Introduction

TSYPYLMA DARIEVA, FLORIAN MÜHLFRIED AND KEVIN TUITE

In the fall of 1997, one of the editors of this volume (Kevin Tuite) attended the autumn festival Alaverdoba, centred around the medieval cathedral of St John the Baptist at Alaverdi, in eastern Georgia. The festivities took place in three concentric spaces: outside the churchyard walls were campgrounds, a bazaar and a first-aid station (where doctors cared for pilgrims who walked barefoot to Alaverdi, in fulfilment of a vow). Within the walls was a constant stream of people bearing offerings of bread and live chickens, and leading sacrificial sheep and bulls, in a triple counter-clockwise circuit around the church. A ruined building near the wall, which we were told was once a mosque, had been visited the day before by Chechens from across the border. Finally, inside the cathedral itself, pilgrims lit candles and prayed, and later heard Mass said by the local bishop.
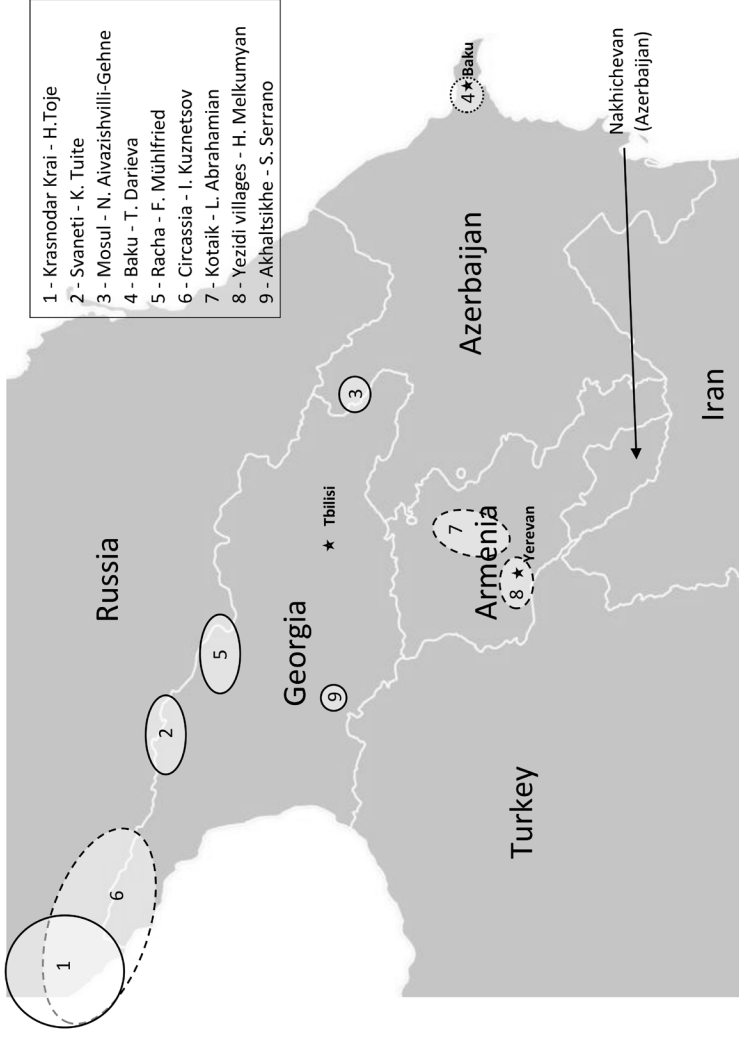
When another of the editors (Florian Mühlfried) went to the same festival in 2006, the second of the three ritual spaces had been suppressed, replaced by an abrupt binary distinction between Orthodox Christian interior and secular exterior. The new bishop of Alaverdi banned the procession of sacrificial animals, and any rituals not sanctioned by the Church, from the churchyard and the cathedral. In an interview, he denied any association of the festival or the site with Muslims. Even the name of the town Alaverdi – which means 'God gave' in Azeri Turkish – was explained away as the deformed pronunciation of a Georgian or Chechen expression.[1]

Why did the authorities of the Georgian Orthodox Church take such an interest in the events at Alaverdi, to the extent of erecting fences, posting instructions on correct behaviour and controlling access to the churchyard? Seen in the light of similar confrontations at other sacred sites in the Caucasus region – not only in Orthodox Georgia, but also Islamic Dagestan, Azerbaijan and Monophysite Christian Armenia – it becomes evident that there is more at stake than property rights. Two sets of narratives and practices come into contact, and conflict, at these

sites: on the one side, the normative and exclusive concepts of identity and behaviour authorized by the institutions of Church and State; on the other, the community-based, non-canonical fluid and variable rituals and discourses commonly labelled 'folk religion'.

The new restrictions at Alaverdi cathedral could be said to be among the less-noticed consequences of the desecularization of post-Soviet societies. Desecularization studies, popularized by a 1999 collection edited by Peter Berger, have for the most part focused on the increase of fundamentalist and evangelical religious movements in the West, and the state-supported resurgence of Christianity and Islam as privileged vehicles of national identity and culture in the former socialist states of the Eastern bloc. The literature on the desecularization of the ex-Soviet republics has by and large portrayed the religious landscape in the USSR before its dissolution as one of secularism fostered by seventy years of official anti-religious policy and schooling (Kyrlezhev and Shishkov 2011; Shishkov 2012). On the ground, and in particular, in the Caucasus region, the situation was more complex. Modernizing struggles against religious experiences had started already in the mid nineteenth century. The Bolshevik campaign was predated by the process of native secularization initiated by national intelligentsiya in Azerbaijan and Dagestan (Swietochowski 1995: 115). Influenced by the modernist reforms undertaken by Russian Muslims in Kazan and Crimean Tatars, local cultural Jadidist movements called for the modernization of traditional religious educational institutions *(maktabs)*, language and alphabet reforms, and the Europeanization of behaviour norms and lifestyles both among the clergy and the civil population. The 'print modernization' of religious experiences among Muslims, developed in larger cities such as Baku and Tiflis, included a harsh critique towards 'backward' mullahs that found its expression in the popular satirical magazine *Molla Nasreddin*, an eight-page bi-weekly founded in 1906 in Tiflis (Khalid 1998; Fenz 2008). Another important aspect of the desecularization process goes back to the historical experience of socialism and the Christian Orthodoxy in the former Soviet Union (Wanner and Steinberg 2008; Wanner 2012). Sergei Shtyrkov and Zhanna Kormina (2015) address and identify the early period of the religious 'revival' in the 1970s after Khrushchov's anti-religious campaign that led to an incorporation of a variety of religious symbols into construction of the national culture in Soviet Russia.

The strict limitations on religious activities imposed by the Soviet government, and the sharp reduction in numbers of clergymen, left most of the churches, cemeteries, pilgrimage sites and other types of sacred places untended by trained priests and mullahs. While there was some targeting of 'folk' religious practices by the authorities during the

Map 0.1 Contributors' fieldsite locations in the North and South Caucasus. Map design by Stefan Schönrock

1 - Krasnodar Krai - H.Toje
2 - Svaneti - K. Tuite
3 - Mosul - N. Aivazishvilli-Gehne
4 - Baku - T. Darieva
5 - Racha - F. Mühlfried
6 - Circassia - I. Kuznetsov
7 - Kotaik - L. Abrahamian
8 - Yezidi villages - H. Melkumyan
9 - Akhaltsikhe - S. Serrano

Russia

Georgia

★ Tbilisi

Turkey

Armenia

★ Yerevan

Azerbaijan

4 ★ Baku

Nakhichevan
(Azerbaijan)

Iran

Stalin years (in Abkhazia, for example), and occasional attempts to limit attendance (or at least keep outsiders away), traditional rituals and festivals continued unabated throughout the period. The Alaverdoba festival is a case in point: not only did it continue to be celebrated throughout the Soviet years, it was even portrayed in a 1962 film of the same name, directed by Giorgi Shengelaia.

In an important sense, then, this volume is about the impact of post-Soviet desecularization on the contemporary religious landscape of the Caucasus, including those sacred places that Soviet ethnographers associated with 'archaic' beliefs, 'survivals' *(perezhitki)* of the past, and pre-Christian and pre-Islamic traditions. The contributors to our volume draw on extensive first-hand ethnographic data and narratives, ranging across political borders and ethnic conflict lines in the Northern and the Southern Caucasus. The geographical spectrum of selected ethnographies covers different regions from lowlands and mountain areas to the steppe and the coastal zones at the Black and Caspian Seas. Located predominantly in rural and small town areas, the scope of ethnographic settings also includes areas in larger urban centres such as Baku. The aim of fresh ethnographic studies in the Caucasus is to contribute to the recent debates in social sciences on desecularization processes in multi-ethnic societies and religious homogenization in the context of globalization.

Most of the contributors to this volume discuss the consequences of the reassertion of institutional control over sacred sites, including attempts to review and renew social boundaries between religious and secular, and reassert control, sometimes in the face of resistance from local actors. Among the consequences of institutional (re)appropriation is the appearance of authorized clergy at these sites, often accompanied by the marginalization of ritual functions performed by women.

Given the tight interconnection between institutionalized 'national' religion and the state in the post-Soviet Caucasus, desecularization projects are simultaneously state-making projects. This is apparent in Georgia and Armenia and to a lesser extent in the Northern Caucasus and in Azerbaijan. At the same time, other countries strive to preserve their secular heritage, most of them in the name of fighting religious extremism. The government of Azerbaijan, for example, tries to disentangle religious and political activities. Yet other political entities such as Abkhazia try to secure equal political representation of Christians, Muslims and adherents of 'traditional religion'. Tendencies of desecularization and attempts to preserve secularity thus coexist in the Caucasus region, but all of them are deeply affected by current attempts to redefine state- and nationhood. State interest in features of the earlier religious environment can be manifested as patrimonialization projects,

such as the reconstructed fortress of Akhaltsikhe examined by Silvia Serrano (this volume), or even the recognition of a normative form of traditional religion as an official cult alongside Christianity and Islam, as in Abkhazia (Kuznetsov in this volume).

With this approach, we hope to contribute to a growing awareness of emerging and vanishing hybrid sacred places in the process of desecularization, their regional histories and contemporary micro-dynamics of change. This perspective can bring theoretical developments in the anthropology of sacred spaces, the notion of hybridity and religious pluralism into a creative exchange.

Why the Caucasus?

Centred on a mountain range straddling the frontier between Europe and Asia, on the peripheries of the Near Eastern, Hellenic, Roman and Iranian spheres of influence, the Caucasus region has been, since prehistory, both a residual zone – conserving old genomic and linguistic lineages (Nichols 1992; Bulayeva et al. 2003) – and a crossroads between north and south, east and west (Grant and Yalcin-Heckmann 2007).

So-called 'world religions' have a long history in the Caucasus.[2] Judaism has been present for twenty-five centuries, if not more, and Zoroastrianism was widespread, at least among elites, in those regions of the eastern Caucasus under Iranian influence. Christianity was implanted by the third century, and Islam within decades after the death of the Prophet. In view of its dual nature as residual zone and crossroads, it is not surprising that the Caucasus landscape abounds in sacred sites of all sorts. Going under various names, such as *ziyarat* (Arabic for place of pilgrimage), *pir* (Persian term for holy, respected person), *ocag* (Azeri), *salotsavi, xat'i* (Georgian), *matur, surb* (Armenian), *svyatoe mesto*, *svyatilische* (Russian), sacred places share certain features. They are linked to identifiable locations such as natural landmarks, built objects or ruins and are typically associated with narratives (often variable, changing, contradictory or contested) linking the site to some manifestation of supernatural power, or an individual regarded as sacred or as a saint. Sometimes the story of the site is transmitted through dreams, visions and apparitions. Visitation and pilgrimage practices at sacred sites may include speech directed at invisible 'interlocutors', and acts of exchange and offering in hopes of obtaining healing, protection or strength. Activities performed at or near sacred places include climbing as a group to mountain-top sites; banqueting at outdoor locations

near holy water-springs and trees; sharing food, sweets and the meat of slaughtered animals; and collecting alms, all of which creates flexible spaces for mundane socializing and modes of convivial sociability. Inside some shrines, for instance in Azerbaijan, hospitality must be given to all visitors, as they are considered to be under the protection of saints, who do not discriminate on religious or ethnic grounds.

The field studies presented by our contributors were carried out in all three South Caucasus countries, including the non-recognized republic of Abkhazia, and in the Russian North Caucasus. Examples demonstrate that with respect to narratives as well as practices, sacred sites become venues for contestation between institutionally supported and informal actors.

Community-Based Sites and Practices in the Face of Institutional Power

Seen from above, the Caucasus region is segmented among four recognized (and three unrecognized) nation states,[3] with more or less coherent association of the titular nation with one of the three Abrahamic faiths (with the exception of Abkhazia). On the ground, however, the situation is more complex, and the confessional divisions are not as neatly cut. The territory of the Caucasus is covered with sites that are considered 'sacred' in some sense. At many of these places, institutional – and, typically, state-supported – religious frames of perception and behaviour confront community-based practices, commonly labelled as manifestations of 'folk religion'. These are usually thought of as vestiges of ancient religious systems pre-dating the implantation or Christianity and/or Islam, but they can be of recent origin, such as the Baku-based Shia cult of the 'Boneless Saint' examined by Tsypylma Darieva in this volume. Whether of ancient or modern origin, so-called 'folk' religious practices are by no means static, but rather continually changing and adapting to circumstances created in large part by institutional state and religious authorities.

Competing understandings of proper piety and religious practices at sacred places can be observed in almost all chapters in this volume. A number of articles raise the important question of folk Christian and Islamic sacred sites contested by different groups, in particular by representatives of the official clergy. There are different forms of practice and contestation between conventional institutionalized versions of religious practices and folk faith practices (initiatives 'from below'). There is a lack of clear juridical frameworks for the operation of sacred sites, so

that management, protection and claims for sacred sites are negotiable in the realm of secular, common or religious laws (see Melkumyan in this volume). Regardless of nominal confession in Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia or Dagestan, there is a striking similarity in the labelling of local shrines and other peripheral worship sites as 'pagan' by the clergy and purists.

Competition can take different forms, and conflicting approaches to a given site among pilgrims and participants can remain latent and hidden (see chapters by Nino Tserediani et al. and Hamlet Melkumyan), or escalate to a visible confrontation. For instance, saints' graves and other popular shrines are mostly tolerated in Dagestan, but there is a growing tendency to install plaques at these places informing visitors about the 'proper' meaning and history of the place (Vladimir Bobrovnikov, personal communication). This can be interpreted as an attempt of the state to attain hegemony over the interpretation of such sites. In Chechnya, the local form of Islam, based on Sufi traditions, is officially advertised as a remedy against Islamist fundamentalism. The autocrat leader of the republic, Ramzan Kadirov, is often seen publicly joining the Sufi zikr dance in order to illustrate his attachment to 'traditional', that is, peaceful Islam. Any form of religious deviance in the field of Islam is violently repressed, and the label 'Wahhabi' serves as an easy discrediting label for potentially oppositional political forces. The local Sufi Islam is declared as the embodiment of religious tolerance, and 'religious tolerance' in this context serves dictatorial purposes. Yet, there are also attempts to link to the larger world of Islam and to brand the country as fervently Muslim. It is worth noting that one of the largest protests against the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists took place in Grozny, on 19 January 2015. Other places in the North Caucasus such as Kabardino-Balkaria are characterized by a widespread absence of non-canonical sacred sites. Places of worship are mainly mosques, but also churches and synagogues, with almost no traces of 'folk religion' to be detected in the sacred landscape. The reasons for the extensive absence of hybrid or pre-Islamic sacred places are to be found in past efforts to symbolically demarcate 'proper' Islam in contrast to formerly prevailing forms of Christian and pagan religiosity, and in the current omnipresent fear of 'Wahhabi' fighters, who have targeted such places in the past.[4] The process of visible re-inscription of the Russian Orthodox Church in local community landscapes and life-rituals in Kuban region is described by Hege Toje, who views the role of the Russian Church as a new source of tension and ambivalence in a multi-ethnic village. Similarly, in Armenia, female caretakers of abandoned shrines in the Kotaik region face harsh critique from representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church for performing 'paganism'

as they 'pollute the territory with self-made low-quality candles' (see the chapter by Abrahamian et al.).

Without going into greater details, it should be noted that these important observations on transformative characters of sacred sites highlight the role of women as actors in ritual observance. Women play important roles in maintaining shrines and sacred places as the 'shadow workers' (in Ilich's sense) of religious observances, preparing offerings and attending services (more often than men). In some instances, women come to the foreground as ritual performers or shrine administrators, as demonstrated in the chapters by Nino Tserediani et al., Hamlet Melkumyan and Tsypylma Darieva. Male domination can be observed in zones associated with principal institutional religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism), as well as with the indigenized 'paganisms' of Abkhazia, Ossetia and Pshav-Khevsureti.

In contrast to orthodox institutionalized faiths, scholars portrayed sacred sites in Central Eurasia, including the Caucasus, as a part of the 'little tradition'– that is, one that is rural, small, unofficial and female. In opposition to this, for example, Sunni Islamic institutions should be interpreted as part of the institutional, 'great tradition' that reflects the dominant male, urban, religious lifestyle (Redfield 1955; Basilov 1970; Grant 2011). Tsypylma Darieva outlines significant shortcomings in this division, as it obscures interactions between different actors, believers and non-believers, including rural and urban pilgrims with a common identity, as belonging to the 'same' religious and ethnic community. Moreover, this differentiation between literate and institutionalized versus oral and localized fails to address change and diversity existing in the discourses and practices that cluster around pilgrimage sites in the modern Caucasus. Thus, we question the appropriateness of the model of 'little' and 'great' traditions of religious practice, which proposes a clear hierarchy between shrines and institutionalized churches and mosques.

Sharing vs. Not-Sharing

Much attention has been paid to the discussion on shared and mixed sacred sites (Hayden 2002; Albera 2012; Bowman 2012) in different parts of the world. Literature published on such sites in the Mediterranean, the Near East and India outlined how crucial these places are for the maintenance of local social life and everyday interaction, and how they have been increasingly marginalized and limited in time and place (Bigelow 2010; Bowman 2012; Albera and Couroucli 2012; Barkan and Barkey 2014).

According to Albera a typical mixed shrine in the Mediterranean region is located in a rural and peripheral area, beyond the reach of central authorities and clerical presence, which presumably makes them conducive to interfaith crossovers (Albera and Couroucli 2012: 228). But we need to avoid assuming a simple uniformity of coexistence modes. Sacred places that have a larger attendance and are under a stronger surveillance by the clerics may generate significant bonds that encourage people to cross the religious divide. For example, in Baku, Azeri Muslim women and men visit the Russian Orthodox Church for their own purposes, namely because it is believed that the Russian priest has the power to get rid of the evil eye. In Azerbaijan, practices of sharing sacred sites are still observable and can be found in everyday narratives, popular stories and hagiographic literature on saints and pirs.

There is a certain disagreement concerning the mode of tolerance and quality of openness underlying the nature of this sharing or mixing. Some say that sharing sacred sites fosters sentiments of mutual belonging, and attachment to place (e.g. Bowman 2012). Others argue, in contrast, that it is rather antagonistic tolerance that comes into play here: groups accept the presence of other groups only as long as they cannot be expelled (e.g. Hayden 2002). Not much attention has been paid to the not-sharing of sacred sites, however. This void could be indicative of the implicit assumption that not-sharing equals hostility, or at least hinders the friendly coexistence of groups. But is this really so? There is ample evidence in anthropological literature that not sharing artefacts may posit a mode of participation in certain contexts. Annette Weiner (1992), for example, pointed out that preserving certain objects from free circulation creates the kind of value that is a precondition for material transactions. These objects provide the reserves for individuals and societies that allow them to interact with a world that is difficult to calculate and to understand. Not sharing, in this sense, is not to be seen as antagonistic, but as a way of engagement with other groups and the world at large – a way of engagement that is oriented towards sustainable social and human-nature relations.

Against this backdrop, it is worth asking whether not sharing sacred sites is necessarily a sign of lack of tolerance, or at least awareness, towards other groups, or could – in certain specific contexts that need to be spelled out – also contribute to getting along well. It is worth asking, then, whether not sharing sacred sites may be an expression of tolerance instead of intolerance. This point makes us rethink political or social theories of cohabitation in this region. Florian Mühlfried explicitly poses this question in his contribution to this volume, drawing

on case material concerning the relations of Christian and Jewish populations in a highland area of Georgia. Furnishing this question with a certain twist, Silvia Serrano, in contrast, asks what it means to share the non-sacred in a multi-confessional context. The example she is drawing upon stems from the desacralized religious complex in Rabati (Georgia), which contains a mosque, a church and a synagogue, manifesting a political discourse of hierarchy between those who tolerate and those who are tolerated. Serrano discusses how holy places become part of the political arena and how policy makes fuzzy religious frontiers tangible.

As these case examples from the Caucasus indicate, cohabitation does not necessarily lead to sharing, collaboration or religious mixing. This observation runs against the widespread hope among scholars that in crisis regions like the Caucasus or the Balkans, which are currently dominated by nationalism, ethnic competition, and social conflict, examples from the past or remote spaces will show us genial collaborations and cooperation. Instead, the further afield we go, we may find, effectively, genealogies of the present. This challenges mainstream perceptions of the Caucasus as a space of contact that creates shared lifeworlds. Whereas historical heterogeneity is without any doubt a core feature of the Caucasus, a shared sense of belonging is not to be taken for granted.

New States, New Boundaries

Within desecularization processes, we observe homogenizing projects with the tendency to purify, nationalize or eradicate 'deviant' hybrid places, practices and memories from the mental map of the nation and religious congregation. The studies carried out in the Mediterranean area help to shed light in religious homogenization and religious mixing around sacred places (Albera and Couroucli 2013). In many respects, the situation of shared sacred sites in the post-Soviet Caucasus is comparable with the post-imperial landscape in the Mediterranean area, marked by the disappearance of the joint use of sacred sites by Muslims and Christians (forthcoming Darieva, Kahl and Toncheva). The role of the state in these processes has been neglected. However, shrines, tombs and sacred sites do not operate independently from political forces. The micro-dynamics of social change and a new choreography of hybrid sacred places may be influenced by the state authorities either to appropriate or abolish it. In both cases state institutions or state sponsored clerics produce narrative claims, purification rites and performative practices to take control over 'informal' and alternative sites. While acknowledging the rise of a new control, state authorities do not necessarily possess a

monopoly for defining and shaping the social life and conflicts surrounding sacred places. There are at least three types of actors: state-sponsored mainstream religious institutions (the Georgian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, Qafkas Müsülmanlari Idaresi in Azerbaijan (QMI), and the North Caucasus Muslim Spiritual Board in the Russian Caucasus); religious 'purists' (such as Salafi Muslims); and the intelligentsiya. All three types of actors for legitimizing activities and claiming proper behaviour can invoke the name of the state. The criticism of 'deviant' rituals and 'unacceptable' local customs at sacred sites, expressed by new religious 'purists', is paradoxically shared by scholars and educated young people (compare with Abashin and Bobrovnikov 2003). In Dagestan the veneration of Muslim saints is opposed to official Islam as a relic of the premodern past (Bobrovnikov 2014). The purification events described at the beginning of the introduction have given way to isolation of the Christian and the Muslim communities in north-east Georgia, a process that could lead to mutual religious radicalization.

It is the state, which is much more interested in controlling clerics and lay people simultaneously. But some places are exceptions; for example, in Abkhazia, where hybrid shrines are actually linked 'from above' to the making of the nation. Purification and eradication of hybrid sacred sites is not part of desecularization processes in the north-western Caucasus as Igor Kuznetsov shows in this volume. In Abkhazia, 'folk' shrines are at the centre of state attention. The flag of Abkhazia features seven stars as references to its seven main 'pagan' shrines, and one of these shrines (Dydripsh-nykha) serves as a venue for state performances, as in 1993, when the Abkhaz victory over Georgia was celebrated there. It is also quite unique that the shrine priest of Dydripsh-nykha, Zaur Chichba, was the first person to deliver a congratulatory speech and blessing of President Vladislav Ardzinba at his inauguration in 1997.[5]

Viewed together, five modes of interaction with hybrid sacred sites can be identified:

- Outright destruction (such as occurred in the Pankisi valley of Georgia where a traditional shrine was allegedly destroyed by Islamic fundamentalists).
- Purification (as in the case of the Alaverdoba festival, mentioned earlier).
- Toleration (as to a certain extent in Armenia and Azerbaijan).
- Control (as in Dagestan and Chechnya, where authorities impose norms and control access to shrine territories, but do not directly interfere in veneration practices).

- Appropriation and incorporation (as in Azerbaijan and Abkhazia, where some communal ('folk') practices are usurped by state authorities as identity markers).

These modes allow for a rough and preliminary, yet significant, mapping of the current state of religious affairs in the Caucasus. What we find is a sketchy mosaic of religious radicalisms, revivalism projects, amalgamations of civic and religious virtues, instrumentalizations of sacred sites for secular endeavours, and sanctifications of 'paganism'. This 'map' can only be reasonably interpreted when considering the role of the state in the processes and phenomena depicted. For it is the state that backs religious institutions such as the Georgian Orthodox Church or the Armenian Apostolic Church; it is the state that initiates educational projects like the setting up of plaques at sacred places; it is the state that tries to instrumentalize 'traditional' forms of Islam in order to oppose the real or fictional threat of global religious fundamentalism; and it is state-sponsored authorities and discourses that assign 'traditional religion' a constitutive role to the nation. In contrast to the prevalent 'ethnographic' depictions of sacred sites in the Caucasus as fixed in time and space and untouched by modern achievements, we advocate not only a processual approach, but one that takes seriously the role of the state in the recent transformation of religious regimes in post-secular societies.

Some accounts provided by the volume demonstrate that sacred sites and belief in the power of saints are not necessarily in a permanent contradiction with the state. The veneration of saints and pilgrimages may undermine or support political authority and national grand narratives, and even emerge from the state.[6] These observations are in contrast, for instance, with the Western view on Islam in Eurasia, which generally identifies the notion of 'being Muslim' in the Soviet Union as an oppositional one to the secular state and more precisely as an expression of 'alternative' and underground forces in the secular society (Bennigsen and Wimbush 1985; Saroyan 1997). In many areas there is a relatively peaceful cooperation between pilgrims, the state and caretakers of 'folk' shrines and pilgrimage sites. Explicitly or implicitly, interacting with 'others' can occur without denying them (male, official religious institutions, state). One important observation to emphasize in this volume is the fact that pilgrims and participants of shrine festivals, by recognizing local differences and deviant practices from the conventional tenets, do not oppose themselves to Christianity and Islam, the Church and Umma, rather they actively present themselves as being true Christians or true Moslems and part of larger Christian or Muslim communities without religious polarization. Some research findings indicate that local

communities develop different strategies for legitimizing and claiming their own sacred places: the role of dream narratives (Armenia), incorporation of secular figures such as communist leaders in saint narratives (Azerbaijan), informality (no site keepers in Dagestan, Svanetia), or the flexible modification of shrine rituals as a response to new border regimes between Georgia and Azerbaijan (see the chapter by Nino Aivazishvili-Gehne). This is to say 'weapons of the weak', whereby locals use different strategies as tools for legitimation, conformity with the state authorities and the continuous adjusting of local practices to new political and social realities.

The transformation of sacred places, competition and contestation with respect to the proper way to worship and behave are by no means specific to the post-Soviet Caucasus. However, the research findings in this volume offer a new perspective in understanding and theorizing desecularization processes and religious pluralism in the post-socialist Caucasus beyond the prevailing views and divisions between premodern and postmodern practices and ideas, and discourses on little and great traditions. The process of contestation reveals a plurality of ways of being Christian and Muslim in a secular world. The sites in the Caucasus can accommodate a plurality of meanings, interpretations and practices. The question is to what extent the 'return' of state control over shrine and pilgrimage networks will affect religious life and the permeability of religious boundaries in a long-term perspective.

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Notes

Note on Transliteration: The range of languages represented in the contributions to this volume includes Georgian, Svan and Abkhaz (South and West Caucasian), Azeri (Turkic) and Armenian (Indo-European). The transliteration systems used for these languages were selected by the individual authors. For Russian, however, we use the standard English transliteration provided by the Library of Congress, available at http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/roman.html.

1. For details concerning the transformation of the Alaverdoba festival, see Mühlfried (2014: 142–144; 2016) and the documentary *Alaverdoba 2006* by Dato Kvachadze and Florian Mühlfried, depicting the changes introduced in 2006 and the reactions of the affected populations. The film is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MtWczbtiX0.
2. By the term 'world' religion we refer to those institutionalized beliefs and religions that spread beyond their places of origin due to imperial influence, mobility, missionary activity, military conquest, etc.
3. The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, South Ossetia and Abkhazia are three partially recognized or unrecognized states in the Caucasus.
4. For details, see Mühlfried 2016.
5. See also in Agababyan (2016).
6. Caroline Humphrey outlined this perspective in studies of the history of shamanism in inner Asia as constitutive of social realities in contexts of powers. See in Humphrey (2008).

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