for Moslems, a believer whose blood and property are sacred to fellow believers.

"If anyone kills a believer deliberately, the punishment for him is Hell, and there he will remain: God is angry with him, and rejects him, and has prepared a tremendous torment for him," states the Qur'an (4:93), immediately adding: "So, you who believe, be careful when you go to fight in God's way, and do not say to someone who offers you a greeting of peace, 'You are not a believer,' out of desire for the chance gains of this life…" (4:94). Indeed, the blood of any human being, believer or not, is held sacred in Islam, unless there has been a clear transgression on the part of the latter. "[I]f anyone kills a person—unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land—it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind," states the Qur'an (5:32). Consequently, no believer well versed in religious matters would ever accept the massive undifferentiated killing of Shias and Kurds as a call of Islam, instead regarding these acts as an explicit sign of apostasy or at least misguidedness. Yet without such deeper knowledge, a believer, however pious, might almost inevitably find himself with questions, both about the call of the likes of ISIS and about the course of action that he personally should undertake. In other words, such a believer would easily fall victim to the extremists' propaganda machine.

I once had a lunch conversation about ISIS with a second-generation UK-born Moslem of Pakistani origin, in the days when ISIS had just come to the surface and many Moslems across the globe were still uncertain of the organization's true identity. A highly educated ophthalmologist, this devout man, who had only recently reverted to Islamic practice and thus had lacked thorough knowledge of the faith, turned to me and asked: "Why do you think we are not rushing to join the ranks of ISIS? What prevents us from doing this?" While I quickly responded that I simply did not feel like joining them, he continued trying to justify his "inaction" by various arguments, including the fact that the UK as a country had given him everything, including high-quality education, and joining ISIS would amount to nothing short of betrayal of the motherland. This man, who had just embarked on a journey into his faith tradition, was full of doubts as to what ISIS represented and whether he personally was meant to answer their public call and join their ranks – this despite being anything but the uneducated lonely radical that the mainstream discourse would lead us to believe that all those who ultimately joined ISIS were.

I also remember when a number of leading scholars of Islam across the globe joined together to issue a public statement denouncing ISIS as violating all Islamic precepts through their actions and thus representing a force from which all Moslems should stay away. I shared the statement on my Facebook wall, along with a prominent Moslem scholar's broader reflections on the evil reality of ISIS. One of my Azerbaijani friends quickly commented with thanks, adding that the information that I had posted "helped" – the implication being that it helped him make a personal decision as to how to relate to the phenomenon of ISIS. Although a highly educated professional with a doctoral degree from a U.S. university, on an upward career track, and a happy family man, he clearly had questions about ISIS in the early days of the latter's existence.

Elites' Complicity in Engendering and Sustaining Religious Ignorance: The Eastern Context

In view of these realities, one might reasonably come to the conclusion that the best course of action against "radicalization" would be a struggle against religious ignorance that would help increase Moslems' awareness of their own faith tradition. In reality, the opposite is happening: the global Moslem community is experiencing a dramatic crisis of knowledge, one facilitated in the Moslem-majority East (particularly across the post-Soviet space) by the restrictive measures adopted by national governments, where the authoritarian regimes in power, which have embraced modernity as their legitimating creed, see the popularization of any genuine religious knowledge as a potential challenge to their political survival. We have therefore seen continued practices of closure, censorship, and harassment (particularly prevalent following the 9/11 events in the United States), with regimes in Azerbaijan and across the broader post-Soviet space shutting down every channel, including literature and schools, that a believer could tap into in pursuit of genuine religious understanding.

Indeed, viewing madrasas (Islamic religious schools) as "little more than propaganda centers where education focuse[s] on advancing national ideologies of foreign governments such as Iran instead of teaching young people about Azerbaijan," as youth and sports minister Azad Rahimov put it, the Azerbaijani regime closed down all Iranian-sponsored madrasas as early as the 2000s and expelled Iranian mullahs. Religious clerks from Turkey and the Gulf countries were also asked to leave at the time.[18]

By 2002, the Baku government had shut down 22 Iranian-sponsored madrasas across various regions of the country, many of which were subsequently restructured into Quranic courses.[19] In August 2007, the government closed down a further 19 out of some 200 restructured madrasas (Quranic

courses) operating within mosque communities across the country (14 in its southern regions on the border with Iran) and removed Iranian or Iranian-educated mullahs from the teaching process.[20] The remaining madrasas became subject, in August 2007, to censorship by the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations. Furthermore, with the adoption of new amendments to the Law on Freedom of Religious Practice in summer 2009, the Azerbaijani regime forbade non-citizens, as well as those citizens who had received an Islamic education outside the country without state permission, to perform or lead "religious rituals and ceremonies of the Islamic faith" in Azerbaijan (Art. 21.3), while the Law's Article 24.2 now required that religious communities receive prior consent from the authorities before sending citizens for religious education abroad.[21] Besides, Azerbaijan's Law on Religious Freedom now stipulates that "only religious centers and departments may establish religious educational institutions for the training of clergy and other religious staff" (Art. 10), thus effectively "annul[ling] the right of individuals who are not members of religious centers and departments to manifest, in community with others, their religion through worship and teaching."[22]In addition to imposing strict control over the citizens' pursuit of religious education outside the country, the government has also moved to ban foreigners from proselytizing and, from 2004, began to strictly control the import and distribution of all kinds of religious material. Justifying state censorship against religious literature, a then-officer of the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations, Jeyhun Mammadov suggested to *Forum 18* in May 2008: "We have people who want to promote radical extremism… If we allowed publications freely, there'd be anarchy. Books have influence."[23]

All in all, many of the measures the regime has taken to stifle the dynamics of Islamic revival, including the shutting down of mosques on a massive scale, the hijab ban in public

schools, state registration of religious communities, strict control over the import of religious literature from abroad, and the active use of a narrative of anti-state political activity to accuse and imprison religious activists and clerics, mimic almost exactly the steps of the Soviets' programmatic assault on Islam in the first three decades of their rule in Azerbaijan.[24]

The result of this onslaught against religious knowledge has been that the "mullahs," who might otherwise have served as a source of religious knowledge, are, for the most part, ignorant themselves. As such, they not only paint Islam in a negative light and reinforce its image as averse to the pursuit of knowledge, but they have also been rendered incapable of offering any meaningful religious guidance to the Moslem population, a reality that ultimately prompts the latter to look elsewhere for such support – hence their susceptibility to external manipulation by extremists the likes of ISIS. What is perhaps even more sad is that the authoritarian elite often fall into their own trap, considering the outcome of their own actions—such as the low quality of religious clerks, a result of the constraints on religious knowledge acquisition in the country—to be "proof" of Islam's aversion to science. I remember talking to a representative of the ruling elite who asked me about the way I reconciled my practice of Islam with the pursuit of science, a question I found odd. I answered that Islamic practice was actually an immense support and afforded me a range of invaluable insights in my scholarly pursuits. My interlocutor responded by citing the ignorance of "mullahs" in Azerbaijan to contradict the notion of Islam's friendly association with anything scientific. Evidently, "they who have put out the people's eyes, reproach them of their blindness."[25]

In Azerbaijan, the authorities now seem to understand that "along with external factors, ignorance lies at the root of the spread of radicalism" and that knowledge is therefore critical to any genuine pursuit of de-radicalization,[26] even

though there is still a serious fear that Islam might serve as a conduit for external influences. The most recent result of this cautious awareness has been the establishment of the Institute of Divinity in February 2018, an initiative with the dual objective of educating "theologians with deep religious knowledge and rich outlook" and, in parallel, cultivating their "love of the homeland, commitment to the state [and to] the idea of Azerbaijanism."[27]

Secular Modernity, Social Exclusion, and the Crisis of Knowledge: The Western Context

In a Western context, the crisis of religious cognizance (and hence an aptitude for alertness to external attempts at manipulation) has been facilitated by a staunchly secularist context in which modernity and consumerism have taken over as the popular religion (and the principal logic of social control). As such, the crisis has been a function of the Moslems' never-ending struggle for recognition under the conditions of continuous exclusion and racism. Indeed, a healthy conversation across the religious-secular divide has long been hampered by the epistemological rift that separates the two sides, a reality that has prompted practicing Moslems in the West (and, in many ways, across the secularized Moslem East) to gradually adjust their positions and points of argumentation to the major discussion themes of secularists and ultimately abandon sacred knowledge altogether, so as to align their epistemology, now also largely secularized, with the positivist (read: empiricist) understanding of knowledge acquisition that reigns in the West (and Western science) today.

However, the acquisition of sacred knowledge and the development of a genuine understanding of scripture – on a par with knowledge of material sciences – is key to a full-fledged emancipation from the multitude of offences and manipulations that account for much of Moslem radicalization today. One must begin by admitting that there is a crisis of knowledge within

the Moslem community today; lifting the veil of ignorance in this community – by devising new mechanisms for full-fledged religious education and by directing internal propaganda efforts towards encouraging Moslem families to make active use of them to educate themselves and their children – must be the first step towards genuine de-radicalization.[28] In other words, the Moslem community must not abandon the transcendental, a critical element of their worldview and understanding, simply because modern secularists are blind to it.

Of course, the lack of social justice and the overall authoritarian climate in countries like Azerbaijan and the growing public negativity towards the Moslem community in the likes of the UK and the US fosters radicalization in that it prompts Moslems to look elsewhere to address the challenges that they see their community as facing. The deteriorating knowledge base that plagues Moslem communities today, however, both enables and breeds further radicalization, a reality that renders the establishment of genuine channels for knowledge acquisition critical to the de-radicalization of the Moslem community. Put simply, the problem of Moslem communities across the globe has been abandoning the religious practice and knowledge base of their faith tradition – the modernist turn and associated dynamics of secularization are the most obvious expressions of this trend – rather than growing too religious. The problem is too little religion, not too much.

In Lieu of a Conclusion: The Broader Landscape of Religious Ignorance and the Means to Ward It Off

Notably, it is not only the Moslem community that has been "radicalized" and whose "radical" attitudes have been fuelled by ignorance and a lack of foundational knowledge about their own faith. The Christians and indeed the Jews have been held in a similar trap of ignorance over the past couple of decades, a trap largely created by the almighty media, and it is this ignorance that has served as the underlying source of

their animosity to everything Moslem. I will never forget the proactive curiosity of a Christian woman who once attended an "open day" that the central mosque in Cambridge, UK, organizes on an annual basis. Her motivation to come was to learn the truth about Islam, for, as she admitted, the way she had seen Islam represented in the mainstream Western media filled her with horror and distrust. She wished to see first-hand what Islam *really* was.

Similarly, the regularly-held scriptural reasoning exercises organized until recently by the School of Divinity at the University of Cambridge for a few years, which I was fortunate enough to attend, exemplified the power of knowledge and mutual understanding the latter enables to forge ties across religious and sectarian divides as nothing else could. The exercises brought together representatives of the Moslem, Christian, and Jewish traditions for ninety minutes of immersion in sacred texts from each tradition: the participants would spend twenty minutes discussing passages from the sacred book of each tradition, all united by a single theme (e.g., leadership, wisdom, guidance, etc.), and trying to make connections to what they know from their own traditions and to real-life dynamics around them. To me, this was a fascinating experience not only because it offered a powerful platform for learning about other traditions, but also, and most importantly, because it helped me improve my understanding of my own tradition and see the many interconnections that underpin and bring together the three traditions that find themselves at odds today. I know other participants had a similar experience: not only because they actually admitted as much, but also because the nature of discussions in every single one of those gatherings – meetings full of curiosity, mutual respect, and constant "aha"-type revelations – testified to the power of knowledge to bridge the rift of animosity across cultures and rally people together.

Unfortunately, not all Christians are so proactive in the

pursuit of knowledge as that woman and the many others who attended the mosque's "open days," nor is every Moslem or Jew. Very few have heard of a scriptural reasoning exercise; even fewer have ever done one. Hence, a concerted effort should be made to eliminate religious and scriptural illiteracy and ignorance in and across all three traditions and so gradually forge a bridge of knowledge and understanding that could ultimately bring these communities together – or at least those representatives of each who choose to heed the message, of whom there will be many.

[1] Murad Ismayilov, *The Dialectics of Post-Soviet Modernity and the Changing Contours of Islamic Discourse in Azerbaijan: Toward a Resacralization of Public Space* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Boks, August 2018).

[2] International Crisis Group, "Azerbaijan: Independent Islam and the State," *Europe Report* 191, 25 March 2008, p.11.

[3] Gamet Suleymanov, *Attitude Towards the Leaders* (Baku, 2001), p.17. Quoted in International Crisis Group, "Azerbaijan: Independent Islam…", p.11.

[4] http://goo.gl/C82dOY.

[5] Murad Ismayilov, *The Dialectics of Post-Soviet Modernity*…; Murad Ismayilov, "The Changing Landscape of (Political) Islam in Azerbaijan: Its Contextual Underpinnings and Future Prospects," *Central Asian Affairs* 5:4, October, 342-72; John Heathershaw and David W Montgomery, "Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia," *Religion, State and Society* 44:3, November 2016, pp. 192-218.

[6] See, for example, the case of a Chechen woman, Iman, and her Kazakh husband, Suleiman, in: Diana Khachatryan, "Run, Iman, Run," *Takie Dela*, in Russian, 29 Nov. 2017. goo.gl/c1Kiho.

[7] See, for example, an interview with an imam in a North London mosque who speaks of the ongoing politics of exclusion and "otherization" of the Moslem population in the West as a primary cause of individual cases of radical expression amongst Western Moslems, goo.gl/Cbz9eb.

[8] BBC News, "Chapel Hill: Obama condemns 'brutal and outrageous murders,'" 13 Feb. 2015. goo.gl/IHqC3o.

[9] BBC News, "Canada Halifax: Police Say They Foiled Shooting Plot," 14 Feb. 2015. goo.gl/tPPKRt.

[10] BBC News, "Virginia Shootings: Gunman Ordered to Seek Medical Help," 27 Aug. 2015. goo.gl/W6z35m.

[11] See also an interview with an imam in a North London mosque, goo.gl/Cbz9eb.

[12] Susie Allen, "Religious Upbringing Associated with Less Altruism, Study Finds," *UChicago News*, 5 Nov. 2015. goo.gl/cxuHxe.

[13] Khachatryan, "Run, Iman, Run."

[14] Oliver Roy, "Who Are the New Jihadists?" *The Guardian*, 13 April 2017. goo.gl/Swi8Gp.

[15] Salla Allah alaihi wa-Sallam (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him).

[16] *Hadith* is a collection of traditions containing the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (Salla Allah alaihi wa-Sallam) which, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Moslems besides the Qur'an.

[17] The Islamic State's choice of the black flag as its symbol was meant to establish associations with a famous prophetic (SAAS) *hadith* suggesting that towards the End of Days, "if [a Moslem] see[s] the black banners coming from

Khorasan [the "land of the rising sun" that includes parts of eastern Iran and most of Afghanistan], [he should] go to them immediately even if [he] must crawl over ice because indeed among them is the caliph, al-Mahdi." The Islamic State "was signaling that its flag was not only the symbol of its government and the herald of a future caliphate; it was the harbinger of the final battle at the End of Days." (William McCants, "How ISIS Got Its Flag," *The Atlantic*, 22 Sep. 2015. goo.gl/vXaeQc). Those who engaged with religion on a slightly deeper level, however, would know that the mentioned *hadith*, which ISIS used to lure thousands of Moslems into their ranks, has long been classified by scholars of Islam as very weak (that is, not authentic and likely fabricated) (see goo.gl/nRsLEA and goo.gl/JLpb9q).

[18] Quoted in WikiLeaks, "New Azerbaijani Youth Minister: A Rare Breath of Fresh Air," Cable 06BAKU383_a, 10 March 2006. goo.gl/4ayYAd.

[19] Altay Goyushov and Elchin Asgarov, "Islam and Islamic Education in Soviet and Independent Azerbaijan." In: Michael Kemper, Raoul Motika, and Stefan Reichmuth, eds. *Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States* (London and New York, 2010), p.210.

[20] The official reason for the closures was the need to re-examine the schools' curriculum. Many, however, have remained closed ever since, not least because the majority thereof were managed by citizens of foreign Moslem countries (in particular Iran and Turkey). See WikiLeaks, "Recent Steps Highlight GOAJ's Attempts to Control Islam," Cable 07BAKU1244_a, 16 October 2007. goo.gl/yA3Dnn.

[21] Felix Corley, "Azerbaijan: Repressive New Religion Law and New Punishments Enter into Force," *Forum 18 News Service*, 3 June 2009. goo.gl/iDbDXZ; Felix Corley, "Azerbaijan: 'The Government Doesn't Want to Give Up Control Over Religion,'" *Forum 18 News Service*, 22 July 2009. goo.gl/s87afI.

[22] Venice Commission, Joint Opinion on the Law on Freedom of Religious Belief of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR, Opinion 681/2012, Strasbourg, Warsaw, 15 October 2012, p.15.

[23] Felix Corley and John Kinahan, "Azerbaijan: Religious Freedom Survey, April 2012," *Forum 18 News Service*, 17 April 2012. goo.gl/coHlOc.

[24] Cf. Goyushov and Asgarov, "Islam and Islamic Education…", pp.168–89.

[25] John Milton's *Apology for Smectymnuus*. In: John Milton, *The Prose Works of John Milton* (London : W. Ball, 1838 [1642]), p.92.

[26] See an interview with the rector of Azerbaijan's newly established Institute of Divinity, Jeyhun Mammadov (24 July 2018, in Azerbaijani) at goo.gl/QcGv3p.

[27] Ibid.

[28] See Nicolas Pirsoul, "Reviving Islamic Epistemology as a Solution to Jihadi Terrorism," *Global Politics*, 20 Sep. 2017.goo.gl/zsKsL9; Jim al-Khalili, "Does the Muslim World Need a Scientific Renaissance?" *Al Jazeera*, 20 Oct. 2015. goo.gl/ZBMsSL.