

# Muslim revivalism and the emergence of civic society. A case study of an Israeli-Circassian community

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Islamic revival activity in a semi-traditional Muslim society seems to be contrary to the development of what is termed civic society. The following case study of Islamic revivalism and its limits in a Circassian community in Israel will show that the relations between Islamic revivalism and the emergence of civic society are complex and dialectical.

Civic society refers to a web of activity that exists beyond the formal political system, and beyond the normal network of traditional kinship relations. I use this term in a sense close to that implied by the more commonly employed term 'civil society'. However, I consider the term 'civic society' to be more appropriate to a discussion that draws on the analytical distinction between state and society.<sup>1</sup> Discussion of the idea of a 'civil society' usually focuses on two components: the relations between state and society, and the activities and influence of those communities and associations acting outside the sphere of the direct control of the state.<sup>2</sup> The term 'civic', however, lends itself more readily to a discussion of specific social and community contexts such as the rise of such a society in a specific community. It is also more appropriate as a description of social developments within traditional and semi-traditional societies, such as that described in the present case study.

The term 'Islamic revivalism' refers to a phenomenon that, in effect, is both general and specific. On the one hand, it refers to a general wave of religious resurgence and reforms, involving a so-called 'fundamentalist' approach. On the other hand, the use of various terms such as 'revivalism', 'resurgence', 'fundamentalism' and 'Islamism' reflects not necessarily different aspects of the same phenomenon, but distinct phenomena occurring in different areas and

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connected in a loose conceptual manner. The Islamic movements that have developed throughout various different societies are diverse phenomena, ‘inescapably formed by the many social, cultural and political experiences unique to their histories’.<sup>3</sup> As noted by Jean-Francois Legrain,<sup>4</sup> ‘By the end of the 1970s, Western observers of Islam had learned, finally, to talk about “the Muslims” in the plural—the various forms the religion takes around the world’.

Islamic revivalism is connected to the ‘fundamentalist’ approach which stresses the need ‘... to locate, insist on and apply fundamental elements of *shaari’a*—law codes—which Islam shares with none of the other faiths or world views from which it would distance itself’.<sup>5</sup> However, the focus in the present discussion is not on the general political level but rather on the level of what has been called ‘Islamization from below’ (as opposed to ‘Islamization from above’), or on the aim of ‘establish[ing] and organiz[ing] “Islamized spaces” in society’,<sup>6</sup> particularly on the level of a specific minority community, as in the case study in question. This kind of revivalist activity is also associated with a strong social egalitarian emphasis and with a stand against injustice and discrimination, involving activity in the areas of welfare and education.

The following discussion will demonstrate the nature of the complex relations between civil society and Islamic revivalism. I shall argue that in this particular context of Islamic revivalism (which is different from the activities of violent radical Islamic groups<sup>7</sup>), the initiation of Islamic activism in effect brings about the emergence of a civil society. This leads, firstly, to the development of competing and ideologically opposed groups within the community. In addition, the Islamic groups themselves possess characteristics similar to those of civil society, both in terms of their breaking out of traditional kinship frameworks and in terms of their substantial agenda in the fields of education and community life. These elements imbue the Islamic activity with an added intensity. However, at the same time they also contain the seeds of its own limitations, for the competing groups that arise as a result of the Islamic activity exploit and oppose the opportunities provided by the movement, thus limiting the influence of the Islamic groups.

Similarly, one cannot understand Islamic revivalism and its consequences simply on the basis of a general sociological analysis or on the basis of Islamic studies. An understanding of the specific cultural and social background of each case study is vital, especially from the point of view of the relations between religious and ethno-national identity. The present study deals with the commencement of Islamic activity inspired by Islamic revivalism in the Arab sector in Israel. However, Islamic revival in Israel itself has strong Arab nationalist elements, a fact that distances it from Circassian ethno-national orientations.

This study will evaluate the sudden rise of Muslim revivalism and the influence of ‘revivalist’ ideology in a Circassian village, the limitations of its success and the influence of its appearance upon the emergence of a civic society among the Circassian community in Israel. The growth of religious revival or awakening and ideology among the Muslims in Israel, also known as ‘fundamentalism’, has also had its effect on the small Circassian community. This influence

has manifested itself primarily through the appearance of social activists who consider their activities to be in line with the new religious ideology.

The Circassian community, being a small one with a relatively closed and cohesive social and political system, can be regarded as a 'social laboratory'. An anthropological analysis of this case can contribute, therefore, to a theoretical understanding of the connection and the inter-relation between the emergence of Islamic revivalism and civic society in traditional societies in transition to 'semi-modernity'. This connection reveals not contradictory socio-political models, but rather two distinct, competing models, both of which constitute alternatives to the traditional socio-political structure. The Circassian case is an interesting example of the way in which Islamic revivalism accelerates the formation of civic society and of more modern political patterns, whereas we usually tend to see only one aspect of this correlation, namely the emergence of fundamentalism as a *reaction* to the influence of modernity (an aspect that also plays an important role in this case).

This paper is based on anthropological fieldwork conducted in the Circassian villages of Galilee, as well as among the Circassians in Northern Caucasus and among the Circassian community in New Jersey. Most of the data were collected in a village in Galilee where I lived for a few months during Autumn 1990 and Winter 1991. My connections with this community started in 1988 and continued to 1994, during which period I took part in major events (such as holidays and receptions) and also came for longer visits, during which I stayed with local families in the community, sometimes for a few days. The diachronical nature of the research and my lasting connection with the community enabled me to observe the development of a process that started before the municipal elections in Israel in 1988, and continued up to and following the municipal elections of 1993. The data pertaining to the question of the general relation of Circassians to Islam were collected during two field trips to the Caucasus and to New Jersey's Circassian community. These journeys provided a perspective from which to understand Circassian culture and background and to evaluate the events in the Israeli Circassian village, which seemed to be the most 'religious' Circassian community. The village in question is an exception among Circassian communities both from the point of view of the preservation of Circassian culture, language and identity,<sup>8</sup> and (paradoxically, but relatedly) because of the phenomenon of Muslim revivalism, which has hardly occurred in Circassian communities elsewhere.

### **Background<sup>9</sup>**

The Circassians living in the Middle East originally come from the Northwest Caucasus. Though the local people describe themselves as Adyge, the term Circassian is used in this paper because of its familiarity in the Middle East. They speak Adyge or Circassian, a language of the North Caucasian family that assumed written form only in the last century.<sup>10</sup>

Following the Russian invasion of the Caucasus in the 19th century, the

Circassians emigrated or were forcefully transferred to Turkey and other parts of the Middle East.<sup>11</sup> While some Ottoman sources talk of 600,000 migrants,<sup>12</sup> modern scholars such as Kemal Karpat and Uner Turgey argue that about 1.5 to 2 million people were transferred.<sup>13</sup>

At present, according to Circassian sources,<sup>14</sup> there are about 3–4 million Circassians in the world, the majority of whom live in Turkey, the Caucasus, Jordan (where they are important in terms of their political position in the Hashemite Kingdom), Syria and other Middle Eastern and Western countries.<sup>15</sup> They arrived in the area that was to become Israel during the Ottoman era, in the late 1870s, in other words, a few years before the first *aliya* (Jewish-Zionist immigration to Israel).

The 3000-odd Circassians in Israel reside mainly in two villages (populations 2200 and 800). This study deals mainly with the larger village. Like most Israeli Arabs, they are Sunni Muslims, but they describe themselves as a separate community, distinct from the other Sunnis in Israel, and are recognized as such.<sup>16</sup> Although small and isolated, this community has succeeded in preserving its culture and identity more than other diaspora Circassian communities with access to greater cultural resources (in terms of ethno-national endogamy, language and customs).

The Israeli Circassians stress that they maintain good relations with the neighboring Jewish villages and towns (ever since the founding of the first Jewish settlement, Moshavot, in Galilee during the last decade of the 19th century) as well as with neighboring Arabs.<sup>17</sup> Circassian men are the only Muslim group to do compulsory service in the Israeli army,<sup>18</sup> making their structural position within Israel similar to that of the Druze minority.

In 1950, the larger Circassian village became a local council.<sup>19</sup> The elections for the council were held in 1950 and were the first democratic elections to be held in the non-Jewish sector of Israel (which used to be known as ‘the minority sector’), at a time when most of the Arab population of the country was still under military rule. Attaining the status of a local council<sup>20</sup> provided the community with many advantages, notably government financial allocations and autonomy in managing local affairs. Up until the 1970s, this fact, combined with the community’s military service, contributed to the rapid development of the village as compared to other villages in the non-Jewish sector. The village was one of the first to be hooked-up to the central electricity and water boards, and various public institutions were constructed. This relative advantage started to diminish during the 1980s and 1990s, when Arab villages acquired and used municipal power as well as general political power, based upon their strong position following the general elections. Thus the Circassians, along with the Druze, became more aware of their unequal resources as compared to the Jewish sector. These developments are relevant to the present case study because of their influence on the emergence of Islamic revivalism in the local political arena.

The municipal council and the position of mayor constitute a major force in the life of the village. They control most of the community’s relations with the

state and represent it in negotiations with the government, with neighboring municipalities and with various public and civil organizations. The municipality is also the biggest employer in the village. This fact, along with the control of various licensing and registration functions, makes the municipality an important economic force. The municipality also has a symbolic significance as it is by means of its official symbols and signs that the community stresses its distinct identity: the traditional Adyge (Circassian) flag flies over the municipality building, alongside the Israeli flag and the local council's flag. The municipal emblem, which greets all visitors to the village, contains a figure of a warrior on a horse, with Cyrillic script (as well as Hebrew and Arabic). The mayor symbolically represents all the Circassians in Israel.

The struggle over the regional municipal council will be, therefore, the context for the discussion of the emergence of civic society in the small Circassian community.

### **The political struggle over the local municipal council**

During the municipal elections of 1988, an Islamic political list was formed in the Circassian village. This list was started by a few youngsters who were not connected to any of the large families who previously held political power in the village. These youngsters were associated with some Islamic institutions in the area of Israel called 'The Triangle', where most of the population are Arab Muslims. Furthermore, one of their leaders studied at an Islamic College in an Arab town in this area (*Baka al-Gharbiyya*). The group who founded this list were known in the village as the 'newly religious' or the 'returnees to religion'. They were so called because of the evidence of Islamic features on their agenda as well as in their behavior and appearance, and they proposed a new model for religious identity in the village, in place of the traditional-religious model that had been dominant in the community up until then. Most of the members of the group were in their late twenties or thirties. They named their list '*Al-Nur*' (Arabic—'The Light'), a name typical of the Muslim revival or 'fundamentalist' groups that were gaining power at that time in the Arab Muslim sector of Israel. Later on this also became the name of a public association established by the Islamic activists in the village. Like other Islamic groups, this group initially concentrated its attention primarily on voluntary social activities.

Up until the 1988 general municipal elections, the political 'parties' or factions in the village were usually connected to the four or five largest 'families' (actually clans) of the village. The elected head of the local council would act as a 'mediating' leader, trying to demonstrate his connections with the government and his ability to secure resources (mainly government funds) for the community, and the candidates for this position were always representatives of the big families. The composition of the local council thus reflected the traditional social structure of the village.

It came as a surprise, therefore, when the new Islamic list gained two out of the seven seats on the local council, or nearly one third of the total votes, in their

first election campaign (three seats would have been sufficient for the list to become the largest and winning party). One of the consequences of these election results was the necessity to hold a second round of elections for the position of the head of the council as no candidate gained sufficient votes. Thus, the Islamic list became a major political force, and one of the other candidates formed a coalition with its members, attaining the position of head of the Council.

The crystallization of this Islamic group, its relative local success and the introduction of religion into politics were unprecedented developments in the conservative Circassian community.

The Islamic list built its initial popularity on the charitable activities (based upon the Islamic principle of giving alms) organized by the group of youngsters who founded the list. But, as the following discussion suggests, the reasons for this relative success were extremely complex, involving a sense of confusion and even crisis in the sphere of values during the period in question in this particular village.

However, as we shall see, the overall impact of this political Islamic success remained limited, although its influence is ongoing. The reasons for this limitation will be the focus of the following discussion.

The appearance of this religious group influenced and accelerated the formation of other social groups in the village. These other groups focused on various public and civic activities, yet their social outlook was diametrically opposed to that of the Islamic group. Among such ventures were the Circassian Cultural and National Association; a new Social Club; and later on the foundation of a Social, Youth and Sport Community Center. The first Association was founded as a result of the new connections with the Circassian homeland in the Caucasus and the emergence of a Circassian national movement.<sup>21</sup> The activities of the second, '30-Plus Social Club' were oriented and related to the majority Israeli-Jewish culture, which exerts a considerable influence in the village, without, however, forfeiting Circassian particularity. Such an approach later came to characterize the new community center, along with other types of activity and orientation. The religious group itself became one of the players in this new social-'civic' sphere, becoming not only a political list but also a registered public association.

The 1993 elections to the local village council reflected the importance of this new 'secular', 'civic' type of groups and associations. The results of these elections clearly showed the correlation between the activities of the Islamic group and the emergence of civic society in the village. They also reflected the restraining influence of the local civic society on the political power of *Al-Nur*, the religious party, which did not gain more power in the 1993 elections, but nevertheless remains an important force and—to the surprise of many who opposed it—has retained its electoral power. However, its power has been restricted not only because of the emergence of civic society, but also because the Islamic group became, in terms of many of its features (although not all of them) part of this civic society. Moreover, the incorporation of many of *Al-Nur*'s features into civic society has also limited their potential effectiveness.

In the context of the general growth of Islamic revivalism, the Circassian case adds an additional dimension to the question of civic society. In order to explain in depth the developments described above, we will first examine the position of Islam among the Circassians before Islamic revivalism started to influence them, and during the inner struggle in the village.

### **Islam in the Circassian village**

In order to appreciate the position of Islam in Circassian society it is essential to deal with the Circassian cultural system that crystallized long before the Islamization of this society in the 17–19th centuries.<sup>22</sup> *Adyge-habze* a term which literally means the Circassian law, refers to a system of rules, etiquette, laws and an ethos. In short, *habze* provides the rules of behavior and moral codes that are handed down in other societies through religion. It is thus important to our understanding of Islam within the Circassian society to understand the relationship between *habze* and Islam, which is a system of moral conduct and a general ethos, as well as a religion.

Ozbek Batiray discovered how the Circassians in Turkey and Syria frequently gave the *habze* precedence over the Quranic laws.<sup>23</sup>

This is quite different from the situation in the Israeli Muslim Circassian villages in Israel, where the religion enjoys an eminent position. The villages are governed by the traditional set of values, especially those concerning relations between the sexes. Traditional elements that are contradictory to what are conceived as Islamic morals are almost absent.<sup>24</sup> Some people in the village even see *habze* traditions as a part of Islamic law, or vice-versa. Thus there is a considerable degree of correspondence and even symbiosis between *habze* and Islamic norms.

Religious life in the Circassian villages (especially in the larger village) revolves mainly around the celebration of collective religious rituals, especially the two main Islamic holidays. Among the Circassians in the Caucasus, there was competition between different clans. After the Circassian migration (during the late 19th century), this was not possible, especially in their new and isolated situation in Galilee. The religious rituals helped to reduce internal competition and thus constituted a cohesive element within the community.

Today, these rituals provide a bond that limits political competition between families and clans to the local council arena, mainly during elections, every four years. During the Muslim holidays, twice a year, the rituals also stress community unity and counterbalance political tensions.

Paradoxically, Islam serves as a binding mechanism that fosters inner cohesion in the village by emphasizing the social borders between the Circassians and the other Muslims in the Galilee, and by encouraging Circassian endogamy in marriages. Although Islam's concept of *Umma* recognizes no boundaries except those of the community of believers in Allah and his prophet,<sup>25</sup> for the Circassians, *Umma* refers only to the local community itself. Beyond the village level, the Circassians' identification will be on the ethno-national level.

Thus, for example, in a few cases I was witness to statements by Circassians who stressed that they have more in common with secular or Christian Circassians than with non-Circassian Muslims.

As we shall see, these particular features of the Circassian community and its Islamic characteristics help to explain the sudden growth of Islamic revivalism, as well as its limits, in the case in question.

### **Reasons for the growth of Islamic revivalism in the village**

The emphasis on Islamic religious rituals and values, which granted inner cohesion to the Israeli Circassian community, gave Islam an important symbolic position in the village. This position provided a platform for Islamic revivalist ideology, helping it to make inroads (as well as setting, from the outset, its limitations, as shall transpire below). By drawing on the prestige of religion in the village the Islamic activists actually tried to change the existing symbolic social order of the community. This situation in effect enabled, or at least encouraged, the new ideology to take hold in the village, even given its ultimate opposition to the existing symbolic social order.

Revivalist ideology asserts the Islamic identity of the community and seeks to establish a bond between the community and the outside world.

Traditionally, Israeli Circassians have adopted a moderate form of Islam that exists side by side with Circassian culture and ethnic identity. The equilibrium and correspondence between Circassian Islam and the group's identity as a minority with preferential status within the state of Israel were threatened at the end of the 1980s for various reasons.

Over the years, the Circassians' ability to preserve their culture and its influence upon the socialization process has gradually diminished. Until recently, the Circassian homeland behind the 'Iron curtain' was a distant and vague notion for the younger generation and connections with various other Circassian cultural centers were not extensive. The Islamic ethos thus prevailed, providing a rich source of value systems. Seen from the religious point of view, the pre-Islamic national epics and social values that the Caucasians reflect appeared pagan, and their national tradition became less and less important in culture and socialization. With the penetration of Islamic revivalist ideology even the Adyge-Caucasian culture's primacy in shaping the collective identity was seriously challenged.

Another significant influence, especially on the youth of the community, came from Western and Israeli culture. The combination of these influences led to different and contradictory messages, creating a generation gap and identity crisis. One can see the impact of these developments in the growing drinking habits among the young, in the growing shift of preference regarding military service from combat to non-combat units and in the disappearance of the traditional self-perception of being a warrior. Frustration towards the state of Israel because of perceived discrimination has accelerated this process, and the Nafsu case<sup>26</sup> became a catalyst for this kind of feeling as it questioned the



community's confidence in the state. At the same time, this case generated heightened consciousness concerning the community's need to organize itself and use modern means to establishing an effective dialogue with the state.

The youngsters who were exposed to the ideology of the Islamic movement perceived it to be an important instrument for solving the social problems within the community. As in the case of the Islamic movement in the Arab sector in Israel, the charitable activities of the association founded by these youngsters granted the group its first initial popularity. At a time when the community was being affected by materialistic values and economic competition (reflecting a similar process in Israeli society at large), these charitable activities were associated with basic community values such as solidarity and cohesion. Such activities thus provided a good starting point from which to act and exert influence in various spheres, such as education and local politics.

One sphere in which the influence of the Islamic group was particularly felt was the local school, and it was also instrumental in bringing about the reappearance of the language debate. Since 1977, the village elementary school has had the distinction of being the only school in the non-Jewish sector to employ Hebrew as the language of instruction.<sup>27</sup> One consequence of this choice has been, naturally, fewer lessons in Arabic (the sacred language of Islam)—a problematic educational outcome from the point of view of the Islamic activists. The revivalists started offering religious lessons to children of the community after school hours. At the same time they unsuccessfully tried to change the language of instruction back to Arabic and to gain more hours for Islamic studies. Tension over the issue of education was heightened a few years ago, when a Jewish woman from a nearby village was appointed principal of the school, an event that precipitated several incidents of conflict between the Islamic revivalists, who were active on the parents' committee, and the school management.

Additionally, the Islamist activists' ideology had a certain amount of influence on the issue of military service. Although only a handful of people have actually pleaded devotion to Islam in order to avoid army service,<sup>28</sup> this is a new development in a community that has always emphasized its relationship with the state and the importance of compulsory military service.

The issue of military service was not directly raised in the course of the religious group's activities, and its influence on this matter was rather indirect, being simply one implication of their general ideological position. Nevertheless, this ideology, together with the other areas of influence mentioned here, such as the sense of frustration amongst many youths regarding the community's relations with the state following the Nafsu affair, and changes regarding the role of the warrior and the army in the Circassian male role model,<sup>29</sup> led to the practical consequence of a considerable number of youths (some of whom were already soldiers in the I.D.F.) noting related ideological factors (such as pan-Islamic arguments) in order to explain the lack of motivation during their compulsory service, and there were even a few cases of desertion and attempts to avoid military service altogether.

The revivalist movement did not enjoy great success regarding the above issues, and the actual deeper influence of revivalist Islamic ideology in the Circassian village remained marginal. Yet, all the same, more people have started using the Islamic idiom as well as the expressions and arguments of the revivalists concerning everyday life and events and, as noted above, this process influenced the revivalists' relative success in the political sphere.

### **Limitations on the growth of the Islamist group**

If one examines the achievements of the Islamic group, one can safely say that its success has been limited. A year or two after the elections, many people expressed disappointment with their representatives from *Al-Nur*. The attempt to create a leadership in line with the religious-charismatic model of the Islamic movement in Israel failed. The group did not succeed in building institutions to anchor and consolidate its influence, and soon became a marginal force whose activities were centered on vocal opposition to specific developments. The inability of Islamic revivalism to become a dominant force in the Circassian villages could be attributed to three major causes:

1. The character of Islam in the village and the relationship between religion and ethno-national identity;
2. Cultural patterns that shape the character of leadership and political institutions in the community; and
3. Political and structural factors.

The main reason for the decline and halt of the new religious ideology derives from the complicated relation between religious identity and ethno-national identity in the Circassian community. It is probably only in Israel that the religious consciousness of the community is such a central force. This is so not only in comparison to other diaspora Circassian communities, but also in comparison to neighboring Arab-Muslim communities. This social situation was instrumental in contributing to the rise of revivalism. But since religious identity is combined with the ethno-national identity and is actually subordinate and secondary to it, the penetration of Islamic revivalism has remained limited.

While the members of the Islamic movement in Israel succeeded in turning many mosques into centers of social, educational and economic activities, the mosque in the Circassian village has remained exclusively a place of worship. Its main importance is symbolic, deriving from the role of religious rituals in preserving and enhancing cohesion within the community.

While the 'newly religious' tried to emphasize other aspects of religious life, their social connections with Muslims outside the village, as well as their outward, physical features, such as beards, headgear (*kafias*) or prayer caps and veils and long dress for their women, became obstacles to their success. The will to preserve social boundaries and to enhance a particular identity are basic features of the social life of the Circassians. In this sense, religion serves as an

integrating force for preserving the Circassian particular identity and not as an international doctrine with the associated political implications.

One should note that the issue here is the rule of religion at the community level, as opposed to the personal significance of Islamic faith at the individual level. The existence of such a distinction (sometimes more apparent to observers than to community members) is one of the factors that distinguishes moderate, although devoted, adherence to Islam (characteristic of the traditional religious patterns of this community) from Islamic Revivalism.

The newly religious gave new meaning to the rule of Islam at the community level (partly by their different interpretation of the concept of 'community'). By changing the rule of religion, they defied the traditional norms, creating a pattern for Islam that, according to many community members, 'resembled that of the surrounding Arab society'. Yet, the attempt to assert new leadership based on a religious ideology is proving problematic. The ideology in question may seem to be universal, but in the Israeli context it is connected to Arab society and to Arab Palestinian national identity. Therefore, the implications of this ideology were perceived as a threat to the independent status of the Circassian community within the state, and to the self-image (derived partly from this status) of a moderate and 'enlightened' Circassian-Islamic community. Furthermore, the revivalist ideology was perceived as a challenge to the desire to preserve the community's particular cultural heritage, and to maintain clear social boundaries<sup>30</sup> from its non-Circassian Muslim neighbours.

The tensions between the two models of Islam in question can be seen in the distance between the ideology and the everyday behavior of the members of the Islamic group themselves. In order to become legitimate, they had to assert their membership in the community and their Circassian identity alongside their 'Islamic identity'. This position highlighted the gap between Islam as a universal *a*-national ideology and the contingent situation in Israel where Islam is associated with Arab-Palestinian national identity. On the other hand, this position led to a certain degree of moderation on the part of the religious group, resulting in participation of its members, in certain cases, with and in response to other groups around civic issues, as we shall see below. This phenomenon is, in effect, part of the process of the emergence of civic society.

### **The creation of civic organizations as influenced by Muslim revivalism and as alternatives to it**

The activities of the Islamic group itself influenced the appearance of new groups that began to act in a fashion different from the traditional social patterns of the village. For example, a precedent was established for organizing activities in the civic social sphere. The newly religious demonstrated a deep social consciousness and in the beginning were acclaimed for the voluntary nature of their activities. Upon entering politics, this voluntary element began to wane. Additionally, the character of the revivalist activity and ideology was an eyesore for many people in the community. Yet it indirectly influenced initiatives and

frameworks for other social orientations, bringing about the creation of national and cultural associations and a new social club, all of which can be seen as the manifestation of civic society. These new initiatives were not only a response to the Islamic trend but were also influenced by the Islamic group's new model of social organization as creating significant social activity outside the traditional 'kinship/family' social pattern. Thus, paradoxically, the various new manifestations of 'civic society' were a response to, but also a direct continuation of (from the point of view of their structural pattern) the new activity of the Islamic activists.

One example of a change in social patterns connected with and influencing the local political system was the founding of a new mode of social gathering: the '30-Plus Club'. The whole idea of starting such an organized and public social activity was not only new but revolutionary in the conservative Circassian community. The founding of the club in 1990 generated much hesitation and debates for its founders. The founders requested and received assistance from the regional labor council of the *Histadrut* (The general Trade Union), which also included organizational advice. The model for the activity was taken from the Jewish settlements in the area but in the end it began to reflect the activities and special character of the village. The members of the club were all married couples who would meet for various activities such as entertainment or community functions. Important activities would take place during the Islamic holidays after the religious rituals. Club members went on outings together to family-type leisure centers—usually in the Jewish sector. The club achieved considerable success and had an active and growing influence in the community. The activities initiated in this framework manifest a shift from traditional patterns to modern patterns of social organization, while still retaining the unique characteristics of the society and its social boundaries.

Another civic type of organization had to do with the newly established ties with the Circassian homeland in the Caucasus following recent developments in the former Soviet Union.

With the changes in the former Soviet Union and Israel's renewal of diplomatic relations with Moscow in 1991, the Israeli Circassians, for the first time in more than 120 years, had a real chance to establish contacts with their motherland. In the summer of 1990, the first delegation from Israel visited the Caucasus and when a well-known Circassian scholar visited Israel later that year, he received an enthusiastic welcome. The initial response was one of enthusiasm, hope and happiness, and many began to discuss the possibility of re-migration.<sup>31</sup>

These developments directly influenced the decline in the popularity of the religious group. The Circassians in the Caucasus had undergone an intensive process of secularization and the new interaction between the Circassian communities in Israel and in the Caucasus underscored the gap between them on the religious level. Connections between the communities, nevertheless, grew stronger.<sup>32</sup> A large number of Israeli Circassians have already visited the Caucasus and have financed reciprocal visits to Israel. Meanwhile, an association

for the revival of Circassian national culture has been founded in the Circassian village. Such evolving activism and institutionalization is typical of the process of the creation of a civic society. These developments do not, however, take the place of traditional manifestations of religious identity. For example, the new 'Circassian Cultural and National Association' in Israel sent religious literature to the Caucasus. This association has had connections with the emerging Circassian national movement—the Circassian World Congress, whose main goals are to foster more autonomy for the Circassian autonomous areas, to promote the Adyge language and culture and to support the motherland.<sup>33</sup>

One of its members took part in the first Circassian national congress held in Nalchik (the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria) in the Caucasus in 1991. It was this Israeli delegate, and not one of the delegates from Muslim states, who asked for the inclusion of religious prayers in the ceremonies and proposed a demand to strengthen religious studies among young people in the Circassian diaspora. It is noteworthy that the Israeli representative used the word 'religion' and not 'Islam'. He later clarified that the intention of his wording was to prevent any possible conflict with Christian Circassians.<sup>34</sup> However, he was clearly referring to Islam, the religion of almost the entire Circassian people.<sup>35</sup>

### **Civic society and the political sphere**

The consequences of the continuing development of Circassian civic society were clearly reflected in the November 1993 local elections. Although the kinship/family code remained strong, further cracks appeared in its structure and a new form of political discourse emerged. Among the five candidates for the position of Mayor, two represented the former family-based type of political leadership—the mayor and the former mayor. They did not gain even one seat on the council.

Of the two candidates who won in the first round, one deliberately presented himself as acting beyond the traditional family code. Although he lost to the other, an older candidate, in the second round, his party became a major force in the municipality. This new party has a 'civic' (as opposed to a 'traditional') character because its activists were not assembled on a family-relation basis.

Interestingly enough, some members of the community perceived both this new party and the 'Al Nur' list as family- or clan-based, the first being associated with the family of the number one delegate on the party's list, a fairly large family whose members had held senior positions on the council in the past, and 'Al Nur' being perceived as an organization of small families against a system which denied them political influence. On close examination of the members of these organizations, this interpretation seems rather far-fetched. Nevertheless, its very existence shows that even if such associations symbolize, as argued here, the creation of organizations on a civil basis, we are dealing with an intermediate stage during which various activities and organizations are interpreted differently by different agents, whether as part of the existing 'family' model or as part of a new model of social organization.

The activists in the 'new party' were comparatively young people, usually with a more 'secular' or 'modern' approach (but still acting within the traditional norms and of the community), most of them with academic degrees, or with successful careers in the army, industry and so on. Many of them were active in the newly organized Cultural and National Association or in the '30-Plus Social Club'. (The connections to the club are evident in the decision to suspend club activities in order to prevent charges of using it for political goals.) These party activists represented a civil-oriented approach towards public, social and political life and this change in the political discourse was also manifested in its content. Questions regarding the educational situation and relations with the homeland became major issues during the elections. Different approaches towards the social involvement of the entire community began to be reflected in the local elections no less than the power struggles between families. All these developments were influenced by the emergence of the religious party, which was the first to act beyond the traditional framework of the village. Thus, the innovative character of the Islamic revivalist group in question lies not only in its ideological orientation but also in its approach towards creating a new dimension of public and social activities outside and beyond the traditional village framework. But the revivalists' influence, which started with criticism of the social and educational situation, has lost its drive, although it has succeeded in retaining its power. During the years following the 1988 elections the first and 'revolutionary' success of the religious activists diminished. Surprisingly, although the religious party did not compete for mayorship in 1993, they gained two seats in the local council, the same number as in 1988. In 1993, 227 people supported the religious party—more votes than any other party, but at the same time it was clear that most of the population, whose votes were distributed among six other parties, were opposed to the religious ideology, and were unsympathetic to its representatives.<sup>36</sup> Clearly, the influence of the Islamist ideology and the success of its party have been limited.<sup>37</sup>

Following the interactions with the Caucasus and other social developments already described, it transpires that the Circassians of Israel are not less religious, but rather reject the tendencies to assert religion as the primary feature of their identity. Religion is an important factor of identity; but at the same time it remains secondary to, dependent upon and constitutive of ethno-national identity.

The Circassian case is exceptional, although one can draw a parallel with other minorities who serve in the Israeli army, such as the Druze, as well as the Beduins. The recent emergence of civic activities in the Beduin community might be seen as a reaction as well as an opposition to the penetration of Islamic revivalism. This reaction first began in the Negev (in the Southern part of Israel) and later on spread to Galilee (in the North). Some examples of this are the Association for the Preservation of Beduin Heritage (*Al-Badiya*), which includes members from several Beduin communities in Galilee, and the 'Beduin Trackers' Association'.

From a more general perspective, the connections between the influence and

limits of fundamentalism and the emergence of civic society might provide us with another way of looking at similar political developments in 1993, the year in which, in many Arab localities, the growing power of religious parties lost its drive and in some cases was even halted. Paradoxically, the overall influence of Islamic movements like the 'Muslim Brotherhood' is limited by their success: their example of how to act beyond the traditional socio-political framework is used by 'civic'-type social organizations which eventually oppose and compete with them.

To summarize, the connection between the rise of Muslim revivalism and the emergence of civil society is a dialectical and complex one. First, as discussed above, the Islamic groups themselves possess characteristics similar to those of civil society; for instance, by acting outside of the traditional kinship systems. Such groups, who act in a fashion that has been described as 'Islamization from below', emphasize the promotion of educational and social issues. This activity is often accompanied by a stand against discrimination and injustice, and has a strong egalitarian flavor. (Of course, this egalitarianism is usually from a social point of view, whereas when it comes to the issue of women's status, the picture is more complex).

Additionally, Islamic groups pave the way for and provide examples of civic-type social organization for different groups who also stress a social, educational and cultural agenda, but who have different ideological and political aims.

Finally, the case in question is another example of the crucial role of specific cultural and national elements in the reception and development of Islamic revivalist ideas.

## Notes and references

1. On this distinction, see Baruch Kimmerling, *Bein Medina LeChevra*, Vol. 2 (in Hebrew) (Open University, 1995), pp 69–72.
2. See Adam Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York, 1992), p 2; Charles Taylor, 'Modes of civil society', *Public Culture*, Vol 3, No 1, 1990, pp 95–118; and John Keane, *Civil Society and the State* (New York: Verso, 1993).
3. James Piscatori, 'Accounting for Islamic fundamentalisms', in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds, *Accounting for Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p 361.
4. Jean-Francois Legrain, 'Palestinian Islamisms: patriotism as a condition of their expansion', in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds, *Accounting for Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p 413.
5. Martin E. Marty, 'Fundamentals of fundamentalism', in Lawrence Kaplan, ed., *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p 17.
6. Legrain, op cit, Ref 4, p 413.
7. I draw a distinction here between Islamic revivalism oriented more at the community level and aiming for a kind of *modus vivendi* with the existing political structure and culture (whether 'democratic' or 'semi-democratic'), and radical Islamic revivalism oriented more at the wider political and state level. This second kind of revivalism often tends to be more violent. Although these two forms are different, both are connected to a wider process of religious changes. The different manifestations of revivalism can, thus, be seen as different points on a continuum—or maybe different continuums in various Islamic societies in different social and political contexts.
8. For further discussions of this community see C. Bram, 'Circassian re-emigration to the Caucuses, and the adoption of the 'American-Jewry Model' among the Circassians in Israel', Paper presented at the Conference on 'Immigration, Language Acquisition and Patterns of Social Integration', Hebrew University

- of Jerusalem, June 1994a; and C. Bram, '*Hachinuch Bekerev Hacherkessim bisrael*' (Hebrew-education among the Circassian in Israel), Report presented to the Ministry of Education, The School for Educational Leadership, Jerusalem, March 1994b.
9. R. Traho, 'Circassians', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 10, No 1/2, 1991, pp 1–63 provides a good survey of Circassian History. (The article is a new English translation of a work first published in Russian in 1950.) General background can be also found in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.
  10. First attempts were made to adopt the Arabic alphabet in 1897, and then the Latin alphabet in 1919. The Cyrillic alphabet has been used since 1938. On language policy towards the Circassians in Israel, see Asher Stern, 'Educational policy towards the the Circassian minority in Israel', in K. Jasporet and S. Kroon, eds, *Ethnic Minority Language and Education* (Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlenger, 1989), pp 175–184.
  11. The major influences of this migration upon the Ottoman empire and on the emergence of modern Turkey are discussed at length by Kemal Karpat, 'The Hijra from Russia and the Caucasus', in Eickelman and Piscatori, eds, *Muslim Travellers* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp 131–153).
  12. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1982) Vol. 2, The entry 'Cerkes'.
  13. Karpat, op cit, Ref 11; A. Uner Turgey, 'Circassian immigration into the Ottoman Empire 1856–1878', in W.B. Hallaq and D.P. Little, *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: E.G.Brill, 1991).
  14. Based on information I received from officials during the second Circassian World Congress held in Maikop, 'The Autonomous Republic of Adyge, in the North Caucasus' [C. Bram, *Shivat Kavkaz shell hacherkessim (The Caucasus Re-immigration of the Circassians)* (Hebrew) (Svivot, 1994c), pp 127–136; C. Bram, 'Language, ethnic identity and crystallization of a national movement—socio-linguistic dilemmas in the making of a the Circassian national movement', paper presented at The First Socio-linguistic Conference, Bar-Ilan University, 1995]. R. Hatukay and S. Achmus, *Hacherkessim—Cherkeskher* (The Cherkess) (Kfar Kama: El Hakim offset, 1991) p 290, give the same figures. This is probably a high estimate.
  15. Because of different degrees of assimilation, today many of these communities are facing the problem of losing their language and culture. Yet compared to other groups, the Circassians have a greater tendency to maintain their separate identity. Especially in the villages, Circassians tend to preserve what Barth (F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups & Boundaries* (Boston: Little Brown, 1969)) calls social boundaries, based on ethnic identity.
  16. Ori Shtendel, *Hacherkessim beisrael (The Cherkes in Israel)* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Am-Hassefer Publishers, 1973), pp 20–44, gives a short general survey of the Israeli Circassians. Another survey, devoted to Circassians in general but also dealing with the Israeli villages, is that by Gerchad (A. Gerchad, *Hacherkessim-Bney HaAdyge (The Cherkes)* (The Ministry of Education, and The Hebrew–Arab Institute, El Mashrak print, 1993), a resident of the village. Hatukay and Achmus (op cit, Ref 14, pp 323–431), also from the village, give a more detailed description of the two villages. An anthropological study of this community is now being written by the author of this paper.
  17. Achmus and Hatukay, op cit, Ref 14, p 362).
  18. The Circassians joined the IDF as early as the 1948 war. Since 1958 they have done compulsory service, following a request submitted by the Circassian leaders and accepted by the Israeli government.
  19. The second village belongs to a regional municipality in the Upper Galilee, where most of the villages are Jewish.
  20. In Israel there are three levels of municipal arrangements: 'city' (or town)—officially beyond 20,000 residents, 'Local Council'—small towns and large villages (usually beyond 2000 residents) and 'Regional Council', incorporating small villages and settlements within the same region.
  21. See p 21, below, for the new connections with the Caucasus. See also Bram (1993) for the developments in the Caucasus and Bram (1994c, op cit, Ref 14) for the new connections with the Circassian homeland.
  22. The Circassians were officially Christians before Islamization, but the influence of Christianity was superficial and did not exclude pagan rites and beliefs; see also Traho (op cit, Ref 9).
  23. In his dissertation from Heidelberg University, Ozbek (Batiray Ozbek, *Die Tscherkessischen Nartsagen* (Heidelberg: Espirit, 1982)) wrote about the ancient Adyge epics, the 'Nart', and their influence on the everyday life of Muslim-Circassians in Turkey and Syria. See also G. Dumézil, *Documents Anatoliens sur Les Langues et Les Traditions du Caucase*, 1960.
  24. An exception is the marriage ceremony, where in the traditional dances, unmarried young women dance with married and unmarried men.
  25. From a sociological, and not only a theological, point of view, the term *Umma* in many Islamic societies usually designates the specific local community as well as the more universal community of believers.
  26. Nafsu was a Circassian Captain in the I.D.F. who, at the beginning of the 1980s, was accused of collaboration with hostile elements. He was pronounced innocent after spending a number of years in prison when it transpired that the General Security Services had used emotional blackmail, with heavy cultural overtones, in order to extract a confession from him. The case was of particular importance as it



- later became part of the general debate surrounding the G.S.S.'s killing of the terrorists who hijacked a bus, in the late 1980s. [For discussion of this case see Ilan Rachum, *Parashat Hashabac (The Israeli General Security Service Affair)* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1990).]
27. For another discussion of the Israeli Educational policy towards the Circassians, see Stern (op cit, Ref 10) and Bram (1994b, op cit, Ref 8).
  28. An arrangement exists whereby the army gives exemptions to people about to take up religious positions within the community, for which they have to undergo training or studies. A similar arrangement exists for the Druze community. However, prior to the activities of the Islamic activists groups in question, this issue was not a controversial one within the internal discourse of the community.
  29. See Bram, 1994b, op cit, Ref 8.
  30. In Barth's (op cit, Ref 15) terms.
  31. Bram (1995), op cit, Ref 14; Bram (1994c), op cit, Ref 14, pp 127–136.
  32. For a wider discussion of the nature of these contacts and of the issue of re-emigration, see Bram (1994a), op cit, Ref 8.
  33. Bram (1994c), op cit, Ref 14, pp 127–136.
  34. Mainly Circassians from Mozdok, North Ossetia.
  35. In July 1993, the association organized the Israeli-Circassian delegation to the second national congress (Bram (1994c), op cit, Ref 14, pp 127–136; Bram (1995), op cit, Ref 14).
  36. The figures quoted here are from *Yalkut Hapirsumim*, State of Israel, 1993.
  37. At the time of publication, the influence of the religious activists is still prominent in a number of areas, especially on issues of education. For example, religious activists and members of the other groups described here are active on the parents' committee, sometimes in a spirit of cooperation and sometimes amidst conflicts and tension. All these groups constitute part of the process of the formation of a civic society. The renewed connections with the Caucasian homeland have also been influential in this respect; paradoxically, the process of cultural revival and frequent visits to the Caucasus has led Israeli Circassians to emphasize their unique and distinctive features as a Diaspora community and to increase their efforts to become a part of the wider civic society of Israel as a whole.

