INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

25 ON

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

CÉCILE DRUEY, MURAT SHOGENOV,
VALENTINA TANAYLOVA (EDS.)

FIGHTING FOR SELF-DETERMINATION, PARTICIPATION AND CONTROL

STATEBUILDING AND THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL MEMORIES IN CHECHNYA (1986 – 2023)

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

25 ON

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

This edited volume traces the tragic history of state collapse and statebuilding, radicalisation and conflict in Chechnya, focusing on the contested and contesting role of historical memory. The time frame covered ranges from the beginning of civil mobilisation during Perestroika in the mid-1980s to the period of increasing authoritarianism, repression and militarisation in the run-up to the Russian-Ukrainian war in the early 2020s. The book's eleven contributions are divided into five sub-periods and are illustrated by a rich selection of primary materials.

Cécile Druey is a researcher and lecturer in international history and politics at the University of Bern (Switzerland). Her main academic interest is conflict and conflict transformation in the former Soviet space, with a particular focus on the North Caucasus, Ukraine and Russia.

Murat Shogenov holds a PhD in social psychology from the Kabardino-Balkaria State University in Nalchik (Russian Federation). He has conducted research in the field of conflict and peace studies as part of various international projects. His research focuses on identity politics, nationalism and conflicts between North Caucasian communities in Russia.

Valentina Tanaylova is a researcher at the Center for Ethnopolitical Studies at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. She is primarily concerned with memory research, trauma and the anthropology of war.

www.peterlang.com

FIGHTING FOR SELF-DETERMINATION, PARTICIPATION AND CONTROL

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES
ON CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Vol. 25

Edited by
Nicolas Hayoz, Jens Herlth & Julia Richers

PETER LANG
Lausanne · Berlin · Bruxelles · Chennai · New York · Oxford

CÉCILE DRUEY, MURAT SHOGENOV,
VALENTINA TANAYLOVA (EDS.)

FIGHTING FOR SELF-DETERMINATION, PARTICIPATION AND CONTROL

STATEBUILDING AND THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL MEMORIES IN CHECHNYA (1986 – 2023)

PETER LANG
Lausanne · Berlin · Bruxelles · Chennai · New York · Oxford

Bibliographic information published by die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche National-bibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at ‹http://dnb.d-nb.de›.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress

The open access publication of this book has been published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

The book was developed within the framework of the research project “Remembe-ring the Past in the Conflicts of the Present. Civil Society and Contested History in the Post-Soviet Space”, based at the University of Bern (2017-2023).

Despite intensive efforts, it may not be possible to identify possible rights holders beyond doubt. If your rights are affected in such cases, please notify the publisher.

Cover image: Celebration of Ramzan Kadyrov’s birthday; a street view in Grozny after reconstruction, 15 October 2016 (the photo was taken by the Chechen photographer Musa Sadulayev)

ISSN 1661-1349
ISBN 978-3-0343-4426-5 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-0343-5060-0 (E-Book)
ISBN 978-3-0343-5061-7 (Epub)
DOI 10.3726/b22020

Open Access: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial NoDerivatives 4.0 unported license. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

© Cécile Druey, Murat Shogenov, Valentina Tanaylova, 2024

2024 Peter Lang Group AG, Lausanne

Published by: Peter Lang Group AG, Lausanne, Switzerland

info@peterlang.com - http://www.peterlang.com

To our colleagues and friends in the Caucasus who cannot speak up,
but whose stories should be heard.

Contents

Acknowledgements 11

Map 1: The North Caucasus 12

Map 2: Chechnya 13

Introduction 15

Terms in Use 29

Part I: Perestroika and the Decolonisation of Historical Memory (1986–1991)

Introduction to the Context (1986–1991) 41

Victor Shnirelman
Chechen Society of the 1990s: Between Nation-Building and Conflict Loyalties 47

Cécile Druey
From Identity-Formation to Independence: The Chechen Movement of "Neformaly" (1986–1991) 75

Photos (Part I) 97

Primary Materials (Part I) 99

Part II: Independence (1): Memory and Statebuilding under Dzhokhar Dudayev (1991–1996)

Introduction to the Context (1991–1996) 109

Murat Shogenov
Construction, Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Memories: The Case of the Deportation Memorial in Chechnya (1994–2019) 115

Yavus Akhmadov
Chechen Civil Society Resistance to the Dudayev Regime in “Ichkeria” during the Chechen Crisis 135

Photos (Part II) 157

Primary Materials (Part II) 161

Part III: Independence (2): Memory and Statebuilding under Aslan Maskhadov (1996–1999)

Introduction to the Context (1996–1999) 175

Mairbek Vatchagaev
The Transformation of Sufism in Chechen Society 185

Vassily Klimentov
Coping with Defeat: The Russian State Duma’s Views of Chechnya after the First Chechen War 211

Photos (Part III) 239

Primary Materials (Part III) 241

Part IV: Memory Conflicts and Chechenisation (1999–2021)

Introduction to the Context (1999–2021) 251

Evgeniya Goryushina
From War to Victory: Narratives of the Past in Chechnya (1999–2021) 259

Valentina Tanaylova
Father and Son: The Heroisation of Akhmat Kadyrov as a Political Tool 283

Marat Iliyasov
Russia and the Russian-Chechen Conflicts in the Collective Memory of Chechen Migrants in Europe 303

Photos (Part IV) 325

Primary Materials (Part IV) 329

Part V: New and Old Dividing Lines, and the Powerlessness of Those Who Remember (2022–2023)

Introduction to the Context (2022–2023) 339

Anna Nemzer
The Marketing of Memory, and How It Affects the Remembrance of the Wars in Chechnya 345

John Russell
Shamil Basayev: Mythical Chechen or Murderous Terrorist? A Polemical Essay 371

Photos (Part V) 381

Concluding Thoughts The Role of Memories in Conflict and Statebuilding in Chechnya (1986–2023) 383

Appendix 1 – Events and Processes (1986–2023) 391

Appendix 2 – Communicative Memories (All Periods) 409

Note on contributors 425

Index 429

Acknowledgements

The project of this book would have been impossible without the support we have received from different parts of the world. In the first place, our thanks go to our colleagues in our research team in Bern: Oksana Myshlovska, Carmen Scheide and Elena Natenadze have supported us mentally and helped us move forward through their constructive criticism and many good pieces of advice. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) for funding the research project "Remembering the Past in the Conflicts of the Present: Civil Society and Contested Histories in the Post-Soviet Space", as part of which this book has seen the light, and especially for its ongoing support during the difficult times of the Covid 19 pandemic and the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Special thanks go to the owners of private archives in Grozny and Moscow who generously provided logistical support and access to primary materials. And, of course, this book project would not have been possible without our respondents and local partners in Kabardino-Balkaria and Chechnya, who made our field trips to the Caucasus an unforgettable and enriching experience. Further, we are indebted to Prof. Victor Shnirelman and Prof. Dmitry Funk of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow for their generous logistical support for our research trips and for the interesting discussions. And a warm thank-you goes to Lelia Ischi and Vinzenz Schwab for their support with graphic questions and visualisation, and to Aoiffe Corcoran and Michael Garvey for their careful proofreading of the texts in this book. We are also grateful for the important support from the families and private sponsors in Switzerland who made it possible for us, as an international team, to work on our ambitious publication project in recent years. And, of course, very special thanks go to the most important contributors to this book, the authors. Together we have done it!

Cécile Druey, Murat Shogenov and Valentina Tanaylova (October 2023)

Map 1: The North Caucasus

Map 2: Chechnya

Introduction

This book conceptualises and empirically substantiates the link between narratives of collective memory on the one hand, and processes of statebuilding, mobilisation and radicalisation in Chechnya since the collapse of the Soviet Union on the other. The title highlights "self-determination", "participation" and "control" as three important and contrasting functions that collective memories have taken on: "self-determination" points to memory as a tool to legitimise the claim for autonomy and independence, and "participation" to the historically substantiated request for a political voice and equal rights for Chechens in the 1980s and 1990s, whereas "control" alludes to the use of historical narratives – by the Kremlin and its authoritarian henchmen in Grozny – to restore Russia's territorial integrity and enforce the power of the state over the Chechen population in the 2000s. The subtitle refers to the political context of conflict and statebuilding in which the memory narratives were used over the past three and a half decades in Chechnya. The interplay between historical memory and political processes and events thus forms the tense backdrop against which the various contributions to this volume have been made.

The time frame chosen is the period from the onset of civic mobilisation during Perestroika (1986) until the reinforced authoritarianism and repression of civil society and the militarisation in the run-up to the Russian-Ukrainian war (2022). The demand for decolonisation and self-determination in the late 1980s and the 1990s went hand in hand with the reshaping of collective memory and a massive rewriting of narratives of the past in the (former) Soviet periphery. This process of socio-cultural emancipation gradually led to more radical claims for political inclusion and participation in decision-making processes in Chechnya, culminating in the "Chechen Revolution", which sought complete independence for Grozny from the Soviet system and its Russian heirs in autumn 1991. Beyond nationalist mobilisation, historical memory increasingly became an instrument of statebuilding and control, in the 1990s under Djokhar Dudayev, but especially under father and son Akhmad and Ramzan Kadyrov since 2000. In this authoritarian function, the mnemonic narratives selected by the historiographers of the

ruling elite mark certain episodes or personalities as "good", that is, as worthy of public remembrance, whereas large parts of history are labelled "bad" because they contradict the political ideas of the ruling elites and are therefore to be erased from society's consciousness. As a result, the last twenty years in Chechnya have seen increasing division and alienation, not only among competing statebuilding actors and societal groups (government vs opposition, civil society vs civil society) and political claims (friendship with Russia vs Chechen independence), but also in relation to the different ways of looking at the past: in addition to the official historical narratives proclaimed by the authorities, something like a "memory underground" has emerged, reflected in informal activities in families and civil society and widely disseminated via social media. The contributions to this book each take a closer look at specific episodes relevant to the topics of statebuilding, conflict and historical memory in Chechnya. The perspectives and methods of analysis may differ depending on the author. When selecting the contributions, we deliberately made sure to involve not only (Western) academics, but also practitioners and researchers from Russia and Chechnya who have followed the events from the inside, so to speak.

The plan for this book was developed within the framework of the research project "Remembering the Past in the Conflicts of the Present: Civil Society and Contested History in the Post-Soviet Space", based at the University of Bern and funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation SNSF (2017–2023). We started writing and collecting chapters in 2020, and in November 2021, the process gained momentum during the international academic workshop "Conflict Escalations and Windows for Peace in Chechnya" in Bern, Switzerland. It is now 2023 and we are wrapping up the work on our book: a little more than a year has passed since the onset of the new war in Ukraine, which turned everything upside down in the former Soviet space and beyond, and sheds a new light on the situation in Chechnya. What is certain is that in Chechnya, too, this new situation consolidates the authoritarian status quo and lends impetus to the personality cult; Ramzan Kadyrov is now no longer just "head" of the republic, but has recently been crowned "father of the country" by his parliament, or "Mekhkan Da" in Chechen (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2023).

How to Study the Role of Memories?

It is well established that historical memories are powerful tools for mobilisation, especially in the context of ongoing or past conflicts and violations of human rights (Carretero, 2011; Trouillot, 2015; Bentrovato, Korostelina and Schulze, 2016; Cairns and Roe, 2003). "Mnemonic actors" are described as creating and disseminating a certain interpretation of the past and therefore following a specific political or military logic. With the formulation of mnemonic narratives, past events are "selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience" (Riessman, 2005: 1). In this sense, mnemonic actors can be understood as "storytellers" interpreting historical events and processes in accordance with a specific broader message, directed towards a specific audience. In recent decades, the role of memories in the construction of political narratives has become a field of growing scholarly interest. Wertsch underlines the "narrative organisation" of collective memory, whereby memories are understood to be "textual resources" that help to shape past events according to a group's needs and interests in the present (Wertsch, 2008). Moreover, a conflict or post-conflict situation strengthens the appeal of collective narratives for those concerned. It makes the messages of the narrative more binding for the groups to which they are addressed, because they often transmit, in our case via references to historical memories, a feeling of threat and "existential insecurity" (Bar-Tal, Oren and Nets-Zehngut, 2014: 663; Hammack, 2010). For instance, Djokhar Dudayev, the first president of de facto independent Chechnya, acted as such a "storyteller" in the early 1990s: in the wake of Chechen de facto independence and during the First Chechnya War, he deliberately played on the traumatic collective memory, notably of the Stalinist deportation, in order to instil a feeling of "existential insecurity" and fear in the Chechen population that the Russian military attacks would lead to a repetition of the ethnic cleansing of 1944. As a result of Dudayev's campaign, large parts of the Chechen male population – his intended "audience" – joined the armed resistance movement.

Beyond political mobilisation, more official and institutionalised forms of rememberance – what Jan Assman refers to as "cultural memory" (J. Assmann, 2008) – are also important elements of statebuilding. As James Wertsch and Nutsa Batiashvili postulate, symbolic acts, like speeches by state

leaders on anniversaries of historical events or inaugurations of monuments, are by no means only about recounting the past; they are also about justifying the present and building the future of a group or state. Again, the impact of memories is closely linked to certain narratives and the political goals of the actors who thematise them. Such a goal can be the consolidation of the central state's sovereignty and the justification for a forceful reintegration of lost territories (Wertsch and Batiashvili, 2012). An example of the use of history and memory to restore territorial integrity can be observed in the reintegration of Chechnya into Russian territory since the early 2000s. Under Vladimir Putin in Russia and especially among his local allies Akhmat and later Ramzan Kadyrov, the narrative of a glorious past of friendship and cooperation has been deliberately evoked, for example, in the joint fight against the Nazis during the "Great Patriotic War". This demonstration of historical unity is intended to help strengthen support for the (pro-)Russian leadership and counter the resistance of the Chechen separatist movement.

However, "cultural memories" and the evocation of the past by political actors can also be used to transmit the idea of an autonomous and independent statehood (Sherlock, 2007). An example of this would be the inauguration of deportation memorial in early 1994 as a tool to unify the population and to legitimise the concept of Chechen statehood, independent of Russia. This makes it clear that the function of memory as a statebuilding element is changing, as it can support both the forcible restoration of territorial integrity and the claim to independence, depending on the political context and the actor. In Chechnya, the functions of memory as a tool both for separation and "self-determination" and for unified "control" were of central importance, as reflected in the title of this book.

Approaches to Conceptualising the Conflicts in and around Chechnya

There is an abundance of academic work on the conflicts in and around Chechnya. This volume contributes to the general literature on the protracted situation in Chechnya in that it understands "conflict" as a broad phenomenon that includes not only armed confrontations, but also

narratives and symbolic practices in diverse fields of social and political life.[1] Various conceptual approaches to researching the conflicts in and around Chechnya, some of which are contradictory, can be distinguished. The most important of them will be briefly discussed below before we outline the thrust of our own book.

One group of authors sees nationalism and historical grievances as the main drivers of conflict.[2] In the Chechen case, this literature, which usually attributes a strong inter-ethnic component to the conflict, focuses on the restoration of justice after the various political, socio-economic and cultural grievances experienced by the peoples of the North Caucasus under Soviet and Tsarist rule. This new scholarly interest in publicising and redressing historical grievances was an important contribution to public and academic discourse during Perestroika and the early post-Soviet period, when a specifically North Caucasian literature of decolonisation and de-Stalinisation emerged. Many of these works were dedicated in particular to the topic of the Caucasian War of the nineteenth century and the Stalinist deportation of several peoples of the Caucasus during the Second World War (Kandur, 1996; Khalilov, 1998; Degoev, 1992; Bliev and Degoev, 1994; Avtorkhanov, 1991; Alieva, 1993). More recently, the new layers of Chechen grievances have also been addressed, as reflected in a large number of academic, journalistic and activist works on the two Chechen wars, and the purges and "Chechenisation" since 2000 (Politkovskaya, 2001; Lokshina, 2007; Memorial, 2016; FIDH and Memorial, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2001). Finally, some authors focused on nationalism and the inter-ethnic dimension of conflict, underlining the mobilising potential of the Chechen tribal system (Tishkov, 1997; 2004; Hughes, 2007).

A second analytical approach to explaining (armed) conflicts, including those in Chechnya, focuses on terrorism and wartime radicalisation as

---

1 For a working definition of the term "conflict", see the section "Terms in Use" at the end of this introduction.

2 In international conflict studies, the interpretation of conflicts as being based on ethnic grievances is most notably advocated in the now classic work of Ted Gurr (Gurr, 1970), Michael Hechter (Hechter, 1975) and especially Donald Horowitz (Horowitz, 1985). Interesting recent work on "grievances" as the main drivers of conflicts also underline that ethnically based grievances alone are not enough to cause conflict; they need to be activated by political exclusion (Cederman, Wimmer and Min, 2010; Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug, 2013).

drivers for the use of force. Martha Crenshaw (1981) points to the role of long-term political, economic and socio-cultural grievances as key causes of insurgent groups resorting to violence. According to this argumentation, guerrilla warfare and terrorism can be used as instruments used to "redress these grievances"; indeed, they constitute typical behaviour among nationalist movements in large colonial empires (Crenshaw, 1981: 383). Linked to the larger problem of grievances is the explanation of the escalation of armed violence as a result of the war itself (Kalyvas, 2006). Following this reasoning, the mobilisation and radicalisation of insurgent groups is a reaction to the immediate exposure to violence and follows an often spontaneous, yet pragmatic logic to gain an advantage over what is perceived as the enemy. In Chechnya, this was impressively demonstrated by the mobilisation of the formerly undecided majority of the population in all districts of Chechnya after the invasion of Russian troops in November–December 1994. Here, "cultural codes" such as honour and the protection of livelihood played an important role (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2017).

A third strand of literature highlights greed and structural opportunities as the most important reasons for conflict.[3] In the case of Chechnya, the greed thesis is represented by authors focusing on access to and control of the Chechen petrol fields and pipelines (Cornell, 2001), and on the deals between a corrupt local elite and Russian oligarchs that gave rise to many conspiracy theories (Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 2010; Roshchin, 2014). Another group of authors emphasises state collapse, economic transition and elite change as opportunities for warlords and other "violence entrepreneurs" to engage in armed conflict (Zürcher, 2007; Cornell, 2001; Derluguian, 2005), or to keep it going, for example, through the trade in kidnapped people between the two Chechnya wars (Roshchin, 2014).

The fourth conceptual approach focuses on religion, especially Islamic extremism, as a primary driver of conflict in the North Caucasus. There is disagreement, however, among the proponents of the "Islamist extremism" thesis about the exact connection between religion and the insurgency. Certain authors hold that extremism, and thus the conflict, was imported to Chechnya by foreign ideologists and members of the global jihadi

3 Authors advocating a "greed and opportunities" approach usually explain the eruption of conflicts with reference to problems of access to and competition for natural resources (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004), and the weakness of institutions and failing state structures (Fearon and Laitin, 2003).

movement. Echoing the war on terror launched in the United States after 2011, the “Islamist threat” in the North Caucasus is portrayed in a kind of clash of civilisations rhetoric, with Russia and the West fighting against the entire Muslim world and global terrorism (Hahn, 2007; Schaefer, 2010; Kulikov and Lembik, 2000). Other proponents of the “Islamist extremism” thesis take a more differentiated approach to the problem of mobilisation and radicalisation under the banner of Islam and see religion not as the origin of the conflict, but rather as an instrument used by some of the involved actors. Thus, the Islamisation of the warlords opened up access to financial and ideological support from global Islamic networks after other resources, such as those from solidarity-based nationalist groups in the former Soviet space and from the international community, had dried up (Hughes, 2007; B.G. Williams, 2004; E. Souleimanov and Ditrych, 2008; Moore and Tumelty, 2008; Sokiryanskaya, 2014; Wilhelmsen, 2020).

A fifth body of literature explores discursive practices and their contribution to conflict escalation and the use of force.[4] According to this approach, conflict-supporting narratives play a key role in the mobilisation and escalation processes in Chechnya. Moreover, this escalation happens not in a linear way, but as an intersubjective process of mutual radicalisation (Wilhelmsen, 2018; 2020). On one side, there is the exclusion and demonisation of Chechnya and the Chechens in Russia, and the discursive construction and securitisation of Chechnya as an existential threat to Russia’s national interests (Russell, 2005; Wilhelmsen, 2013; 2018; Snetkov, 2014). On the other side, the insurgents in Chechnya become more radical and find support and a new outlet of violence in the international Islamist movement (Hughes, 2007; 2001; Wilhelmsen, 2005; 2020).

Finally, the broader literature dealing not directly with conflict, but with issues of contested memories in Chechnya is also of relevance to this book. Various authors highlight the historical roots of Chechen nationalism (Bennigsen and Wimbush, 1985; Bennigsen Broxup, Avtorchanov and Lemercier, 1992; Gammer, 1998; 2006), or discuss specific episodes

4 Like the first analytical approach discussed above, authors focusing on the narrative triggers of mobilisation and radicalisation also point to the importance of pre-existing grievances and collective trauma; however, according to them, structural grievances become relevant only when “activated” by political actors and framed as part of a particular broader narrative – which also implies certain political or military acts (Cobb, 2013; Bar-Tal, Oren and Nets-Zehngut, 2014; Hammack, 2010).

from the past, such as the Stalinist deportation of 1944, and the fear that these traumatic experiences could be repeated in the present (Derluguian, 2005; Cheterian, 2008; Brian Glyn Williams, 2000; Gammer, 2002). Other authors devote their research to the controversial politics of history and the aggressive "cult of victory" of the Second World War in Chechnya and Russia since 2000, which unfolds against the backdrop of Putin's increasingly authoritarian regime (Merlin, 2014; Le Huérou, 2019; Iliyasov, 2022).

Due to the broad thematic spectrum of the individual contributions, it is difficult to assign the present volume to one of the above categories. Several contributions relate to the production of (memory) narratives and their significance in the conflicts and statebuilding processes in Chechnya. Thus, at least in part, the book follows the approach of the fifth body of literature, which centres on the discursive dimension of conflict. However, the contributions are not only about narratives; it is also about the environment in which they emerged. The book thus measures the contested memory narratives against the timeline of concrete events and broader processes. Combining narrative analyses with meticulous studies on the political, socio-cultural and military context, the book makes an interdisciplinary contribution to various academic fields, from history and social anthropology to political science, sociology and social psychology. The book also builds methodological bridges, notably between memory studies, which are departing more from oral histories and victims' perspectives, and conflict and peace research, putting greater emphasis on the hard facts of the political and military context and developments at local, national and international levels. Ultimately, a rich and detailed image emerges that should help to better understand the protracted conflict(s) in Chechnya and the changing themes and functions of historical memory since Perestroika.

Political Context and Mnemonic Debates in Chechnya, 1986–2023

The conceptual link between memory narratives, statebuilding and conflict inspired the main idea behind, and the individual contributions to,

the book. The timeline of political developments in and around Chechnya since Perestroika serves as a methodological guideline for the contextualisation of the narratives, and as a structure for arranging the contributions of the individual authors. To facilitate this contextualisation, a detailed chronological overview is included at the end of the book, containing key political events and processes between 1986 and 2023, including those involving collective memories. This chronological mapping, produced by the co-editors but contributed to by several authors of contributions to this book during the academic workshop in Bern at the end of 2021, also differentiates the political levels and geographical scope on which certain events and processes take place (see Appendix 1 – “Events and Processes”; a visualisation of the mapping can be accessed via an external link).[5]

Through the combination of analytical chapters, polemic essays and primary materials, the edited volume provides a richly detailed study from the perspective of a variety of authors, who, in some cases, were themselves involved in political and military processes in Chechnya. This multilayered, context-based approach makes it possible to look at the complex political, cultural, socio-economic situation in the North Caucasus from different angles and thus to gain a differentiated picture. Care has also been taken to ensure that not only academics in the strict sense have their say, but also journalists, activists and practitioners who have followed events in and around Chechnya from the inside.

The book is structured into five parts, each of which reflects a certain sub-period. These time periods are to be taken as rather loosely indicative, since various chapters refer to more than one period; however, all of the chapters have a strong connection to the part of the timeline to which they have been assigned. Each of the chronological parts contains an introduction summarising the mnemonic debates and the political context. Additionally, the analytical texts are illustrated by selected primary sources, which were largely made available to us by private archives in Grozny and Moscow.[6] These primary materials, such as photos, interview

---

5 Both the chronology and visual mapping can also be accessed via <https://doi.org/10.48620/228>, or by following the QR code given at the beginning of Appendix 1 at the end of the book.

6 The primary materials reproduced here are scientific citations. Despite intensive efforts, in certain cases potential rights holders could not be located. Should your rights be affected in any way, please inform us at cecile.druey@unibe.ch.

excerpts, political programmes and speeches by specific actors, are usually placed in a specific time period; however, there are also cross-period materials at the end of the book (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).

As a starting point of the mnemonic debates and increased mobilisation of society, Part I is dedicated to the processes of political emancipation and identity-building during the late Soviet period of Perestroika (1986–1991). At the level of local politics in Chechnya, the abolition of the Communist Party's monopoly and the attempt to increase inclusion brought with them a boost in the participation of civil society in the redefinition of Chechen national identity and a trial of the strength of local and national power structures. The rehabilitation and re-activation of formerly taboo episodes from the past played a key role in this process of decolonisation and democratisation. Local historians and other public actors engaged in the construction of a de-Sovietised national history of the Chechens, portraying themselves as carriers of an ancient civilisation with their own population, territory, culture and religion – all attributes needed for sovereign statehood. Victor Shnirelman's contribution provides a summary of Chechnya's complicated history full of hardship, which forms a backdrop of traumatic social memories still recalled by Chechens today, and analyses the ethnic demography and traditional structures of the Chechen people from an anthropological perspective. Cécile Druey, then, is interested in the political mobilisation and increased use of historical themes in Chechnya during Perestroika, and locates this phenomenon in the political context of the late 1980s.

Part II moves on to study Chechnya's first period of de facto independence and statebuilding under Dzhokhar Dudayev (1991–1996). In contrast to the previous phase, when the societies of the Soviet peripheries began to achieve emancipation while still being connected to Moscow via a strong socio-cultural and political "umbilical cord" (Gammer, 2002: 120), this second phase of mobilisation in Chechnya was all about the struggle for (or against) independence. Among other things, this led to the strong political instrumentalisation of historical memory for statebuilding purposes. Murat Shogenov, in his analysis of the fate of the deportation memorial inaugurated in spring 1994, describes how the first Chechen president, Dzhokhar Dudayev, openly appealed to the traumatic experience of the Stalinist deportations (1944–1957) in order to unite the Chechen people behind the cause of independence, and to frighten those who might choose a more moderate path and avoid open confrontation with Moscow.

The second contribution to Part II looks at the first period of de facto independence in Chechnya from a "within" perspective and touches not on the topic of memory, but rather on the political and military context. In his personal and polemical chapter, Yavus Akhmadov, who was himself an active member of the anti-Dudayev opposition in the 1990s, reports on the internal divisions in the population of Chechnya, and on the military confrontations of the opponents of independence with Dudayev and his supporters.

Part III touches on a particularly under-researched period: the second phase of Chechen independence under Aslan Maskhadov's presidency (1997–1999). Due to international isolation and the increasing securitisation of the North Caucasus by the Moscow Kremlin, independent primary data about this period are scarce. This makes it especially important to collect available information to reconstruct the political context and the use of historical memory during the time between the two Chechnya wars. Mairbek Vatchagaev, who was himself an advisor to President Maskhadov in 1997, outlines, in his chapter, the context of the late 1990s and thematises the key role of religion in the political processes in Chechnya. In particular, he points to the changing significance of Sufism, which was an instrument in the struggle for Chechen independence in the 1990s and was co-opted by the pro-Russian Chechen elites in the 2000s. Vassily Klimentov's analysis, on the other hand, starts from a completely different angle and focuses on competing positions on Chechnya in Russia. Based on discussions in the State Duma in Moscow in 1996 and 1997, the author traces the controversies among Russia's political elite relating to the difficult legacy of the First Chechnya War and shows how these debates became increasingly militarised towards the turn of the millenium.

Part IV looks at the processes of statebuilding and the role of historical memory in the 2000s, from the onset of Russia's second military operation in the North Caucasus in September 1999 until the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022. Since the Kremlin delegated large parts of the monopoly of power and violence to the local elites under Akhmat and his son Ramzan Kadyrov from the early 2000s, as part as its programme of statebuilding in the North Caucasus, this period is also referred to as "Chechenisation". Whereas, in the preceding periods, active mobilisation, often also legitimised by historical memories, was carried out by civil society, the period of "Chechenisation" is characterised by the establishment of authoritarian power structures, the demobilisation of

civil society and the repression of collective memory and popular traumas. The leading elites actively built their own version of the past, which was presented as the "one and only truth" and suppressed all alternative perspectives on history. Valentina Tanaylova writes about the heroisation of Akhmat Kadyrov as a political tool, and about the deliberate construction of a cult of memory around the pro-Russian Chechen President Akhmat Kadyrov, who was killed in 2004. The two following contributions dive into the topic of collective memory from a non-state perspective. Based on the oral histories of Chechen migrants in Europe, Marat Iliyasov reconstructs a multi-faceted mosaic of the Chechens' memories of the two wars and their attitudes towards the Russians and Russia in general. Evgeniya Goryushina's contribution, on the other hand, is dedicated to the politics of memory in post-war Chechnya itself and shows how, under Akhmat and Ramzan Kadyrov, the public discourse on the past switched from a focus on "war" to a focus on "victory".

Finally, Part V deals with the most recent past, since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022, which has involved a new escalation of repression and militarisation for the whole of Russia, including Chechnya. Many civic activists who had not done so earlier left the country as of spring 2022, forming new Russian diasporas in the states of the former Soviet periphery, Western Europe and the United States. Anna Nemzer's essay reflects the lostness and anger of Russian civil society before and after February 2022, much of which has now itself become diaspora: what the director of the documentary film *The Banished Memory of the Chechen Wars* (2020) heard from her respondents as they recalled violent events in Chechnya is, it seems, now being tragically repeated in Ukraine. In Chechnya proper, Ramzan Kadyrov, buoyed up by the war, is pushing ahead with his own statebuilding programme as of 2022. He continues to instrumentalise the memory and cult of his father and conducts his own military mobilisation campaigns in parallel with the Russian army leadership, making Grozny – once again – the Kremlin's undisputed security partner in the Caucasus. The new war also exposed old dividing lines within the population of Chechnya. There has been a reactivation of the armed Chechen nationalist underground, and diaspora Chechens from all over Europe have been fighting alongside the Ukrainian armed forces under the banner of Chechen independence – not only against Moscow, but also against many of their own people fighting on the opposite side under Russian command. Thus, in tandem with the authoritarian

personality cult and Grozny's demonstration of friendship with Russia, Chechens have, since 2022, been awakening very different memories of the past, as expressed in John Russell's essay on the renowned independence hero and warlord Shamil Basasyev.

All these contributions on the context of statebuilding, conflict and collective memory in Chechnya are written from the personal perspective of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the beliefs and opinions of the co-editors. At the heart of the editing of the book was an intent to primarily give voice to different opinions, generations and geographical groups of researchers and practitioners, and thus to contribute a few new pieces to the mosaic of the analysis of the conflicts and statebuilding processes in Chechnya, and the ambiguous role of historical memory.

Cécile Druey, Murat Shogenov and Valentina Tanaylova (October 2023)

Terms in Use

This section introduces some of the key terms that are often used throughout the book.

"Narratives", "Memory Narratives", "Mnemonic Narratives"

A narrative, as it is understood here, is a "story about an event or events that has a plot with a clear starting point and endpoint, providing sequential and causal coherence about the world and/or a group's experience" (Bar-Tal, Oren and Nets-Zehngut, 2014: 663). At a collective level, narratives are "social constructions" that link a sequence of historical and current events, and thus construct a certain shared collective identity (Bruner, 2002: 76; Bar-Tal, Oren and Nets-Zehngut, 2014: 663). "Memory narratives" or "mnemonic narratives" are therefore by no means only about what happened in the past; rather, they are frameworks of meaning or "textual resources" used to reconstruct and interpret the events of the past from a political and socio-cultural standpoint in the present (Wertsch, 2008: 122). In conflict situations, collective narratives – for example, about a traumatic experience of a certain group in the past – are experienced by members of the group as more compelling because of the existential uncertainty they might be facing (Hammack, 2010; Bar-Tal, Oren and Nets-Zehngut, 2014).

"Chechnya Wars", "Chechen Wars", "Russian-Chechen Wars"

Various terms are used to refer to the recent armed conflicts on the territory of Chechnya, often with certain political connotations. Whereas the expressions adopted by individual authors may vary, the book in general applies the abridged expression "Chechnya wars" to mean "wars in Chechnya". More precisely, "First Chechnya War" refers to the armed conflict of 1994–1996, and "Second Chechnya War" refers to the one of 1999–2009. This seems to be more correct than the more common notion of "Chechen War", which seems to be rather uncritically adopted from the Russian formulation ("Chechenskaya voyna") and suggests Chechen authorship.

"Chechenisation"

The policy of "Chechenisation", pushed vigorously by Vladimir Putin since 2000 in order to transfer responsibility from the Russian armed forces to the Chechens on the ground, has led to a consolidation of the power of President Ramzan Kadyrov and his armed formations (Dannreuther and March, 2008). This policy has been accompanied by the local leader's quasi-total and uncontrolled freedom to apply his own arbitrary and increasingly authoritarian rules in governing his own population. Thus, under Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechnya practically became a "state within a state", with its own security apparatus, cultural and social policy, and a parallel legal system based on Islam and local customary law more than on the Russian constitution. The newly defined relationship with Moscow and the increasingly authoritarian attitude towards its own population have had an immense effect on the role of historical memories. As a result of the policy of "Chechenisation", a mnemonic division formed whereby a "good past", co-opted from the general history of the Chechens, has been juxtaposed with the "bad past", which is no less Chechen, but is politically inconvenient. This intra-societal division is typical of the current situation in the republic.

"Conflicts" and "Wars"

"Conflict" is a term used in many different contexts in this book, from contested history and symbolic protest to direct violence and war. Thus, individual authors' understanding of conflict should in each case be defined separately. This ambiguity is also expressed in the field of memory, since the memory of a conflict is usually associated with contested understandings and interpretations of past events by the actors involved; both from an academic and a political perspective, we thus ask readers to exercise caution. One of the most contested terms in the context of commemorating the conflicts or wars in Chechnya is the word "war", because although most authors and speakers refer to the same events, not all are willing to label them as "war" or "wars". In their understanding of "conflict", the editors of this book largely follow the definition of social conflict by Lewis Coser (1964), which can be applied to many situations; Coser sees conflict as a "struggle over the values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the objectives of the opponents are to neutralise, injure or eliminate their rivals".

"Statebuilding"

In this context, the term "statebuilding" refers to processes that have less to do with the institutionalisation of the state itself, than with various social actors' visions and ideas of what the state should be like. Along with other factors involved in shaping different perspectives on the future, historical memory, understood as the representation of the past in the context of the present, is seen as an important meaning-making tool to model the future "state". In each of the five periods examined in this book, the contestation of memory does not primarily involve a reference to the past, but constitutes above all a competition between different actors' visions of the political future of the state and its inhabitants.

"Radicalisation"

Donatella Della Porta defines radicalisation as an "escalation from non-violent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time" (Della Porta, 2018: 462). Thus, the relational approach in conflict studies understands radicalisation not as one-off and localised phenomena, but as processes that involve different spaces, individuals, groups and institutional actors. The broader context is of key importance for these processes of radicalisation. Notably, political events and opportunities contribute to the radicalisation (or de-radicalisation) of groups, as do specific actors, who are themselves supported by the symbolic, material and organisational resources they have at their disposal.[1]

"Grievances"

The term "grievances" is often used in the context of the academic debate on "greed and grievances" as the main causes of civil wars, insurgencies and violent conflicts (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). In this book, however, the use of the term is not in the first instance guided by this discussion. Rather, the term "grievances" is used in relation to collective experiences of structural problems or unequal treatment (e.g. due to ethnic, political,

---

1 Opportunities or contexts potentially supportive of radicalisation would include, for instance, a change in the political system or clashes between protestors and security forces or political adversaries. "Resources" mean the material, logistical or symbolic support provided by third actors and symbolic rewards (Della Porta, 2018: 463).

or cultural identity). These painful experiences of unequal treatment can range from discriminatory memory politics to cultural and religious persecution, civic and political exclusion, and the denial of political autonomy. In defining grievances, the book follows the view of Cederman et al. (2013) that structural grievances in the context of the political and economic exclusion of (ethnic) groups are important potential elements of successful mobilisation to violence. In our reflections on the causal relationship between grievances and conflict, however, we go one step further and take the view that the existence of structural inequalities does not automatically lead to conflict; it only does so if these inequalities are "activated" by political actors who articulate them, and by an appropriate context.

"Trauma" and "Chosen Trauma"

By "trauma", we mean here the collective memory of an event that harmed a community or was perceived as a threat to its survival; the community therefore calls itself a victim (Bar-Tal et al., 2014). Collective victimhood can be adopted not only by those directly affected, but also by subsequent generations if the event is given traumatic significance by broad sections of the group (Alexander et al. 2004; Volkan, 2001). In other words, collective trauma is the representation of an event that is permanently reconstructed in the collective memory of a group, and the attempt to ascribe meaning to it (Hirschberger, 2018), with the construction of meaning taking place in the cultural and political context of the present (Assmann and Clift, 2016). Overcoming collective victimhood involves the international community's recognition of the perpetrator's guilt and of the victimhood status, which contributes to the in-group sense of justice and security (Alexander et al. 2004). When this does not happen, the memory of the (unpunished, unrecognised) perpetrator is preserved for generations as traumatic; in this narrative of permanent and often "chosen trauma" (Volkan, 2001), the in-group has to remain vigilant in relation to the perpetrator, and should perhaps even take revenge in order to prevent a repetition of the event in the future. "Chosen traumas" thus often act as conflict-supporting narratives, as they significantly impede reconciliation and a normalisation of relations between rival groups.

"Colonisation", "Decolonisation", "Self-Determination"

Colonisation has two components: a cultural component and a political component. When we speak of colonisation, we always mean both the

political dominance and cultural hegemony of one society or state over another (Etkind, 2011). The process of decolonisation, however, can involve both the political and the cultural, or just one of them. By decolonization, we mean the liberation of a previously colonised society or state from unequal conditions under colonial rule that previously dominated the different spheres of life (political, cultural, economic and social) of that society or state (Loomba, 2015). In the Chechen context, it is not only the role of memory in processes of cultural and political decolonisation that is important, but above all the decolonisation of collective memory itself. "Decolonisation" thus aims to include themes and episodes from the past that were marginalised or forbidden under the conditions of colonial inequality. The notion of "self-determination" is also important in the context of decolonial Chechen discourse. On the one hand, it is contained in the idea of political self-determination as a sovereign, autonomous or even independent entity. On the other hand, the idea of cultural self-determination is no less relevant as a key element of identity-building, making it possible to better understand one's own history and culture, and to answer the question "Who were we? Who are we?" according to the interests and significance for Chechen society itself, as opposed to the interests of external forces.

References

Akhmadov, Ilyas, and Miriam Lanskoy (2010) *The Chechen Struggle: Independence Won and Lost*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Alexander, Jeffrey, et al. (eds.) (2004) *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Alieva, Svetlana (1993) *Tak Eto Bylo, Natsional'nye Repressii v SSSR, 1919–1952* [*Thus It Was: The National Repressions in the USSR 1919–1952*], Insan, Moscow.

Assmann, Aleida, and Sarah Clift (2016) *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, First edition, Fordham University Press, New York.

Assmann, Jan (2008) Communicative and Cultural Memory, in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*

(eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning), Media and Cultural Memory; Medien Und Kulturelle Erinnerung, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 109–18

Avtorkhanov, Abdurakhman (1991) *Ubiystvo Checheno-Ingushskogo Naroda. Narodoubiystvo v SSSR* [*The Murder of the Chechen-Ingush People. People's Murder in the USSR*] (ed. Aleksandr Uralov), Vsya Moskva, Moscow.

Bar-Tal, Daniel, Neta Oren and Rafi Nets-Zehngut (2014) Sociopsychological Analysis of Conflict-Supporting Narratives: A General Framework. *Journal of Peace Research* 51(5), 662–75.

Bennigsen, Alexandre, and S. Enders Wimbush (1985) *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union*, Hurst, London.

Bennigsen Broxup, Marie, Abdurachman Avtorchanov and Chantal Lemercier (eds.) (1992) *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World*, Hurst and Co., London.

Bentrovato, Denise, K.V. Korostelina and Martina Schulze (eds.) (2016) *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*. Eckert. Die Schriftenreihe. Studien Des Georg-Eckert-Instituts Zur Internationalen Bildungsmedienforschung, Band 141. V&R unipres., Gottingen.

Bliev, Marc, and Vladimir Degoev (1994) *Kavkazskaya Voina* [*The Caucasian War*], Roset, Moscow.

Bruner, Jerome S. (2002) *Acts of Meaning*. 10. print. The Jerusalem-Harvard Lectures. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Cairns, Ed, and Micheal D. Roe (2003) *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Carretero, Mario (2011) *Constructing Patriotism. Teaching History and Memories in Global Worlds*. Advances in Cultural Psychology: Constructing Human Development. Information Age Pub, Charlotte, NC.

Cederman, Lars-Erik, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Halvard Buhaug (2013) *Inequality, Grievances, and Civil War*, Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics, Cambridge University Press, New York.

Cederman, Lars-Erik, Andreas Wimmer and Brian Min (2010) Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis. *World Politics* 62(1), 87–119.

Cheterian, Vicken (2008) *War and Peace in the Caucasus. Russia`s Troubled Frontier*, Hurst & Company, London.

Cobb, Sara B. (2013) *Speaking of Violence: The Politics and Poetics of Narrative Dynamics in Conflict Resolution*, Explorations in Narrative Psychology, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Collier, Paul, and Anke Hoeffler (2004) Greed and Grievance in Civil War. *Oxford Economic Papers* 56(4), 563–95.

Cornell, Svante E. (2001) *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*, Caucasus World, Curzon, Richmond, Surrey.

Coser, Lewis A. (1964) *The Functions of Social Conflict.* 1. paperback ed. Sociology. Free Press, New York.

Crenshaw, Martha (1981) The Causes of Terrorism. *Comparative Politics* 13(4), 379.

Dannreuther, Roland, and Luke March (2008) Chechnya: Has Moscow Won? *Survival* 50(4), 97–112.

Degoev, Vladimir (1992) *Kavkazskiy Vopros v Mezhdunarodnykh Otnoshcheniyakh 30–60 Gg XIX v* [*The Caucasian Question in International Relations from the 1830s to the 1860s*], Sogu, Vladikavkaz.

Della Porta, Donatella (2018) Radicalisation: A Relational Perspective. *Annual Review of Political Science* 21(1), 461–74.

Derluguian, Georgi M. (2005) *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Etkind, Aleksandr (2011) *Internal Colonisation: Russia's Imperial Experience*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin (2003) Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War. *American Political Science Review* 97(01), 75–90.

FIDH, and Memorial (2006) La Torture en Tchétchénie : La "Normalisation" du Cauchemar. Rapports le la mission internationale d'enquête. <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/Tchetchenie462frconjoint2007.pdf> (accessed 9 October 2023).

Gammer, Moshe (1998) *Musul'manskoe Soprotivlenie Tsarizmu* [*Muslim Resistance to Tsarism*], Kron-Press, Moscow.

——— (2002) Nationalism and History: Rewriting the Chechen National Past. In *Secession, History and the Social Sciences* (eds. Bruno Coppieters and Michel Huysseune), VUB Brussels University Press, Brussels, 117–40.

——— (2006) *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule*, Hurst, London.

Gurr, Ted Robert (1970) Why Men Rebel, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Hahn, Gordon M. (2007) *Russia's Islamic Threat*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

Hammack, Phillip L. (2010) Identity as Burden or Benefit? Youth, Historical Narrative, and the Legacy of Political Conflict. *Human Development* 53(4), 173–201.

Hechter, Michael (1975) *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, Routledge, London.

Hirschberger, Gilad (2018) Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning. *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (August), 1441.

Horowitz, Donald L. (1985) *Ethnic Groups in Conflict: With a New Preface*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Hughes, James (2007) *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

Human Rights Watch (2001) The "Dirty War" in Chechnya: Forced Disappearances, Torture and Summary Executions. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/chechnya/RSCH0301.PDF> (accessed 9 October 2023).

Iliyasov, Marat (2022) Moscow's Manipulated Memory Politics and Attack on Ukraine. *Ponars Eurasia*, March. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/moscows-manipulated-memory-politics-and-attack-on-ukraine/> (accessed 9 October 2023).

Kalyvas, Stathis N. (2006) *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Kandur, Mukhadin (1996) *Muridism. Istoriya Kavkazskikh Voin 1819–1859* [*Muridism. History of the Caucasian Wars*], El'fa, Nal'chik.

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2023) Parlamentarii Chechni Utverdili Novoe Nazvanie Dolzhnosti Kadyrova [Chechen Parliamentarians Approve Kadyrov's New Job Title]. *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, February. <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/385756/> (accessed 9 October 2023).

Khalilov, Arlsan (1998) *Shamil i Kavkazskaya Voina* [*Shamil and the Caucasian War*], Dagestanskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, Makhachkala.

Kulikov, Anatoliy, and Sergey Lembik (2000) *Chechenskiy Uzel: Khronika Vooruzhennogo Konflikta 1994–1996* [*The Chechen Knot: Chronicle of the Armed Conflict 1994–1996*], Dom Pedagogiki, Moscow.

Le Huérou, Anne (2019) Une Mémoire Sous Contraintes: La Commémoration de La Prise d'otages de Beslan. *Ethnologie Française* Vol. 49(1), 103–18.

Lokshina, T. (ed.) (2007) *Chechnya inside Out*, Demos, Moscow.

Loomba, Ania (2015) *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Third edition, New Critical Idiom, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London.

Memorial (2016) *Counter-Terrorism in the North Caucasus: A Human Rights Perspective. 2014 – First Half of 2016*, Memorial Human Rights Centre, Moscow.

Merlin, Aude (2014) Remembering and Forgetting in Chechnya Today: Using the Great Patriotic War to Create a New Historical Narrative, in *Chechnya at War and Beyond* (eds. Anne Le Huérou et al.), 1st ed., Routledge, London, 37–57.

Moore, Cerwyn, and Paul Tumelty (2008) Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya: A Critical Assessment. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31(5), 412–33.

Politkovskaya, Anna (2001) *A Dirty War: A Russian Reporter in Chechnya*, Harvill, London.

Riessman, Catherine (2005) Narrative Analysis, in *Narrative, Memory and Everyday Life* (ed. Nancy Kelly), University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, 1–7.

Roshchin, Mikhail (2014) Kidnapping and Hostage-Taking between the Two Chechen Wars (1977–1999), in *Chechnya at War and Beyond* (eds. Anne Le Huérou et al.), Routledge, London, 118–32.

Schaefer, Robert W. (2010) *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*, Praeger Security International, Santa Barbara, CA.

Sherlock, Thomas D. (2007) *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia: Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future*, 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Sokiryanskaya, Ekaterina (2014) State and Violence in Chechnya (1997–1999), in *Chechnya at War and Beyond* (eds. Anne Le Huérou et al.), Routledge, London, 93–117.

Souleimanov, Emil Aslan, and Huseyn Aliyev (2017) *How Socio-Cultural Codes Shaped Violent Mobilization and pro-Insurgent Support in the Chechen Wars*, Springer, New York.

Souleimanov, Emil, and Ondrej Ditrych (2008) The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality. *Europe-Asia Studies* 60(7), 1199–1222.

Tishkov, Valeriy (1997) *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London.

——— (2004) *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society*, California Series in Public Anthropology 6, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph (2015) *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA.

Volkan, Vamik D. (2001) Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity. *Group Analysis* 34(1), 79–97.

Wertsch, James V. (2008) The Narrative Organization of Collective Memory. *Ethos* 36(1), 120–35.

Wertsch, James V., and Nutsa Batiashvili (2012) Mnemonic Communities and Conflict: Georgia's National Narrative Template, in *Trust and Conflict* (eds. Alex Gillespie and Ivana Marková), London: Routledge, 37–48.

Wilhelmsen, Julie (2020) Exclusion and Inclusion: The Core of Chechen Mobilization to Jihad. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14(2), 27–41.

Williams, Brian Glyn (2004) From "Secessionist Rebels" to "Al-Qaeda Shock Brigades": Assessing Russia's Efforts to Extend the Post-September 11th War on Terror to Chechnya. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24(1), 199–213.

Williams, Brian Glyn (2000) Commemorating "The Deportation" in Post-Soviet Chechnya: The Role of Memorialization and Collective Memory in the 1994–1996 and 1999–2000 Russo-Chechen Wars. *History and Memory* 12(1), 101–34.

Zürcher, Christoph (2007) *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus*, NYU Press, New York.

Part I
Perestroika and the Decolonisation of Historical Memory (1986–1991)

Introduction to the Context (1986–1991)

> *So, the page is turned. Let us agree that the struggle has begun. God help us!*
>
> —*Bart (1989)*

The first phase covered in this book coincides with an exceptionally turbulent time of mobilisation and political awakening in civil society at the end of the Soviet period. This introductory text will summarise the main developments linked to Perestroika in the North Caucasian and Chechen contexts, including the significance of historical memory.

Victor Shnirelman's chapter introduces the reader to the historical, political and social context in Chechnya. He gives an overview of the different historical periods of Chechnya, its social structure and cultural peculiarities. The importance of this chapter also derives from the personality of the author and his position in the international expert community. Shnirelman occupies a significant place in Russian archaeology and anthropology, and his chapter in this book is thus representative of the way in which the subject of Chechnya is represented in contemporary Russian academic discourse.

Perestroika and Decolonisation in the Caucasus

Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of "Glasnost" and "Perestroika" and the awakening of civil society and its struggle to achieve political participation and civil liberties throughout the existence of the Soviet Union also took hold in the Caucasus and acquired momentum. In the late 1980s, a powerful decolonisation movement developed in the North Caucasus, although, at this early stage of nationalist mobilisation, all-Caucasian unity and empowerment were more in the foreground than the development of the individual ethnic groups. This is vividly expressed on the cover page

of the first volume of the Chechen periodical *Bart*[1] in 1989: "We, the peoples of the Caucasus, are united in this Assembly today […]. Wherever possible, we will clear the dirt on the paths of perestroika; wherever the fortress of Violence stands in our way, we will take up its siege by a triple force: Unity, Popular Will, and the Law" (Bart, 1989: 1). Cécile Druey's chapter focuses on this early phase of civil society mobilisation, and especially on the Chechen movement of "Neformaly". It provides an insight into how civil society in Chechnya interacted with memory during the Perestroika period and the role memory played in the mobilisation and radicalisation of Chechen society as a whole. Her chapter is particularly valuable because it introduces empirical material that is little known in the West.

The claims of the North Caucasian movement of decolonisation were directed against Soviet and Russian imperial rule, referred to as the "Fortress of Violence" and the "common enemy" of the repressive Soviet state (Bart, 1989). In their struggle, the pioneers of decolonisation in the North Caucasus relied on three main resources: the "triple force of unity, popular will, and the Law".

Unity, in this context, means pan-Caucasian solidarity and mutual support in facing the enemy – as in the time of the North Caucasian "Autonomous Mountain Socialist Republic" (1921–1924), when several ethno-territorial groups united to form a short-lived political alliance at the beginning of the Soviet period. In the international context, this "unity of the oppressed peoples" proclaimed by the North Caucasian nationalists in the 1980s also resembles the "Group of 77" or the "Non-Aligned Movement" of Asian and African states, which formed a multilateral coalition in their struggle against the (neo-)colonial policies of the Global North in the 1950, 1960s and 1970s.

By *popular will*, the advocates of decolonisation in the North Caucasus are referring to the mass mobilisation of civil society for civic liberties and national self-determination that gained momentum throughout the former Soviet space during Perestroika (Beissinger, 2002). Applied to the case of the North Caucasus, we can see how nationalism and a mixed context of reform and repression helped to transform structural grievances, such

1 The cover page of *Bart* (1989), volume 1, is also reproduced in the section "Primary Materials" at the end of this part of the book.

as historical traumata and political inequality, into leverage, enabling mass mobilisation and the reversal of the political system.

Law as a core value of the early Chechen and North Caucasian nationalists emphasises the prioritisation of international law and human rights as guiding principles for a new political order, overriding the discriminatory legal practices of the Soviet state in the past. It is significant that in the first issue of *Bart*, on the front page, there is an excerpt from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. More than anything, however, *Law* means historical "justice": reparations and financial compensation are sought to remedy the losses caused by the Stalinist deportations and other forms of repression by the Soviet state.

Building a New State: The Main Directions of Early Chechen Nationalism

Decolonisation and democratisation under Gorbachev also led to a change in Moscow's political attitude towards Chechnya, which was expressed primarily in power-sharing and the new inclusion of local ethnic elites in decision-making processes. However, these timid attempts at reform and rather cosmetic changes did not satisfy the leaders of the Chechen-Ingush national movement. Rather, they sought more political self-determination for the inhabitants of the republic; Moscow's "imperial practice" of appointing the heads of the administration in the republic should be replaced by local selection mechanisms. They wanted this to happen through a revival of traditional norms and institutions, such as the council of elders, or "Mekhka Kkhel" in Chechen (Bart, 1989).

Further, the early Chechen nationalists required a new political status based on more autonomy, if not yet full independence. More concretely, they wanted to achieve an upgrade of the Chechen-Ingush territory's administrative status from an "Autonomous Republic" ("Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic", ChIASSR) to a full-fledged union republic ("Chechen-Ingush Soviet Socialist Republic", ChISSR), which would be directly subordinate to the Soviet central government in Moscow, but not to the Russian Union Republic (RSFSR) (Bart, 1989). Beyond the political

realm, the construction of a new Chechen statehood also called for self-determination in a socio-cultural sense. It was felt that the Russification of the Chechen Republic should be stopped, traditional customs should be revived and the state should be "de-atheised", that is, religion should be rehabilitated and become again an integral part of political life (Bart, 1989).

Rehabilitation of Historical Memory

As a key element of socio-cultural self-determination, the peoples of the North Caucasus also claimed the right to write their own history, a decolonised and de-Sovietised national history, including formerly taboo subjects. During Glasnost and Perestroika, a new, specifically Chechen historiography emerged. This was tantamount to a (legal) rehabilitation of the Chechens as a part of the Soviet system, symbolised in the scientific rehabilitation of their national heroes and episodes from their collective memory. For example, under Gorbachev, there was a renewed interest both among historians and in the mass media in leaders of the Chechen or North Caucasian movement of resistance against Russian colonisation, such as Imam Mansur (1762–1794), Imam Shamil (1797–1871) or Kunta-Haji (1830–1867). The rehabilitation of these heroes in Soviet historiography aimed not only to correct falsified memories and restore honour and justice to the North Caucasians, but also to carry out statebuilding functions. Imam Shamil in particular was celebrated as a newly discovered symbol of Chechnya's ancient statehood: in the early nineteenth century, so the narrative went, he had established on the territory of what is today Chechnya and Dagestan a central administration, a taxation system and a regular army, which also proves Chechnya's credentials and viability as an independent state in the political present (Gammer, 2002: 124–25).

In conclusion, the first stage of nationalist mobilisation in Chechnya (1986–1991) was marked by a powerful movement of political emancipation and socio-cultural self-determination. However, during this early wave of nationalism, the Chechen demands were made "with the umbilical cord still solidly tied to the colonial metropolitan power" (Gammer, 2002: 118). That is, the demands of the Chechens were still embedded in the movement of pan-Caucasian nationalism and did not (yet) aim for

secession and independent statehood, focusing rather on reform of the existing Soviet order.

References

Bart (1989) Obrashchenie (“Open Call”). *Bart* 1 (September), 1–2.

Beissinger, Mark R. (2002) *Nationalist Mobilisation and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, 1st ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Gammer, Moshe (2002) Nationalism and History: Rewriting the Chechen National Past, in *Secession, History and the Social Sciences* (eds. Bruno Coppieters and Michel Huysseune), VUB Brussels University Press, Brussels, Belgium, 117–40.

Victor Shnirelman

Chechen Society of the 1990s: Between Nation-Building and Conflict Loyalties

Abstract: For centuries, Chechnya was influenced by various great powers whose interests overlapped in the Caucasus. During the Caucasian War (1817–64), Russia managed to establish itself definitively as a colonial power in the North Caucasus. During the Soviet period after 1920, Moscow's policies also significantly affected the local population. This chapter provides a brief examination of Chechnya's complicated and tragic history, which forms a backdrop of traumatic memories that continue to underpin socio-political and cultural life in Chechnya, influencing its relationship with the Russian state today. Furthermore, the chapter explores the ethnic demography, economic foundations, professional occupations, and traditional social and religious structures of the Chechen population. It demonstrates how conflicting loyalties in society can cause it to weaken during conflict. Finally, the chapter scrutinises national myths that were developed by the Chechen authorities to consolidate the nation. An anthropological approach is used to carry out the analysis. This is based on data collected from interviews conducted in 1992 in Grozny by the author, as well as from numerous publications in local newspapers, memoirs of Chechen authors and scholarly materials produced by Chechen, Russian and other international researchers.

Keywords: Chechens, Russia, North Caucasus, traditional social structure, Islam, national mythology

Introduction

The Chechens have a complex and tragic history. For centuries, they had to withstand the expansion of Chechnya's neighbouring powers, with Russia finally conquering their territory and establishing its rule over Chechnya by the late nineteenth century. After the Russian revolution of 1917, which resulted in the disintegration of the Russian Empire, the Chechens attempted to gain independence. However, this attempt failed and the Chechens became part of the newly established Soviet state. In the 1920s, the Chechens were disarmed and their main religion, Islam, was

persecuted. In the early 1930s, they raised a revolt against the collectivisation of agriculture[1] and were subsequently suppressed. This was followed by the Great Terror of 1937–1938, during which almost all of the Chechen elite was arrested, exiled or killed. Once again, they raised a revolt during the Second World War, which was harshly suppressed and resulted in the forced deportation of the Chechen people from Chechnya to Central Asia, within the Soviet Union. The Chechen people only started to return in 1957, when their republic was restored. They suffered discrimination in the late Soviet decades, and their standard of living was, in general, much lower than that in the other Russian regions.

Although the Chechens made up the majority of the republic, most of them were peasants and lived high in the mountains, whereas their capital, the city of Grozny, was populated mostly by the Russians, who were employed primarily in the local oil-refining and petrochemical plants.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was seen by many Chechens as a chance to establish their own rule. However, the new Chechen authorities lacked a well-developed blueprint of a future society and instead attempted to restore traditional social institutions, namely clans (*teyps*) and tribes (*tukhums*). Moreover, a dichotomy existed in Chechnya between the highlands, which were occupied by the higher-status clans, and the lowlands, which were occupied by the lower-status clans. A religious schism between the Naqshbandiya and Qadiriyya orders (*tariqas*) further complicated the situation, with Chechens experiencing conflicting loyalties to tribal and religious groups. In addition, there was a conflict between traditional Islam based on the Sufi brotherhoods and fundamentalist Islamic schools of thought (Wahhabism). As a result, Chechen society was overburdened with tensions and conflicts, which hindered the development of national self-awareness and loyalty to a single nation. This considerably weakened Chechen society during the recent wars with Russia.

In an attempt to consolidate society, the Chechen separatist leader General Dudayev and his staff developed an attractive ideology based on three main narratives: the idea of a "Caucasian Home", the representation of the conflict with Russia as one of different civilisations caused by incompatible religions (Islam and the Russian Orthodox Christianity), and the

---

1 Under collectivisation politics, peasants were forced to give up their individual plots and to join large collective farms.

call for irridenta[2] aimed at Northern Dagestan. However, these ideas failed to consolidate Chechen society and failed to recruit allies, both in the Caucasus and beyond.

This chapter provides a brief examination of Chechnya's complicated and tragic history, which forms a backdrop of traumatic social memories that still exist among the Chechens today. This social memory has coloured Chechens' relationship with the Russian state. In addition, the chapter analyses the ethnic demography, economic foundations, professional occupations and traditional social and religious structures of the Chechen people. It explores the idea that conflicting loyalties within a society can cause it to weaken during conflict. Finally, it scrutinises the national narratives that were developed by the Chechen authorities to consolidate the nation.

This analysis of Chechnya uses an anthropological approach, with an emphasis on the traditional social structure, the highland/lowland dichotomy, religious systems, interethnic relationships and national narratives. It investigates the various tensions and conflicting loyalties caused by each of these factors, which hampered nation-building in post-Soviet Chechnya under conditions of delayed modernisation.

The arguments in this chapter are based on the author's own observations and interviews in the city of Grozny in 1992, as well as numerous publications in local newspapers, memoirs of Chechen authors and scholarly materials provided by Chechen, Russian and other international researchers.

Historical Overview

The Chechens were first mentioned by Russian sources between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; specifically, the terms "Chechens" and "Chechan Land" were first mentioned in 1658 (Magomadova, 2006). In that period, the Moscow principality was expanding and turning into

2 The term "irridenta" here refers to when people within a territory are historically or ethnically related to one political unit, but under the political control of another. These people often want to unite with their relatives across the border.

a multi-ethnic empire. Clashes with Iran, the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate were unavoidable, and there were continuous struggles between these powers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. North Caucasians also took part in these struggles, attempting to defend their own interests (Akhmadov, 2006: 160–70, 370–78, 380–81; Gammer, 2006: 8–10).

The Cossacks were the Russian vanguard that built fortresses between the Terek and Sunja rivers in the sixteenth and especially the seventeenth centuries. Whilst building the fortresses, the newcomers were met by the Chechens and Ingush, whose leaders began serving Russians from the late sixteenth century. However, their relationships were not without problems, and were sometimes characterised by mutual riots.

By this time, the highlanders lived in separate communities in the gorges high in the mountains or along the rivers of the plain (Akhmadov, 2006: 185). The first Chechen community to make an oath to Russia in 1735 lived in Kizliar. Following this, many other Chechen communities joined Russia between 1730s and the early 1780s. The Karabulak (also known as Orstkhoy) community swore an oath to Russia in 1762 (Shnirelman, 2008); the Ingush did the same in 1770. The highlanders grew in numbers and slowly moved down along the slopes and streams, with some of them settling on the plain. In January 1781, the elders of the settlements Big Chechen and Adji *aul* swore allegiance to Russia, in what was viewed by Soviet historians as the end of a long process of the Chechen and Ingush peoples joining the Russian Empire. These agreements were in fact rather informal, and were treated by the local leaders as military alliances rather than allegiances to Russia (Gapurov, 2006a; Zakriev, 2006; Akhmadov, 2006: 379–81).

The subjugation of the North Caucasus to Russia particularly dissatisfied the Muslim clergy and those rulers who had oriented themselves towards the Ottoman Empire. Anti-Russian propaganda started, referring to the process as a “struggle with infidels”. From 1785 to 1787, the Chechen settlement of Aldy became the centre of the anti-Russian movement, during which Sheikh Mansur (Ushurma) announced the “Holy War” (Gakaev, 1997: 18; Gall and De Waal, 1998: 38–39; Gammer, 2006: 17–29; Akhmadov, 2006: 315–36; 2022).

ПРИСОЕДИНЕНИЕ КАВКАЗА в 1800–1864 гг.

Map 3 – The conquest of the Caucasus (1800–1864): The Russian annexation of the Caucasus happened successively and gave rise to various local resistance movements (Source: *Istoriya SSSR* [History of the USSR] (1947), Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, VII, p. 22).

The movement attracted many Chechens, as well as their neighbours – Kabardians and Kumyks – who had been oppressed by local rulers, experienced troubles because of a shortage of land and were dissatisfied with the appropriation of land by the Tsar's noblemen. In addition, people stood against the numerous punitive deeds of the Russian military, who had suppressed the peasants' actions against their rulers. This multi-ethnic movement was led by the clergy and certain princes who opposed the Russian expansion. The highlanders viewed it as the first national liberation movement against the Tsar's authority. However, the Russian army proved to be much stronger. Sheikh Mansur fled to the Kuban river area and was finally captured in the Black Sea fortress of Anapa in 1791. He subsequently died in prison in 1794.

As a result, Russian military and administrative rule was established in the North Caucasus. However, the highlanders resisted, and new riots

took hold of the region in 1818, when the Caucasian War broke out (Gakaev, 1997: 18–25; Dunlop, 1998; Gall and De Waal, 1998: 39–51; Gammer, 2006: 31–44). The highlanders arranged raids on the Russian villages, which had been founded on the plains in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These raids were followed by the Russian punitive marches. People were even less satisfied with the Temporary Court for Civil Affairs, which replaced the traditional religious courts in Kabarda. In 1822, General A. Yermolov announced the peasant emancipation. All of these measures instigated social conflicts in the highlanders' communities and caused resentment of Russian rule among the Muslim clergy and nobility. At the same time, the only Christians in the North Caucasus, the Ossetians, started to settle in the lowlands from 1820 onwards. Yermolov wanted to gain their loyalty for the Russian Empire and thus provided them with certain privileges. However, his general politics towards the Chechens was quite the opposite. He suggested they settle under the supervision of Russian military rule, stop their raids, pay tax and join the Russian labour service. The Chechens responded with resistance. In return, the Russian military burned their settlements (*auls*), and plundered their cattle, gardens and woods (Gapurov and Zakriev, 2006; Gammer, 2004: 29–38).

In the 1830s, the *Murid*[3] movement started, which was based on the harsh Islamic norms of conduct aimed at the consolidation of the highlanders' community in their struggle against "infidels". The Tsar's officials treated the highlanders as brigands who could only be suppressed by force. This stance was shared by Nicolas I, who ordered General I. F. Paskevich "to suppress the highlanders forever and to exterminate the disobedient". This policy was implemented in the 1840s when the Chechens and the Dagestani people were forced out of the plain, isolated from the outside world and driven to starvation. Indeed, the fact that they were deprived of the winter pastures in the lowlands significantly disrupted their transhumant pastoralism.

The highlanders' revolt started in Avariya in Dagestan. It was of anti-feudal and anti-colonial nature and demanded that Sharia norms be introduced into society. It was led by Gazi-Magomed from 1829 until 1834, after which Imam Shamil became the permanent leader. The movement reached its apex in the 1840s when it turned into mass warfare and covered

---

3 Murid means "one who aspires".

the bulk of the North Caucasian region. The military actions achieved mixed success (Gammer, 2004: 49–263).

The Russian army went on the offensive immediately after the Crimean War finished in 1856. They occupied Chechnya from 1857 to 1859 and thereafter Dagestan. Shamil was taken as a prisoner and brought to St Petersburg (Gammer, 2004: 267–93). The highlanders were disappointed: those who were bitter foes of Russia emigrated to the Ottoman Empire, whilst others swore allegiance to Russia. Colonisation continued: the Adyghe people were forced out of the North–West Caucasian coast, with many of them also leaving for the Ottoman Empire. As a result, the North Caucasus lost around half a million indigenous people by the mid-1860s (Gammer, 2004: 79–80); these people were largely replaced by Russians and Ukrainians.

A new administrative system was introduced in the North Caucasus in the 1860s, whereby it was divided into the Stavropol province and the Kuban and Terek regions, each of which were run by civic rules. The traditional norms (*adat*) were restored and used to found new courts (Akhmadov, 2006: 647–649). Thus, whilst the power of the Muslim clergy was somewhat weakened, traditional social institutes gained legitimacy.

As such, the Muslim clergy and the local nobility were dissatisfied. New revolts broke out in Chechnya and Dagestan in April 1877. However, these revolts lacked any unity as their separate leaders wanted to become independent rulers. As a result, they culminated in severe repression in the autumn of 1877 (Gammer, 2004: 84–103).

In the 1880s, a period of reform came to an end in Russia and reactionary forms of government started to prevail. The seedlings of civic establishment and national statehood were abandoned. Previously, the highlanders had been subordinated to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. This was replaced by the War Ministry, and the highlanders were ruled by military Cossack departments. A politics of Russification was introduced in schools, which involved all education being carried out in Russian rather than in local vernaculars. The urban districts were intentionally dissociated from any ethnic names. A passport system was introduced in 1891; this was closely linked to the harsh policing regime and greatly restricted freedom of movement. The law of 1893 demanded that cases of criminality among highlanders be subject to court-martial. The peasants responded with revolts, and a brigand (*abrek*) movement emerged. One Chechen,

Zelimkhan Gushmuzulaev, became especially famous, as he managed to avoid the Tsar's gendarmes for thirteen years (Gammer, 2006: 113–17).

In 1917, the Russian Empire collapsed and was replaced by several emerging independent states. In March 1918, the Terek People's Republic was declared in the North Caucasus. At the same time, friction developed between the Cossacks and the highlanders, who viewed the political structure and values of the Terek People's Republic differently. A particular problem concerned the Cossack settlements, which blocked access to the plain for the Chechens and Ingush. Therefore, in May 1918, the Third Congress of the Terek Peoples passed a decision to relocate five of the Cossack settlements. However, this was not implemented due to a Cossack revolt against the decision (Gammer, 2006: 122–24). In 1919, General Denikin's Volunteer Army waged war against the highlanders. The "Mountain Republic", which existed between May 1918 and 1919, was abolished. In September 1919, Sheikh Usun Haji established the North Caucasian emirate, which was dissolved by the Red Army in February 1920 (Gakaev, 1997: 69–75; Gammer, 2006: 128–32). Initially, the Chechens and Ingush supported the Soviets, which helped them to achieve a victory over the Cossacks and to solve the problem surrounding the Cossack settlements. However, in September 1920, under the leadership of Said-Bek, they revolted against the Bolsheviks. The revolt was suppressed in May 1921, and the Red Army was occupied with the disarmament of the Chechens until 1922 (Bennigsen Broxup, 1992: 112–45; Gakaev, 1997: 78–80; Gall and De Waal, 1998: 51–53; Kil'seev, 2006; Shnirelman, 2006a: 51; Gammer, 2006: 133–38).

In 1921, the "Autonomous Mountain Socialist Republic" was established (with its capital in Vladikavkaz), only to be dissolved soon after in 1924. It encompassed six administrative districts (*okrug*): Balkar, Kabardian, Karachai, Chechen, Nazran (Ingush) and Vladikavkaz (North Ossetian). The Chechen Autonomous Province (*oblast*) was established in 1922. All the former units of the Autonomous Mountain Socialist Republic were included in the North Caucasian region (*krai*). In the late 1920s, there was a plan to unite the Chechens and Ingush into a single ethnic group (*ethnos*). Philologists were ordered to develop a single Vainakh language for them – an idea that largely failed (Karpov, 1994: 10). Nonetheless, in 1934, Chechnya and Ingushetia were merged into a single Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Province, which was given the status of an Autonomous Republic in 1936.

Map 4 – "The "Autonomous Mountain Socialist Republic": The "Autonomous Mountain Socialist Republic" was established in 1921 and encompassed six administrative districts" (Source: Tsutsiev, A. A. (1998), *Osetino-ingushskiy konflikt* [The Ossetian-Ingush conflict], Moscow, Rossiyskaya politicheskaya entsiklopediya, <http://iriston.com/books/cuciev_-_oset-ing_konfl_karty.htm> (accessed 30 October 2023).

In the 1930s, the highlanders' courageous struggle against forceful collectivisation at times took the form of open revolts. A large-scale upheaval took place in Chechnya between 23 March and 5 April 1932 and was fiercely suppressed. During the Great Terror in 1937, up to 14,000 people were arrested, which accounted for about 3 per cent of the Chechen-Ingush population. All the political leaders and almost all the intellectual elite were purged (Gammer, 2006: 154–57).

A guerrilla movement led by the former communist Khasan Israilov developed in the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic between 1940 and the autumn of 1943. In early 1940, a provisional government ran the republic for a few weeks. Afterwards, a detachment, which consisted of a few hundred warriors, called for a conclusive alliance with the Germans. In February 1942, the guerrilla movement was strengthened by the detachment of M. Sheripov, a brother of the famous Chechen revolutionary of

the civil war period, Aslanbek Sheripov (Gakaev, 1997: 97–99; Shnirelman, 2006a: 69–70; Gammer, 2006: 159–63). In 1943, the movement was already in decline. Nonetheless, the Chechens and Ingush were accused of disloyalty towards the Soviet state and, in late February 1944, were collectively deported to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Gakaev, 1997: 101–02; Gall and De Waal, 1998: 56–73). Furthermore, the less accessible communities situated high up in the mountains were massacred by the security services, as was the case with the Khaibakh *aul* community, where 650–700 persons were burnt alive. The Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic was abolished by a decree on 7 March 1944, and its territory was transferred to neighbouring republics. During the course of the deportations, around 70,000 Chechens and Ingush, that is, more than 10 per cent of the Vainakh population, died between March and April 1944 of cold, illnesses and hunger (Gakaev, 1997: 97–99; Gall and De Waal, 1998: 64–75; Cornell, 2001: 186–87; Shnirelman, 2006a: 225–29; Gammer, 2006: 159–62; 167–73).

In 1956, the Chechens and Ingush were rehabilitated, and their Autonomous Republic was restored on 9 January 1957 (Tsutsulaeva, 2006). They began to return to their homeland in 1956, but were quite unexpectedly met with the resistance of those who had resettled there during the previous years. Tensions grew in Grozny, leading to several bloody clashes in 1958 (Gammer, 2006: 181). Numerous reconfigurations of the borders caused a complex territorial problem. In the end, the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic retrieved all its former territories, except the most developed and industrial Prigorodny district, which remained part of North Ossetia. As compensation, the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic received three districts (Nadterechny, Naursky and Shelkovsky) from the neighbouring Stavropol region, which were occupied by the Russian Cossacks (Shnirelman, 2006a: 245–50; Gammer, 2006: 187). Ever since, the Russian–Chechen relationship has been coloured by a mutual distrust, which, over the final two decades of Soviet rule, led to a permanent departure of Russians from the republic. In response, in the 1990s, the Cossacks emphatically demanded that their lands be transferred back to the Stavropol region.

In 1982, the regional Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) branch (*obkom*) initiated a magnificent celebration of the anniversary of the Vainakh people "voluntarily joining" Russia. The concept of "voluntary joining" was coined by the archaeologist Vitaly Vinogradov, who was

appointed the regional CPSU branch's main advisor in ideology and social sciences (Shnirelman, 2006a: 266–78). The Chechen intellectuals were indignant about Vinogradov's concept, as it erased the glory of Chechen resistance during the Caucasian War from official memory. However, the Chechen historians who protested against this concept were fired and even persecuted (Gakaev, 1997: 133; Shnirelman, 2006b).

In June 1989, for the first time in history, a Chechen, Doku Zavgaev, was appointed as First Secretary of the Chechen-Ingush CPSU branch and occupied this position for about a year.[4] Previously, the Chechens had had no access to the highest political positions (Gakaev, 1997: 108; Ibragimov, 2006: 371; Cornell, 2001: 192). Zavgaev brought with him the liberalisation of economic, social and ideological policies. As a result, Vinogradov and his followers were pushed to the outskirts of society (Gakaev, 1997: 136–37; Shnirelman, 2006a: 283–87).

Ethnic Demography

According to the national census, 1,270,429 people lived in the Chechen-Ingush Republic in 1989; most were ethnic Chechens (734,500 or 57.8 per cent). Russians accounted for 23.1 per cent of the population and the Ingush accounted for 12.9 per cent.[5] More than 73 per cent of Chechens lived in the countryside in 1990, by which time the population was growing rapidly. Several fast and drastic population changes have occurred since 1990, as the Ingush established their own republic and many Russians left due to social chaos, wars and economic breakdown.[6] Many Chechens left as well. Thus, the population of Chechnya had shrunk to 1,097,000 by 1994. By 2000, the number of inhabitants further declined, with about 600,000

4 Further on, in 1990–1991 and in autumn 1994, he was a chair of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic.

5 Various specialists provide somewhat different numbers but proportions are reliable (Tishkov et al. 1995: 9; Gadzhiev, 2006: 126; Ibragimov, 2001: 373; Cornell, 2001: 193; Bugaev, 2017: 11).

6 Up to 60,000 Russians left in 1992 alone, and around 200'000 left between 1991 and 1994 (Regent, 1999: 121–22; Gall and De Waal, 1998: 115).

Chechens leaving to live in various Russian cities, and 400,000 being registered as refugees in the Ingush Republic (Akhmadov, 2001: 118; Muzaev, 1995: 171; Gakaev, 1997: 214). Yet, surprisingly, a national census in 2002 revealed a population of 1 million people in Chechnya.

Ethnic Russians lived mainly in Grozny and also in the northern plain (mostly in the Naursky, Shelkovsky and Nadterechny districts). They made up the bulk of city-dwellers, whereas Chechens primarily occupied the city outskirts, having only started moving to Grozny after 1973. Therefore, when the Russian air forces bombed Grozny in early 1995, the main victims proved to be Russian because most of the Chechens had left for their villages (Iskandarian, 1995: 24–25). For this reason, it was easy for the Russian troops to occupy the northern territories in October 1999 and to re-establish Russian rule there.

Professional Occupation

A high level of unemployment was endemic in the North Caucasus over the last decades of Soviet rule. It was caused by a scarcity of arable land and less developed infrastructure. There were only three cities in Chechnya, of which only Grozny existed from the pre-revolutionary period. The two other cities, Gudermes and Argun, formed during the Soviet period. Chechnya underwent a slow process of modernisation. A total of 77.5 per cent of Chechens lived in the countryside in 1979 (73.13 per cent in 1989). Modern industry was based upon petrol fields and natural gas exploitation, with oil-refining and petrochemical plants being located in Grozny.[7] However, it was mainly ethnic Russians who worked in Grozny.

Traditionally, the Chechens were highlanders and occupied themselves with transhumant sheepherding, with a minority of farmers settling in the plains. As the highlanders could not supply themselves with all the products they needed, they had to trade with the plain dwellers. If this chain was broken, they often resorted to stealing the horses of the plain dwellers

7 Oil deposits in Chechnya were discovered in the mid-1880s, and their industrial exploitation began in the 1890s (Gammer, 2006: 105–6).

and raiding their homes. It was for this reason that after the hill settlements were bombed and the economic facilities destroyed, the Chechens looked for alternative means of income, which, for many of them, meant going to war or taking hostages, in line with traditional norms (Gapurov, 2006b; Iziliaeva, 2006: 489–93). By the 1990s, almost one third of the able-bodied population (100,000–200,000 people) were unemployed in Chechnya, and this number was growing rapidly. The standard of living was much lower than in the other Russian regions. The average wage in Chechnya was only 74.8–82.5 per cent of the average wage in the Russian Federation. Medical services were poor, and Chechnya's level of education declined. Only 34.14 per cent of students graduated from school in 1989, and only 4.67 per cent received higher education. Russian language skills were poor among Chechens (Gakaev, 1997: 112, 173; Ibragimov, 2006: 370; Gall and De Waal, 1998: 79–80).

In addition, the Chechens avoided employment in the services sector, as they felt that serving others was humiliating and violated their customs. I was told that when a young man was promoting the slogan "Chechnya for the Chechens" in the early 1990s, he was stopped by an elder who pointed to the Armenian barber and asked, "Would you like to be a barber?"

Traditionally, Chechen men were engaged in sheepherding, farming, construction and defence and women were engaged in gardening, housework and childcare. Trade was another traditional occupation of both men and women.

Social Structure, Values and Religion

Regarding its social structure and religion, Chechnya presents a very complicated and contradictory case. These contradictions are revealed at various levels.

Traditional Clan Structure

Chechen traditional society consisted of patrilineal clans, or *teyps*. Despite Russia's attempts to modernise, urbanise, increase education levels and

change social structures in Chechnya, the organisation of Chechen society into *teyps* survived, though it remained almost invisible to outsiders. Traditionally, the *teyps* had religious and legal responsibilities. They were categorised into "clean" and "unclean" *teyps*: the former were viewed as autochthonous, and the latter as strangers, or newcomers with a lower status. The category of "noble *teyp*" also existed; this *teyp* owned its own hill and was excluded from the tax system. Thus, every *teyp* wanted to receive this status (Mamakaev, 1973; Makarov and Batuev, 1996; Gall and De Waal, 1998: 26–27; Lieven, 1998: 339–42; Fedorovich, 2001: 129–35; Akhmadov, 2006: 274–82).

A *teyp* consisted of extended families ("people of the house") and nuclear families. Both were involved in a system that practised blood revenge. *Teyps* ranged in size, from several hundred to tens of thousands of people.

Several *teyps* made up a tribe, or *tukhum* (Akhmadov, 2006: 282–84). A *tukhum* emerged as an alliance among *teyps*. Usually, it comprised up to a dozen *teyps* in a common river basin that together owned the territory. The number of *tukhums* that exist in Chechnya is uncertain. Various authors estimate that there are between seven and thirteen *tukhums* and up to 160 *teyps*. (Mamakaev, 1973; Makarov and Batuev, 1996; Chesnov 1999: 69; Fedorovich, 2001).

After the Chechen Revolution in September–November 1991, the new Chechen authorities lacked any well-developed blueprint for a future society and attempted to restore traditional social institutions (Gakaev, 1997: 37–38, note 1). They wanted to replace the former Soviet nomenclature but could not imagine any legal alternatives other than a re-establishment of the *teyp* system. Lively discussions on the political and social role of *teyps* took place in the early 1990s, and *teyp* congresses became a regular practice. A cultural centre of the Nashhoy *teyp*, to which Dudayev belonged through his mother's line, was established. About 100 *teyp* congresses were held from 1992 to 1993, including a congress of 112 *teyps* in October 1993 that supported Dudayev (Gakaev, 1997: 37–38, note 1; Landa, 1995: 274; Lieven, 1998: 342–43). As a result, a paradoxical situation emerged: while developing a modern nation, the Chechens attempted to restore the *teyp* system. On the one hand, this hindered the development of Chechen national self-awareness and loyalty to a single nation. On the other hand, the *teyps* were quick to consolidate when faced with a

common enemy, due to their segmentary organisation (according to E.E. Evans-Pritchard, 1940).

Dichotomy between Highlands and Lowlands

As is common in traditional societies, the highlanders in Chechnya believed they had a "higher moral standard" (consisting of honesty, openness, and courage) than the lowlanders, who they believed to be "morally inferior". Similarly, the lowlanders believed they had a higher level of culture and often treated the highlanders as backwards people.[8] This played an important role in Chechen politics between 1992 and 1994. Doku Zavgaev originated from the northern Nadterechny region (*teyp* Gendargenoi) and was supported by the lowlanders, whilst President Djokhar Dudayev originated from the highlands, where he gained his support (Gall and De Waal, 1998: 27, 105; Lieven, 1998: 336–37).

The opposition became especially visible after Dudayev had established his personal rule in the summer of 1993. In the autumn of 1992, both Chechen intellectuals and businessmen in Grozny told me of their disagreement with General Dudayev.[9] To successfully struggle against the opposition, Dudayev's followers were spreading rumours that its leaders originated from the "unclean *teyps*" (Landa, 1995: 276). Many of the oppositionists had left for Moscow or other Russian cities by the autumn and winter of 1994, making up a large proportion of the Chechen diaspora. Since that period, Chechnya has lost a large part of its intellectual resources (Shnirelman, 2006a: 357).

Meanwhile, on 19 January 1994, President Dudayev issued a decree that changed the name of the republic. Since the late 1990s, the Chechen radicals had called their republic Nokhchi-cho (Gakaev, 1997: 143–44). This means "The Chechen State" in Vainakh. Instead, Dudayev renamed it the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. Ichkeria means "inland" in the Kumyk language. Earlier, this applied to a small south-eastern area of Chechnya

---

8 With reference to this point, Prof. S.A. Arutiunov advised to divide Chechnya into two parts with different administrative statuses (Arutiunov, 2003)

9 Many scholars emphasized this point as well (Vasilieva, Muzaev, 1994: 62–67; Tishkov, 1995: 27; Gakaev, 1997: 200–04; Lieven, 1998: 337–38; Cornell, 2001: 204–06; Shnirelman, 2006a: 342–48).

where many Turkic place names had survived. Why did Dudayev decide to replace the Chechen name with the Kumyk one? Arguably he did so to counter the lowland opposition; it was important for him to emphasize the superiority of the highlands over the lowlands in a symbolic way (Dunlop, 1998: 151). The highlands enjoyed a higher social status because most of the "noble" *teyps* were situated there.

Sufism

Alongside the *teyp* organisation, the Chechens were united by a religious system consisting of Sufi orders, or *virds*. The latter formed two *tariqas* [paths], Naqshbandiya and Qadiriyya, which had competed with each other since the late nineteenth century (Akaev, 2006: 89–94; Vatchagaev, 2008: 54–60; Gall and De Waal, 1998: 32–33; Lieven, 1988: 343–44, 362–63; Gammer, 2004: 39–46; 2006: 73–79). Naqshbandiya was especially popular under Imam Shamil, but after the highlanders' defeat in the Caucasian War, its prestige had decreased. Its former followers began to move to Qadiriyya, which was established by a sheepherder, Kunta Kishiev (Kunta Hadji), in Dagestan in 1849 and in Chechnya in 1861. Kunta-Hadji introduced a ritual dance of *zikr*, which involved dozens of men. Initially, the Qadiriyya demonstrated pacifism and, in contrast to the more rigid Naqshbandiya, it fostered music, songs and dances. Yet, as a result of consistent persecution (Kishiev was arrested and taken to an asylum in 1864), its followers became more radical. Notably, after the Caucasian War, the Naqshbandiya leaders took a pro-Russian position, whereas the Qadiriyya proved to be permanently in conflict with both Russian law and the Naqshbandiya (Cornell, 2001: 203; Gammer, 2006: 81, 109, 197).

The deportation of the Chechens to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in February 1944 provided Qadiriyya with a new opportunity. A new, more radical Vis-Khaji Zagiyev's *vird* was created (Gall and De Waal, 1998: 33), which Djokhar Dudayev's elder brother, Bekmuraz, joined. In the 1990s, he was among the godfathers (*ustaz*) of this *vird*, which proved to be the largest and the strongest among the Qadiriyya *vird*s (Nasardinov, 1996). The Council of the Chechen elders consisted of the respected Qadiriyya members, and the Vis-Khaji Zagiyev's *vird* was declared the bearer of the national idea. By contrast, the Naqshbandiya was suspected of disloyalty, although Dudayev himself and many of his relatives belonged to the

Naqshbandiya *tariqa*, as did the subsequent president, Aslan Maskhadov. Nonetheless, many Naqshbandiya members joined the anti-Dudayev opposition from 1993 to 1994, which originated in lowland villages, such as Urus-Martan.

Initially, neither Dudayev nor Maskhadov, both of whom had had a secular education, wanted to use Islam in politics. Islam, despite being a strong mobilising factor, appealed to the *umma*[10] and neglected the nation; it therefore did not suit the purpose of modern nation-building. In addition, there was grave conflict between traditional Islam and radical Islam (Wahhabism) (Malashenko and Trenin, 2002: 28–29, 73).

Dudayev skilfully exploited tensions between certain *teyps* and *virds*. He understood that the *teyp* system hampered nation-building. Therefore, he and his advisor on ideology, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, shaped an image of the ideal Chechen, who was portrayed as a supporter of Vis-Khaji Zagiyev's *vird* and as a bearer of the Chechen national idea who hated Russia. They presented this "ideal Chechen" as opposed to other *teyps*, which were stuck in a struggle against each other for social prestige. However, the economic and financial system in Chechnya was controlled by Yaragi Mamadayev, who ran the entire local petrol industry. In the early 1990s, Mamadayev was an advocate of the *teyp* organisation, believing that resorting to folk traditions was the only way to improve the situation and that religion should not interfere with politics. In response, Dudayev and his staff launched a campaign against him, accusing him of financial corruption. Mamadayev subsequently escaped to Moscow in 1993, where he established a parallel "government of national confidence" (Gall and De Waal, 1998: 91, 108).

Thus, the social situation in Chechnya in the 1990s was overburdened with "conflicting loyalties" (according to Max Gluckman, 1955) between regions, clans and religions.

---

10 *Umma* is a Muslim term for an entity that encompasses all the Muslims throughout the world.

The Archaisation of the Chechen System and the Restoration of Equality

The Chechen peasant rebellions that took place between the 1750s and the 1780s were aimed at the foreign nobility that had previously run the country (mainly the Kabardians), and many former noble people, who were killed or expelled (Gakaev, 1997: 13–14; Sigaury, 1997: 248; Lieven, 1998: 339; Vatchagaev, 2008: 45; Akhmadov, 2006: 319–20). This caused an archaisation of the socio-political system, as the peasants restored social equality, and blood revenge became one of the most important regulative mechanisms in Chechen society. While inflicting blood revenge, the *teyp* became a protector of personal freedoms. Ever since, personal freedom has been considered one of the most important values of Chechen society. According to Moshe Gammer, "*Marsho* – freedom – is a central concept in both Chechen culture and the Chechen psyche" (Gammer, 2006: 5–6). It was supported by Islam, with its idea of equality. For the Chechens, the word "*nakh*" [the people] means a community of free and responsible people.

It is not easy for a Chechen to acknowledge somebody's superiority and to elect a leader. Sometimes, this reluctance can cause ridiculous situations like what happened during the Chechen visit to Moscow in 1992: the Moscow officials immediately began to look for the leader of the group to negotiate with him. The Chechens considered this to be "funny" because all of them were equal and had a similar mandate, without any formal leader.[11] It was also for this reason that dozens of warlords were active in Chechnya in the 1990s, and none of them were subordinated to any single leader. As such, whereas President Aslan Maskhadov claimed that he was in control of the situation in the republic, his authority was actually restricted by traditional egalitarianism. He was unable to criticise the latter; otherwise, he could have been overthrown by a revolt.

However, this system of "actualised traditions" does not work in the present situation in Chechnya, which is marked by political authoritarianism and the concentration of power in the hands of a single leader. This implies the need to be careful and to avoid essentialising these sorts of traditions.

11 Author's interview in Grozny in 1992.

Interethnic Relationships

An Ingush thirst for sovereignty was met with disapproval in Chechnya, where the Ingush were viewed as a lower status *teyp*. The Chechens accused the Ingush of a violation of Vainakh solidarity. In turn, the Russians were viewed by the Chechen national narrative of the early 1990s as undesired newcomers and colonisers. A tradition of blood revenge and protection based on kinship left Russians especially defenceless (Gall and De Waal, 1998: 27–28). Indeed, any harm suffered had to be retaliated, and it was the offender or his close relatives who were punished by the relatives of the victim. The Chechens had strong codes of honour, and ethical norms and rules were carefully observed. However, the Russians lacked such a defensive mechanism. In 1993, in Grozny, they complained of aggressive Chechen insults and physical attacks on the streets (Gall and De Waal, 1998: 115; Ibragimov, 2006: 374).

National Myth, the Messianic Idea and Political Rhetoric

In the 1990s, the Chechen Great Narrative focused on three historical cases of Chechen victimisation and glorification, which were extremely popular in Chechnya's mass media. Two of these cases referred to tragic episodes of Chechen history: the Caucasian War of the nineteenth century and the mass deportation of Chechens in 1944. The media recalled the awful losses of the Chechen people caused by the unjust colonial Tsarist and Soviet regimes, in turn fostering aggressive anti-Russian sentiments. It also nurtured pride in the Chechen people, emphasising that they had survived despite these disasters and inspiring confidence in them in relation to their future.

This sense of pride was also cultivated by the media's narrative that contemporary Chechens should be inspired by the actions of their great ancestors. This particular narrative was used politically to improve Chechnya's image among neighbouring states and in the eyes of the international community, and to recruit allies.

The Chechen leaders recognised that it would be difficult for the Chechens alone to resist the Russian assault. Therefore, they tried to ensure that they had international support. They used three ideological models

for this, namely, the idea of the "Caucasian Home" (Vasilieva and Muzaev, 1994: 11; Anchabadze, 1997; Abubakarov, 1998: 23–24), the "Muslim idea", and the idea of irredenta.

The idea of the "Caucasian Home" applied mostly to the Confederation of Caucasian Peoples. The Chechen leaders not only established close relationships with this organisation, but Dudayev's brothers-in-arms took up key positions in the organisation. Dudayev believed that with such support he could build a "Great Chechnya" (Shnirelman, 2006a: 360) and make it a regional super-state. However, this ambitious plan needed an ideological base. Dudayev therefore appealed to the heritage of the most ancient civilisations of the Near East and insisted that the Chechens were their legal successors (Shnirelman, 2006a: 355–56).

Once approved by the authorities, this idea was picked up and developed by several Chechen historians, philologists and amateur authors, who insisted on cultural and linguistic continuity between the Hurrites-Urartians and the Vainakhs (Shnirelman, 2006a: 361–63). Indeed, this approach allowed them to search for the roots of the Chechen state in early history. Certain Chechen authors claimed that all the most ancient states (Sumer, Hurrian and Urartu) had been built by Chechen ancestors. Allegedly, the Chechen ancestors were already moving northward during the Bronze Age and were building towns, fortresses and even states along their route. Thus, the Vainakhs were given a civilisational mission in the Caucasus, and their emergence as a people was linked to the Southern Caucasus, Asia Minor and the Near East. According to this view, as the Chechens had enjoyed their own statehood in the remote past, they had the right to have an independent state nowadays. Notably, the republican authorities supported an image of the "great ancestors" and their "great early state". This was approved by General Dudayev, who sincerely believed that as the "earliest people on the Earth", the Chechens were blessed to lead all the neighbouring Caucasian peoples to a "beautiful future".

Yet, the idea of the "Caucasian home" did not succeed, as a pro-Russian stance dominated the North Caucasian republics, whose local leaders had their own ambitions and thus avoided consolidating under the Chechen banner.

Chechnya also referred to Islam in order to "imagine" the conflict with Russia as a civilisational one, and thus generate financial and political support from the Muslim world (Shnirelman, 2006a: 391–403). This demonstrated not only an anti-Russian, but also an anti-Western and anti-Semitic

("anti-Zionist") stance. For example, they organised meetings of solidarity with the Iraqi people against the "American-Zionist aggression" in Grozny in 1990 and 1991. In the summer of 1994, the envoys of the Chechen Republic (Yandarbiyev and others), together with the leaders of certain Russian chauvinistic movements, signed a declaration of "eternal friendship" between the Chechen and the Russian peoples. The document condemned the "Zionist financial circles" for their attempts to cause tension between two peoples (Shnirelman, 2006a: 381–90). The same ideas were manifested in a somewhat different way by Khozh-Akhmet Nukhayev in his statement against the New World Order and the "Big Satan" (Nukhaev, 2003). All these actions and documents have shown the Chechen disposition to a "third world ideology" that usually accompanies a delayed modernisation[12].

An ideology of irridenta was encouraged as the most important narrative aimed at the Akki Chechens, the narrative of whose past was revised. This is a large Chechen community in Central Dagestan, which was deported, together with other Chechens, to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in February 1944. After returning to Dagestan, they persistently laid claim to their former houses and plots of lands, which were then occupied by Laks and Avars. This caused ethnic clashes and significant casualties (Shnirelman, 2006a: 403–04). Since the autumn of 1991, the Chechens of Dagestan have identified themselves as part of the newly established Chechen Republic. Simultaneously, the Chechen Republic began to claim access to the Caspian Sea at the expense of the Dagestani territory. Indeed, President Maskhadov claimed that "Khasavyurt was Vainakh holy land" (Malashenko and Trenin, 2002: 84; Shnirelman, 2006a: 404–05). A secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Dagestan, Magomet Tolboev, warned of Grozny's plans for territorial expansion at the expense of Dagestan, referring to his discussions with Chechen authorities (Shnirelman, 2006a: 404–05). A similar stance was popular among the Akki Chechens, who understood the name Dagestan to mean the "ancestral land".

In the 1990s, certain Chechen historians began to revise the history of Chechen settlement in Dagestan. At that time, village chronicles appeared, promoting the idea that the Akki Chechens had arrived in the area about 2,000 years ago. With reference to this obviously forged document, some

---

12 On delayed modernisation in Chechnya, see Gakaev (1997: 73).

authors developed a less accurate picture of the settlement practices of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, making it seem as though the Chechens had occupied parts of Northern Dagestan up to the Caspian Sea (Shnirelman, 2006a: 405–07). Notably, the Kumyks who lived there for centuries were not mentioned at all. In the 1990s, this narrative became popular among the Akki Chechens, who viewed it as the true history of their ancestors. On their side, Dagestani experts revealed in these statements an ideology that could legitimise a military invasion, which they discussed during a scholarly conference in Makhachkala in 1997 (*Sovremennoe sostoianie*, 1997).

Islam and Dagestan in Autumn 1999

Since the turn of the 1990s, followers of fundamentalist Islamic schools of thought (Wahhabis) arrived in the North Caucasus as advocates of the "true Islam" (Berezhnoi, 2006). These were mainly young Caucasian men who, due to drastic political changes in the late 1980s (Perestroika), were given a chance to receive a religious education abroad. After they returned to their homeland, they were shocked by the local form of Islam, which, in their view, diverged from the canonical one. Indeed, the local Islam had been adapting to the Caucasian cultural environment for centuries and incorporated many traditional pre-Muslim beliefs. The young zealots could not reconcile themselves with this and began to enthusiastically teach their compatriots the "true Islam". They stood against the Sufi orders, which had deep roots in the North Caucasus. This immediately put them in opposition to local priests and caused conflict.

In 1992, the Chechen mullahs called to ban Wahhabism, and its spread throughout Chechnya stopped. However, the Wahhabis settled in the Dagestani mountains and began to actively invite youngsters into their movement; such young people gladly joined, often due to unemployment and poverty rather than religious faith. They were mostly attracted by the struggle against highly corrupt authorities to achieve a just social order and a better future.

Wahhabism became popular in Chechnya during the war of 1994–1996, when many volunteers arrived from the Middle East (Malysheva,

1996: 27–28; Malashenko and Trenin 2002: 102–04). However, the Wahhabis' activity was controlled by the authorities. When clashes took place in the spring of 1998 between the Wahhabis, on the one side, and law enforcement officers and local inhabitants on the other, President Maskhadov intervened. In July 1998, a Sharia guard established after the first Chechen War, an Islamic regiment and some local Sharia courts were dissolved, and the Higher Sharia Court was reorganized (Malashenko and Trenin 2002: 30–31). As a result, the Wahhabi leaders declared their loyalty to the president. Notably, after the First Chechen War, the Qadiriyya Sufi order took the side of the Federals against the Wahhabis (Gammer, 2006: 217).

However, the events in Dagestan took a different course. There, the Wahhabis retained the name of "Central Front of Dagestan Liberation" and demanded that Dagestan be released from both Russian control and pro-Russian politicians (Malashenko and Trenin 2002: 32–33). However, the Dagestani people were dissatisfied not in a first instance with their dependence on Russia, but with the incompetent and corrupted authorities in their own republic, whom they believed to be responsible for the poverty and economic collapse in the highlands (Malashenko and Trenin 2002: 82–84). It was in this context that Islamist ideas were welcomed. The raise of Islamism was also a result of the collapse of the social ideal based on the Soviet communist ideology. Furthermore, the Wahhabis called for equality and justice, which were values at the core of Soviet ideology and which continued to exist in Dagestan in the 1990s. It was in this environment that the Second Chechen War broke out.

References

Abubakarov, T. (1998) *Rezhim Djokhara Dudaeva: Pravda i vymysel. Zapiski dudaevskogo ministra ekonomiki i finansov* [*Dzhokhar Dudayev's Regime: Truth and Fiction. Notes of Dudayev's Minister of Economics and Finances*], INSAN, Moscow.

Akaev, V. Kh. (2006) Islam v Chechne: traditsii i sovremennost' [Islam in Chechnya: Traditions and Modernity], in *Chechenskaya respublika*

i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the Chechens], (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 88–101.

Akhmadov, Y. (2001) Spolzanie Rossiiskoy Federatsii i Chechenskoy respubliki Ichkeria k konfliktu [The Sliding of the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya towards Conflict], in *Chechnia: ot konflikta k stabil'nosti* [*Chechnya: from Conflict to Stability*] (eds. J.J. Gakaev and A.D. Yandarov), Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Moscow, 112–25.

Akhmadov, Y. (2022) *Groza nad Kavkazom: imam Mansur* [*Threat over the Caucasus: Imam Mansur*], Akademia Nauk Chechenskoi Respubliki, Grozny.

Akhmadov, Sh. B. (ed.) (2006) *Istoria Chechni s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei [History of Chechnya from ancient times to the present day]*. Vol. 1. Knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, Grozny.

Anchabadze, Yu. D. (1997) Kavkazskaya ideya: istoriya i sovremennost' [The Caucasian Idea: History and Contemporarity], in *Moskovskoe ekho Kavkaza* [*Moscow's Echo of the Caucasus*] (ed. Yu. S. Goriachev), Etnosfera, Moscow, 77–83.

Arutiunov, S. A. (2003) Vpered nazad, k estestvennomu pravu [Forward-Backward to the Real Law], in *Rossia i Chechnya. Poiski vykhoda [Russia and Chechnya. Searching for a way out]* (ed. Y.A. Gordin), Zvezda, St Petersburg, 12–13.

Bennigsen Broxup, Marie (1992) The Last Ghazawat. The 1920–1921 Uprising, in *The North Caucasus Barrier. The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World* (ed. Maria Bennigsen Broxup), Hurst & Co., London, 112–45.

Berezhnoy, S.E. (2006) Osnovnye tendentsii ul'traradikal'nogo islamizma (vakhkhabizma) na territorii Severnogo Kavkaza [The Main Tendencies of the Ultra-Radical Islamism (Wahhabism) on the Territory of the North Caucasus], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the Chechens]* (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 523–30.

Bugaev, A.M. (2017) Naselenie i territoria Checheno-Ingushskoi ASSR v 60-e - 80-e gody 20 veka [Population and Territory of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR from the 1960s to the 1980s], *Vestnik Kalmytskogo Universiteta* 33(1), 6–11.

Chesnov, I.V. (1999) Byt' chechentsem: lichnost' i etnicheskie identifikatsii Naroda [To Be a Chechen: Personality and Ethnic Identification of

the People], in *Chechnya i Rossia: odshchestva i gosudarstva* [*Chechnya and Russia: Society and State*] (ed. D.E. Furman), Muzei imeni A. Sakharova, Moscow, 63–101.

Cornell, S.E. (2001) *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*, Curson, Richmond.

Dunlop, John B. (1998) *Russia Confronts Chechnya. Roots of a Separatist Conflict*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1940) *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Fedorovich, A.S. (2001) Teypovo-religioznye otnosheniya v chechenskom obshchestve [Teyp-based and Religious Relations in Chechen Society]. *Tsentral'naia Azia i Kavkaz* [*Central Asia and the Caucasus*] 2(14), 129–35.

Gadzhiev, M.G. (2006) Demograficheskaya situatsiya v Chechenskoy respublike (sravnitel'niy analiz) [The Demographic Situation in the Chechen Republic (Comparative Analysis)], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy* [*The Chechen Republic and the Chechens*] (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 125–36.

Gakaev, J.J. (1997) *Ocherki politicheskoy istorii Chechni (XX vek) [Essays of the Political Hostory of Chechnya (20th Century)]*, Chechensky kul'turny tsentr, Moscow.

Gall, Carlotta, and de Waal, Thomas (1998) *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus*, New York University Press, New York.

Gammer, Moshe (2004) *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnya and Daghestan*, Frank Cass, Abington.

Gammer, Moshe (2006) *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule*, Hurst & Company, London.

Gapurov, Sh. A. (2006a) Aktual'nye problem istorii Chechni v XVI-XIX vekakh [Contemporary Problems of Chechen History from the 16th to the 19th Century], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the Chechens]* (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 40–48.

Gapurov, Sh. A. (2006b) Eshcho raz o gorsko-kazach'ikh nabegakh [Once Again on the Mountain-Cossack's Escape], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the Chechens]* (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 202–17.

Gapurov, Sh. A., and Zakriev, B.B. (2006) Naznachenie A.P. Ermolova namestnikom Kavkaza – novyi etap v vostochnoi politike Rossii [The Nomination of A.P. Yermolov as Viceroy in the Caucasus as a New Phase in Russia's Oriental Policy], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the Chechens]* (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 276–81.

Gluckman, M. (1955) *Custom and Conflict in Africa*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Ibragimov, M.M. (2006) Ob osobennostiakh krizisa v Chechenskoy respublike v 1990-e gody [The Pecularities of the Crisis in the Chechen Republic in the 1990s], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the Chechens]* (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 367–82.

Iskandarian, A. M. (1995) *Chechensky krizis: proval rossiiskoi politiki na Kavkaze [The Chechen Crisis: Failure of the Russian Caucasus Policy]*, Moskovsky tsentr Carnegie, Moscow.

Iziliaeva, L.O. "Chechensky terrorizm:" prichiny poiavlenia, napravlenia minimizatsii ["Chechen Terrorism": Causes of Emergence and Measures for Minimisation], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the Chechens]* (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 489–93.

Karpov, Yu. Yu. (1994) Mezhnatsional'nye otnosheniya na Severo-Vostochnom Kavkaze [Inter-Ethnic Relations in the North-Eastern Caucasus], in *Mezhnatsional'nye otnosheniia v usloviakh sotsial'noy nestabil'nosti [Inter-Ethnic Relations under Instable Conditions]* (ed. E. Kh. Panesh), MAE, St Petersburg, 7–33.

Kil'seev, E.I. (2006) Russkie i chechentsy v gody grazhdanskoy voiny, 1917–1920 [Russians and Chechens during Civil War], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the Chechens]* (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 293–94.

Landa, R.G. (1995) *Islam v istorii Rossii [Islam in Russian history]*, Vostochnaia literature, Moscow.

Lieven, Anatol (1998) *Chechnya. Tombstone of Russian Power*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

Magomadova, T. S. (2006) Russko-chechensky voenno-politichesky soiuz v kontse XVI – pervoi poloviny XVII veka [The Russian-Chechen Military Alliance from Late 16th to Early 17th Century], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the*

Chechens] (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 246–53.

Makarov, D., and Batuev, V. (1996) Chechentsy i teipy [Chechens and Teyps]. *Argumenty i fakty*, 17 January, 3.

Malashenko, A., and Trenin, D. (2002) *Vremia Yuga. Rossia v Chechne, Chechnia v Rossii [The Time of the South. Russia in Chechnya, Chechnya in Russia]*, Gendal'f, Moscow.

Malysheva, D.B. (1996) *Konflikty na Kavkaze: regional'noe i mezhdunarodnoe izmerenie [The Conflicts of the Caucasus: Regional and International Dimensions]*, IMEiMO, Moscow.

Mamakaev, N.A. (1973) *Chechensky taip v period ego razlozhenia [The Chechen Teyp in Times of Decay]*, Checheno-Ingushskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, Grozny.

Muzaev, T. (1996) *Chechenskaya respublika: organy vlasti i politicheskie sily [The Chechen Republic: Authorities and Political Forces]*, Panorama, Moscow.

Nasardinov, S. (1996) Mify o religii i politicheskaya praktika [Religious Myths and the Political Practice]. *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 23 February, 3.

Nukhaev, Kh.-A. (2003) Chechnya i Rossiya: odno tsennostnoe prostranstvo – dve obshchestvennye sistemy [Chechnya and Russia: One Value Space, Two Social Systems], in *Rossiya i Chechnya. Poiski vykhoda [Russia and Chechnya. Searching for a way out]* (ed. Y.A. Gordin), Zvezda, St Petersburg, 115–85.

Regent, T. (1999) *Migratsiya v Rossii. Problemy gosudarstvennogo upravleniya [Migration in Russi. Pronlems of State Leadership]*, ISEPN, Moscow.

Shnirelman, V.A. (2006a) *Byt' alanami: intellektualy i politika na Severnom Kavkaze v 20 veke [To Be Alans: Intellectuals and Politics in the North Caucasus in the 20th Century]*, NLO, Moscow.

Shnirelman, V.A. (2006b) A Revolt of Social Memory: The Chechens and Ingush against the Soviet Historians, in *Reconstruction and Interaction of Slavic Eurasia and Its Neighboring World* (eds. Osamu Ieda and Tomohiko Uyama), Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, 273–307.

Shnirelman, V.A. (2008) The Orstkhoi Revival: Identity and Border Dispute in the Northern Caucasus, in *Ethno-nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder* (ed. Moshe Gammer), Routledge, London, 139–47.

Sigauri, I. M. (1997) *Ocherki istorii i gosudarstvennogo ustroistva chechentsev s drevneishikh vremen [Historical Essays and State Structure of the Chechens since Antiquity]*, Russkaya zhizn', Moscow.

Sovremennoe sostoyanie i perspektivy razvitiya istoricheskoy nauki Dagestana i Severnogo Kavkaza [Contemporary Shape and Perspectives of Development of History in Dagestand and the North Caucasus] (1997), Dagestansky nauchny tsentr RAN, Makhachkala.

Tishkov, V.A. (ed.) (1999) *Puti mira na Severnom Kavkaze [Paths to Peace in the North Caucasus]*, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, RAN, Moscow.

Tishkov, V.A., et al. (1995) *Chechensky krizis. Analiticheskoe obozrenie [The Chechen Crisis. An Analytical Overview]*, Tsentr kompleksnykh sotsial'nykh issledovaniy i marketinga, Moscow.

Tsutsulaeva, S. S. (2006) Politiko-pravovaia reabilitatsia chechenskogo naroda [The Legal-Political Rehabilitation of the Chechens], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the Chechens]* (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 345–51.

Vatchagaev, M. (2008) *Sheikhi i ziiaraty Chechni*, Publisher unknown, Moscow.

Vasilieva, O., and Muzaev T. (1994) *Severny Kavkaz v poiskakh regional'noi ideologii [The North Caucasus on the Search of a Regional Ideology]*, Progress, Moscow.

Zakriev, B. B. (2006) K istorii rossiisko-chechenskikh otnosheniy posledney treti XVIII [The History of Russian-Chechen Relations in the Last Third of the 18th Century], in *Chechenskaya respublika i chechentsy [The Chechen Republic and the Chechens]* (eds. Kh. I. Ibragimov and V.A. Tishkov), Nauka, Moscow, 254–61.

Cécile Druey

From Identity-Formation to Independence: The Chechen Movement of "Neformaly" (1986–1991)

Abstract: During the years that preceded the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic (ChIAR) has experienced an intense movement of civil society mobilisation and nationalist radicalisation. Referring to the society "Kavkaz" as an example of the emerging movement of civil society, this paper traces the mobilising role of history and historical memories during the period of reform under Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s, until the "Chechen Revolution" in 1991. It argues that the use of historical memory is not so much a cause than an indicator of conflict and radicalisation in society, and that these processes of radicalisation are closely linked to their context at a local, national and international level. Drawing on data collected from conversations with representatives of the Chechen national movement, from local newspapers, and legal acts, the paper tracks the evolution of civil society movements in Chechnya in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Doing so, it departs from a relational approach to conflict analysis (Della Porta, 2018; Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, 2012; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015; Hughes and Sasse, 2016).

Keywords: Chechnya, Perestroika, Decolonisation, Civil society mobilisation, Radicalisation, Historical memories

Introduction

After almost seventy years of communist rule, Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of opening up and transparent reform in the mid-1980s Soviet Union, also referred to as "Glasnost" and "Perestroika", initiated a period of deep change in economic, political and cultural life. At a macro-level, this meant the end of the Cold War and a policy of rapprochement and "New Thinking" towards the former enemies in the West. At a meso-level, "Perestroika" unleashed – or was caused by? – strong movements of national self-determination and de-Sovietisation in the Russian SSR and in different parts of the Soviet periphery, including the North Caucasus. In local politics in Chechnya, the abolition of the Communist Party's monopoly and

the struggle for more inclusion of civil society brought with it a boost of nationalist mobilisation and, later, an increasing radicalisation and fragmentation of society. Historical memories and their use as a justification for the creation and consolidation of new "frameworks of meaning" play a crucial role in these processes.

This chapter is dedicated to the movement of civil society in Chechnya during the late Soviet period and to the role of historical memories within these processes of mobilisation and radicalisation. The starting point for the analysis is the moment of the first formal move of "democratisation from above", which was the "Regulation on amateur association, hobby clubs" issued by the Soviet Ministry of Culture in May 1986. This regulation encouraged civil society to participate in political processes and had a crucial impact on the development of the Soviet movement of "Neformaly" (non-formals), which also occured in Chechnya. The end point of the analysis is November 1991, when with the "Chechen Revolution", part of the movements opted for a status of full-fledged self-determination of what was later to become the de facto independent "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria".

The analysis is organised, firstly, along the lines of actors and contexts: Who were the actors of civil society in Chechnya that became active with Perestroika? What were their political claims? What were the key stages in the processes of mobilisation and radicalisation in pre-war Chechnya, and within which political context did they happen? Secondly, we will take a critical look at the role of historical memory in these developments: How is historical memory linked to these processes of mobilisation and radicalisation? Did its role change during the given time frame? The study focuses on the society "Kavkaz" as a case study, which started its activities in 1986 in Grozny as a discussion club on locally relevant issues. Among other things, the members of the society had an explicit interest in historical topics.

As primary sources, the analysis refers to interviews with representatives of the "Kavkaz" society, conducted in spring 2021. I would like to use this offortunity to express my sincere gratitude to the respondents and former members of the "Kavkaz" society for the insightful information they provided, and for their enthusiastic participation and patience during the long, and partially, exhausting process of exchanging questions and answers under difficult circumstances during the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, it was helpful, that they made available precious primary materials from their private archives. In addition to the interviews, the paper draws

on local periodicals linked to specific actors of the civic movement, such as the newspaper "Spravedlivost", and on national legal acts initiating the period of political reform and civil society inclusion during Perestroika.

Conceptually, the analysis loosely draws upon the literature on mobilisation and radicalisation, reflecting a relational approach to conflict analysis (Della Porta, 2018; Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou, 2012; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015; Hughes and Sasse, 2016). Applying this approach to the topic of historical memory, the chapter argues, that the use of the latter is not so much a cause as it is an indicator of conflict and radicalisation in society. Further, these processes of radicalisation, and the use of historical memory within them, are closely linked to the contex, and to the behaviour of other political actors at a local, national, and international level. In summary, the prevailing historical narratives and the processes of radicalisation of civil society in Chechnya are mutually influenced by local factors (role of nationalist elites, economic collapse, collective memories, etc.), political developments at the national level (economic and political reforms, coup d'état of August 1991, collapse of the Soviet state, etc.) and the international context (end of the Cold War, decolonisation of the former Soviet space, etc.).

The "Kavkaz" Society and the Democratisation of Memory

> For me, the emergence of the club "Kavkaz" was the key event when Perestroika, imposed from above in Chechnya-Ingushetia, began to transform itself into a national movement that increasingly escaped the control of the authorities. Despite the fact that none of the future leaders of the different social movements got "settled" in the club, it was where everything started. (Member of "Kavkaz" society, April 2021)

The "Scientific Society Kavkaz" was initially established as "Interest club Kavkaz" in 1986, thus, at a very early stage of Perestroika. Under the lead of the historian Salman Dzhamirzayev and other key figures of the local intelligentsiya, the society brought together students and scholars from Chechen universities, workers at various Chechen enterprises, and other persons who were interested in local culture and politics. Clearly intellectual in its thrust, "Kavkaz" was mainly active in the capital of the ChIAR (Grozny), with events also organised in rural areas. The permanent

members of "Kavkaz" were almost exclusively Chechen in ethnicity (Author interview with "Kavkaz" representatives (2) and (3), 2021).

The main aim of the organisers of "Kavkaz" was to raise awareness and to provide knowledge to the local youth about Chechen culture and other questions of national interest. Notably, high in demand were hitherto unknown and taboo episodes of local history, such as the migrations and origin of Caucasian peoples, the Caucasian War (1817–1864), the purges of Chechens and Ingushs under Stalin in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Deportation of 1944–1947. Beyond this "democratisation of historical memory", the debates in the club were dedicated to burning questions of the present, such as the representation of the Chechen language, environmental questions, and unemployment.

The members of "Kavkaz" were young, mainly born in the 1950s, at the time of the Chechen deportation to Kazakhstan. They had all lost relatives, not only during the deportation of 1944–1957, but also during the period of Stalinist purges preceding it, which, unlike the deportation, has hardly addressed to this day. "Rarely did any of us have grandfathers. They were subjected to repression in the 1920s and 1930s, mainly as Kulak and Mullah elements and anti-Soviet organisations. According to the most conservative figures, more than 30,000 people were repressed" (Author interview with "Kavkaz" representative (1), 10 March 2021). The "Kavkaz" meetings were key for the collection of oral histories and their transformation into more formal, scientific projects of historical memory. That is, to speak in Assman's (2008) terms, "Kavkaz" acted as a translator from "communicative" to "cultural memory".[1] Moreover, the collective remembering of historical injustice was an important element that emotionally united the members of the club, and guided them to become politically active. An initial, symbolic upheaval of "Kavkaz" was to scientifically debunk the concept of "voluntary incorporation of Chechens into Tsarist Russia" (Author interview with "Kavkaz" representatives (1) and (3), 2021). This was a myth conjured up by the local party leadership in a attempt to justify Russian domination and to smooth inter-ethnic tensions (Shnirelman, 2006: 291).

---

1 "Communicative memory", according to Assman, is the non-institutionalised memory of social groups and appears in everyday interactions and oral history. "Cultural memory", on the other hand, is an externalised and objectified form of memory that is created by common symbols, such as traditions, museums, monuments, textbooks etc. (Assmann, 2008).

The example of "Kavkaz" is interesting in that it neatly demonstrates the gradual politisation and radicalisation of the early Chechen nationalist movement. Although it started its activities as an only loose association or "club" of local intellectuals with broad thematic interests, individual members gradually became more politically focused and radical in their claims, and some of them even became founding members of political parties.

Developments at the National Level and Their Relevance for Chechnya

> Take as much sovereignty as you can swallow! […] But you are in the centre of Russia – and you need to think about that. (Boris Yeltsin in August 1990, as quoted in Obeshchaniya.ru 2021)

It is a question the chicken and the egg, what came first, the movements of nationalist mobilisation unleashing centrifugal forces at the periphery, or the the disintegration of the Communist Party (CP) and thus of the backbone of the Soviet Union's central power? The causal relationship between the rise of nationalism and the collapse of the Soviet state is disputed among analysts of the (former) Soviet space.[2] This chapter argues, that the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence and radicalisation of the nationalist quest for self-determination were mutually related processes, where both factors, the gradual abolition of the guiding force of the CP, as well as the will to ethnic self-determination, structural inequality, and the exclusion of minorities from decistion-making played a role. Chechnya makes a powerful case in this regard.

In the following, the most important political developments at the all-Soviet level will be briefly summarised and their relevance for the situation in Chechnya will be demonstrated.

2 Some scholars hold that the vacuum of ideological power due to the gradual abholition of monopoly of the Communist Party during Perestroika were at the heart of the emergence of nationalism in the periphery (Gammer, 2002: 117). Others, however, argue that nationalism, as it was contained in the Soviet nationalities policy, was the main reason for the collapse of the Union (Beissinger, 2002; Slezkine, 1994).

The "Regulation on Amateur Association, Hobby Clubs" (1986)

The "Regulation on amateur association, hobby clubs" was issued by the Soviet Ministry of Culture in spring 1986, with the aim of stimulating civil society to participate in, and to take responsibility for, political processes (Ministry of Culture, 1986). This regulation oversaw the legalisation of civil society associations, which at an early stage were mainly organised as informal circles, groups or clubs.[3] Therefore, it made a key contribution to the development of the movement of "Neformaly" (non-formals), which throughout the former Soviet space led to a mass-mobilisation and protest of civil society and gave way to a "democratisation from below". Thus, the 1986 regulation lays the basis of the formalisation and institutionalisation of civil society as an independent factor of socio-political life.[4]

Among the Chechen intelligentsiya, the liberalising tendencies of 1986 in Moscow were met with suspicion. Morover, Perestroika in general was perceived as an attempt to reform the system "from above" in the centre, which would hardly lead to any tangible changes in the periphery (Author interviews with "Kavkaz" representatives (1) and (2), 2021). However, a cautious awakening of local civil society and the formation of a new specifically Chechen civic identity was observed. Among others, these gradual processes of democratisation became evident in a renewed interest and popularisation of formerly taboo episodes in Chechen history.

The Constitutional Amendment of 1990

The constitutional amendment adopted in March 1990 de facto initiated the abolition of the Communist Party's monopoly of power and prepared the ground for the introduction of a multi-party system. The amendment brought an addition to the controversial Article 6 of the Constitution, formerly stating the exclusive responsibility of the Communist Party to organise all parts of social, cultural and political life of Soviet citizens. In its

---

3 In a way, the civil society associations in the Soviet Union of the late 1980s remind the "circles" or "kruzhki" of the mid-nineteenth century, where members of the Intelligentsia debated actual issues and united based on their political interests (e.g. Westerners or Slavophiles) (Walicki, 1979).

4 For the emergence of the movement of "Neformaly" see also (Glezin 2008).

new reading, the article said: "*The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, other political parties, trade unions, youth, and other public organisations and mass movements shall participate in the formulation of the policy of the Soviet State and in the management of state and public affairs, through their representatives elected to the Congress of of People's Deputies and in other forms*" (Congress of People's Deputies 1990).[5] That is, the new formulation anticipated the mobilisation of civil society and enshrines its right (and duty) to participate in political decision-making.[6]

In Chechnya, the formal abolition of the CP's monopoly of power in spring 1990 accelerated the politisation and institutionalisation of the civil society movement. If earlier they were organised as clubs or groups, the constitutional amendment now allowed them to transform into political parties (see also Annex 1 "Overview of Civil Society Organisations and Parties in Chechnya" at the end of this chapter). The claims of civil society towards an increasingly disoriented and repressive local government became more radical, which led to an escalation of the situation and an intensification of conflict between civil society associations and the local communist elites under the leadership of Doku Zavgaev.

The Military Coup of August 1991

The main objective of the initiators of the coup d'état in19 August 1991 of the members of the "Governmental Committee on the State of Emergency" (GKChP), was to prevent the collapse of the USSR. In their opinion, the collapse was to begin on 20 August, at the start of the signing procedure of the New Union Treaty, which aimed to transform the USSR into a

---

5 In the old version of the 1977 Constitution, Article 6 reads as follows: "*The leading and guiding force of Soviet society, the nucleus of its political system and state and social organisations is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The CPSU exists for the people and serves the people. Armed with the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the Communist Party determines the general outlook for the development of society and the internal and external policies of the USSR; it directs the great creative activities of the Soviet people and gives a systematic, scientifically substantiated character to the struggle for the victory of communism. All Party organisations operate within the framework of the USSR Constitution*" (Glezin, 2018).

6 For the significance of the constitutional amendment of March 1990 see also (Glezin, 2008).

confederation. The coup incited significant demonstrations and protest rallies in Moscow, Leningrad and a number of other cities in the country, which made the military withdraw and the leaders of the coup flee the capital. The coup was thus defeated, but at the same time the Soviet leadership under Gorbachev had also lost its authority and had to gradually transfer power to the leaders of the Russian national movement (RIA Novosti, 2011).

During the coup, a detachment of Chechens under the command of Shamil Basayev, who was later to become one of the most wanted terrorists of the Russian Federation, was dispatched in front of the White House in Moscow, ready to defend the sovereignty of the young Soviet successor states (Zakurdaeva 2020). That is, in August 1991, even Chechen militants like Basayev, still stood firmly behind the Russian national movement and worked hand in hand with Boris Yeltsin. This was certainly a result of Yeltsin opting for democracy in competition for power with other members of the political elite, which made a great impression on the emerging states at the Soviet periphery. "*Take as much sovereignty as you can swallow!*" was the famous sentence he pronounced during a mass meeting in Kazan in August 1990 (Obeshchaniya.ru, 2021). The second part of the statement, "*…But you are in the centre of Russia – and you need to think about that*" immediately relativised this enthusiasm for power-sharing and de-centralisation although usually escaping public attention.

At a local level in Chechnya, the events of August 1991 initiated a period of escalating violence between the local authorities and representatives of the national movement, which finally led to the "Chechen Revolution" of October–November 1991, and to the ousting of the local communist government under Doku Zavgaev.

The Emergence of the Chechen National Movement (1986–1991)

> What kept me in the club ["Kavkaz"] was above all the opportunity to witness first-hand the birth of the Chechen national movement, which I believe was pushed to shape political developments before it had time to fully form. I think this also explains the lack of vision of the ideologists of the 1991 "Chechen revolution" and the complete

> collapse of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in the aftermath. (Member of "Kavkaz" society, April 2021)

This chapter thematises the formation, politisation, radicalisation and split of the civic movement in Chechnya, focusing on the political claims and repertoires of the different groups and offering a periodisation for the processes of gradual radicalisation.

Emergence of the Movement of "Neformaly" in Chechnya (1986–1990)

There was an initial distrust of local civil society in the ideas of Perestroika, as they were expressed in the new national legislation (notably, the 1986 and 1990 legal acts). However, despite this the civic movement in Chechnya emerged early during Perestroika, within months after Mikhail Gorbachev's arrival to power. Seminal to this were active groups, such as "Kavkaz". During its active period (1986–1994) "Kavkaz" did not intially exert direct influence on political decision-making, which, according to former members, was also not the aim. However, through its raising awareness activities for issues of national culture and the lively debates led by professional scientist, the society developed great public appeal and contributed to the sensitisation and political empowerment of the Chechen youth. It is thus not sursprising, that most of the organisations of "Neformaly" that emerged in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in the late 1980s, were formed with the participation of "Kavkaz" members and, in one form or another, incorporated ideas and issues raised at meetings of that society (author interviews with "Kavkaz" members (1) and (3), 2021).[7]

However, Kavkaz was not the only one, in the first years after the legalisation of the civil society movements in 1986, a number of other associations emerged in Chechnya, such as "Bart", and "Niyso-Narodniy Front", etc. Officially they were referred to as groups or clubs, but several of them functioned as proto-parties, which would later form the units of the new political system (see also Annex 1, "Overview of Civil Society Organisations and Parties in Chechnya"). Slowly but steadily, these

7 This snowball effect-like role of "Kavkaz" is not only mentioned by its members, but also appears in memoirs of political actors, such as Mairbek Vatchagaev (Vatchagaev 2019).

informal organisations grew into a fully fledged national movement. At an early stage, the claims of the movement were not yet really political, intending a general sensibilisation for Caucasian and specifically Chechen cultural, economic, and socio-political interests vis-à-vis the central power in Moscow (decolonisation, de-Sovietisation, de-Russification). The repertoires in use were informal discussions, teaching and informative campaigns, whereas some groups entertained their own publications (see, for instance, the newspapers *Bart* or *Niyso-Narodniy Front*, both founded in the late 1980s as information channels of specific groups).

In exploring the resources of the new national movement, we have to look beyond the borders of the Chechen-Ingush republic. Parts of the Chechen national movement entertained active links with groups in other Soviet republics, which was important later for their politisation and transformation into political parties, but also for very down-to earth questions of material support. In particular, the Lithuanian nationalist movement "Sayudis" and its leader Vytautas Landsbergis played an important role by supporting the printing of the magazine *Bart* and offering networking possibilities and ideological advice to what would later become the Vainakh Democratic Party (VDP). It was also in the Baltic States, in Tartu in Estonia, that representatives of the VDP in the late 1980s met the still unknown Soviet general Dzhokhar Dudayev and were able to persuade him to take a leading role in the Chechen national movement (Author interviews with "Kavkaz" member (1), 2021).

Politisation, Radicalisation and Split (1990–1991)

Against the accelerated pace of Perestroika across the Soviet Union, the Chechen national movement became more politicised, and as is often the case with revolutionary movements, new, more radical groups soon broke away. This rupture between radical (aspiring rapid political change and full independence) and moderate (aspiring decolonisation and self-sustainability of the Chechen state) Chechen nationalists began to manifest itself in the last years of the 1980s. A considerable part of the new civil society formations felt that the impact of intellectual discussion clubs such as "Kavkaz" was not strong enough, and that the situation required more resolute means and clearer statements towards the incumbent Communist government in Grozny. Mass protest meetings became the main repertoire

of the radicalising movement, whereas historical topics proved to have a particularly powerful motivational effect.

During the early 1990s, and especially under the influence of the 1990 amendment of the Soviet Constitution, some of the clubs of interest and discussion circles were registered as political parties with all corresponding administrative attibutes (statutes, formal governing body, etc.). This formalisation and institutionalisation of the civil society movement was not a smooth process, but caused lively discussions and conflicts, even inside the "Neformaly" movement. For example, the group "Spravedlivost"/"Niyso-Narodniy Front" (Justice-Popular Front) split into the more radical party "Popular Front" in early 1990, whereas "Niyso/Spravedlivost", although also registered as a party, kept a rather informal character (see announcement and statutes pubished in Spravedlivost, 1990).

The First National Congress of the Chechen People on 25–27 November 1990 in Grozny was a key moment in the radicalisation of the Chechen national movement, and a triumph for the radical wing of the national movement aspiring a status of full independence for Chechnya. This was especially so for the newly formed party (named after the conference "National Congress of the Chechen People / OKChN"), and for the man who was to become its new leader. Dzhokhar Dudayev, who chaired the session at the time only as president of the day, on 25 November 1990 announced the seminal sentences, "Dear comrades! Our dear guests! I sincerely congratulate you and myself at the occasion of the first hours and the first day of citizenship under a sovereign state. [Continuous applause]. The declaration has been adopted, and I am in full conviction that if anyone has the thought of opposing it, he will be a potential enemy of our people!" (Dudayev, 1990).[8] Although he does not yet claim full political independence, but rather sovereignty for Chechnya, Dudayev's words in November 1990 leave no doubt about the readiness of the radicalised national movement to take decisive, possibly violent action, not only against its actual opponents, i.e. the communist leadership, but also against moderate representatives of the Chechen national movement itself.

Moderate groups, such as Kavkaz, have followed this radicalisation of the national movement with suspicion. In particular, they criticised the

---

8 A full English version of Dudayev's speech of 25 November 1990 is reproduced in the section "Primary Materials" at the end of this part of the book.

exclusive focus on political upheaval preventing substantive discussions that would have been urgently needed to tackle the problems at hand and to build a new, viable state. "I remember a meeting with Kh. Bisultanov from the Popular Front, organiser of mass meetings, who basically kept repeating 'Down with the CPSU!' We tried to explain to them that if one denies an existing order, the people must be offered an alternative solution, first of all regarding social security and economy as a basis for life. This [lacking sense of reality – C.D.] was their weak point" (Author interviews with "Kavkaz" member (1), 2021).

In sum, the moderate nationalists who were at the basis of mobilisation during the early years of Perestroika, and made an important contribution to developing visions for a new state, were sidelined and overruled by the radicals who were to define the future political outcomes. As a result, trenches opened up in Chechen civil society between supporters of different visions of status and statebuilding, which led to an increasing fragmentation of political power.

Radicalisation, Violence and Historical Memory

> All associations of "Neformaly" in the Checheno-Ingush ASSR of that time raised the issue of the repression of the Chechens and Ingush to one extent or another, published articles and held round tables. At the same time, the communist authorities often took measures to block the manifestation of our thoughts. (Member of "Kavkaz" society, April 2021)

It is established that historical memories are powerful tools of mobilisation, especially in ongoing or past armed conflict, and gross violations of human rights. The Chechen case neatly illustrates this link between conflict and historical memory. The time period focuded on here is particlarly interesting in this regard, because it represents simultaneously a post-repressive situation, reflected in the attempt of coming to terms with the 1944 deportation and Stalinist repressions, and an escalating conflict between different groups in Chechnya. These conflicts resulted from the processes of mobilisation, radicalisation and political fragmentation during Perestroika. The changing role that historical memory plays during this period will be the

focus of the next section, with the "relational approach" to conflict studies as a conceptual lense for the analysis.

The Conceptual Link between Historical Memory and Conflict

Traditional approaches to studying radicalisation and violence focus either on the macro level (e.g. traditional terrorism studies and international relations, which concentrate on "root causes" and structural change) or on the micro level (e.g. social psychology, which emphasises grievances and individual vulnerability) to explain the escalation of violence. The relational perspective offers an alternative to these conceptual approaches, focusing on "*interpersonal processes that promote, inhibit or channel collective violence and connect it with non-violent politics*" (Tilly, 2003: 20). This approach is interdisciplinary and includes an analysis of all levels of political and social life, as they are seen as interconnected and mutually defining. Thus, the developments at an international, national and group level are considered, as well as the psycho-social situation and the individual behaviour of the actors. Structural causes, such as inequality or historical grievances (traditionally defined as "root causes"), are not necessarily seen as producing violence, but only if they are activated (Della Porta, 2018; Hughes and Sasse, 2016).

Donatella Della Porta, who is an important proponent of the relational approach, defines radicalisation as an "*escalation from non-violent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time*" (Della Porta, 2018: 462). Thus, she understands it not as a onetime and localised phenomenon, but as a process that involves different individuals, groups, and institutional actors who are mutually linked. The broader context is considered to be key for these processes of radicalisation. Notably, the political opportunities[9] of the involved actors, and their symbolic, material, and organisational resources play an important role in whether or not they are radicalised. Finally, the

9 "Opportunities", or contexts potentially supportive to radicalisation would be, in Della Porta's understanding, for example a change in the political system, clashes of protestors with security forces or political adversaries. "Resources" mean the material, logistical or symbolic support provided by third actors and symbolic rewards (Della Porta, 2018: 463).

"framing" of violence is important, that is, the use of frameworks of meaning to explain the action (Della Porta, 2018: 463).

If we apply these three key conditions for radicalisation, opportunities, resources and framing, to the case of Chechnya, we note that the *opportunities* were firstly in the context of political change at an international (end of Cold War), national (Perestroika) and local level (empowerment of the "Neformaly" as political actors). Secondly, the increasingly violent repression of the local authorities and the power struggle between authorities and civic movement favoured the radicalisation on all sides, with a growing spiral of violence between the different radicalising poles. In terms of *resources*, the Chechen movement of "Neformaly" was at least at an early stage of mobilisation mainly self-sustainable, with the exception of strong bonds between Chechens and other Caucasian peoples. With the increasing politisation of the movement, contacts were established with other national movements in the post-Soviet space, especially in the Baltic States. And only at an advanced stage of institutionalisation and statebuilding under Dudayev did the Chechen nationalists reach out to seek recognition and support of Western states and international organisations (Vatchagaev, 2019).

The Use of Historical Memory in Chechnya

Framing, finally, is mentioned as a third condition contributing to a radicalisation (or de-radicalisation) of political actors. The instrumentalisation of historical memory in Chechnya neatly demonstrates, how such frameworks of meaning are constructed and used as a symbolic resource to legitimise political action. Following Della Porta's logic, historical grievances and injustice suffered in the past are structural causes of conflict which by themselves do not create violenceunless they are politically "activated" (Della Porta, 2018: 462). That is, historical memory requires a context and an ideological framing to become what Hughes and Sasse call "power ideas", instruments that enablee political actors to "turn linkages into leverage" (Hughes and Sasse, 2016: 320).

Transferring this to the case of Chechnya, we can see how nationalist mobilisation and a mixed context of reform and repression have helped to turn traumatising historical memories and political inequality into leverage for mass mobilisation and political revolt against the ruling system. The historical topics that popped up during the processes of mobilisation in

Chechnya changed depending on time, actors, and political claims. At an early stage, the emerging actors of civil society focused in the first instance on All-Caucasian topics, such as the Mountain Republic (1918–1919) and the Caucasian War (1817–1864), as examples for a successful struggle for self-determination. Aimed at the creation of all-Caucasian unity and the cultural emancipation from central power, this early use of of historical memory was primarily dedicated to purposes of decolonisation (see for instance the activities of the society “Kavkaz”).

If at an early stage, representatives of the Chechen movement of “Neformaly” might have had an intellectual and rather apolitical interest in Chechnya’s national culture and historical memories, at the end of the 1980s this was increasingly instrumentalised for political aims. The Deportation of 1944–1957 proved to have a particularly high mobilisation effect. Incidentally, for some political parties the reference to historical memory was not only of ideological, but also of financial benefit. It is reported that on 23 February 1990, at a mass commemoration of the forty-sixth anniversary of the Deportation in Grozny, the Chechen Popular Front collected a sum of around 80,000 roubles (about €850 at the time), which was allegedly divided between party leader Kh. Bisultanov, and the Association of Chechen Muslims (Shakhbulatov, 1990: 2).

Beyond the Deportation topic, the narrative of the Chechens’ “300 years of resistance against Russian aggression” became important. The goals of this narrative was, in a first instance, to underline Chechnya’s right to self-determination (and independence), since it was forcefully colonised and has never voluntarily joined Russia, Russia has no legal right to impose its control. Secondly, the discursive focus on the Deportation and on the “300 years of war against Russia” were part of a larger narrative of a “chain of attempts at genocide” (Gammer, 2002: 128), which should legitimise the nationalist revolution and its leaders, even if Chechnya has to pay its independence with the high price of war.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown, based on the example of the mobilisation of Chechen civil society during Perestroika, that the escalation of conflicts between different factions of society, and between society and government,

are mutual processes that take place in the interrelation between different actors. This is closely linked to the political context at the local, national and international levels. Two main stages of radicalisation of the Chechen national movement can be distinguished during Perestroika. At an initial stage (1986–1990), mobilisation was based on the principle of self-determination of the peoples of the Caucasus, using repertoires such as intellectual debates, raising- awareness activities and commemorative events, which should help mobilise the Chechen youth to discover and defend its own history and national culture. At the next stage (1990–1991), the national movement became more politicised and more radical, claiming sovereignty for Chechnya and the inclusion of civil society in decision-making, with mass protest meetings as a main repertoire. These developments were met with suspicion and (later) repression by the acting government and the security apparatus, which led to frustration and to the formulation of even more radical claims by the protestors (full independence, overturn of the local government) and, in turn, to a more radical and violent repression.

A second finding of the chapter is that historical memories manifest themselves not so much as causes than as indicators of mobilisation and radicalisation of the civil society movement in Chechnya. Depending on the national and local political context, and the stage of radicalisation, the historical topics and their (political) purposes changed. At an early stage of mobilisation, the emphasis was on a general democratisation of memory with the aim of making public formerly forbidden episodes from different stages of the Chechen past (decolonisation and de-Sovietisation of local historical memory, unification of the peoples of the Caucasus etc.). At a later stage, and especially after the declaration of Chechnya's sovereignty in November 1990, we can observe a nationalisation and hierarchisation of collective memory, with a focus on Chechen uniqueness and its long tradition of resistance against Russian rule. As a result, two "master-grievances" prevailed from the former pluralistic picture of historical discourses: the narratives of the deportation of the Chechens of 1944–57, and of the "300 years of resistance against Russian rule" (together forming a "chain of attempts at genocide"). As a result, the act of remembering was at a later stage of nationalist mobilisation no longer a pluralist movement from below, as it was practiced during the years of Perestroika by actors like the "Kavkaz" society. Rather, it (again) became an instrument in the hands of the dominant political parties, used to legitimise the choice

for independence as a specifically Chechen path (instead of the whole-Caucasian choice or unity with the Ingush), to rationalise the possibility of an armed conflict with Moscow, to unite the Chechen population behind the narrative of the "reiterated genocide".

In summary, during the turmoil of Perestroika (1986–1991), the young national movement in Chechnya experienced a period of enthusiastic mobilisation, but also of internal strife and repression by the authorities, rapid deterioration of the economic and security situation, and the collapse of the Soviet state. Thus, the young civil society movement was exposed to high pressure and was expected to take on important ideological, economic and statebuilding tasks for which it was perhaps not (yet) prepared. As a result, all sides radicalised, and the Chechen national movement fragmented, with the radical wing increasingly gaining the upper hand over the moderate one.

Annex 1: Overview of Civil Society Organisations and Parties in Chechnya During Perestroika

Organisation (leader/s)	**Period of action**	**Repertoires, resources, alliances**	**Claims, roles**
Society "Kavkaz" (S. Dzhamirzaev and others)	1986–1994	–Informal debates and roundtables – Scientific publications; – Conferences; – Participation in official political events; – Advisory function to government; – Organisation of commemorative events; – Loosely links to local Communist Party structures	–Scientific discussion of actual problems from a Chechen (and Ingush) point of view; – Awareness-raising for Chechen popular culture among urban and rural youth; – Popularisation of Chechen and all-Caucasian historical memory;
Party "Niyso/ Spravedlivost' " (L. Saligov)	1988–1994	–Awareness-raising activities – Own journal *Niyso/ Spravedlivost* – Ideological, methodological and material support received from Baltic nationalist movements (esp. "Sayudis", Lithuania).	–Promoting Perestroika; – Popularisation of Chechen historical memory; – Fight against corruption; – Inclusion of civil society/bottom -up decision making; – Multi-party system, political pluralism; – Ecological claims;

Organisation (leader/s)	**Period of action**	**Repertoires, resources, alliances**	**Claims, roles**
"Bart" group, since 1990 Vainakh Democratic Party (VDP) (Z. Yandarbiev, M. Udugov)	1989–1994	–Publishing activity; own journal *Bart* – Mass meetings – Ideological, methodological and material support received from Baltic nationalist movements (esp. "Sayudis", Lithuania).	–Popularisation of Chechen culture and historical memory; – Fight against corruption; – Decolonisation, self-determination of Caucasian people – Multi-party system, political pluralism; – Democratic reform; – Chechen statehood, sovereignty, independence; – Declared aim of VDP: destabilising the political situation in the ChIASSR; providing a political alternative to the local CP;
Ecological movement (R. Goytemirov)	1990–1994	–Awareness-raising activities; – Linked to the whole-Caucasian and other (post) Soviet ecological movements	–Ecological claims; – Inclusion of civil society/bottom-up decision making;
Popular Front (Kh. Bisultanov)	1990–1991	– Mass meetings – Commemorative events, e.g. 23 February (anniversary of 1994 Deportation).	– Fight against corruption; – Inclusion of civil society/bottom-up decision making; – Multi-party system, political pluralism; – Ecological claims;

Organisation (leader/s)	Period of action	Repertoires, resources, alliances	Claims, roles
National Congress of the Chechen People (OKChN) (Dzh. Dudayev)	1990–1996	– Mass meetings – Televised debates	– Chechen independence – Democratic reform – Decolonisation; – Restoration of rights of the Chechen nation; right to self-determination; – Chechen statehood, sovereignty;
Party "The Islamic Way" (B. Gantamirov)	1990–1994	– Mass meetings – Statebuilding activities	– Declared aim: resignation of the republican "partisan" leadership – Supporting "chechen Revollution" (1991)

(Source: author interviews with "Kavkaz" members, 2019)

References

Alimi, Eitan, Lorenzo Bosi and Charles Demetriou (2012) Relational Dynamics and Processes of Radicalisation: A Comparative Framework, *Mobilization* 17 (1), 7–26.

Assmann, Jan (2008) Communicative and Cultural Memory, in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning), Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 109–18.

Beissinger, Mark R. (2002) *Nationalist Mobilisation and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, 1st ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Congress of People's Deputies (1990) *Ob Uchrezhdenii Posta Prezidenta SSSR n Vnesenii Izmeneniy i Dopolneniy v Konstitutsiyu (Osnovnoy Zakon) SSSR [On the Establishment of the Position of President of*

the USSR and on Amendments and Additions to the Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the USSR], Vol. N 1360-I, <https://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1977/zakony/185465/> (accessed 11 March 2023).

Della Porta, Donatella (2018) Radicalisation: A Relational Perspective. *Annual Review of Political Science* 21(1), 461–74.

Dudayev, Dzhokhar (1990) 25 Noyabrya 1990 g. Perviy Obshchenatsional'niy S'ezd Chechenskogo Naroda [25 November 1990 First National Congress of the Chechen People], Presented at the First National Congress of the Chechen People, Grozny, 25 November. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pM3P4CgNww> (accessed 11 March 2023).

Gammer, Moshe (2002) Nationalism and History: Rewriting the Chechen National Past, in *Secession, History and the Social Sciences* (eds. Bruno Coppieters and Michel Huysseune), VUB Brussels University Press, Brussels, 117–140.

Glezin, Eduard (2008) *Obshchestvenno-Politicheskie Neformal'nye Organizatsii v RSFSR v 1987–1990 Godakh: Stanovlenie i Razvitie [Socio-Political Informal Organisations in the RSFSR from 1987 to 1990: Formation and Development]*, Moscow Pedagogical University, Moscow, <https://www.dissercat.com/content/obshchestvenno-politicheskie-neformalnye-organizatsii-v-rsfsr-v-1987-1990-gg-stanovlenie-i-r/read> (accessed 11 March 2023).

——— (2018) Kak Gorbachev Demontiroval Odnopartiynuyu Sistemu v SSSR [How Gorbachev Dismantled the One-Party System in the USSR]. *Livejournal*, January, <https://ed-glezin.livejournal.com/896532.html> (accessed 11 March 2023).

Hughes, James, and Gwendolyn Sasse (2016) Power Ideas and Conflict: Ideology, Linkage and Leverage in Crimea and Chechnya. *East European Politics,* 32 (3), 314–34.

Ministry of Culture (1986) *Polozhenie o Lyubitel'skom Ob'edinenii, Klube Po Interesam [Regulation on Amateur Association, Hobby Clubs]*, No. 05/15-38, 26–28.

Obeshchaniya.ru (2021) Yeltsin: Berite Stol'ko Suvereniteta, Skol'ko Smozhete Proglotit [Take as Much Sovereignty as You Can Swallow!]. *Obeshchaniya.ru*, <http://www.obeschania.ru/documents/promises/berite-stolko-suvereniteta-skolko-smozhete-proglotit> (accessed 14 April 2021).

RIA Novosti (2011) Gosudarstvenniy Komitet Po Chrezvychaynomu Polozheniyu v SSSR (GKChP SSSR) [The State Committee on the State of Emergency in the USSR (GKChP USSR)]. *RIA Novosti*, 19 August, <https://ria.ru/20110819/418882612.html> (accessed 11 March 2023).

Shakhbulatov, L. (1990) Narodniy Front: Pokhozhe Raskol? [Popular Front: Looks like a Split?]. *Komsomolskoe Plemya*, 27 December.

Shnirelman, Victor (2006) A Revolt of Social Memory: The Chechens and Ingush against the Soviet Historians, in *Reconstruction and Interaction of Slavic Eurasia and Its Neighboring Worlds* (ed. Uyama Tomohiko), Hokkaido University, Sapporo, 273–307.

Slezkine, Yuri (1994) The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism. *Slavic Review*, 53 (2), 414–52.

Spravedlivost' (1990) Informatsionnoe Zayavlenie [Announcement]. *Spravedlivost'*, 2 September.

Tilly, Charles (2003) *The Politics of Collective Violence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

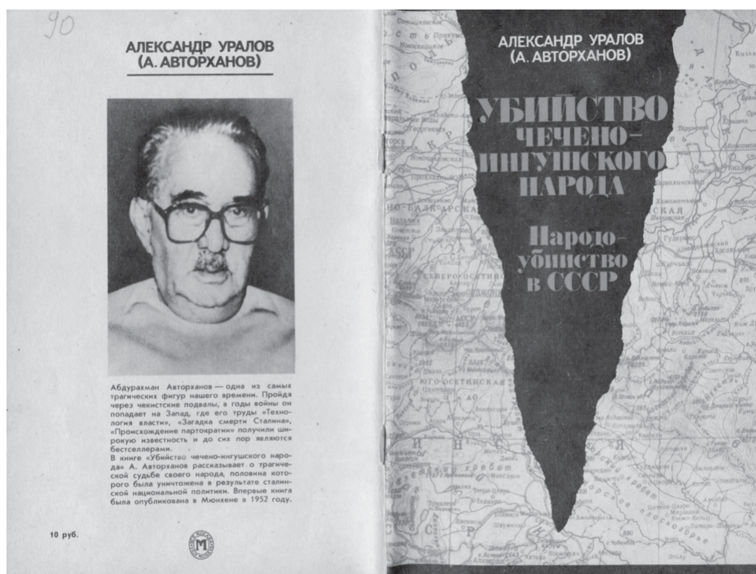
Tilly, Charles, and Sidney G. Tarrow (2015) *Contentious Politics*, Second revised edition, Oxford University Press, New York.

Vatchagaev, Mairbek (2019) *Chechnya: The Inside Story*, Open Books, Cambridge.

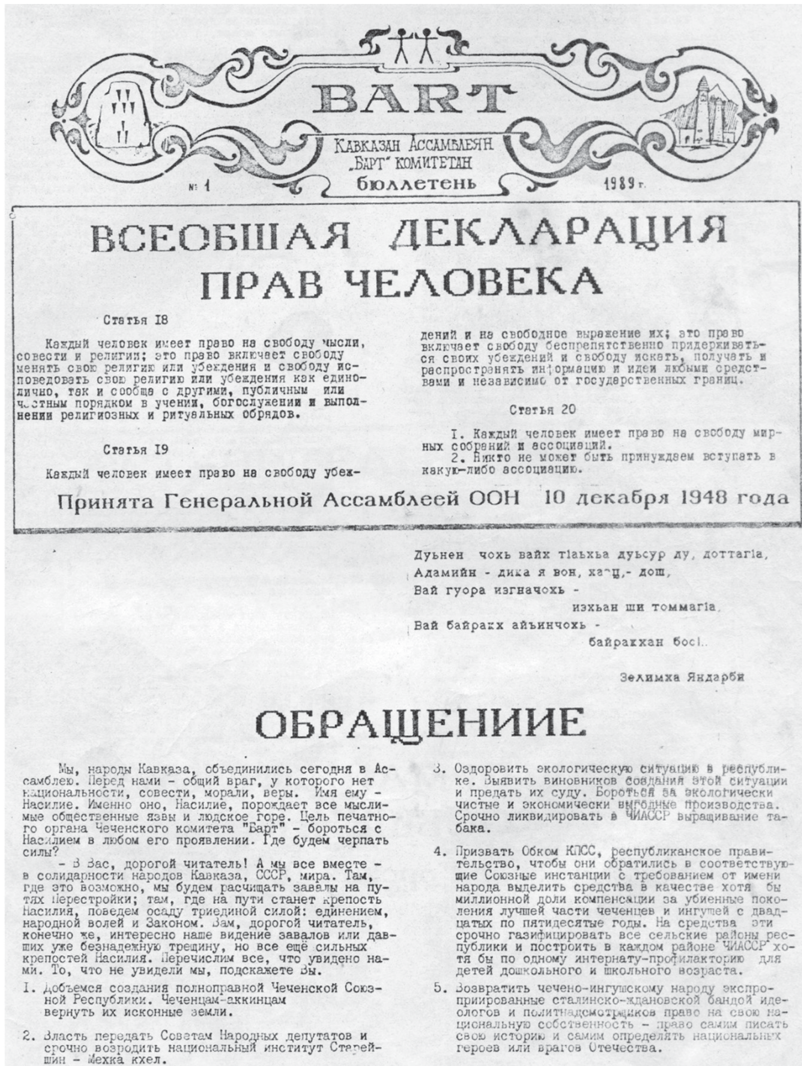
Walicki, Andrzej (1979) *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightement to Marxism*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

Zakurdaeva, Kristina (2020) Ot "zashchitnika demokratsii" do "terrorista nomer odin". Kem byl Shamil Basaev [From "Defender of Democracy" to "Terrorist Number One". About Shamil Basayev]. *Nastoyashee Vremya*, June, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/budyonnovsk-25-years-shamil-basayev/30665968.html> (accessed 11 March 2023).

Photos (Part I)



The new, specifically North Caucasian historiography emerging in the 1980s and 1990s is dedicated to themes of historical trauma and national pride. Pictured: Works by Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov (1991) and Lema Usmanov (1997) (Source: private archive, Grozny).



BART

Кавказан Ассамблеян „Барт" комитетан

№ 1 бюллетень 1989 г.

ВСЕОБШАЯ ДЕКЛАРАЦИЯ ПРАВ ЧЕЛОВЕКА

Статья I8

Каждый человек имеет право на свободу мысли, совести и религии; это право включает свободу менять свою религию или убеждения и свободу исповедовать свою религию или убеждения как единолично, так и сообща с другими, публичным или частным порядком в учении, богослужении и выполнении религиозных и ритуальных обрядов.

Статья I9

Каждый человек имеет право на свободу убеждений и на свободное выражение их; это право включает свободу беспрепятственно придерживаться своих убеждений и свободу искать, получать и распространять информацию и идеи любыми средствами и независимо от государственных границ.

Статья 20

I. Каждый человек имеет право на свободу мирных собраний и ассоциаций.
2. Никто не может быть принуждаем вступать в какую-либо ассоциацию.

Принята Генеральной Ассамблеей ООН 10 декабря 1948 года

Дуьнен чохь вайх тlаьхьа дуьсур ду, доттагlа,
Адамийн - дика я вон, хаъц,- дош,
Вай гуора изгначохь -
изхьан ши томмагlа.
Вай байракх айъинчохь -
байраккан босl..

Зелимха Яндарби

ОБРАЩЕНИИЕ

Мы, народы Кавказа, объединились сегодня в Ассамблею. Перед нами - общий враг, у которого нет национальности, совести, морали, веры. Имя ему - Насилие. Именно оно, Насилие, порождает все мыслимые общественные язвы и людское горе. Цель печатного органа Чеченского комитета "Барт" - бороться с Насилием в любом его проявлении. Где будем черпать силы?

- В Вас, дорогой читатель! А мы все вместе - в солидарности народов Кавказа, СССР, мира. Там, где это возможно, мы будем расчищать завалы на путях Перестройки; там, где на пути станет крепость Насилия, поведем осаду триединой силой: единением, народной волей и Законом. Вам, дорогой читатель, конечно же, интересно наше видение завалов или давших уже безнадежную трещину, но все ещё сильных крепостей Насилия. Перечислим все, что увидено нами. То, что не увидели мы, подскажете Вы.

I. Добъемся создания полноправной Чеченской Союзной Республики. Чеченцам-аккинцам вернуть их исконные земли.

2. Власть передать Советам Народных депутатов и срочно возродить национальный институт Старейшин - Мехка кхел.

3. Оздоровить экологическую ситуацию в республике. Выявить виновников создания этой ситуации и предать их суду. Бороться за экологически чистые и экономически выгодные производства. Срочно ликвидировать в ЧИАССР выращивание табака.

4. Призвать Обком КПСС, республиканское правительство, чтобы они обратились в соответствующие Союзные инстанции с требованием от имени народа выделить средства в качестве хотя бы миллионной доли компенсации за убиенные поколения лучшей части чеченцев и ингушей с двадцатых по пятидесятые годы. На средства эти срочно газифицировать все сельские районы республики и построить в каждом районе ЧИАССР хотя бы по одному интернату-профилакторию для детей дошкольного и школьного возраста.

5. Возвратить чечено-ингушскому народу экспроприированные сталинско-ждановской бандой идеологов и политнадсмотрщиков право на свою национальную собственность - право самим писать свою историю и самим определять национальных героев или врагов Отечества.

The first issue of the periodical *Bart* (September 1989) speaks in the name of the “Peoples of the Caucasus” and discusses topics of International Law and historical memory, such as the 170th anniversary of the Dadi Yurt massacre of 1819 (Source: private archive, Grozny)

Primary Materials (Part I)

Bart, September 1989, No. 1, pp. 1–2

"Open Call"

We, the peoples of the Caucasus, are united in this Assembly today. We face a common enemy who has no nationality, no conscience, no morality, and no faith. His name is Violence. It is violence that gives rise to all imaginable social ills and human woe. The purpose of the Chechen Committee's publication, "Bart", is to fight violence in any of its manifestations. Where do we draw our strength from? From you, dear reader! And we are all united in solidarity with the peoples of the Caucasus, the USSR, and the world. Wherever possible, we will clear the dirt on the paths of perestroika; wherever the fortress of Violence stands in our way, we will take up its siege by a triple force: unity, popular will, and the Law. You, dear reader, are of course interested in our vision of the ruins, or of what needs to be done with the already hopelessly cracked but still strong fortresses of Violence. Let us list all that we have seen. What we have not seen, you will tell us.

1. Let us establish a full-fledged Chechen Union Republic. The Chechen-Akkyn people should get back their ancestral land.
2. The governmental power should be transferred to the Councils of People's Deputies; and the local institution of elders, the *Mekhka Kkhel*, urgently needs to be revived.
3. The environmental situation in the Republic must be improved. Those responsible for this situation need to be identified and brought to justice. We must fight for environmentally friendly and economically viable enterprises. Tobacco cultivation must be abolished in the ChIASSR [Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialistic Republic – C.D.].
4. We must call on our republican government, the Obkom of the CPSU [Regional committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet

Union – C.D.], which should appeal on behalf of the people to the relevant authorities of the Soviet Union to provide funds amounting to at least one millionth of the compensation for the murder of generations of the best Chechen and Ingush people from the 1920s to the 1950s. These funds will be used immediately to supply gas to all rural districts of the republic, and to build at least one boarding school for pre-school and school-age children in every district of the ChIASSR.

5. The Chechen-Ingush people must be given back their right to ownership, the right to write their own history and to determine their national heroes or enemies of the fatherland, which was taken away from them by the Stalin-Zhdanov gang of ideologues and political watchdogs.
6. The names of murderers of the people must be published and, for those still alive, brought to justice.
7. The whole truth about religious persecutions must be revealed.
8. Atheism and state must be separated.
9. Those who foment ethnic division or who vilify nation, history, religion, culture, and customs should be publicly outlawed.
10. The imperial practice regarding selection and deployment of officials must be put to an end once and for all: The ChIASSR and soon also the Chechen Union Republic must be led by representatives of the native nationality.
11. The artificial migration to and from the ChIASSR should urgently be stopped, as it leads to the loss of a sense of homeland and native soil, and thus to the formation of an uprooted and de-moralised mass of mindless freaks, a source of crime, prostitution, drug addiction and alcoholism. For a person to develop as a full-fledged personality they need to do so only in the depths of his or her native culture, native people; only a person brought up in this way can also respect and love other people.
12. The condition of the penal labour camps on the territory of the CHIASSR and the "houses of mourning" (psychiatric hospitals) where lawlessness prevails, as everyone has known for a long time, must be subjected to in-depth control by society. Muslim, Christian, and Jewish clergy must be given access to these places on a weekly, if not on a daily basis, so that they can conduct spiritual work with the prisoners and the mentally ill. An educational institution should be set up from among respected elders and popular figures from science,

culture, literature, education, and industry as a matter of urgency; these personalities should educate the prisoners or those who have contributed to their moral corruption (by bringing vodka and drugs into the camp) and should bring them to justice publicly, with wide media coverage.

13. The deployment of more than a dozen large military units in Grozny and in the regions of the ChIASSR is one of the most burdensome anachronisms we have inherited from the Stalin-Beria genocide of the Chechen and Ingush peoples. No tank or infantry battles with an "adversary" will take place on our territory. Nor is another expulsion of the Chechen-Ingush people from their homeland planned. Therefore, these military units must be withdrawn immediately from the republic to places where their presence might be appropriate.
14. A memorial complex should be constructed, using traditional gravestones organised in a symbolic "Wall of Sorrow" for the victims of the genocide, with a spacious room at this Wall for people to pray at any time.
15. In all districts of the ChIASSR and Grozny, charity societies should be created which will organise free meals for the poor and needy and will provide them with medical assistance.
16. The activities of the "unsinkable" agricultural leaders from the "stagnation" period must be subjected to an in-depth public examination, so that the guilty among them and their patrons can be punished in court for sabotaging rent and cooperation, for ruining acres of land – the most precious material asset of any state – and for their hidden losses and embezzlement.
17. A broad public monitoring of all party leaders should be initiated, of scientific, cultural, educational actors, law enforcement agencies and the media, to ensure that they are fit for office.
18. Local "Krasniy Molot" factories should be used to produce instruments for the small-scale mechanisation of agriculture: mini-tractors, auxiliary equipment for all types of soil cultivation and farming, to be sold to the population at prices that the impoverished villagers can afford.
19. The discriminatory practices towards productive cooperatives and renters must end immediately. All fraudulent cooperatives (mobile barbecue stands, new and old cooperations selling food and industrial products at double or triple the price, etc.) must be closed immediately.

20. The health services for the population of the ChIASSR must be radically improved.

You, dear reader, will continue this list of claims. We assure you that we will do our best to make it shorter and shorter, day by day and year by year. We also promise to be as honest as possible in our publications, and to respect the opinions of those who disagree with us.

So, the page is turned. Let us agree that the struggle has begun. God help us!

Chechen Declaration of Sovereignty

First national congress of the Chechen people: Speech by Dzhokhar Dudayev[1]

25 November 1990

00:16 (…talks in Chechen…) Dear comrades! Our dear guests! I cordially congratulate you and me on the first hour and the first day of citizenship of a sovereign state.

Continuous applause

00:50 The Declaration has been adopted and I am fully convinced that even if someone had the idea of opposing it, it would be a potential enemy of our people.

Applause

01:12 We, the representatives of the people, the delegates to the congress, have taken on an extraordinary responsibility. To declare it is not so difficult, but there is a wise folk proverb: "Never take out a dagger unnecessarily, take it out and use it".

Continuous applause

01:48 The dagger is naked. Now we have to think about how to settle a sovereign state. This is an extremely responsible and complicated process, and I would like to warn my compatriots that the most dangerous period of possible provocations, of depriving individuals of

1 Original video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pM3P4CgNww> (accessed 22 February 2023).

their reason, leading to bloodshed, is right now. There are sufficient forces for that.

Here the young man who spoke expressed how dangerous it is to introduce tanks. A tank is not dangerous, it is visible, you can lie under it with grenades, blow it up.

Applause

02:44 There are forces more dangerous than all the tanks, planes and all the weapons – the seven-storey buildings that stand in the next street. If even one person sits in each office of them, you can imagine the forces for this republic. No other union republic has that kind of capacity in terms of buildings. Probably it goes even further down – a couple of floors into the ground.[2]

Applause

03:20 As hard as it may be to acknowledge, and assume responsibility, until a sovereign republic has its own protection forces, expressed in the security of the republic, in the Ministry of the Interior, expressed in mobilization readiness, in creating its own formations – it is not a true sovereign republic.

Applause

03:57 This confirms the course of events unfolding in all regions and, as has been said here, we must now act and not wait for help from the outside. If we are presenting the bill, my personal conviction is that we should stick closer to Russia, where the parliament is in the forefront, where there are capable forces, forces of democracy who are setting the impulse for perestroika. To present all the invoices that we are talking about, for the damages that our small poor people have suffered in this land.

---

2 Editor's note: The image of the even-strorey building with several layers of floors underground refers to the Soviet intelligence and its practice of detention and torture, often implemented in underground locations.

Applause

04:41 The relative prosperity in the republic when compared to other regions, is ensured, probably, first of all by the flexibility of the leadership, which has to be given its due credit, and second, by the wisdom of the people. A beautiful land, one of the most fertile places, nature always gives birth to beautiful people with natural positive qualities of soul, body, spirit, will, and character.

Applause

05:18 When we talk, I would ask our compatriots not to refer to the glory of the past. The best people of Russia and all over the world talk about about that past glory. When we ourselves talk about it, it means the spiritual potential of the present generation has dried up.

Applause

05:50 Yes, you could say that…. If in the past there were doubts that democracy, the rule of law, could be upheld, so now the young people in the Organizing Committee were able to bring two parties together in the most difficult conditions, hence, there is potential and strength of young people moving forwards. The rest of the proposals on the parliament, if the leadership and the organizing committee are interested in them, I will pass them on in writing.

Thank you for your attention, good luck and let's go!

A long round of applause.

Part II
Independence (1): Memory and Statebuilding under Dzhokhar Dudayev (1991–1996)

Introduction to the Context (1991–1996)

The second period covered in this book (1991–1996) marks the first phase of Chechnya's de facto independence under Dzhokhar Dudayev – now without Ingushetia, which, in November 1991, became a separate autonomous republic within the newly formed Russian Federation (Demos, 2022). In the following, the most important political and socio-cultural developments in Chechnya, including in the field of historical memory, will be outlined and situated in the federal (all-Russian) and international context.

Building an Independent State in Chechnya

The enthusiastic "Chechen Revolution" in October/November 1991 resulted in Chechnya's de facto independence and dealt a death blow to the communist leadership. The leaders of the independence movement under Dzhokhar Dudayev, who was now confirmed as president, were primarily concerned with building an independent and economically viable state. This was to be done with the help of radical reforms and the introduction of a "liberal-state capitalist" system, which, as an intermediate form between a Soviet planned economy and full privatisation, was intended as a basis for building new relations with Moscow and the international community. Dudayev announced the cornerstones of this new statehood in a programmatic article in the spring of 1993 (Dudayev, 1993).[1]

However, Dudayev's plans were thwarted by important developments at the federal level. During the constitutional crisis of October 1993, President Boris Yeltsin was declared deposed by the national parliament after he had unsuccessfully tried to disband it. To regain and consolidate

1 Excerpts of Dudayev's article "About the Political Structure of the Chechen Republic" (1993) are reproduced in the section "Primary Materials" at the end of this part of the book.

his power, Yeltsin formed an alliance with parts of the security sector. This helped him to re-establish control of the parliamentary building and to dissolve the two legislative bodies by military force. The events of autumn 1993 led to a strong polarisation between different factions of the Russian political establishment regarding the "Chechen question". In the run-up to the First Chechnya War, liberal forces, on the one hand, sympathised with the Chechen population and its claim to self-determination and independence. On the other hand, the politico-military elite, which had emerged as a winner from the 1993 constitutional crisis, was strongly opposed to the idea of self-determination, considering it a threat to Russia's national security and territorial integrity.

At a local level in Chechnya, the developments of 1993 in Moscow caused frustration about what was perceived as a reactionary turn in the Russian democratic movement, dashing hopes of a peaceful resolution of the conflict surrounding Chechnya's political status. The de facto independent republic of Chechnya-Ichkeria was, through the new Russian Constitution (December 1993), again made an integral part of Russian territory, with the aim of re-establishing full control via co-optation of the local population and, if need be, by military force. Moreover, in a new, much more radical and accusatory programmatic article from around January 1995, Dudayev described the 1993 constitutional crisis as an authoritarian turning point in Russian politics, and the international community as complicit in this development (Dudayev, 1995).

Escalation of Internal Conflict

Russian attempts since 1991 to solve the "Chechen Problem" by (military) force and not by negotiation and political inclusion had a unifying effect on part of the Chechen national movement and unleashed a wave of protest. However, the early years of Chechnya's de facto independence were a time not only of mobilisation and unification, but also of a radicalisation of claims on all sides, and of a growing intra-Chechen power struggle between pro- and anti-Dudayev forces. As is pointed out by activists from Grozny, the support of the Chechen population for the Dudayev regime in the early 1990s was by no means as great as it is often portrayed; it was

at most 30 per cent (Project Memcope, 2021a).[2] This means that about 70 per cent of Chechens must have been indifferent to Dudayev, or openly rejected his "hard course" of full independence. Eyewitnesses on the different sides have their own memories of these events, which is also reflected in their descriptions and interpretations of the context in the 1990s. The narratives of the supporters of independent Chechnya-Ichkeria are nowadays banned from the official discourse in Chechnya. However, these memories are still alive and reproduced in parts of the society, for example, among members of the Chechen diaspora in Europe, which is generally opposed to the current political regime in the homeland. Part IV of this book focuses in particular on how Chechens in the diaspora remember the events of the early 1990s. In comparison with the "Ichkerian" narratives, the memory of the anti-Dudayev opposition from the early years of independence is even more marginalised in today's political debates, among the diaspora, but especially also in Chechnya itself, as it does not fit into the official politics and mnemonic narratives surrounding the personality cult of Akhmat Kadyrov. It is preserved only by a scant few. The chapter by Yavus Akhmadov, a former active member of the anti-Dudayev movement in the 1990s, is a case in point; his personal and polemical essay discusses the internal divisions within the Chechen population and the violent clashes between supporters and opponents of Dudayev.

The initially political intra-Chechen confrontation developed into a quasi-civil war between 1992 and 1994, during which Dudayev's supporters were opposed by forces of the parallel government of the so-called "Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic"[3] under Umar Avturkhanov (Vremenniy Soviet Chechenskoy Respubliki, 1994), supported by Moscow with military equipment and personnel. In December 1994, with the full-fledged military invasion of Russian troops, these intra-Chechen divisions receded into the background; however, after the cessation of hostilities and the conclusion of a ceasefire agreement in August 1996, the rifts opened again, and the political landscape in Chechnya has remained strongly fragmented.

---

2 Excerpts of the focus group discussion with women activists from Chechnya and Ingushetia (2021) are reproduced in "Appendix 2 – Communicative Memories" at the end of the book.

3 An illustration of programmatic documents of the "Provisional Council" (1994), including text excerpts, are reproduced in the section "Primary Materials" at the end of this part.

The Mobilising Role of Historical Memory

While, in the part of the book covering the period from 1986 to 1991, we saw that history and historical memory were used to consolidate the North Caucasians' right to self-determination, since 1991 they have mainly been in the service of political mobilisation on ethnic grounds in Chechnya proper and emphasise the difference and enmity between Grozny and Moscow. Chechen collective memories of past traumatic events play a key role in this process of mobilisation, and Dudayev skilfully instrumentalises these historical traumas and structural grievances, as expressed, for example, at the inauguration of the deportation memorial in 1994.

In general, the topics of the Stalinist purges and the deportation of 1944–1957 developed a strong mobilisation force in Chechnya. There was great fear among the population that the Russian attempts in the early 1990s to restore control over Chechnya by force could result in a repetition of the traumatic historical experience of the 1930s and 1940s. It is for this reason that after the entry of Russian troops at the end of 1994, the Chechens, including former members of the anti-Dudayev opposition, mobilised in a united fashion to "defend their homeland" (Project Memcope, 2021b). This reactivation of collective memory and the historical concern for survival and the defence of dignity vis-à-vis the (Soviet or Russian) state also played an important role in the Chechens finally gaining the upper hand in the First Chechnya War (1994–1996).

This instrumentalisation of the traumatic memory of the Stalinist past, successful in the context of the struggle for Chechnya's independence, had ambiguous consequences later on (see also Part IV of this book). The changing functions of memory, whereby the memory of one and the same event can act in a mobilising way and later be completely banned from public discourse, are discussed in the chapter by Murat Shogenov. Analysing the fate of the deportation memorial unveiled in the spring of 1994, he describes how Dzhokhar Dudayev openly invoked the traumatic experience of Stalin's deportation (1944–1957) to rally the Chechen people around the idea of independence and to intimidate those who might have chosen a more moderate path and avoided open confrontation with the Russians. However, the political exploitation of collective trauma meant that first the monument and then the memory of these tragic events, as

well as the practice of commemoration, fell victim to the memory politics of the new Chechen authorities in the 2000s, who wanted to get rid of any reminder of the events of the early years of Chechen de facto independence and of Dzhokhar Dudayev as the main actor associated with Chachnya's "Ichkerian" past.

Beyond its emotional impact on the unification and mobilisation of the Chechens, historical memory in the 1990s also performed important statebuilding functions, with local elites building up a new and specifically Chechen historiography and "cultural memory" (Assmann, 2008). Unlike during the previous period, the local historians of the 1990s no longer aimed to rehabilitate the Chechen historiography in the system, but rather used it in the service of mobilisation *against* the system. A powerful tool in this regard was the Chechens' narrative of the "300-years-long war"[4] against the colonial oppressors in Moscow (Gammer, 2002).

References

Assmann, Jan (2008) Communicative and Cultural Memory, in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning), Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 109–18.

Demos (2022) 30 Noyabrya 1991 Goda Sostoyalsya Referendum Ingushskogo Naroda Ob Obrazovanii Ingushskoy Respubliki v Sostave Rossii [On 30 November 1991 the Ingush People Held a Referendum

4 According to the historian Moshe Gammer, the "300-years-long war" narrative of the North Caucasian decolonisation movement points to nine peaks of resistance against Russian rule, going back to the time of Tsar Peter the Great: the "First Ghazawat" or "Holy War" under Imam Mansur (1785–1792), the revolt under Sheikh Mohammad of Mayortup (1824–1827), the "Great Gazawat" (1829–59) led by the Sufi Imams Ghazi Muhammad, Hamzat Bek and Imam Shamil, the uprising of 1863 inspired by the Polish revolt, the "Lesser Gazawat" (1877–78), the "Last Gazawat" (1918–21) in the independent "Mountainous Republic", the revolt of 1929–30 against Stalinist collectivisation and persecution of religion, the "Israilov Revolt" (1940–42) and, finally, the Second Chechnya War of the 1990s (Gammer, 2002: 121–22).

on the Establishment of the Ingush Republic within Russia]. *Demos*, June, <https://archive06.ru/30-noyabrya-1991-goda-sostoyalsya-referendum-in/> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Dudayev, Dzhokhar (1995?) Kontseptsiya Natsional'no-Gosudarstvennoy Politiki Chechenskoy Respubliki Ichkeria [Concept of National State Policy of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria], Original unpublished, draft available at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/543947143194220/posts/771371767118422> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Dudayev, Dzhokhar (1993) K Voprosu o Gosudarstvenno-Politicheskom Ustroystve Chechenskoy Respubliki [About the Political Structure of the Chechen Republic]. *Ichkeria* 38, April.

Gammer, Moshe (2002) Nationalism and History: Rewriting the Chechen National Past, in *Secession, History and the Social Sciences* (eds. Bruno Coppieters and Michel Huysseune), VUB Brussels University Press, Brussels, 117–40.

Project Memcope (2021a) *Focus Group Discussion with Women Activists*, Nalchik.

Project Memcope (2021b) *Focus Group Discussion with Memory Activists*, Grozny.

Vremenniy Soviet Chechenskoy Respubliki (1994) *Dokumenty i Materialy [Documents and Materials]*, Izdatel' Vremenniy Sovet Chechenskoy Respubliki, Znamenskoe.

Murat Shogenov

Construction, Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Memories: The Case of the Deportation Memorial in Chechnya (1994–2019)

Abstract: This article explores the dynamics of state memory politics in the Chechen Republic. The memorial to the victims of the deportation in the capital city of Grozny is used to illustrate the state use of collective trauma. Despite the two Russian-Chechen wars in the past three decades, the most traumatic memory of the Chechen people relates to the Stalinist deportation of the entire population to Central Asia in 1944. This chapter gives a brief overview of the origins of this deportation and explores why Chechens consider the deportation to be the most tragic event in their history, becoming an important part of their cultural and political identity. Further, it studies the life cycle of the public memory of the deportation, which clearly demonstrates how collective trauma has been instrumentalised for political purposes. The cycle begins with prohibition during the Soviet era, passes through the mobilisation for ideas of nationalism and independence during the collapse of the USSR, and ends with the demobilisation and new suppression of the deportation memory in the context of the re-centralisation of state power in Russia.

Keywords: Chechnya, Memory Politics, Contested Memories, Collective Trauma, Competitive Victimhood

Introduction

Issues of memory politics occupy an important place in peace and conflict studies. The concept of collective trauma has become a core element of identity and social order for many modern societies. On the one hand, collective memory of past tragic events and mistrust between former antagonistic groups is not a present-day issue, despite being a tool of community survival from the evolutionary standpoint (Hirschberger, 2018). However, on the other hand, the modern political framing of victim and perpetrator status often brings about the opposite effect, hindering the peaceful

development of the affected communities and construction of safe communications with other groups (Kapelchuk, 2021). Young and Sullivan (2016) point out that the growing role of competitive victimhood around the world is largely due to categories of contemporary global culture such as identity politics, crimes against humanity, collective reparations and apologies.

Alexander et al. (2004) defines collective trauma as cultural, emphasising that it is not so much the natural consequence of an event as the attribution of a traumatic meaning to the event, which is constructed not only by the group itself, but also with the involvement of other groups. Similarly, Bar-Tal et al. (2009) sees collective victimhood as a self-perceived sense based on the social construction of the meaning of a related harmful event, as a result of which the group can label itself as a victim. As the construction of collective victimhood is based on differentiation between groups, the process of victimisation is accompanied by mutual stigmatisation, which contributes to further exclusion between competing groups (Crocker and Major, 2003; Major and O'Brien, 2005; Frost, 2011; Stockwell, 2014). A premise for reconciliation can be the development of an inclusive collective victimhood that supposes both recognition of the uniqueness of a group's suffering and a shared experience of suffering with other groups (Sullivan et al., 2012). However, this is only possible in the context of the necessary structural, social, cultural, and political conditions. Assmann (2016) notes that it is not the past itself that affects society, but its representations, mediated by certain cultural and political contexts. Collective memories are created in the process of selecting and embodying information in cultural artefacts and symbolic acts – memorials, celebrations, and rituals. Collective trauma has a crisis of meaning (for both victims and perpetrators), and its representation as a constant reconstruction in the collective memory of the group in an attempt to give meaning, is discussed by Hirschberger (2018).

Thus, the retrospective nature of trauma implies a process of ongoing reconstruction in collective memory to give meaning to the past for the present and future of the community. Defining collective trauma as historical implies its embeddedness in intragroup narratives of community origins and continuity, in other words, in what they call their history. The socio-psychological features of transgenerational transmission of chosen trauma in post-conflict societies are explored by Volkan (2001). In other words, trauma is preserved and reconstructed in collective memory

because of the instrumental functions it can perform for a community. Theoretical debates are supplemented by empirical case studies of the instrumentalisation of traumatic memory and related grievances by social and political actors. Particularly, the role of grievances in civil wars in the political context of nationalism and ethnically based exclusion from power is explored by Cederman, Skrede Gleditsch and Buhaug (Cederman et al., 2013).

In relation to Chechnya, the most detailed studies of the role of historical memory in political mobilisation belong to Flemming (1998), Williams (2000), and Gammer, 2002. In Russia, the empirical literature is much scarcer, as the topic of the deportation was banned under Soviet rule and is currently being controverted. One of the first was Bugai's article "The Truth about the Deportation of the Chechen and Ingush Peoples" (1990). Much documented data was later revealed by Simchenko and Zemskov in their significant Russian study on the Stalinist deportation in the USSR (Simchenko, 1995; Zemskov, 2003).

This article contributes to the debate on the political instrumentalisation of memory in post-conflict societies, using the Chechen Republic as an example. Based on a combination of different analytical approaches it examines contemporary memorial policy in Chechnya as part of a wider Russian state policy of remembrance. It analyses how the (de)construction of the deportation memorial has been used to symbolically frame collective memories for the purpose of political (de)mobilization in a changing post-Soviet political context. The paper refers to primary data, such as field notes and oral histories recorded by the author, and social media discussions organised and conducted as part of the research project Memcope (Memory-Conflict-Peace) at the University of Bern (2018–2022). Further, it draws on secondary literature gained from independent and state media, research papers, reports of human rights organisations and documentary materials.

Historical Context I: Soviet Memory Politics

The depth of trauma caused by the experience of the deportation cannot be overstated. However, the high degree of traumatisation is also linked to the

policies that followed including forced oblivion implemented by the Soviet authorities. The social, cultural, and political discrimination of Chechens continued throughout the Soviet period until 1986.

On 23 February 1944, when the Second World War was still at its height, the entire Chechen and Ingush population was deported from their homeland to Central Asia on charges of collaboration with the Nazis and anti-Soviet activities. According to archival records, approximately one fourth of the estimated 500,000 deportees died during the deportation and in subsequent years (Bugai 1990). The deportees were placed in deportation camps under harsh conditions and were given the status of special settlers, without the right to change their place of residence.[1] In parallel to the Deportation, the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic was abolished, and its territories were incorporated into neighbouring republics (Simchenko, 1995).

The repatriation of the deported peoples became possible after Stalin's death in 1957. However, due to the inconsistency and resistance of the leadership of the Communist Party of the republic, the return process dragged on and caused many problems. Numerous conflicts occurred between the returnees and the new settlers, brought in by the authorities during the exciled Chechen absence. With the Chechens returning, the Russian-speaking population again began to leave Chechnya. The Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic was restored with new borders, and part of its former territories were never returned. Returnees were forbidden to resettle in mountainous areas, where the authorities would have difficulty in controlling them. In addition, many mountain villages had been destroyed in 1944 and would have had to be rebuilt. Thus, the authorities forced the returnees to sign agreements renouncing their former property to resettle on the plains in collective state farms (Williams, 2000). In addition, following 1957, distrust towards the Chechens was expressed in the remained since the deportation banning on religious and cultural practices. Furthermore, as the leading position in the republic's Communist Party was always held by an ethnic Russian, the Soviet authorities excluded ethnic Chechens from power (Gammer, 2002).

1 Women could escape the unfavourable status of "special settlers" by marrying a non-Chechen or non-Ingush man (author interview, 2021). The parents of the respondent – an Ingush woman – had themselves survived the deportation.

Nevertheless, the official policy of forgetting has not prevented the population from passing on the memory of the deportation to subsequent generations. The survivor's trauma of the deportation was reinforced by the grievance of the younger generations for not being able to mourn it. This is an example of "chosen trauma". According to Volkan (2001), communities unable to overcome victimisation or to avenge a collective trauma pass mourning and revenge onto the next generation. In this way, the collective "chosen trauma" creates determination in new generations to prevent a recurrence of the traumatic event. Communities who are concerned by this phenomenon respond differently to real or perceived threats than those who have not gone through traumatic experiences in the past (Volkan, 2001). This "chosen trauma" applies not only to Chechens, but to many other peoples deported in the USSR, specifically for Crimean Tatars (Nikolko, 2018).

> The memory of the repressed [deported] peoples must remain in the memory of our society for years to come. Our descendants should know the truth and never again allow such a terrible human catastrophe. (Eider Bulatov, Head of the Crimean Scientific Centre of Islamic Studies; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2019c)

> My father told me how many Chechens died during the deportation. The deportation is part of us – Chechens. (A young Chechen who grew up in the United States in a family of refugees; TV Rain, 2020)

Historical Context II: Post-Soviet Memory Politics

The period following the collapse of the USSR was marked by processes which had their origins in the social and political reforms of the final years of the Soviet state. These processes had diverse outcomes for society depending on the memory of the Soviet past in different parts of the disintegrated country. They had also significantly affected statebuilding trajectories including state memory policies as a means of statecraft.

The state policies of Perestroika and Glasnost pursued by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986–1988 led to significant changes in social and political life throughout the USSR. On Gorbachev's initiative, laws were passed that spurred the development of civil society and the emergence of non-state

memory actors (Druey, 2021). The cultivation of historical memory, which until then had been exclusively a domain of the state, gradually began to be de-monopolised. Alternative memories to those promoted by the state became very popular, and previously forbidden narratives, especially traumatic ones, have attracted the most interest (Gammer, 2002).

The "parade of sovereignties" in 1988–1991 led to the collapse of the USSR, followed by processes of state and sub-state building.[2] These processes reflected the "nationalist system change" in the post-Soviet space, to use Gilpin's definition (1981), a fundamental transformation of the main types of actors defining politics – the "top-down" principle of sovereignty is being replaced by a "bottom-up" logic, defining the people as the nation, and as the source of political legitimacy. Along with the struggle for independence in the former Soviet republics, many conflicts for power have erupted in the autonomous republics of the North Caucasus, and in Checheno-Ingushetia in particular. During these conflicts, civil society, non-state memory actors,[3] and politicians formed alliances that claimed power on behalf of the people. In the case of Chechnya, the National Congress of the Chechen People (NCNC/OKChN), led by Dzhokhar Dudayev, became the leading political actor in the local power struggle and in the subsequent conflict with Moscow about independence.

The local conflict for power in Chechnya is an example of a struggle between two types of actors (and corresponding concepts of political legitimacy): those who acted "from below", the members of the national movement who felt discriminated in power and claimed political participation, and those in power, who acted "from above" as part of the Communist Party apparatus.[4] However, due to the post-Soviet institutional disorder, both parties lacked legitimacy. This situation has contributed to the political instrumentalisation of traumatic memory and grievances linked to the Soviet past. Among other factors, this concept of activating historical

2 The "parade of sovereignties" is a common term for a series declarations of sovereignty made by the Soviet republics in 1988–1991 that resulted in the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

3 By non-state memory actors, the study refers to history enthusiasts, local historians, independent researchers, individuals, and associations that emerged during the Gorbachev's reforms.

4 For the notion of conflicting political legitimacies see Cederman et al., 2013.

memory as a means of mobilisation benefited Dudayev: he was elected president in 1991, and soon after declared independence from Moscow.

The new government's memory policy continued to deconstruct the Soviet view of what happened in the past, replacing it with politically mobilising narratives about the glorious past of the Chechen people. This was expressed, among others, in the renaming of streets, squares, airports etc. Although tensions between Moscow and Grozny increased after 1991, Dudayev's government did not initially enjoy sufficient support from most of the Chechen population. Dudayev and his comrades thus urgently needed support to forge unity among the divided population; seeking for more legitimation they opted for the deportation as a traumatic episode from the past. The memory of the deportation was a powerful instrument of mobilisation, all the more that many witnesses who had gone through the tragedy were still living (Gammer, 2002)

The Construction of Memory

To mobilise the traumatic memory of the deportation, the new government resorted to memorial practices which in many ways resembled those of the Soviet period. In exchange for embodying the forbidden memory in a monument with a carefully chosen symbolic framing, the authorities were eventually able to win broad political support from the population.

The Memorial of the Deportation was a major symbol of the rule of Dzhokhar Dudayev. It was unveiled at the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the tragic event, on 23 February 1994. In the central part of the memorial was a hand holding a dagger, and in front of it is an open marble Koran. Ancient tombstones from cemeteries destroyed throughout Chechnya, which were used to build roads during the deportations, were located around. The symbolism of the tombstones in the memorial is that in this way the "dignity [of the dead] was restored" (Smith, 1998). On the wall behind was an inscription quoting Dudayev in Chechen using the old Latin alphabet: "We will not weep, we will not weaken, we will not forget".[5]

---

5 Memorial zhertvam deportatsii chechentsev i ingushey 1944 [The Memorial to the victims of the deportation of Chechens and Ingush peoples in 1944]. Sakharov Center, <https://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/pam/?t=pam&id=135> (accessed 18 January 2023).

Despite the appeal to the tragic event of the Deportation, the mobilising and militaristic message of the memorial is evident. The hand rising from the ground would seem to symbolise the revival of the Chechen people, but the dagger warns of a readiness for armed resistance, and the marble Koran gives the sacred right to do so. The symbolism of the memorial is not so much about mourning or forgiveness, as it is about a promise to remember, to take revenge or to resist by any means necessary. The location, on which the memorial was built in 1994, was also symbolic. Before the Bolshevik Revolution, it was the site of a monument dedicated to one of the Tsarist conquerors of the Caucasus, General Yermolov. The street was named after Tsar Alexander II, during whose rule the Russian Empire completed its conquest of the Caucasus. Yermolov lived at this place during the construction of the Grozny fortress.[6] For this construction, several Chechen villages and cemeteries were razed to the ground (Avtorkhanov, 1998).[7] On the fence of the monument to Yermolov there was an inscription: "No people are more meanness and cunning. Yermolov of Chechens" (Kavtaradze, 1977).

The monument was demolished in 1922, after the Bolsheviks finally came to power, but was erected again during the deportation in 1949. Although after Stalin's death the inscription was erased, the Yermolov monument remained in place, with returning Chechens repeatedly trying to destroy it (by legal and illegal means) – without success. It was only in 1989, at the end of Soviet rule, that the monument was finally demolished. Another symbolic value of the deportation memorial was the fact, that it was erected at the place of the former NKVD office, where during the Stalin's Great Terror in 1930s people were imprisoned, tortured and shot. Further, the borders of the street, where the memorial was erected in 1994 were made of ancient tombstones from Chechen cemeteries, which were destroyed during the deportations (Ponomareva, 2012).

It is therefore not surprising that the monument had a high symbolic value in the eyes of the Chechen population.

---

6 The word "Grozny" means "Terrible" in Russian. In summer 1996, at the end of the First Chechen War, the city was renamed Dzhokhar-Ghala, in honour of Dzhokhar Dudayev who had been killed by Russian troops in April 1996.

7 General Yermolov devised a plan for the conquest of the Caucasus, which included building fortresses, destroying rebellious villages, and destroying their inhabitants.

> The memorial is a symbol that we have survived, came back, and will always revive, because our roots – our fathers and mothers – are in our land and not in another's land! […] The hand that rises from the ground expresses exactly this idea: we have escaped our graves, risen as the mythical bird Phoenix, from the ashes. (Usam Baisayev, member of the human rights NGO "Memorial"; Baisayev, 2008)

The example of the memorial erected in 1994 thus shows, how the "chosen trauma" of the Deportation, narratives of victimisation and related fears were embodied and used by new political elites, to mobilise the Chechen society in the face of escalating conflict with Moscow.

The Deconstruction

During the first Russian-Chechen War in 1994–1996, the memorial was badly damaged and had to be rebuilt after the war. During the second war in 1999–2009, it was again significantly damaged, but not repaired this time. The fate of the memorial in the post-conflict Chechnya has become again linked to a changing political context. New authorities began to develop new politics of memory in which the deportation shall not be the main tragedy in the history of the Chechen people. In 2007, Ramzan Kadyrov was officially appointed President of the Chechen Republic. The first attempt to fully deconstruct the memorial was undertaken in 2008, when the authorities tried to move it to the outskirts of the city, to an area close to the main Russian military base at Khankala village. Initially, they promised that the main element of the memorial – the hand with the dagger – would be preserved, and that the memorial would be displayed in a significant new museum in honour of the victims of different kinds of political repression. This would also be a place to perform rituals and prayers.

> From the very beginning, this [memorial] complex was built in an inconvenient place […] This is a tragic date for the entire Chechen people, and its past should be known to our younger generation. Therefore, the complex should be grandiose with all conveniences for religious rites, excursions, and other events. (Ramzan Kadyrov; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2008d)

However, local media as well as local and Russian civil society organisations, such as the Committee for the National Salvation of Chechnya and the Human Rights Centre "Memorial", strongly criticised this decision,

for several reasons. Firstly, they stated that the two coinciding dates – the Day of Deportation, mournful for Chechens, and the Defender of the Fatherland Day, which is a holiday celebrated by the Russian military base – could not be celebrated at the same time and in the same space.[8] In addition, the proposed venue was located next to a large rubbish dump. Well-known Chechens and public figures have openly stated in interviews that the authorities' attempt to move the memorial is a betrayal of the memory of their ancestors.

> Destruction of this monument means that the past is forgotten and evil triumphs […] Tsarist General Yermolov destroyed about 42 villages to create the fortress of Grozny. There was a cemetery on the place where the memorial is now located. (Writer Murad Naskhoyev; Regnum Agency, 30 May 2008)

Many residents of Grozny agreed with this concern raised by non-governmental organisations and civic activists.

> What is happening cannot be called by anything other than barbarism, blasphemy and an open mockery of the memory of people […] These [tombstones] were brought here from all over Chechnya […], so that our descendants know about the atrocity of the Stalin's regime and remember tens and hundreds of thousands of victims of this monstrous action. (66-year-old resident of Grozny; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2008b)

Some Chechens were convinced that the authorities were concerned with a persistent association of the deportation memorial in public view with Dudayev and the linked memory of independence.

> The only reason for the demolition of this monument, in my opinion, is that it was erected by Dzhokhar Dudayev. Those in power today […] decided to destroy with this memorial the memory of people from those times, but they will not succeed. (Resident of Grozny; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2008b)

An online vote was held against the authorities' decision to dismantle the memorial (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2008c). One of the leaders of this protest was the well-known Chechen human rights activist Natalia Estemirova. At the time she was head of the Public Council of Grozny. As a result of the

8 The Day of the Defender of the Fatherland is a federal holyday in Russia celebrated on 23 February. Before the fall of the USSR, the day was called the Soviet Army and Navy Day.

protests, the deconstruction of the memorial was stopped; however, the authorities surrounded it with a high fence – allegedly because of the security risk – with the only access passing through the closed area of a nearby state institution.

The Contested "Day of Remembrance and Mourning" (2011)

In 2008, Chechen troops as part of the Russian federal forces was actively engaged in the conflict in South Ossetia against Georgia. Following the conflict and in response to criticism from the international community, memory politics became a consistent part of Moscow's domestic and foreign policy. In 2009, the "Commission to Counteract Falsification of History to the Detriment of the Russian Federation" was created, at the initiative of the then president, Dmitry Medvedev. According to Medvedev, a campaign to falsify Russian history was launched by Western states in the 2000s, and these attempts "are becoming increasingly harsh, vicious, aggressive" (RIA Novosti, 19 May 2009). In new textbooks on Russian history the Stalinist mass repressions and terror appeared to be justified as necessary and adequate for the time.[9]

Meanwhile, the local regime under Ramzan Kadyrov continued to consolidate its power, with strong support from Moscow. The local authorities successfully cracked down on potential political opponents and intensified the persecution of civil society representatives (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2008a). In 2009, Natalya Estemirova, who had led a protest against the demolition of the memorial in Grozny the year before, was kidnapped and killed by unknown assailants. In parallel, the personality cult of Ramzan's father, Akhmat Kadyrov, who was killed in a bomb attack on 9 May in 2004, was actively promoted as part of the statebuilding policies in Chechnya. In 2010, Ramzan Kadyrov had declared 23 February as the official "Day of Remembrance and Mourning". However, in 2011, after his re-election as head of the republic, Kadyrov moved this official holiday to 10 May calling it the "Day of Remembrance and Sorrow of the Peoples of the Chechen

9 An example of the reinterpretation of the Soviet past is presented by the so-called "textbook by Filippov" on Russian history in 1900–1945 (Filippov and Danilov, 2009). One of the critics of the textbook, historian Alexey Miller, noted that it "fosters patriotism, understood as loyalty not even to the state, but to the authorities" (Miller, 2009).

Republic". In fact, it was the day of the funeral of his father Akhmat Kadyrov. Thus, in his view, the old and new mourning dates would not interfere with the celebration of federal Russian holidays.

> There are many tragic dates in the history of our people. The Stalin deportation of the Chechen people on 23 February 1944, the burnt-out inhabitants of the village of Khaibakh, the hundreds of thousands of civilians who died in the first and second military campaigns on the territory of the Republic, the tragic death on 9 May 2004 of our first President, Akhmat Haji Kadyrov. These are tragic dates in the history of the Chechen people, but I do not want these days of mourning to coincide with the all-state Russian holidays. (Ramzan Kadyrov; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2011)

As a result of this decision, any manifestation of mourning on 23 February was banned from public life. In public views, the postponement of mourning from 23 February to 10 May was perceived as an attempt to erase the events of February 1944 from popular memory, and a manifestation of the growing cult of personality of Akhmat Kadyrov.

> In my opinion, the establishment of 10 May as a National Day of Remembrance and Sorrow is a similar attempt to falsify our history […] I do not think that all these innovations will make our people forget their past and the nationwide tragedy of 1944. (Representative of a local NGO; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2011)

Some Chechens claimed that Remembrance and Mourning Day was effectively replaced by mourning for Akhmat Kadyrov.

> This day was considered a mourning day even after Dzhokhar Dudayev announced in 1994 that our republic would no longer live in the mourning […] Authorities are simply deceiving us by banning one and imposing another date. The only thing they want to achieve is to make people forget the tragedy of 1944. (Resident of Chechnya; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2015)

The Reconstruction

In the 2010s, Ramzan Kadyrov continued to enjoy the full support of the Moscow Kremlin, and vice-versa.[10] In early February 2014, on the eve of the

10 In 2014, Kadyrov actively backed the annexation of Crimea, with detachments of allegedly Kadyrov's volunteers participating in fighting on the side of the rebels in eastern Ukraine (Ivshina, 2014).

70th anniversary of the deportation and of the 10th anniversary of Akhmat Kadyrov's death, the old Deportation Memorial was finally fully dismantled. The ancient tombstones were moved to become part of a new memorial to the victims of terrorism. Explaining the decision, the authorities again referred to the fact that the memorial needed more space for mass visits.

> There was not enough room for mass events, even for parking. Therefore, it was decided to move the tombstones to the central part of the city. (Ramzan Kadyrov; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2014a)

In 2014, no active public protests took place, as it had been the case in 2008. Critical voices from civil society were harshly punished by the authorities. For instance, Ruslan Kutayev, head of the NGO "Assembly of the Peoples of the Caucasus" and representative of the Human Rights Centre "Memorial" in Chechnya, in February 2014 organised an academic conference in Grozny and publicly criticised the relocation of the memorial and the ban on mourning events on 23 February. He was then arrested and sentenced to four years in prison, officially on charges of drug possession (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2014b). However, this time there was only latent indignation among the residents of Chechnya.

> People are outraged, but no one is going to protest openly because they realize that this is going to cause serious trouble. And our public organizations, which used to make statements on the occasion, are now silent. (Resident of Grozny; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2014a)

The "Memorial to Those Who Died Fighting Terrorism" on Akhmat Kadyrov Square was inaugurated on 9 May 2010. The memorial consists of thirty-eight black stones, on the polished side of which are carved the names of persons who were killed during the Russian counter-terrorism operation in Chechnya. Among the honoured are policemen, members of the clergy and heads of municipal administrations. The centre of this new memorial is occupied by a giant 70-ton black monolith surrounded since 2014 by the ancient tombstones from the deconstructed deportation memorial. At the foot of the monolith is a carved inscription in Russian: "May justice prevail. Akhmat Kadyrov". Around this central monolith there are also five smaller stones on which are carved the names of the officers and horsemen of the Chechen cavalry regiment, which had fought on the side of the Russian Empire during the First World War.

In 2019, the memorial was moved again, but this already caused only little or no public outcry at all. After 2014, people stopped perceiving the official memorial as a suitable symbol for commemorating the deportation.

> When there was the memorial, then yes, it mattered. Now they [the tombstones] are just rocks that can be moved from place to place and put wherever officials want. (Resident of Grozny; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2014a)

As the example of the reconstruction shows, the authorities have found a way to conceal the memory of the deportation by disguising the traumatic memory with the glorious one, without pushing it out of the central part of the city. While the old memorial was firmly associated in public opinion with the "Chechen nationalism" and Dzhokhar Dudayev, the new one is supposed to be associated with "Chechen patriotism" and Akhmat Kadyrov (who had sacrificed his life for justice and peace in Chechnya and Russia). Thus, the local population sees the new memorial as part of the cult of personality of Akhmat Kadyrov, while the authorities argue that the previous deportation memorial was an aggressive symbol and did not promote peace.

> the old deportation memorial suffered during the wars, it had aggressive symbols, rhetoric… the death of Kadyrov is also a tragedy, he is our father [of the people] […] February 23 is an all-Russian holiday, we also want to [celebrate it] […] For mourning there will be one day [10 May]. (Dzhambulat Umarov, Minister of National Policy, Foreign Relations, Press and Information of the Chechen Republic; TV Rain, 2020)

Residents of Chechnya point out that the new memorial is not embodying the collective memory of the tragedy in the same way the old deportation memorial has done. In their opinion, the new memorial honours only soldiers and other war professionals but does not pay tribute to the Chechen people, including civilians who suffered during the war. Thus, in addition to the replacement of the memory of the deportation by the memory of the recent Chechen Wars, recognition of the later has become exclusive.

> […] the memorial, even the united one, must [tribute] to all people – civilians, women, children, not just to military. (TV Rain, 2020)

Conclusion

In summary, the collective memory of the deportation has become closely associated with the memorial built during the Dudayev term and is therefore linked to the corresponding memory of the war for independence. The actual regime in Chechnya considers this memory as a threat and tries to erase any associations with the period from public space. Thus, the memory of the deportation fell victim to the new memory politics of the local authorities due to its previous political instrumentalisation. As a result, the memory is today hidden under the surface of the new, glorious memory of the conflicts of the past. Further, it is subordinated to the cult of personality of Akhmat Kadyrov and the policy of loyalty of Russia, which distances itself from the personality of Dzhokhar Dudayev who himself stands for an ideology of Chechen self-sufficiency and independence. In fact, the memory of the deportation has today again been banned from public space, as it was in Soviet times, albeit in a new way. Moreover, this time it is supplemented by a new trauma of the exclusive commemoration of the victims of the second Chechen War.

However, the exclusion of the traumatic experience affected not only the Chechens themselves, but also other victims of the events described above, whose memory also remains overshadowed and has not been considered within the scope of this article. The transgenerational trauma of the deportation of the Chechens has become a transgenerational perpetrator stigma imposed on Russian residents who experienced the events of the Dudayev era of the struggle for independence. Essentially the entire Russian-speaking population was forced to abandon their homes and flee the republic, paying for the crimes of the Soviet state. To this day the voice of these victims remains unheard both by ordinary Chechens, carriers of an exclusive sense of collective victimhood, and by the Russian state and its Chechen authorities, that prefers promoting a narrative of triumph over terrorism instead of remembering the civilian victims of violent conflict. Without recognition and mutual inclusion of the traumatic experiences of all victims of the conflict events in Chechnya it is impossible to achieve the reconciliation necessary for a non-violent peacekeeping both within the republic and between Chechens and Russians, as well as preventing future political actors from attempting political instrumentalisation of collective traumas of the past.

References

Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. (2004) Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma, in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, University of California Press, Oakland, 1–30.

Assmann, Aleida (2016) *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, Fordham University Press, New York.

Avtorkhanov, Abdurakhman (1998) Kavkaz, Kavkazskaiya voyna i imam Shamil [The Caucasus, the Caucasian War, and Imam Shamil], *Vainakh segodniia*, 1–3(7–9), 23–31.

Baisayev, Usam (2008) Gde budushchee nashey pamyati? [Where Is the Future of Our Memory?], *DOSh Journal*, Moscow-Grozny, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200120052505/http://www.evartist.narod.ru/text19/115.htm> (accessed 18 January 2023).

Bar-Tal, Daniel, et al. (2009) A Sense of Self-Perceived Collective Victimhood in Intractable Conflicts. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 91(874), 229–258.

Bugai, Nikolai F. (1990) Pravda o deportatsii chechenskogo i ingushskogo narodov [The Truth about the Deportation of the Chechen and Ingush Peoples]. *Voprosy Istorii*, 7, 38–39.

Cederman, Lars-Erik, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Halvard Buhaug (2013) *Inequality, Grievances, and Civil War*, Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Crocker, Jennifer, and Brenda Major (2003) The Self-Protective Properties of Stigma: Evolution of a Modern Classic. *Psychological Inquiry*, 14(3–4), 232–237.

Filippov, Aleksandr V. and Aleksandr A. Danilov (eds.) (2009) *Istoriya Rossii, 1900–1945 gg. 11 klass: uchebnik dlya obshcheobrazovatelnykh uchrezhdenii [History of Russia, 1900–1945. Textbook for 11th Grade Students of Secondary Education Institutions]*, Prosvesheniye, Moscow.

Demirel, Cagla and Johan Eriksson (2020) Competitive Victimhood and Reconciliation: The Case of Turkish–Armenian Relations. *Identities*, 27, 537–556.

Druey, Cécile (2021) Memory – Mobilisation – War: The Case of Chechnya (1986–1994). *25th Annual World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities* (New York, 5–8 May 2021). PANEL

K7: Historical Memory and Conflicts of the Present in Ukraine and the Caucasus: The Dynamics of Radicalisation and Peacebuilding.

Flemming, William (1998) The Deportation of the Chechen and Ingush Peoples: A Critical Examination, in *Russia and Chechnya: The Permanent Crisis* (ed. Ben Fowkes), Palgrave Macmillan, London, 65–86.

Frost, David M. (2011) Social Stigma and Its Consequences for the Socially Stigmatized, *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 5(11), 824–839.

Gammer, Moshe (2002) Nationalism and History: Rewriting the Chechen National Past, in *Secession, History and the Social Sciences* (eds. Bruno Coppieters and Michael Huysseune), VUB Brussels University Press, Brussels, 117–140.

Giesen, Bernhard, et al. (2004) The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity, in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, University of California Press, Oakland, 112–154.

Gilpin, Robert (1981) *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Hirschberger G. (2018) Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1441, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441> (accessed 18 January 2023).

Istambulov, Kazbek (2008) *Periferiya pamyati, ili "ekstraditsiya" memoriala [Periphery of Memory, or "Extradition" Memorial]*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080228233715/http://www.nohchi.vu/authorcolumn/detail.php?ID=35719> (accessed 18 January 2023).

Ivshina, Olga (2014) *Chechentsi na vostoke Ukrainy: rassledovaniye Bi-bi-si [The Chechens of the East of Ukraine: A BBC Investigation]*, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/05/140529_donetsk_chechens_ivshina> (accessed 18 January 2023).

Kapelchuk, Kseniya (2021) Historical Trauma between Event and Ethics: Aleida Assmann's Theory in the Context of Trauma Studies, *Electronic Journal of Folklore* 83, <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2021.83.kapelchuk> (accessed 18 January 2023)>.

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2008a) MVD Chechni: prichastnost Iamadaevykh k pokhishcheniyu i ubiystvu podtverdili v batal'one "Vostok" [The Chechen Ministry of Internal Affairs: Yamadaev's Involvement in the Kidnapping and Murder Was Confirmed by the "Vostok" Battalion],

29 April, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/137730/> (accessed 18 January 2023).
Kavkazskiy Uzel (2008b) V Chechne demontiruiyut Memorial pamiyati zhertv deportattsii [Chechnya Dismantled the Memorial in Memory of the Victims of the Deportation], 29 May, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/137083> (accessed 18 January 2023).
Kavkazskiy Uzel (2008c) Protiv perenosa pamyatnika zhertvam stalinskikh repressii v Chechne mozhno progolosovat [The Relocation of the Monument to Victims of Stalinist Repression in Chechnya Can Be Voted Down], 6 June, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/139473/> (accessed 18 January 2023).
Kavkazskiy Uzel (2008d) V stolitse Chechni obsudili proyekty memoriala zhertvam deportatsii [In the Capital of Chechnya Projects of a Memorial to the Victims of Deportation Were Discussed], 25 June, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/138381/> (accessed 18 January 2023)
Kavkazskiy Uzel (2011) V Chechne uchrezhden Den pamiyati i skorbi narodov respubliki [Chechnya Establishes the Day of Remembrance and Sorrow of the Peoples of the Republic], 11 April, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/183560> (accessed 18 January 2023).
Kavkazskiy Uzel (2014a) V Groznom zavershaetsiya demontazh memoriala zhertvam deportattsii [The Dismantling of the Memorial to Victims of the Deportation Is Completed in Grozny], 19 February, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/238406/> (accessed 18 January 2023).
Kavkazskiy Uzel (2014b) Sud v Chechne prigovoril Ruslana Kutaeva k chetyrem godam lisheniiya svobody [Court in Chechnya Sentenced Ruslan Kutayev to Four Years in Prison], 7 July, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/245433/> (accessed 18 January 2023).
Kavkazskiy Uzel (2015) Zhiteli Chechni zayavili o podmene Dnya pamyati i skorbi traurom po Akhmatu Kadyrovu [Residents of Chechnya Claim that the Day of Remembrance and Sorrow Is Replaced with a Mourning for Akhmat Kadyrov], 10 May, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/262046> (accessed 18 January 2023).
Kavkazskiy Uzel (2019a) Kak Kadyrov 23 fevralya ustroil iz pominok prazdnik [How Kadyrov Made a Celebration out of the Wake on 23 February], 22 February, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/298148/> (accessed 18 January 2023).

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2019b) Demontazh memoriala bezrazlichie vlastey k pamiyati zhertv deportattsii [The Dismantling of the Memorial Highlighted the Authorities' Indifference to the Memory of the Victims of the Deportation], 7 October, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/340934/> (accessed 18 January 2023).

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2019c) Deportattsiya narodov Severnogo Kavkaza v istoricheskoy pamiyati i politicheskom nastoiyashchem. Onlayn diskussiia [The Deportation of the Peoples of the North Caucasus in Historical Memory and Political Present. Online Discussion], 31 October, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/forum/online_topics/6473> (accessed 18 January 2023).

Kavtaradze, Aleksandr G. (1977) *General A.P. Ermolov [The General A.P. Ermolov]*, Prioksky publishing house, Tula.

Major, Brenda, and Laurie T. O'Brien (2005). The Social Psychology of Stigma, *Annual Review of Psychology*, 56, 393–421.

Miller, Aleksei I. (2009) Rossiia: Vlast i istoriia [Russia: Power and History], *Pro et Contra*, 3–4, 6–23.

Nikolko, Milana (2018) Collective Trauma, Memories, and Victimization Narratives in Modern Strategies of Ethnic Consolidation: The Crimean Tatar Case, in *Crisis and Change in Post-Cold War Global Politics* (eds. Erica Resende, Dovilė Budrytė and Didem Buhari-Gulmez), Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 69–93.

Noor, Masi, et al. (2012) When Suffering Begets Suffering: The Psychology of Competitive Victimhood between Adversarial Groups in Violent Conflicts, *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 16(4), 351–374.

Ponomareva, Izabella Z. (eds.) (2012) *Grozniy. Gorod, kakim my tebiya pomnim [Grozny. The city as We Remember You]*, The Charitable Foundation for the Support of Chechen Literature, Moscow.

Regnum Agency (2008) Prodolzhenie operatsii "Chechevitsa": chechentsy govoryat o snose pamyatnika zhertvam repressii [Follow-Up of the Operation "Chechevitsa": Chechens Report About the Demolition of the Monument to the Victims of the Repressions], 30 May, <https://regnum.ru/news/society/1007759.html> (accessed 18 January 2023).

RIA Novosti (2009), RF sozdaet komissiyu po protivodeystviyu popytkam falsifikatsii istorii [Russian Federation Is Setting Up a Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History], 19 May, <https://ria.ru/20090519/171517015.html> (accessed 18 January 2023).

Simchenko, Yuri B. (1995) *Deportatsiya narodov SSSR. 1930–1950 gody [The Deportation of the Peoples of the USSR. 1930–1950]*, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.

Smith, Sebastian (1998) *Allah's Mountains: Politics and War in the Russian Caucasus*, Tauris, London.

Stockwell, Jill (2014) Stigma, Trauma and the Social Forces Shaping Memory Transmission in Argentina, *PORTAL*, 11(1), <https://doi.org/10.5130/portal.v11i1.3775> (accessed 18 January 2023)

Sullivan, Daniel, et al. (2012) Competitive Victimhood as a Response to Accusations of Ingroup Harm Doing, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(4), 778–795.

TV Dozhd (2020) *Zapreshchennaya pamyat' chechenskikh voin. Dokumentalniy film Anny Nemzer* [*The Banished Memory of the Chechen Wars. Documentary by Anna Nemzer*], <https://youtu.be/O1RF-py72yI> (accessed 18 January 2023).

Volkan, Vamik D. (2001) Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity, *Group Analysis*, 34(1), 79–97.

Williams, Brian Glyn (2000) Commemorating "The Deportation" in Post-Soviet Chechnya: The Role of Memorialization and Collective Memory in the 1994–1996 and 1999–2000 Russo-Chechen Wars, *History and Memory*, 12(1), 101–134.

Young, Isaac F., and Daniel Sullivan (2016) Competitive Victimhood: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature, *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 11, 30–34.

Zemskov, Viktor N. (2003) *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR, 1930–1960 [Special Settlers in the USSR, 1930–1960]*, Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.

Yavus Akhmadov

Chechen Civil Society Resistance to the Dudayev Regime in "Ichkeria" during the Chechen Crisis

Abstract: This essay, written by a contemporary witness who was himself involved in the events, focuses on the history of resistance by Chechen democratic forces against the Dudayev regime in the Chechen Republic in 1991–1996. It outlines some of the features of the post-Perestroika development of the republic and its society, and discusses the struggle between the various political forces and the seizure of power by General Dzhokhar Dudayev's government in Chechnya. The essay describes the development of what is perceived as the democratic opposition to the regime, which relied first on political means and later on armed force. It also shows how the opposition created state power structures, initially in the "liberated" districts and then, upon defeating the combatants in 1994–1995, on the whole territory of Chechnya. According to the author, the defeat of the civilian democratic opposition in Chechnya in August 1996 was mainly the result of political games played by the then Kremlin leadership, which decided to temporarily withdraw from Chechnya and hand power in the republic over to the leaders of the combatants.

Keywords: Chechnya, political parties, democratic opposition, Chechen civil war, First Chechnya War (1994, 96), Khasavyurt agreements

Introduction

In the varied and thorough historiography of the "Chechen crisis", as the conflict in Chechnya is called in a comprehensive sense, one important question remains unanswered: how Chechen society organised civil and then armed protest against the tyranny and violence of the Dudayev regime. Both in Russia and around the world, a great deal of research on Chechnya in the 1990s and early twenty-first century has been dedicated to the conflict between the Dudayev–Maskhadov separatist regimes and the Russian state in the era of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. Paradoxically, in the historiography of Chechnya, according to A. Osmayev, the

greatest difficulty is not a lack of material, but rather "an abundance of published material on various aspects of the 'Chechen crisis'" (Osmayev, 2010: 4).

I believe that the story of the heroic resistance of large parts of the Chechen population, led by political parties and grassroots movements, against the tyranny of what was, in the author's opinion, a criminal regime in the 1990s, is worthy of more scholarly attention. It is a pity that this topic has been so neglected in recent years. I would like to draw the attention of specialists to this interesting phenomenon, because "our history" is not over – the popular resistance movement was and remains deprived of international recognition, while criminal regimes traded the interests of their countries, and continue to do so with the tacit public consent of most of today's democratic states.

It is widely accepted that any historical study is influenced by the personality of the researcher, his or her ideological and political opinions and his or her civic position. In the present case, the author, the historian Yavus Akhmadov, was directly involved in key events of the period in question in the Chechen Republic, on the side of the political forces that he believed served the interests of the nation and society. As a researcher and politician, he has personally "lived through" the bloody Chechen crisis, including the two wars, which obviously results in a certain bias.

The period of the Chechen crisis was characterised by popular unrest, the collapse of local power structures, the economy and society, a confrontation between society and the political regime, two wars and the beginning of post-conflict reconstruction. According to the author, this period started in August 1991 (with the attempted coup of the *GKChP* – State Committee on the State of Emergency) and ended in 2003–2005, when the new Chechen constitution was adopted (23 March 2003) and presidential and parliamentary elections were held (on 5 October 2003 and 27 November 2005 respectively). Accordingly, the present study focuses on the period between autumn 1991, when Dudayev's supporters seized power and a democratic opposition was formed in Chechnya, and August–September 1996, when the guerrilla forces finally prevailed and, along with the local and Russian authorities and the army, expelled all dissenting voices from the region.

The Beginning of the Chechen Crisis, the Democratisation of Society and the Seizure of Power in Chechnya by Political Extremists (1991–1992)

In a nutshell, the author's view of the processes that took place on the eve of the overthrow of the local government in Chechnya and the resulting tug-of-war in society is as follows: during Perestroika, the majority of Chechen-Ingush society (which had undergone significant social modernisation in the twentieth century) supported ideas of "prudent autonomy" and wanted to achieve long overdue political sovereignty and economic independence (either within Russia or in an alliance with it). But they wanted this to happen at a reasonable pace. That is why a moderate segment of society first tried to organise itself to some extent and restore the shattered political stability. However, the then leader of the Chechen-Ingush Republic (ChIR), Doku Zavgayev, and his inner circle were not up to the task. Thus, the old, sluggish government in Grozny, which faltered at the end of August 1991, was overthrown relatively easily. Here, too, as the researcher I. Sigauri correctly noted, a whole range of socio-economic, socio-political and even psychological reasons came into play (Sigauri, 2002: 37–39).

From 18 to 21 August 1991, as is well known, there was an attempted coup in Moscow and for a few days, power in the Soviet Union formally passed to the pro-communist State Committee for a State of Emergency (*GKChP*). Two days later in Chechnya, against a backdrop of internal political tensions and evidence that the old government was beginning to buckle, a crowd, consisting mainly of representatives of the rural and urban grass roots and aptly named "*dzhokharbins*" (radical supporters of the retired General Dzhokhar Dudayev associated with the political group United Congress of the Chechen People – *OKChN*) marched to the central square in Grozny. Thus began the "Chechen Revolution", as political adventurers and populists seized power from the hands of the weakened old elite.

Doku Zavgaev, chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Chechen Republic – that is, the de facto head of the local communist government – was publicly accused, not by Soviet Moscow but rather by Russian Moscow, of supporting the August 1991 coup. The real goal was probably to get him to make concessions in the dispute over the oil fields near Grozny.

However, in Chechnya-Ingushetia proper, Zavgaev had serious political rivals, above all groups with a Communist Party background or links to illegal entrepreneurs. Zavgaev's power was also challenged, to some extent, by local radical nationalists and "street intellectuals" of all kinds (Sigauri, 2002: 9–14; History of Chechnya from Ancient Times to the Present Day, 2008: 725–726).

The first days of the Chechen Revolution in autumn 1991 demonstrated that the *OKChN* led by Dzhokhar Dudayev and his peculiar "political commissar", Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, was unable to overthrow the government using its own resources, for, however hard Dudayev's functionaries tried, they failed to produce noticeable growth of a real popular movement. Under these conditions, Dudayev's patrons among the political elite in Moscow tried to secure the transition of power in Chechnya-Ingushetia from the hostile "old communist nomenklatura" to the "new democratic forces" using force and other means.

By giving an order to the crowds of rural and urban marginals that swarmed into the centre of Grozny, the leaders of the *OKChN* turned this flow of unemployed people against the Zavgaev administration and the Chechen Supreme Soviet. On 6 September 1991, armed with sticks and pieces of metal, Dudayev's supporters (*dudayevtsy*) violently broke up a session of the Supreme Soviet in the House of Political Education in Grozny; this seems to have been the last session held (Gakayev, 1999: 164–165).

Subsequently, the leaders of the (still Soviet) Russian Republic (*RSFSR*) demonstrated their support for those who had seized power. Ruslan Khasbulatov, Gennady Burbulis, Mikhail Poltoranin and others from Yeltsin's immediate entourage arrived in Grozny and announced the creation of a Provisional Supreme Council (or Soviet), which included some deputies from the dissolved government of the Chechen Republic. The Provisional Soviet was not only to lead the republic during a transitional period, but also to organise the election of a new government.

In violation of all agreements, on 6 October 1991, the Executive Committee of the *OKChN* announced the dissolution of the Provisional Supreme Soviet and occupied its building. However, the Soviet, represented by a group of democratic deputies led by Baudin Bakhmadov, refused to disband and, together with representatives of the democratic opposition, formed a civic alliance, the "Movement for the Preservation of Chechen-Ingushetia".

On 27 October 1991, the *OKChN* held its own hastily organised presidential and parliamentary elections on Chechen territory (Ingushetia refused to participate as it was establishing its own autonomous region), despite the fact that the Supreme Soviet in Moscow had previously declared such elections illegitimate. The elections turned out to be a farce: the single candidate Dzhokhar Dudayev and an election commission formed by his supporters at *OKChN* did not even bother to give this rigged election any appearance of legality. Consequently, not a single state authority in Chechnya, the Russian Federation or abroad recognised these "elections" (The Govorukhin Commission, 1995: 16–17; History of Chechnya from Ancient Times to the Present Day, 2008: 737).

Although Dudayev publicly declared himself victorious, he did not gain real power, due to the illegitimacy of the procedures that led to his "election" and a total lack of recognition among the population. In Chechen society, with its strong traditions and strict criteria for the selection of its leaders, Dudayev and his comrades in arms were perceived as either temporary transitional figures (mere jokers) or "urban madmen" playing at politics – all the more so because the democratic forces in Chechnya at that time, led by the Provisional Council, with the support of the "red directors" and intellectuals, were preparing alternative elections (the text of the electoral law was prepared by the author of these lines) and had set the election date for November 1991. At the same time, as a counterweight to the *dudayevtsy*'s "national guard", an armed popular militia began to be formed (Sigauri, 2002: 35–36).

It was obvious that Dudayev and his supporters were losing the initiative, and a kind of countdown began in the republic. However, hasty action taken by Yeltsin caused a significant shift in the situation in Chechnya, turning the tide in Dudayev's favour. On 7 November 1991, Moscow television announced the introduction of a state of emergency throughout Chechnya and the dispatch of special units of the Interior Ministry and the National Guard (*OMON*). In Chechnya, this decree, which completely rejected Chechen sovereignty, caused outrage. Internal tension boiled over, giving rise to general outcry against Moscow's decisions. Tens of thousands of people from all over Chechnya arrived in Grozny that same day, resolutely opposed to any attempt to decide the fate of the republic from outside. Dudayev, who gave a brilliant battle speech on Grozny television that very evening in the field uniform of a Soviet general, called for armed

action "for the sake of Chechnya's freedom" and in response got the public recognition he so coveted.

The opposition, unfairly but massively branded as "pro-Moscow" and "partocratic", was forced to disperse and disband its militia. General Dudayev and his supporters were not only formally victorious; on 9 November 1991, Dudayev was inaugurated as president in the ceremonial uniform of a general (History of Chechnya from Ancient Times to the Present Day, 2008: 736–737). Thus began Dudayev's reign in Chechnya.

The Main "Achievements" of Dzhokhar Dudayev's Rule, which Led to the Appearance of a Civil Resistance Movement

If one disregards the enormous number of vastly different reports and takes into account only objective scholarly assessments, the results of Dudayev's domestic policy in 1991–1994 (before the First Chechen War) can be characterised as unprecedentedly destructive. There was not a single creative step; rather, the regime totally withdrew from all state obligations to the population (education, health care, social security, etc.). There was an unrestrained rise in crime; the old state apparatus was completely destroyed; Russian and Chechen "partocrats" were expelled from their posts; open embezzlement of budgetary funds, allegedly taken for the Chechen Revolution, became commonplace; and public-sector workers simply stopped receiving their salaries, pensioners their pensions, and the sick and large families their social benefits. Nevertheless, Dudayev gained a narrow, but loyal base of social support in society.

Top officials of the Chechen Republic (including President Dudayev) became actively involved in the plundering of petrol. Through covert deliveries of raw oil to foreign countries, as well as the speculative sale of petrol, fuel and various oil products to regions in southern Russia and the South Caucasus, the leading functionaries of the Dudayev regime gained (according to the most conservative estimates) between 3 and 9 billion dollars per year (Akhmadov, 2004: 134). Oil – the "black blood of war" – in Chechnya merits a separate study. Few people know that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Chechnya's share of the GNP of the Russian Federation rose to 10–12 per cent. There were up to 2,000 kilometres of primary and secondary pipelines on Chechnya's territory and "[m]ore

than 58 million tonnes of oil were exported through them in 1990" (Grodnenskiy, 2004: 216–220).

Another important source of income for the Dudayev regime was the trade in Soviet weapons. Under the pretext that it was impossible to remove the weapons that had been stockpiled in Chechen depots during the Soviet period to meet the needs of the Southern Military District, virtually all of them were "left" to Dudayev (for resale, of course). In one stroke, he came into possession of the following equipment at the beginning of 1992: 260 trainer aircraft that could be used as light attack aircraft, 134 armoured vehicles (including 42 tanks), 139 artillery systems, an unknown quantity of anti-aircraft weapons, and 37,795 small arms, aircraft rockets and artillery shells with arrowheads. All of these were actively marketed, in particular to the countries of the South Caucasus (Surkov and Turchina, 1998: 119–139; History of Chechnya from Ancient Times to the Present Day, 2008: 747).

The population at large, which was not included in these games, was transformed into impoverished cohorts, ready not only to serve but also to fight for a small subsidy. Of course, to encourage peace of mind, people were offered some murky socio-political fantasies (Dudayev, 1993: 11, 16; Abubakarov, 1998: 48).

Worst of all, the *dudayevtsy* destroyed not only intra-societal stability, but also national peace early on in Chechnya by allowing a flood of refugees of non-indigenous nationalities to flood into the Russian regions (Surkov and Turchina, 1998: 157–177).

Representative sociological data from Z. Altamirova shows how people survived in Chechnya in the 1990s, deprived of a permanent income, heating, water and electricity (except for gas). Only 2–7 per cent of the working-age population lived off a regular wage, mostly paid by state institutions and security services, 9–14 per cent made a living from occasional jobs and small commercial enterprises, and 30–40 per cent of the population tried to get by on petty trade (Altamirova, 1999: 314, 321–322). Almost half of the population survived on pensions irregularly issued by Russia in neighbouring regions (the "freedom fighters" simply stole this money from the bank in Grozny), and some people were saved by financial support from relatives who had left for Russia in time.

From the beginning, the Dudayev regime was illegitimate and was viewed as such by the overwhelming majority of the Chechen population. This illegitimacy, along with the regime's destructive economic policy and

its establishment of an inherently thievish governmental system, contributed greatly to the rise of the anti-Dudayev political opposition. From the outset, Dudayev himself met any criticism with indignation, which is understandable; he had crossed a line early on and could not relinquish power without fatal consequences for himself.

In addition, Dudayev had, from the beginning, made use of the armed paramilitary units of his supporters in this internal political struggle. Thus, he blatantly ignored the first peaceful civil rallies and protests organised by the democratic opposition, and subsequently dispersed such crowds with gunfire directed at their feet and over their heads.

However, Dudayev's commitment to armed means of resolving sociopolitical issues quickly prompted the anti-Dudayev civil opposition to take up arms. As early as 31 March 1992, one of the oppositional groups, named "Coordinating Council for the Restoration of Constitutional Order in the Chechen-Ingush Republic", mainly composed of former party and Soviet leaders, attempted to remove Dudayev and his government from power through a demonstration of force. The TV building was seized and people protested in the streets of Grozny. Dudayev, in turn, set the Basayev-Gelayev gangs against the opposition and organised a paid rally "for Dudayev", with loyal "elders" – public functionaries – immediately gathering in Grozny. These crowds moved towards the TV building, shots were fired and people were killed and wounded. In order to avoid massive bloodshed, the Coordinating Council of the opposition was forced to retreat and dissolve itself (History of Chechnya from Ancient Times to the Present Day, 2008: 749). Its organisers fled the republic and the Dudayev authorities celebrated the event as the crushing of a terrible plot by Moscow agents and local partocrats.

The Rise of Democratic Opposition to the Dudayev Regime and the Beginning of Organised Resistance (1993)

It should be stated that civic protest initiatives emerged in Chechnya quite early during Perestroika in the form of political parties, movements, associations and independent newspapers. The first of these was the political "club" of Chechen intellectuals, *Kavkaz*, then the "Union for the Promotion of Perestroika"/Popular Front (*Soyuz sodeystviya perestroika/Narodniy Front*) led by Khozh-Akhmed Bisultanov, the Niyso

(Justice) party, led by Lechi Saligov, editor-in-chief of the newspaper of the same name, the *Daimohk* (Motherland), led by Lechi Umkhayev, and the *Marsho* (Freedom) bloc, led by Abdulla Bugayev. Opposition newspapers, such as *Impulse*, *Niyso*, *Marsho*, *Golos Chechenskoi Respubliki* and others, were regularly published and had large print runs (Sigauri, 2002: 72–73, 83).

In the autumn of 1992, Umar Avturkhanov, the democratically elected mayor of the Nadterechny district (in northwest Chechnya), publicly announced the secession of the entire Priterechye region from Grozny. This constituted a deadly blow for the *dudayevtsy*. The following year, the densely populated Urus-Martan and a large part of the Groznensky district bordering the Terek River and directly adjacent to Grozny broke away from the Dudayev government (Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic, 1994: 27–31).

On 15 April 1993, the democratic opposition renewed their struggle to reverse the criminal regime of Dudayev: an informal permanent mass protest rally began in Grozny, the centre of the Chechen Republic. Leading the opposition and the rally were Salambek Khadzhiyev, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) and a prominent scholar and influential figure among the republic's former leaders, as well as L. Magomadov, L. Umkhaev, G. Elmurzaev, Badrudi and Musa Dzhamalkhanova, A. Bugaev, Professors V. Mezhidov, Z. Gakayev, Y. Akhmadov (the author of these lines), and others. The capital's city assembly, Grozny mayor Bislan Gantemirov, and later a large part of the Chechen parliament, led by the new speaker Yusup Soslambekov, also supported the permanent rally in Theatre Square.

For all its internal fragmentation and disparities, the opposition, led by Salambek Khadzhiev, generally advocated liberal democratic reforms in Chechnya, including the privatisation of state property, democratisation of the political system (including the removal of Dudayev) and an agreement with Russia regarding the division of competences (Kurumov, 2021: 146–147).

In response, General Dudayev carried out a new coup d'état on 17 April 1993, effectively abrogating the constitution and dissolving the parliament, the constitutional court and the government of the Chechen Republic. He began to consult field commanders, especially Kh. Khankarov, S. Basaev, R. Gelayev, K. Arsanukayev (Grodnenskiy, 2004: 98) and others, who already had experience of shedding blood in the armed conflicts in

Abkhazia and Azerbaijan. A witch hunt against independent periodicals and opposition journalists was launched.

Meanwhile, the opposition rally in Grozny's Theatre Square had grown into a military and civilian structure, with the movement's headquarters becoming a second government of Chechnya. A plan for a national referendum was adopted, and ballot papers were printed. However, the protracted internal political crisis ended in mass bloodshed. On 4 June 1993, Dudayev's units stormed the building of the Grozny police department, having previously shelled it with a self-propelled gun. The city assembly and the building where the parliament of the republic sat were also attacked. In addition, machine guns were fired at a peaceful procession of protesters in Teatralnaya Square, who, led by Lecha Magomadov, had moved to help the besieged. A total of sixty people died, with more than 200 wounded. On the night of 4–5 June 1993, in order to avoid mass bloodshed, the opposition leadership was forced to disband its supporters (Sigauri, 2002: 88–91).

Most of the members of the opposition dispersed and returned to their homes, but some of them began to group in the districts and mountain villages. Incidentally, to defeat the opposition and the parliament, Dudayev needed the support of the commanders of the largest armed formations (Basayev, Gelayev and others); in return, he gave them control over some economically profitable enterprises. For example, the protection of oil refineries in the Zavodskoy district was entrusted to a so-called "Abkhazian" battalion of Shamil Basayev.

But for a regime that had now fully exposed its anti-people character, the result of all these measures was a phenomenon called *Zugzwang*, whereby each new socio-political measure only deepened the crisis and worsened the position of the elite under Dudayev.

The Unfolding of the Civil War and the Formation of an Oppositional Government in Some Regions in Chechnya (1993–1994)

In the summer of 1993, the armed defeat of the opposition in Chechnya effectively marked the beginning of a civil war. Between June 1993 and

October 1994, Dudayev's men carried out eleven punitive expeditions into Chechen villages and districts that refused to recognise his authority. Fighting took place near Kalaus and Znamenskoye, Tolstoy-Yurt, Ken-Yurt and Gekhi, and near the cities of Urus-Martan and Argun, where opposition forces were concentrated. During these clashes, up to 1,500 young men were killed and wounded on both sides (Orlov and Cherkasov, 1998: 21–49; Abubakarov, 1999: 134; Grodnenskiy, 2004: 104–108).

On 4 June 1994, the opposition held a large congress in the village of Znamenskoe in the Nadterechny district of Chechnya. The congress declared the suspension of Dudayev and his regime and transferred executive power in the republic to the Provisional Council established in autumn 1993 until new legitimate elections could be held (Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic, 1994: 5–6). The Provisional Council began to establish local state structures, including a government, television, radio and newspapers, and set up military detachments under central command in the Nadterechny and part of the Grozny and Urus-Martan districts. The influence of the Provisional Council at that time extended over the entire northern part of the republic and some of the central part. Grozny remained in the hands of the Dudayev regime, as did some other districts and enclaves in Chechnya.

By this time, the Russian leadership in Moscow had come to the conclusion that it was impossible to reach a mutually acceptable agreement with Dudayev. However, this did not mean that Moscow fully supported the anti-Dudayev opposition in Chechnya. Indeed, even after the dramatic events of October 1993 in Moscow, when the national parliament was shelled and the political structure of the Russian Federation collapsed, a fierce internal political struggle continued among Russia's ruling elite; the "Chechen question" was a key component in that struggle. There was no doubt that Dudayev was well connected in Russian political, industrial, financial and military circles (The Chechen Conflict: Events, Opinions, Facts, 1995: 3).

For these reasons, the leaders of Chechen opposition, who had been fighting the Dudayev regime on the battlefield, tried to appeal directly to the democratic forces in Russia, bypassing governmental structures: "Unfortunately, democratic forces in Chechnya have so far not received any serious support from parties, social organisations and movements in Russia… We are certain that all forces with common sense in Russia will unequivocally condemn the "Ichkerian" regime [i.e. the

Dudayev government], that they will not allow certain groups with mafia-type and predatory aims to whitewash the image of the Dudayev clique in the mass media, and that they will not tolerate certain representatives of state structures talking hypocritically about Chechnya" (Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic, 1994: 10–11).

The Provisional Council, led by Umar Avturkhanov, obtained with great difficulty a modest number of small arms, a batch of grenade launchers, several anti-aircraft guns and four civilian helicopters (later converted into unguided rockets) from the Russians. As for heavy equipment, the Provisional Council disposed of several obsolete tanks and armoured personnel carriers. Several guns and new APCs were seized by the militias from the Dudayev formations in combat. It was not until late autumn 1994, when the confrontation with the Dudayev regime entered a decisive phase, that a consignment of T-72 tanks and other weapons was handed over to the opposition by Moscow. According to various sources, the Provisional Council received between 8 and 40 billion rubles for the maintenance of the militias and for the payment of salaries to employees in the Nadterechny, Urus-Martan and Grozny districts (Dunlop, 2001: 160; Sigauri, 2002: 107–112).

It should be noted that in the summer of 1994, Ruslan Khasbulatov, the former chairman of Russia's violently dissolved Supreme Soviet, returned to his native village of Doikar-Aul (also known as Stariy Yurt, Tolstoy-Yurt) in Chechnya after his release from prison in Lefortovo. He basically created a new opposition front: a popular figure, he gathered up to 100,000 people in August 1994 for anti-Dudayev rallies near Grozny, demanding the resignation of the regime and the holding of fair elections. Dudayev, in turn, threatened the protesters with weapons, including machine guns and cannons, to prevent them from trying to enter Grozny (Khasbulatov, 1995: 25, 33, 36).

The complete reversal of public opinion in favour of the opposition was the most significant result of this period of internal unrest in Chechnya. Moreover, the *dudayevtsy* – the "wolves" – were not as warrior-like as they portrayed themselves on television, and the "sheep from the opposition" were not as timid. The "wolves" began to suffer one defeat after another against the "sheep".

The Victorious Battles of the Opposition Units against the Dudayev Army: The Tragic Defeat on 26 November 1994

Despite a shortage of weapons, especially heavy weapons, the Provisional Council militia under the command of U. Avturkhanov, Yu. Elmurzaev, A. Kelematov and other commanders fought a number of successful battles against Dudayev's units. In June 1994, supporters of the Provisional Council fought in the Argun region and, in August, oppositional units from Urus-Martan even tried to break through to Grozny. On 12 September, a combined force of Dudayev's army (up to 3,000 men, including tanks and air support), led by Colonel A. Maskhadov, marched to Urus-Martan, the most important oppositional enclave in the south of the republic. They were repulsed in a fierce battle against a militia commanded by Yu. Elmurzaev, the district's mayor and a former teacher, and suffered heavy casualties. Wounded members of Dudayev's forces filled Grozny's hospitals, which did not even have bandages and painkillers. Nevertheless, on the night of 17 September 1994, armed formations of "Ichkerians" supported by aircraft, artillery and tanks attacked the villages of Goryacheistochnenskoe and Tolstoy-Yurt, 20 km north of Grozny, where the headquarters of the regional opposition forces led by Khasbulatov was located. In the battle, which lasted two days, the enemy was defeated and fled in panic to Grozny. On 27 September, near the villages of Kalaus and Znamenskoye in western Chechnya, large formations under the command of Shamil Basayev and Ruslan Gelayev, trained to the level of the Russian special forces, attempted in vain to take revenge for all the defeats of the Dudayev–Maskhadov army (Grodnenskiy, 2004: 106–108).

The internal contradictions of the Russian leadership's "Chechen policy", which deliberately provoked bloodshed in Chechnya in order to weaken the warring sides as much as possible, also had tragic consequences for Russia's own credibility. In the second half of November 1994, the Provisional Council was increasingly pressured to launch an attack on Grozny; tanks with Russian crews had even been allocated. Moreover, it was promised that Russian special forces would bring all strongholds in Grozny under their control before the opposition units entered the city and that the Russian air force would crush any resistance.

On 26 November 1994, opposition groups consisting of 2,000–3,000 men and thirty-two tanks (without ammunition) entered Grozny from three directions and fell into prepared traps. Heavy fighting lasted until

the evening, at which point the Provisional Council troops withdrew to their original lines. Hundreds of people had been killed and wounded. Chechen armed volunteers and several dozen Russian tankers had been taken prisoner (Sigauri, 2002: 107–115; Grodnenskiy, 2004: 108–110). The men of the Provisional Council had not received any additional support from outside [i.e. from Russian troops] in the air or on the ground, as had originally been promised.

The direct provocation of a military confrontation in Chechnya, without adequate air and special forces support for the civil militias, dealt a heavy blow to the anti-Dudayev opposition in Chechnya. However, the defeat of the local militia also demonstrated that it was now logical for Moscow to raise the question of a military invasion by the regular Russian army.

The Democratic Opposition during the First Russian–Chechen War (1994–1996)

Discussions about the need to subjugate the "bandit enclave" on Russian territory had been going on for a long time. Moreover, chapter 3, article 65 of the new Russian Constitution adopted on 12 December 1993 referred to the Chechen Republic as a subject of the Russian Federation. On 25 March 1994, the State Duma even passed a resolution entitled "On the Regulation of Political Relations between the Governments of the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic". This seems to have been the reason why, on 14 January 1994, Dudayev proposed replacing the name "Chechen Republic" ("Nokhchiycho" in Chechen) with "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria" (ChRI); it is thus clear that he regarded the constitutional conflict with the Russian Federation to be over. The designation "Ichkeria", despite its questionable validity (since it covered only one of the historical regions of Chechnya), became popular.

The Russian authorities were under pressure. In addition to internal actors, the oil lobby was putting pressure on them. Bound by international obligations, Russia had to ensure the transit of oil from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries on the Caspian Sea to the west through the Grozny-Novorossiysk pipeline, which also runs

through Chechnya. At the same time, as we know, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia tried to promote an alternative involving the pumping of Caspian oil through the South Caucasus, bypassing Russia.

But these were not the main reasons for the First Chechen War, which quickly came to be called a “commercial” war, and about which so much has been written that there is no need to repeat it here. In fact, Russian oligarchs, who had amassed unprecedented wealth in the 1,000 years of the Russian state’s existence, simply “bought” the Chechen war from Yeltsin. Russia’s plundering class calculated that it would be best to shift the attention of millions of discontented Russians away from the robbery and strife in their country to the explosions and fires of a “small victorious war”, thereby reducing the likelihood of a revolution and a new civil war in Russia, directed against the oligarchs and criminals. Businessman Boris Berezovsky (who had been active in the Chechen coup and, more generally, in Caucasian affairs since 1991) and the young billionaire Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who believed himself to be the informal leader of the new capitalist Russia, may have been among the “buyers” of the war. In one of Khodorkovsky’s first public statements after he was released from prison in 2013, he justified the past wars in the Caucasus, and specifically in Chechnya: “I consider war a very bad thing, but if it is a question of ‘separation of the North Caucasus or war?’, then war […] This is our land, we conquered it” (Shmulevich, 2013). This reads like a justification in hindsight for pushing through a “victorious war” in the name of “business” interests. The rest of Yeltsin’s pro-Western entourage was not blameless either. There was also a peculiar contingent among the Russian ruling class, which could be conventionally called “patriotic”, that hoped to boost both its own and Russia’s imperial credibility through a small, victorious military operation in Chechnya.

However, one should not think that Dudayev and the crowd of rural “patriots” around him did not, for their part, also dream of a war with Russia, not only to take revenge: in order to crush the remnants of the empire and to avoid an internal civil war, an external enemy needed to be constructed. Even the “Ichkerian” leaders believed that only through war could a new, united Chechen society be created (Osmayev, 2020: 38).

On 29 November 1994, after the military defeat of the opposition forces in Grozny, Yeltsin called on the parties in the conflict to lay down their weapons and disband the armed formations within forty-eight hours. This was only done by the anti-Dudayev opposition; it surrendered all

heavy weapons and its militia units were subsequently legalised and combined into two battalions of Russian Interior Ministry troops.

This and several subsequent ultimatums had no effect on Dudayev and his supporters. "They will not let you finish me off, you will be stopped", Dudayev stubbornly told Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev at their last meeting on 6 December 1994, at which point the bombing of Grozny had already begun (Grozny, 2004: 114). He was probably quoting a promise made to him by another group in the Kremlin, which was interested in the defeat of Russia and overthrowing the Yeltsin regime.

On 9 December 1994, Yeltsin signed a presidential decree on "Measures to Suppress the Activities of Illegal Armed Formations on the Territory of the Chechen Republic and in the Zone of the Ossetian-Ingush Conflict" (President of the Russian Federation, 1994b), and a few days later Russian troops were deployed on the pretext of "restoring constitutional order" (President of the Russian Federation, 1994a).

The Russian command estimated that there were 20,000 Chechen fighters (who, incidentally, had never even taken up arms); in reality, at the beginning of the war, Dudayev and his comrades in arms had less than 3,000 men (the so-called regular army, units of the Interior Ministry and gangs of field commanders). There were 124 tanks and armoured vehicles and 200 guns, including large-calibre anti-tank guns and fourteen multiple rocket launchers (Orlov and Cherkasov, 1998: 31–32). Of the large number of aircraft at Dudayev's disposal, all were destroyed during the first days of the war as a result of the failure to take routine measures (camouflage, etc.). Most of the heavy weapons and artillery of Dudayev's so-called army were unusable due to the impossibility of repairing them.

On 11 December 1994, Russian troops (increasing over time from 23,000–24,000 to 40,000) started to violently reclaim the Chechen Republic. It should be noted here that Dudayev never distinguished himself as commander-in-chief of the Chechen armed forces. Despite his loud declarations, military parades and ambitious plans for air strikes against Russian targets, including the Kremlin, in 1992–1994, no serious war precautions were actually taken.

After the bloody assault on and capture of Grozny in February 1995, the deaths of hundreds of combatants and the destruction of Dudayev's forces' remaining heavy weaponry, by the summer of 1995 up to 80 per cent of Chechnya had been taken over by federal forces. All this gave rise to the hope that the hostilities, which had caused enormous civilian

casualties, would soon end, allowing the country to return to a peaceful existence.

Creation of State Structures in the Course of the "Chechen War"

During the fighting at the end of 1994–1995, the civilian state structures of the "Government of National Revival of Chechnya" were created, headed by prominent politician and scholar Salambek Khadzhiyev and recognised by the Russian Federation. The new Chechen government included representatives of the main political parties and movements in the republic, prominent scientists and public figures. With the support of the Russian state, schools and hospitals were opened again, the residents received their pensions and salaries, and peace was restored. Moreover, from the very outset of the arrival of Russian troops and the large-scale "Chechen war", the government of Khadzhiev, the leader of the Chechen democratic opposition, declared that it was not interested in war and thus distanced itself to some extent from the federal centre's military campaign.

Opposition forces also established another important body, the "National Accord Committee", a kind of proto-parliament that aimed to consolidate all parties involved in the intra-society conflict in Chechnya. It was headed by Umar Avturkhanov, former head of the Provisional Council of Chechnya and ex-mayor of the Nadterechny district (Kurumov, 2021: 118–119).

In the spring and summer of 1995, Khadzhiev and Avturkhanov attempted to initiate a process of intra-Chechen reconciliation by putting forward various proposals. In order to create favourable conditions for a national compromise, they proposed a so-called "zero-sum option" involving the simultaneous resignation of the leaders of the conflicting parties – Khadzhiev, Avturkhanov and Dudayev – followed by general parliamentary elections and the formation of new republican governmental bodies of power in which the whole political spectrum would be represented. Talks with Dudayev, however, did not prove productive and were soon abandoned.

The massacre in the village of Samashki on 7 and 8 April 1995 was a terrible blow to people's hopes for the restoration of peace, law and order and the moral authority of the new leadership. The village, which had 15,000 inhabitants at the time, was subjected to a so-called "cleansing

operation", a cruel and violent punitive action by troops of the Ministry of Interior and OMON under the command of Lieutenant General Anatoly Romanov (All Available Means, 1995: 120).

The second blow to the peace process was dealt by a detachment of fighters, commanded by Shamil Basayev, who, on 14 June 1995, drove five or six trucks into the small city of Budennovsk in the Russian Stavropol district and seized up to 1,500 hostages from the city hospital. The attackers' main demand was the cessation of hostilities in Chechnya and the initiation of talks between the "Ichkerian" leadership and Russia. The Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin agreed to Basayev's demand (Budennovsk: Seven Days of Hell, 1995: 141).

Peace talks began in Grozny under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), bringing together the representatives of General Dudayev (who were, in fact, the front-line leaders of the insurgents) and the Russian delegation. Despite various backlashes, the negotiation process between Moscow and the Dudayev group, supported by international mediators, continued (with interruptions of varying lengths) for almost a year, but yielded no visible results (Grodensky, 2004: 188–189; Skagestad, 2008: 190–191).

Regrettably, the army and the new authorities in Chechnya were entirely dependent on short-term attempts to resolve the military-political crisis and on successive interest groups in the Kremlin. In the negotiations and in contact with the combatants, there were some messy deals that were exclusively motivated by the interests of one group or another.

The Zigzags of Russia's Chechnya Policy and the Accommodation with the Militants

In principle, the outcome of the first Chechen war was determined in the summer of 1995 – a year before the Russian presidential elections. President Boris Yeltsin felt a growing need to end his "Chechen campaign" as soon as possible, even at the cost of a military defeat for his army.

In the second half of 1995, Moscow began to purge the Chechen political field of figures that might have prevented the "Ichkerian" leadership's return to power. In the author's opinion, the Kremlin's decision to remove Khadzhiev and Avturkhanov, two respected representatives of the

democratic opposition in Chechnya, should be seen as part of this purge. In its own way, Moscow implemented the "zero-sum option" in Chechnya by paving the way for new politicians from the camp of the insurgents.

This could be the end of the discussion about the true democratic civic movement in post-Perestroika Chechnya. It should be noted that, on 24 October 1995, Khadzhiyev and Avturkhanov, under pressure from Moscow, left Grozny. On the other hand, Doku Zavgayev, the former head of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, returned as an interim leader, only to be exiled again shortly afterwards. On 21 April 1996, Dzhokhar Dudayev, the unrecognised president of the unrecognised "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria", was killed near the village Roshni-Chu. On 6 August of the same year, armed groups of combatants took Grozny practically unopposed and their new leader Aslan Maskhadov signed the so-called Khasavyurt agreements with representatives of Moscow on 31 August 1996.

Thus ended, for the time being, the heroic and self-sacrificing history of the Chechen people and its democratic leaders.

What can be said about the outcome of the internal political processes in the Chechen Republic during the period under consideration and the political games of the parties concerned, especially the rival Russian power structures? Not many words are needed.

A country that was thousands of years old lay in ruins. During the war, up to 100,000 armed men and civilians from both sides (including several thousand children) were killed or injured. Fifty thousand flats and houses in Grozny alone were reduced to rubble. Between 600,000 to 700,000 people out of a little more than a million Chechens became refugees. More than 20,000 Chechens went through so-called "filtration camps" (essentially torture chambers) that were set up during the war, and not all of them emerged alive.

It seemed that the cruel experience of should teach a lesson and instill in the "Ichkerian" leadership compassion for the people and a desire to make their easier and more beautiful. The masses of foot soldiers marched into the towns and villages of the Chechen lowland in the full conviction that "now everything will be all right!" However, exactly the opposite has been the case: the leaders of the combatants behaved in Chechnya as if they were in a conquered and occupied country and waged a new, much bloodier and more brutal war.

References

Abubakarov, T. (1998) *Rezhim Dzhokhara Dudaeva: pravda i vymysel: Zapiski dudaevskogo ministra ekomomiki i finansov [The Dzhokhar Dudayev Regime: Truth and Fiction: Memoirs of the Dudayev Minister of Economy and Finance]*, INSAN, Moscow.

Abubakarov, T. (1999) Mezhdu avtoritarnost'yu i anarkhiey [Between Authoritarianism and Anarchy], in *Chechnya i Rossiya: obshchestva i gosudarstva [Chechnya and Russia: Societies and States]* (ed. D.E. Furman), Polyform-Talburi, Moscow, 177–196.

Akhmadov, Ya. (2001) Restenziya: Chechnya i Rossiia: obshchestva i gosudarstva [Review: "Chechnya and Russia: Societies and States"], Publications of the Andrei Sakharov Museum and Public Centre. *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 6, 130–132.

Altamirova, Z. (1999) Zhizn' v poslevoennoy Chechne [Life in Post-war Chechnya], in *Chechnya i Rossiia: obshchestva i gosudarstva [Chechnya and Russia: Societies and States]* (ed. D.E. Furman), Polyform-Talburi, Moscow, 308–323.

Blinushov, A., et al. (eds.) (1995) *Vsemi imeyushchimisia sredstvami: Operatsiya MVD RF v s. Samashki, 7–8 apr. 1995 g.: Rezul'taty nezavisimogo rassledovaniya nablyudatel'noy komissii pravozashchitnoy obshchestvennoy organizastii v zone vooruzhennogo konflikta v Chechne [By All Available Means: Operation by the Russian Interior Ministry in the Village of Samashki, 7–8 April 1995: Results of the Independent Investigation Mission of the Observatory of Human Rights Organisations in the Zone of the Armed Conflict in Chechnya]*, Human Rights Centre "Memorial", Moscow.

Chechenskiy konflikt: sobytiya, mneniya, fakty [The Chechen Conflict: Events, Opinions, Facts] (1995), *Golos Chechenskoy Respubliki*, 28 May–6 June.

Dudayev, D. (1993) *K voprosu o gosudarstvenno-politicheskom ustroystve Chechenskoy Respubliki [On the State and Political Structure of the Chechen Republic]*, publisher unknown, Grozny.

Gakayev D. (1999) Put' k chechenskoy revoliutsii [The Road to the Chechen Revolution], in *Chechnya i Rossiia: obshchestva i gosudarstva [Chechnya and Russia: Societies and States]* (ed. D.E. Furman), Polinform-Talburi, Moscow, 150–176.

Gorlov, A.G. (ed.) (1995) *Budennovsk: Sem' dney ada (O zakhvate zalozhnikov chechenskimi boevikami v iyune 1995 g) [Budennovsk: Seven Days of Hell (On the Hostage-Taking by Chechen Fighters in June 1995)]*, Kodeks, Moscow.

Grodnenskiy N. (2004) *Neokonchennaya voyna: Istoriya vooruzhennogo konflikta v Chechne [The Unfinished War: The History of the Armed Conflict in Chechnya]*, Kharvest, Minsk.

Istoriya Chechni s drevneyshikh vremen do nashikh dney [History of Chechnya from Ancient Times to the Present Day] (2008), 2 vols, vol. 2, "Book Publishers", Grozny.

Khasbulatov, R. (1995) *Chechnya: mne ne dali ostanovit' voynu. Zapiski mirotvortsa [Chechnya: They Did Not Let Me Stop the War. Memoirs of a Peacekeeper]*, Paleya, Moscow.

Komissiya Govorukhina (Materialy Parlamentskoy komissii Gosudarstvennoy Dumy po issledovaniyu prichin i obstoyatel'stv vozniknoveniya krizisnoy situatsii v Chechenskoy Respublike) [Govorukhin Commission (Proceedings of the Parliamentary Commission of the State Duma to Investigate the Causes and Circumstances of the Crisis Situation in the Chechen Republic)], Laventa Publishing House, Moscow.

Kurumov, D.S. (ed.) (2021) *Salambek Hadzhiev v vospominaniyakh sovremennikov [Salambek Khadzhiev in Memories of Contemporaries]*, Litera, Moscow.

Orlov, O.P., and A.V. Cherkasov (eds.) (1998) *Chechnya: tsep' oshibok i prestupleniy 1994–1996 [Russia–Chechnya: A Chain of Mistakes and Crimes 1994–1996]*, Zvenya, Moscow.

Osmayev, A. (2010) *Obshchestvenno-politicheskaya i povsednevnaya zhizn' Chechenskoy respubliki v 1996–2005 gg [The Socio-political and Everyday Life of the Chechen Republic in 1996–2005]*, Doctor of History thesis abstract, Makhachkala.

Osmayev, A. (2020) *«Chechenskii krizis». (Glazami uchastnika sobytiy. Sbornik materialov) [The Chechen Crisis. (Through the Eyes of a Participant of the Events. Collection of Materials)]*, IBA, Moscow.

President of the Russian Federation (1994a) Ukaz No. 2137 Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 30 noyabrya 1994 g. „O meropriyatiyakh po vostanovleniyu konstitutsionnoy zakonnosti i pravoporyadka na territorii Chechenskoy Respubliki" [Decree No. 2137 by the President of the Russian Federation Dated 30 November 1994 "On Measures

to Restore Constitutional Legality and Order on the Territory of the Chechen Republic"], 30 November 1994.

President of the Russian Federation (1994b). *Ukaz No. 2166 Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 9 dekabrya 1994 g. „O merakh po presecheniyu deyatel'nosti nezakonnykh vooruzhennykh formirovaniy na territorii Chechenskoy Respubliki i v zone osetino-ingushskogo konflikta" [Decree No. 2166 by the President of the Russian Federation Dated 30 November 1994 "On Measures to Curb the Activities of Illegal Armed Groups on the Territory of the Chechen Republic and the Zone of the Ossetian-Ingush Conflict"]*, 9 December 1994.

Sigauri I. (2002) *Ocherk istorii i gosudarstvennogo ustroystva chechentsev s drevneyshikh vremen [A Sketch of Chechen History and State Structure from Ancient Times]*, Rus', Moscow.

Shmulevich, A. (2013) Hodorkovskiy i voyna za Kavkaz [Khodorkovsky and the War for the Caucasus], <https://avrom.livejournal.com/912336.html> (accessed 24 October 2022).

Skagestad, O. (2008) Opyt raboty OBSE v Chechne, 1995–2003 gody [OSCE Experience in Chechnya, 1995–2003], *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Journal of Social and Political Studies* 5(59), 186–200.

Surkov, A., and A. Turchina (eds.) (1998) *Chechnya v plameni separatizma [Chechnya in the Flames of Separatism]*, Publishing House of the Academy of Civilian Service, Saratov.

Vremenniy sovet Chechenskoy Respubliki: dokumenty i materialy [The Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic: Documents and Materials] (1994), Znamenskoe.

Photos (Part II)

Postcard with the image of the Deportation memorial inaugurated on 23 February 1994. Inscription: “Dukhur dats! Dölkhur dats! Dits a diir dats! (We won’t break! We won’t cry! We won’t forget!)” (Source: <https://oc-media.org/features/after-73-years-the-memory-of-stalins-deportation-of-chechens-and-ingush-still-haunts-the-survivors/>, accessed 12 March 2023)

ВРЕМЕННЫЙ СОВЕТ
ЧЕЧЕНСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ

ДОКУМЕНТЫ И МАТЕРИАЛЫ

ЗНАМЕНСКОЕ — 1994 г.

The Znamenskoe Documents (1994) comprise a collection of materials (speeches, articles, etc.) of the Provisional Council which formed a parallel government to the one of Dzhokhar Dudayev in Grozny from 1992 to 1994 (Source: private archive, Moscow).

ДЖОХАР ДУДАЕВ

К ВОПРОСУ
О ГОСУДАРСТВЕННО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОМ
УСТРОЙСТВЕ
ЧЕЧЕНСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ

Грозный, 1993

Dudayev's programme of 1993 announces radical economic reforms and aims to set the cornerstones for new relations with Moscow and the international community (Source: private archive, Grozny).

Primary Materials (Part II)

Published in *Ichkeria*, No. 38, 29 April 1993, and distributed as a printed booklet by *Izdatel'stvo 'Grozenskiy Rabochiy'*, 14 September 1993.[1]

"About the Political Structure of the Chechen Republic"

Dzhokhar Dudayev

* * *

Allow me, by the will of Allah, to present to the readers some opinions inspired by today's reality on the war-torn land of Chechnya.

The reason for writing this article is my sincere conviction of the need for urgent, comprehensive, and thorough discussions about our long-standing and pressing issues.

It has been almost a year and a half since the proclamation of the independent Chechen Republic. What once seemed like an unattainable centuries-old dream for the Chechen people is today, despite everything, an objective reality.

We not only freed ourselves from the imperial dictate, but we also proclaimed the task of building a new social formation along the lines of the developed capitalist countries, and we call it "secular civilisation". Of course, for many people in the past it seemed much easier, it was enough to remove odious figures, break or dismantle some things, give up some

1 Editors' note: This article was written by the President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria Dzhokhar Dudayev, during a heated discussion in Chechen society about forms of government. The following selection of quotations from Dudayev's programme focuses on his idea of creating an economic platform as a basis for Chechnya's new statehood and peaceful relations with Moscow. He sees this new statehood as being based primarily on the economic restructuring of the system, precisely what he calls the transition from "state capitalism" to "private capitalism". In general, the text is written entirely according to the idea of "rationality instead of ideology".

others, and all the rest would go its way, without any problems. Moreover, we had almost no doubts about WHAT we wanted to build and HOW we wanted to live in it. We thought, and even now we are strongly convinced, that if we only adopt the external attributes of civilised democratic countries, that is, if we choose a parliament, president, and Constitutional Court and implement the so-called "separation of powers", if we delegate the best representatives of the people to these structures, all the questions will be automatically resolved. But the future, it turns out, always makes its unexpected adjustments.

The "revolutionary" euphoria is gradually fading, and unusual expressions become commonplace and familiar. Meanwhile, daily life confronts us with new problems and questions that are increasingly complex and weighty. Also, with time we become wiser.

Even a cursory hindsight into our recent past allows us to rethink many things in a new way, highlighting the failures and mistakes. In addition, the chronic insolvability of some of our society's main economic problems during this transitional period often generates nihilistic moods, feelings of dissatisfaction and pessimism in citizens; sometimes this even leads to defeatist or even aggressive rejection of everything that has been done.

But there is nothing tragic in this, believe me, and there is no reason to panic. Such is the dialectic of the natural course of complex reformist transformations. They say that a person is happy twice, when he "buys" and then when he "sells". We have already fully experienced the first, and we are obviously on the verge of the second. It has just become difficult to verify what we have acquired, what could still be useful, and what should be put into the dustbin of history.

However, in the present era of information-political excesses and of utmost politicisation of society, it can indeed be extremely difficult to objectively understand the intense events happening around us and to give them an unambiguous analytical assessment. Even the Chechen "political elite" was not prepared for this. The absence of effective methodological tools in its "portfolio" not only has put us all in a false dead-end position, but it has also not provided a sufficiently effective way out of the crisis.

Today, several myths and major misconceptions can be named that are detrimental to the formation of the Chechen state. They can be roughly summarised as follows:

1) Ambiguity of the constitutional status of the Chechen Republic.
2) False prerequisite of a "separation of powers".
3) Myth about "good leaders".
4) Choice of the form of economic development.

The fiercest debates and discussions, hampering our progress, are related to the ambiguous assessment of the socio-political and socio-economic entity that is now referred to as the Chechen Republic.

Today, there is no shortage of all kinds of definitions and attempts to characterise all the ills of our state, not to mention "reliable diagnoses" and a multitude of "no-alternative prescriptions". That is why a logically adequate interpretation of the processes around the contemporary stage of the historical development of the Vaynakh people becomes highly relevant. And in my opinion, only the anatomy of the disintegration and transformation processes of the Russian Empire, on the one hand, and the influence of the laws of evolutionary development of society, on the other, can provide such a clear picture of the problems in the formation of a sovereign Chechen state.

According to Western scientific standards, there are two types of state structures: the authoritarian and the collegial one. The first usually refers to a one-party regime, where one PERSON [original emphasis] governs (leader, ruler, etc.). The second refers to the situation when a country is collectively governed by REPRESENTATIVES OF VARIOUS POWERS of society.

The distinct variations of state capitalism and private capitalism can take each of these forms of government. That is, there are four main variations:

1) Authoritarian state capitalism.
2) Collegial private capitalism.
3) Authoritarian private capitalism.
4) Collegial state capitalism.

It is necessary to warn, first, that frequently used definitions such as totalitarianism, dictatorship, democracy, etc. should be used with caution, as they often, and particularly in the context of the issue under consideration, do not reflect the essence or content of the government system, as will be explained below. Secondly, although this classification does not claim to be true in the first instance, it is a simple and reliable navigational map amidst the reefs of the "Noahian" political science terminology.

As we know, the former Soviet Union during the pre-Gorbachev period was one of the classical examples of an authoritarian state capitalist regime with all the necessary attributes of a pyramidal, all-encompassing power and executive discipline. This was a necessary and sufficient basis for the centralised scheme adopted for the country's economic management. A bright example of the opposite and antagonist government system is the collegial capitalism in the United States. […]

It is CLEAR that in this provisional but very efficient and illustrative categorisation, the Chechen Republic does not belong to the first formation from which it fled under the banner of anti-imperialism, but neither does it belong to the second one which is still an unknown distance away. Of course, we are just as far away from the third camp of "dignitaries". Thus, only the last kind remains collegial state capitalism! Here is our emergency landing leads us, and this is the stove around which we must dance.

Another fatal factor for the Chechen state is the consensus among an overwhelming majority of its population that it is necessary and sufficient to have for the republic "a good leadership and a good parliament" which, supposedly, improves the life of the people. And almost everyone has their own version of "good" candidates for leadership positions. The dangerous consequences of this and other similar approaches that are outwardly very attractive and seemingly the only true ones lie in the methodological incompetence that has afflicted our society. Unfortunately, we very often, one might say, mix everything and do not distinguish between concepts, terms, and formulations. […]

Unfortunately, and this is probably typical of most citizens of the former Soviet Union, we are still in a deep state of nostalgic illusions about the executive branch, which was exercised through years of a clearly aligned totalitarian system, with a wide range of instruments at its disposal, from fiscal bodies to suppress dissent to "ideological brainwashing" institutions, from the stick to the carrot […].

Let us imagine hypothetically that the proverbial power passes entirely into the hands of a single entity overnight, either the president, or parliament, or someone else. And let us be ruled by an ideal in each case, either presidential X, or a multi-faced parliamentary Y, or an unnamed Z. What does this mean in practice? It means that in this case all the national wealth, all the resources of the country and all its economic potential would fall under the monopoly of X, Y, or Z. That is, they will manage and distribute what does not really belong to them personally, but the declared

owner – the people have very ephemeral economic rights! Together with the entire ministerial team, the governing echelon of government can hardly constitute even a tenth of a per cent of the population.

But the psychology of behaviour and the programmed mindset of any managerial non-private co-owner, especially when economic production is in decline and the standard of living of the poor is deteriorating, is to instinctively hold on to their place under the sun. This is done by justifying their motives, invoking objective and subjective difficulties, and criticising the various formal and informal objects that create allegedly insurmountable problems. Think of N.Ryzhkov, V.Pavlov or T.Gaidar. Chernomyrdin is bound to follow that path.

Naturally, and it is inherent in human nature, that the discontented and offended, "who know better how to govern the country and what the people need", having necessarily started with derogatory criticism, can move on to much more serious and active actions to "restore justice".

What is the answer for the ruling elite?

A tightening of the screws? But that would be a return to the totalitarianism from which they fled and have not yet had time to catch their breath.

A reshuffle of personnel? Nothing will change significantly.

Then the system itself must be replaced! But, it seems, we have changed it, by dismantling the "single party" and creating a modernised one, with "multiple warheads". Here was another stumbling block. Having at first flown out in one "anti-imperial rocket", we ended up like the "crab, crab and pike", with our spatially differently oriented vectors of Stimulus and Power, different baggage of Motive and Means […].

What, then, is the reason for stability in the collegial private-capitalist camp? Is it really quiet in their "collective economy"? Not at all. Here too, interests and motives can differ greatly, there can be various storms and tsunamis. But in the world, where the dominant private property rules, the communicative language of business invariably works out a mutually acceptable solution which, having passed through "their" power structures, is always fulfilled because it is refined by the filter of economic expediency and the state Guarantor of private capital. They have adopted the only way of a civilised solution to any conflict that has been worked out for centuries – to make it more profitable for the disputing parties to stop it than to continue it. We have yet to master such methods.

Thus, by implying a change of the System, in fact, we have changed only its external form, the attributes. The System itself has remained intact – state-capitalist! […].

If the society being reformed in the direction of collegiate private capitalism does not decisively overcome the transitional phase of non-authoritarian state capitalism, which is fraught with instability and centrifugal forces, chaos, crime, economic collapse, and general ungovernability, the state spheres may reach its climax, beyond which armed conflicts and historically irreversible processes are horrendous in their consequences. The example of the collapse of the USSR, the "boiling points" in Russia and the CIS countries and, thank God, only sensitive echoes in the Chechen Republic are impressive proof of this […].

WHAT is the fate of the Russian Federation now? Will Yeltsin's "sappers" be able to overcome the unfortunate minefield for the Union, or is an explosion imminent? Or maybe Khasbulatov's frightened parliament will be able to pull everything back to more familiar circles? What if all this comes back to bite us in Chechnya? Today, it is likely that few people remember Yeltsin's December 1991 speech. His programmatic speech, delivered on 28 December after the famous deed of Belovezhskaya Pushcha, shone the long-awaited green light as a signal for the most active action, as an indulgence for the ideals of private property. This was despite it being couched in parliamentary language and thinly veiled diplomatically for would-be Russian magnates. Behind this was the little-known fact that the current processes in the Russian Empire (USSR, CIS, and RF proper) were financed. And this was done purposefully "under Yeltsin", who in contrast to the bluffing Gorbachev, DID give consent to the West for the birth of the Russian Financial Oligarchy! […].

Another, and by no means unimportant factor, is that Russia has considerable healthy forces, high intellectual potential, and the desire and means to complete the radical reforms which have been initiated. In other words, the complete package – Stimulus, Motive, Means and Power […].

WHAT then awaits us? Can it be that the mutant virus of the managerial toolkit of authoritarian state capitalism (the last time it was transformed in our country into a Soviet party apparatus), which is stubbornly fighting for vital space in the Chechen parliament, and indeed in the Russian Supreme Soviet, will nevertheless give rise to incurable metastases? For such a cancerous infection inevitably dooms the representative organs of government to becoming a kind of "reanimated Chechen Party

headquarters", taking over the rudimentary functions of control, management, and distribution in the sphere of production and consumption from its now-defunct predecessor, and usurping the right of "sole administrator of the interests and problems of the people".

So, what should be our priorities? What forces and by what means should we use first? Not easy questions, but still, answers are visible.

Let us first understand one simple axiom once and for all. No parliament of the world and no president by themselves, sitting in their palaces or residences and issuing only laws and decrees, have in the whole of the world's history fed any nation and created commodity abundance for anyone […].

That is why there is no task more important for us today than to create the best possible conditions for the intensive development of a business class from which the local Vainakh magnates of financial and industrial capital, the future flagships of the Chechen ship, the guarantors of the stability and prosperity of society, will inevitably be nurtured. It is more urgent because, unfortunately, unlike Russia, no one is financing us. Behind this was the little-known fact that the current processes in the Russian Empire (USSR, CIS, and RF proper) were financed. And this was done purposefully "under Yeltsin", who in contrast to the bluffing Gorbachev, DID give consent to the West for the birth of the Russian Financial Oligarchy! […]. But there is a deep conviction, based again on the laws and examples of social development, that the Vainakh people, which has unlimited potential reserves, will be able to dispose of them rationally, that some of the excessive willpower of the present-day Chechen population will be transformed into the missing factors and compensate for any retardations that arise on its way. And there is no other alternative to this!

FINALLY, the latest hotly debated topic of the day is the legitimacy of the current form and content of the state structure of the Chechen Republic. A sort of tablecloth for our failed political cooks. The grief-experts of both the local modus operandi and those in Moscow go to such extremes as to look for a speck in someone else's eye. So that the "worm of doubt" about the legitimacy of Chechnya does not torment and finally knock the trump card out of the hands of others, the following clarification must be given.

If we take a dialectical approach, legal professionals know that a reference to any law of any country can always be challenged on historical, legal, moral, or other grounds, because jurisprudence is inherently eclectic. That

is, "for every wise man, there is nothing simple enough", since a counterargument can always be found to any argument if desired.

It is impossible to create any small code of laws without explicit or implicit contradictions. Mankind has not yet developed a universally identifiable, logically adequate, and legally sterile language, like the machine linguistics of the computer, free from such drawbacks. And then, on the scales of disputing parties, in principle, there are always weighty enough competent reasons in their favour, but the making of judicial, arbitration, social-political or any other "legal" decision depends mostly on the balance of forces and opinions in society, on the power and force positions of disputing and mediating parties, finally, on the existing realities. This has always been the case, everywhere, at any level – from the village council to the UN General Assembly,

There is no doubt that Russia was unable to "crush" us after the secession of 1991, but it is also undeniable that Chechnya has not yet regained its position in the dispute. We are today like those two tired wrestlers on the mat who, having got into a clinch, have taken a wait-and-see position for the final victory shot. It's a difficult balance for the country, an unstable one. However, remember, unacknowledged Permanent Reality tends to be legitimised sooner or later. It is only a matter of time and stamina and – effort to do so […].

Personally, I see us in collegiate private capitalism, which certainly has national characteristics, and I am convinced that the Chechen state already not only has a history, but also a real, "non-banana-republican" great future, all we need do is to unleash the "good genie-capital". If we will not do it, others will surely do it.

IN CONCLUSION I would like to remind you of one thing. Do not forget. TRUTH is like an endless mosaic of innumerable pieces of "truths". Truth is one, the cognition of the whole immeasurable depth of which, apparently, is not given to a mere mortal, only the Almighty is destined to know it in its entirety. We are destined to perceive only its separate fragments. Everyone has his own set of truths from which he can put together his portion of the canvas of truth. How much of it can be realistically displayed, what components does it consist of and what should they be? These and other similar questions, have not yet been identified in our society. But I believe in collective Vainakh capabilities, in Chechen stimulus and motive, capable of [making up] the necessary picture of truth, however

small in size and large in number its components may be, because behind each of them stands our Man with his invaluable destiny.

PEACE, TRANQUILLITY AND PROSPERITY TO ALL OF YOU.

Vozrozhdenie No. 16, October 1994

"The Main Rehearsal Has Taken Place!"

Statement by U. Avturkhanov, Chairman of the Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic

Since various, often contradictory information and rumours have started to spread around the events in Grozny on the night of 15–16 October [1994 – C.D.], as the Chairman of the Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic, I consider it necessary to make the following statement:

The military plans of the Armed Forces of the Provisional Council had long foreseen a tactical training for our infantry within the city of Grozny, the capital of the Chechen Republic. The introduction of troops into a city with a population of almost half a million is a difficult task, all the more that some fragments of Dudayev's illegal formations remain there.

So, on 15 October, the battalions from the government troops assigned to practice operations in urban conditions were concentrated in the village of Tolstoy-Yurt and entered the suburbs of Grozny from the north, while units from the Urus-Martan grouping moved simultaneously from the south. Ten armoured personnel carriers and one tank were attached to the infantry.

We gave orders to clear the streets, seal off residential areas, and occupy important facilities in the city. The troops were in no way tasked with occupying the city. Military specialists will probably understand me, because in that case, the operation would have had a completely different character. However, on the way our formations were were surrounded by thousands of armed volunteers, who practically tied our hands. With their enthusiasm, they occupied almost half of the capital, and some groups came within 500 metres of the presidential palace.

Dudayev's men set up a sparse barricade in only one part of the city, but at the same time, in the Staropromyslovsky district, a group of dudayevtsy with tanks and guns was ready and on the move to fight. Imagine an artillery barrage within a densely populated city and a heavy fighting. Naturally, there would have been destruction of residential buildings and

heavy civilian casualties. But our government and our command had set out to take control of Grozny without fighting and destruction.

Because of the large number of armed civilians who had joined our combat units, the withdrawal of our troops from Grozny was very difficult. The men were eager to fight, and unfortunately there were also cases of disobedience to commanders and lack of cooperation. We suffered four fatalities, five wounded, one tank shot down, and one APC. On the side of the bandits, we killed mainly snipers and members of the so-called "Abkhaz" battalion, about thirty people in total. We captured ten people who made interesting statements.

Thus, it is to be hoped that in Grozny, as in the whole Chechen Republic, constitutional order will be restored by the governmental forces of the Provisional Council without any [external, Russian – C.D.] interference. Believe me, we will put a stop to the first (and hopefully last) fascist regime in the CIS very soon.

Umar Avturkhanov

Part III
Independence (2): Memory and Statebuilding under Aslan Maskhadov (1996–1999)

Introduction to the Context (1996–1999)

The inter-war period from September 1996 to September 1999 was the second period of Chechnya's de facto independence. The events of these years were characterised by economic and political challenges related to the aftermath of the war. The main political crisis in Chechnya was related to the contradictions between the main political forces after the war: the representatives of the nationalist government and the Islamist opposition. While local political dynamics in the Chechen Republic are important, for a deeper understanding of the processes of this period, it is essential to also be aware of the broader context in which they unfolded, since the repertoires of the actors involved in conflict and statebuilding both in Chechnya and Russia were largely shaped by the political dynamics and processes at the all-Russian and international levels – in some cases these factors shaped them even more than factors of local significance.

After the assassination of Dzhokhar Dudayev in April 1996, the military successes of the Chechens under the leadership of Aslan Maskhadov on the one hand and the failed attempt of the Kremlin to promote the anti-Dudayev opposition as a local proxy on the other hand pushed the Russian leadership to the negotiating table. The war formally ended on 31 August 1996 with the signing of the Khasavyurt ceasefire agreement; however, violent attacks in Russian cities continued. Neither side was happy with the outcome of the agreement, and the issue of the status of the republic was postponed until 2001 (Guldimann, 1998).

Moscow completed the withdrawal of its troops from Chechnya by the end of 1996, despite the continuing political controversies. However, the domestic political situation in Russia was, to a large extent, shaped by another confrontation at the federal (all-Russian) level, namely between the liberal faction under Boris Yeltsin and the communists around Gennady Zyuganov. On 3 July 1996, Yeltsin defeated Zyuganov in the second round of voting and was elected president for a second term.

President Maskhadov: Between International Politics and Domestic Challenges

A brief review of events during this period shows that after Chechnya's victory in the First Chechnya War, historical memory was no longer central as a resource for political mobilisation against the external enemy. The political situation in Chechnya was now, after Dudayev's death, shaped by the emergence of a new confrontation. His successor Aslan Maskhadov advocated peaceful relations with both Russia and the West and relied on the support of traditional religious structures of Chechen society, the *Sufi* brotherhoods.[1] Those who opposed any negotiation with Russia were represented in Chechnya by Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, Shamil Basayev and other radical politicians and field commanders, who acted in alliance with the international *Salafist* movement and held a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.[2] In January 1997, presidential elections were held in Chechnya and recognised as legitimate by an OSCE mission (Guldimann, 1998). The Russian authorities welcomed the election of Aslan Maskhadov as a moderate candidate.

In a similar way to historical memory in the early 1990s, religion became the main mobilising tool for political actors during the years after the First Chechnya War. A detailed assessment of the diminished importance of historical memory is difficult because independent primary data on the situation during the inter-war period is scarce. This makes a reconstruction of the political context of the period all the more important, including from direct accounts of eyewitnesses of those events. The chapter by Mairbek Vatchagayev, who was an advisor to President Maskhadov in 1997, emphasises the growing role of religion in the political processes in Chechnya over time. In particular, Sufism, which is the traditional denomination of Islam to which the overwhelming majority of Chechens adhere, was actively exploited in the struggle for independence in the 1990s, along

1 *Sufism* is a mystical denomination of Sunni Islam to which a majority of Chechnya's population traditionally adheres.

2 *Salafism* is a radical manifestation of political Islam, also referred to as *Wahhabism*. Adherents of the movement in Chechnya, however, refuse to use the term "Wahhabism", preferring to be called "Salafi".

with traumatic historical memories. However, unlike radical Islam, Sufism was not banned from public life in later years – quite the opposite, because the Sufi structures were co-opted by the pro-Russian elites in the 2000s and were actively used for political purposes by the authorities in contemporary Chechnya.

In May 1997, Boris Yeltsin and Aslan Maskhadov signed the "Peace Treaty and Principles of Relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic Ichkeria". However, the treaty did not formally recognise Chechen sovereignty and did not solve the conflict politically, as had been foreseen in the 1996 Khasavyurt agreements (Stanley, 1997). Thus, the radical Chechen opposition accused Maskhadov of making concessions to Russia without counter-demands, and their representatives left the government in protest (Muzayev, 2004).

The political tensions in Chechnya in the late 1990s were accompanied by the increased securitisation of the North Caucasus in the political debates in Russia. In the immediate aftermath of the war, certain parts of the (liberal) political establishment in Moscow were still willing to recognise Chechnya as a de facto independent entity and welcome a restoration of scientific and economic relations. Other, more radical groups in Russia, however, soon became more influential and vowed to put a forceful end to the conflict and to restore Russia's control over Grozny by military means. These debates at the federal level are addressed in Vassily Klimentov's chapter, which traces the contradictions among Russian political elites about the painful legacy of the First Chechnya War through discussions in the State Duma in 1996 and 1997. Despite the heated political climate in which they took place, these parliamentary discussions can also be seen as a window of opportunity for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, as there were still at least several political options on the table. However, as the political crisis in Chechnya deepened, the room for discussions continuously shrank and the dominating narratives on Chechnya became more and more militarised.

Meanwhile, an acute confrontation emerged between the executive branch in Chechnya, represented by the law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary, represented by the Supreme Sharia Court (Kommersant, 1997b), whose structure includes armed groups of Sharia Guards. Several public executions under Sharia law were carried out in Grozny in September 1997 (LENTA.RU, 2019). According to Russian media, this display of religious radicalism, which was what the executions were portrayed as, empowered

Moscow to negotiate with the West over Chechnya and claim the sole right to put an end to the "barbaric lawlessness" in Chechnya once and for all (Kommersant, 1997a).

Despite the difficulties of the domestic political situation and the negotiation process with Moscow, Aslan Maskhadov consistently took steps towards a rapprochement with the West. In November 1997, with Turkish mediation, Maskhadov visited the United States, which was seen as a diplomatic breakthrough for the Chechen Republic, opening the door to international recognition (Kommersant, 1997c).

Political Rivalries and Growing Crime Rates

In 1998, kidnappings of Russians and foreign citizens became a widespread practice and even a form of business for many field commanders, often associated with Salafist groups (POLIT.RU, 2006). This situation undermined the international credibility of official Grozny, despite Maskhadov's efforts to disarm the Salafists and to free the hostages (Muzayev, 2004). The intra-Chechen tensions increased further and led to a series of violent clashes. The bloodiest confrontation occurred in July 1998 in the industrial centre of Gudermes, when a local division of Maskhadov's National Guard, reinforced by local Sufi brotherhoods, defeated the Salafist Sharia Guard that had occupied large parts of the city. In September 1998, the Salafist opposition, led by Basayev, tried to remove Maskhadov from presidential power through the Sharia Court. However, Sufi brotherhoods came to Maskhadov's aid and foiled the coup. Thousands of demonstrators gathered in Grozny's main square to demand the immediate condemnation of those who conspired against the state.

At the end of 1998, the head of the anti-kidnapping department in Grozny was killed and there was also an assassination attempt on the head of the Chechen Muftiat, Akhmat Kadyrov. Further, foreign engineers working in Grozny under a contract between the government and a British telecommunications company were kidnapped and killed. This series of murders and hostage-takings were another blow to Maskhadov's reputation as a local law enforcer and did enormous damage to the attractiveness of the republic for foreign investors (BBC, 1998). However, Maskhadov

did not give up his foreign policy strategy. Among others, he managed to meet with representatives of the House of Lords and business leaders in London to discuss investment prospects in Chechnya (Kommersant, 1998a). Maskhadov argued that the kidnapping of the British engineers was the work of criminals acting at the behest of the Russian "Party of War" to isolate Chechnya (Kommersant, 1998b).

Regionalisation of the Conflict and Onset of the Second Chechnya War

In February 1999, Maskhadov announced the introduction of full Sharia rule and the establishment of an Islamic parliament ("shura"), which was a concession to the opposition and an attempt to prevent further bloodshed in the conflict with the Salafists. The opposition leaders refused, however, and formed their own shura, of which Basayev became chairman (Muzayev, 2004). In 1999, the intensity of terrorist attacks in Russian cities increased, and Gennady Shpigun, the official representative of the Russian Interior Ministry in Grozny, was kidnapped. As a retaliatory measure, Russian Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin announced the possible expulsion of members of the Chechen diaspora from the territory of Russia (Moskovskiy Komsomolets, 1999), which Chechen media interpreted as an act of repression against the Chechen people as a whole (POLIT.RU, 2006). After a series of successful measures against Salafist groups, Maskhadov regained control in Chechnya. In June 1999, he met with Stepashin, who was considered a prospective candidate to succeed Yeltsin as president of Russia at that time.

Meanwhile, the Salafists went ahead with their plans to expand their insurgency in the name of Islam across the borders of Chechnya to neighbouring regions of the North Caucasus. In August 1999, there was a large incursion of groups led by Basayev and Ibn al-Khattab into Dagestan. Official Grozny condemned this attack, but Moscow stated that Maskhadov was unable to control the situation in Chechnya. In September 1999, the federal government announced a full-scale "counterterrorist campaign" in Chechnya, which marked the beginning of the Second Chechnya War.

While Russian troops were advancing into Chechnya, moderate nationalists and members of Sufi brotherhoods tried to negotiate in order to avoid an armed confrontation; some Chechen groups even openly supported the Russians (including Mufti Akhmat Kadyrov and his supporters). Unlike Kadyrov, Maskhadov was unable or unwilling to cooperate with the federals and ended up in the same camp as his former adversaries from the Salafist opposition (Muzayev, 2004).

Amid the security challenges in the North Caucasus, Boris Yeltsin appointed FSB Director Vladimir Putin as acting prime minister and named him his successor. On 31 December 1999, when Yeltsin quit office, Putin became acting president of the Russian Federation. Despite harsh criticism of NATO's military operation in the former Yugoslavia, Moscow continued to strengthen relationships with the West, visibly avoiding isolation. In 1999, Russia participated for the first time as a full member in a G8 summit. And at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul in November 1999, the Western states formally confirmed Russia's territorial integrity according to the Constitution of 1993, which meant that Moscow was given a free hand to solve the "Chechnya problem" as an internal matter. In return, Russia agreed to reduce its presence in other separatist territories in the former Soviet space, notably in Abkhazia and Transnistria (Hill, 2002).

Historical Memory Lost in Politics

During the inter-war period of 1996–1999, the political use of historical memory was somewhat pushed to the background by religious issues and the conflict between local Muslim groups (Sufism vs Salafism). The historical narrative of resistance against the Russian enemy, as used in Chechnya under Dudayev, was replaced by the mnemonic narrative of the triumphant Chechen victory of 1996, and by a programme of statebuilding based on religious principles.

The new leadership of the Republic of Chechnya-Ichkeria focused on building and embodying power through tangible and symbolic facts. In 1996, Grozny was renamed Dzhokhar in honour of the late President Dzhokhar Dudayev (Gammer, 1999). In 1997, the year of the 200th anniversary of Imam Shamil, leader of the resistance movement against Russian

colonisation of the North Caucasus (1797–1871), a memorial complex was opened in his honour in Vedeno, the "capital" of Shamil's imamate from 1845 to 1859. The collective commemoration of the 1944 deportation had not lost its socio-cultural significance either, although it had lost its former effect as an instrument of mass mobilisation. Hence, on the fifty-fifth anniversary of the deportation in February 1999, the Dudayev monument, inaugurated five years earlier and badly damaged during the war, was rebuilt.

The Salafist opposition, too, cared little about questions of historical memory. Driven by Russia's policy of exclusion and its stigmatisation of the Salafists as "enemy number one", the latter were much more concerned with finding allies outside Chechnya, which they succeed in doing in a new alliance with global Islamist networks. Thus, unlike during the First Chechnya War, when the insurgency was exclusively a Chechen affair both in terms of political goals of independence and sources of mobilisation (traditional Sufi Islam and Chechen historical grievances), Salafism and the call for global jihad now provided a new framework for many Chechens to join the Islamist insurgency along with other North Caucasians. The ground for a regionalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency was thus laid in the inter-war period, long before Basayev's armed incursion into Dagestan.

The dominant role of religion in political mobilisation was also reflected in the changed status of Sufism, which went from being Dudayev's instrument in the mobilisation for the independence struggle in late 1990s to an instrument of the Kremlin to co-opt pro-Russian Chechen groups and to suppress the independence movement in the early 2000s.

References

BBC (1998) Kidnapped Workers "Ignored Advice", 5 October, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/186075.stm> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Gammer, Moshe (1999) Collective Memory and Politics: Remarks on Some Competing Historical Narratives in the Caucasus and Russia and Their Use of a "National Hero". *Caucasian Regional Studies*, 4(1),

<https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/crs/crs_1999/crs99_gam01.html> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Guldimann, Tim (1998) Supporting the Doves against the Hawks. *OSCE Yearbook 1997*, Baden-Baden, 135–143.

Hill, William (2002) The 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit Decisions on Moldova and Georgia: Prospects for Implementation (2002), *Kennan Institute Occasional Paper Series*, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/op284_1999_osce_instanbul_summit_conference_2002.pdf> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Kommersant (1997a) Boris Eltsin: etot shariat nedopustim [Boris Yeltsin: This Shariah Is Unacceptable], *Kommersant*, 5 September, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/183607> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Kommersant (1997b) Aslan Maskhadov razognal shariatskiy sud [Aslan Maskhadov Dissolved the Sharia Court], *Kommersant*, 11 October, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/185621> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Kommersant (1997c) Diplomaticheskiy proryv Chechni [Chechnya's Diplomatic Breakthrough], Kommersant, 15 November, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/187701> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Kommersant (1998a) Maskhadov v Londone [Maskhadov in London], *Kommersant*, 11 March, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/194161> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Kommersant (1998b) Maskhadov nashel v Londone druzey [Maskhadov Finds Friends in London], *Kommersant*, 13 March, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/194378> (accessed 4 March 2023).

LENTA.RU (2019) Poyavilos video shariatskogo suda nad Aslanom Maskhadovym [Sharia Trial Video of Aslan Maskhadov Has Appeared], *LENTA.RU*, 12 March, <https://lenta.ru/news/2019/03/12/shariat/> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Moskovskiy Komsomolets (1999) Delo o trekh milliardakh [The Case of the Three Billion], *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 12 March, <https://www.mk.ru/editions/daily/article/1999/03/12/141600-delo-o-treh-milliardah.html> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Muzayev, Timur (2004) *Aslan Maskhadov: Politicheskaya Biografiya. Rekonstruktsiya Chechni – Sovmestniy Proekt POLIT.RU i Soiuza Pravykh sil [Aslan Maskhadov: Political Biography. Reconstruction of Chechnya – A Joint Project of POLIT.RU and the Union of Right Forces]*, 18 November, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061225004109/http://kavkaz-forum.ru/dossier/3279.html> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Stanley, Alessandra (1997) Yeltsin Signs Peace Treaty with Chechnya. *The New York Times*, 13 May, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/13/world/yeltsin-signs-peace-treaty-with-chechnya.html> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Yaremenko, Valeriy (2006) General Shpigun: pokhishchenie i smert [Valery Yaremenko. General Shpigun: Kidnapping and Death]. *POLIT.RU*, 22 March, <https://polit.ru/article/2006/03/22/shpigun/> (accessed 4 March 2023).

Mairbek Vatchagaev

The Transformation of Sufism in Chechen Society

Abstract: This article examines the transformation of Sufism in Chechnya and the shift in priorities and the degree of Sufism's influence on society during armed conflict. The break-up of the Soviet Union and the two destructive wars in Chechnya (1994–1996 and 1999–2009) greatly altered the traditional order of Chechen society, including in the sphere of religious belief. Under the influence of external factors, a certain segment of society was radicalised. The present-day situation in the religious field affects many aspects of life in Chechen society. This article deals with the threats to Sufi structures and traditional values in Chechen society (family, culture, behaviour, etc.) posed by radical branches of Islam. Based on discussions with young people in Chechnya and Chechens from the diaspora, it reflects on the extent and causes of the spread of radical sentiments and studies features of and factors influencing the religious life of the Chechen diaspora in Europe.

Keywords: Chechnya, Islam, Sufism, Salafism, radicalism

Introduction: The Religious and Social Texture of Chechnya

The majority of Chechens are Sunni Muslims[1] of the *Shafi'i madhhab* school,[2] and adherents of the Sufi current of Islam.[3] Some scholars have suggested that Sufi orders or *tariqats*,[4] represented here by the *Naqshbandiya*,

1 Sunni Islam is the largest branch of Islam (representing 85–90 per cent of the world's Muslim community). Its name comes from the word *Sunnah*, which refers to the tradition of Muhammad.

2 The Shafii is one of the four major traditional schools of religious law (*madhhab*) in the Sunni branch of Islam. It was founded by Muḥammad al-Shafii.

3 Sufism is a mystic body of religious practice, found mainly in Sunni Islam but also in Shia Islam. It is characterised by a focus on Islamic spirituality, ritualism, asceticism and esotericism (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022).

4 *Tariqa* (pl *tariqat*, Arabic) means "road", "path" or "way". In the ninth and tenth centuries, *tariqa* signified the spiritual path of individual Sufis (mystics). Eventually, *tariqa*

might have penetrated the North Caucasus as early as the second half of the eighteenth century. In particular, the famous Chechen military commander Sheikh Mansur (1785–1791) could have been an early representative of this *tariqa* as indirect evidence indicates the possible presence of Sufism in the region at that time (Bennigsen, 1994). However, it is more prudent to assume that the *Naqshbandi tariqa* came to be adhered to by the Chechen masses only in the first third of the nineteenth century and the *Qadiri tariqat* in the second half of the same century.

Thus, Sufism in Chechnya is represented by two orders – the *Naqshbandiya*, which includes eighteen Sufi brotherhoods (or *virds*[5] in Chechen), and the *Qadiriya*, which includes six brotherhoods (Vatchagaev, 2009). Since no research has ever been conducted in the republic to determine the quantitative make-up of individual brotherhoods, any assertion about the dominance of a specific *vird* in Chechnya must be treated with a degree of caution.

The presence of two *tariqats* introduces a competitive element to Chechen society, though this is difficult to perceive from the outside. In the relations between brotherhoods, this competitive element is evident in attempts to promote their "own" candidates for powerful positions, to obtain *imam*[6] or *qadi*[7] status in villages with mixed *tariqats*, to lobby business interests, and so on.

A distinguishing feature of Chechen Sufism is that the members of the brotherhoods do not follow a living leader or sheikh who is part of the official chain of consecutive successors.[8] Practically all Chechen *murids*[9]

---

came to mean the order itself (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022). The two Sufi orders that are prevalent in the North Caucasus are the *Qadiriya* and the *Naqshbandiya*.

5 A *vird* is a Sufi brotherhood, a group of followers of a particular sheikh. Another meaning is a set of non-ritual prayers that a sheikh prescribes to a Sufi.

6 In Chechnya, *imam* refers exclusively to the one who is elected by the community to lead prayers and manage the work of the mosque. In practice, he is the Muslim leader of the village or community.

7 A *qadi* is a Muslim judge who renders decisions according to the *Sharia* (Islamic law) (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).

8 *Silsila* (the Arabic word for "chain") is commonly used to describe the spiritual genealogy of Sufi lineages, which in turn are used to legitimise the authority of Sufi sheikhs.

9 A *murid* is a novice committed to spiritual enlightenment and traversing a path with a spiritual guide, who may take the title of sheikh. A Sufi follower only becomes a *murid* when he makes a pledge (*bayʿah*) to a sheikh.

consider the founders of their brotherhood to be their sheikh, even if he lived in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. That is, despite the fact that the transfer of knowledge from sheikhs to *murids* is very important in contemporary Sufism (Akayev, 1994), all Chechen *murids* live according to what their sheikhs taught in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This has to be understood against the background of the severe persecution of the founding sheikhs and their families and successors by the tsarist and Soviet authorities. In an attempt to protect themselves from reprisals, the role of brotherhood leader in Chechnya was transferred exclusively by inheritance within the family of the leader or *ustaz*.[10] However, during his lifetime, nobody ever calls a brotherhood leader a sheikh: his status is concealed, primarily to protect him from persecution by the state.

One of the largest *virds* of the *Qadiriya* is the *Kunta-Haji* brotherhood. Since the arrest of their sheikh Kunta-Haji Kishiev in 1864, the followers of this powerful *vird* have not had a clearly identified leader. To this day, this community is organised on the expectation of the return of its first sheikh. In the meantime, however, the role of leader in each village is assumed by a kind of temporary leader, referred to as a *turqkh* in Chechen. The *turqkh* is not a spiritual leader or *ustaz*; he is only the administrator of a brotherhood, with no special powers.

Up to the present day, the Sufi brotherhoods of the North Caucasus have preserved their militarised social structure, dating from when the Chechens (and other North Caucasian peoples) fought the Russian Empire in the Caucasian War (1785–1864). Each brotherhood, depending on its demographic strength, is divided into groups of one thousand, one hundred or ten members, each of which is headed by an elected leader (Vatchagaev, 2009). This structure allows a rapid response to any event in Chechnya, from a war to a political process, such as elections. In each village, local leaders (*turqkhs*) are tasked with dealing with any issues associated with their *vird*, such as the implementation of the directives of superiors.

Another feature of Chechen Sufism is its distance from official Islam and from the state in general, as highlighted by the French Islamic scholar Alexandre Bennigsen. Members of Sufi brotherhoods in Chechnya, Dagestan and other regions of the tsarist or Soviet Empire lived in their

10 An *ustaz* is a Sufi follower who is authorised to teach, initiate and guide aspiring dervishes (brothers, *murids*) in the Islamic faith.

own parallel worlds, shielding themselves from the influence of official religious structures, since the Islamic administrations established by the authorities were seen as part of the state, regardless of whether they were Russian or Soviet (Bennigsen, 2016).

This kind of disengagement from the state was also observed in the field of law enforcement. Chechens often replaced constitutional law with rules based on *adat*[11] and *Sharia law*,[12] thus bypassing the state when regulating everyday life in their clans (*teyps*) and *virds* (Lazarev, 2019). They thereby attempted to neutralise the influence of the state on the traditional foundations of Chechen society, and to protect their members from persecution and the belligerent atheism of the Soviet authorities. The Russian authorities, on the other side, both during tsarism and later in the Soviet period, saw the Chechens as antagonists of the state structure and defined them as politically untrustworthy citizens.

Chechen Sufism and Its Political Significance in the Present

Sufi Mobilisation in the 1990s, Including the Chechen Revolution

The hardening of the Kremlin's policy towards the national republics led to turbulent political events, during which some union republics attempted to secede from Moscow and the Soviet Union. In addition, among the autonomous republics within the Russian Federation, which was the biggest of the newly formed Soviet successor states, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Chechnya made harsh demands for secession. However, only in Chechnya did the political forces that opposed Moscow succeed in gaining power;

11 *Adat* is the customary law of the North Caucasian peoples. It was the unwritten traditional code governing all aspects of personal conduct from birth to death. After the adoption of Islam by the local peoples, much of the *adat* was adapted to fit the Sharia system of law.

12 *Sharia*, the religious law of Islam, is seen as the expression of God's commands for Muslims and constitutes a system of duties that it is incumbent upon all Muslims to follow by virtue of their religious belief.

while the republican authorities in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan succeeded in gaining at least some economic concessions from the federal centre, in the Chechen case Moscow chose to take the road of confrontation.

The Chechens justified their secession from the Russian Federation in 1990 using a law passed by the Soviet national parliament ("Supreme Soviet") and approved by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev that equalised the rights of the autonomous republics of the Russian Federation and those of union republics in the USSR, including in relation to the right to secede (Law, 1999). Thus, the Chechens declared their desire to establish their own state outside Russia, which, according to the Soviet law, was legal. However, under the constitution of the new Russian state, the autonomous republics did not have this right. Therefore, the supporters of Chechen independence appealed to the laws of the Soviet Union, while Moscow proceeded on the basis of the constitution of the Russian Federation.

In the early 1990s, most Sufi brotherhoods adopted a wary watch-and-wait attitude towards the developments surrounding Chechnya's independence. Only Akhmet Arsanov, the grandson of Deni Arsanov, a well-known Chechen sheikh, explicitly declared himself to be against independence. He was then appointed as the personal representative of Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Chechnya and used his grandfather's authority to lure part of the population to Russia (Kisriev, 2007).

However, the expected effect was not achieved. This was made particularly evident by the fact that the family of Dzhokhar Dudayev, the first Chechen president of independent Chechnya, were adherents of the Deni Arsanov brotherhood. Sufi brotherhoods may state a common position on a particular matter, but this does not mean that all members of the brotherhood will adopt that position.

Newspapers of the time often stated that the population of the Nadterechny district[13] of Chechnya were anti-Dudavev. However, this is not compatible with the fact that Dudavev's successor and the second president of "Ichkeria", Aslan Maskhadov, was himself a native of the region and a follower of one of the influential local sheikhs, Usman-Hadji Khantiyev. This highlights that the networks and political loyalties of the individual

13 The headquarters of the anti-Dudayev opposition were located in settlements in the north of Chechnya, along the Terek River. This part of the republic accounts for seven of the eighteen Naqshbandi sheikhs.

brotherhoods are much more complicated and fragmented than they are often portrayed as being, and do not necessarily run along clearly visible lines of conflict.

The social role of Sufi brotherhoods is also apparent in the naming of armed units after certain Sufi sheikhs during the first Russian war in Chechnya (1994–1996): Ali Mitaev, Tashu-Haji, Kunta-Haji, Gazi-Haji of Zandak, Sheikh Mansur, Imam Albek-Hajji, and others.

Another example of the socio-political significance of Sufism relates to the 1997 presidential campaign in the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria". Except for the radical Islamist candidates (i.e. the former Vice President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev and the Minister of Information Movladi Udugov), all candidates – Aslan Maskhadov, Shamil Basayev and Akhmed Zakayev – actively used Sufi structures to attract the electorate and drew upon the support of the descendants of Sufi sheikhs. For example, Shamil Basayev made no secret of the fact that he relied on the support of the followers of Sheikh Ali Mitaev, who attracted tens of thousands of votes. Aslan Maskhadov, in turn, received support from many *Naqshbandi virds*; however, in order to win he also needed the support of the *Qadiriya*. To gain this support, an informal meeting was arranged between Maskhadov and Shamil Mitaev, the grandson of Sheikh Ali Mitaev, on whose followers Maskhadov's main rival Basayev had placed his bets. This meeting, although not officially linked to the electoral campaign, was nevertheless regarded by adherents of this brotherhood as a sign that their sheikh's grandson preferred Maskhadov as a candidate (Vatchagaev, 2019).

In 1998, to prove the support of the Sufis in Chechen society to the elected President Aslan Maskhadov, the latter organised meetings with almost all leading *virds*. On three afternoons per week, representatives of the brotherhoods were invited to his home. They introduced him to the history of their sheikhs and *virds*, as well as the performance of their religious rites, after which *murids* performed a collective dance or *zikr*.[14] Maskhadov, who was not familiar with life in the republic due to his military career in the Soviet army, became acquainted afresh with another part of Chechen society, the real significance of which he did not yet

14 A *zikr* is a form of Islamic meditation in which phrases or prayers are repeatedly chanted in order to praise God. It plays a central role in the Chechen Sufi tradition and is performed as a collective group.

realise. These meetings secured support for Maskhadov later that year: on 17 December 1998, tens of thousands of people, urged by their brotherhood leaders, united for a rally in the Chechen capital in order to demonstrate support for their elected president in opposition to an increasingly active wing of Islamic radicals (Muzayev, 2004).

Conflict between Sufis and Salafis

When discussing "radicals", meaning supporters of political Islam and Salafist ideas,[15] it should be borne in mind that this group is not entirely homogeneous. During the Soviet era, it was not difficult to identify the Salafis as they never took part in Sufi rites – *zikr* and *mawlud*.[16] When they attended funerals, they tried to leave quickly, so as not to be even indirectly involved in Sufi rituals. When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and liberalised public life during Perestroika, the Salafis were able to legalise their existence as a public association. They even held a constituent assembly of the "Islamic Revival Party" in Grozny in 1987 (albeit underground, since, at that time, the Communist Party did not tolerate the existence of any other party).

The theological differences between Salafis' and Sufis' understandings of Islam are substantial. Much of what is accepted in Sufism is considered forbidden by Salafis. In the early 1990s, a kind of Salafist elite of Chechens emerged in Chechnya: Akhmad Matayev (chief ideologist), Isa Umarov (who was killed in Syria in 2018), Islam Khalimov, Adam Deniyev (who later rejoined the Sufi camp), Movladi Udugov and others.

During Russia's first war in Chechnya (1994–1996), the small Chechen Salafist elite was pushed aside by volunteers from the Middle East and Turkey, who came to fight by the side of the Chechens under the flag of radical Islam. The Chechen Salafis did not want to play a secondary role

---

15 Salafism is a theological, social and political movement within Sunni Islam that advocates a return to the traditions of early generations of Muslims, who are believed to exemplify the purest form of Islam.

16 *Mawlud* is the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday; in Sufi tradition, it is performed on any occasion – a child's birthday, the completion of a house, the purchase of a car, a wedding, etc. *Mawluds* are also recited in commemoration of deceased relatives.

and sought to occupy a niche that would allow them to communicate with Islamic radical thinkers in the Middle East without intermediaries. It should be noted that the international Salafist movement showed no interest in Chechnya at that time, which is why not a single statement in support of the Chechens was made by radical Islamic leaders of world jihadism until the early 2000s.

The most prominent Salafis in Chechnya were the ethnic Chechen from Jordan, Sheikh Fathi Zandaki Shishani, and the Saudi *amir* Ibn al-Khattab. It was through them that the first Salafist paramilitary units in Chechnya emerged. They established a structure of *jamaats*, that is, religious communities opposed to the traditional Sufi brotherhoods to which the majority of the republic's population belonged. The primary group of a *jamaat* consisted of five people, one of whom was appointed the leader (*amir*). These groups formed territorial *jamaats* (rural or urban) that could count among their numbers from a few dozen to several hundred people. The *amirs* of the different territorial *jamaats* formed a deliberative body, the *shura* (or *majlis*, a kind of "parliament"). This kind of Islamist network operated throughout the North Caucasus – Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Karachay-Cherkessia and Adygeya.

If a young man decided to join the Islamists, he was assigned to a group of five people who were each given their own car, a monthly salary of $100 per person and firearms – all things that the Sufi groups did not have. In the autumn of 1996, just after the end of the first war, military training centres were established for young supporters of Salafism on the sites of former Soviet summer camps for children in the foothills of Chechnya. There, young North Caucasians learnt, among other things, the basics of Salafi Islam, techniques for religious debates, and so on. Moreover, Sharia crash courses were organised with the aim of replacing the former secular judges with Islamic courts all over the Chechen Republic. These courses were attended not only by Chechens but also by representatives of other North Caucasian republics, as well as representatives from Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

The main error of the radicals was their belief that the majority of the republic's population would support them. Their first disappointment came during an armed clash with military units of President Aslan Maskhadov in the city of Gudermes in July 1998. During the clash, the radicals were literally rescued from total physical extermination by Shamil Basayev and the "Ichkerian" Vice-President Vakha Arsanov, who asked the president to

allow the Salafists to withdraw from the city surrounded by armed groups of *Sufi* adherents. President Maskhadov, who viewed the conflict anxiously and was anxious to avoid an Afghanistan-type civil war, agreed to let them escape in the direction of Urus-Martan, where most of the group's leaders originally came from. The result of the clash was that the *Salafi* realised that they at this stage had only very limited popular support; no one dared to stand up for them, even among those who shared their views.

In the months that followed, the republic became embroiled in a protracted confrontation between Sufists and Salafists, which now took the form of kidnappings and hostage-takings by Salafist groups and did enormous damage to the reputation of the independent Chechen Republic. By invading the neighbouring Dagestan in August 1999, the Chechen detachments commanded by Shamil Basayev and Ibn al-Khattab believed they could gain the support of the local population and proclaim an Islamic Republic of Dagestan. This would then become their main base in the region and serve as a counterbalance to Chechnya, since many Salafists did not feel understood by the Sufist Chechens. However, among those who participated in the military incursion into Dagestan were different groups, as well as leaders who, in peacetime, did not even communicate with each other. Not all of them were Salafis; there were also Sufis who sincerely believed that the Daghestani people were waiting for them in order to rise up against Russia. It was only when they arrived in the Botlikhsky district of Dagestan (a region bordering Chechnya) that they came to understand that the Dagestanis neither supported their views, nor expected any help from them in establishing an Islamic republic.

The Kremlin Bets on the Sufis

Sufi brotherhoods are closed communities in which much happens in a non-public, veiled way. It is difficult to learn about the internal problems of the brotherhood from the outside.

During the second military campaign in Chechnya, Moscow took stock of the many mistakes made during the first war in 1994–1996, including in the selection of local allies. This time, Moscow decided to rely on the structures of Sufi Islam. The appointment of Akhmat Kadyrov, at the time still Mufti of "Ichkeria", as a leader of the pro-Russian forces in the republic came as a surprise for many. As a result of this decision

and in order to counterbalance the Kremlin's nominee, candidates from other Sufi brotherhoods began to appear – an eventuality that Moscow's political strategists had not expected: Ruslan Khasbulatov (an adherent of the *Naqshbandi* sheikh Dokku Shaptukayev), Husain Jabrailov (from the *Qadiri* brotherhood Kamatgirev), as well as a number of candidates supported by other brotherhoods. However, under various pretexts, the candidates not supported by the Russian presidential administration were later forced not only to withdraw from the presidential campaign but also to abandon the political arena of the republic forever.

The readiness of Sufi leaders to seek an agreement with Moscow became a turning point for a part of Chechen society. After having resisted militant state atheism throughout the Soviet period, the Sufi structures now became a political tool for the same state that had invaded and destroyed independent Chechnya and the people living in it. During this war, the Sufis who had previously criticised the spiritual administrators of the Soviet Union, because they saw them as defenders of the state's policy, merged with those against whom they had previously struggled. The loyalist stance taken by the leaders of the brotherhoods affected all adherents of Sufism and led to disappointment with Sufism among a certain segment of the population, especially the youth.

Since the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022, there has been an interesting development in the instrumentalisation of Sufism for political and military mobilisation. In line with the Kremlin's policy of Chechenisation, Akhmat Kadyrov and his son Ramzan made ample use of the monopoly of power that was transferred to them by Moscow in the early 2000s, re-organising the political, social and religious conditions in Chechnya according to their own and the Kremlin's interests. Moreover, since February 2022, Ramzan Kadyrov has attempted to re-activate the experience of the First Chechen War, when adherents of the Sufi brotherhoods, without orders from Dudayev or Maskhadov, created volunteer units and named them after certain sheikhs. That is, Kadyrov seems to believe (mistakenly, in the author's opinion) that such a bottom-up mobilisation along Sufi lines is also possible in the present day, in Russia's war in Ukraine.[17] However, today this attempted mobilisation has occurred not from below, as in 1994, but from above, on the initiative of the authorities.

17 See also Mamsurov (2022).

This is precisely the problem, and this is why Kadyrov's attempt will, in the author's opinion, not find support among the masses in Chechnya. The head of the republic may announce that some Sufi units have been created, and he will certainly try to gain political profit from this; however, these will hardly be spontaneously created detachments, equipped and financed by the *murids* themselves, as was the case during Russia's first invasion of Chechnya. That is, Kadyrov is certainly aware that the *murids* continue to have great mobilisatory potential; however, as has been demonstrated in the past, the Sufi brotherhoods do not tolerate outside interference in their affairs. The author therefore thinks that Kadyrov's appeal to the brotherhoods to support the Russian armed forces in Ukraine will, for the most part, be ignored by the Sufis.

The "Salafisation" of the Chechen Armed Resistance

The Second Chechen War, which began in autumn 1999, changed many things, both among members of the armed resistance and in society. The Chechens were divided on the new war, tired as they were as a result of the political crisis of the inter-war period. People had not had time to recover from Russia's first devastating assault on Chechnya. There was no consensus in society as to who was to blame for the outbreak of the new war. Many believed, not entirely wrongly, that the activities of the Salafists had led to this new tragedy. At the beginning of the second war, the former political opponents resisted the Russian invasion independently of each other: the forces subordinate to President Maskhadov fought separately from the Islamic radicals, who did not act in common with the "Ichkerian" president, as they had during the first war. It took a year and a half for everyone to realise that the second war bore little resemblance to the first, and that it could not be fought alone.

In 2002, the leaders of the radical *jamaats*, who had previously denied the very possibility of recognising President Maskhadov as the sole leader of the armed resistance, were forced to declare subordination to him until the end of the military activities. Two competing political structures merged in face of their joint enemy, Russia: the "State Defence Committee", headed by President Maskhadov, and the "Supreme Military Majlisul Shura (Supreme Council) of the United Mujahedeen Forces of the Caucasus", headed by Maskhadov's more radical political rival, Shamil

Basayev. The new unified body was called the "State Defence Committee – Majlisul Shura". It is worth nothing, firstly, the change in the balance of power in the Chechen resistance movement. By that time, Maskhadov was already disillusioned with the West's attitude towards Russian actions in Chechnya, so he sought support in the Middle East and was prepared to make concessions to the local radicals. Secondly, it was not Maskhadov who gave in to the radicals; rather, the latter realised that they could not win without forming an alliance with other military units, especially those subordinated to Maskhadov. And finally, both Maskhadov and the radicals had, by that time, realised that the situation was far more critical for them than they had initially imagined.

The assassination of President Maskhadov in Tolstoy-Yurt in 2005, carried out by the Russian security services, was met with silence by the international community. His death was the starting point for the radical transformation of the entire Chechen armed resistance. The assassination of Abdul-Khakim Sadulayev, Maskhadov's successor, by *kadyrovtsy* (Ramzan Kadyrov's paramilitary groups) in 2006 quashed the hopes of those who still believed in fighting under the flag of independent "Ichkeria" rather than radical Islam. The final ideological substitution of the values of the Chechen resistance as a struggle for the independence of "Ichkeria" took place under the leadership of Doku Umarov, who was no different from the more prominent field commanders. After the death of Maskhadov, Sadulayev and Basayev, the resistance found itself in an ideological vacuum, which was quickly filled by radical Islamic ideologists from the *jamaats* of neighbouring republics. The most important among them was Anzor Astemirov, one of the leaders of the Salafist movement in Kabardino-Balkaria and commander of the local *jamaat* Yarmuk. Astemirov provided Umarov with a new vision of a future North Caucasus unified as a single Sharia state. As the leader of the North Caucasus armed underground, it was he who confronted Doku Umarov with the question of why Kabardians, Dagestanis, Ingush and other peoples of the North Caucasus should fight for the independence of "Ichkeria" only. To avoid such a contradiction, it was decided to raise the flag of Islamic armed resistance in the North Caucasus, where all the *jamaats* would fight for common values, while at the same time aiming to liberate their own republics from Russian domination. This was the final departure from the concept of an independent "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria". In 2007, these developments cumulated in the emergence of the *Imarat Kavkaz* (Caucasus

Emirate). Although not all Chechen commanders were immediately ready to accept this radical change,[18] it was nevertheless the beginning of the end of the armed resistance in the name of the independence of "Ichkeria".

Slogans of Islamic unity, conceived by the new leaders of the armed resistance, were presented as a unifying ideology based on a single religion for all peoples of the North Caucasus. However, all this was of no importance to the armed underground itself. Russia has repeatedly attacked the *jamaats* in various parts of the North Caucasus, wiping them out one after the other, with the result that, by 2010, the conflict was confined to the borders of Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan.

With the death of Doku Umarov, the leader of the Caucasus Emirate, in September 2013[19] and the transfer of the command of the armed resistance to the Dagestani *jamaat*, the very structure of the armed underground in the North Caucasus began to break apart. By that time, the members of the *jamaat* had neither the strength nor the capacity to carry out any special operations in Chechnya, Dagestan or in any other republic of the North Caucasus. Their main task became surviving persecution by the FSB (Russian intelligence services), the Interior Ministry and the Russian armed forces.

The appearance of the Islamic State (IS) in the region seemed to represent a new chance for dramatic changes in favour of the armed underground.[20] Support for IS grew because several thousand representatives of the North Caucasus, most of whom were of Chechen origin,[21] participated in the armed resistance against the regime of the Syrian President

---

18 The announcement of the Caucasus Emirate provoked the rebellion of three field commanders who supported independent "Ichkeria": Aslanbek Vadalov, Aslan Byutukaev and Tarkhan Gakaev refused to recognise Doku Umarov's leadership for several years. This led to Doku Umarov making a video message on 2 August 2010 about the resignation of the *amir* of the Caucasus Emirate and the appointment of Vadalov as his successor. However, two days later, he changed his mind and stated that this video message had been falsified by his opponents.

19 See *Kavkazskiy Uzel* (27 September 2017).

20 According to the Institute for the Study of War, the Islamic State has announced the creation of its own province – a wilayat in the Caucasus. This was announced on 23 June 2015, by the AFP agency, which cited a statement by Abu-Muhammad al-Adnani, who acts as the group's spokesman (see Gambhir, 23 June 2015).

21 The Russian media, citing data from US authorities, reported that there could be up to 3,000 Chechens in Syria (see *Vzglyad – Delovaya Gazeta*, 23 March 2016).

Bashar al-Assad. This was particularly alarming for Russia, as the danger of a return of radical Islamist fighters from Syria was considered to be very real. The return of these fighters and the shift to Islamic State structures in the local underground could undo all of Russia's achievements in the fight against the insurgency in the region. The new insurgents with Islamic State ideology were considered more radical than those who were commonly referred to as "radicals" or "Islamists" in Russia.

It seemed that the insurgency in the North Caucasus had found a powerful ally and could once again become active and capable of responding to attacks by the Russian security services. But, in fact, apart from some propagandistic announcements, there appeared to be no trend of *jamaats* moving from the Caucasus Emirate to the Islamic State.

The War in Syria as a Factor in the Transformation of Chechen Radicals

The Chechen *jamaat*, weakened after numerous strikes by Russian intelligence, suddenly made itself known outside the republic when numerous Chechen units showed up in Syria. The leaders of the "Caucasus Emirate" were less than delighted by the fact that insurgents from North Caucasus had changed their target from the region to distant Syria. Experts actively discussed the possibility that Russia itself was facilitating the insurgents' departure to Syria (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2015).

Initially these units were created on the basis of those North Caucasians who were already in the Middle East, studying in numerous Islamic educational institutions, when the conflict in Syria began. They began to look for an opportunity to unite with those who came from Russia or the former Soviet Union. Those from the North Caucasus, and especially the large Chechen diaspora in the Middle East, have formed their own combat units in the armed structures of the Islamic State.

By early 2013, Chechens holding refugee status or citizenship in European countries, as well as Chechens living in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge bordering Chechnya, together with natives of other countries of the former Soviet Union, had also joined the ranks of Chechen units in Syria.[22]

---

22 The Syrian ambassador to Russia said that about 10,000 militants fighting for the Islamic State come from the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The attention of North Caucasians, including Chechens, shifted to events in Syria, which has led to the de facto demise of the "Caucasus Emirate" in the political and military arena. Its commanders had practically ruined with their own hands what they had been creating since 2007 and tried to create a representation of the so-called "Islamic State" instead (Vatchagaev, 2015).

With the fall of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the armed resistance in the North Caucasus also virtually disappeared. The sporadic actions of Chechens in Chechnya, who used their meagre resources to attack police officers, made little difference to insurgency in the region as a whole. Isolated attacks and the oaths of allegiance to the Islamic State by *jamaat* leaders could no longer compensate for what had been physically destroyed by the Russian security services in the region.

Of the better-known Chechen commanders in Syria, only Abdul-Hakim Shishani (Rustam Azhiev), who moved to Ukraine in 2022 to fight against the Russian army, and Muslim Shishani (Murad Margoshvili) are alive today. Although the latter was reported to be dead, it is more likely that he illegally moved to Turkey.

The assassination of Aslan Byutkayev, the last leader of the Chechen *jamaat*, in early 2021 sealed the armed resistance's withdrawal from the political scene in Chechnya. Nevertheless, that is not to say that the radicals have ceased to be a political force in Chechnya. In the changed circumstances, some radicals have gone underground, forced to conceal their opinions, because the slightest suspicion that they are members of an organisation, or even the mere expression of sympathy for a particular political project, would result in the authorities of the present-day Chechen Republic persecuting them most severely (Human Rights, 2019). At the same time, the authorities officially adhere to Islamic values; however, they see these values only in a Sufist context and in line with Moscow (Belov, 2021).

See the message of the Syrian ambassador to the Russian Federation Riad Haddaa to journalists in St Petersburg in 2015 (*Ria Novosti*, 20 November 2015).

Sufism and Radicalism among Present-Day Chechen Youth

In 2015 and 2020, a group from the Centre for Caucasian Studies (Paris) and the Centre for Caucasian Initiative (Moscow-Grozny-Paris), with the assistance of colleagues from universities in Chechnya, conducted interviews with Chechen youth. This aim of this study was to find out what young Chechens in and outside Chechnya think about the events in Syria, and what they think about the Islamic State.

The first part of the study was conducted among Chechen students both in Chechnya and at two Russian universities (Moscow and Saratov). The questions addressed their understanding of the political situation in the Chechen Republic, where any mention or discussion of the above-mentioned topics can lead to persecution by the authorities. It was decided to limit the interviews to a minimum of four questions, which clarified how much information they had and how they personally perceived the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

The second part of the study was conducted online, due to the risk posed to all participants. The respondents answered the questions anonymously, indicating only their place or residence (European state or region in Russia), age and gender. The aim of the second part of the survey was to find out how much the Chechens living in Europe had changed over the last two decades, how the mentality of young people who had received an education in Europe differed from that of those residing in Chechnya, how strong a connection Chechens in Europe had with their historical homeland of Chechnya, what the differences in their attitude towards religion were, and which country they saw themselves being citizens of in the future. For the purposes of this article, we will now have a closer look at the questions concerning religiosity and way of life, as well as those relating to events in Syria: "How do you assess the involvement of Chechens in the conflict in Syria and Iraq (2012–2018)?" and "How do you see the future of Chechnya: democratic, like in European countries, or with an Islamic form of government?"

The average present-day Chechen associates his or her existence with Islam, even if he or she is not a practising Muslim. When asked about religious affiliation, the Chechen answers: "Of course I am a Muslim, because I am a Chechen". For Chechens today, the two notions are equivalent. This

seems to explain why almost all Chechens associate themselves exclusively with Islam, while a significant number of them express a negative attitude towards other religions (Tekushev, 2011).

The results of the study, while not intended to be representative, have made it possible to sketch a portrait of the average young Chechen's perceptions of Islamic and national traditions. These findings allow assumptions to be made about the prevailing sentiments among young people in terms of gender, age and place of residence. Hundreds of respondents were questioned at both stages of the survey (200 in the first case and 230 in the second). Thus, it is possible to talk with a degree of certainty about how and what young Chechens think about radical Islam in contemporary society.

Young people in Chechnya, who were sympathetic towards the members of the armed resistance both in Chechnya and in Syria, predominantly saw the insurgents as those who dared to take action against the authorities. Unable to express their own point of view on what is happening in Chechnya or the Muslim world, they expressed interest in and sympathy for those who did so outside Chechnya. This attitude is linked to the anti-Russian position of this segment of the youth: they tend not so much to radicalise as to protest against certain measures taken by Moscow through its proxies in Chechnya. In other words, the radicalisation of young people in Chechnya is more of a symptom of protest than a general trend of radicalisation.

Chechens who live in Chechnya "absorb" much from reading radical content on the internet, especially content that is critical of the local authorities and Russian politics in general. They do not trust local Muslim theologians, believing that they work for the authorities and express the ideas of the authorities. This alienates young people from the official clergy and pushes them towards those who call on them to rise up under the banner of the fight for freedom. It is mainly those who proclaim the ideas of radical Islam who are viewed as liberators. The minority backing the concept of "Ichkerian" independence does not have sufficient influence or capacities to compete with those calling for liberation through global jihad.

If we attempt to sketch the portrait of the average young Chechen who holds radical Islamic ideas, it looks as follows: a young man or woman aged between 16 and 24, with a higher education or about to receive one; he or she actively uses the internet in search of confirmation of his opposition to Russian authorities, which are viewed as an obstacle to the realisation

of universal justice through the establishment of Islamic Sharia law; he or she is ready to defend the own ideas and considers everything that does not coincide with his or her point of view on what is happening in Syria to be propaganda created the authorities and not trustworthy; he or she is aggressive, as it is impossible to convince him- or herself and others of the own rightness. It is likely that this resentment is the result of the harsh policies of the Chechen authorities, as well as a feeling of disempowerment experienced by them and their family members.

The studies show that radical Islamic ideas, in their most extreme form, are widespread among students. It makes little difference whether these students study in Grozny or Moscow: the degree of acceptance of radical ideas is high regardless of the place of residence. Indeed, it is slightly higher in Moscow in comparison with Grozny. It is probable that this is representative of protest among young people against the Muslim institutions in Russia, which they perceive as working closely with the authorities, and which sometimes act in defiance of Islam by imposing political slogans, as, for example, in the context of the present war in Ukraine, which the Chechen authorities have called a jihad (Holy War), with all those who die under the Russian flag being declared shahids.[23]

The Muslim clergy's association with the authorities discredits it in the eyes of young people. They look online for alternative Muslim ideas and structures, which are not subject to the control of the authorities. Also, they demonstrate a general mistrust towards Sufism because whatever a Sufi scholar might say anywhere in the world is immediately equated with the words of those who are collaborating with the authorities in Chechnya today.

23 *Shahid* is the term for believers (martyrs) who were killed by the enemy in war, fighting in the name of Allah, defending their faith, homeland, honour and family. It is used in the sense of "a martyr for the faith". In the twenty-first century, the word "shahid" is widely used (mainly by journalists) to refer to Islamist terrorists who commit suicide attacks.

Sufism among the Chechen Diaspora in Europe

The voice of Chechen exiles plays an important role in Chechnya's domestic political discourse, regardless of whether they travelled abroad because they hold views opposed to Kadyrov and faced persecution by Russian security services and local authorities, because they were active in the underground, because they sympathise with the idea of an independent "Ichkeria", because they do not accept Sufism or religious traditions as understood by the authorities, or simply because they turned their backs on the war to seek their fortune far from their homeland. Today, large Chechen diasporas exist in France (about 67,000), Germany (50,000), Austria (30,000), Belgium (20,000), Norway (15,000), Poland (10,000) and other European countries. Nobody can say exactly how many Chechens are in Europe; we can only assume that their number exceeds 200,000 (North Caucasus, 2021). However, it is worth keeping in mind that tens of thousands of Chechens also live in Turkey and in Middle Eastern countries, and additional tens of thousands live in the successor states of the former Soviet Union. One can therefore estimate that at least one of five Chechens lives outside his or her ethnic homeland.

In contrast to the rest of Europe, the Chechen communities in the United Kingdom and the United States are largely made up of the business elite and students. Furthermore, many Chechens have migrated to Canada. A number of young Chechens are well integrated and have successfully found a place in their new countries of residence: Bella Bach is a member of the German Bundestag; Adam Isayev is a deputy of a city council in Belgium; Adlan Taramov is the head of the city district of Toronto (Canada); doctors and lawyers who have received their education in Europe have begun careers there. There are numerous associations, foundations and centres devoted to preserving Chechen language and traditions among the younger generations. There is a pan-European diasporic political structure, the "Chechen Assembly of Europe", headed by Aslan Murtazaliyev. Fearing that Chechen identity will be dissolved in these new cultures, the older generation of Chechens is concerned with its preservation among their children and grandchildren. For this reason, Sunday schools have been set up in Paris, Nice, Strasbourg, Berlin, Vienna and other cities. They teach traditions and try to establish closer cultural

connections with the historical homeland so that children continue to feel a sense of belonging to it.

Among the Chechen diaspora in Europe, Canada and the United States, there has been an active search for a political platform that could unite all Chechens abroad. Debates and conferences are held on this topic and statements and calls for unity are published. However, so far, the diaspora has remained separated along the same dividing lines as in Chechnya, as the Chechens living in Europe have brought with them all the problems they previously faced in their homeland. These dividing lines relate to the confrontation between Sufism and Salafism, the standoff between "Ichkerians" and supporters of the Kadyrov regime (*kadyrovitsy*), the apolitical attitude of large parts of the population, disputes over whether the future Chechen state would be democratic or organised according to Sharia, etc. However, the younger generation of the diaspora has become more active and its members are now creating associations designed to bring together Chechens from different countries. It is to be hoped that they who speak several languages and are familiar with Western methods of social development can bring a new perspective to determining the future path of Chechen society.

Additionally, in European countries, a certain number of Chechens, though not the majority, try to follow Sufi traditions. Performing *mawlud* (the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday) is the most common activity. In some Belgian cities, there are representatives of the Kunta Hajji brotherhood, who organise weekly *zikr*. Similar activities are organised in Austria, Germany, Norway and France. Some *murids* seek out mosques of Turkish or North African communities in Europe, because their conception of Islam largely coincides with that of the Chechen Sufis. There is also a reluctance to bury a family member in Muslim cemeteries in European countries. For adherents of Sufism, it is obligatory to bury family members in their ancestral village in Chechnya.

However, the prospects of developing or maintaining Sufism among Chechen diasporas in Europe are doubtful. The youth, regardless of their country of residence, tends to integrate into the new, local culture and become an integral part of it. Even if some aspects of Sufi identity are still intact in the Chechen communities in Europe, it is unlikely that these will be strong enough to survive among the second-generation Chechens in Europe.

Of course, there have also been issues in the Chechen diaspora. There is conflict between first-generation migrants and the authorities and societies in host countries regarding recognition of gender equality. And there are disputes between the younger generations and their parents, who try to educate them as they would in Chechnya without taking into account the fact that their sons and daughters are granted the same rights as the local youth. Further, young Chechens who came to Europe as children sometimes try to see the world exclusively through the eyes of a Chechen immigrant, which can lead to their radicalisation, as evidenced by terrorist attacks or other attempts to forcefully change the situation in their host countries; examples include the May 2018 attack in the Paris Opéra district (carried out by Hamzat Azimov, born in 1997) and the murder of teacher Samuel Pati in a Paris suburb in October 2020 (carried out by Abdullah Anzorov, born in 2002).

Conclusion

On the basis of the above, is it possible to conclude that Sufism in Chechnya is on the decline and that it is weakening under the onslaught of radicalism? In fact, one should not draw far-reaching conclusions merely based on the fact that representatives of radical Islam are more active and more visible in the internet space than adherents of Sufism. Sufism experienced a shortage of professional theologians and Islamic scholars from its own ranks in the late 1980s and early 1990s, that is, precisely at the time of the rise of Salafism. The Sufi sheikhs based their arguments on assertions such as “this is the traditional truth and it is not open to debate”, while the Salafists, referring to the teachings of numerous educated Muslim preachers, managed to convincingly debunk the words of the sheikhs as invented interpretations and to confuse the sheikhs with simple questions about the Qur’an and the Prophet’s *Sunnah* (Islamic traditions and the exemplary actions of the Prophet Muhammad).

In the second half of the 1990s, Chechen Sufis actively started sending their followers to study in the countries of the Middle East. They went primarily to Syria, but also to Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. As a result, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, educated Sufis appeared, albeit belatedly, who

could reasonably argue with the Salafis and refute the dogmas of radical Islam. Today there are not just *mullahs* in Chechnya, but also hundreds of *qadis* and *imams* who have higher Islamic education. It is not uncommon for Sufi adherents to have doctoral degrees, including in Sharia law. In other words, the situation is changing for the better for the followers of Sufism.

More and more young people are participating in *zikr*. In the 1990s, participants in these Sufist ritual dances were mostly elderly people, but today there are also many young participants. In numerous YouTube videos, it is apparent that there are more young people than elderly people participating in public collective *zikr*. It is therefore premature and incorrect to speak of the complete control of the minds of young people by the proponents of radical Islam. Even Chechens living in European countries continue the Sufi practice of *zikr*. It comes as no surprise that *zikr* are conducted in Chechen mosques in Belgium, France, Germany and Austria. Sufi practices are still the norm, as can be seen, for example, in funeral rites: out of a notional hundred funerals, perhaps two or three are conducted according to Salafi norms.

Another factor contributing to the development of Sufism in Chechen society is the present socio-political context. Today, there is still no real political party in Chechnya that could represent the interests of various groups of the population; instead, there are informal Sufi structures. The Russian authorities brutally repress the expression of any public opinion that is at odds with Moscow. Therefore, all political parties created in line with the federal centre are nothing more than levers of the administrative regulation of political processes and bypass the real life of Chechen society.

In spite of the presence of supporters of Salafism in Chechnya, as elsewhere in the North Caucasus, one can assume that today the overwhelming majority of the republic's population still identifies itself with the Sufi structure of Chechen society. A majority of Chechens are involved in politics through Sufi brotherhoods, which, over the past two centuries, have become a substitute for political parties. It is the fraternities that will determine the future of Chechnya, not the fictitious parties and insignificant federally appointed figures who represent them. Thus, the Sufi structure, having adapted to the real structure of Chechen society, has become more of a political phenomenon than a religious one, having largely lost the features of classical Sufism. Sufi brotherhoods make it possible to rise above clan (*teyp*), geographical (plain, mountain, etc.) and social alliances,

which gives them a centralising function in Chechen society. This is the peculiarity of the current state of affairs in Chechen society. Will this structure change over time? Undoubtedly, the emergence of real parties will at some point relegate the brotherhoods to the background. Nevertheless, in the next decade, there is no danger of Sufism leaving the political arena of Chechnya, and those who intend to live and work in the republic should take this into account.

References

Akaev, V.K. (1994) *Sheikh Kunta-khadji: zhizn' i uchenie [Sheikh Kunta Hajji: Life and Teaching]*, unknown publisher, Grozny.

Belov, E. (2021) "Kreml' vyrastil drakonchika". Chego zhdat' ot chetvertogo sroka Kadyrova? ["The Kremlin Has Raised a Dragon". What to Expect from Kadyrov's Fourth Term?], *Kavkaz Realii*, 11 October, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/kremlj-vyrastil-drakonchika-chego-zhdatj-ot-chetvertogo-sroka-kadyrova/31503110.html> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Bennigsen, A. (1983) *Musulmane v SSSR [Muslims in the USSR]*, YMCA Press, Paris.

Bennigsen, A. (1994) *'Svyashchennaya voina' Sheikha Maysura (1785–1791gg). – Maloizvestniy period i sopernichestvo v russko-turetskikh otnoshcheniakh [Sheikh Mysore's "Holy War" (1785–1791) – A Little Known Period and Rivalry in Russo–Turkish Relations]*, Tarikh, Makhachkala.

Embassy of the United States in Russia (2019) Ezhegodniy doklad o polozhenii c pravami cheloveka v stranakh mira za 2019 god (Rossiya) [Annual Report on the World's Human Rights Situation 2019 (Russia)], <https://ru.usembassy.gov/ru/our-relationship-ru/official-reports-ru/hrr-2019-ru/> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Encyclopedia Britannica (2022) <https://www.britannica.com/> (accessed 9 March 2023).

encyclopedia.com (2022) <https://www.encyclopedia.com/> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Gambhir, Harleem (2015) ISIS Declares Governorate in Russia's North Caucasus Region, *Institute for the Study of War*, 23 June, <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/isis-declares-governorate-russia%E2%80%99s-north-caucasus-region> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2015) Eksperty postavili pod somnenie svedeniya o trekhkratnom roste chisla boevikov iz Rossii v IG [Experts Have Questioned Reports that the Number of Russian Fighters in IS Has Tripled], 12 December, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/274190/> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2017) Umarov Dokku Khamadovich (Abu Usman), 27 September, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/77362/> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Kisriev, E.F. (2007) Islam i natsional'nye otnosheniya na Severnom Kavkaze [Islam and International Relations in the North Caucasus], in *Islam v Rossii [Islam in Russia]* (ed. A. Malashenko), Aspekt Press, Moscow.

Kunta, Eset S. (2012) Ya gord, chto eto vyshchee dukhovnoe zavedeniye nosit imya moego pradeda [I Am Proud that This Institution of Higher Learning Is Named after My Great-Grandfather], 25 July, *Vesti Respubliki*, <https://vesti095.ru/2012/07/4538766/> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Lazare, Egor (2019) Laws in Conflict: Legacies of War, Gender, and Legal Pluralism in Chechnya, *World Politics*, 71/4, 28 August.

Mamsurov, Alikhan (2022) Ideya o Sufiyskikh Batalyonakh Obnazhila Problemy Rekrutinga v Chechne [The Idea of Sufi Battalions Has Exposed Recruitment Problems in Chechnya], *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, 18 November, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/383156/> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Murzaev, Timur (2004) Aslan Maskhadov: politicheskaya biografiya [Aslan Maskhadov: Political Biography], *Rekonstruktsiya Chechni*, 18 November.

Ria Novosti (2015) Posol Sirii v Rossii: okolo10 tysyach vykhodtsev iz SNG voyuyut za IG [Syrian Ambassador to Russia: Around 10,000 CIS Nationals Are Fighting for IS], 20 November, <https://ria.ru/20151120/1325042319.html> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Sokolov, Denis (ed.) (2021) *Severniy Kavkaz: obshchestvo v regione, strane, mire [The North Caucasus: A Society in the Region, the Country, the International Community]*, Laurus, Kyiv.

Tekushchev, I. (2011) *Islam na Severnom Kavkaze: istoriya i sovremennost' [Islam in the North Caucasus: History and Modernity]*, Medium Orient, Prague.

Vatchagaev, M. (2009) *Sheikhy i ziyarty Chechni [Sheikhs and Ziyarats in Chechnya]*, Mozhayskiy poligraficheskiy kombinat, Moscow.

Vatchagaev, M. (2015) Two North Caucasus Rebel Leaders Face Off in Islamic State–Caucasus Emirate Dispute, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 12/120, 26 June, <https://jamestown.org/program/two-north-caucasus-rebel-leaders-face-off-in-islamic-state-caucasus-emirate-dispute-2/> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Vatchagaev, M. (2019) *Chechnya: The Inside Story. From Independence to War*. Open Books.

Vzglyad – Delovaya Gazeta (2016) Gosdep naschital v ryadakh terroristov v Sirii do 3 tys. vykhodtsev iz Chechni [The State Department Has Counted up to 3,000 Chechens among the Ranks of Terrorists in Syria], 23 March, <https://vz.ru/news/2016/2/23/795933.html> (accessed 9 March 2023).

USSR (1990) *Zakon No. 1457-I o razgranicheniy mezhdu Soyuzom SSR i sub'ektami Federatsii, ot 26 aprelya 1990 [Law No. 1447-I on the Division of Powers between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Entities of the Federation, 26 April 1990]*.

Vassily Klimentov

Coping with Defeat: The Russian State Duma's Views of Chechnya after the First Chechen War

Abstract: The First Chechen War (1994–96) was a watershed moment in Russian domestic politics. It has greatly influenced the elites' transitions that occurred in the 1990s. Interestingly, the Russian defeat in the war has not, as one might have expected, marginalised the Soviet-era nationalist security elites most responsible for starting and losing the war. Instead, it has reinforced their influence on policy while discrediting the liberals who opposed the conflict. Examining the debates about Chechnya in the State Duma in 1996–97, this article suggests that there are two reasons for this: the continued perception that the liberals and President Boris Yeltsin were responsible for the Chechen War and the controversial Khasavyurt Accord that ended it, and the fear that a weak Russia may collapse due to a separatist domino effect born out of Chechnya.

Keywords: Chechnya, Russia, First Chechen War, State Duma, Imam Shamil

Introduction

The First Chechen War (1994–96, hereafter the Chechen War) was a defining moment in post-Soviet Russian history. More than any other event, it illustrated Russia's difficulty in shedding its imperial legacy after the Soviet collapse. Fearing Chechen separatism, Russian President Boris Yeltsin launched a brutal and indiscriminate war in December 1994 to keep Chechnya inside the Russian Federation. Facing fierce Chechen popular resistance, opposition from Russian public opinion towards the rising number of casualties, and, ultimately, acknowledging its own military's lack of preparation for this type of conflict, the Kremlin eventually appealed for peace with the Chechens.

In August 1996, the on-and-off negotiations led to a settlement signed in the town of Khasavyurt in Dagestan. However, this did not solve the issues of Chechen-Russian relations and simply pushed back the decision

on Chechnya's status to 2001. It also saw the war-torn and bankrupt Yeltsin administration make promises regarding the financing of Chechen reconstruction that it never planned to keep. On the Russian side, security sector and political elites, and even some liberals, saw the Khasavyurt Accord as a retreat, an unacceptable concession made by Russia. Among the former KGB, the military, the nationalist deputies of the State Duma, and the Lower House of the Russian Parliament, such perceptions fuelled a revanchist attitude towards Chechnya. On the Chechen side, amidst competition between nationalist and Islamist leaders, some Chechens similarly saw the accord as a temporary solution that was too accommodating to Russian interests.

In retrospect, the Chechen War was a watershed moment that made the "Chechen factor" central in Russian domestic politics. At the time, whilst the peace achieved in Khasavyurt seemed to vindicate the position of the liberal and pro-Western politicians in Russia who had most strongly opposed the war, it also created a suction effect that led to the strengthening of hard-line politicians and people from the security services. While some of these people had already been integrated into Yeltsin's team before the war (and had been instrumental in starting the war), many security services operators ascended to top positions after the war. As Andrei Kozyrev, Yeltsin's liberal minister of foreign affairs, once remarked, the Chechen War fostered the "revenge of the [Soviet] bureaucracy" (quoted in Aven and Koch, 2013: 194–96). From a broader perspective, it marked the beginning of the Russian authoritarian drift in domestic and foreign policy.

While many scholars have worked on the Chechen War, the historiography has not systematically engaged with the question of why the defeat in Chechnya discredited the liberals and not the security services (on the First Chechen War: Lieven, 1998; Rakhmanova, 2012; Souleimanov, 2007; Trenin and Malashenko, 2004; Wilhelmsen, 2016; Yemelianova and Broers, 2020). This article fills this gap by investigating the discussions on Chechnya at the State Duma in 1996–97 and the proceedings of the "Shamil and the Caucasian War. History and Modernity" conference (hereafter "the conference") organised by the State Duma in October 1997. It argues that at least two factors have led to the liberals' marginalisation and, correspondingly, the rise of the security elites: the continued perception that the liberals and Yeltsin were responsible for both the Chechen War itself and its controversial resolution in Khasavyurt, and the fear that

a weak Russia may collapse due to a separatist domino effect born out of Chechnya.

This article builds on the analytical notes about the North Caucasus produced by various governmental agencies for the State Duma and on the records of the State Duma debates available at the State archive of the Russian Federation (*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, GARF) in Moscow. It also relies on the proceedings of the "Shamil and the Caucasian War. History and Modernity" conference available in GARF.

The article is structured in three parts. The first part offers context about the Russian-Chechen conflict and the elites' transitions in Russia in the early to mid-1990s. The second part is split into three sections and discusses the debates on Chechnya at the State Duma in 1996–97. The final part examines the proceedings of the conference.

Chechnya and the Elites' Transitions in Russia in the 1990s

Following the end of the Soviet Union, Russia witnessed a differentiated transition among its ruling elites. In the Kremlin, a political shift happened. Yeltsin had not been a politburo member since 1987 and had been marginalised from national level politics. After side-lining Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991, he built a team of young liberal reformers centred on Egor Gaidar, who was prime minister from June to December 1992. Many of these people came from outside the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Yeltsin and Gaidar selected many collaborators precisely due to their lack of links to the communist elites, especially the security establishment (Aven and Koch, 2013: 17–19). In domestic and foreign policy, the new political elites were initially characterised by staunch anti-communism.

By contrast, although the failed August 1991 coup (engineered by the CPSU hardliners against Gorbachev) discredited the top members of the KGB and the military, the Soviet bureaucracy as a whole thrived in post-Soviet Russia. In the security sector, attitudes and beliefs changed more slowly than in the rest of society (Harding, 2020: 63–83). Likewise, many regional political elites in Russia and in other parts of the former Soviet Union held their power after 1992. Former first secretaries of the local communist parties stayed in power in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan,

Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan. Members of the former communist elites likewise ruled Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Tajikistan. In Russia, the neo-communists also originally stayed in power in the North Caucasus, Tatarstan, and many other republics and regions.

The competition between the new political elites and the old Soviet bureaucracy led to schizophrenic foreign and domestic policies in Moscow. While Yeltsin and Kozyrev pushed to end support for the communists in Afghanistan, the military and the former KGB argued that it was vital to maintain this support (Klimentov, 2022; Lyakhovsky, 1995: 610; Yeltsin, 2008: 109). When Yeltsin and Kozyrev built ties with the Tajik democrats and Islamists, the security elites argued that Russia should ally itself with the neo-Soviet groups in Tajikistan (Spolnikov, 1994).[1] Ultimately, nationalist groups, centred on Yeltsin's vice-president Alexandre Rutskoy who had previously pressured Gorbachev in a similar way (Chernyaev, 2003: Nov 1991), claimed that the Kremlin was not doing enough to defend Russia's interest in Transdniestria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Chechnya. Kozyrev insisted that these "national-patriotic groups" were constantly harassing the Kremlin.[2]

Answering the public backlash provoked by the mounting economic crisis following Gaidar's "shock therapy", Yeltsin integrated nationalist hardliners into the government of Victor Chernomyrdin, a Soviet era administrator from the CPSU, who replaced Gaidar in December 1992. Gaidar, however, remained in various roles in the new government during 1993. A similar shift happened among Yeltsin's advisers when people from the security elites increasingly challenged the liberals. By 1994, these representatives of the security sector would play a central role in pushing Yeltsin to wage a war in Chechnya.

While a detailed analysis of the decision-making process leading to the intervention in Chechnya lies beyond the scope of this article, it is important to underline that the security services faction advocated for it (on the decision-making leading to the war: Aven and Koch, 2013: 245–46; Baturin et al., 2011: 590–600; Lieven, 1998: 56–101; Souleimanov, 2007: 89–125; Zezina et al., 2011: 352). It included Nikolay Egorov, the ex-Governor of Krasnodar Region and Yeltsin's representative in Chechnya,

1 Anatoly Adamishin, interview, Moscow, August 2019.
2 Andrei Kozyrev, "Partiya voiny nastupaet", *Izvestia*, 151, 30 June 1992.

Victor Yerin, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Sergei Stepashin, the head of the Federal Security Service – a successor agency to the KGB, Oleg Lobov, the head of the Security Council, and Alexander Korzhakov, Yeltsin's bodyguard. Pavel Grachev, the minister of defence, had initially urged caution about using force in the North Caucasus, fearing that a war may lead to "the consolidation of the [North Caucasian] Islamic republics in their opposition to Russia" (Aven and Koch, 2013: 245–56, 272–73).[3] However, by 1994 he would change his mind and promise Yeltsin that the Russian forces would capture Grozny in a matter of days. Other politicians, such as Chernomyrdin, provided only lukewarm support for the conflict. Inside Chechnya, Doku Zavgaev and several other pro-Moscow leaders also supported the war. Ultimately, many politicians believed that starting a "small victorious war" in Chechnya was the solution to Yeltsin's decreasing popularity due to the many economic and political issues facing Russia. By contrast, liberals around Gaidar, who was in political opposition by 1994, Anatoly Chubais, the first deputy prime minister, Yuri Kalmykov, the minister of justice, Kozyrev, and most of Yeltsin's advisers opposed the conflict.

The Chechen War upended Russian domestic politics, discrediting many of its instigators. Yerin, Grachev, Korzhakov, and Lobov would be expelled from national politics by 1997. Despite the disaster, compounded by the spectacular hostage takeovers conducted by the Chechens in Budennovsk in Stavropol Krai in June 1995 and in Pervomayskoe and Kyzlyar in Dagestan in January 1996 (Klimentov, 2021: 374–408), and being blamed for starting the war, Yeltsin managed to remain in power. In fact, he was controversially re-elected to the presidency in June 1996 as the conflict was drawing to a close. Multiple irregularities, including a massive media bias in his favour as compared to his main challenger, the communist Gennady Zyuganov, overspending by his campaign beyond the limits authorised by electoral laws, and even fraud on the election day marred Yeltsin's re-election. Yet, Russian liberals, many of them, including Gaidar, by this time in opposition, and the West supported and applauded the re-election. They believed that keeping Yeltsin was still much better than

3 "Dokumenty ob obshchestvenno-politicheskoi situatsii v Severo-Kavkazskom regione", 4 December 1991, *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (GARF), fond (f.) 10026, opis' (o.) 1, delo (d.) 2763, list (ll.) 1–12.

seeing the communists return (on Russia's 1990s politics: Belton, 2020: 50–210; Rakhmanova, 2012: 13–43).

While Yeltsin continued to be seen in Russian public opinion and abroad as a liberal and democrat – a factor that ironically led to the liberals being most blamed for the Chechen War – his actual political ideas and personality had considerably changed by 1996. He was no longer the staunch anti-communist who had prevailed over Gorbachev in 1991 and the A. Rutskoy – Ruslan Khasbulatov duo in 1993. He was a leader beset by health problems and alcoholism. Yeltsin's influence in making policy had been declining while power had passed to "the family", a group of actual relatives, oligarchs, advisers, and politicians around him. To stay in power, Yeltsin and his inner circle had already accepted compromises with hardliners, bringing many of the security elites into power in 1993–94. By 1996, amidst the war in the Balkans, the Chechen War, and the economic crisis in Russia, the Yeltsin administration further reversed course and embraced the neo-Soviet security elites and their agenda.

Hardliners consolidated their influence in the Kremlin. Stepashin, a moderate representative of the security services, was long in line to be Yeltsin's designated successor. The controversial generals Genady Troshev and Vladimir Shamanov, who had commanded Russian forces during the First Chechen War, remained influential in the army, harbouring revanchist attitudes towards the Chechens (Rakhmanova, 2012: 96–99; Troshev, 2017: 44–178). Vladimir Putin would in fact call them back to lead Russian forces during the Second Chechen War in 1999.

Replacing the hardliners discredited during the Chechen War, more people from the security services came to the Kremlin, further challenging the liberal faction. Yeltsin thus co-opted Alexander Lebed, the general who had negotiated the Khasavyurt Accord and who had come third in the 1996 presidential elections. In a matter of months, though, Chubais and the remaining liberals in the Kremlin managed to sideline Lebed. Ultimately, the symbol of the new transition among political elites was the replacement of Kozyrev by Yevgeny Primakov, the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service – another successor agency to the KGB. By 1998, Primakov would replace Chernomyrdin as prime minister, becoming popular in Russia and appearing as another prospective candidate to succeed Yeltsin. Amidst Primakov's rise, the new economic crisis in Russia in 1998 had ended up pushing the remaining liberals, such as Chubais and Boris Nemtsov, the deputy prime minister, out of government (Fishman, 2022: 199–297).

Nationalist and communist groups also saw their influence rise in the State Duma. The elections of 1995 had seen the strengthening of Zyuganov's communists, who tripled their representation compared to the 1993 parliament. In this victory's wake, the communist Gennadiy Seleznyov replaced Ivan Rybkin from the leftist Agrarian Party as chairman of the State Duma in 1996. Meanwhile, the nationalists of Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), who had infamously advocated for an unrestrained use of force in Chechnya,[4] lost seats but remained the third strongest party at similar levels to Yeltsin-Chernomyrdin's "Our Home – Russia" ("*Nash dom – Rossiya*") party. Among Westerners and liberals, the elections completely marginalised Gaidar's "Democratic Choice of Russia" ("*Demokraticheskii Vybor Rossii*") party, which lost most of its seats. Grigory Yavlinsky's "*Yabloko*" party now represented the depleted liberal and democratic opposition. In other words, nationalist forces, including the communists who held the majority with allied leftist groups, dominated the State Duma of the 2nd Convocation (December 1996–December 1999). Conversely, the pro-Yeltsin disparate coalition represented a comparatively smaller force.

Overall, the disastrous Chechen War, despite its rejection in Russian public opinion, had not discredited the patriotic-nationalist elites. Instead of what one might have expected, it had weakened the pro-Western democratic and liberal groups who had always opposed the war in the parliamentary elections in 1995 and the presidential elections of 1996. The nationalists had benefitted from three factors; firstly, people continued to see Yeltsin as the main liberal and blamed him and other liberals for the war; secondly, Yeltsin's administration's mishandling of the economy had overshadowed the war; and, thirdly, Russia's perceived humiliation in Chechnya amidst widespread corruption and dysfunction had led to people wishing for stronger political leaders, such as Lebed or Primakov. In other words, the Chechen War had nurtured nostalgia for the stability provided by Soviet communism.

The next part of this article shows how the debates about Chechnya at the State Duma in 1996–97 help explain the ascendency of the security and

4 Zhirinovsky famously debated with Boris Nemtsov on television during the Budennovsk hostage takeover. "V 1995-m Zhirinovskii oblil Nemtsova apel'sinovym sokom", *Meduza.io*, 29 March 2022.

nationalist elites in Russia in the Chechen War's aftermath. Amidst blame towards Yeltsin for starting the war, criticism of the Khasavyurt Accord, and fear that Chechnya may still destabilise Russia, the deputies of the State Duma, including the liberals, remained ambivalent about the future of Chechen-Russian relations. Strikingly, while the nationalist groups made the argument that Russia had still to protect itself from Chechnya, the liberals and the pro-Kremlin factions, in a minority at the State Duma, failed to present a way forward for the future of Chechen-Russian relations.

The State Duma's Debates about Chechnya in 1996–97

The State Duma of the 2nd Convocation was dominated by opponents of the Kremlin; this was a unique occurrence in Russia's history. This explains why most deputies were critical of Yeltsin's policies. Overall, the State Duma's debates on Chechnya featured three major themes that were often interconnected: (a) Yeltsin was blamed for the war in Chechnya and for the Russian military's poor performance in the war; (b) the reliance on force or on negotiation in dealing with the Chechens; and (c) criticism of the Khasavyurt Accord. Interestingly, the same themes also emerged between the lines in the participants' speeches during the "Shamil and the Caucasian War. History and Modernity" Conference, which is discussed in the final part of this article.

The Responsibility of Yeltsin

Not surprisingly, liberal and nationalist deputies blamed Yeltsin personally for the Chechen War. Their criticism was three-fold. They stressed the Kremlin's responsibility in starting and continuing the war, in the disastrous performance of the Russian military amidst reports of poor material conditions in the army,[5] and for either a too restrictive, or a too permissive,

---

5 "Dokumenty po voprosam, svyazannym s sobytiyami v Chechenskoy Respublike", January 1996–August 1996, GARF, f. 10100, o. 13, d. 1003, l. 95.

use of force. The latter aspect was in turn also featured in the debates at the parliament over the necessity to negotiate with the Chechens as explained below. In an example of the criticism Yeltsin faced, Vladimir Lopatin, the independent liberal deputy from Vologda, argued in March 1996 that "the war in Chechnya was a war between the democratic future and the totalitarian past of Russia".[6] Lopatin stressed that the massive casualties suffered by the Russian army and its unpreparedness had discredited Yeltsin. He had received, he claimed, 12,000 letters from citizens criticising the president and calling to end the war.[7]

Some North Caucasians who addressed the State Duma similarly pictured the events in Chechnya as Yeltsin's war, drawing a line between the Kremlin and the State Duma. In March 1995, Abdullah Khamzaev, a Chechen who had had a distinguished career in the Soviet and Russian ministries of interior affairs, argued to the Committee on Nationalities Affairs that "the so-called expression 'in the interests of preserving the indivisibility of the Russian [*rossiyskogo*] state' is leading to the planned extermination" of the Chechens. Yet, he noted, "as a Chechen, I cannot say which forces are doing that. It is only you, the Russian people, who can picture the President [Yeltsin] in the most negative ways".[8] Other Chechens similarly blamed the Kremlin for the conflict and the Caucasophobia it triggered in Russia.[9]

In January 1996, the Chechen socio-political movement "Islamic Way" ("*Islaman Nek*"), which opposed Russia, similarly called on the newly elected State Duma to "show wisdom and curtail the actions of … the Kremlin" amidst heated debates over Russia's indiscriminate use of force in Chechnya in response to the attacks in Budennovsk, Pervomayskoe, and Kyzlyar, which the Islamic Way nevertheless condemned. Like the Russian public opinion, the Islamic Way felt that the State Duma could pressure the Kremlin into intensifying negotiations with Dzhokhar Dudayev, the leader of the Chechen separatists, to obtain a ceasefire.[10]

---

6 "Dokumenty po voprosam, svyazannym s sobytiyami v Chechenskoy Respublike", January 1996–August 1996, GARF, f. 10100, o. 13, d. 1004, l. 109.

7 Ibid.

8 "Dokumenty po podgotovke i provedeniyu parlamentskikh slushanii", March 1995, GARF, f. 10100, o. 2, d. 1351, ll. 1–11.

9 "Dokumenty po voprosam svyazannym s problemami Severnogo Kavkaza", January 1996–December 1996, GARF, f. 10100, o. 14, d. 488, l. 97.

10 GARF, f. 10100, o. 13, d. 1004, l. 98.

These debates show how various forces in Russia and even many Chechens continued to see the Chechen War as Yeltsin's war. This was ironic given that many deputies in the State Duma were more nationalistic than Yeltsin and that even in the Kremlin the decision to intervene had been largely due to Yeltsin's more hawkish advisers from the security sector. Still, this association helps explain why the liberals, represented by Yeltsin for the Russian public opinion, and not the security agencies or the nationalist deputies, ended up being blamed the most for the disaster in Chechnya.

Force or Negotiations

The State Duma increasingly wondered about which strategy to adopt towards the separatists when the Russian army became bogged down in Chechnya. While liberal deputies had already called for negotiations in 1995,[11] the dominant mood in the State Duma remained unclear. Although most deputies hoped for a ceasefire, the nationalists and communists who dominated the Committee on Nationalities Affairs believed that they could not compromise Russia's territorial integrity, even for peace.[12]

By early 1996, these debates took a more pressing turn amidst the hostage takeovers in Budennovsk, Pervomayskoe, and Kyzlyar that humiliated the Russian military, the exhaustion of the Russian forces, and the upcoming presidential election in Russia. At this point, despite the communist domination, the mood started to shift in the State Duma towards more decisive calls for a ceasefire without conditions with the Chechens. In January 1996, the State Duma adopted a resolution that clarified that it wanted the creation of a commission under the president to negotiate an end to the conflict. At the same time, it continued to blame Yeltsin for disregarding its previous "initiatives for a peaceful resolution".[13] The Kremlin was a convenient scapegoat for everything that went wrong in Chechnya.

Specific aspects regarding the Chechen War continued to divide the State Duma. Regarding terrorism, the deputies had condemned the attacks

11 GARF, f. 10100, o. 2, d. 1351, ll. 1–11.

12 "Dokumenty po podgotovke i provedeniyu parlamentskikh slushaniy", March 1995, GARF, f. 10100, o. 2, d. 1352, l. 198.

13 GARF, f. 10100, o. 13, d. 1003, ll. 1–2.

in Budennovsk, Kyzlyar, and Pervomayskoe. They overwhelmingly agreed that here too Yeltsin had failed in his policies. In January 1996, the State Duma passed a resolution stressing that "the taking of hostages, principally of women and children, had become the norm of behaviour of Dudayev's band[it] formations". The Chechens' actions, the resolution claimed, "stirred war across the North Caucasus through the use of extreme forms of terrorist acts". While the resolution noted that this "raised the question of how to prevent and adequately answer such bandit activities", it still called on the Russian army to have a "measured reaction" and not resort to indiscriminate attacks.[14]

Beyond this, different political factions offered differing responses to terrorism. Whilst Yavlinsky's liberals recognised that the Chechens had grievances and called for Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin's resignations, the communist and nationalist groups pushed for more forceful military operations. Zyuganov proposed a stronger condemnation of terrorism and accused Dudayev of trying to start "a large-scale war" across southern Russia. To him, the Russian army had to take "harder and more forceful actions against the Chechens".[15] The communists and various far-right groups believed that Yeltsin was not doing enough to win the war, and was too accommodating to the separatists who did not respect the ceasefires with Russia.

The tensions over Chechnya continued into the spring of 1996 amidst the State Duma's renewed call to Yeltsin to end the war and criticism of the Russian army's methods. Interestingly, such calls and criticism had spread across party lines, as even nationalists and communists wished for an end to the conflict. In March, twelve deputies, including representatives of Zhirinovsky's LDPR, communists and leftists, as well as liberals from "*Yabloko*" and Gaidar's party, issued a declaration claiming that Yeltsin's promises to develop "a plan for a peaceful settlement in the Chechen Republic had been a bluff".[16] The deputies further condemned the continuing "barbarian operations" of the Russian military and, in particular, the "'mop-ups" (*zachistki)* – the clearing operations featuring armed patrols and forceful house-to-house searches that primarily affected civilians.

14 Ibid,1–2.
15 Ibid., ll. 3, 8.
16 Ibid., l. 92.

Interestingly, several of the deputies who issued the call were already well-known for their involvement in Chechnya. Viktor Kurochkin and Yulii Rybakov had negotiated the release of hostages in Budennovsk and Arkady Yankovsky had been part of the negotiations on prisoners' exchanges.

That same month, the State Duma saw the return of the fact-finding multi-party mission it had sent to Chechnya. Led by Georgy Arbatov, a military analyst and member of "*Yabloko*", general Eduard Vorob'yev from the "Democratic Choice of Russia", and general Albert Makashov from the Communist Party, the mission presented a damning report about the situation in the Russian army, again criticising Yeltsin for this unmitigated disaster. The military suffered from poor material conditions, the mission's report argued. Diseases and poor hygiene conditions afflicted Russian soldiers who lacked weapons, armoured vehicles, equipment, and medical support. The soldiers' salaries were often unpaid, the families of killed and wounded soldiers waited for months for compensation, and the soldiers did not receive their promised decorations. Furthermore, the report noted, many Russian soldiers wondered about the legal justification for the war and their own status as combatants.[17]

In parallel, the State Duma's mission of Arbatov, Vorob'yev, and Makashov had also assessed the morale in the military, reaching a key conclusion. The deputies, all of whom were prominent specialists in military affairs, argued that the Russian army had divided opinions on a potential ceasefire and on the use of force in Chechnya. The senior officers advocated for forceful actions, including encircling separatist troops, using "mop-ups", and firing without warning on presumed hostile Chechens, in combination with negotiations with the Chechens at village-level. These were the same tactics the Russians had been employing since 1995. By contrast, the junior officers believed that this approach had proved ineffective. They argued instead for either a withdrawal and blockade of Chechnya after evacuating the ethnic Russian population, or for an indiscriminate use of force in Chechnya to combat the separatists.[18] The difference in assessments was striking and showed both the radicalisation but also discouragement of the soldiers and junior officers in the Russian army who had suffered heavy losses in the war.

17 Ibid., ll. 95, 103–12.
18 Ibid.

Beyond this, the mission's report clearly showed that the Russian army's command generally believed that it could still win the war. This helps explain why the military would see the peace in Khasavyurt as a stab in the back from the civilians and harbour revanchist attitudes towards the Chechens. It also explained the disconnection between the military and the civilian authorities in Moscow.

Ultimately, the mission demonstrated how the State Duma had moved towards a multi-party support to unconditional negotiations with the Chechens. A major incentive for peace was by then the fear that the Chechen War may further spread to Russia.[19] In the conclusion of their report, Arbatov, Vorob'yev, and Makashov emphatically argued that "there was no realistic alternative to peace negotiations" in Chechnya. However, they did not explain what the contours of this "peace" should be. As we will see below, this question rapidly shattered the consensus reached at the State Duma.

The Khasavyurt Accord and Its Aftermath

The tension over how to resolve the Chechen War continued after the signing of the controversial Khasavyurt Accord. While deputies across parties wanted the conflict to end, many nationalists and communists were not ready for this end to come at any cost.

Meanwhile, as Lebed and Aslan Maskhadov, who took command of the Chechen forces after the death of Dudayev in April 1996, signed the accord, another high-level political mission returned from Chechnya. General Kim Tsagolov, Chernomyrdin's special envoy to Chechnya who had also been a senior political adviser in Afghanistan, reported his findings to the State Duma. Tsagolov highlighted that violence in Chechnya continued due to "uncontrolled groups of Chechen fighters".[20] Many Chechens still called on Dagestan to rise against Russia, he argued. Tsagolov, unlike other observers, also emphasised the Islamist danger in the North Caucasus,[21]

---

19 Ibid.; and "Porucheniya Pravitel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii po problemam Severnogo Kavkaza", 22 January 1996–20 September 1996, GARF, f. 10121, o. 2, d. 263.

20 GARF, f. 10121, o. 2, d. 263, ll. 86–108.

21 Russian observers emphasised ethnic and national factors as drivers of conflict in the North Caucasus. See the talks at the State Duma's Committee on Nationalities Affairs: GARF, f. 10100, o. 2, d. 1351, ll. 1–11.

although he insisted that ethnic and separatist tensions remained the main drivers of the conflict.

Overall, Tsagolov's report demonstrated how many policymakers believed that the Khasavyurt Accord had not solved the "Chechen problem" in the long term. The rising influence of Muslim countries in the North Caucasus and their support for Islamist forces heightened the threat to Russia according to these policymakers. Some Chechen leaders' provocative statements reinforced their concerns. In Khasavyurt, Shamil Basayev, the infamous Chechen commander, had implicitly threatened an attack on Makhachkala, Dagestan's capital.[22] Likewise, regular Chechen encroachments into Russian territory fuelled the tensions and the belief that Chechnya would remain a security issue for Moscow.

In this context, the Khasavyurt Accord led to controversy in the State Duma. While the deputies ultimately recognised the accord as legitimate, many did so reluctantly, fearing for the future of the Russian population in Chechnya and the security of the Russian regions neighbouring the breakaway republic.[23] Unlike the nationalists and communists, the liberals, alongside the pro-Kremlin party, supported the Khasavyurt Accord. They generally argued that it was a necessary step in normalising Russian-Chechen relations, and that Russia had to re-establish trade relations with Grozny and help the reconstruction of Chechnya. Yet the liberals' support came with reservations. Firstly, most liberals tried to simply move past the Chechen War, arguing that it had produced no winners or losers. They thus denied justice and reparation to the Chechens for the Russian attack and the atrocities of the conflict.[24] Secondly, even the liberals perceived the accord as incomplete and poorly implemented. In December 1996, Yavlinsky protested that the Chechens continued to kidnap and ransom Russian citizens from regions around Chechnya. Exasperated, Yavlinsky threatened Maskhadov with a blockade if he did not address the issue.[25]

---

22 Aleksandr Budberg, "Za dva dnya ot Basayeva. Voidut li modzhakhedy v Makhachkalu?", 2 October 1996. The article circulated in the State Duma. "Dokumenty k proektam federal'nykh zakonov po Severnomu Kavkazu", 1 October 1996–31 October 1996, GARF, f. 10100, o. 13, d. 1252, l. 35.

23 Ibid., ll. 48, 113.

24 Ibid., ll. 15–22.

25 Ibid., l. 152.

Conversely, resistance to the Khasavyurt Accord was greatest among the army, the communists, and the nationalists as they feverishly denounced the accord at the State Duma and in the media.[26] In a landmark speech and resolution, general Lev Rokhlin, a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya from the pro-Yeltsin party and chairman of the State Duma's Defence Committee, gave massive criticism to the deal. Months before breaking up with Yeltsin, Rokhlin declared that Russia had achieved none of its objectives in Chechnya while leaving behind thousands of hostile Chechen fighters. It had waged an incompetent war, the pinnacle of which had been the loss of Grozny days before the signing of the Khasavyurt Accord, amidst massive Russian casualties.

Strikingly, Rokhlin did not doubt that Chechnya would become independent while remaining a source of security threats to Russia; these threats included kidnapping, smuggling, terrorism, and separatism. Chechnya could mark the "beginning of [Russia's] breakdown", he declared.[27] The Chechens, Rokhlin believed, would train fighters for "liberation wars" against Russia and try to annex territories in the North Caucasus to gain access to the sea. In that, Rokhlin claimed, the Chechens might benefit from further support from Turkey and the Middle East. Ultimately, Rokhlin's apocalyptic speech combined many of the criticism and fears that had accumulated in the State Duma regarding Chechnya. Most importantly, echoing Tsagolov's report, it showed how many deputies, who had been interested in ending the war, felt that the price of peace may ultimately have been too high. As before, such deputies saw Yeltsin and the liberals who had supported the unconditional end of the war as the main culprits for Russia's failures.[28]

Other deputies supported Rokhlin and offered even stronger condemnations of the accord in unpassed resolutions.[29] They complained that it had legitimised terrorism, humiliated Russia, and jeopardised Russia's territorial integrity. The communist Victor Panin meanwhile protested pragmatically that the main problem was Russia's commitment to help Chechnya economically.[30] His colleague Aleksandr Kulikov agreed that Russia should

---

26 Ibid., l. 154. A Cossack colonel from Tomsk published one such piece titled: "Nado Zashchishchat'sya!", *Znamya mira* 11, *Russkiy Vestnik* 35–37, December 1996.

27 Ibid., l. 1.

28 Ibid., ll. 1–11, 122.

29 Ibid., ll. 85–89, 118.

30 Ibid., l. 30.

not provide humanitarian and reconstruction help without ensuring that the Chechen leadership safeguarded the interests of ethnic Russians. He also claimed that Lebed had changed the accord at the last minute to give Chechnya more sovereignty compared to what the military command had originally agreed upon.[31] Zhirinovsky's LDPR even advocated to reject the accord altogether and to arrest Maskhadov for murdering Russians.[32] Even pro-Russian Chechens from the town of Urus-Martan lamented that the deal signed by Moscow had overlooked their interests.[33]

Zyuganov himself published an article in the newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* in October 1996 offering blanket condemnation of the accord. Chastising Yeltsin for the war and, particularly, for the peace, the unsuccessful presidential candidate wrote at length about his and others' pervasive fear of a separatist domino effect across Russia and of the kidnappings organised by the Chechens. Crucially, he embraced the army's argument that the politicians had not allowed it to win the war. They had stabbed the army in the back, Zyuganov argued.[34] Such criticism continued in 1997 and shaped the popular negative perception of the Khasavyurt Accord in Russia. Overlooking the fact that the accord had ended the disastrous war, few deputies appeared ready to defend it.

In this context, the State Duma's Committee on Geopolitics organised a roundtable evocatively titled "Chechnya – A New Reality" in February 1997. The LDPR's Alexei Mitrofanov presided at the event, which also included Yury Ivanov from the Communist Party, Anatoly Kotkov from a leftist party, Konstantin Borovoy, an influential independent liberal deputy, Nina Zatsepina, another independent deputy, and several scholars. Overall, the roundtable reflected the same preoccupations about Chechnya in the State Duma as in 1996.

Its participants overwhelmingly agreed that, despite the fact that the Khasavyurt Accord left the issue of Chechnya unresolved, Chechnya's independence had become unavoidable. Most notably, they wondered about how this new situation would impact Russia amidst fears of a domino effect, of the growing influence of Muslim countries in Russia's South, and of the criminality streaming in from Chechnya. Zatsepina, a deputy

31 Ibid., ll. 43–45.
32 Ibid., ll. 15, 28.
33 Ibid., l. 59.
34 Ibid., ll. 32–34.

from the southern Krasnodar region, feared that the regions on the Black Sea may now ask for more autonomy and accused the West of using the Islamism-fuelled instability in Chechnya against Russia.[35] Borovoi similarly feared that Chechnya would continue fuelling instability in the North Caucasus.[36] Kotkov, in turn, reverted to the old argument that Chechnya had not defeated Russia, but that Moscow had decided to leave. After losing Grozny in August 1996, Russian forces could have bombed it and hence put pressure on the Chechen negotiators, he noted.[37] As others at the State Duma, he claimed that Russia should not provide any economic help to Chechnya and establish a *cordon sanitaire* around the republic.

Others made similar arguments by dwelling on the supposed benefits that Chechnya and other peripheral regions had been receiving from Moscow. "If they want to leave, let them leave for good right now – no need for this 5 years transition; and if they leave, we treat them as a hostile state, and limit economic ties with them and support to them … and man our joint border", Ivanov argued.[38] The same went for the rest of the North Caucasus, he believed. Likewise, Mitrofanov noted, Russia should "make all these republics pay to stay in the Russian Federation, and [then] make Chechnya beg to return".[39] Such nationalist sentiments echoed the Russian civilising mission discourse that explained how the Russian conquest had supposedly brought progress and modernity to the Caucasus since the nineteenth century. It also told of the rising Caucasophobia and Islamophobia across Russia in the 1990s.[40]

The roundtable confirmed the dominant mood in Russia in 1997. Many Russian political elites from various parties had not fully accepted the Khasavyurt Accord; they saw Chechnya as an unresolved problem. While some nationalists harboured revanchist attitudes and wanted to accelerate Chechnya's re-integration into Russia, others saw the solution

35 "Stenogramma kruglogo stola 'Chechnya – Novaya Real'not' ", February 1997, GARF, f. 10100, o. 14, d. 5240, ll. 40–43.

36 Ibid., l. 51.

37 Ibid., ll. 52–53.

38 Ibid., ll. 36–40.

39 Ibid., ll. 43–8.

40 "Dokumenty po voprosam svyazannym s problemami Severnogo Kavkaza", January 1997–December 1999, GARF, f. 10100, o. 14, d. 494, ll. 115–124.

in complete isolation. This meant cutting economic and political ties with Grozny and taking no responsibility for the destructions of the war.

At the same time, all deputies remained concerned about the security risk that the instability in Chechnya represented for Russia, a fear fuelled by the security agencies. By 1997, the final draft of the official "Conception of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus" circulated in the State Duma reflected these perceptions. It pictured the rising ethnic and nationalist conflicts in Chechnya, alongside the rising influence of Muslim countries, as major threats for Russia. Beyond this, it presented Islamism and sectarian conflicts as an issue, noting that the "active penetration of Wahhabism represented a real threat to national cohesion" in the North Caucasus and Southern Russia.[41] Additional analysis shared with the State Duma by Russian research centres on the North Caucasus further stressed how "the local authorities [in Chechnya] were often involved in the raising intolerance [towards Russia]".[42]

Yet, while the Conception detailed these threats, it said nothing of a potential response. On Chechnya, it argued that work on a political solution should be initiated by December 2001, as had been agreed in Khasavyurt, and economic support should be provided to the breakaway republic. Such support, the Conception claimed, was necessary to prevent Russia from losing influence in the North Caucasus to other Muslim and Western countries.[43] It was, however, unclear what type of relations Russia and Chechnya may have in the future. *In fine*, such documents demonstrated the ambiguity that prevailed regarding Chechnya in the State Duma. Deputies across factions saw Grozny with anxiety as to the danger it may represent for Russia and held uncertain expectations regarding the future of Chechen-Russian relations.

41 Ibid., ll. 66–91.
42 Ibid., l. 115.
43 Ibid., ll. 74–86.

The "Shamil and the Caucasian War. History and Modernity" Conference

Two-hundred years after his birth, the "Shamil and the Caucasian War. History and Modernity" conference at the State Duma (October 1997) examined the figure of Imam Shamil, the famous military, political, and religious leader of the North Caucasians during the war against the Russian Empire, known as the Caucasian War (1817–1864). Historical debates have focused on Shamil's origins, his political project, and his beliefs as various groups have tried to appropriate his memory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (on Imam Shamil: Perović, 2018: 21–75; Gammer, 1992: 729–77). Crucially, Shamil remains both a divisive and a uniting figure among Russians and Caucasians. After leading the Caucasian insurgency from 1834 to 1859, Shamil surrendered to Tsar Alexander II. The latter showed mercy to the defeated leader and offered him a retirement in exile in Russia. In 1869, Alexander II allowed Shamil to go on *Hadj* to Saudi Arabia where he soon died.

In this context, Shamil's legacy is both seen to represent resistance to Russia's colonial rule and an acceptance of the Russian domination as ineluctable. This duality has rendered Shamil an appealing topic for different political forces. In the State Duma, opposite political factions thus participated in organising the conference. Nadirshakh Khachilaev, a deputy from Dagestan who headed the Union of Russian Muslims and had joined Chernomyrdin's "Our Home – Russia" party, and Dmitri Rogozin, a Russian nationalist from the Congress of Russian Communities party, were the main organisers of the conference. The pro-Kremlin Russian Regions party, the governmental Commission for State Education, and the State Duma Committee on Nationalities also supported the organisation.

The event's participants discussed Shamil's ambivalent legacy and in its wake the Chechen War. Reinforcing this connection between past and present, Vladimir Zorin from the "Our Home – Russia" party who chaired the conference insisted in his opening remark that Shamil's great-great-grandson, Shamil Shafi Ghazi Magum, was attending the event.[44] By

44 "Dokumenty po podgotovke i provedeniyu konferentsii", October 1997, GARF, f. 10100, o. 14, d. 4718, ll. 1–3.

treating the great Caucasian leader's heritage selectively, the participants advanced pro-Russian and pro-separatist arguments. However, while they all condemned the Chechen War, they could not hide strong divergences as to the Russian legacy in the North Caucasus and the future of Chechen-Russian relations. In fact, three ideological groups emerged.

Firstly, several liberal deputies and historians insisted on Shamil's complex legacy and distinguished between the nineteenth century and the present. They struck reconciliatory notes regarding the Chechen War, while insisting on the role Islam had played in Shamil's political project. Khachilaev hence celebrated the "progressist and humanist meaning of *Sharia*". Challenging the discourse on Russia's civilising mission, he noted that Shamil's Imamate incarnated "the best forms of a modern democratic state". At the same time, Khachilaev, taking an almost Marxist stance, claimed that Shamil "did not fight against Russia, [but] against slavery in the guise of the Russian and Caucasian aristocracy, governors, and officials". Khachilaev therefore suggested that the North Caucasus would have no reason to oppose a democratic Russia, especially if it were given the right to embrace Islam. Strikingly, he concluded his passionate speech with "Allahu Akbar".[45]

Several historians similarly insisted on the uniquely democratic nature of Shamil's political project and his complex and difficult relation with Moscow, while also opposing the Russian nationalist scholars at the conference. Besides this, they avoided commenting on the recent Chechen War. Ibragim Khadzhmurat, a historian from the North Caucasus, criticised his fellow academics, such as Vladimir Degoev, who tried "to prove that there had been no Russian-Caucasian War, that there had been no colonial policy of tsarism".[46] Leonid Tsukiyanin, another historian, similarly struck a balance between praising Shamil for building a modern Islamic state in the North Caucasus and also suggesting that it could inspire modern Russia; he avoided, however, the politically sensitive issue of resistance to Russian domination: "It is quite timely and acceptable to talk about the perspective of *Sharia* for the legal system of [Russia], in particular of its Islamic regions", he noted in a sign of how Islamism was still not perceived as a threat by Russian elites.[47]

45 Ibid., l. 10.
46 Ibid., l. 45.
47 Ibid., l. 69.

Secondly, nationalists, communists, and pro-Russian North Caucasians presented Russia's civilising mission discourse about the North Caucasus and downplayed the violent episodes of their shared history. Most of them, as the North Ossetian linguist Magomet Isaev, believed that the North Caucasus was bound to be part of Russia. "To me it is entirely obvious", Isaev argued, "that Shamil … ha[s] tragically come to the actual conclusion that Dagestan, Chechnya, the North Caucasus are inalienable parts of Russia".[48]

Ramazan Abdulatipov, a former Dagestani deputy from the Russian Regions party and now a deputy prime minister, similarly argued in a baroque and ahistorical speech that the "path of Dagestan and the North Caucasus had [always] been leading them to Russia". It would be "humiliating" for the Caucasians to say that Russia had "conquered" them, he noted. In this interpretation, "in no case, should one make it sound as if Shamil had fought against Russia. He defended his fatherland" from an apparently unidentified enemy.[49] Abdulatipov's convoluted speech continued with a claim that one must praise Shamil's reliance on *Sharia* but that, at the same time, the introduction of *Sharia* today in the North Caucasus "did not succeed and would not succeed". The latter comment again demonstrated how Russia's elites had noted Islamism's rise but tended to dismiss it.

In a concluding remark, Abdulatipov clumsily linked Shamil's legacy to the present. "I spoke with Aslan Maskhadov, a very sympathetic person, … with whom you can and should definitely work", he argued. "How is it", Abdulatipov said he asked Maskhadov, "that other peoples have decided to stay with Russia… but our Chechen-brothers have gone into a different direction". According to Abdulatipov, Maskhadov had echoed Shamil by answering that if "he had known this [democratic] Russia, but not these warmongers (*voenshchina*) who had come to the Caucasus, he would have never been at war with Russia".[50] By blaming the army for the Chechen War, and strikingly not Chernomyrdin's government of which he was now part, Abdulatipov seemed to suggest that Chechnya may still want to rejoin Russia if it became more democratic (although he did not say this outright).

48 Ibid., l. 132.
49 Ibid., l. 23.
50 Ibid., l. 23.

Sergei Baburin, a well-known “patriotic” deputy, integrated Shamil into Russia’s civilisation at large in his speech. Russia was now “at the epicentre of a spiritual struggle” as it tried to “repel the pressure from an alien [supposedly Western] civilisation”, he argued. While even Baburin noted that it would be “wrong to equate the interests of the people of the Russian Federation today with the actions of the presidential authorities in Grozny”, his speech was mainly there to celebrate Russia’s conquering drive. Even if it had relied “on aggressive colonial policies” in the past, Baburin noted, Moscow “had safeguarded those people who had united [in it], it had created the conditions for the development of the national culture [of those people]”. Baburin saw the Chechen War as the result of the Soviet collapse engineered by the West. “It is the tragedy of today that [Russia’s] ancestral enemies had managed to cause to quarrel people who used to live peacefully” in Chechnya, Tajikistan, Transdniestria, and Abkhazia.[51] As with other nationalists, he dodged Russia’s responsibility for the tragedies incurred during the Chechen War. Ultimately, he suggested that, because foreign forces had provoked the conflict, Chechnya may still return to Russia.

Rogozin, another key Russian nationalist figure, highlighted many of the same ideas. In a more neutral speech (which also did not call outright for Chechnya to re-join Russia), he offered a form of historical relativism where all figures were equivalent. Like Baburin, he believed that, if the State Duma celebrated Shamil, it should also celebrate the general Aleksei Yermolov who had commanded the Russian forces in the Caucasian War. To him, the key issue was for ethnic Russians “to continue being fully fledged members of the dialogue in the North Caucasus”. Like the others, he saw the Chechen War as the product of external forces, which had transformed it into a “geopolitical conflict”. It would be best, Rogozin argued, if “international organisations from Europe or Turkey, or Iran, or Saudi Arabia” all stayed out of the North Caucasus.[52]

Thirdly, representatives of de facto independent Chechnya, now called the “Chechen Republic of Ichkeria”, and of some of Russia’s Muslim minorities offered a completely different narrative. They pushed against Russian nationalists’ civilising mission discourse, insisted on the importance of

51 Ibid., l. 18.
52 Ibid., l. 75.

Islam, and argued that the Chechen War had changed the power balance between Moscow and its peripheries. Their speeches contained, however, different degrees of radicality towards Russia.

Shamil Beno, the head of the department of foreign affairs of the directorate of the Muslims of Chechnya, focused less on denouncing Russia's civilising mission discourse than on tracing a way forward for pacified Chechen-Russian relations. The Chechen War had resembled the colonial Caucasian War, Beno argued, but things had now changed in Russia. The holding of the conference testified to that. Besides, Beno stressed the shift in Russian elites: "[The Chechens] remembered the position of … Chernomyrdin during the conflict in Budennovsk, [they] remembered the drive of the new generation, of the new type of Russian leaders who had appeared on the Chechen-Russian arena in 1995, already after the main tragedy had happened. [Chechens] are happy to work with them and [they] hope that our co-operation and dialogue would continue".[53] Beno thus struck a surprisingly optimistic note as he underlined how Russian leaders, including Yeltsin (whom he said bad advisers had originally misinformed about Chechnya), were able to eventually stop the Chechen War and talk to Maskhadov. For Beno, all Chechens, even Shamil Basayev, were ready to re-establish ties with Russia and were looking forward to participating in more such conferences.

While some representatives of Grozny wanted to normalise relations with Russia after the Khasavyurt Accord, others were more confrontational towards Moscow. Ruslan Kutayev, a special adviser to Maskhadov, thus declared that Chechnya and Dagestan had "united under the flag of Shamil because he had … showed [everyone] the idea of the almighty Allah" and proposed a modern state. "What could have Russia and its serfdom system brought to the free Caucasus, to the free people of Chechnya?", Kutayev asked the previous nationalist speakers. Tracing an almost direct parallel between the Caucasian War and the Chechen War, Kutayev vehemently denounced the Russian "democrats" who had launched the Chechen War, showing again how people still blamed Yeltsin more than the military for the conflict. Testifying to the growing ideological tensions in Chechnya which reignited Russian fears of a domino effect, Kutayev advocated for

53 Ibid., l. 136.

Islam to serve as a unifying factor across ethnic differences in the North Caucasus.[54]

Ironically, the most confrontational speeches did not come from the Russian nationalists or the Chechens, but from representatives of Russia's other Muslim minorities. The latter built on the Chechens' success to advance their own autonomist tendencies. Den'ga Khalidov, a leader of the Union of Russian Muslims and a political figure in Dagestan, thus pointed out how Russia's use of force in the Caucasus had failed. After this, he boldly argued that "after the Chechens had conquered the right [to govern themselves], other peoples in the North Caucasus… had the right to obtain through reforms such a status that would allow them to solve their political and foreign, … and legal issues without [Moscow]".[55]

Fauziya Bairamova, a representative from Tatarstan, went even further in her fiery speech: "There is only one lesson to be learned [from the Caucasian War and First Chechen War]", she argued, "one should never encroach on the territory of another people". Rebuking Baburin and Abdulatipov, she further declared that "Shamil perfectly knew against which Russia he fought because in his memory was the fall of the Kazan Khanate" in 1552. Moving to the present, Bairamova was not scared to profess that "the Tatars would do everything for Chechnya to be independent. … And after the Chechens, [they] would also rise" because they wanted independence.[56]

Bairamova's speech contrasted with the generally conciliatory tone of the conference, forcing Zorin to lament that women were just too emotional. In fact, it testified to the conference's underlying tensions. Kutayev, Khalidov, and Bairamova had vividly reminded the delegates of the enduring danger of a domino effect in Russia following Chechnya. That threat seemed to be especially acute in regions neighbouring Chechnya and in the resource-rich Republic of Tatarstan, which had three years prior to the conference negotiated a wide-ranging autonomy deal with Moscow after having threatened secession. This too reinforced the securitisation of Chechnya promoted by the security elites.

54 Ibid., l. 65.
55 Ibid., l. 92.
56 Ibid., l. 117.

Conclusion

Although the Khasavyurt Accord terminated the Chechen War, it did not address the war's root causes. As is clear from the debates at the State Duma, the accord immediately triggered controversies that were fuelled by communist and nationalist deputies, but which also extended to the weakened liberal and pro-Yeltsin parties. While the heated parliamentary debates and the organisation of the conference in memory of Shamil testified to the State Duma's fundamentally democratic nature, they also showed that Chechnya remained an unresolved issue for Russia.

In this context, the State Duma's debates revolved around at least two major themes that ironically contributed to discrediting the weakened liberal parties and reinforcing nationalist and security circles. Firstly, after having been extensively blamed for starting the war, Yeltsin and the liberals were now largely blamed for accepting the weak peace agreement in Khasavyurt that humiliated Russia and jeopardised its security. The fact that even the liberals from "*Yabloko*" and the pro-Kremlin "Our Home – Russia" parties questioned the implementation of the Khasavyurt Accord reinforced this argument. The communists and the LDPR nationalists meanwhile talked of how civilians had stabbed the Russian army in the back and did not allow it to win the Chechen War.

Secondly, the criticism of the Khasavyurt Accord in the State Duma concentrated in highlighting that, even despite Russia's perceived concessions, Chechnya remained a source of threats for Russia. These threats were both direct, through encroachments of armed groups into South Russia, and indirect, through the example that Chechnya's de facto independence set for other Russian regions. Acutely, many deputies at the State Duma, including among liberal and pro-Kremlin groups, feared a domino effect. In particular, this growing securitisation of Chechnya favoured the nationalist and security elites, at many levels preparing the terrain for the Second Chechen War that was soon to start.

References

Aven, Petr, and Alfred Koch (2013) *Revolyutsiya Gaidara [The Revolution of Gaidar]*, Alpina, Moscow.

Baturin, Yu. M., et al. (2011) *Epokha Yel'tsina [The Epoch of Yeltsin]*, Prezidentskii Tsentr B. N. Yel'tsina, Moscow.

Belton, Catherine (2020) *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took on the West*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.

Chernyaev, Anatoly (2003) *The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev*, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

Fishman, Mikhail (2022) *Preemnik*, *Istoriya Borisa Nemtsova i strany, v kotoroy on ne stal prezidentom [The Successor. The History of Boris Nemtsov and the Country Where He Did Not Become President]*, Corpus, Moscow.

Gammer, Moshe (1992) Shamil in Soviet Historiography. *Middle Eastern Studies* 28(4), 729–77.

Harding, Luke (2020) *Murder, Mayhem, and Russia's Remaking of the West*, Harper Collins, New York.

Klimentov, Vassily (2021) Bringing the War Home: The Strategic Logic of "North Caucasian Terrorism" in Russia. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 32(2), 374–408.

Klimentov, Vassily (2022) The Tajik Civil War and Russia's Islamism Moment. *Central Asian Survey*.

Lieven, Anatol (1998) *Chechnya, Tombstone of Russian Power*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

Lyakhovsky, Alexander (1995) *Tragediya i Doblest' Afgana [The Tragedy and Valor of Afghanistan]*, GPI Iskona, Moscow.

Perović, Jeronim (2018) *From Conquest to Deportation, The North Caucasus under Russian Rule*, Hurst, London.

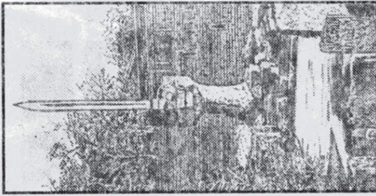
Rakhmanova, Tania (2012) *Au cœur du pouvoir russe [At the Heart of Russian Power]*, La Découverte, Paris.

Souleimanov, Emil (2007) *An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective*, Peter Lang, Bern.

Spolnikov, Victor (1994) Impact of Afghanistan's War on the Former Soviet Republics of Central Asia, in *Central Asia, Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects* (ed. Hafeez Malik), Macmillan, London, 96–116.

Trenin, Dmitri, and Alexei Malashenko (2004) *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia*, Carnegie, New York.
Troshev, Gennady (2017) *Moya voyna, Chechenskiy Dnevnik Okopnogo Generala [My War. The Chechen Diary of a General in the Trenches]*, "Veche", Moscow.
Wilhelmsen, Julie (2016) *Russia's Securitization of Chechnya: How War Became Acceptable*, Routledge, London.
Yeltsin, Boris (2008) *Zapiski Prezidenta [Notes of the President*], Rosspen, Moscow.
Yemelianova, Galina M., and Laurence Broers (eds.) (2020) *Routledge Handbook of the Caucasus*, Routledge, London.
Zezina, M.P., et al. (2011) *Chelovek Peremen [The Man of Changes]*, Novyi Khronograf, Moscow.

Photos (Part III)

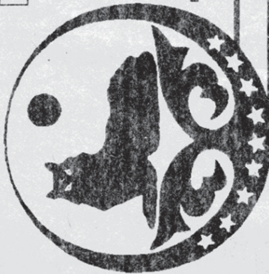


ДАЛА КЪОБАЛДОЙЛА НОХЧИЙН КЪОМАН ГІАЗОТ!

ИЧКЕРИЯ

Газета Правительства Чеченской Республики ИЧКЕРИЯ

№ 11 (375) 25 апреля, четверг, 1996 год



...Но была одна нация, которая совсем не поддалась психологии покорности, - не одиночки, не бунтари, а вся нация целиком.

Это - чеченцы.

Александр Солженицын. "Архипелаг ГУЛАГ"

ПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВЕННОЕ СООБЩЕНИЕ

Правительство Чеченской Республики Ичкерия с глубокой скорбью извещает народ ЧРИ и мировое сообщество о том, что в ночь с 21 на 22 апреля 1996 года, в результате спланированного в кабинетах московского Кремля террористического акта, на своем боевом посту погиб первый Президент Чеченской Республики Ичкерия Джохар Дудаев.

Во время очередной телефонной связи с Москвой по обсуждению вопросов переговоров, по месту нахождения Президента ЧРИ был нанесен вероломный ракетно-бомбовый удар с использованием системы космического наведения, в которой были задействованы не только российские средства, но и спутники ряда западных держав. Вместе с Президентом ЧРИ погибли и его соратники - военный прокурор Чечни Магомед Жаниев и представитель Президента Республики в Москве Хамат Курбанов. Есть раненные и разрушения.

Чеченское государство и народ понесли невосполнимую утрату: враг нанес очередной удар прямо в сердце народа. Но чеченский народ не сломлен и из очередного испытания выйдет еще более сплоченным и организованным для победного завершения войны с российским агрессором и обязательно победит. И никакие злодеяния, террористические акты, клеветнические измышления врага не способны поколебать нашу веру, убеждения. Последний зловещий акт окончательно очистил наш народ от всяких иллюзий по поводу возможности каких-либо компромиссов с преступным российским режимом.

Правительство Чеченской Республики Ичкерия выражает уверенность в том, что мировое сообщество в лице ООН, ОНН, Совета Европы, ОБСЕ и других международных организаций, а также правительства государств, которым дороги принципы гуманизма, права человека и народов, торжество справедливости, со всей принципиальностью осудят этот очередной сатанинский акт государственного терроризма России против чеченского народа и примет меры по обузданию агрессора и международного террориста, посредством политических, экономических и военных санкций.

Память о первом Президенте Чеченской Республики Ичкерия, великом сыне чеченского народа и всего Кавказа будет вечно в наших сердцах и в сердцах потомков. Дело, которому посвятил свою жизнь Джохар Дудаев, победит и воплотится в свободу и независимость Кавказа.

Аллахlу Акбар!

Правительство ЧРИ

ПОСТАНОВЛЕНИЕ

Государственного Комитета Обороны, Парламента, Кабинета Министров Чеченской Республики Ичкерия

23 апреля 1996 года

В связи с чрезвычайным положением, связанным с трагической гибелью Президента Чеченской Республики Ичкерия Джохара Дудаева, в соответствии с Конституцией ЧРИ

1. Возложить исполнение обязанностей Президента Чеченской Республики Ичкерия

The death of the first Chechen president, Dzhokhar Dudayev, in April 1996 was a serious blow to the young de facto state and boosted the cult of Dudayev as a symbol of the Chechen independence movement (Source: private archive, Grozny)

..-я страница — Грозненский рабочий

ПРОГРАММА
кандидата в президенты ЧРИ Аслана МАСХАДОВА

Нынешнее положение в республике характеризуется сложной общественно-политической, экономической и социальной ситуацией. После двухлетней войны наступил хрупкий мир, для укрепления которого требуется выработка сбалансированной политики и избрание во все органы власти — от местной администрации до Президента — людей с государственным уровнем мышления.

Война практически полностью уничтожила народнохозяйственный комплекс, разрушены города и села, огромный ущерб причинен природе, республика находится на грани экологической катастрофы. А самое главное, мы понесли невосполнимые человеческие потери. Лучшие сыны Отечества отдали свои жизни за свободу и независимость Родины.

На руководство республики, которое придет к власти в результате всенародных выборов, ложится огромная историческая ответственность за настоящее и будущее государства, за судьбу своего народа. В руководстве нужны личности, которые бы сумели сконсолидировать все слои общества и направить их объединенные усилия на преодоление многосложных задач, стоящих перед республикой. Единство и использование национальных традиций и обычаев, следование нормам ислама позволяло нам в прошлом иметь высокий уровень демократии. Теперь, когда мы стремимся развивать наше государство по пути ислама и шариата, нам необходимо использовать и все лучшее из прошлого нашего народа.

Исходя из этого, предстоит подготовить и внести изменения и дополнения в Конституцию ЧРИ. В частности, на первых порах из нее должно быть исключено все, что несовместимо с исламской верой, с нравственностью и моралью нашего народа. Необходимо открыть путь для постепенного перехода к нормам шариата. При этом права и свободы других конфессий не только не будут ущемляться, а напротив, будет исключено любое принуждение и неуважение к ним. Следует четко определить допустимое и недопустимое в нашем обществе (хьанал, хьарам).

Борьба с преступностью

Слова "суверенитет" и "независимость" превращаются в пустой звук, если граждане внутри страны не свободны, имеется в виду незащищенность значительной части населения от преступных посягательств.

Такое сложное явление, как война, в результате неизбежно приводит ко многим негативным последствиям, в том числе к резкому росту преступности. К сожалению не стала исключением и российско-чеченская война.

Общество не может нормально восстанавливаться и развиваться без борьбы с преступностью. Поэтому необходимо подготовить и утвердить государственную программу борьбы с ней.

Для успешного претворения ее в жизнь нужна прочная законодательная база. Предстоит дополнительно разработать и предложить Парламенту для принятия такие законы, которые бы позволили в кратчайшие сроки сбить волну преступности.

При этом совсем не обязательно во всех случаях приме-

Со своей стороны государство должно создавать им условия для эффективной работы. Они должны быть так обеспечены материально, чтобы исключить даже саму возможность соблазна получения каких-либо благ неправомерным путем.

Законодательно следует закрепить гарантии для семей работников правоохранительных органов, что они будут обеспечены материально и защищены государством в случае гибели или увечья кормильца.

Государство должно обеспечить защиту самих работников таким образом, чтобы им не пришлось оглядываться на обычаи, адаты и т. п. при исполнении ими служебных обязанностей.

Действия всех правоохранительных органов должны быть строго скоординированными и дополнять друг друга. При этом должна обеспечиваться разумная достаточность численного состава работников и их обеспеченность транспортом и специальной техникой.

Следует исключить возможность укрытия в нашей республике преступных элементов из других стран, также как и исключить возможность нахождения пристанища за рубежом преступниками из нашей республи-

Вооруженные Силы республики будут находиться в оперативном управлении Главного Штаба и подчиняться министру обороны страны, который, в свою очередь, подчиняется Президенту, как главнокомандующему всеми Вооруженными Силами ЧРИ.

Экономическая политика государства

Существование Чечни, как самостоятельного государства, напрямую зависит от того, сможем ли мы обеспечить политическую свободу·свободой экономической, без которой первая превращается просто в утопию.

В свою очередь Чечня может стать экономически свободной, если граждане республики будут обладать свободой действий, как хозяйствующие субъекты, основой которого является право собственности.

Собственность в руках каждого — это гарантия стабильности нашего государства, одно из важнейших условий предотвращения социальных потрясений.

(озеленение, очистка, разборка завалов, поддержание в порядке определенной территории, закрепленной за ним по договору, восстановление и содержание павильонов на остановках общественного транспорта и т. д.).

Агропромышленный комплекс

Сельское хозяйство должно занимать одно из важнейших мест в деле улучшения материального благосостояния народа, оказывать большое влияние на социальный прогресс и другие стороны экономики Чечни.

Все внимание государства должно быть направлено на создание прогрессивной структуры этой отрасли, суть которой заключается в следующем:

— передача земли в долгосрочную аренду и в собственность для создания крестьянских хозяйств. Разумеется, это не должно быть насильственной мерой, направленной на разру-

№ 3 (3) 23 января 1997 года — ИМАМ — 7

МНЕНИЕ

ОН ДЕЛАЛ ВСЕ, чтобы остановить эту войну.

— Те, кто давно знает Шамиля Басаева с момента учебы в Московском вузе, по событиям в Абхазии и во время войны в Чечне, не могут никак понять — отчего с таким остервенением московское телевидение старается сделать из него террориста и почти отпетого бандита — заявил "СК" депутат парламента Северной Осетии-Алании, бывший командир народного ополчения республики, Управления охраны объектов народного хозяйства Бимболат Дзуцев.— Таким его пытаются показать России. Но сами чеченцы, кто видит происходящее в республике не через телеэкран, знают совершенно другое. Подмечена уже одна деталь. По степени непопулярности среди московской государственной прессы на первом месте был Джохар Дудаев, после него Шамиль Басаев. Просто эти люди — самые неподконтрольные Кремлю. Они больше других вызывают опасения у российских властей, которые и пытаются обезопасить себя от неподкупных лидеров своего народа.

Я давно знаю Шамиля, - продолжает Б. Дзуцев, - еще с Абхазии, куда он почти первым приехал защищать ее народ даже не от грузин, а от войны! Народы не развязывают войны, это делают политики. Этот глубоко порядочный, мужественный и в то же время скромный молодой человек со своей стороны делал все возможное, чтобы остановить эту грязную войну . В Кремле его сегодня боятся, Приказали телевизионщикам создать Басаеву образ, которым можно пугать всю Россию. Но Чечня знает совершенно другое. Джохар Дудаев только о нем сказал: "Это настоящий герой Чечни!". Даже Черномырдин был вынужден разговаривать с Шамилем как с равным.

Жалею, что Шамиля Басаева пытаются представить в сознании простых людей бандитом, хотя это совсем не так. Почему мы сами не можем наладить информационный обмен на Кавказе, зачем нам московские фильтры? Завтра им другой наш политик не понравится, так они и за него возьмутся. У каждой республики свои признанные народом лидеры, за них люди голосовали, они руководят сегодня субъектами Федерации. И у чеченцев также свои лидеры - Джохар Дудаев и Шамиль Басаев. Так вот, в Буденновск Шамиль Басаев отправился не террористом, а человеком, который делает отчаянный и уже последний шаг спасти свой народ, остановить войну, жестокие убийства как чеченцев, так и русских на земле Ичкерии. Он привлек к Чечне внимание всего мира, лично добился обещания прекратить убийства мирных людей из уст российского премьер-министра. Только с этого момента начались переговоры, которые закончились миром на чеченской земле. Зная обстановку в Чечне и вокруг нее, еще раз хочу заявить - этим человеком мы все должны гордиться, ведь пламя чеченской войны обязательно перекинулось бы на соседние республики, так что он спас не только свой народ. Это должны помнить все.

Я встречался с людьми из Буденновска, — продолжает Бимболат Дзуцев. - Они далеко не все считают его кровожадным бандитом. Мирных людей там убивали не люди Шамиля, а те кто пытался "освободить" их.

Уверен, что будучи человеком, глубоко верующим и одновременно по-горски чрезвычайно терпимым к другой вере и национальностям, Шамиль не хотел трагедии и переживает ее до сих пор как свою личную. Точно знаю, что в один день он похоронил одиннадцать членов своей семьи. Все они погибли в Ведено при бомбежке.

Я всегда говорил, - продолжает Бимболат Дзуцев, - что война в Чечне - это грязная война. Погибают ни в чем не повинные люди, в основном женщины, дети и старики. Человек не виноват, что его родила русская или чеченка, осетинка или кабардинка или женщина любой другой национальности. Никто не имеет право отнимать жизнь у другого. Трагедию чеченского народа нельзя воспринимать как чужую. Это может случится любым другим народом на Кавказе. У нас есть поговорка: "Если у соседа горит дом, не радуйся: завтра может загореться и твой дом". На какой еще войне вы слышали, чтобы пленных солдат отдавали матерям. А ведь немалая заслуга в этом именно Шамиля Басаева. Именно Шамиль находился всегда на самых опасных участках в этой войне. И сейчас он делает все, чтобы остановить преступность в самой республике.

В.Авсарагов,
"Северный Кавказ"

In the election campaign for the presidency of Chechnya-Ichkeria in January 1997, Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basayev were facing each other as two very different candidates (Source: private archive, Grozny).

Primary Materials (Part III)

Grozenskiy Rabochiy, 23 January 1997[1]

Programme of the Presidential Candidate of the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria" Aslan Maskhadov

The current socio-political, economic, and social situation of the Republic is complex. After two years of war, there is a fragile peace; to stabilise it, balanced policies, and the election of state-oriented personalities at all levels of government, from local administration to the president, are needed.

The war has almost destroyed the national economy, towns and villages have been wiped out, enormous damage has been done to nature, and the Republic is on the brink of ecological disaster. But above all, we have suffered irretrievable human losses. The best sons of the fatherland have given their lives for the freedom and independence of their homeland.

The leadership of the Republic, which will come to power through popular elections, bears a great historical responsibility for the present and future of the state, for the destiny of its people. The leadership needs personalities capable of consolidating all strata of society and directing their joint efforts towards overcoming the challenges facing the Republic. Unity and the use of national traditions and customs, as well as adherence to the norms of Islam, have enabled us to achieve a high level of democracy in the past. Now, as we seek to develop our state along the path of Islam and Sharia, we must also make use of the best of our people's past.

1 The following translation of Aslan Maskhadov's pre-electoral programme (1997) includes selected sections, notably those on Chechnya's general situation, foreign policy and relations with Russia, defense, social rehabilitation and the re-integration of combatants.

On this basis, amendments and additions to the Constitution of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria should be prepared and implemented. Everything that is incompatible with the Islamic faith, with the morals and morality of our people should first be deleted from the constitution. The way should be paved for a gradual transition to the norms of Sharia. At the same time, not only will the rights and freedoms of the other denominations not be violated, but on the contrary, any coercion and disrespect towards them will be excluded. It should be clearly defined in our society what is allowed and what is not allowed (khanal, kharam).
[…]

Relationship with the Outside World. Defence

It is clear, that the Republic does not intend to close itself off from the outside world. The Chechen Republic is ready for equal and mutually beneficial cooperation with all states and peoples and will build relations with them on the basis of international law, the principles of friendship, and mutual assistance.

The Chechen Republic does not accept a violent solution to problems and disagreements that arise. Our people, who have repeatedly experienced genocide in its most severe forms, need international guarantees against a repetition in the future. When concluding treaties and agreements with other states and international organisations, the need for security of our country must be considered.

Relations with the Russian Federation, particularly economic relations, will continue to occupy an important place in the future. There could also be a convergence of interests between the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and the Russian Federation in the military and defence spheres. At the present stage, these relations will be based on the Khasavyurt-Moscow agreements.

Relations with Russia should be shaped in a way that excludes the possibility of future enslavement and economic dependence. In this sense, we should focus on our own resources and opportunities, as well as on the advantages of international economic integration. Blockades of any kind cannot be ruled out, so we must be prepared for an autonomous existence. The natural, geographical, and climatic situation of the Chechen Republic

offers us such opportunities, especially as they are supported by the bravery and inexhaustible diligence of our people.

An important element of a successful foreign policy of any state is an army capable of fulfilling the defence tasks of the country.

The military doctrine of the ChRI plans the creation of a regular army on a contract basis and a reserve with permanent readiness in every locality.

The regular army will consist of a mixed brigade of six to fourteen battalions of various purposes stationed along the borders of the Republic.

The permanent standby reserve (PSR) is the structural core of the general mobilisation system. The size of the PSR varies between five and twenty men depending on the locality. The above-mentioned contingent, which in peacetime forms a self-defence unit permanently stationed at a specific location, is to become the structural core in the event of war; on its basis the mobilisation plan of the military commissariats is implemented and regular exercises and retraining of citizens of military age are carried out.

The armed forces of the Republic are under the operational control of the General Staff and report to the republic's Minister of Defence, who in turn reports to the president as Commander-in-Chief of all the armed forces of the ChRI.

[…]

Social Protection of the Population

The issues of social protection of the population remain very acute for the Republic. The task of the state is to create a socially oriented economy and to replace the [provisional] declaration of social priorities with distinct mechanisms for their implementation that are clear to every citizen. These are mechanisms for long-term measures in regulating minimum wages, the pension and social security system, free education and medical care, and the citizens' rights to work, recreation, and housing.

Today's challenges require urgent action in the payment of pensions, allowances, and compensation to citizens for the loss of housing and property. The resolution of these issues is primarily a problem of inter-state relations between Russia and Chechnya and requires the development of mechanisms for the implementation of Russia's obligations as the legal successor to the USSR and for its compliance with international agreements on compensation.

This includes the implementation by the Russian side of the requirements of the USSR Law on the Rehabilitation of the Oppressed Peoples of the USSR.

This does not mean, however, that the solution of questions of social protection of the population in Chechnya depends exclusively on the political relationship between Russia and Chechnya. The state can and should raise funds to meet the minimum needs of the socially disadvantaged part of the population. These [funds] will be made up of the capacity of the state budget of the Republic and resources raised from outside in the form of humanitarian aid, charitable foundations and loans from international financial organisations and other governments secured through the economic revitalisation programme of the Republic and especially its oil industry.

The problem of unemployment has been a serious problem for the Republic for many years. Before the war, the proportion of employed people in the national economy did not exceed 50 per cent of the total working-age population. Today, this problem has been exacerbated by the destruction of enterprises and the forced return of many Chechen citizens due to repression in Russia.

The scope of this problem makes it necessary to develop a special national programme for the employment of the population. UN specialised agencies and international development funds should be involved in the elaboration of this programme and its implementation.

Measures to promote entrepreneurship, to create favourable conditions for the development of new industries and to introduce special tax breaks for domestic and foreign companies, would help to alleviate the employment problem, provided they create additional jobs and open new production facilities. Foreign companies should be obliged to employ as many local workers as possible.

At the same time, it is necessary to examine the possibilities of sending Chechen nationals abroad to work and study, and to organise special training and language courses for them. The rehabilitation of combatants should be a special concern for the state. The drafting of a law and its adoption by the parliament of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria should be a priority. The state must create the most favourable conditions for them in all areas, to enable their soon and full return to civilian. Priority measures should include:

- Establishment of a medical rehabilitation centre.
- Organising prosthetics.
- Referral for treatment abroad.
- Preferential annual sanatorium treatment.
- Provision of medicines.
- Free provision of wheelchairs and motor vehicles for persons with limited mobility.
- Opening of correspondence schools and evening schools with the right to take external examinations for obtaining a secondary education certificate.
- Opening of preparatory departments in higher education institutions with the right to enrol their graduates as students without entrance examinations.
- The granting of the right to enter higher and secondary educational establishments without competitive examinations.
- The right to priority admission to the civil service in accordance with the profession acquired.
- Establishment of a printed organ of resistance fighters and radio and television broadcasts.
- Creation of a state commission for the search for missing persons and the return of the forcibly detained.
- Creation of feature and documentary films about war heroes and significant events of the war period.
- Organisation of annual competitions and establishment of State Prizes for the best works of literature and art on war topics.
- Commemoration of the names of heroes by naming streets, squares, and localities after them.
- Unveiling of monuments, memorials and panoramas.
- Establishment of state pensions for disabled war veterans.
- Priority payment of compensation for loss of housing and property.
- State support for families who have lost a breadwinner.
- Provision of housing for resistance fighters.
- Allocation of long-term interest-free loans for the establishment of enterprises and farms.
- Allocation of land plots for lease and ownership.
- Provision of benefits on utility bills.

[…]

Imam, No. 3 (3) 23 January 1997, p. 7 [Shamil Basayev's campaign programme]

He Was Doing Everything He Could to Stop This War

By V. Avsaragov, North Caucasus

"Those who have known Shamil Basayev for a long time, since the time they studied in Moscow, from events in Abkhazia and during the war in Chechnya, cannot understand why Moscow television is trying so hard to make a terrorist out of him, and an outlaw" Bimbolat Dzutsev told *NC*, member of the parliament of North Ossetia-Alania and former commander of the republic's people's militia and the Directorate for Protection of National Economy Facilities. This is how they are trying to portray him in Russia. However, the Chechens themselves, who do not see what is happening in the republic on television, know the opposite. Dzhokhar Dudayev, followed by Shamil Basayev, tops the unpopularity list for the Moscow state press. They are seen as the most uncontrollable for the Kremlin, they are the most feared by the authorities of the Russian Federation, who are trying to protect themselves against the incorruptible leaders of their people.

"I have known Shamil for a long time" continues B. Dzutsev, "ever since Abkhazia, where he was almost the first to come to defend its people not even from the Georgians, but from the war! Peoples do not start wars, politicians do. This deeply decent, courageous, and at the same time modest young man did everything possible to stop this dirty war. He is feared in the Kremlin today. They have ordered the TV crews to create an image for Basayev which can frighten the whole of Russia. But that is not what Chechnya knows. Dzhokhar Dudayev has only said of him: "This is a real hero of Chechnya!" Even Chernomyrdin was forced to talk to Shamil as an equal.

I regret that they try to make Shamil Basayev a bandit in ordinary people's minds, although this is absolutely not the case. Why can we not set up an information exchange in the Caucasus ourselves, why do we need Moscow's filters? Tomorrow they will not like another of our politicians,

they will discredit him too. Each republic has its accepted leaders, people voted for them, they are running the territories of the Federation today. The Chechens also have their own leaders – Dzhokhar Dudayev and Shamil Basayev. Thus, Shamil Basayev went to Budennovsk not as a terrorist, but as a man who is taking a desperate last step to save his people, to stop the war and the brutal killings of both Chechens and Russians on Ichkerian soil. He drew the world's attention to Chechnya and personally secured a promise from the Russian prime minister to stop the civilian deaths.

Only from that moment did the negotiations start, which ended in peace on Chechen soil. Knowing the situation in and around Chechnya, I would like to state once again that we should all be proud of this man, because the flames of the Chechen war would certainly have spread to the neighbouring republics; thus, he saved not only his own people. Everyone should remember this."

"I met people from Budennovsk" continues Bimbolat Dzutsev. "By far not all of them consider him a bloodthirsty bandit. It was not Shamil's men who killed peaceful people there, but those who tried to "liberate" them.

I am sure that as a man of deep faith, and extremely tolerant of other faiths and nationalities as highlanders usually are, Shamil did not want this tragedy, and is still experiencing it as his own. I know that on one day he buried eleven members of his family. All of them died in Vedeno in a bomb attack."

"I have always said" continues Bimbolat Dzutsev, "that the war in Chechnya is a dirty war. Innocent people are dying, mainly women, children and the elderly people. It is not a person's fault to be born to a Russian or a Chechen mother, an Ossetian or Kabardinian, or a woman of any other nationality. No one has the right to take the life of another person. The tragedy of the Chechen people cannot be perceived as someone else's. It could happen to any other people in the Caucasus. We have a saying: "If your neighbour's house is on fire, don't rejoice: tomorrow your own house may catch fire too." In what other wars have you heard of captured soldiers being returned to their mothers? It was Shamil Basayev who has contributed a great deal to make this possible. It was Shamil who was always at the most dangerous sites in this war. And now he will do everything to stop criminality in his own republic."

Part IV
Memory Conflicts and Chechenisation (1999–2021)

Introduction to the Context (1999–2021)

The fourth period under review in this book starts with the Second Chechnya War, that is, with the incursion of Chechen fighters into Dagestan in August 1999 and the onset of the Russian "Counterterrorist Operation" a month later. By December 1999, the lowlands of Chechnya were again under Russian control, which was successively expanded to more mountainous regions. In spring 2000, Russian military officials declared the end of the armed operation by regular troops, switching to "special counterterrorist operations" targeting selected persons and groups. For the populations on the ground, however, this change in names did not change much, since the bombings continued and even intensified.

On 12 June 2000, Vladimir Putin appointed the former Supreme *Mufti* Akhmat Kadyrov of (de facto independent) Chechnya-Ichkeria as head of the pro-Russian interim administration of the new Chechen Republic. In 2003, a new Chechen constitution was adopted, making the republic a full-fledged subject of the Russian Federation. In the same year, Akhmat Kadyrov was elected president of the Chechen Republic. With the new Chechen president, Moscow now transferred the monopoly of power and the control over the law-enforcement apparatus to the local elites, and the latter were also given the ability to independently decide many issues related to statebuilding at the local level. This is why this shift of political rights and responsibilities is also referred to as "Chechenisation".

The period between 2000 and 2006 was a time of purges, abductions and extrajudicial executions in Chechnya. Many respondents quoted in this book remember that period as the most traumatic part of the Second Chechnya War.[1] At the same time, an internal split was emerging in society, which is also discussed in this book on various occasions: the Chechen Republic was now a subject of the Russian Federation, but the political project of independent Chechnya-Ichkeria, which had ceased to exist legally, remained alive in the underground and among the increasingly numerous Chechen diaspora in Western Europe. With mounting

1 See excerpts of the focus group discussion with women activists (2021) reproduced in "Appendix 2 – Communicative Memories" at the end of the book.

pressure from the Kremlin's and Kadyrov's counter-insurgency forces, the Chechen ("Ichkerian") movement of independence experienced a split one wing, headed by the exile government under Ahmed Zakaev after Aslan Maskhadov's death in 2005, continued to pursue the (nationalist) goal of Chechen independence, whereas the other wing radicalised towards Islam and built new alliances with the international jihadi movement. On 6 October 2007, the fifth president of Chechnya-Ichkeria, Doku Umarov, announced the abolition of "Ichkeria" and proclaimed the formation of the "Caucasus Emirate" (a terrorist organisation banned in Russia by the courts), with the Chechen Republic as one of its *vilayats*.[2]

In Grozny, Ramzan Kadyrov succeeded his father Akhmat as head of the republic in 2007, after the latter's assassination in 2004 and an interim period under Alu Alkhanov. Ramzan Kadyrov was now the Kremlin's fierce ally for its "counterterrorist operation" in Chechnya, which officially ended in April 2009 (though many claim that it is still ongoing). And Kadyrov also won the most recent presidential election in 2021, with 99.7 per cent of the vote.

Increasing Authoritarianism and Civil Society Resistance

During the period under review, statebuilding by both the Chechen and Russian authorities was based on strengthening authoritarian rule, which was reflected in a changed climate at a social and political level. On 7 May 2000, Vladimir Putin became president of the Russian Federation. Russian society, which at that point pinned great hope on Putin, saw him as a young leader capable of helping the country out of the grave economic crisis, raising it to a new level of socio-cultural development and solving the "Chechen issue" once and for all.

In the second half of the 2000s and the early 2010s, a crisis of power legitimacy emerged throughout the former Soviet space, with violent mass demonstrations against (neo-)authoritarian practices and electoral fraud by the former Soviet elites still in power. These civic protests are also

2 *Vilayats* are administrative-territorial unit in some states of North Africa, the Near and Middle East, and Central Asia.

referred to as "Colour Revolutions".[3] In Russia, civil society in the 2000s again became an important actor of political contestation and demanded the removal of President Putin and the dissolution of the State Duma. A powerful civic protest movement gathered momentum, to which the authorities reacted with increasing nervousness, expressed in repressive measures and a rise in criminal cases. In 2011, as part of this first wave of civil society mobilisation and protest in Russia between 2011 and 2013, Aleksey Navalny created the Anti-Corruption Foundation. Parallel to the mass rallies in Moscow (also called "Bolotnaya square protests"), there were protests in other cities throughout the country. Similar to the "Colour Revolutions" in other former Soviet states, the protests in Russia were caused by electoral irregularities, in this case during the presidential elections in March 2012 and the elections to the State Duma in December 2011.

Since the early 2010s, the state has increased pressure on civil society, restricting its scope, and the repression and violence that the Kremlin used in Moscow has set the tone for all regions, including Chechnya. In 2012, the so-called "Law on Foreign Agents"[4] was adopted in Russia, making it possible to restrict the activities of non-governmental organisations on the pretext that they were working for an "unfriendly West" against Russian interests. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, mass protests became almost impossible in Russia, yet large protest rallies formed across the country following Navalny's arrest in spring 2021.

"Counterterrorism" as an Official Mainstream Narrative

From 1999 until the early 2020s, various cities in the Russian Federation were targets of terrorist attacks. In several cases, Chechen radicals (either through an investigation or according to the groups themselves) were

3 Associated with the "Colour Revolutions" in the former Soviet space are notably the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia (2003–4), the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine (2004–5) and the "Tulip Revolution" in Kyrgyzstan (2005).

4 Federal Law "On Amending Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation Regarding Regulation of Activities of Non-Profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent" of 20 July 2012 N 121-FZ.

found to be the masterminds of the attacks. These attacks played a major role in changing Russian society's attitude to the events in Chechnya, allowing the government to successfully construct and implement a new narrative of "counterterrorism". The "Black September" of 1999 was a turning point, when a series of terrorist attacks were carried out in Moscow, Buynaksk and Volgodonsk. As a result, the former Chechen "insurgents", "armed resistance" and "freedom fighters" of the First Chechnya War, were replaced in the Russian public discourse by the "Islamic terrorists" of the Second Chechnya War (Russell, 2005).

Since the early 2000s, the mnemonic heritage of the "Great Patriotic War", as the Second World War is commonly termed in Russia, has become more and more central to the ideological constructions of Russian authority. State officials throughout the Russian Federation (including Grozny) systematically referred to two main narratives, one of "heroism" and the other of "counterterrorism" – which in essence turned out to be closely linked. This "big narrative" scheme in official Russia mixed up different wars and different geographical contexts (Trubina, 2009). The narrative of heroism was built upon an ubiquitous state glorification of the Russian fighter, ranging from participants in the Second World War to fighters against Chechen terrorism. An analogy was drawn between the former and the latter, just as an analogy was drawn between the declared targets of the heroic action. With the subtlety of Russian politicians, including the president, all supporters of Chechen independence have been turned into terrorists, and terrorists turned into an equivalent of Nazis, against whom any means is justified (Russell, 2005). This story of Russia fighting terrorists in Chechnya in particular, and the North Caucasus in general, has become firmly entrenched in the discourse of Russian politicians since 2000. More broadly, however, the counter-terrorist narrative about the armed "operation" in Chechnya was politically motivated to such an extent that at a certain point, as a counterweight to the state narrative, alternative versions of events have begun to emerge in society, according to which it was the Russian power structures themselves that carried out the "terrorist" attacks (Tanaylova, 2021).

Creating a Unity of Memories in Chechnya

As a result of the war and the policy of "Chechenisation", deep divisions of memory opened up in Chechen society. Thus, after 2000, it became apparent to the government that there was a need in Grozny to overcome these "mnemonic splits" by creating a strong, unified official memory policy. The federal and local authorities therefore repeatedly attempted to remove from the public space any controversial subjects that were not in line with state policy aimed at the consolidation of society. Despite the fact that the official memory policy in Chechnya has been quite effective, there were still diverging accounts of the past. The chapter by Evgeniya Goryushina is devoted to such conflicting narratives about Chechnya's past in today's republic.

The attempt of the Chechen officials to create unity in collective memories has resulted in an authoritarian rescheduling of holidays, among other things. In 2011, Ramzan Kadyrov announced that the commemoration day of the Stalinist deportation, which was an important popular holiday celebrated on 23 February in Chechnya, would be moved to 10 May, which was the day of Akhmat Kadyrov's funeral in 2004. This merging of two important days of mourning was a concession to the growing cult around the personality of "Akhmat-Haji" Kadyrov, which was also reflected in the re-naming of several streets, squares and city sites in the Chechen Republic in father Kadyrov's honour. His portraits, together with those of Ramzan and Putin, were prominently placed on the facades of residential and administrative buildings,[5] and the government established competitions and awards in his name. Akhmat Kadyrov was the key symbol for the ideological foundation of the regime of his son, Ramzan Kadyrov. Valentina Tanaylova's contribution concentrates on one particular subject of memory: the memory of "Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov". Taken together, the two first chapters of this part thus provide a nuanced picture of the peculiarities of collective memory in contemporary Chechnya, as it prevailed in society and among the authorities who used it as a political tool.

---

5 See selection of photos reproduced in the section "Primary Materials" at the end of this part.

The memory of the wars in Chechnya is traumatic and therefore deeply embedded in the identity of all those who witnessed them. When Chechens say, "We are those who survived the war", this "we" may signify different groups in Chechen society: civilians, combatants and children of those who died during the war etc. The memory associated with the events of the two wars is strictly forbidden in Chechnya and tacitly repressed in Russia – but it is not forgotten. In 2019, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the First Chechnya War, various civil society commemorative events took place throughout the country. For instance, the Boris Yeltsin Centre in Ekaterinburg organised an exhibition and a conference dedicated to the two Chechnya wars (Shogenov, 2019), and Anna Nemzer's documentary film *The Banished Memory of the Chechen Wars* also conveyed an important message about not forgetting (Nemzer, 2020).[6] The memories of eyewitnesses and participants in the wars in Chechnya often blatantly contradict the official version of those events. For this reason, the Chechen authorities have long been active in preventing inconvenient private representations of the past from entering the public space. The activities of civil society representatives aiming to commemorate the victims of the war are also banned (Memory Activist, 2023; Project Memcope, 2021).

At the beginning of the 2020a, civil society in Chechnya found itself under severe pressure from the authorities not only in matters relating to memory. Its activities more generally have been suppressed in the harshest ways, and its key figures have become the targets of increasingly violent measures by the state, as exemplified by the assassinations of Anna Politkovskaya in 2006, Natalya Estemirova in 2009 and Boris Nemtsov in 2015, by Oyub Titiev's criminal case in 2018, and by many other similar episodes.

As Chechnya came once again under full control of the Russian Federation in the mid-2000s, it became clear that all those who disagreed with the new pro-Russian authorities – pro-independence "Ichkerians" as well as supporters of an Islamist "Emirate" in Chechnya – would have to leave the country or face harsh repressive measures. Chechen natives therefore emigrated in significant numbers and became major diasporas in

6 Excerpts from the interview with Dmitry Pushmin, curator of the exhibition at the Yeltsin Centre in Ekaterinburg (2019) and a collection of snapshots from Anna Nemzer's film (2020) are reproduced at the end of this section.

the Middle East and Europe, even becoming the largest group of Russians seeking protection outside their country (ECRE, 2007). The memory of the war(s) for independence and their consequences persists in the Chechen diasporas, and the image of Chechnya-Ichkeria as a bastion of Chechen freedom is built up by politicians and activists and resonates with members of the diaspora. This memory was constantly actualised within the diasporas as part of their political confrontation with the Kadyrov regime. Marat Iliyasov's chapter takes stock in an impressive way of these "memory conflicts" taking place among the Chechen diaspora in Europe: although the collective memory of Chechens in Chechnya and that of the members of the Chechen diaspora in Europe might differ, the mnemonic struggles in the diaspora can facilitate better understanding of the internal processes in Chechen society as a whole – because topics and views are openly discussed among the diasporas (and on social media), wheras they are only mentioned behind closed doors in Chechnya itself. In addition, kinship ties play an extremely important role in Chechen society, and are constantly maintained between relatives in Chechnya and Europe, serving as a channel for the movement of ideas and opinions, including those related to the common historical past.

References

European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2007) *Guidelines on the Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers and Refugees from Chechnya in Europe*, <https://www.refworld.org.ru/pdfid/472726292.pdf> (accessed 9 October 2023).

Nemzer, Anna (2020) *Zapreshchennaya pamyat' chechenskikh voin* [*The Banished Memory of the Chechen Wars*], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1RF-py72yI> (accessed 10 October 2023).

Project Memcope (2021) Focus Group Discussion with Women Activists, Nalchik.

Russell John (2005) Terrorists, Bandits, Spooks and Thieves: Russian Demonisation of the Chechens before and since 9/11. *Third World Quarterly* 26(1), 101–116.

Shogenov, Murat (2019) Author Interview with Dmitry Pushmin.

Tanaylova V. (2021) (Ne) Byt’ veteranom Chechenskikh voyn [(Not) Being a Veteran of the Chechen Wars]. *Sibirskie istoricheskie issledovaniya*, 2021, 2, 99–119.

Trubina E. (2009) *Fenomen vtorichnogo svidetel’stva: mezhdu bezrazlichiem i “otkazom ot nedoverchivosti” [The Phenomenon of Secondary Witnessing: Between Indifference and “Denial of Distrust”*], Travma: punkty, Moscow.

Evgeniya Goryushina

From War to Victory: Narratives of the Past in Chechnya (1999–2021)

Abstract: Despite the end of a full-scale military operation in 2000, armed and terrorist attacks continued to occur in Chechnya, where a new republican government and memorial policy was formed. The lifting of the counter-terrorist operation (CTO) on 16 April 2009 not only marked the end of the acute phase of the guerrilla war, it also put forward the need to solve the conflict of memories associated with the active combat phases of 1994–1996 and 1999–2000. Collective memory in Chechnya after 1999 is marked by the preservation of traumatic experiences of the past, including the collective stigmatisation of the Stalinist Deportation in 1944 and the growing national consciousness between1994–1996. Since 1999, the mobilisation of Chechen national history in the context of armed hostilities and their aftermath has led to the establishment of a hegemonic narrative of "victory" as the dominant norm. In this article, the author analyses the conflicts that exist between the official narrative of the authorities and private memories of respondents, based on a synthesis of 100 interviews collected between 2017 and 2022.

Keywords: Chechnya, past, conflict narration, collective memory, interview, memory policy

Introduction

In contemporary public and academic discourse, post-conflict Chechnya is presented as a territory of continuous conflict, where the memory of certain historical events is subject to erasure and even taboo. The internal armed conflict in Chechnya is an integral part of Russian history, and its memory occupies a significant place in the general memorial space not only in the North Caucasus, but also in the whole country. However, this conflict still leads to heated scholarly and public debate, often initiating so-called "wars of memory" and thus shaping the new course of Russian remembrance policy.

The designation "internal armed conflict" is a consequence of the official approval by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation on

8 August 2001 in the "Manual on International Humanitarian Law for the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (Manual on International Humanitarian Law for the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, 2001). The document interprets an internal (non-international) armed conflict as a protracted conflict between armed forces or other organised armed groups on the territory of one state. Such a definition tends to provoke an emotional response among Chechen historians and those who directly witnessed and/or participated in those events. Most of them regard the armed conflicts of 1994–96 and 1999–2009 as wars, and completely reject the designation "internal armed conflict".

The chronological delineation of the periods outlined above is also an equally contentious element in the collective memory of contemporary Russia. By appealing to open sources, it is possible to identify two phases of armed operations in Chechnya: the armed conflict itself, fought between 1994 and 1996 (known as the First Chechen War), and the counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya between 1999 and 2009 (known generically as the CTO; commonly known as the Second Chechen War).

In line with the chronological framework in the title of this article, the study is concerned with the study of narratives from 1999 to 2022, a period which includes the counter-terrorist operation and the post-conflict reconstruction of Chechnya. The official closure of the counter-terrorist operation on 16 April 2009 not only brought the acute phase of the guerrilla war to an end, it also highlighted the need to resolve the conflicting memory within the republic's population. This is connected with the active combat phases of 1994–1996 and 1999–2000, the attempts to rewrite national history after the collapse of the USSR, and the integration of Chechnya into the Russian national memorial space.

The principal aim of this study is to reveal the mechanism by which the war narrative has been transformed into a narrative of victory at the state level in Russia since 1999. In addition to the academic relevance, this study has a social and political significance as the institutionalisation of collective memory in the post-conflict period in Chechnya is closely linked to the integrity of the Russian state. This is due to the fact that the armed hostilities in the republic saw the preservation of its territories and, following the end of the military operation, the final consolidation of the Chechen Republic within Russia and the levelling of memories of its separatist past. Therefore, studying the narrative from war to victory in the collective memory of Chechnya inevitably entails clarifying the links between

the official (state) narrative and the private narratives based on the interviews gathered.

Theory and Methods: War, Narratives, and the Institutionalisation of Memory

The hypothesis of this study is that collective memory is accessed through individual storytelling and the narrative (at state and regional level) is gradually institutionalised, eventually constituting not only a cultural instrument (informal institution) mediating collective remembering, but also the official course of memory policy (formal institution). The author makes the assumption that private memories (narratives) are "assembled" into a collective memory, which may subsequently be deliberately altered or distorted by one or a group of institutions to initiate war or armed conflict. In doing so, the institutionalisation of memory is intended to fulfil a moralising function, as this process allows for the ritualisation of those norms that appear to be specific to a particular group.

The study therefore relies on discursive institutionalism, which allows us to study the institutionalisation of collective memory as a clash of discourses, as a result of which new meanings are generated and subjects are constituted. Therefore, the approach of Carstensen and Schmidt (2016), postulates that instead of ignoring ideas or bringing them under the classical understanding of power as coercive, structural, institutional and productive, discursive institutionalism helps to identify ideological and discursive power and define their distinguishing features. Such power can be conceptualised in three forms: power of persuasion through ideas and discourse, coercive power over ideas, and discourse and structural/institutional power in ideas and discourse. Power over ideas is the ability of actors to control and dominate the meaning of ideas through discourse. This is similar to how power directly monopolises public discourse and action in order to change collective memory in the post-conflict period in Chechnya (and especially after the lifting of the CTO regime). In the field of discursive institutionalism, there are relatively few works devoted to the study of collective memory of the post-Soviet armed conflicts. This

is the reason for the expansion of this research segment, where separate attention is paid to the theoretical and methodological side of the study of narratives about the past and, especially, in Chechnya since 1999.

In its most general form, collective memories are widespread knowledge about past socially significant events that may not have been experienced personally, but are collectively constructed through communicative social functions (Schuman and Scott, 1989). Social representations or shared knowledge about the past are developed, transmitted and preserved within an ethnic group through interpersonal and institutional discourse, becoming an informal/formal institution enshrined in the form of a narrative.

The starting point in analysing the narratives used by the state to justify the outbreak of war or to justify its end (victory) is how the individual perceives and ultimately remembers the military action through the stories told. In wars and armed conflicts of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, any state as a formal institution regularly uses narratives as a conceptual framework to interpret the causes of armed hostilities in order to attract the attention of a wider audience (Goryushina, 2021).

To understand the essence of the war narrative, it is necessary to look at how the state extensively uses them to embed the past into political reality. The term "war narrative" is established in popular academic discourse thanks to Professor M. Vlahos of the US Naval War College, who actually outlined the contours of an institutionalised subcategory of narrative, limited to a specific area of individual human life (Vlahos, 2006). It is important to understand that the explicit features of the war narrative are:

1) A firm attachment to the past, and
2) The war experiences on which the narrative is based are the most powerful in human life. Portelli noted that war itself "embodies history… participation in war acts as the most immediate tangible statement that one is imprinted in history" (Portelli, 2017: 25).

In the case of the study of collective memory in the Chechen Republic, this study focuses on summarising transcribed oral sources recorded through interviews (2017–2022). Whereas previous works have deliberately avoided generalising empirical sources in the form of recorded interviews (Goryushina, 2021), in this case, by contrast, the author works with an analysis of memories, contrasting the state narrative with the private narrative. For this purpose, a "snowball" method was applied, which did

not involve the creation of a strict sample of respondents, impossible in the absence of precise information about the general population. The collection of material took into account the socio-demographic and professional differences of the respondents, their role and status in the events in question, which influenced their perception of the events and the content of their memories. The unrepresentative sample was formed on the basis of criteria for collecting interviews with representatives of the first generation of participants and (or) eyewitnesses (no younger than 38 years of age). Most respondents were of Chechen ethnicity (84 of 100 interviews). Gender balance among the respondents could not be maintained, as it was only possible to interview three women currently living outside the territory of the Chechen Republic. This was due to the fact that in traditional Caucasian societies "men have the great privilege of telling their story" (Assman, 2019: 47).

As a result, differentiations were identified in respondents' perceptions of individual events, the interpretations of which point to persistent conflicts of memory (based on the analysis and thematic synthesis of forty-nine audio recordings of in-depth interviews by the end of 2020, seventy eight transcribed and synthesised interviews by the end of 2021, and one hundred transcribed interviews in 2022).

A Historiography of Conflict and Memory in Chechnya

At the heart of any war is violence and the desire to impose one's will on another. In this respect, the concept of war is virtually unchanged (even if war methods change). However, practices of warfare, ways of interpreting and conceptualising it, notions of what is permissible and forbidden, are renewed according to the conditions of the time. As a consequence, a significant number of studies have appeared that examine remembrance of the war, moving simultaneously from a purely oral-historical and methodological search towards (re)constructing a narrative of the war on a country level. It constructs the past on the basis of the memory of armed actions and is usually conditioned by different social, political and economic conditions.

In this connection, it is worth highlighting those works that concern the historical memory of the political transformations and armed actions in Chechnya over a long period, beginning with the forcible expulsion of Chechens and Ingush from the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1944. Some works update the problems of the reflection of the Caucasian War[1] in the historical memory of the contemporary Caucasus, while others investigate the consequences of the post-Soviet armed conflict for its participants and eyewitnesses. This line of research includes the works of Ram (1999),Williams (2000), Tishkov (2001), Gammer (2002), Cornell (2003), Banner (2006), Campana (2012), Danilova (2014), Malishevsky's (2015) extensive English-language historiography of the armed conflict in Chechnya, Sikevich (2017) and others.

Despite the considerable body of journalistic material on the memory of armed hostilities in Chechnya, the past three decades have been characterised by the production of a significant body of scholarly work on the Chechen conflict. At the same time, there is very little research on memory, its institutionalisation, and the specific nature of this process in the Chechen Republic.

A separate segment of contemporary research is the analysis of the existential experience of participants in and/or eyewitnesses to the hostilities, which includes various kinds of memories not only of the armed conflict itself, but also of the war/inter-war/peace period. However, publications offering a comprehensive analysis (based on a synthesis of individual narratives and other forms of memoir) of the post-Soviet everyday life of the population in the context of wars and conflicts, not only in the Chechen Republic but also in the North Caucasus as a whole, are virtually absent from contemporary Russian historiography. For example, the everyday lives of people in Chechnya are described in a chronological framework which either does not cover the post-Soviet era at all, or which partially covers the everyday lives of Chechens in particular localities in a given period.

1 The Caucasian War (1817–1864) is a generic name for the military actions of the Russian Imperial Army related to the incorporation of the North Caucasus into the Russian Empire, and to its military confrontation with the North Caucasian Imamate.

Historical Memory in the Context of the Political Processes in Russia in the Early 2000s

The narrative of the war is significant not so much for its individual participants as for the state, which is left with the institutional right not only to use it, but to modify and transform it according to the objectives pursued. The outbreak of armed hostilities in Chechnya in 1999 marked the beginning of a rapid securitisation of historical memory at the legislative level, not only in Russia, which arguably runs the risk of being stuck in old and counterproductive roles in international politics (Mälksoo, 2015). It is fair to say that practically all major Second World War participating states are stuck in counterproductive roles.

Shortly before the withdrawal of the counter-terrorism regime in Chechnya on 15 April 2009, there was a transformation of the war narrative at country level, prompted by the need to change perceptions of the memory of victory in the Great Patriotic War.

The historians Andreev and Bordyugov emphasise the symbolism of Vladimir Putin's two inaugurations on the eve of 9 May 2000: "The first inauguration of 2000 took place in an atmosphere of explicit identification of the newly elected president with the spirit of victory. By that time the actual military part of the CTO in Chechnya had already been completed, and this extremely important local victory for the Russian Federation, which was not easy, looked as if it were a reflection of that major victory of 1945" (Victory-70: Reconstruction of the Anniversary, 2015: 47). Researchers argue that it was "the memory of the Great Patriotic War that was in sharp demand in the first months of Putin's presidency, above all in the situation of the second Chechen war" (Bordyugov, 2015: 47). Three years later (February 2003) – at the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad – Vladimir Putin's speech outlined a new narrative of victory. The Russian president compared the terrorists to the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s, stressing that "Russia knows what war is like better than any other country, knows the price of peace, and therefore we respect the right of peoples to sovereignty, independence and free development" (President of Russia, 2003).

This comparison was necessary on the one hand to mute "the double standards inherent in European public opinion with regard to the fight

against terrorism in the North Caucasus" (Victory 70: Reconstruction of the anniversary, 2015: 47), and on the other, to call for unity against a common enemy, as was the case during the Second World War. In doing so, the initiative to call for the unity of all again belongs to Russia.

This narrative likening terrorists to Nazis is not coincidental two years after 11 September 2001, when the fight against terrorism gained prominence on the world stage. The tragedy of September 11 effectively removed international claims against Russia over Chechnya and automatically incorporated Russia into the international anti-terrorist coalition under the interim leadership of the US.

By late 1999 and early 2000, the all-Russian political memorial space became supplanted by one of its functions – that of actualising the past in the context of the events of the present moment. The results of the armed conflict in Chechnya in 1994–1996 were codified in the form of the Khasavyurt agreements of 31 August 1996 ('Principles for determining the basis of relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic'). However, despite the cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of federal forces, the Accords postponed the issue of the status of the republic's territory until 31 December 2001 which effectively meant a loss for the federal centre. Therefore, after the resumption of armed violence in the Chechen Republic in 1999, victory was extremely necessary for the new Russian authorities in the twenty-first century to restore the spirit of victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1945 as one of the central elements of the national idea in Russia.

Conflicts of Memory: Official Narratives and Respondent Perceptions

Analysis of the remembrances has shown that respondents prefer to suppress and (or) silence the memory of armed hostilities in Chechnya. This also explains the frequent refusal to record interviews (especially on tape recorder) within the Chechen Republic itself.

The official memory policy associated with the armed hostilities in Chechnya almost entirely excluded memories that ran counter to the

socio-political agenda. Therefore, memories were more frequently shared by those who lived outside Chechnya and who were not connected with any power structures at either the federal or republican level. These respondents requested anonymity and a guarantee that the audio recordings would not be passed on to a third person (including a transcript).

Nevertheless, the analysis of the recorded interviews enabled the identification of six conflicts of memory, and the comparison of the position of state power and respondents' interpretation of events contributes to clarifying the links between private and official narratives.

The Political Aims of the Outbreak of Armed Hostilities in Chechnya

The aims and reasons for the armed hostilities in Chechnya elicited different assessments among respondents. Many (59 per cent) confidently referred to the outbreak of the conflict as a direct consequence of the collapse of the USSR and an attempt by external actors to shake up the ethnopolitical situation in certain regions of the country with the aim of national republics seceding from the Russian Federation. Notably this attempt by external actors focused on the US through the mediation of Saudi Arabia as interpreted by 17 per cent of respondents: "…who would benefit from rocking the most difficult region of the country? The Caucasus has always been a tidbit for all empires" (AFM, Interview, 3 September 2021). "When the USSR collapsed, everything collapsed. What did Yeltsin say? Take as much freedom as you want…so you took it on your own head" (AFM, interview, 9 September 2021).

A related cause was purely domestic – on 17 December 1995, elections to the State Duma were held. Sixty-four per cent of Russia's eligible voters took part. The CPRF received the most votes – 22 per cent. Presidential elections in Russia were scheduled for 16 June 1996, and on 15 April that year began withdrawal of federal troops from Chechnya. By this time Yeltsin had lost his credibility. Many oral testimonies reveal hostility towards the then Russian president: many point to his inappropriate behaviour, including drunkenness ("How could a drunken man start a war? How could they trust him with the country?" (AFM, Interview, 19 April 2019)), political weakness and surrounding himself with oligarchs (some interviews mention B. Berezovsky, a Russian businessman and from 29 October 1996 to 4 November 1997 Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council).

In comparison, it is evident that the (generally accepted) state position regarding the causes of the outbreak of armed actions in Chechnya is limited to the separatist intensions of the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria" (ChRI) established in 1991, which aimed for secession of Chechnya from the USSR and the RSFSR. However, the federal centre did not achieve its ultimate goal and agreed to a de facto total loss of control over Chechnya in the form of the Khasavyurt Agreement of 1996.

Naming the Armed Hostilities in Chechnya

The naming of military events in Chechnya is most often the subject of heated debate and discussion, not only among respondents, but also in the process of approbating research results at academic events. The majority of respondents of Chechen ethnicity reject the designation "Chechen internal armed conflict", referring to the designated events as a war. In general, before starting to record their recollections, respondents checked with the interviewer to find out his attitude towards the events of those years, "I want to ask you straight away whether this is a war or a conflict for you? I will explain. For us it is a bloody war. There can be no conflict between the peoples of one country" (AFM, Interview, 11 July 2019). "What is the difference between the first Chechen war and the second? The first one was not lost by the military, it was lost by politicians" (AFM, Interview, 27 July 2019). Participants in the armed actions from the federal centre were also at a loss for a definition, "I don't know about the second, but the first Chechen campaign, as I call it… Not even wars, campaigns! Like going out for a beer with the company!" (AFM, Interview, 30 August 2017). At the same time, representatives of the Russian academic community, distanced from the Chechen Republic, either insist on naming the events of that period "the Chechen campaign" or even use the everyday/public name "First Chechen" or "Second Chechen".

The Storming of Grozny on 31 December 1994

The event creates diametrically opposed interpretations between memorials and the official narrative. Still possessing considerable symbolism in collective memory, the storming demonstrated the federal centre's lack

of understanding of the peculiarities of fighting in the urban landscape of the Chechen capital. It is in this vein that eyewitnesses of those events recall: "…they [ed. – the federals] came into a city that they didn't know… we […] remember every corner by heart, we grew up in it, I can reconstruct all the streets from memory, and we couldn't give it up just like that. It was impossible" (AFM, Interview, 17 December 2019). The assault also showed that the Russian army needed reform and Russian national policy needed consistency and toughness to avoid the outbreak of civil war throughout the country. "The feds came to fight in a city they did not know […] they simply did not know how to fight in such conditions, where high-rise buildings, where fire was coming from several floors at once […] I did not believe to the last that they would come to Grozny…" (AFM, Interview, 24 October 2019). The widely held (governmental) position is based on the aftermath of the 1993 conflict between Dudayev's supporters and parliament. The Russian authorities openly supported the Provisional Council, including with arms and weapon experts. Clashes reached their peak in the autumn of 1994. During the same period, a series of opposition raids on Grozny took place.

Grozny as a Symbol of the Past/Present

When asked about the symbolic significance of the Chechen capital in their past, an overwhelming proportion of respondents (89 per cent) emphasised nostalgia for the different nationalities then living in Grozny before the outbreak of war, where there were many green areas, recreational facilities and businesses. For the respondents, authentic Grozny is in the past and has no connection with urban space in the present. One of the respondents, a native of Grozny, had left the capital with her family before the outbreak of open hostilities in 1994 and had never returned to her homeland. She explained this by the fact that she and her family have no desire to return to the place from which she was expelled by her "neighbours". The woman says that she does not want to see a new Grozny, as the Chechen capital is now a picture devoid of its former spirit. At the same time, she retains a grudge against those who "came down from the mountains and demanded to buy a house in Grozny for nothing" (AFM, Interview, 27 November 2019). With the loss of her home, she lost her land and her connection to it.

Between 2007 and 2009. Grozny was not just rebuilt with the support of the federal centre; it was transformed beyond recognition. The redesigned urban and memorial landscape of the Chechen capital was designed to perform a consolidating function in the post-war reconstruction of the republic. Grozny became a symbol of reconciliation between the federal centre and the once-rebellious periphery, an example of how a ruined city could be rebuilt in the armed conflict of the post-Soviet period. The reconstruction and rebuilding of the city is akin to rewriting history, as evidenced by the transcribed interviews.

The Caucasus War and Deportation: The Continuity of Memory

The link between the memory of the Caucasian War and Operation "Chechevitsa"[2] in 1944 is reflected ambiguously in the memorials analysed. In part, the desire of Chechen respondents to preserve the historical continuity expressed in the line of national resistance in the Russian Empire since the time of the Caucasian War is traceable. "We didn't come to them, they came to us [ed. – referring to the centre of the Russian Empire, then the USSR and afterwards the administrative centre of the Russian Federation]" (AFM, Interview, 26 June 2020). This is probably due to deeply preserved traumatic experiences passed down Chechen generations, which eventually became a feature of their collective national memory. Many link these chronologically distant events into a single line of action by the federal centre to stigmatise Chechens. "…first they came to our house in the forty-fourth, we were evicted […] they came again in the ninety-fourth and proceeded to shoot us…and that's not the end…" (AFM, Interview, 3 September 2021).

Meanwhile, rallies in Chechnya and Ingushetia commemorating the victims of the 1944 forced relocation, were consolidated on 23 February (Day of Remembrance and Mourning). "For our family there is not just one day…the twenty-third…throughout our lives we remember and will

2 The deportation of Chechens and Ingush, or Operation "Chechevitsa" in the slang of the Russian intelligence (in Chechen: *dohadar, ardahar, makhkakh dakhar* – "eviction"), is the forced expulsion of Chechen and Ingush nationals from the Chechen-Ingush Republic and adjoining areas to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, carried out by the authorities of the USSR between 23 February and 9 March 1944.

never forget…" (AFM, Interview, 26 June 2020). However, in 2011, by decree of the head of the Chechen Republic, R.A. Kadyrov, all commemorative events were postponed from 23 February to 10 May, the day of A.A. Kadyrov's funeral. In the same year, the commemoration in Ingushetia was also postponed, but one day later on 24 February.

Russia traditionally celebrates 23 February as Defender of the Fatherland Day. This demarcation of commemorative acts at the federal and republican levels therefore demonstrates the implementation of a hegemonic policy of remembrance by Moscow through the levelling of the war narrative and the 1944 forced relocation of Chechens and Ingush associated with it.

In the Russian memorial space of the twenty-first century, it is extremely important to preserve a national holiday that was born in the USSR (the Day of the Soviet Army and Navy). At the same time, to free this date from the shadow of the past, filling it with solemn and triumphant content at the national level.

The Image of the Enemy

The negatively charged image of the enemy in collective memory supports the assumption that the official narrative of the state has moved from war to victory. This is provable through several arguments.

First, analysis of memories indicates that often the local population joined illegal armed formations (IAF) opposing the federal centre but did not always share the ideology of fighting Moscow. Thus, some of those who joined them chose a survival and livelihood strategy, including robbery, looting and even kidnapping for ransom. Most respondents conclude that with A. Kadyrov coming to power, and following a fall in the external influx of fighters into the republic, the situation in Chechnya changed drastically. An interview with a Chechen correspondent revealed this, "I gathered five or six guys around me, it depended on many reasons… […] I had connections, money, weapons. I knew who to go to, who to say what to, people came to me, they asked. I was found, I found who needed to be found. We survived. We were busy surviving. I only knew one thing: I did not want 'strangers' to come and take my family, my mother, my father […] many people just did not understand that they were being cheated, that easy money was followed by deception! That to work for

the Wahabbis for money, for the sake of survival, was idiotic!" (AFM, Interview, 14 December 2019).

When asked to name and describe the image of the enemy, respondents who sided with the federal centre claimed that they were "militants, mujahideen, whatever you want to call them, *dukhi*…" (AFM, Interview, 13 November 2017). The respondent confidently shares his memories of the involvement of the international mercenary specifically from 1999, though he himself makes the caveat that "in the second one we fought mostly with locals for some reason, they got caught" (AFM, 13 November 2017). "I didn't see [the Arabs], I'm not going to lie, because all we killed all this […] that we saw were mostly Chechens, and God knows there. They're all hairy, bearded, you can't tell. Especially here towards the end, when international Islamisation has started, they do not cut their hair, do not shave, they cannot do anything…" (AFM, 13 November 2017). The same respondent notes that the beginning of the second phase of the conflict in Chechnya was characterised by "healthy outfitted men" who were making enough money also for personal use. However, after 2005–2006 the situation changed radically and "there were beggars: kids and youngsters. They had a tracksuit on, a soldier's belt with a pouch or two canvas ones, and a Kalashnikov assault rifle… and that's it, they were empty. There were no good boots, no unloading gear" (AFM, 13 November 2017). This respondent's point of view is supported by many oral testimonies of Chechen respondents. They note the reduction in the number of well-equipped fighters after 2002, which can be explained by the end of the phase of active fighting in 2000–2001, which entailed a war without the significant involvement of Russian internal troops.

Many of the interviews demonstrate how ordinary people sold carpets and other material valuables in 1994–1996 to buy weapons or simply to get by. This narrative contradicts the popular construct that there was a surplus of weapons in Chechnya in 1991–1994, obtained in several ways. These include through theft from Ministry of Defence warehouses, or picking up leftovers from the withdrawal of federal troops, procurement and "humanitarian aid" from abroad, and handicraft production. However, such oral evidence may be a consequence of the transformation of private memory and the justification/"rehabilitation" of members of their own people in an armed conflict where survival is based on the use of force and weapons and survival strategies.

Secondly, since 1999 there has been a shift in the official state narrative away from Chechnya's separatist past. The collective enemy portrait is dominated by the image of the Chechen terrorist (rather than militant) who has gone beyond armed hostilities (terrorist attacks in Moscow – including the "Nord-Ost", Buynaksk, Beslan – seizing school №1, Volgodonsk; attacks in Nalchik, Avtur, Nazran and Grozny in 2004 and the attack in Nalchik in 2005). However, the December 1999 case connected to the actions of General V. Shamanov in his area of responsibility in the village of Alkhan-Yurt, which resulted in forty-one civilian deaths, as well as other past cases (the Samashki tragedy in April 1995) are definitively removed from the state narrative.

Thirdly, in the memorial field in contemporary Russia, commemorative acts serve as a political tool for displacing the war narrative and embedding the victory narrative. Thus, on 3 September 2019. V. Putin went to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the victory over the Japanese at Khalkhin-Gol without attending the fifteenth anniversary of the terrorist attack in Beslan (Tass.ru, 2019). At the country level, 3 September is the Day of Solidarity in the Fight against Terrorism in Russia (established by the federal law "On Amendments to the Federal Law 'On the Days of Military Glory (Victory Days) of Russia" of 21 July 2005). On this day Russia pays tribute to the thousands of compatriots who died at the hands of terrorists in Beslan, at the Dubrovka Theatre Centre, in Budennovsk and Pervomaysk, in the bombing of residential buildings in Moscow, Buynaksk and Volgodonsk and in other terrorist attacks. Against this background, Khalkhin-Gol memorial has the advantage that a substantial part of the Russian population has difficulty understanding the historical background to the commemoration of this event and lacks sufficient knowledge of what happened between Soviet and Japanese forces on Mongolian territory in 1939.

Conclusion

The institutionalisation of the narrative from war to victory in Chechnya 1999–2021 combines memorial links between different historical events, still traumatic and therefore silenced at state level. In particular, the UN's

recognition in 2003 of the Chechen capital as the most destroyed city on earth is often linked to Stalingrad, Grozny became the second most destroyed city on earth after the symbol of military valour in 1942–1943 (now hero-city Volgograd).

On the whole, the study of memories about armed hostilities in Chechnya makes it possible to highlight the discrepancy between the official viewpoint and the respondents' perceptions of individual events, whose interpretations indicate continuing conflicts of memory (Appendix 1). The table also reflects the diversity of private narratives. Even several decades after the beginning of the armed conflict in Chechnya there is a continuing narrative line about its purpose, its name, the relationship between the events of the 1990s and the forced removals of 1944 and the Caucasian War (1817–1864). This question demonstrates the difference in perception between the respondents and the official (state) position. In doing so, we are talking about two memorial parallel realities, where the official (state) position appears rather to be artificially constructed.

At the same time, the state narrative is a hegemonic form of remembrance where common perceptions of the past are introduced for members of one community (the nation). "It presupposes the existence within the nation-state of a dominant historical narrative, which is maintained through the education system, media, museum sphere, a set of official holidays, etc" (Letnyakov, 2022). Notably, versions of the past that contradict the hegemonic narrative are "marginalised and suppressed because they are seen as undermining national unity and patriotic feelings". (Letnyakov, 2022). This form of memory is characterised by the securitisation of discourse about the past, history must necessarily be protected from falsification and from attack by internal and external enemies. This requires not just a victory in the present, but the maintenance of a narrative of victory in the past.

References

Assman, Aleida (2019) Zabvenie istorii – oderzhimost' istoriey [Oblivion of History – Obsession with History] *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, Moscow.

Banner, Francine (2006) Uncivil Wars: "Suicide Bomber Identity" as a Product of the Russian-Chechen Conflict. *Religion, State and Society* 34(3), 215–253.

Bordyugov, Gennady (ed.) (2015) *Pobeda-70: rekonstruktsiya yubileya [Victory-70: reconstruction of the anniversary]*, AIRO-XXI, Moscow.

Campana, Aurélie (2012) The Chechen Memory of Deportation: From Recalling a Silenced Past to the Political Use of Public Memory, in *Public Memory, Public Media and the Politics of Justice* (eds. Philip Lee and Pradip Ninan Thomas), 141–162.

Carstensen, Martin and Vivien Schmidt (2016) Power Through, Over and In Ideas: Conceptualising Ideational Power in Discursive Institutionalism. *Journal of European Public Policy* 23(3), 318–337.

Cornell, Svantje (2003) The War Against Terrorism and the Conflict in Chechnya: a Case for Distinction, in *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*. *The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy*, 167–184.

Danilova, Nataliya (2014) Victims and Heroes: Commemorating the Russian Military Casualties in The Chechen Conflicts, in *Chechnya at War and Beyond* (eds. Anne Le Huérou et al.), Routledge, London, 58–75.

Gammer, Moshe (2002) Nationalism and History: Rewriting the Chechen National Past, in *Secession, History and the Social Sciences* (eds. Coppieters et al.), VUB Brussels University Press, Brussels, 117–140.

Goryushina, Evgeniya (2021) Politika pamyati na Kavkaze posle 1989 g.: teoreticheskoe obosnovanie narrativa o voyne v Chechne [The Memory policy in the Caucasus after 1989: A theoretical basis for the war narrative in Chechnya], *Istoriya* 12(10) <DOI: 10.18254/S207987840017352-6> (accessed 28 December 2022).

Letnyakov D. E. (2022) Rezhimy istoricheskoy pamyati: ot gegemonizma k agonizmu [Regimes of Historical Memory: from Hegemony to Agonism]. *Politika i Obshchestvo* 1, 45–53.

Malishevskiy N. N. (2015) Angloyazychnaya istoriografiya vooruzhonnogo konflikta v Chechne [English-Language Historiography of the Armed Conflict in Chechnya]. *Problemy nacional'noy strategii* 5, 224–249.

Mälksoo, Maria (2015) 'Memory Must Be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonic Security. *Security dialogue* 46(3), 221–237.

Nastavlenie po mezhdunarodnomu gumanitarnomu pravu dlya Vooruzhennyh Sil Rossiyskoy Federatsii (utv. Ministrom oborony RF 08.08.2001) (2001) [Manual on International Humanitarian Law for the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Approved by the Minister of

Defence of the Russian Federation on 08.08.2001)], <https://normativ.kontur.ru/document?moduleId=1&documentId=9424> (accessed 28 December 2022).

Portelli, Alessandro (1998) Oral History as Genre, in *Narrative and Genre*, (eds. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson), Routledge, London, 23–45.

President of Russia (2003) Vystuplenie na torzhestvennom zasedanii, posvyashchennom 60-letiyu Stalingradskoy bitvy. Administratsiya Prezidenta Rossii [Speech at the solemn meeting to mark the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad. Administration of the President of Russia], *kremlin.ru*, 2 February, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/copy/21855> (accessed 28 December 2022).

Ram, Hasha (1999) *Prisoners of the Caucasus: Literary Myths and Media Representations of the Chechen Conflict*, Working Papers Series, Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

Sikevich, Z. V. (2017) Etnicheskaya identichnost' russkikh i chechentsev v kontekste istoricheskoy pamyati (sravnitel'nyy analiz) [Ethnic Identity of Russians and Chechens in the Context of Historical Memory (Comparative Analysis)]. *Vlast'* 2, 122–129.

Tass.ru (2019) Putin ne planiruet poseshchenie Beslana v godovshchinu zahvata terroristami shkoly [Putin has no Plans to Visit Beslan on the Anniversary of the Terrorist Takeover of the school], 28 August, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6808056?ysclid=ldgd0x2o6z728003038> (accessed 28 December 2022).

Tishkov, V.A. (2001) *Obshchestvo v vooruzhennom konflikte. Etnografiya chechenskoy voyny [Society in Armed Conflict. The Ethnography of the Chechen War]*, Nauka, Moscow.

Vlahos, Michael (2006) The Long War: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Protracted Conflict – and Defeat, *The National Interest*, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-long-war-a-self-fulfilling-prophecy-of-protracted-conflict-and-defeat-1061> (accessed 28 December 2022).

Williams, Brian Glyn (2000) Commemorating "The Deportation" in Post-Soviet Chechnya: the Role of Memorialization and Collective Memory in the 1994–1996 and 1999–2000 Russo-Chechen Wars. *History and Memory* 12(1), 101–134.

Interviews

Author's Field Materials (hereafter referred to as AFM).
AFM. Interview on 3 September 2021. Venue: Grozny. Duration: 89 min.
AFM. Interview on 30 August 2017. Location: Rostov-on-Don. Duration: 74 min.
AFM. Interview 13 November 2017. Venue: Rostov-on-Don. Duration: 110 min.
AFM. Interview 19 April 2019. Venue: Novorossiysk. Duration: 42 min.
AFM. Interview July 11, 2019 Location: Moscow. Duration: 49 min.
AFM. Interview July 27, 2019 Location: Moscow. Duration: 94 min.
AFM. Interview on 24 October 2019. Venue: Grozny. Duration: 46 min.
AFM. Interview 27 November 2019. Venue: Rostov-on-Don. Duration: 101 min.
AFM. Interview December 14, 2019 Location: Moscow. Duration 128 min.
AFM. Interview on 17 December 2019 Location: Moscow. Duration 79 min.
AFM. Interview on 26 June 2020. Venue: Pyatigorsk. Duration: 89 min.
AFM. Interview on 9 September 2021. Venue: Stavropol. Duration: 56 min.

Annex 1. Conflicts of memory: comparing the position of state authorities and respondents' interpretations of events

Narrative	**Summary of interview results**	**Generally accepted (governmental) position**
The political aims of the outbreak of armed hostilities in Chechnya	A number of ethno-political conflicts (notably the Ossetian-Ingush conflict in 1992) in the post-Soviet period are directly or indirectly related to attempts to provoke Dudayev into carrying out large-scale military operations outside the republic.	Creation of the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria" (IChRI) in 1991 with the aim of seceding Chechnya from the USSR and the RSFSR. Struggle with the unrecognised "Ichkeria" to take control of Chechen territory. Separatism.
Naming the armed hostilities in Chechnya	A large proportion of respondents reacted sensitively to such references to the events of 1994–1996 and 1999–2009 as "conflict" or "armed hostilities". Many respondents believe that it was a war and argue that federal troops had entered the territory of Chechnya.	On the basis of the "Instruction on International Humanitarian Law for the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation" (approved by the Russian Minister of Defense on 8 August 2001), the term "Chechen internal armed conflict" applies and is divided into two phases of armed hostilities respectively.

Narrative	**Summary of interview results**	**Generally accepted (governmental) position**
The storming of Grozny (31 December 1994)	A mistake by Russia's political leadership, a negative attitude towards B.N. Yeltsin and the planned unleashing of war in the North Caucasus by the federal centre.	In 1993, conflict between supporters of Dudayev and the parliament. The Russian authorities openly support the Provisional Council, including with arms and specialists. Armed clashes reach their height by the autumn of 1994, with a series of opposition raids on Grozny.
Grozny as a symbol of the past/present	The majority of respondents recorded a nostalgic narrative of the concentration of different nationalities in Grozny prior to the deployment of hostilities, where there were many green spaces, recreational areas and businesses. For the respondents the authentic Grozny has remained in the past and has no links with the urban (memorial) space in the present. Grozny as a symbol of the pre-war past.	In 2003 Grozny was declared by the UN the most destroyed city on earth (after Stalingrad in 1942–1943). From December 2006 an active phase of reconstruction of the urban space began. The rapid pace of construction allowed the reconstruction of Grozny to be completed in 2009. The new Grozny as a symbol of the post-conflict reconstruction of the Chechen Republic.

Narrative	**Summary of interview results**	**Generally accepted (governmental) position**
Linking the memory of the Caucasian War with Operation Lentil in 1944 (continuity of memory)	An overwhelming number of respondents saw the memory of the Caucasus War, the deportations of 1944 and the outbreak of armed hostilities in 1994 as interrelated and perceived these events as a continuous process of stigmatisation of the Chechens.	Until 2011, Chechnya and Ingushetia celebrated 23 February as Memorial and Mourning Day. In Chechnya, a 2011 decree by the head of the republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, postponed the events until 10 May, the day of Akhmat Kadyrov's funeral. The same year, in Ingushetia, the events were postponed until 24 February.
Image of the enemy	Since 1994, foreign fighters began to appear and were generally described by respondents as "newcomers", "outsiders". Private narratives suggest a personification of the enemy, as well as joining the IMF in order to survive (searching for food and livelihood; participation in the IMF was seen as the only way to earn a living).	1994–1996: confrontation between Russian federal troops (forces) and armed formations of the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria", created in violation of Russian law. 1999–2009: There is a consolidated enemy at the republican and federal level: terrorism. At that time there are resonant acts of terrorism: seizure of more than 700 hostages in the Dubrovka theatre centre in Moscow on 23 October 2002; series of night-time explosions in residential buildings in Moscow, Buynaksk and Volgodonsk on 6–14 September 1999, and so on.

Narrative	Summary of interview results	Generally accepted (governmental) position
		The terrorist attack in Beslan (Republic of North Ossetia-Alania) on 1 September 2004 is particularly symbolic in collective memory.

Valentina Tanaylova

Father and Son: The Heroisation of Akhmat Kadyrov as a Political Tool

Abstract: If you do memory research in Chechnya, you have a lot to say about what cannot be remembered. You cannot remember "uncomfortable" moments in Chechnya's history and Chechnya's relationship with Russia. Before you could not remember the deportations. Now you cannot remember the First and Second Chechen wars, or "Ichkeria". The question remains, what then can you remember? What can be remembered is the personality of Akhmat Kadyrov, his political activities and his achievements in the cause of establishing peace in the Chechen Republic. By analysing interviews with Akhmat and Ramzan Kadyrov, commemorative practices and official narratives, media investigations and publications, in this chapter it will illustrate how the image of the first president of the Chechen Republic is being glorified and what functions this image fulfils in Ramzan Kadyrov's politics.

Keywords: Heroisation of Akhmat Kadyrov, personality cult of Ramzan Kadyrov, memory politics in Chechnya, collective memory

Introduction: Biography and Heroisation of Akhmat Kadyrov

Within classical studies, two ways of knowing the past can be distinguished – history (or historical facts) and collective memory. History is a way of reconstructing a community's past independently of its current situation, of its problems and needs. Ideally, the flow of historical facts is fixed and remains stable (Halbwachs, 1992: 191–192). However, although history as a scientific discipline strives for objectivity and tries to rely on rigorous evidence, in reality this is not the case. History, like memory, is influenced by social and political realities. Collective memory also reconstructs the past. However, it works with different instruments, using symbols rather than facts, and it disappears when it no longer corresponds to current experience.

Schwartz (1997a) asserts that collective memory and social action are mutually constituent parts of the same whole and not simply causes and effects of each other. Not only does the contemporary political and social situation determine society's attitudes to the past, but memory of the past also determines attitudes to contemporary realities. What we think is right and acceptable today depends on which ideals of the past we are committed to and which symbols of these ideals and of this past we choose. And today, one of the main symbols in Chechnya turns out to be the heroic figure of Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov.

My sources for this chapter include interviews with Akhmat Kadyrov and Ramzan Kadyrov, their official statements, commemorative practices and official narratives, media investigations and publications. The earliest materials I have used date back to the early 2000s, the most recent to 2022. In analysing these sources, my aim was not simply to outline the constructed image of Akhmat Kadyrov, but to outline his functions as a political tool.

Without specific access to material and testimony as can be found in archives and interview transcripts in Chechnya, information about Akhmat Kadyrov, is difficult to access. One of Russia's most popular Internet resources, Wikipedia, attempts a neutral biography of Akhmat Kadyrov: "Born: August 23, 1951, Karaganda, Kazakh SSR, USSR; died: 9 May 2004, Grozny, Chechnya, Russia; Chechen statesman, political and religious leader. The first president of the Chechen Republic within the Russian Federation. From 1995 to 2000 he held the post of mufti of the unrecognised Chechen Republic of Ichkeria". In general, the available information offers various assessments of the life and work of Akhmat Kadyrov, including more negative perspectives.

In constructing an image of Akhmat Kadyrov, two of the most important moments in his biography are his defection from the Chechen fighters to the Russian government, and his tragic death in a terrorist attack. During the First Chechnya War, Kadyrov supported the fighters for "Ichkeria" as an independent state, and later he started to position himself as a supporter of Russian authorities. He discussed this in the following way:

> Jihad was first declared in late 1994 by the then Mufti Alsabekov. I was his deputy at that time and firmly believed that the leading minds of the Chechen people had proclaimed an independent republic and that Russia, by introducing its troops, wanted to suppress that independence. Without going into the political situation at the time, or

> analysing what happened under Zavgaev's rule, I continued the jihad Alsabekov had declared, soon after the latter left Chechnya. (Grozny Inform, 1 July 2020)

> But then the situation changed.

> In 1998 I realised I had been mistaken. The fact is that I was against the introduction of Shariah rule in the republic. And I was against the spread of Wahhabism. (Grozny Inform, 1 July 2020)

This shift in political and military stance played an important role in shaping the public identity of the Chechen president. As Garfinkel (1956) notes, public identity is based on intentions, not achievements. Public identity refers "not to what one has done, but to what the group considers the ultimate reasons or causes of one's activities" (Garfinkel, 1956: 420). If it is intentions rather than actions that are important, the claim of Akhmat, and even more so his son Ramzan Kadyrov, that he has always acted in the interests of the Chechen people are extremely important. In 2009 Ramzan Kadyrov gave an interview to Igor Svinarenko in which he described this moment of transition as follows:

> Igor Svinarenko:
> - Ramzan! How did you and your father see the future of Chechnya before you joined the federals?

> Ramzan Kadyrov:
> - We did not change positions. We did not join anybody; we have always been with the people! I have never been for the federals or against the federals, I have always been with the people. I am not a traitor. In the first campaign, we were with the people and in the second campaign we were with the people.

> Igor Svinarenko:
> - So the scheme is as follows: the people were against the feds and you are against them, the people are for the feds and you are for them?

> Ramzan Kadyrov:
> - Yes.

In an interview with *Rossiyskaya gazeta* on 7 April 2009, Ramzan Kadyrov developed an image of his father which allows Kadyrov junior to become the successor to the noble cause of struggle and work for the good of the Chechen people:

> Berezovsky signed up for this. Whoever ruined the Soviet Union had to ruin Russia too. Berezovsky was doing the job. He worked with the generals, the government, and the administration. But there was a man who explained what was happening – my

> father Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov. Everyone knew his ancestors, everyone knew his father and his grandfathers, everyone knew that he and his ancestors had always acted in the name of the people. Among our ancestors there were people who taught Islam in madrassas, and were imprisoned and deported. The Kadyrov family is trusted. They knew about my father that he was a spiritual man and would never sell out his homeland. They knew that! And because he could easily explain it to people, they listened to him better than a man from Moscow. I will tell you about him. One night – it was 1999 or early 2000 – there was fighting everywhere, there was no light at home, and I went to see him. I called him "Chief". I told him, "Today people do not understand us. Most of the people! The feds accuse us of being bandits, the Wahhabis call us traitors. We are in a wrong position. What will happen? Why do we need all this?" He said to me, "Are you weak? I will buy you a flat in Moscow or abroad, go and study. And I will not leave my people in this pitiful condition. The only chance for our people is to make a deal with Putin and get out of the situation. I will take that chance. I know that I am pushing myself and my family into certain death. I know that you have no future, but I am taking this important step, I am doing it in the name of the people. And you, if you want, go away." I told him, "Chief, I am with you, I am like-minded, I will show that I am worthy!" and from then on, I started fighting. I was with him day and night. He started as a driver, and then he became a group commander. It was very hard for him, sometimes he could not sleep. He was getting closer and closer to death, but he would not back down. He took it upon himself for the sake of the Almighty, for the sake of his people. (Rossiyskaya gazeta, 7 April 2009)

In the above quotation Ramzan Kadyrov makes another important point in the context of the mythologisation and heroisation of the image of Akhmat-Haji. He states that from the moment he came to power, Akhmat Kadyrov's life was precarious, and, as we know, his life came to a forceful end. On 9 May 2004, there was a terrorist attack on the Dynamo stadium in Grozny. At 10:35 am, an explosive device with one kilogram of TNT went off under the podium for the guests of honour, where the leadership of the Chechen Republic and representatives of the federal army command were sitting. According to official figures, seven people were killed, including Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov, and more than fifty were injured. As was readily emphasised afterwards, Kadyrv died from something he had been fighting against, terrorism. This fact heroises the first president of Chechnya. Those who perish under tragic circumstances are forever fixed in a state of "impeccability". There is no need to confirm this repeatedly, as there would be if Akhmat-Haji were alive.

In November 2021, the Chechen State Television and Radio Company Grozny announced the introduction of a textbook about Akhmat Kadyrov into the school curriculum. The book is called *The Way Illuminated by*

Light. The message was quickly picked up by the various media outlets, mostly independent, and there was much discussion of the new book on social networks. Ramzan Kadyrov proposed studying the biography of Akhmat Kadyrov in schools previously in March 2019 during a meeting with officials. It was dedicated to Chechnya's Constitution Day. "If teachers in school and in kindergarten would spend one minute, two, three, at most five minutes describing the path, how we achieved what we have now, then people would have an understanding," Kadyrov said (CHGTRK "Groznyi", 23 March 2019).

The author of the book, Police Major Amrudi Edilov, was the head of the Chechen Interior Ministry's department for economic security and combating corruption. His co-authors were Tamara Elbuzdukayeva, deputy director of the National Museum in Grozny, and Ruslan Alkhanov, head of the Interior Ministry. It is most likely that Major Edilov became the author of a biography of Akhmat Kadyrov because his family is from the same village as the Kadyrovs, Tsentaroi (later renamed Akhmat-Yurt), and he belongs to a small circle of the Chechen president's confidants. It is noteworthy that the book cannot yet be found in the electronic catalogues of libraries, although all Russian publishers are required to send several copies to the country's major libraries. However, we can read the abstract of the book, which, although brief, very revealingly articulates its objective:

> The textbook is intended to educate young people of the Chechen Republic on the example of the life and work of the First President of the Chechen Republic, Hero of Russia, Akhmat-Haji Abdulhamidovich Kadyrov. The life of Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov and his public and political activities serve as a striking example to all succeeding generations. On this path (based on the roots of his family and the roots of his people) he absorbed strength and spirit, an iron will and the fear of God, and, most importantly, boundless love for [his] people. Kadyrov's moral and humanist creed did not permit him to differ between word and action. He did not accept double standards and approaches in politics. Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov proved in practice that one can be honest, sincere, and high-minded in politics. His son Ramzan Akhmatovich Kadyrov, Hero of Russia, and Head of the Chechen Republic, continued worthily the policy of peace and creation established by Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov. (Edilov et al., 2020: 2)

The image of his father is extremely important to Ramzan Kadyrov. It is a holistic structure, the image and role of the son rests on those of the father. One must first be built so that the other can be. The claim that Akhmat Kadyrov has brought the war in Chechnya to an end is of benefit to the present head of the Chechen Republic. Of course, we cannot know all the

nuance and contestations of the agreement between Moscow and Akhmat Kadyrov, but we do know that it was he who found himself in power when the war in Chechnya formally concluded. The narrative of Akhmat Kadyrov's desire to serve the Chechen people in every way, his presence in power in Chechnya when the war ended, and his tragic death all provided the ideal image to embed in the collective memory.

The Image of Akhmat Kadyrov as a Tool of Legitimisation of the Authoritarian Regime in the Chechen Republic

Researchers and analysts define the regime in today's Chechnya differently, although on closer inspection there are many similarities between the versions. Russell (2014), in his article "Ramzan Kadyrov's 'illiberal' peace in Chechnya", compares Chechnya to Northern Ireland, the Emirates, Kurdistan, and Africa (or more precisely to its four post-conflict territories, Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Sudan). He states that in Chechnya the population is moving towards better material well-being and visible stability, but that the situation with civil liberties and rights is much worse. There is some discrepancy between Kadyrov's large share of sovereign power and the official policy of the Russian Federation, which asserts itself to be a sovereign democracy that exists in general conformity with international liberal norms. Thus, what Russell calls a "semi-authoritarian" regime of government has taken shape in Chechnya. He highlights some of the features of the Kadyrov regime, arguing that, firstly, Ramzan Kadyrov has managed to establish peace in Chechnya, secondly, an illiberal peace is better than war, and thirdly, what Kadyrov has managed to create has proved to be more durable and stable than the "liberal democracies" that have been and are being created with the help of Western interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria. Russell calls it a variant of the hybrid world. However, he asks the question, can we describe Chechen society as being at peace? And he answers this question as follows: Yes. There is no war there. No. There are ongoing crimes against civilians (Russell, 2014). Russell (2014) claims that three things are needed for the subsequent construction of a full-fledged regime of liberal democracy, a high level of economic prosperity, active

citizenship of a large middle class, and a national culture based on tolerance. Russia and Chechnya have none of these things. However, Russell was comforted by the fact that a semi-liberal world could itself be a stage on the road to full-fledged democracy (he cited the example of Latin American countries after military dictatorship regimes). It is now 2023, and we can clearly see that neither Chechnya nor Russia has moved towards democratic, liberal rule, but on the contrary, is moving in the opposite direction.

Another approach is to define the regime of power in Chechnya as neo-sultanistic. Such regimes are generally characterised by extreme patrimonialism – the central role in the state belongs to the "sultan" and his family, a high degree of control over a large part of the budget and over business, a high level of corruption, a lack of a defined ideology, which is replaced by a personality cult, suppression of political pluralism, an inability for peaceful political change, etc. (Eke and Kuzio, 2020). In the case of Chechnya, traditionalism and the Islamisation of society are also contributors (Druey, 2015). Derluguian (2010) argues that such regimes should not be seen as purely transitional. These are not just failures, but inevitable intermediate phases on the historical path of ascent to something better and, according to the transitional theory of democratisation, more Western. On the contrary, this "Eastern" type of power has emerged creating a necessary niche for the Moscow network of political patronage and management of peripheral crises (Derlugian, 2010).

Laruelle (2017) proposes the term "Kadyrovism" to describe the regime of power in Chechnya, and focuses on the creation of the cult of Kadyrov, but within the framework of the de facto subordination of the head of the Chechen Republic to Russian President V. Putin. According to Laruelle, "Kadyrovism" is a relatively coherent ideology, which has its own internal logic and propaganda tools, and reflects the reality of Ramzan Kadyrov's rule. Kadyrovism is defined by two main features, first, the anti-colonial Chechen narrative and its transformation into a Russian patriotic ideology which portrays Chechens as harbingers of Putin's success. Secondly, a rigid, puritanical version of Islam inspired by the Persian Gulf and its crossing with traditional Chechen Islam. According to Laruelle (2017), the Putin regime is not a political monolith, many regional political actors develop within the "ecosystem" created by the Kremlin, enjoying a certain space of maneuver without clearly defined limits. Ramzan Kadyrov is one such figure. Thus, like all other ideological constructs in Putin's Russia,

Kadyrovism is in flux, creating uncertainty about the future of the regime and its ideology (Laruelle, 2017).

Whatever different label the current political situation in Chechnya and however they describe the regime and ideology, what they describe is a form of power that requires legitimization, achieved with the image of Akhmat Kadyrov. In his "heroified" version, Kadyrov embodies certain values which should have won the existing regime many supporters, but, as human rights activists believe, the people no longer believe the rhetoric of the authorities. As for the idea of an authoritarian government in Chechnya, it was not Ramzan Kadyrov who initiated it. Back in 2002, in an interview with Anna Politkovskaya, Akhmat Kadyrov spoke of the need for a dictatorship to restore order in Chechnya:

> Anna Politkovskaya:
> - Do you think someone should rule alone in Chechnya?
>
> Akhmat Kadyrov:
> - Yes, so that one person should be responsible for everything. Including all the power structures. The type of state structure that will emerge in Chechnya in the future will be presidential, complete power in one hand, because otherwise no order will be maintained. A dictator is needed here, in the truest sense of the word.
>
> Anna Politkovskaya:
> - As you see it, who is a modern dictator?
>
> Akhmat Kadyrov:
> - A man who has the right to decide all questions of restoring order. When all the levers are in one hand. (Politkovskaya, 2003)

When Kadyrov senior gave this interview to Politkovskaya, the call for "dictatorship" was justified with the post-war social and political situation in Chechnya. It was assumed that the fight against the "terrorists" and "bandits" who were preventing the return of peace and prosperity to Chechnya required a "hard hand". However, twenty years later, the situation has changed and the regime in power has remained the same. Now it is presented as a continuity of the style of government and its tasks. The son continues his father's work.

The Image of Akhmat Kadyrov as a Tool to Strengthen the Power of Ramzan and His Family

The process of Akhmat Kadyrov's did not develop in isolation. Rather, it can be seen as part of a process of building a personality cult for Ramzan Kadyrov and the cult of the Kadyrov family as a whole. The scheme, which is based on symbolic continuity, has been applied in different countries and at different times. In a work devoted to the memory of Abraham Lincoln, Schwartz (1997a) writes that when Lincoln became president, both he and his supporters began to construct a line of succession between him and George Washington, "In their engravings, he looked at George Washington's bust, stood beneath or beside Washington's portrait in the presence of familiar state symbols. Lincoln himself contributed to the creation of such representations. He regularly compared his problems to those faced by Washington. He launched military offensives on Washington's birthday. And when Lincoln died, panegyrists compared his character to that of George Washington" (Schwartz, 1997a: 488). It is a similar case here. Ramzan Kadyrov's image is the result not only of his actions, but also of symbolic links with the idealised image of his father. Such links, as Durkheim (1965) states, are not limited to revealing the psychological state with which they are associated, they help to create it.

As early as 2007, portraits of Ramzan Kadyrov were hanging everywhere in the republic (Deutsche Welle, 5 April 2007). Both Kadyrov the elder and younger, were on the facades of state institutions and on residential buildings which had not had time to be repaired after the shelling. They hung on the walls of schools and university buildings, at the entrance to the Dinamo stadium, which was being rebuilt, and on specially erected brick bases along the republic's highways. Human rights activists were already talking with alarm about an incipient cult of personality. At the time, Kadyrov himself refuted such accusations and insisted that behind all this there was nothing but the sincere love of the people for him and his father (Deutsche Welle, 5 April 2007).

The BBC Russian Service has found hundreds of streets bearing the initials of Kadyrov's children, his sisters, brother, parents, nephews, and other relatives. The Kadyrovs' home village was renamed Akhmat-Yurt, in honour of Ramzan Kadyrov's father. There are nine streets and lanes in

Bachi-Yurt named after the Kadyrovs. Two of them are named after A.R. Kadyrov which are the initials of Ramzan Kadyrov's two sons – 15-year-old Akhmat and 13-year-old Adam. The village has streets named after his mother, father, sister, and two of his nephews. There is also a street named after Magomed Daudov, the chairman of the parliament and Kadyrov's closest associate. There are a total of 346 streets and lanes in Chechnya named after the Kadyrovs. The number of streets named after the Kadyrovs depends on their proximity to places significant to the family. The closer to the ancestral villages, the more streets there are. In the Nozhay-Yurtovsky district, where the Kadyrovs family originates, there are streets with this surname in 48 of its 53 villages and hamlets. At the same time, there are only four streets named after Kadyrovs in 25 settlements of Shelkovsky district in the north-east of the republic (BBC News Russkaya sluzhba, 30 December 2020).

Educational institutions in Chechnya are periodically obliged to hold contests in honour of members of Ramzan Kadyrov's family, as well as to leave comments under the posts of his cronies. "It's not enough to write these comments, we have to take screenshots and send them to higher authorities, showing the results," says one education official (Kavkaz.Realii, 30 November 2021). Competitions devoted to Ramzan Kadyrov's father and other relatives are held regularly in Chechnya. The annual contests for young artists "The Renaissance of the Chechen Republic through the Eyes of Children", and for writers "Children's Pen", are dedicated to him. In September 2021, the best portraits of Akhmat Kadyrov, his wife Aymani and Ramzan Kadyrov himself were also chosen. The first prize for the artists is 500,000 Rubles (Kavkaz.Realii, 30 November 2021)

In the summer of 2018, the BBC's Russian Service published an investigation with a detailed "map" of Chechen power. Almost the entire system of governance in Chechnya appeared to be tied personally to Ramzan Kadyrov and people close to him. In February 2020, at a government meeting, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov admitted that when selecting candidates for various government posts he considered their relationship to his late father Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov. He had earlier stated to the contrary, "The surname Kadyrov won't get you anywhere, my friend, if you do not have merit". In the time since the BBC investigation, several "kin" of Ramzan Kadyrov have advanced considerably in their careers. A map of Chechnya's governance was compiled by the BBC's Russian service in 2018. As Kavkazskiy Uzel wrote, Ramzan Kadyrov made several personnel

reshuffles in the Chechen government in February. On 12 February it became known that he had appointed his nephew, 23-year-old Khamzat Kadyrov, who had previously been the head of the Kurchaloysky district, as Chechnya's minister for physical culture and sport. On 10 February, the head of the republic appointed his nephew Ibrahim Zakriyev, 29, who was mayor of Grozny, as head of the administration of the Chechen president and government. On 4 February it became known that Ramzan Kadyrov had appointed his cousin Idris Baisultanov, who had previously held the post of deputy head of the Chechen presidential administration (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 5 March 2020), to the post of education minister. Ekaterina Sokiryanskaya commented on that matter, "Kadyrov's inner circle is what in English they call a trust network – it is people close to him, people you can trust, not just because you know them, but because there is more to them than anything else. The status quo we have today in Chechnya is military governance, run by military people. In this sense, the parallels with the Kremlin are interesting, because there, too, the security council is now becoming the most important body in making internal political decisions, because in principle politics today is built on security" (BBC News Russkaya sluzhba, 25 June 2018).

Since members of Ramzan Kadyrov's family hold many posts in power in Chechnya, it is natural that journalists, human rights defenders, and political analysts should argue that the heroisation of Akhmat Kadyrov serves as the basis of Kadyrov rule as evidenced by the inclusion of their clan, closest relatives, and cronies. It is as if they are all continuing the righteous cause of the great man, but for this to sound legitimate the man first needs to be exalted as much as possible. This is what the very process of heroisation as such is aimed at.

The Image of Akhmat Kadyrov as a Tool for Constructing a Symbolic Space in the Field of Memory

Following Schwartz (1997b), I propose to consider memory as an independent cultural force and to recognise the special role of the "positional meaning" of its object. "The positional meaning of a symbol", according to Turner (1967: 51), derives from its relations with other symbols in the

totality, the gestalt, whose elements acquire their meaning in the system as a whole. Representations of the past are so interconnected that reference to one representation activates and defines the others in the system and is in turn mobilised and determined by them (Schwartz, 1997b).

A closer look at the functions of the symbolic image of Akhmat Kadyrov reveals them to be wider than just legitimising power and strengthening the position of the current leader of the Chechen Republic. The most complex of these, in my view, is the function of creating a system of symbols that determines what memory is possible and acceptable in Chechnya today. Where Akhmat-Haji is a sacrificial hero and peacemaker, the leaders of the Chechen independence movement are traitors and thieves, the "Ichkerians" are "terrorists" and "murderers", and so on. In creating an image of his father, Ramzan Kadyrov forms a whole system of symbols where some meanings correlate with others and define them.

What is happening to memory in the Chechen Republic today? Here is what one of the researchers involved in the study of memory in Chechnya says in his interview: " "Ichkeria" is a taboo. Wars and the independent republic of "Ichkeria" are certainly taboo. Relations with Russia are less dangerous, but it is especially wrong to criticise today's government. Criticism of Ramzan Kadyrov is forbidden. People try not to discuss him at all. Dudayev, as a criminal, is not even mentioned by many in the conversation" (Author interview with regional expert, 3 April 2021).

The Chechen government has spent a great deal of time and effort to develop and implement an official version of the memory of the First and Second Chechen wars. This version is consistent with the official memory of these events in Russia as a whole. To begin with, in official Russian discourse the word war does not appear at all. The first war in Chechnya is officially called "Measures to restore constitutional legality and law and order in the Chechen Republic", while the second is called "Counter-terrorist operations in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation". For a long time, the word "war" was taboo in Chechnya too. But the situation has changed, and a substitution has taken place. The war of Russia against Chechnya, which for a long time was to be kept quiet, has turned into a war of Russia and Chechnya against radicals, extremists, terrorists, and Islamic fundamentalists. It is not only possible but necessary to talk about it. It was in the context of the struggle against the terrorist threat and the break-up of both Russia and Chechnya that the heroic image of Akhmat Kadyrov became possible. The official version of memory is, of course, at odds with

the reality of what participants in and witnesses of the military events in Chechnya remember and recount. However, the mechanism of the state policy of remembrance works and creates a network of meanings in which links are formed based on the principle of binary opposition. Independent Chechnya becomes a stronghold of banditry and a terrorist base, Chechnya as part of Russia becomes the power and buttress of the whole state, Dzhokhar Dudayev destroys Chechnya – Akhmat Kadyrov builds a new republic, the "Ichkerians" turn into supporters of chaos and extremism – Kadyrovtsy become defenders of stability and peace, and so on.

The Image of Akhmat Kadyrov as a Tool of Mastering the Symbolic Space Inside and Outside Russia

The image of Akhmat Kadyrov has been an important part of Chechnya's symbolism from the outset, and over the years it has become increasingly important. Everything possible is named after Kadyrov Senior. Everyone understands that Akhmat Kadyrov is no longer just a man. Ramzan Kadyrov himself has said so more than once. "Akhmat is a symbol, it is the name of the great Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov, the first president of the Chechen Republic, a Hero of Russia, the man who led the fight against Russia's enemies, the terrorists, who together with Russian President Vladimir Putin saved the country from international terror and collapse" (Kavkaz.Realii, 9 May 2019). Thousands of politicians and athletes around the world utter with pride the slogan "Akhmat is power!" – he said in 2017. Chechnya's most popular social network (before it was blocked in Russia), Instagram, has almost 80,000 posts with the hashtag #akhmatsila (#ахматсила) (Kavkaz.Realii, 9 May 2019).

There is a republican foundation named after Akhmat Kadyrov, as is Akhmat Tower, a tower under construction in Grozny. It is planned that it will be the tallest building not only in Russia, but also in Europe. The Akhmat Kadyrov mosque is named after the Heart of Chechnya. In April 2019, the Grozny Strikeball Club, which had been in operation since 2015, was renamed Akhmat. The decision to rename their club Akhmat was announced by the management of the Gorets cycling club, which was established in 2012. In January 2020, the Edelweiss judo sports club in

Chechnya announced the creation of the Akhmat club. The Akhmat fighting club operates in Chechnya. In June 2017, the Terek football club was renamed Akhmat. When sports car races began to be held in the republic, they were also called the Akhmat Race. Gymnasium No 11 in Grozny, a kindergarten in the village of Beno-Yurt, a school and cadet corps in the village of Akhmat-Yurt and a playground in Gudermes were named after Akhmat Kadyrov. In August 2019, the name of Akhmat Kadyrov was given to the Suvorov School in Grozny. In the same year, a new micro-district of 128 houses was opened in the village of Znamenskoye in Chechnya's Nadterechny district for people resettled from landslide zones. The housing estate was also named after Akhmat Kadyrov. There are sites in honour of Akhmat Kadyrov outside Chechnya as well. Streets in his honour are in Makhachkala, the Dagestani villages of Sultan-Yangi-Yurt and Bammatyurt, the Israeli town of Abu Ghosh, the Moscow district of Yuzhnoe Butovo, Nalchik, the Turkish town of Sivas, and the Jordanian town of Amman. In 2016, St Petersburg authorities named an unnamed bridge over the Dudergofsky Canal after Akhmat Kadyrov, which sparked protests. A white supergiant star in the constellation of Leo is named after Akhmat Kadyrov. And that's not counting the monuments to Akhmat Kadyrov. And the fact that the Day of Mourning and Sorrow for the Victims of the deportation has been moved from 23 February to 10 May, which is also a day of mourning for Akhmat Kadyrov. This date was established by Ramzan Kadyrov in 2011 as an alternative to mourning for the victims of Stalin's deportation. Participants in the mourning events and ceremonies in 2018 noted that the focus is not on the victims of the deportation, but on the biography of Akhmat Kadyrov. As a day of mourning for the victims of the Stalinist deportations, this date never caught on (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 11 May 2019).

This detail gives rise to the phenomenon of the "Akhmatisation" of symbolic space, in which the image of Akhmat Kadyrov not only fills the symbolic void of material space but also displaces those images and symbols that were previously represented in it. This "Akhmatisation" is taking place far beyond the borders of the Chechen Republic. This is directly linked to the fact that in recent years the head of the Chechen Republic has actively mastered the Middle Eastern and European directions of foreign policy, and this activity is more akin to that undertaken by representatives of independent countries than to the heads of Russian regions. As Luzin (2018) noted in his article "Ramzan Kadyrov in Russia's Foreign

Policy", during his trips to the Middle East and countries of North Africa the Chechen leader held meetings at the highest level and established close (including personal) relations with the heads of state and their closest entourage. Ramzan Kadyrov marks his presence in other countries with a symbolic image and the name of his father. In Israel, for example, in the Arab village of Abu Ghosh the Chechen Government sponsored the construction of a mosque named after Akhmat Kadyrov. According to one version, the locals are descendants of Chechens, natives of the North Caucasus, who migrated to the territory of the Ottoman Empire back in the sixteenth century. In 2014, Ramzan Kadyrov arrived in Abu Ghosh for the grand opening of the mosque. By the time he arrived, a huge Chechen flag with the inscription 'We are against terror, we are for peace' had been placed over the entrance to the village. The Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov Street leading to the mosque was decorated with the national flags of Russia, Israel, and the Chechen Republic. Even the name plates were changed. Especially for Kadyrov's visit they were made in three languages: Arabic, Hebrew and Russian.

The Brussels-based European Muslim Forum (EMF) has circulated information that three cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina could become twinned with cities in Chechnya. The organisation said it was working to integrate, develop, educate, and assist Muslims across Europe. The twin towns of Sarajevo, Zavidovichi and Gorazde could become Chechnya's Grozny, Shali and Gudermes. Earlier the EMF representatives announced that they would help to attract investors for the reconstruction of Zavidovichi. In return one of the streets there is to be named after Akhmat Kadyrov. In 2021, the municipality of Zavidovichi claimed that "activities to upgrade the bridge and build a roundabout named after Ramzan Kadyrov, the current president of Chechnya, have been discussed". However, the Sarajevo mayor told the Balkan Service of Radio Liberty that no official procedures for so-called twinning had been initiated.

Conclusion

Kavkazskiy Uzel journalists gathered the opinions of several analysts who believe that Ramzan Kadyrov, by virtue of the nature of his rule, is

compelled to surround himself with his relatives, neighbours, and those who owe him and his family something. Analysts polled by *Kavkazskiy Uzel* also believe that Kadyrov is making such appointments to strengthen his power. Ruslan Kutayev believes that the appropriateness of such appointments is measured against a specific scale, "It is not a scale of professionalism and experience - by that these people should have been in lower positions, but a scale of loyalty". Political analyst Aleksey Malashenko said that such appointments show that Kadyrov cannot trust many people. "In so doing, the head of Chechnya is trying to show that power in the republic is not his own personal power, but that it belongs to the clan, the foundation of which was laid by Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov" (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 05.03.2020). The image of Akhmat Kadyrov is almost a sacred image of the founder of the dynasty. He is a mufti and a man of tradition who was truly respected in his time in Chechnya. It is as if his image is an epitome of what his son is doing. The image of Akhmat-Haji is responsible for this appeal to the roots. Mukhammad Abdurakhmanov (brother of the disgraced Chechen blogger Tumso Abdurakhmanov), a representative of the European-based Chechen human rights association Wayfond, also believes "The propagation of the personality cult of Akhmat Kadyrov is necessary for today's authorities in Chechnya to justify their existence" (Kavkaz.Realii, 30.11.2021). Aslan Murtazaliyev, head of the Assembly of Chechens of Europe, agrees, "The formation of the personality cult of the Kadyrov family is an attempt to justify and conceal crimes. Religion, culture, and traditions are levers in their hands to suppress the will of the people. Kadyrov understands that one day Moscow will sacrifice him to its people, and he is trying to protect himself by elevating his father to the rank of saint" says Murtazaliyev (Kavkaz.Realii, 30.11.2021).

At a certain point, Ramzan Kadyrov's regime became popular among the Chechen youth because through his efforts the representatives of the federal authorities, who, according to the locals, could kidnap and kill anyone, disappeared from the streets of Chechen villages and towns. Under Kadyrov, they found themselves strictly at their places of deployment. In their place, Chechen security forces with the republic's insignia on their uniforms began to walk the streets. This was supposed to create a feeling of reliability and protection, however, the regime began to destroy what Chechen society had always been built on - egalitarianism. A vertical power structure was built, even more rigid than at the federal level. It is completely at odds with Chechen traditions and mentality. As Russian

human rights activist Oleg Orlov says, "Some brat with a machine gun given to him by Kadyrov's government can humiliate and intimidate a respectable elderly man and dictate to a Chechen woman how she should behave. The only thing that remains of the real traditions to which the authorities appeal are the clothes, the dancing, and the ostentatious respect accorded the elderly. So, there can be no talk of popularity. In Chechnya, the 'kadyrovtsy' only provoke irritation, spite, and hatred among the people of Chechnya. At one point, the regime played on the revival of Chechnya, but it has descended into general suppression and widespread corruption" (Put' Akhmata, 2020). However, a significant proportion of Chechens support Ramzan Kadyrov, especially among young people. This support might be seen as mere propaganda by the federal and republican authorities if it were not for the fact that young people truly believe in what is happening in Chechnya. They really embrace the policies and authority of Ramzan Kadyrov. "Akhmat Kadyrov is the father of our people, he is the best of the Chechens, an example!" - so say the representatives of the younger generation. Some of them are certain that Kadyrov "never took off his hats like a real mountaineer" and "wore our national costume" (Put' Akhmata, 2020). This is not true, of course, Akhmat Kadyrov often did not wear a hat at all, and would come to an interview wearing casual jeans. But this is a simple and clear example of the idealisation of Akhmat Kadyrov at work.

The older generation speaks of Kadyrov the elder in a different, more balanced way. "Akhmat-Haji was a very respected man, he treated the elderly with respect, he listened to everyone and always you could talk to him. Many people do not like the fact that they are now building a cult around Akhmat-Haji. It is not in accordance with our tradition and not with Islam. No, I agree that he should be remembered and honoured - he was really a great man! But I do not like what they are doing. It's not accepted here; it is not allowed. They shout 'Akhmat is a force!' But what kind of power is that? It is their power, you see" (Kavkaz.Realii, 09.05.2019).

Taking Geertz's (1973: 215) assertion that "every conscious perception is an act of recognition, a pairing in which an object (or an event, an action, an emotion) is identified by placing it against the background of an appropriate symbol" we can adopt a semiotic model in which memory appears to be an important part of the programme that articulates collective values. And we can see memory objects as the very symbols that turn collective memory into a structure that people rely on to make sense of their present experience. Here we come back to the important observation

that not only does memory depend on the present, but that making sense of the present depends on memory and the symbols within it. If the image of Akhmat Kadyrov has attained near-sacred significance, and everything Ramzan Kadyrov does is sanctified by that "sacred" image, then the possible repression and violation of human rights in the republic are, in the eyes of the average man, not crimes, but necessary elements of government, which only cares about stability in the republic and the well-being of the Chechen people. It is in this illusion that the greatest danger lies in the instrumentalisation of the symbolic image of the first president of the Chechen Republic.

References

Author interview with regional expert (03.04.2021); the interview is kept in the author's personal archive.

BBC News Russkaya sluzhba (2020) Sotni ulits v Chechne nazvany v chest' rodnykh Kadyrova. Teper' tam otkryli sportkompleks imeni ego syna [Hundreds of streets in Chechnya are named after Kadyrov's relatives. Now a sports complex named after his son has been opened there], 30 December, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-55489480> (accessed 01 February 2023).

BBC News Russkaya sluzhba (2018) Chechnya prestolov: kto i kak upravlyaet respublikoy. Podrobnaya karta [Chechnya of Thrones: who governs the republic and how. Detailed map], 25 June, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-44576739> (accessed 01 February 2023).

CHGTRK "Grozny" (2019) Ramzan Kadyrov prinyal uchastie v torzhestvennom sobranii, posvyashchennom Dnyu Konstitutsii CHR [Ramzan Kadyrov took part in a solemn meeting dedicated to the Chechen constitution day], 23 March, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oL8kD567u3c> (accessed 1 February 2023).

Deutsche Welle (2007) Na chem derzhitsya Chechnya Kadyrova [What Kadyrov's Chechnya is hanging on to], 05 April, <https://www.dw.com/ru/%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BC-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B6%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%81%D1%8F-%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%87%D0%BD%D1%8F-%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%8B%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0/a-2433968> (accessed 01 February 2023).

Derlugyan, Georgy (2010) Adept Burďe na Kavkaze: Eskizy k biografii v mirosistemnoy perspektive [Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: perspective World System Biography], Territory of the Future, Moscow.

Druey, Cécile (2015) Stability without Peace in Chechnya. *Politorbis* 2(60), 43–47.

Durkheim, Emile (1965) The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, The Free Press, New York.

Eke, Steven M, Taras Kuzio (2000) Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus. *Europe-Asia Studies* 52(3), 530–532.

Edilov, A., T. Elbustukaeva and R. Alkhanov (eds.) (2020) *Put' ozarenniy svetom. Uchebnoe posobie dlya obrazovatel'nykh uchrezhdeniy Chechenskoy Respubliki [The Path Illuminated by Light. Textbook for Educational Institutions in the Chechen Republic]*, Grozenskiy Rabochiy, Grozny.

Garfinkel, Harold (1956) Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies. *American Journal of Sociology* 61, 420–424.

Geertz, Clifford (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Basic Books, New York.

Grozny Inform (2020) Lichnost' Akhmata-Khadzhi kak duhovnyi i politicheskii fenomen [The personality of Akhmat-Haji as a spiritual and political phenomenon], 01 July, <https://www.grozny-inform.ru/news/analitics/119097/> (accessed 1 February 2023).

Halbwachs, Maurice (1992) *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Kavkaz.Realii (2021) Put' Kadyrova. Zachem shkol'nikam navyazali knigu ob ottse glavy Chechni? [Kadyrov's way. Why have schoolchildren been forced to read a book about the father of the head of Chechnya?], 30 November, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/putj-kadyrova-zachem-shkoljnikam-navyazali-knigu-ob-ottse-glavy-chechni/31585707.html> (accessed 01 February 2023).

Kavkaz.Realii (2019) Akhmat - ikh sila [Akhmat is their power], <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/ahmat-ih-sila/29930328.html> (accessed 01 February 2023).

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2020) Kadyrov obrugal kritikov svoey kadrovoy politiki [Kadyrov berates critics of his personnel policy], 05 March, <https://kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/346707/> (accessed 01 February 2023).

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2019) Godovshchina pokhoron Akhmata Kadyrova ne stala datoy vsenarodnogo traura v Chechne [The anniversary of Akhmat Kadyrov's funeral has not become a date of national mourning in Chechnya], 11 May, <https://kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/335321/> (accessed 01 February 2023).

Laruelle, Marlene (2017) *Kadyrovism: Hardline Islam as a Tool of the Kremlin?* Notes de l'IFRI: Russie. NEI. Visions, No. 99.

Luzin Pavel (2018) Ramzan Kadyrov vo vneshney politike Rossii [Ramzan Kadyrov in Russia's foreign policy], <https://www.ridl.io/ru/ramzan-kadyrov-vo-vneshnej-politike-ro/> (accessed 01 February 2023).

Politkovskaya, Anna (2003) *Vtoraya Chechenskaya [The Second Chechen War]*, Zakharov, Moscow.

Memorial (2020) *Put' Akhmata [The way of Akhmat]* <https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/put-ahmata> (accessed 01 February 2023).

Svinarenko, Igor (2009) Ramzan Kadyrov: segodnya nam neobkhodimo mnogozhenstva, [Ramzan Kadyrov: Today we need polygamy]. *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 07 April, <https://rg.ru/2009/04/07/kadirov.html> (accessed 01 February 2023).

Russel, John (2014) Ramzan Kadyrov's 'Illiberal' Peace in Chechnya, *Chechnya at War and beyond*, (ed. Anne Le Huérou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey, Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski), Routledge, London, 133–151.

Schwartz, Barry (1997) Collective Memory and History: How Abraham Lincoln Became a Symbol of Racial Equality. *The Sociological Quarterly* 38(3), 469–496.

Schwartz, Barry (1997) Memory as a Cultural system. Abraham Lincoln in World War I. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 17(6), 22–58.

Turner, Victor (1967) *A Forest of Symbols*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

Marat Iliyasov

Russia and the Russian-Chechen Conflicts in the Collective Memory of Chechen Migrants in Europe

Abstract: The Russian discourse that accompanied the invasion of Ukraine once again demonstrated the power of collective memory. Indeed, collective memory can galvanise substantial support for state policies, shape public opinions and attitudes, and determine domestic and foreign politics. It can be a driving factor in some conflicts but a pacifying factor in others. Exploring the power of collective memory, this chapter presents the memories of the Chechen migrants in Europe from the Russo-Chechen wars of 1994–1996 and 1999–2009, including their perceptions of Russia. These accounts allow us to better understand the pillars that Chechen collective memory rests on, and to consider how it might change in the future.

Keywords: Collective memory, Chechnya, Russia, Russians, migrants, war, perception

Introduction

The First Russo-Chechen War started in December 1994. It was consequential to the collapse of the Soviet Union, which presented an opportunity for previously suppressed nations to regain autonomy and start a separate political course. For the Chechens, this also provided an opportunity to reach out to international society in search of a guarantee that the genocidal deportation experienced in 1944 would not happen again. The memory of this deportation to a large extent contributed to the decision to seek full independence as the Chechen Republic in 1991, and to protect it with arms in 1994 (Williams, 2000; Khalilov, 2003). The cruelty of this war, which lasted 18 months, was to some extent balanced by the conduct of certain participants, who still had positive memories of cohabitating in the Soviet state. Some combatants from both sides, let alone the civil population in Russia and Chechnya, could not dehumanise the ‘enemy’ completely. Dehumanisation, however, played a role in the preparation for the

Second War that Russia launched in 1999. The analysis of Russian media conducted by Julie Wilhelmsen (2016) demonstrates why the dehumanisation effort was successful this time. In particular, the state-controlled Russian media formed a public perception of independent Chechnya as a criminal hub for drug trafficking and a source of international terrorism. This perception led to the Second Russo-Chechen War being much crueller; this was confirmed by the journalistic accounts of Politkovskaya (2001) and the memories of those who witnessed both wars.

Almost thirty years have passed since the beginning of the First War in Chechnya in 1994. More than seventy-five years have passed since the Chechen people were deported to Central Asia. However, the tragic memory of both (the wars and the deportation) is still vivid among the adult Chechens of all generations. The memory of these events was powerful enough to encourage Chechen volunteers to participate on the side of Kyiv in the war in Ukraine that Russia-backed separatists have waged since 2014. More Chechen volunteers were attracted by the direct Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Most of these volunteers came from Europe, where they had emigrated to in the early 2000s in order to establish a calmer and more secure life.

Drawing on the theory behind collective memory formation, namely its power and importance for forming domestic and foreign politics, this chapter presents memories from the war of the Chechen refugees who live in Europe. The paper explores the dominant perceptions of Russia amongst the memories of Chechen migrants. It does so by analysing 110 individual accounts recorded between 2014 and 2017. Furthermore, it analyses the complex interrelation between the previously formed collective memory of the Chechens about their relations with Russia. The chapter refers to the transgenerational transmission of information about traumatic experiences to demonstrate that collective memory can persist even without organised state support. Finally, the analysis enables to identify potential consequences of such a strong collective memory on future relations between the Chechen nation and Russia.

The Link between Perception and Collective Memory

The theoretical framework for this research concerns the mutual link between political perceptions in the present and the collective memory

of what occurred in the past. To unpack this connection, it is necessary to understand two terms in particular: "perceptions" and "collective memory". Firstly, the concept of "perceptions" (or "narratives") can be traced back to Asch's (1946) classical psychological approach, which is based on the idea of stereotyping. This explores an evolving belief system about large categories of people that can be primarily defined by gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, occupation, and sexual orientation etc. (Fiske, 1998; Hamilton, 2007; Hamilton and Sherman, 1994; Schneider, 2004). The concept of "collective memory" is usually understood as a widely spread knowledge about actual or imagined facts of history that, according to a group of people, happened in their common past (Bar-Tal, 2014; Green, 2004: Halbwachs, 1992; Olick, 2008). Further analysis of the components and characteristics of collective memory exposes the link between collective memory and political perception, specifically how collective memory can itself construct a perception of a certain group of people.

There are different ways in which collective memories can be constructed, imposed, or promoted by or for a certain group of people (Rahman, 2010). One of the most important is the "master-narrative", which can appear as authoritative accounts, cultural artefacts (museums, textbooks, films, commemorations, etc.), and acts of legislation. According to Sutton (2008), these master-narratives are used by many social scientists to analyse the process of collective memory formation. However, it is important to notice that it is the institutes of power that commonly use master-narratives as tools, pursuing their memory politics. The goals and strategies of implementing these politics depend on the memory regime type that is prevalent in a country. Kubik and Bernhard (2014) describe four mnemonic regimes, namely warriors, pluralists, abnegators, and prospectives. This chapter discusses the phenomenon of "mnemonic warriors", who favour a singular interpretation of the past aiming to legitimate certain ideological choices of the regime through semiotic (discourse) and institutional practices (ceremonies) of memory politics (Wertsch, 2008; Zajda and Zajda, 2003). The development of technology made it more challenging for such political regimes to achieve the aspired result; even if they control access to all traditional media types, the development of different forms of online communication made constructing a singular version of the past more difficult. Online communication has widened the reach and increased the power of conversation as a tool for constructing collective memory through communicating oral histories. As with other tools, the success of the conversation can depend on many

factors, such as the charisma of a speaker, the preparedness or education of the audience (Sutton, 2008), the quality of the offered discourse, the legitimacy and appropriateness of the agent, the culture of the audience (Nets-Zehngut, 2011), and the population's beliefs and convictions (Omelicheva, 2016). Moreover, it should be kept in mind that collective memory is a subject of dispute in every given society (Misztal, 2003; Olick and Robbins, 1998). The same historical event can, and usually is, interpreted by different segments of society in completely different ways, which is one of the fundamental problems in the analysis of collective memory formation. Hence, the reactions of these segments of the population to memory politics can diverge significantly and determine what becomes collective memory and what does not. The most successful narratives that turn into collective memory are those that refer to the events of a tragic or glorified past of communities. Tragic events elicit the imperative "Never again!" (Alexander, 2004; Booth, 1999), and glorious ones fill an individual with pride (Daase, 2010).

The aforementioned variables determine the success of memory politics. It is also important to note that collective memory is capable of shaping attitudes towards the Other. Indeed, collective memory is an important and unique factor in shaping both groups' images of themselves and intergroup relations (Hanke et al. 2013; Liu and Hilton, 2005). This was apparent during Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The official Russian rhetoric referred to the collective memory of the "Great Patriotic War" (the Soviet-Nazi encounter during WWII), emphasising the role of the Soviet Union in overcoming the Nazi regime and linking the Ukrainian government and politics to the Nazis. This rhetoric was largely successful because it appealed to the above-listed points, which constitute the most sensitive part of Russian collective memory. The significance of this memory has been steadily promoted by the Russian government since 2010 (Iliyasov, 2022).

Two more important characteristics to be mentioned here are the malleability and durability of collective memory. The first allows it to be constructed, and the latter ensures its continuity (Kansteiner, 2010). Both features should be understood loosely, because they depend upon the type of society analysed. For instance, conservative societies are more resistant to changes and have longer-lasting collective memories. In such societies, collective memories are kept alive by a cultural framework of religion

and ethnicity, national traditions, and durable narratives of significant events. In other words, collective memory can be accumulative and build on existing memories; this in turn determines the success of memory politics. Moreover, the durability and malleability of collective memory can result in both: the persistence of collective identity and its change. The connection between collective memory and identity is aptly summarised by Khazanov (2008: 296), "…tell me what you want to remember, commemorate, and forget, and I will tell you who you are".

In conclusion when narratives refer to the events of a tragic or glorified past of a community, they are more likely to turn into collective memory. This can be achieved through different methods of communication. A government will usually promote collective memories using textbooks, TV, newspapers, ceremonies, monuments, and museums etc., whereas the population will rely upon oral history communicated through conversations or social media. However, the success of a collective memory, whether it stems from a government or the population, also depends upon the charisma and legitimacy of the speaker, the culture of the audience, the quality of the discourse being communicated, and, finally, the population's own beliefs and convictions. Yet once constructed, collective memory can have a powerful impact on the future relations between nations.

Methodology and Data Collection

This article focuses on oral histories of those Chechens who found refuge in Western Europe from the Russo-Chechen wars and their consequences. It presents and categorises these narratives, in order to develop an understanding of the existing perceptions of Russia among the Chechen refugees in Europe. Moreover, it assesses whether the dominant perception will become a durable collective memory with the potential to prevail among Chechens living in Europe. The close connection between Chechen migrants living in Europe and their relatives from Chechnya implies a certain degree of overlap of opinions. This overlap is reinforced by shared identities and experiences. The indicators of such an overlap can

be observed in Chechnya, even if the possibility of expressing personal opinions freely there is limited.[1]

The interviews, on which the present analysis is based, were conducted in Russian and Chechen from 2014 to 2017. Around 35 per cent of the interviews were recorded during personal meetings in different European countries (Belgium, France, Norway, Germany, Austria, and the UK), where considerably large Chechen diasporas reside. The rest were conducted online via Skype. In addition to the interviews, eight online group conversations were recorded. The conversation dynamics, and similarities and differences between the memories of different group members demonstrated which memories are more collectively entrenched and which are less so. In its analysis of these memories, the paper also contextualises them against the prevailing negative opinion amongst the Chechen diaspora towards Russia and the Russians. The target groups of this research included a variety of people of different ages and professions. Among the participants were former politicians, artists, journalists, construction workers, human rights activists, former combatants, students, housekeepers, and unemployed people. Some of them held a very clear political position and opinion concerning the last two Russo-Chechen wars, as well as about Russia (and the Russians), whilst others tried to emphasise their neutrality. The research did not detect any significant correlation between the interviewees' opinions and their occupations, education, gender, or age. Most of the interviewees (85 per cent) were within the age group of 30–55 years old, with a minority of respondents younger than 30 and older than 55. Only around 10 per cent of the interviewees were women; this imbalance is usual when researching traditional and patriarchic societies. All of my interviewees remembered or were well informed about the Russo-Chechen wars (1994–96, 1999–2009) and the Deportation of 1944–1957.

The material collected was coded using the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 10. Every opinion of a respondent was classified as a unit of analysis. The transcribed interviews were uploaded onto the system

1 <http://mobile.dagestan.test.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/263874/> (12 June 2015), accessed 25 January 2018; Kavkazskiy Uzel (3 February 2018), "Zhiteli Groznogo pozhalovalis' na prinuzhdenie k uchastiyu v mitinge [‚Grozny residents complain of being forced to participate in rally']". *Kavkazskiy Uzel* (accessed 3 February 2018); Interviews N 20, 62, 34.

and analysed, with relevant opinions being grouped inside each respective node. Each entry counted as one opinion. The proportions of opinions were later calculated in percentages. It should be noted that in some cases an interviewee would express several (sometimes controversial) opinions, which increased the number of entries and weakened the accuracy of the calculation.

The Chechen Perception of the Russian State and Nation

This section is divided into four parts. The first three sections present the dominant perceptions of the Russian state as conveyed by the interviewees. These perceptions describe Russia as an "aggressor," an "evil," and a "threat to Chechen identity". The last section considers a distinction between the Russian state and the Russian nation that has appeared in some discourses.

Narrative 1: Russia as an "Aggressor"

This part explores upon answers to the question "Do you think that a new Russo-Chechen war is possible?" The answers of the informants varied in detail but all supported that a new war is possible. Some of them were more sarcastic, with one stating "do you think it's impossible?" (Lyoma, 35 years old). Others expressed a reconciliatory attitude and regret: "I wish it was impossible, but we [Chechens] cannot be sure about the Kremlin's intentions" (Khasan, 52 years old). The variations of this uncertainty were contextualised with a historic overview by many interviewees. Their discourses could be summarised by the following excerpt:

> We are so used to being attacked by Russia every 50 years that we always talk about it happening in the future. We are always waiting for another aggression, and I am sure that it will happen, if we do not solve our problems with Russia now. (Dokka, 55 years old)

According to the statement above, it is a question of "when" not "if" a future war will happen. The probability of a new war was deemed to be

particularly high by Dokka, whose statement conveys a clear fear and distrust towards Russia. The way these feelings prevail amongst Chechens is disclosed in the following excerpt, which also shows the societal expectations of Chechen men:

> When the First War [1994–1996] started, we, all five brothers, decided to go to war. Our father was dead by that time, so we had to inform only our mother of our decision. She did not protest. She just said that she would like one of us to stay with her. As for the others, she said: "Russians will have no mercy to us. I know it because I remember how they treated us during the Deportation… You will be safer if you are armed. Moreover, it is your responsibility. As Chechen men you must protect your homeland". (Timur, 56 years old)

The interviewee highlights the distrust in Russia by referring to the previous experiences of his mother. The behaviour of the soldiers of the Red Army during the Deportation of 1944 bolstered the negativity towards Moscow as the aggressor and led to an expectation that these atrocities would be repeated. References to past negative experiences of Russian aggression were especially frequent in the discourses of older interviewees. However, instead of talking about their personal experience or the experience of their relatives, they preferred to refer to information that is widely shared on the internet and known by many Chechens:

> Russia always tried to destroy us. Starting from the Caucasian War, we are always under attack. It's either a direct military aggression or it is in a form of repressions. Such repressions took place in the 1920s, then in the 1930s, then it was the deportation, and again the military invasion in 1990s. (Selim, 37 years old)

Besides giving a historic overview of Chechen encounters with the Russian state, this quote shows that prevailing feelings of insecurity and mistrust are based in the previous experience of the Deportation.

Narrative 2: Russia as an "Evil"

The opinion that Russia is an evil state responsible for "all Chechen hardships" was expressed by roughly 65 per cent of the interviewees. This sentiment appeared in many statements of my respondents in answer to the question: "how did the Chechens end up being so divided along political and religious lines?"

> Russia envied our independence [in 1991–1994 – M.I.]. They couldn't bear that we were doing well. They wanted us to fail, and they sought this through an imperial policy of "divide and conquer". They sent their agents from the Arab countries to Chechnya, who brought us a new ideology which divided us. We believed in them just because we thought that if something is written in Arabic, it should be from the Qur'an and if a person speaks Arabic, he is at least a saint. We were ignorant, and the Russians used it to destroy our dream to live freely. (Muhammad, 54 years old)

The interviewee repeats a very frequent claim of Chechen politicians in exile that Chechnya was doing better than Russia in the early 1990s. In order to evidence this belief, they usually rely on two arguments: firstly, that the largest wholesale market opened near Grozny in Chechnya, which supplied the whole North Caucasus with different goods up until 1994; secondly, that before the first war, bread in Chechnya was distributed for free for a prolonged period. Furthermore, the interviewee mentions the appearance in the republic of a new (for the Chechens) branch of Islam, which was referred to as a "new ideology" (Salafism, also known as Wahhabism in Russia), claiming that this appearance was facilitated by the Russian special services. According to the interviewee, this was done in order "to divide and conquer". Later this was used to support the Chechens in harbouring international terrorists. A similar argument appeared in about 32–35 per cent of the interviews. Nevertheless, some interviewees of this batch admitted that the blame for Islamisation and radicalisation partly lies with the Chechen side. They would regret that the Chechens were "too naïve and trustful" and "would accept every Arab speaker as a true believer or as somebody to follow". Despite this recognition, the very same interviewees would also hold Russia responsible for every possible misfortune that happened to the nation. One such misfortune, according to them, was the general decrease of moral standards among the Chechens.

> People's mentality was destroyed by war. They had to survive, and they used, literally, all means. They did things that they never would have done under normal circumstances. Interestingly, they still do those kinds of things, which show that the war is still ongoing in their heads. For example, you know that Chechens do not "joke" about birth and death. It's sacrilegious to do so. And yet, people forge birth and death certificates to get benefits from the state. Even during Soviet times, when it was a sacred obligation to steal from the state, the Chechens never would have done something like this. (Djabrail, 48 year old)

In his statement the respondent blames Russia for the degradation of Chechen moral standards. It was Russia that initiated the wars which forced Chechen people to step over their principles to survive. He identifies Russia as an existential threat, which is still present today. For the interviewee, this is apparent from Chechen behaviour, which follows a model adopted by the Russian state during the time of war. The interviewee argues that even today, when there are no military actions on the territory of the Chechen Republic, people still behave as they would behave in times of war. This behavioural model for my interviewee is also a confirmation that Russia is "evil" because it encouraged a degradation of the nation's morality. This assessment was confirmed by another interviewee, who also elucidated the roots of the Chechen negative perception of the Russian state.

> We did not have a state in a form as it is understood today. We were already advanced and had a model, which today is found in Scandinavia. The only difference is that Scandinavians still have a central government that functions all the time, and we had it only in times of war. And in times of peace, Mehk-khel [the Council of State – Chechen] would gather only from time to time to decide on the new laws, according to which people had to live. However, most of the regulations would be decided by the local communities themselves. Being used to this kind of very autonomic lifestyle, the Chechens did not want to live in a state that regulates every aspect of your life. Therefore, the Chechens have always seen Russian actions as something negative, something that restricts their rights. (Isa, 45 years old)

This interviewee's remarks explain the Chechen's general opposition to Russia. The rigid frame of Russia's legislation, which does not account for peculiar norms and traditions of the people who live in the country, was one of the reasons why the Chechens wanted their own state. The inflexibility and rigidity of the state in enforcing its policies and quelling all dissatisfaction contributed to the image of Russia as an "evil" and "wicked" entity that tried to destroy the Chechen nation. This idea can be summarised by the belief of many interviewees that "everything that is wrong or bad comes from Russia" (Khussein, 33 years old).

Narrative 3: Russia as a "Threat to Identity"

Similarly to the narratives presented above, roughly 57 per cent of the respondents emphasised that the target of Russia's "evil" plans is the

Chechen identity. According to this narrative, Russia wants to foster new and inappropriate values among Chechens, such as greed, immorality, and disrespect towards elders and traditions. If it succeeds, this plan would result in the complete assimilation of the Chechens, which is "the worst possible [outcome] that could occur" (Lyoma, 35 years old).

> Even today the war is going on against the Chechen identity, against our mentality. Russia wants to enslave us. They want us to accept their dominance, to admit that they are our masters, and we are their slaves. This is possible only if we cease being Chechens, if we lose our identity. (Beslan, 39 years old)

This excerpt not only identifies the target of the Russian "attack", but also dismisses the hypothetical possibility of accepting Russian dominance and the consequent changes in identity. This emphasis on identity as the target of Russia's attack posed a question regarding the ways in which this "attack" is conducted. According to my respondents, there are four ways in which this can be done: 1) through the language – many Chechens know Russian better than Chechen and this corrupts identity because "one cannot transmit ethnic identity using words of a different language" (Apti, 65 years old); 2) through installing Salafism (focus-group N 4); 3) through "eroding our traditional societal structure", which is the basis of the Chechen society's self-governance (Ruslan, 48 years old); and 4) through "changing our values" (Lyoma, 35 years old) and installing new and unacceptable ones.

The interviewees considered a potential change of values as the most serious threat to Chechen identity. The hypothetical possibility that future generations would prioritise other values over Chechen values (e.g. equality, valour, respect to elders, observation of traditions etc.) for the respondents would mean a real Russian victory over the nation. Further, excerpts emphasise this concern:

> Since the time of the Caucasian War, Russia had never appointed a Chechen to rule Chechnya. They never trusted Chechens. This time is different. Although they [Russians – M.I.] still do not trust Chechens, they decided to give real power to one of us, enabling him to rule over the nation. By doing this, they created a political elite, which we never had. We had respectful people in our society and political leaders. This was our elite, but it was one without privileges. Today's elite has privileges. It is the first time that Chechens shamelessly enjoy undeserved privileges. It was a very smart move by the Russians. It undermined the principle of equality, in accordance with which the society lived for centuries. The new elite also knows all of the methods that we used to confront the Soviets and therefore can anticipate and prevent us

> from using these methods confronting its rule. This made us powerless. (Muhammad, 54 years old)

The quotation above suggests that the Russian policy of "changing" the Chechens through Chechenisation was very successful, whereas Muhammad's explanation describes a transformation of the conflict from a Russo-Chechen conflict into a conflict among Chechens. The simple move of creating a Chechen political elite and entrusting it with power achieved two goals; it suppressed the opposition and corrupted Chechen identity. The first goal was achieved due to the awareness of the resistance methods that the new administration possessed and the Chechen unwillingness to wage a civil war (Usman, 32 years old). The second goal was achieved because the existence of an elite *per se* undermines egalitarianism, which was a core principle and value of Chechen society according to some scholars (see Souleimanov, 2007: 27; Reynolds, 2005). However, this elite consists of people who consider themselves Chechens, which, according to one of my interviewees, might lead to the failure of the Chechenisation policy in the future.

> Yes, on the one hand, the Russians resolved "the Chechen problem" through this to a degree they could not even dream about, but on the other hand they created a paradox, which can eventually lead to the rebellion of the elite [that they created – M.I.] against the Moscow patrons. If the "Chechenness" of the elite takes over, they might rebel against their patrons in the same way as the Moscow Khanate rebelled against the rulers of the Golden Horde once they gained enough strength. (Lyoma, 35 years old)

Elaborating on the possible change in Chechen values and the role of the new elite in this process, many interviewees evaluated the current situation in the following way. Today Russia has succeeded in suppressing the Chechens to a certain extent. However, the core of Chechen identity has remained unchanged, and the nation will repair very quickly the damages that it suffered, such as, observable changes in behaviour, preferences of values, or identity. The quotation below presents this evaluation:

> The Russians always tried to enslave us. First, they tried to do it by submitting us to force. Yermolov [Russian General and military commander in the Caucasus] tried to exterminate the whole of the Chechen nation, but he realised that it was impossible and therefore he adopted a more cunning way. In his memoirs, he talks about how to destroy the Chechens. He suggests sowing seeds of greed among Chechens, which

> will “make them forget their pride and turn them into treacherous people”. His plan did not work out. The Soviets tried a different method. They tried to “liberate” us from Islam by killing our sheikhs [religious authorities] and they tried to “emancipate” our women. When they did not manage to do so, they deported us, but we survived. True, over time we lost some of our traditions. For instance, the Teyp system was seriously harmed, but we saved the nation. Today, Russians try to assimilate us again. They force us to forget who we are. They do it by using other Chechens. However, I am positive they will fail again, and we will be reborn stronger than we were before. (Islam, 66 years old)

This interviewee accuses Russia of attempt to corrupt the Chechen identity and denies its success. This process took a long time and involved military means, the repression of the clergy, the installation of false values, and the dismantling of convenient forms of regulatory social mechanisms, such as the *Teyp*-system. My interviewees (or at least those who were aware of it) considered Moscow’s policy of indigenisation (*korenizatsia*) to be a veiled policy of assimilation, which was introduced in the 1920s and designed to support and develop the languages of small nations. As some respondents also noted, the *korenizatsia* policy resulted in a replacement of the Arabic alphabet widely used in society with the less known Cyrillic alphabet. The latter was supposed to reorientate Chechen people away from the Islamic world and towards Russia.

Narrative 4: Who Is the Other: Russia or Russians?

While talking about the Russian state or the Russians, most of my respondents would use the word *ghaski*, meaning “Russian” in the Chechen language. This word Chechens use referring to both the Russian state and Russian people, making no separation between these concepts.

However, several respondents have chosen to be very specific and precise. These interviewees (approximately 20 per cent) would make a clear distinction between the state and the people, while talking about their experiences and the Russo-Chechen interactions. Some of these respondents would emphasise their rather positive attitude towards the Russian people, with one stating “*I don’t have any grudge against ordinary Russians, they are suppressed, but the authority of Russia is our enemy number one*” (Ayndi, 58 years old). Others would blame both the Russian state and Russian people, despite making the distinction between the two concepts

in their mind, and others still made the distinction between "good" and "bad" Russians.

> He was the only Russian who I remember apologising for the atrocities that the Russians committed in Chechnya. He was a priest. He lived in our neighbourhood in Grozny and before his death he converted to Islam. He asked my husband to bury him as a Muslim. He saved my life twice. If not for him, the Russians would have abducted me. He used to say that those soldiers were not Russians. (Zara, 56 years old)

In the quotation above the respondent tries to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Russians by providing an example of a good Russian, who encouraged her to make such a distinction. He conveyed the message that the Russian military does not represent all the people. For my interviewee, this message bears a possibility of reconciliation, although this is tempered with caution because "*he was the only Russian*…". Moreover, the possibility to reconcile is diminished by the obligation to apologise that lies on all Russians and the last wish of the narrative's character – "to bury him as a Muslim". Before dying the Russian priest tries to distance himself from the Russians, despite his attempts to convince my interviewee that the Russian people should not be equated with the Russian military. As a result, my interviewee seems to be convinced that if Russian people do not apologise for the military actions in Chechnya, they are to be treated the same as the Russian state and military. This is the case even if the interviewee distinguishes between the Russian state from Russian people. It is does not matter for those who do not see the difference.

> The eldest brother of my friend was a conscript when the protests in Novocherkassk erupted [1962 – M.I.]. His detachment was sent to disband the rally. As you know, a clash happened, and many people were killed there I asked the guy if he also shot the protesters. He swore to God that he used all his ammunition up shooting them… do you see? He was revenging for all the hardships that he had to live through during the deportation. He did not distinguish between bad Russians or good Russians – they were all the same for him. They were guilty in his mind for the sufferings of the Chechens, and he hated them all. (Apti, 65 years old)

In this quotation the respondent demonstrates that he understands and can see the difference between the Russian state and its people. However, the respondent does not deem this distinction to be necessary, instead suggesting that the Chechens hold a negative attitude towards both the Russian state (even if they act as its employees) and the Russian people.

Many Chechens, according to him, serve Russia despite hating it. The respondent made it clear that he was not referring to the new Chechen elite, which "serves the Russian state sincerely", unlike the ordinary Chechens, who "serve while hating" it.

A similar observation was made by another interviewee, who summarised his thoughts as follows:

> Nothing has changed. As we hated them before, so we do so now. Ask any Chechen and he will say: "Russians are bad". (Ismail, 54 years old)

By contrast, some interviewees of the same group emphasised their neutrality or even friendliness to ordinary Russians.

> Interestingly, we have seen Russians killing us for the last 20 years, and still we do not have hatred towards them. If a Russian stops by and talks to me, even I [a veteran of both Russo-Chechen wars], can keep up the conversation, share food with him, and even become a friend. Is this normal? Maybe it is our tradition that forces us to be friendly to friendly people and respond aggressively to aggression… or maybe it is a result of assimilation… after all many of us know the Russian language better than Chechen. (Khasan, 52 years old)

An explanation of such mixed feelings that involve hatred, indifference and even sympathy was deemed by this respondent to lie in the Chechen tradition of hospitality and the experience of living together for a long time. The latter was mentioned in some of the other interviews too, which sometimes led to contradictory assessments. On the one hand, the Soviet Union was considered to be the same "evil" as the Russian state, and on the other hand, the last decades of the Soviet Union's existence proved to bring more prosperity for the Chechens. As the following excerpt demonstrates, there was a time when the Russian state and Chechens learnt how to co-exist. This ability was lost with Vladimir Putin's ascendance to power, which deteriorated the mutual rapport between Chechens and Russians.

> We had a normal relationship with people in the Soviet Union, of course we had some problems too, but we could always find people to deal with it. People have changed after Putin came to power. It is difficult for us to find a common language with the Russians now. The mutual hatred is overwhelming. Today's Russia resembles the Soviet Union of the 1930s. It is a totalitarian state and there is no friendship among people. Today, we hate each other and do not help each other to survive in this state. (Rakhman, 39 years old)

The distinction made in the quotation above links the form of the Russian state with the Russian people. The Soviet Union was, for the interviewee, much more acceptable than the Russian Federation, which due to its harsh policies and cruelty resembled the early Soviet times of the 1930s. In other words, the interviewee is eager to blame the state policies for the deterioration of relations between the Russian and Chechen people. However, in a later statement the same interviewee also expresses negativity towards the Russian people, which allows the conclusion to be drawn that for the Chechens, the enemy (or the historical Other), is both the Russian state and the Russian people. This not only holds true for this respondent, but for most of my interviewees.

Conclusion

This research suggests four important findings. Firstly, it establishes the continuity of the predominantly negative Chechen perceptions of Russia based on collective memory. These perceptions were well-detected and analysed by some scholars and Russian military officers in the nineteenth century (Benckendorff, 1910 [1845]; Lieven, 1999; Schaefer, 2010; Tishkov, 2001; Tornau 2008 [1881]). The available records of first-hand experiences, interviews and other primary sources demonstrate a continuity of these perceptions over the time-period of approximately 200 years – since the conquest of Chechnya. Such persistent perceptions are based on a regular pattern of armed clashes and other types of negativity experienced by Chechens.

Secondly, referring to the analysed literature and primary sources, the study identifies a division of the Chechens into three large groups: those who actively opposed the Russian state and supported the Chechen opposition, those who sided and sympathised with the Russians, and those who held a rather neutral position towards Russians, although with various degrees of negativity towards the Russian state. The qualitative analysis of this article suggests that the latter group was the largest. After the conquest of the Caucasus in the nineteenth century, most Chechens tried to adapt to the new circumstances and live peacefully within the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, or Russian Federation, despite their negative feelings towards

these Russian regimes. Over time, however, these feelings fostered increasing support for the active opposition to the Russian rule. This is what, according to many Chechens, made the Chechen resistance so resilient (Jaimoukha, 2005: 3; Lieven, 1999: 302; Smith, 2001: 79–80; Werth, 2006).

Thirdly, the chapter explains the negativity of the Chechens through the lens of collective memory. Deploying this theoretical framework allows for the following analysis of the vicious circle of the Russo-Chechen conflict: the inflexibility and arbitrariness of the Russian administration (Gammer, 1998: 163–4; Kovalevsky, 1912: 13; Sheremet, 2011) provoked regular rebellions (Lieven, 1999: 304) which were cruelly quelled, in turn fostering further rebellions. The memories of these events led to feelings of uncertainty towards the future and a negative perception of Russia and Russians, which led tofurther attempts to regain independence. New clashes revitalised the collective memories and the image of Russia as an existential threat to the historic Chechen Other (Cheterian, 2008: 306; Russell, 2002; Sokirianskaia, 2008).

Fourthly, the Chechen perceptions of the Russian state collected during the fieldwork conducted from 2014 to 2017 confirm that the negativity observed in literature is still prevalent among many Chechens of diaspora today. Most of the respondents possessed a negative perception of Russia and Russians. Moreover, many of them (up to 25 per cent) claimed to be representing the whole Chechen nation. According to some of my interviewees, the Chechens have not ceased considering Russia as the historic Other (Souleimanov, 2007: 215), which holds "evil" plans to eradicate Chechens or "Chechenness". This perception is reinforced by the collective memory of past events and the anti-Chechen campaign led by the Russian authorities in the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Foxall, 2014: 3–5, 102–3; Ó Tuathail, 2009; Wilhelmsen, 2016: 115–125).

Overall, the chapter supports Murer's (1999) theoretical conclusion that the prolonged retention of negative memories leads to "timeless conflicts". In other words, the Russo-Chechen conflict did not finish together with the war and will last for as long as the negative collective memories are active. The search for ontological security and Russia's refusal or inability to provide it demonstrates the Chechen preference for remembering over forgetting. In such cases, as MacGinty and Williams (2016: 110) suggest, there is little chance to make a lasting peace.

The chapter also concludes that this vicious circle of remembering the negative past, which in turn fosters conflict, can be broken by a change in

Russian policies. This possibility was suggested by some of my interviewees from 2014 to 2015 and by Markovich (1897: 286) more than 100 years ago, who concluded: "One just has to know how to behave with Chechens. They value those who do not infringe their 'democratic rights' and do not act like a boss".

References

Alexander, J.C. (2004) Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy. *Sociological Theory* 22 (4), 527–573.

Asch, S.E. (1946) Forming Impressions of Personality. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 41, 258–290.

Bar-Tal, D. (2014) Collective Memory as Social Representations. *Papers on Social representations* 23(1), 5–1.

Benckendorf, K. (1910) *Souvenir intime d'une campagne au Caucase pendant l'ete de 1845,* Translation by General-Lieutenant Kolubakin Boris, <http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/Dokumenty/Kavkaz/XIX/1840-1860/Benkendorf/text6.htm> (accessed 10 November 2017).

Booth, James W. (1999) Communities of Memory: On Identity, Memory, and Debt. *American Political Science Review* 93(2), 249–263.

Cheterian, V. (2008) *War and Peace in the Caucasus*, Hurst, London.

Daase, C. (2010) Addressing Painful Memories: Apologies as a New Practice in International Relations, in *Memory in a Global Age* (eds. A. Assman and S. Conrad), Palgrave Macmillan, London, 19–31.

Fiske, S.T. (1998) Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination, in *The Handbook of Social Psychology* (eds. S.T. Fiske et al.), 4th ed., Vol. 2, McGraw-Hill, New York, 357–411.

Foxall, A. (2014) *Ethnic Relations in Post-Soviet Russia: Russians and Non-Russians in the North Caucasus*, Vol. 98, Routledge, London.

Gammer, M. (1998) *Shamil: musulmanskoe soprotivlenie tsarizmu, zavoevanie Chechni I Dagestana [Shamil: Muslim Opposition against the Tsar, Conquest of Chechnya and Dagestan]*, Kron-Press, Moscow.

Green, A. (2004) Individual Remembering and "Collective Memory": Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates. *Oral History* 32(2), 35–44.

Halbwachs, M. (1992) *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
Hamilton, D.L. (2007) Understanding the Complexities of Group Perception: Broadening the Domain. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 37(6), 1077–1101.
Hamilton, D.L., and J.W. Sherman (1994) Stereotypes, in *Handbook of Social Cognition* (eds. R.S. Wyer, Jr. and T.K. Srull), 2nd ed., Vol. 2, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ, 1–68.
Hanke, K., et al. (2013) When the Past Haunts the Present: Intergroup Forgiveness and Historical Closure in Post-World War II Societies in Asia and Europe. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 37(3), 287–301.
Iliyasov, M. (2022) Moscow's Manipulated Memory Politics and Attack on Ukraine, *Ponars Eurasia*, 19 March, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/moscows-manipulated-memory-politics-and-attack-on-ukraine/> (accessed 14 March 2023).
Jaimoukha, A. (2005) *The Chechens – A Handbook*, Routledge, London.
Kansteiner, W. (2010) Memory, Media and Menschen: Where Is the Individual in Collective Memory Studies? *Memory Studies* 3(1), 3–4.
Kavkazskiy Uzel (2018) 'Zhiteli Groznogo pozhalovalis' na prinuzhdenie k uchastiyu v mitinge [Grozny Residents Complain of Being Forced to Participate in Rally], 3 February.
Khalilov, Roman (2003) Moral Justifications of Secession: The Case of Chechnya. *Central Asian Survey* 22(4), 405–420.
Khazanov, A.M. (2008) Whom to Mourn and Whom to Forget? (Re) Constructing Collective Memory in Contemporary Russia. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9(2–3), 293–310.
Kovalevsky, P. (1912) *Vosstanie Chechni i Dagestana v 1877–78 [Upheaval of Chechnya and Dagestan in 1877–78]*, Zelimkhan, Akinfiyev tipography, St. Petersburg.
Kubik, J., and M. Bernhard (2014) A Theory of the Politics of Memory, In *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (eds. M. Bernhard and J. Kubik), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 7–36.
Mac Ginty, R. and Williams, A. (2016) *Conflict and Development*, Routledge, London.
Markovich V. (1897) *V lesah Ichkerii. Vospominaniya lesnichego o chechenskom lese. Zapiski Kavkazskogo otdela imperatorskogo Russkogo*

geograficheskogo obshestva [In the Woods of Ichkeria. Memories of a Woodchuk about the Chechen Wood. Notes by the Caucasus Department of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society], Book 19, Tbilisi.

Misztal, B.A. (2003) Durkheim on Collective Memory, *Journal of Classical Sociology* 3(2), 123–143.

Murer, Jeffrey (2009) Constructing the Enemy-Other: Anxiety, Trauma and Mourning in the Narratives of Political Conflict. *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 14(2), 109–130.

Nets-Zehngut, R. (2011) Origins of the Palestinian Refugee Problem: Changes in the Historical Memory of Israelis/Jews 1949–2004. *Journal of Peace Research* 48(2), 235–248.

Ó Tuathail, G. (2009) Placing Blame: Making Sense of Beslan, *Political Geography* 28(1), 4–15.

Olick, J.K. (2008) "Collective Memory": A Memoir and Prospect. *Memory Studies* 1(1), 23–29.

Olick, J.K., and J. Robbins (1998) Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 105–140.

Omelicheva, M.Y. (2016) Authoritarian Legitimation: Assessing Discourses of Legitimacy in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. *Central Asian Survey* 35(4), 481–500.

Politkovskaya, A. (2008) *A Small Corner of Hell*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Rahman, S.A. (2010) The Presence of the Past: Negotiating the Politics of Collective Memory. *Contemporary Political Theory* 9(1), 59–76.

Reynolds, Michael (2005) Myths and Mysticism: A Longitudinal Perspective on Islam and Conflict in the North Caucasus. *Middle Eastern Studies* 41(1), 31–54.

Russell, J. (2002) Mujahedeen, Mafia, Madmen: Russian Perceptions of Chechens during the Wars in Chechnya, 1994–96 and 1999–2001. *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 18(1), 73–96.

Schaefer, R. (2010) *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad*, Praeger Security International, Santa Barbara.

Schneider, D.J. (2004) *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, Guilford, New York.

Sheremet, V. (2011) Pod tsarskoyu rukoy… Rossiyskaya Imperiya i Chechnya v XIX – nachale XX vekov [Under the Tsar's Hand… The Russian Empire and Chechnya in the 19th and Early 20th Century], In *Vainakhi i imperskaia vlast: problema Chechni i Ingushetii vo vnutrennei*

politike Rossii i SSSR (nachalo XIX—seredina XX v) [The Vaynakhs and Imperial Power: The Problem of Chechnya and Ingushetiya in Domestic Politics of Russia and the USSR (Early 19th to mid-20th Century)] (ed. Polian et al.), Yeltsin Fund, Moscow, 21–52.

Smith, S. (2001) *Allah's Mountains. The Battle for Chechnya*, Taurus Park, London.

Sokirianskaia, E. (2008) Ideology and Conflict: Chechen Political Nationalism Prior to, and during Ten Years of War, in *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder* (ed. Moshe Gammer), Routledge, London, 102–138.

Souleimanov, E. (2007) *Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main.

Sutton, J. (2008) Between Individual and Collective Memory: Coordination, Interaction, Distribution. *Social Research* 75(1), 23–48.

Tishkov, V. (2001) *Obshestvo v vooruzhennom konflikte. Etnografiya Chechenskoi voiny [Society and Conflict (The Ethnography of War)]*, Nauka, Moscow.

Tornau, F. (2008 [1881]) *Vospominaniya kavkazskogo oficera [Memories of a Caucasian Officer]*, AIRP-XXI, Moscow.

Werth, N. (2006) The “Chechen Problem”: Handling an Awkward Legacy, 1918–1958. *Contemporary European History* 15(3), 347–366.

Wertsch, J.V. (2008) The Narrative Organisation of Collective Memory. *Ethos* 36(1), 120–135.

Wilhelmsen, J. (2016) *Russia's Securitization of Chechnya: How War Became Acceptable*, Taylor and Francis, London.

Williams, B.G. (2000) Commemorating the Deportation in Post-Soviet Chechnya: The Role of Memorialisation and Collective Memory in the 1994–1996 and 1999–2000 Russo-Chechen Wars. *History and Memory 12*(1), 101–134.

Zajda, J., and R. Zajda (2003) The Politics of Rewriting History: New History Textbooks and Curriculum Materials in Russia. *International Review of Education 49*(3), 363–384.

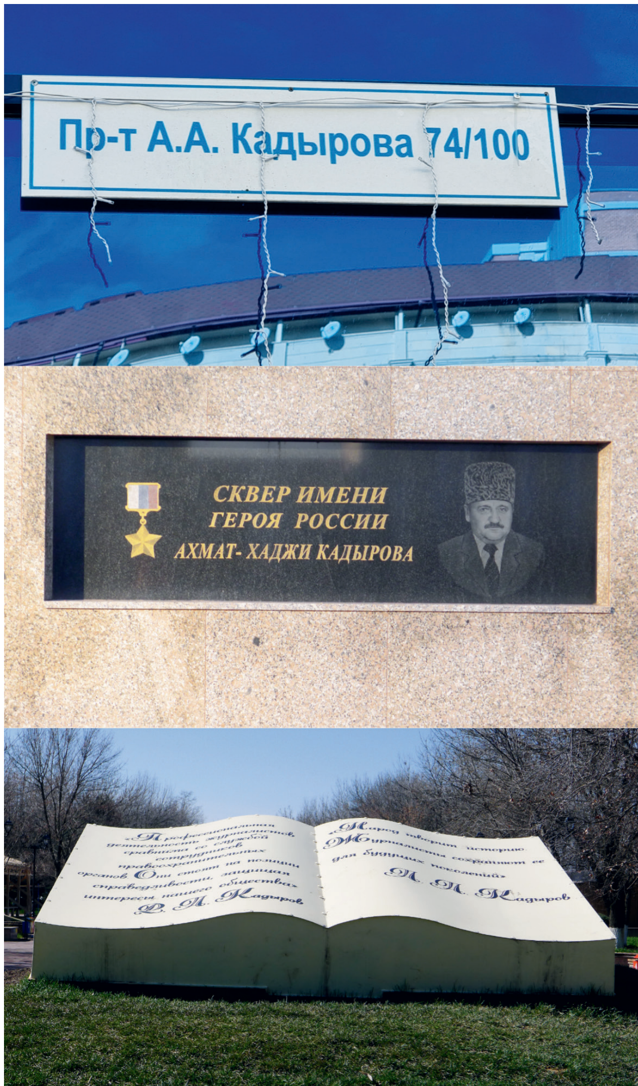
List of Interviewees:

Lyoma, 35 years old
Khasan, 52 years old
Dokka, 55 years old
Timur, 56 years old
Selim, 37 years old
Muhammad, 54 years old
Djabrail, 48 years old
Isa, 45 years old
Khussein, 33 years old
Beslan, 39 years old
Apti, 65 years old
Ruslan, 48 years old
Usman, 32 years old
Islam, 66 years old
Ayndi, 58 years old
Zara, 56 years old
Rakhman, 39 years old
Ismail, 54 years old
Focus-group N 4 – 12 participants.

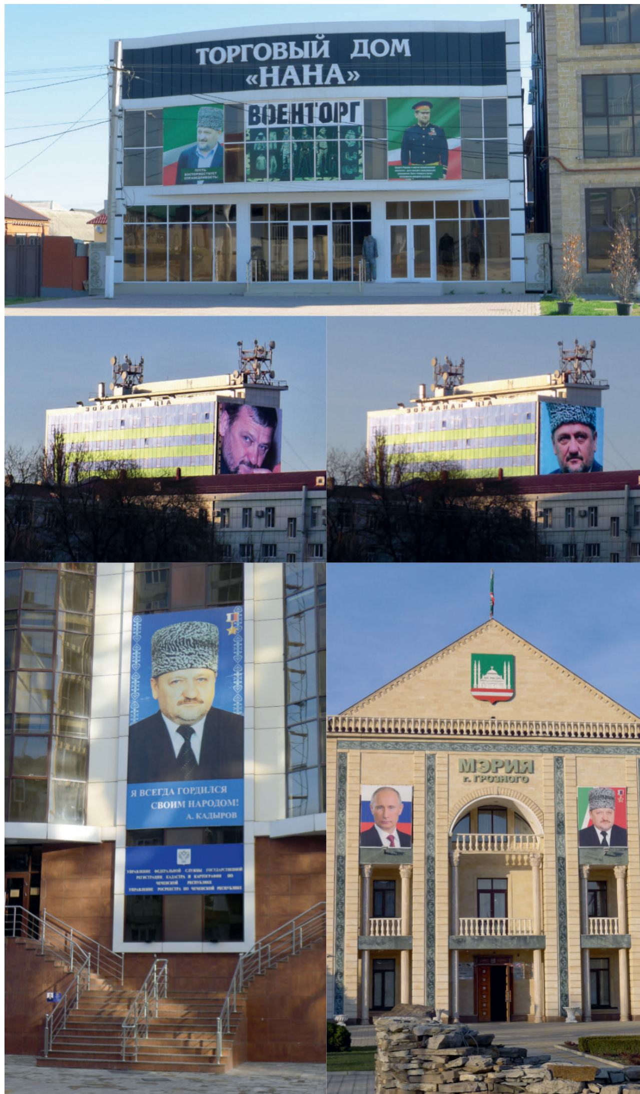
Photos (Part IV)

Anna Nemzer's film *The Banished Memory of the Chechen Wars*
(Russian: "Zapreshchennaya pamyat' chechenskikh voin") (2020) is a manifesto against forgetting and records most diverse views of the past. Pictured are various snapshots from the film (source: Nemzer 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1RF-py72yI>).

The politics of remembrance under Ramzan Kadyrov turns the various historical traumas of the Chechen population into a general and diluted “soup of mourning” in which the specific events have lost their mobilising power. In the picture: Monument in the centre of Grozny with gravestones of the old deportation monument and new memorial stones in honour of the fallen of the Second World War (photo: Evgeniya Goryushina).



The name of Akhmat Kadyrov (killed 2004) is omnipresent in Chechnya of the 2010s and 2020s: streets and various objects of state and private infrastructure are dedicated to him, and his sayings are to serve as the basis of a new statehood and new Chechen historiography (photos: Cécile Druey 2019; Evgeniya Goryushina 2023).



The “battle of the Portraits” forms a separate, symbolic scene of statebuilding and conflict to be observed in Chechnya. While in the early 2010s the majority of the portraits showed the trinity of Putin, Kadyrov senior and Kadyrov junior, by the end of the 2010s it was mainly only Putin and/or Kadyrov senior, whereas in 2023, Kadyrov junior is most present, together without with his father, but often without reference to Moscow (photos: Cécile Druey 2019).

Primary Materials (Part IV)

Interview with Memory Activist from Grozny (2023)

Interview conducted by Cécile Druey, 14 February 2023

Interviewer: With me is here XXX, who is an activist from Grozny. XXX, you wanted to tell me about the initiatives you led in Grozny regarding the commemoration of the war, yes? Do I understand that correctly, not the commemoration of the deportation, but the commemoration of the war, of the Chechnya wars?

Respondent: Well, I wanted to talk specifically on the idea of erecting a monument to the children who were innocently killed during the two wars, and not only in the wars, but also during the period from 2000 to 2006, children were killed also during the purges. But of course also in the direct bombings and attacks carried out by the Russian armed forces on the territory of the Chechen Republic. The idea to build such a memorial came up in 2002 when we were working on a project with war-wounded children, i.e. children with disabilities due to the war, shrapnel wounds in the spine, severed arms, legs, bullets in the head. There was a whole lot of stuff. These were bed-bound children. We had a project to help these children and their mothers, because they were mainly looked after by their mothers. We had a girl there, a very pretty girl, she was 7 years old at the time. She had a bullet wound in her spine. She could not walk and was laying down, her mother was taking care of her. And some time later we found out that this girl had died, she could neither be operated on in place nor transferred, and apparently something happened there that an infection started to spread. When the girl's mother went to collect the certificate of her death, it was noted on it that she had died due to an infection. And the mother said – well, I understand the mother, she was in such a state at the time –, she said, "No, write gunshot wound, because my daughter had a gunshot wound and the cause of death was a gunshot wound." They refused to record

a gunshot wound. But even in cases after 2005, if there were direct gunshot wounds, they did not record it on the death certificate, they recorded heart attack or some other illness. Apparently, there was an order that they were not allowed to write this. And when we found out about this conflict, that is when we got involved. And at the administration, I was fighting a lot at that time, I also demanded that the death certificate say it was a gunshot wound. And this was the first time I said, out of the blue, look how many children have died. I said they should have put up a memorial for these killed children. So many innocent people, I said, and you do not even want to remember! Why don't you want to keep their memory at least in the statistics? And then came this man. When he heard me, he had turned and looked at me. And he came up to me and said, "Who needs those numbers, will anyone need those numbers?" I said to him, "Of course! Now the situation is different, but people will need them. Do you want justice?" And he said, "Yes, I want justice." And he said that he himself keeps accurate statistics of children and adults who have died from gunshot wounds, even if [their death] happens much later. I mean, they are ill for some time and then they die. And he said: "I always ask, whether it is a child or an adult, why they died, and if it is as a result of a gunshot wound, I write it all down separately. After this we had a meeting at the Ministry of Health, Mother and Child Department. Since we were working with pregnant women, we were sometimes invited by the Ministry of Health […]. And so we were discussing this with representatives from the Mayor's Office, from the Department of Social and Religious Organisations, from the Ministry of Social Security and the Ministry of Health as organisers […]. And very different questions were raised. The main discussion was about the establishment of a crisis centre, because the federal authorities had issued a decree in this direction. And then, at the end, during an informal conversation, when I said to the representative of the Department of Relations with Religious and Public Organisations, "Listen, wouldn't you like to open a memorial for children?" […]. That was in 2007. And my interlocutor was very frightened, very frightened by the idea of even proposing this. And he said to me, "What are you talking about? You cannot talk about such things". I asked why, and he said, "Because it was an anti-terrorist operation and there was no war, which means there were no children affected by a war. There weren't. All those who died were killed for the cause." I said, "What do you mean by 'for the cause'?

24,000 children?" At that time the number 24,000 children was circulating. I remember it very clearly. I even went on record that 24,000 children died, that number was mentioned in official sources at the time. That was in 2007. After that, of course, everything was rigged again. This and that data was changed. I do not even know how exact these data were. But then it happened in such a way that it was…. You asked me about the projects at the beginning, we did different projects about memory, about war memory. And we started to think more and more about this memorial.

Interviewer: For children specifically?

Respondent: For children, yes, for children. And you know, when these events happened in Beslan, the occupation of the school, it was announced that all schools would officially mourn on the 1 September.

Interviewer: In the North Caucasus or in the whole of Russia?

Respondent: No, all over Russia, all over Russia, on the 1 September of every following year, we remembered, stood up and observed a minute of silence in memory of the children who died in Beslan. And, you know, for me it was, not only for me, but for our entire team and for the people [in Chechnya] – our friends who visited us every day – this was very painful. We felt compassion for the children of Beslan, for the parents and the other children, for the bereaved families. We were very sympathetic, because we know this experience. But it is, you know, it is like, it is such an injustice when children continue to die here too, yes, they continue. They were killed in 1995, 1999, during the purges, how many children died being run over by tanks, by drunken officers who were just rushing around on those tanks, and they keep dying from bullet wounds. And this is all being ignored and it is all being shut down in the [Chechen] republic, also by the local authorities. This is a huge injustice, and for many, many mothers it has caused a sense of hopelessness and a feeling that there will never be any justice. And honestly, by the way, a large part of the mothers who came to us, they went into religion, found support, yes, in religion, because there was no better protection elsewhere. You want to be protected, you want to be protected inside. It is very scary to live in a world where you are disappointed, where you

are hurt, where you feel hurt, yes, just hurt, and where you feel guilty that you cannot do anything even in memory of those children. And then we happened to be holding an event at the seventh school. It is one of the central schools in Grozny. It was an event dedicated to the 1 June, Children's Day. […] This was already either 2014 or 2015. But this [memorial] was a topic we lobbied about all the time, all the time. And I received many threats for it. For voicing it.

Interviewer: From the administration?

Respondent: Yes, and I can even tell you now from whom directly. At first I received such a kind of warning, a threat – warnings from the head of the Department. He personally said to me: "If you bring this topic up again at any meeting…". We used to have NGO meetings. I always brought up this topic at meetings, as soon as children's projects were brought up. He said to me like this, "If you ever bring it up again, I will be a very cruel man to you". He did not say director or anything, he said I would be a "cruel person to you". But I wanted to tell you about the Seventh School. We held an event there on 1 June. And the Minister of Education came to the event. And I spoke, I opened the event, and I said that I am not speaking now as an NGO leader, but as a person, and I want you all to stand up now and honour the memory of the children who died and who will never be among us on 1 June, on Children's Day. Many people stood up and started to cry, because their brothers or sisters had died. And several mothers came to me after my speech, one mother came and kissed my hands. And she said, "Thank you! My grandchildren died, my two grandchildren… My children are alive, but my grandchildren are dead and no one has ever asked for forgiveness that these two kids were taken from our family, just like that." Even the Minister of Education, he was very scared, very much. But he came up to me and said, "I really hope that among these 300 people," there were 300 people! "that among these 300 people, there is nobody who will bring this information to those who do not like it." And they did not. Not one. Of the 300 people there […]. But I have not yet told you the best thing, it happened the last time when in the Department I participated in a meeting with Timur Aliyev, Kadyrov's human rights advisor, and Leila Ayubova, a pro-government NGO representative. And there I was, it was my last speech about the monument and they accepted it!

Interviewer: What, did they build the memorial?

Respondent: No, but they accepted it as an idea. They said that they would consider, they would think about it, you know? Well of course they did not do anything. But it was amazing that they supported it openly in front of everybody…

Excerpts from Interview with Dmitry Pushmin, Head of the Archive of the Boris Yeltsin Centre (2019)

Interview conducted by Murat Shogenov (via Skype), 25 December 2019

The exhibition "At War. Reflections on the First Chechen War" at the Boris Yeltsin Museum in Ekaterinburg (Russian Federation) was organised to mark the 25th anniversary of the start of the First Chechen campaign.[1] In a small black pavilion, closed off from the rest of the space, one could see photographs and texts. These were produced by participants who experienced the events in Chechnya and tried to capture and make sense of the course and nature of that war from different angles. The exhibition featured a library of publications about the Chechen campaign: documents, memoirs, diaries, memory books and works by historians. As the exhibition organisers wrote in the announcement: "The war in Chechnya has defined much in our present-day life – and even more in the lives of people in the 1990s. Does Russian society want to talk about it today? We do not give any final assessments or definitive answers; we believe that by seeing our exhibition you can find your own answers to questions related to the First Chechen War".

In addition to the exhibition, the Centre hosted a conference on "How the war in Chechnya changed Russian society".[2] Human rights activists, journalists, and Russian politicians, including those who made important political decisions about Chechnya, spoke about the causes and consequences of the war, about how citizens were involved in resolving the conflict, and about the fate of the people involved in it. The conference, which was held in the Freedom Hall of the Boris Yeltsin Museum, was opened by Alexander Drozdov, the Centre's executive director: "The war

---

1 Yeltsin Centre (21 November 2019). The exhibition "At War. Reflections on the First Chechen War" at the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Centre, 21 November 2019–19 January 2020, <https://yeltsin.ru/affair/vystavka-na-vojne-razmyshleniya-o-pervoj-chechenskoj/>.

2 Yeltsin Centre (21 November 2019). The war in Chechnya – a tragedy without an ending. The conference "How the war in Chechnya changed Russian society" at the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Centre, 9 December 2019, <https://yeltsin.ru/news/vojna-v-chechne-tragediya-bez-finala/>.

in Chechnya is a tragedy without an ending. Everyone has their own truth about this war. In the events of Russian history, it refers to those that are buried somewhere deep, hurting and bleeding, no matter how much we pretend that all is well. […] I really wish that one day we can say that we survived this war and realise that we have learned a lesson from another circle of our Caucasian conflicts."

Murat: Do you think the space allocated [at the Museum of the Yeltsin Center[3]] to the history of the war in Chechnya is sufficient?

Dmitry: […] the exhibition about Chechnya [i.e. the First Chechnya War] inside the main exhibition has turned out to be very compressed; there are several reasons for this. For example, beginning with the design of these rooms in which we placed the exhibition, we had the idea to divide the exposition into seven days, seven events which posed key challenges to society, and to the country's leader [Boris Yeltsin]. Thus, the exhibition about the war in Chechnya is represented in the space for "Day Five" addressing the 1996 presidential elections. And in fact, it shows one of the key problems the electoral headquarters had [at that time]. The election narrative itself literally displaces this war issue, that's the first point. […] This suppression of the war theme by the 1996 election [headquarters] is in some ways justified; after all, the institution of elections itself proved capable of dealing with issues of war and peace [by brokering the ceasefire agreement of Khasavyurt]. No matter how monstrous a president is supposed to be, when he realises that his electoral prospects depend on his deciding the war, that if he does not win – he will decide to end the war. In other words, the institution of elections can resolve issues of war and peace in a healthy society. […][…]

Murat: And this photo exhibition ["At War. Reflections on the First Chechen War"] in a way also had this goal [to show humans at war]?

Dmitry: Yes. We haven't finished discussing this with my colleagues, but I'm sure that we agree here that the main actors in history are human beings. History studies the individual, not the state or other structures, and therefore it is very human-centred. We are by no means agitators, but how do we show that war is bad? We simply must familiarise a large

3 Yeltsin Centre. The Boris Yeltsin Museum. <https://yeltsin.ru/museum/>.

number of visitors who know nothing at all about it with a large number of different assessments. And to show what deep cleavages and trauma conflict creates. This is [important] in the event of a conflict escalation, in this case as many people as possible must be careful in their assessments, must be aware of the past experience, must understand that war is an insanely expensive way of solving contradictions in the truest sense of the word. And all potential parties to a conflict should have this understanding; then there is a chance that the conflict will be resolved in a less bloody way. […]

Murat: Why do you think people do not want to talk about this war? Why do you think it is important to recall it nevertheless?

Dmitry: Our museums generally deal very little with contemporary history. For example, the main historical museum in the country ends its permanent exposition not even with the Soviet Union, but with Alexander III. History is still a matter of politics. An exhibition is a thing that appears once and then stands for several years. There might be a fear of having to change some things upon request from the higher authorities. I think that our opinion leaders should thematise this issue. We have a very state-centric approach to everything. […] We are not used to thinking of the events in Chechnya as a civil war, because it is still perceived as a war on terror. We are not used to considering that the war in Chechnya has had a major influence on the formation of modern political life in our country, on the nature of our federalism, on questions of elected branches of government in the federal subjects, on our one-channel system of taxation, where it seems correct that Moscow accumulates a significant part of the revenue and then distributes it. And the authorities of the constituent entities must defend their budgets in Moscow by demonstrating loyalty. Chechnya lies at the root of many things.

Part V
New and Old Dividing Lines, and the Powerlessness of Those Who Remember (2022–2023)

***

Introduction to the Context (2022–2023)

A new upsurge in civic protests throughout the Russian Federation is related to Russian's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, to which the authorities have responded with an unprecedented number of detentions and arrests, and the introduction of laws that effectively paralyse any civic movement. With the revision of the Constitution in 2020, all leaders of the liberal opposition have been disempowered or arrested, organisations critical of government positions have been dissolved, and virtually all independent media have been deprived of their licences (Russian Federation, 2020). Since 2017, Vladimir Putin has been the longest-serving Russian political leader after Stalin.

This part deals with the most recent phase of the situation in and around Chechnya, which starts with the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022. Although various processes had been going on for several years, the beginning of Russia's "special operation" in Ukraine marked a political watershed for the situation in the whole Russian Federation, including Chechnya: on the one hand, a new, massive armed conflict began, with all its traumatic consequences for the population, and on the other, the war in Ukraine triggered new waves of repression and political contestation, especially in the North Caucasus. Furthermore, many civic activists who had not done so earlier, left the country starting in 2022, forming a new, numerous Russian diaspora in the states of the former Soviet periphery, Western Europe and the United States (Inozemtsev, 2023).

For large parts of Russian society, the massacres committed on Ukrainian civilians during the first months of the war in Ukraine were a terrible déja vu, and many struggled with a sense of collective (civic) guilt – because neither then nor now could these massacres be prevented or at least foreseen. Anna Nemzer's chapter is an impressive testimony in this regard. The author is a fine observer of internal social injustices and conflicts, and an unsparing critic of her own country's regime behavior then and now.

The increasing competition and conflict between the different types or levels of memory of the two Chechnya wars – what Jan Assman would call their "communicative" (informal, private) and "cultural memories" (official, externalized) (Assmann, 2008) – is an important problem identified

in several articles of this book. However, both types of memories are also instrumentalised on the different sides, and this mix of informal and official memories of the Chechnya wars can be silenced, reformulated, rewritten and traded depending on the actors involved – like any good on the market. This "marketing of memory", according to Nemzer's chapter, and the level of authoritarianism under which the military mobilisation takes place, make it possible for the Chechens, who were involved in two bloody wars against Russia in the 1990s and 2000s, to occupy Ukrainian cities for the Russian Kremlin and its allies in Grozny in 2022.

However, there has been not only cooperation with the state and its institutions involved in war, but also resistance to militarisation. Especially in the early weeks of the new conflict in spring 2022, protests against the war in general and against the military mobilisation of Russian citizens took place in various parts of the North Caucasus, some of them along ethnic lines ("Why should we fight for Moscow, we ourselves have suffered under Russian colonial rule and imperialism and we have other, more pressing concerns than defending Russian interests in Ukraine!"). Such anti-war protests took different forms in different places. While in most of the North Caucasian republics it was more social media users or relatives, especially women, who took to the streets, as, for instance, in Karachaevo-Cherkessia (Kavkaz.Realii, 2022) or Chechnya (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2022d; 2022e; 2022c), the protesters in Dagestan were mainly angry young men demonstrating against their own impending mobilisation: there was resentment among the population because it was felt that it was mainly poorer sections of society and rural areas of Russia that were targeted, with Dagestan being particularly affected (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2022 f). However, the fate of the protesters was the same everywhere, differing only in the level of brutality of the authorities: demonstrations were violently dispersed and protesters were sentenced to long prison terms, with reference to the rapidly and rigorously tightened national legislation and to *adat*, local customary law, the implementation of which is largely determined by the local elites in power. In Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov even officially declared those protesting military mobilisation to be "enemies of the people" (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2022c).

The Chechen Republic follows its own logic in terms of military mobilisation. Unlike in the other regions of the North Caucasus, the process is not directly subordinated to the central authorities in Moscow, that is, in a first instance the Russian Ministry of Defense; rather, the mobilistaion

of Chechen "volunteers" takes place in a "Chechenised" form, under the direct aegis of Ramzan Kadyrov and his comrades, who declare the miltiary involvement of Chechens in Russia's conflict against Ukraine to be an act of "jihad" (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2022a; 2022b). With this move, Kadyrov kills two birds with one stone: first, he strengthens his grip on the population in the republic, which, monitored by representatives of its own society and bound by local socio-political and cultural norms, finds it difficult to escape the control and mobilisation imposed by the local government. Second, he is consolidating his position of power at the national level, making Grozny and above all Kadyrov himself – once again – the Kremlin's undisputed security partner in the Caucasus. Thus, Ramzan Kadyrov, strengthened externally and internally by the war, is pushing ahead with his own statebuilding programme. He continues to instrumentalise the memory and cult of his father to "Kadyrise" the republic's statehood, for example, by renaming local courts in honour of Akhmat Kadyrov (Chechnya Today, 2023).

As clearly as Kadyrov demonstrates power at home and loyalty to the Kremlin, the new war, which commenced in 2022, exposes old dividing lines in Chechen society. There is a military reactivation of the Chechen nationalist underground, and diaspora Chechens from all over Europe are now defending Chechen independence as well under the banner of the Ukrainian armed forces – not only against Moscow, but also against their own people fighting under Russian command (Kirilenko, 2022). Thus, since February 2022, Chechens have literally faced each other on the battlefield in Ukraine. The conflict between the different sections of Chechen society can also be seen in the symbolic field. Kadyrov's battalions are named after Akhmat Haji, while opponents of the pro-Russian government in Chechnya name their combat units after Sheikh Mansur and Dzhokhar Dudayev. Symbols of historical memory serve to legitimise the new challenge to the political elites in Moscow and Grozny by the "Chechens of Europe", as expressed in the renaming of streets in honour of Chechen independence heroes in Ukraine. A few photographs of this new cult of Ichkerian heroes are reproduced at the end of this section (see "Photos (Part V)").

The glorious (re-)activation of historical memory by the state actors in Grozny and their challengers in exile is contrasted by the powerlessness and almost forlornness of civil society; it is also clear that the population of Russia is becoming more and more entangled in the political and ethical-moral clutches of the two conflicts, that is, the conflict in

Chechnya and the confict in Ukraine. This is expressed in the contribution by John Russell, whose polemical essay explores the memory of the (in)famous Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, as well as considering Basayev's biographer Andrei Babitsky. The latter was a renowned opponent of the Russian campaigns in Chechnya in the 1990s and 2000s and repeatedly interviewed Basayev. Moreover, since 2015, he was involved as a journalist and civic activist in Donetsk (Eastern Ukraine), which in turn experienced the collapse of an idealistic dream of self-determination and independence in 2022, when the Donetsk region went up in the flames of a new war and was definitively annexed to the territory of Russia.

References

Assmann, Jan (2008) Communicative and Cultural Memory, in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning), Media and Cultural Memory; Medien Und Kulturelle Erinnerung, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 109–18

Chechnya Today (2023) Gosduma Prinyala Zakon o Pereimenovanii Rayonnyykh Sudov Groznogo [State Duma Passes Law Renaming District Courts in Grozny]. *Chechnya Today*, February, <https://chechnyatoday.com/news/362940> (accessed 10 October 2023).

Inozemtsev, Vladislav (2023) The Exodus of the Century: A New Wave of Russian Emigration. *Notes de l'IFRI* 129 (July), <https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_inozemstev_exodus_july_2023.pdf> (accessed 10 October 2023).

Kavkaz.Realii (2022) V Karachaevo-Cherkessii Zhenshchiny Perekryli Dorogu s Trebovaniem Soobshchit' Im o Sud'be Rodnykh v Ukraine [In Karachay-Cherkessia, Women Blocked the Road Demanding to Be Informed about the Fate of Their Relatives in Ukraine]. *Kavkaz. Realii*, March, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/v-karachaevo-cherkesii-zhenschiny-perekryli-dorogu-s-trebovaniem-soobschitj-im-o-sudjbe-rodnyh-v-ukraine/31768074.html> (accessed 10 October 2023).

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2022a) Mufti Chechni Obyasnil Dzhihadom Uchastie Zemlyakov v Voennoy Operatsii Na Ukraine [Chechen Mufti Explains Jihad in Involvement of Countrymen in Military Conflict in Ukraine].

Kavkazskiy Uzel, February, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/373689/> (accessed 10 October 2023).

——— (2022b) Kadyrov Nazval Dzhihadom Deystviya Chechenskikh Voennykh Na Ukraine [Kadyrov Calls Chechen Military Actions in Ukraine a Jihad]. *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, March, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/373871/> (accessed 10 October 2023).

——— (2022c) Kadyrov Posle Mitinga Obyavil Vragami Naroda Protivnikov Mobilizatsii [Kadyrov after the Rally Declared Opponents of Mobilisation as Enemies of the People]. *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, September, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/381352/> (accessed 10 October 2023).

——— (2022d) Prizyv Na Miting Protiv Mobilizatsii Rasprostranilsya v Chechne [Call for a Rally against Mobilisation Spreads in Chechnyal]. *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, September, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/381334/> (accessed 10 October 2023).

——— (2022e) Ochevidtsy Soobshili Podrobnosti Sryva Mitinga Protiv Mobilizatsii v Groznom [Eyewitnesses Reported Details of the Disruption of a Rally against Mobilisation in Grozny]. *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, September, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/381376/> (accessed 10 October 2023).

——— (2022f) Obnarodovany Video Strel'by Na Aktsii Protivnikov Mobilizatsii v Dagestane [Video of Shooting at the Anti-Mobilisation Rally in Dagestan Released]. *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, September, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/381479/> (accessed 10 October 2023).

Kirilenko, Anastasiya (2022) Chechentsy Evropy Obyasnili Motivy Voevat' Na Storone Ukrainy [Chechens in Europe Explained Their Motives for Fighting on the Side of Ukraine]. *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, March <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/374043/> (accessed 10 October 2023).

Russian Federation (2020) *Zakon Rossiyskoy Federatsii o popravke k Konstitutsii RF o sovershenstvovanii regulirovaniya otdel'nykh voprosov organizatsii i funtsionirovanii publichnoy vlasti* [*Law on Amendment of the Constitution of the RF on Improving the Regulation of Certain Issues of Organisation and Functioning of Public Power*], No. 1-FKZ, <https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_346019/> (accessed 10 October 2023).

Anna Nemzer

The Marketing of Memory, and How It Affects the Remembrance of the Wars in Chechnya

Abstract: This chapter deals with the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine as a troubling reoccurrence of past events, not only for the Chechen people but also for all those in Russia who have critically engaged with the wars in Chechnya over recent decades. The author is a historian and a 'memory activist'. In her critical essay, she describes the situation in early 2022 from the critical perspective of a journalist working for a liberal television channel that was itself forced to leave Russia as a result of the attack on Ukraine. An expert on the 'memory wars' in Chechnya, she shows how Ramzan Kadyrov is advancing his own state-building programme, supported by the ongoing war. As part of this programme, he persists exploiting and 'marketing' the memory and cult of his father while simultaneously assembling a parallel military force to buttress Vladimir Putin's endeavour in Ukraine.

Keywords: Chechnya wars, banished memory, historical memory, civil society, marketing of memory, cleansing, Russian-Ukrainian war

Twenty-eight years ago, the first war broke out in Chechnya – a war that was officially called a "campaign" or an "operation", but that had all the attributes of war: killings of civilians, abductions, torture, crimes. At that time, the state of Russia had been in existence for barely three years of existence since the fall of the Soviet Union, and the outbreak of the war cruelly shattered the illusions of those who had invested sincere hope in the young country and its emerging democracy. This war has no chronological borders. We can state that it began to 11 December 1994, when tanks entered Grozny, but it is not possible to say precisely when it ended, because its terrible aftermath stretched on for years and is in some ways still being experienced today. President Boris Yeltsin, who had started the war, thought it was his fault and apologised for it. Vladimir Putin, who continued it, preferred not to incorporate it into the larger ideological narrative, which is why he shamefully referred to it using euphemisms. The official account of the war has been reduced to a short description of how "we all fought the terrorists", but, in fact, the authorities launched a propaganda campaign to

forcibly erase that period from the memory of the Chechen people. Or, at least, that is what they tried to do.

Twenty-eight years after the beginning of the war in Chechnya, Russia invaded Ukraine and waged a criminal war there, which Putin's propaganda again seeks to frame in terms of the idiotic and disdainful euphemism "special operation".

Context is often more important than content; at the very least, the former can significantly influence the latter. I agreed to write this article in January 2022. At that point, the few remaining Russian independent media outlets were covering the situation of the Yangulbayev family (Milashina, 2022).

I was living in Russia at the time, working for TV Dozhd. An important topic for me, in all my work, was the study of historical memory. In 2019, I went to Chechnya to make a documentary about how the memory of the two Chechen wars is preserved in Chechnya; the film was released on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the start of the first war (Nemzer, 2020). I was also going to write an article about this experience, after a discussion I had had with students in Bern in December 2021.

In the summer of 2022, I had not been to Russia since 24 February 2022. On that day, I had left for a business trip; I thought I would be abroad for a week, but it turned out that I would be gone forever. Dozhd was blocked, accused of extremism and spreading "fake news" about the Russian army. My colleagues left Russia and I had nowhere to return to.

Taus Serganova, a human rights activist, editor-in-chief of Dosh magazine and one of the heroes of my film (in Russian, the word "hero" has two meanings – hero as we understand it and also as a character in a story; in this case, both meanings coincided), said in an interview: "We must remember that Chechnya is Russia." The illusion of Chechnya's separateness was the result of many misleading signs, both external (it is a religious island within a secular state) and internal (the Chechen authorities often violated the laws of the Russian Federation, without any countermeasures being taken by the Kremlin, as, for example, in the persecution of the Yangulbaevs). However, we should not have been misled by this illusion back then. The current situation, in which the Russian Federation is bombing Ukraine and Akhmat hadji Kadyrov's troops are occupying Ukrainian cities, has destroyed this illusion completely. It is in this context – as I repeatedly feel the connection between how the Russian authorities "allowed themselves" to go to war in Chechnya, then in Georgia in

2008, and how they are now waging a criminal war in Ukraine – that I am finishing writing this article.

We decided to make this film for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the start of the first war in September 2019, and that whole month was spent in futile negotiations with potential heroes – or, rather, people who had left Chechnya and now lived outside Russia agreed to be interviewed; however, those inside Russia would not. Apart from the aforementioned Taus Serganova and Oyub Titiev (the head of Grozny Memorial, who by then had already survived arrest, false accusations, prison and release; Milashina, 2019), all potential respondents refused to talk to TV Dozhd. "It is not even safe for us to exchange notes with you."

N., a native of Grozny, had travelled to Moscow the year before for a memory laboratory, where we met her. N. is an artist and writer and the winner of many awards. At our Moscow "hackathon", she was working on an animated project about uzam, a Chechen chant, through which, she said, her grandmother passed stories of the deportations on to her. Memory researchers are well aware of this phenomenon: a taboo topic that has not been discussed for years makes its way into conversation through legend, song or tradition, gaining legitimacy through "another's word". N.'s project was dedicated to this.

Later, I saw other projects on her social networks, such as a series of postcards about the first Chechen war, which she had witnessed as a child. Of course, I wrote to her – and received a painful response in return. It was hard for her to refuse, but she could not agree. We corresponded for a long time. She said she would discuss it with her mother, then she decided that she would definitely give an interview because she had her mother's support. However, at the last moment, when I was flying to Grozny, she wrote to me to tell me that she was ill and would not be able to meet. The next day, I ran into her at an event at the National Library in Grozny, where she was giving a talk. I reassured her and explain that I was not offended, that I understood completely. Upon meeting me at a workshop in Moscow, which I was attending not in a role of an opposition journalist but as one of the curators of a memory laboratory, she was able to talk. In Chechnya, however, when I was in the role of an employee of TV Dozhd, she could not.

Thus, by the end of September, my prospects seemed bleak. Almost no one inside Chechnya had agreed to talk to me. A possible option was not to go to Chechnya and make this choice explicit in the film, turning

Chechnya into a spoken absence. However, my colleagues and I disliked this option. At an editorial board meeting, we asked ourselves: what if we talked to Umarov? Dzhambulat Umarov was then the minister for national policy in Chechnya. Some colleagues said that he had sometimes agreed to give comments to us. Things developed at breakneck speed. Before I had time to think about whether I was ready to follow such an official path, my producer told me that Umarov was in Moscow and that he wanted to meet me in an hour. It had been arranged that the meeting would take place in a restaurant at the Central House of Writers. This was where the writing elite had gathered in the 1970s, and the establishment's new owners were trying to preserve that time and that atmosphere. I felt like I was in a bad movie: the restaurant's interior and menu had not changed since the 1970s, the music from The Godfather was playing and the man waiting for me had been called "Kadyrov's Goebbels" by the media – which he himself was happy to quote. He asked, "What sort of film do you want to make?" I answered honestly: "Soon it will be 25 years since the start of the first [Chechnya] war. Nobody talks about it, nobody remembers the deaths of civilians. I want to talk to different people who remember this war. I am interested in talking to them about how its memory is preserved." "Come on," he replied, "make a good film. A good one. I'll give you an interview too." I walked out of the Central House of Writers, called the producer and asked for tickets to Grozny. A week later, we flew to Grozny. In the week between the meeting with Umarov and our trip, my producer managed to arrange several interviews in Chechnya; people just needed to hear that Umarov had given his permission.

The Ideologue of the Kadyrov Regime

We flew in with official permission. There was a young official waiting for us in a car at the airport. He was supposed to accompany us. But why am I describing the arrangements in such detail? It turned out to be a symptom that describes the situation better than direct evidence. The official met us in a nice, but rather modest Toyota. He had clearly been given the task of "feeding and watering us", but we never gave the lanky young man the opportunity to pay for us at any café or shop. Moreover, several times

during those days in Grozny, I told him: "Tamerlan, tomorrow morning we will be walking in the city ourselves, and we will stop by a few more people's houses. Let us meet in the afternoon and go to the National Library." He dutifully agreed, so part of the time we were completely on our own. When he arrived to pick us up at the house of the human rights activist Taus Serganova, with whom we had spent half a day, he started asking her questions in Chechen. She recounted this conversation to me later, with a touch of disgust (towards him); the official was only interested in one thing: whether we had talked about homosexuals. At that time, the authorities were apparently highly sensitive in relation to this topic – even though human rights activists and journalists had already written extensively about the persecution of homosexuals in Chechnya two years earlier (Milashina, 2018; Nastoyashchee vremya, 2019; Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2020; Meduza, 2019).

For some reason, even Umarov brought up the topic of homosexuality in my interview with him before I had the opportunity to ask him about it. I started the interview, as I had planned, by talking about the war and – after all, he had experienced the war as a young man and remembered it well; in that sense, he was no different from my other heroes. However, he himself switched to the new topic, in a rather clumsy manner. Our conversation went something like this: I asked him, "Why are people in Chechnya so afraid to talk about the war? Why didn't they agree to an interview before they knew that it was all with your permission?" He responded: "People are not afraid of me and Kadyrov, but of you personally, of you journalists. People are afraid of causing harm to their republic. And by the way, I had a British journalist here the other day, and I knew straightaway he was gay…"

Then he made a statement I had heard many times before: "We are not against gays, let them do what they want, but why to put it on display, why hold gay parades? We are a traditional society, and our customs must be respected." This formula, upholding Chechnya as a bastion of patriarchy and religiosity, was used many times by Putin in his responses to the question of gay marriage. Thus, it was not new to me.

I must say that going to Chechnya under such strange conditions (seemingly without any prohibitions, but for some reason needing official permission) had led me to reflect at length on how to deal with this delicate ethical situation. I determined that the best approach would be complete honesty and transparency. I told the whole story of this "unconditional agreement" in the film. And, in the same way, I told Umarov honestly

on camera: "Dzhambulat Vakhidovich, I have come to make a film on a completely different topic, but since you yourself have raised it, as a journalist I cannot but continue to ask questions. I do not have any direct evidence in my hands, apart from the texts of human rights defenders and my colleagues from *Novaya Gazeta*, I cannot show you now, say, a video of torture. But I myself have spoken to gay people who managed to leave Chechnya for Europe, and I know what they have gone through here. You say you do not care, but, excuse me, torture and persecution are no longer a sign of indifference."

Answering this question was easy for him. I had no direct evidence at hand, apart from articles in the press and personal off-the-record conversations. Umarov said that torture and persecution were terrible, that they should not happen and that he had said so many times in public. I had not expected anything more from him. But I was curious to understand why he had brought the subject up himself, for no apparent reason. During the editing process, I was faced with an interesting problem: I felt compelled to include this fragment in the film, even though it had nothing to do with the war. As I say, the jump to that topic was extremely awkward. There was only one remedy: to speak honestly, talking through the awkwardness and diagnosing the painfulness of the subject.

Why am I dwelling on these episodes in such detail? All of this gave me the distinct impression that the authorities were not all that concerned about the war in Chechnya. Other issues were much more important to them. At the same time, I could read it in their faces; for the people, the topic was, firstly, incredibly painful, and secondly, it was associated with enormous fear, sometimes unconsciously – a fear of who knows what and why. "You never know what will happen. It could affect our relatives." This dissonance was a red thread in my film.

The Marketing of the Memory of War

Every government relates to its country's past in some way, recycling history into a convenient narrative; in this, political regimes with varying degrees of humanity are quite similar. The narratives and the cloud of tags associated with governments are marketed to the public, with the degree

of repressiveness of this "sale" being directly linked to the degree of repressiveness of the regime. Since 2000, Putin has frequently referred to history, with the support of the apparatus working around him and for him. The relationship between Russian power and Russian history could be the subject of a huge and fascinating study in its own right. The problem for the authorities is that it is more difficult to transform interpretations of the recent past and to simply lie about the recent past than it is in relation to ancient history: too many witnesses are still alive. The dilemma starts with description: who fought whom? "We" were at war with whom? "We", the Russians, were at war with the Chechens, who were, and still are, also Russian citizens. A war within one's own country is always much harder to explain, as the necessary distinction between "us" and "them" is blurred. Nevertheless, a combination of propaganda and intimidation leads – at least externally – to the result desired by the authorities; that is, a violent marketing of history.

It seemed to me that the Chechen authorities had dealt with the topic of the war quite efficiently in marketing terms (if we consider the efficiency of violence). The main efforts in this regard were, of course, made long before my arrival in Grozny. Apparently, they took about ten years, from 2005 to 2015. The new official version of the past could be summed up as follows: "Yes, in the early 1990s, we had illusions. Yeltsin said then: take as much sovereignty as you want. A brave general, Dudayev, appeared and many fell under his spell. But we were all naive and did not understand that our illusions and hopes would be instrumentalised."

In this official version, the period of genuine agency of Chechen society, in its struggle for independence, is condensed into a few days, or perhaps months, and a few pro-independence rallies; after this, a period of unrest seems to have begun, and it is here that the official rhetoric strips the Chechens of any agency whatsoever. "We were ruled like puppets. Dudayev was also a puppet." Who exactly ruled? "The collective West." "The grey cardinals." "Corporations." "Those who benefit." No clear answers are required for the official version.

The problem is that this marketing scheme, as it is applied to the first Chechnya war, does not work well and is in direct contradiction with the memories of people who remember the atmosphere of the early 1990s, who remember their dreams, and who remember the bombing of civilians. This is where the efficiency begins to falter.

Here, the marketing of the First War, not entirely successful, gets support from the narrative about the Second War, in which responsibility is transferred to the terrorists (it was Shamil Basayev who, in the summer of 1999, attacked Dagestan and thereby broke the 1996 armistice agreement). The war is renamed a "counter-terrorist operation" and continues to be referred to as such for a very long time. This is convenient from a marketing point of view. After the 1996 ceasefire, during the 1997 elections, the whole of Chechnya votes for Aslan Maskhadov as a man who stands for peace. By this time, the greater part of Chechen society seems so exhausted and destroyed by the war that their dream of independence has been pushed to the background, kept alive only by the most passionate "Ichkerians" (i.e. supporters of Chechen independence), whose irreconcilability ultimately contributes to marginalising them. And in society as a whole, there seems to be one clear request: "Leave us alone, stop killing us, let us live in peace and recover a little after these years of hell."

Thus, a conventional marketing specialist of the Chechen wars forms the following picture: "At first, there was a period of illusions. It was short. But then we realised that we needed peace and a life with Russia. But then the terrorists came, and we all, Russians and Chechens, fought the terrorists." So this is what emerges – a counter-terrorist operation. The official memory of the wars is constructed in this way and it is broadly documented.

The memorial to war victims in Akhmat Kadyrov Square has become a visible expression of the official position. Along its perimeter stand churty, low gravestone slabs, battered and uneven; these are reminders of those who died during the 1944 deportation. And in the centre are shiny and tall new black steles in memory of those who died during the "counter-terrorist operation". It is important to pay attention to a few details here.

In the official account, the memories of different tragedies are merged; all the pain of the Chechen people is fused into one narrative. The logic of this fusion led to the paternalistic determination of the date of commemoration: not 23 February (the actual day of the deportations) or 11 December (the day when the first Chechen war began), but 10 May. The officials put it this way: 23 February is "Defender of the Fatherland Day", a Russian state holiday inherited from the Soviet state. People should not downgrade this holiday by mourning. For the Chechen people, 9 May is a terrible date as it is the date of the death of Akhmat-Hadji Kadyrov, who was assassinated on 9 May 2004. However, 9 May, officials say, is also the "Victory Day"

dedicated to the end of the "Great Patriotic War", a holiday that should not be contaminated. Therefore, officials landed on 10 May to commemorate Kadyrov Senior, the tragedy of the deportation, and the horrors of the counter-terrorist operation. Thus, for the expression of sorrow, a single chronotope, one time, one space, was created; and this expression of sorrow, once a year, would, according to the ideologists' plan, be sufficient for all the aforementioned troubles. I would suggest that the histories of each particular tragedy and the need to make sense of them were lost in this commemorative confluence.

When asked how this decision to commemorate all these troubles on one day, Dzhmabulat Umarov replied: it had been discussed at all levels of civil society.

Oyub Titiev, head of Grozny's Memorial Human Rights Centre, who had, by that time, already survived false accusations, arrest, and several years in prison, responded to my question about the monument with a short, tough answer: "I don't even want to talk about this. The memorial to the deportation should be separate. There is no memorial to the civilians who died during this war. There must be one. It should also be separate."

Under the current political circumstances, it was a matter of complete impossibility to ask questions. Every Chechen knows about the tragedy of the deportation; there is no family that was not affected. People in Chechnya hate Stalin more unanimously than anywhere else in Russia. When I asked who was responsible for the deportation, the answer was nearly unanimous; there was only one exception, to which I shall return a little later. Over the past decade, while "Great Russia" has not directly rehabilitated Stalin's image, it has created a murky and ambiguous halo around his figure: on the one hand, the official narrative tells us, there was repression in the Soviet Union, but this is presented more like a natural disaster, a hurricane or an earthquake; the perpetrators, those who initiated the murders and imprisonments, are never talked about loudly. On the other hand, Stalin is often remembered as the great military leader who won the Second World War, but the grand narrative never mentions the monstrous acts Stalin committed during the war: the criminal orders 227 ("not one step back", which called for deserters to be shot on sight) or 270 (which prohibited surrendering), or the deportation, when Stalin got the paranoid idea that all Chechens (along with the Ingush and Crimean Tatars) were collaborating with Hitler. This crazy idea, which was not even supported

geographically (the German troops did not reach those territories), found expression, as is often the case, in a legend: "The Chechens were preparing a white horse for Hitler's arrival." This wild legend served as a justification for the expulsion of the peoples – in one day, under terrible conditions. Chechens orally recount the story of the mountain village of Khaybakh: it was inconvenient to take people from there through the mountains; those who could walk were driven out of the village on foot; those who could not were driven into a barn and burned alive.

It was forbidden to talk about the deportation even after Stalin's death in 1953. From 1957 onwards, many Chechens returned home from Kazakhstan. Taus Serganova says that very quietly, at kitchen tables and in whispers, people began to discuss what had happened from around the end of the 1980s, when she was a student. Of course, such discussions were in full force in the early 1990s: the memory of the deportation, widespread hatred, and the demand for punishment became an integral part of the struggle for independence. Just like talk of repression in the Soviet Union, the topic of the deportation broke through into public space.

There was one exception among the answers to the question of who had been responsible for the deportation. Yanina, a young journalist, writer, and blogger born in the city of Taldykorgan in Kazakhstan, where her family lived after the forcible relocation, answered this question differently, vaguely, and poetically: "I don't know. I ask myself the question of who did this to us and why, and I do not find an answer. Such questions are answered by time." By "this", she meant both the deportation and the two Chechen wars.

The time between the deportation and my conversation with Yanina was long enough (seventy-five years had passed) for answers to have been provided. And these were clearer than they had been in the 1990s. Twenty-five years had passed since the outbreak of the first Chechnya war. Yanina was a child when her grandfather decided that the whole family should return from Toldykorgan to Grozny. This was in November 1994, a month before the war started. "My grandfather was asked: where are you going, are you crazy? My grandfather replied: have I never seen a war?" The family returned. Yanina survived the first bombings in Grozny, then another evacuation, whereupon she returned again. I saw her as a young representative of Grozny's art scene (in this she was similar to my friend N., who had not dared to give me an interview). At the start of her journalistic career, Yanina was confronted by the fact that it was forbidden to use the word "war" (her

voice, altered and under a different name, features at the beginning of my film: "I was told to name it in so many ways: the 'counter-terrorist operation', the 'restoration of constitutional order…' – 'Who told you to say that, the chief editor?' – 'Yes, the editor-in-chief says you should not say that… All right, not war means not war – what can you do…' "). However, in 2019, she was using the word "war" in our early conversations; she was using it in the knowledge that I was making a film and would conduct interviews with the permission of the authorities. The word could be used. However, there could be no subsequent logical step, no question of responsibility. Instead, people said that "time gives answers". That is, once again, the question of who had perpetrated the violence was once again lost in shared tears and shared catastrophes: "it happened" to us, not "they did it" to us.

The Puzzle of the War Memory and the Attempt to Put It Together

Shooting the film in 2019, I noticed how, paradoxically, the system of prohibitions had softened slightly. It took the marketing experts of Chechen ideology about ten years to create the following vague myth: "We survived many tragedies; we remember them and will never forget. However, there are details. Firstly, if the official narrative about Stalin tells us that he was an effective manager, a ruler with a 'steady hand' under whose rule there was order and stability, we cannot in our official statements express open hatred of him. If the official Russian narrative tells us that the FSB [i.e. Russian intelligence services] succeeded the MGB and the NKVD [i.e. Soviet intelligence services], the criminal Soviet power structures, then we cannot speak of the perpetrators of the deportations with hatred either. However, the general fog of tragedy overshadows questions of concrete responsibility. Our memory contains pain – but no concrete revenge. Secondly, if Chechnya is now part of Russia, and if the head of the republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, regards Putin as his father, we simply cannot remember that during the second Chechen war Putin fought against Chechnya."

This practice of fog and tragedy without putting blame on anybody has been effective for the past ten to fifteen years; by the time I arrived in

Grozny, it had indeed been somewhat softened – at least on a rhetorical level. Umar Yarichev, a poet and moral authority in Chechnya, an ardent loyalist and an admirer of Kadyrov and Putin, a man who was born on the day the Great Patriotic War began (22 June 1941), and who survived a deportation at age of three, says: “Of course it was a war. Well, war is war, it is not a dance on the lawn.” After years of lacquering the past with other words, the word “war” no longer poses any danger.

I would not be seduced by this apparent softening. Probably it was a small concession to the survivors of the bombing (when you are being bombed, I suspect that it is hard to call it an “operation”). Probably it was a sign that the word itself was no longer a serious threat to ideology. Many years of myth-making had borne fruit. I should add that the marketing and ideological work I have described would not be possible in a free society, nor would it be efficient. The success of this marketing depends on the repressive nature of the political system and the pervasive fear in Chechnya. My team and I felt this fear when we started organising interviews for our film.

Hasan Betelgeriev, a poet, bard, and university teacher of Latin and French in Chechnya, moved to Nice in 2017. That is where we met him. In my film, there is no one main character. My primary goal was to show a diversity of people of different ages and beliefs, living both in and outside Chechnya. Thus, for example, Hasan, an ardent opponent of Kadyrov and a passionate *Ichkerian*, spoke about the war not only without lexical restrictions, but also without regard for etiquette (which may have played a role in other interviews). I asked: “How did you explain to your children when the war started what was happening and who was to blame?” He said: “The Russians, it was the Russians who wanted to kill us.” In comparison, Zara Murtazaliyeva, a Chechen woman who had witnessed the war as a child, answered a similar question (“How did your parents explain what had happened?”) as follows: “My mother told me: ‘Zara, the Russians are good people, you have Russian classmates, you have a Russian teacher, they are good, they are not against us. The military is against us. It is all about politics.’” A few years later, when Zara returned to Moscow as a student, she was arrested by the police, tied up with plastic scotch, and ultimately sentenced to eight years in prison. After serving her sentence, Zara moved to Paris, where I met her. Her story was exceptional: thanks to human rights activists, her case had become known immediately after her arrest and had achieved widespread media coverage. However, this did not help at all: the case against her was obviously fabricated, the prosecution

had no evidence, and yet she served her full sentence. Human rights activists have highlighted thousands of similar false verdicts against Chechens framed using charges relating to drugs or explosives; Zara's story was one of many, a glaring symptom of Russia's xenophobia and Chechenophobia during the war and the post-war period. But at least her story got media coverage, even if this did not save her from prison.

Hasan Betelgeriev, who had left Chechnya a few years before our conversation, was not subject to any restrictions and could speak freely; accordingly, his description of the war was clear, without allusions or paraphrasing Nevertheless, it is important to understand the context. Even when he was still living in Chechnya, Hasan had been in opposition to the current government. In 2016, he wrote several posts, one in support of independent "Ichkeria" and about the war in Syria; he was not satisfied with that war and wrote about its pointlessness. Of course, this post was eventually deleted. The media then reported that he had been abducted and human rights activists loudly expressed their concern about his disappearance (Kavkazskiy Uzel 2016; OVD News 2016).

After this, Hasan was released and immediately moved to Nice, where his daughter and her children were already living, and where a large Chechen diaspora had found a new home. I know all the details of this story, but I cannot speak about them; Hasan was more than frank about the wars in Chechnya, but he told me the story of his post and the consequences of it off the record. At that moment, he was not free from fear, even though he was abroad; his wife was still in Grozny and her papers to join him in Nice were just about to be issued. The fear that pervades all of Chechen society does not let go of you even after you leave Chechnya, because everyone has relatives and the authorities have a habit of taking hostages. The practice of putting pressure on people through their relatives is widespread and has been described by journalists and human rights activists. It has also been used outside Chechnya: Oleg Navalny, the brother of the opposition leader Alexei Navalny, was sent to prison, and a criminal case was launched against the father of one of Navalny's closest associates, Ivan Zhdanov. Soviet laws and law enforcement mechanisms allowed for formulations such as "wife of an enemy of the people", and the repression of an entire family after the data of the main character was meticulously, legally, and linguistically recorded. The Russian laws do not invent names for the relatives of their opponents; they simply arrest them and frame this as a coincidence. In Chechnya, this has been practised repeatedly.

In this way, the puzzle of the memory of the wars gradually formed for me – a lively, real and tragic memory on the level of individual families and personalities, but one that was clouded by complicated constructions and formulations on the official level. I had no illusions about the degree of repression in the Chechen Republic even before my visit: I had learnt of it through my colleagues' publications, the accounts of human rights defenders, and plenty of personal conversations. I was aware of the persecution of dissidents and the most brutal reprisals, abductions, torture and killings. I was impressed that the word "war" was allowed to exist and be uttered in 2019; it was used by all my heroes, including the Kadyrov official. At the same time, I felt the fear of all my heroes, which would probably be difficult for them to put into words if I asked what exactly it related to. It was clear that the grief of the wars, which had been erased from the official agenda, remained under the sole responsibility of each individual, that the wars themselves had become a fact of personal history. And everyone who had survived the wars was, in a sense, in a state of desperate existential isolation: the wars were a tangible fact and lives had been ruined, but there was no ritual of shared grief, no *closure*, which means that there was no punishment of those responsible. Rituals and closures could not originate at a grassroots level either; with the level of violence at the top, any such initiative was doomed to fail. People did not know what exactly they were afraid of; it seemed possible to talk about the war, but "many things can happen". At the same time, the officials, in my view, were much more afraid of discussing another universal theme: political persecution, torture, violations of the law, and corruption. And it was impossible for people to estimate the level of potential danger and to delineate the boundaries of what is considered dissent according to the authorities. Which topics are taboo and which are not? Making a mistake in an interaction with the Kadyrov government is a risky experiment.

The Shared Term Is "Cleansing": Patterns of Russian Army Violence in Chechnya and Ukraine

I am finishing this article three years after my visit to Chechnya and six months after Russia launched a criminal, bloody war in Ukraine. In this

new context, memories of the wars in Chechnya come up often (much more so than three years ago). The heinous crimes of the Russian army in Bucha, Irpin and Gostomel, the shooting of civilians, the raping and the looting all remind me of the word “cleansing”, a common practice during the wars in Chechnya. Since April 2022, I have been observing what I think can probably be termed re-traumatisation (although I am not a trained psychologist). All Chechens, and certainly those who are not in Chechnya and are therefore able to speak, have started to remember “their” wars as the whole world looks on in horror at the evidence from Bucha.

I started comparing testimonies.

Oyub Titiev (he survived both Chechen wars in Grozny): “Well I still sleep in my clothes, because since the first war you had to be ready at any moment to go out, jump out, pull out, protect, save the children; one had to be ready for anything.”

Olena Trutnieva (she lived with her son and mother for fifteen days under occupation near Gostomel and managed to escape): “We hid from the shelling and slept in our house, in the sauna on the floor under the benches; it was the ground floor and there were no windows. We laid blankets on the floor and slept in our clothes, so that we could run out of the house in case of fire or shelling at any time” (Interview Turtnieva, 2022).

Musa Sadulayev (photographer, speaking about the beginning of the second Chechnya war): “I had the car full of kids, with my brother’s wife, white cloths hanging out the window […]. As we were driving, this mortar shell exploded, or something, because this… right in front of us on the road. In short, we were under fire. There was screaming, and my niece, she was shouting, ‘Uncle, they are killing us, do not let them kill us!’ And a motorcyclist was already coming out from under the fire, shouting, ‘Turn around, it is worse over there!’ We had already turned and were about to drive out of the shelling. My brother came towards us in his car, he was all white, and said, ‘I thought that’s it, I am going to collect the corpses.’”

Elena Trutneva (2022): “We had stuck a piece of white cloth on the engine bonnet of our car and written ‘children’ on it with a pen. We held white flags in our hands out the window, which we had made with a stapler, sticks and a piece of sheet before we left. […] When we arrived at the designated evacuation point, we saw a huge column of cars. […] Then suddenly military helicopters were flying directly above us. There was gunfire, explosions, people running apart, cars turning around and driving back.

A shell hit the intersection where we had come from and there was a chaos of cars. There was no way back for us."

The word "cleansing" is pronounced ("we know what it is…"), and nightmarish details are repeated; young children have their names written on their bodies in case their parents are killed.

Here, various explanations and parallels emerge from different methodological orientations. Psychology: soldiers who have absolutely no clue what they are doing, why or what they are fighting for; an encounter between an army in a miserable shape, without a clear idea of its mission, and the fierce resistance of the population, guided precisely by just such a mission (to preserve one's country, to defend one's independence); an in this case inevitable failure; bestiality; a loss of humanity. Sociology: conversations about wars and mechanisms of dehumanisation, the reproduction of patterns of atrocities and vandalism by the army. History: anamnesis of the Soviet, post-Soviet and Russian military past; the knowledge of the Soviet/Russian soldier that he is dehumanised not only by the war with the enemy but also by "his own people" – here, we recall the bloody, criminal practices of Great Patriotic War waged by Stalin, who destroyed his own soldiers along with those of the enemy, lining them up in barrage squads as cannon fodder, shooting deserters on sight, conducting an endless maniacal search for spies and killing people upon the first paranoid suspicion (I feel uncomfortable using medical terms here, but after Timothy Snyder's [2022] mention of "schizofascism", I cannot think of any other expression).

There is another explanation, which is closer to me methodologically and in a sense unifies the previous ones. It is about memory, about the institutional inertia of violence that has never been overcome by anyone – neither at the time of the unmasking of Stalin's cult of personality (Khrushchev's February 1956 speech), nor during the 1990s, the only period of relative freedom in modern Russian history.

This institutional inertia of violence has actually been felt already at a micro-level. In Russia's times of superficial prosperity (in the 2000s, when there was a young president in power, it was a petrol paradise, there was gradual digitalisation, and society was radically apolitical), this was particularly interesting to observe. The inertia of violence affected not only the army, but also extended to all other areas of life, and the "golden 2000s," characterised by sharp and uneven income growth, demonstrated this better than ever before. I will give a simple and common example, from the everyday life of a normal Russian family. If a mother goes to the

conscription office with her son and has no money to buy him out of the army, the conscription officer has all the power. But if that same conscription officer goes to a regional polyclinic with some complicated disease, and this mother turns out to be the head of department in the clinic, they swap roles and now she can do anything she wants with him. The example is dramatic but revealing: in all areas in which it was impossible to buy people off with money (by paying for a certificate exempting the son from military service or by going to a private clinic), the same kind of violence prevailed and was never institutionally abolished. It has never even been discussed. Those who could engage in this kind of discussion usually had money and thus did not need to engage in such discussion. The small part of society that tried to speak, write and shout about it was perceived as a marginal group. They even thought up the term "demschiza" (democratic schizophrenia) for it.[1]

The institutional inertia created a sense of absolute impunity. No external arbiter or protector existed in this system; whoever was in power could do as he or she pleased. The task of those who were not in power was to wait for a different setup, a different balance of power. There was no punishment or hope of punishment for those who transgressed authority. In this sense, the army was no different from other institutions. The question was where and to what extent the reality was covered up by money, which in some cases created a convincing façade of a "civilised Western world" that was enough to impress foreign tourists. These conditions kept society as depoliticised as possible. However, the situation has changed since the Bolotnaya Square protests in 2012. During those protests, the authorities realised that society was politicising and resorted to the old methods: violence and repression. In addition, there was much less money around at that time. But we will leave that to the economists.

---

1 "Shiza" (Russ. "шиза") is a slang word for "schizophrenia" and is also used metaphorically to mean "it's a mess, it's crazy". "Demschiza" (Russ. "демшиза") means "democratic schizophrenia" and began to be used in relation to the democratic politicians and public figures who sharply criticised the authorities. Peculiarly, it was not the authorities that first used the word, but rather people from the democratic camp. This was indicative of a split in the inner circle. The term was offensive and devalued the words of such people as Valeria Novodvorskaya, Galina Starovoitova, Viktor Shenderovich and others, who were shouting: "Something really bad is happening right now and it might lead to horrible consequences!" Nobody listened to them; they were "demschiza".

In March 2022, I watched a press conference of captured Russian soldiers in Ukraine (Interfax Ukraine, 2022). These were the very first days of the war, when the Russian authorities still hoped to take Kiev within a few hours and to walk through the streets victorious; the planned *Blitzkrieg* turned into a monstrous failure – not only from a military tactical point of view, but also strategically, as it proved the complete insanity of the Russian authorities and their misinterpretation of the situation. At the beginning of March, these Russian soldiers answered questions at a press conference, choking back tears. They recounted that their phones had been taken away from them on 23 February so they could not pass information to their relatives and that they were told to march on Kiev. Totally unprepared, they immediately got stuck in some swamp, their cars out of order, and had to walk through Ukrainian villages in a poor and broken state, the locals saying to them, "My dear, we have no fascists here, do not try to eliminate us." Then they were captured. It was so similar to the senseless and terrible storming of Grozny on New Year's Eve 1994 that it was hard to believe. True, there were no press conferences in 1994 and the news spread at a different speed. These men sobbed during the conference and were filled with remorse and horror at what they had done. Other soldiers like them had gone to Bucha to rape children. These are not different people, not different motor-rifle brigades (and any talk of how "Buryats" or "Chechens" are more brutal than "Rostov" or "Ryazan" people is not only xenophobic, but also methodologically pointless). No, they are the same people, from the same system. It is just that some of them were faced with an external arbiter and the prospect of punishment, while others have felt complete impunity.

The same emotions of horror and remorse, it seems to me after many conversations and interviews, accompanied the brutal mop-up operations during the Chechen wars. Nobody found out about anything, and all kinds of terrible things were done. For years, journalists and human rights activists toiled to uncover the crimes that had occurred during those wars. However, the fruits of their efforts never became anything like Watergate due to society's apoliticism. And secondly, despite these heroic efforts, they did not manage to achieve much. For instance, even today, there is no accurate data on the dead and missing, either for the first or the second war.

It is this impunity, it seems to me, that has determined the modus operandi of the Chechen authorities over the last fifteen to seventeen years. All Russian officials, from ministers to governors, were embedded in the

hierarchical system of violence and learnt to use this system to their own advantage. All Russian officials who were even a little observant knew that they did not enjoy 100 per cent immunity – staff turnover was a usual phenomenon, and the possibility of falling from grace was very real, as illustrated by the landmark arrest of Minister Alexey Ulyukayev in 2017. However, as this "rotation" was determined by no visible logic, no external, independent arbiter, the system continued to operate according to the law of the jungle: the person who is stronger will eat the rest. Ramzan Kadyrov understood this very well – and he still does – as evidenced by his chaotic and bloody purge of his ranks. Does he feel his own immunity and complete impunity? That is a difficult question, one that I have asked political analysts many times. On the one hand, Kadyrov is only one of many such "governors" who are complete masters of their own land but can be removed at any time. On the other hand, Kadyrov is obviously permitted a great deal more than others (the case of the Yangulbayev family is telling: a persecution for personal motives of revenge, on someone else's territory). To the question of who is afraid of whom – Kadyrov of Putin or Putin of Kadyrov – not a single political scientist could provide a clear answer. But it is clear that both of them fear each other, that the two systems converge, that despite an apparent collapse of logic there is no real contradiction here. Thus emerges a picture of absolute unpredictability, imbued with fear. The absence of intelligible logic, the absence of clear prohibitions, the endless arbitrariness of the situation all produce fear. In fact, all of Russian society is permeated by this fear, but Chechnya has become an area where the whole of Russia is mapped as if on a microchip. Taus Serganova said this during our interview for the film.

Convulsions of the Empire

There is another crucial and painful topic that cannot be avoided in this discussion. The imperial ambitions of the Russian Federation and its unbridled colonialist instinct, which have played such a tragic role in the current course of events bring us right back to the Chechnya wars. These wars are the direct and obvious consequence of the collapse of the Soviet empire and its hysterical attempts to preserve itself.

I am writing this text in Tbilisi, where I have been living for the last six months, and have just returned from a two-week trip to Riga, where TV Dozhd found a home after being expelled from Russia. I belong to the generation that grew up in the 1980s. My childhood coincided with the end of the Soviet Union. Add to that my good memory and my political alertness and commitment, which I have displayed ever since I was a small child. I remember talking to my parents about what a "tear gas cherry" was – in April 1989, this is what was used to break up a rally of the independence movement in Tbilisi. I vividly remember going by boat to the Baltic Sea every summer (today, I still feel at home there, though I have no idea if I am allowed to say that now). I remember my holiday friends, Latvian kids who usually lived in Riga; we would spend the summer together in the same village. I remember a letter from these friends that I received in Moscow in January 1991: "The Black Helmets shot four men" – they described the actions of the *OMON* special troops in Riga, who supported the Soviet authorities, broke up rallies and killed protesters and pro-independence activists. There were many such examples. Toponyms became synonymous with terrible crimes: Baku, "Black January", the Soviet army's suppression of political opposition; Soviet tanks in Vilnius. The empire had difficulty saying goodbye to the territories it occupied; for me, this was background knowledge. Thus, I always found it hard to hear about the "bloodless collapse of the USSR" – yes, only (only? just?) three people died in the 1991 coup d'état when the collapse of the union became a reality; their names are known. Usually, the fall of empires involves far more victims. However, the chain of bloody conflicts on the territories of the former Soviet republics, before and after the August coup, makes it impossible to speak of bloodlessness. The two Chechen wars are a case in point, and an example of how the empire, in some cases, does not cede its occupied lands, especially if has allies in those territories – the Kadyrovs have become such allies for Russia.

Why do I refer to my own past? Firstly, there is the fact that for me as an activist my own past is a possible methodological tool, since activists have a little more freedom in this regard than academic researchers. However, I do so primarily because I was very aware of the gap between my generation and the generation born after 1991. What had been, for me, not only the subject of constant reflection, but also a tangible factor in my personal life, was, from 1991, recoded into a murky and long history, which was never taught in school. In a sense, the Soviet Union fell into oblivion at

lightning speed – this was a welcome fate for people who sincerely hated it, but also a great danger that no one grasped back in the 1990s. The speed of this rupture is the subject of other research and is brilliantly articulated in the title of the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak's book: It Was Forever, Until It Ended (Yurchak, 2021).

In 2014, I was asked to give a lecture on the Chechen wars to young people who worked for certain press institutions. They were excellent professional journalists and it was important to me that my talk did not sound arrogant to them. I started the presentation by asking how many union republics they thought the USSR had. Answers ranged from seven to thirty-five. It is impossible to imagine Soviet pupils giving such an answer; certain information was hammered into us. But people born after the collapse of the union found themselves in a sort of timelessness, in a situation without a past – because society did not have the strength for full-fledged reflection. Even in the best schools, where history was well taught, this period was condensed into a couple of pages in new textbooks. I was aware of the situation of the union republics in my childhood because my own friends wrote to me about the shootings in Riga. People born after 1991 lived in a situation in which Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Lithuania were separate countries. To travel to Armenia, say, you do not need a Schengen visa, but you do not need one to travel to Turkey either. However, to travel to Latvia or Estonia, you need one. The watershed already runs along a completely different line. And here I find a question arising in my mind. I understand why Vladimir Putin, a deeply Soviet man who grew up and became an adult in the Soviet system, has a fascination with the empire. I also understand how ambition can grow in a man who has been in power for twenty-two years. But where does the resentment among young people come from? These are young people who, for better or worse, have no clue about history. Where do they get the idea that Ukraine is not an independent state and therefore “we” can invade it? What propagandistic myths and explanations serve to send people to war?

On this, I have a thesis that is difficult to confirm or deny – by the way, my research algorithm is unclear here, so everything remains at the level of intuition. My position is partly confirmed by the literary and cultural scholar Alexander Etkind, who recently expressed similar views in an interview for my programme on *TV Dozhd* (Nemzer, 2022). Young people go to war not because they have a clear view of Ukraine's sovereignty or because there is an ideological incentive or a strong belief or ethical

attitude, but rather because the institutional inertia of fear and violence does not leave space for people to reflect. When the demand for reflection arises, propagandists wrap it up in a series of meaningless slogans.

Modern Russian propaganda is another issue; on the one hand, it is massive and efficient, but on the other hand, if you look closely, it functions rather sloppily at the semantic level. The public is not offered a comprehensible version of daily events, the ends do not fit together, there is no logic; senior comrades of the Russian propagandists, such as Julius Streicher or Joseph Goebbels, would be extremely unhappy with such propaganda. To give an example: on 14 July 2022, a missile attack was carried out by the Russian army on Vinnitsa, killing, among others, three children. The internet was full of pictures of the 4-year-old Lisa. Russian propaganda claimed that "the Nazis were there". Even when the monstrous crimes in Bucha were being investigated, the propagandists tried to invent something: they explained that the bodies were not corpses but dummies. These explanations were immediately shown to be untrue, but no one cared anymore. However, after the attack in Vinnitsa, the propaganda went completely overboard. Where were the Nazis? In the medical centre? Was the 4-year-old girl also a Nazi? Or is her mother an important member of a terrorist group? There were no such explanations. It turned out that merely saying that "the Nazis were there" was enough. Propaganda could spare itself the trouble of logic and complicated interpretations. Society would be satisfied because the unconscious fear is stronger than the demand for clarity. The absence of logic and a clear definition of prohibitions reinforces this fear.

The parallels between the current war and the wars in Chechnya are manifold: the demoralised Russian army that does not understand its mission or the meaning of what is happening; the battle with an enemy that is very aware of its mission and thus has a huge advantage; mop-ups; torture; kidnappings; a sense of total impunity; the absence of any intelligible logic; the lack of ideology; and, finally, on a rhetorical level, its framing not as a war but as a counter-terrorist operation – not as a war, but as a special operation (against the Nazis).

It must be said that when the rhetorical level begins to crack and fail, this gives a "schizophrenic" impression (to use Snyder's terminology), but it does not invalidate either violence or fear (Snyder 2022). Just as it became possible to say the word "war" in Chechnya in 2019, the word "war" is not completely banned in the case of Ukraine now either. The ban is a useful instrument against opposition activists, who can be criminally charged for

using the word. But the propagandists themselves are no longer able to hold the line, and every now and then they use the word. With the present level of violence, however, words cease to mean anything.

On 11 December 1994, when Russian tanks entered Grozny, I was 14 years old; I remember feeling hatred, nausea and shame. Twenty-eight years later, I am living with these feelings again – and I know that they will stay forever. I can name the start dates of both wars, although even these should be viewed with caution: the shadow war with the Chechens began a couple of years before 1994, and the war in Ukraine really started eight years before 24 February 2022. Nevertheless, let us agree that we can mark the start of Russia's full-scale invasions with precise dates. However, just as I cannot give a date for the end of the Chechen war, so the present war is, in a sense, endless. I believe Ukraine will win, and I hope that it will more than anything – and that, for Ukraine, such a victory would be the end of the war. For Russia, however, there can be no end, and it will always carry the legacy of crimes against humanity. The only question remaining is how the cheap publicity tactic of renaming a "war" as a "special operation" has twice produced such a monstrous result. I can understand how the bureaucratic apparatus around Putin came to this decision: I think it is the result of the institutional inertia of violence. For more than a hundred years (beginning in 1917), the regime has been functioning based on forceful decisions made by those in power. There are simply no other functional mechanisms – and these attitudes were not changed in the ten years after the fall of the Soviet Union. I often hear non-Russians ask: but who did it? Was it Putin? Was it the secret grey cardinals? Or is society really hungry for war?

The problem is that there is no real answer to these questions. Of course, it was Putin; it was his insane and criminal decision. But the bureaucratic machine around him had no other option but to support him – and he knows this.

As for society, I do not know. I will, most probably, be looking for an answer to how it was possible to fall into this cheap publicity trap of renaming the war and sending your children to kill and to be killed in a "special operation" until the end of my days.

References

Arendt, Hannah (1951) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, HBJ books, San Diego, CA.

Assmann, Aleida (2006) *Memory, Individual and Collective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Epple, Nikolay (2020) *Neudobnoe proshloe: pamyat' o gosudarstvennykh prestupleniyakh v Rossii i drugikh stranakh [An Inconvenient Past. Remembrance of State Crimes in Russia and Other Countries]*, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Moscow.

Etkind, Aleksandr (2018) *Krivoe gore. Pamyat' o nepogrebennykh [Crooked Grief. The Memory of the Unburied]*, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Moscow.

Hirsch, Marianne (2012) *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Columbia University Press, New York.

Interfax Ukraine (2022) Press Conference of Captured Russian Intelligence Officers, 9 March, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0_knKR2X7s&t=729s> (accessed 9 March 2023).

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2016) Rodstvenniki Betel'gerieva zayavlyut o bezdeystvii politsii [Betelgeriev's Relatives Accuse Police of Inaction], 4 April, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/280274/>.

Kavkazskiy Uzel (2020) "Meduza" rasskazala o novoy taktike presledovaniya geev v Chechne ["Meduza" Reveals New Tactics of Harassment of Gays in Chechnya], 2 July, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/351478/> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Lambert, Alan, et al. (2009) How Does Collective Memory Create a Sense of the Collective?, in *Memory in Mind and Culture* (eds. Pascal Boyer and James Wertsch), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Meduza (2019) V Chechne snova presleduyut i pytayut geev. S nachala dekabrya, vozmozhno, ubity neskol'ko chelovek [Gays Are Being Persecuted and Tortured again in Chechnya. Several People May Have Been Killed since the Beginning of December], 14 January, <https://meduza.io/feature/2019/01/14/v-chechne-snova-presleduyut-i-pytayut-geev-s-nachala-dekabrya-vozmozhno-ubity-neskolko-chelovek> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Milashina, Elena (2018) Chechen-geyt. 18+ [Chechen Gate. 18+], *Novaya Gazeta*, 24 December, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/12/23/79043-tayna-za-zheleznoy-dveryu> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Milashina, Elena (2019) Oyub osvobozhden [Oyub Is Free], *Novaya Gazeta*, 20 March, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/03/19/79926-oyub-osvobozhden> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Milashina, Elena (2022) Kaka ya spasla vraga Kadyrova, kotorogo on sozdal sebe sam [How I Saved an Enemy of Kadyrov's that He Had Created Himself], *Novaya Gazeta*, 28 January, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2022/01/28/kak-ia-spasla-vraga-kadyrova-kotorogo-on-sozdal-sebe-sam> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Nastoyashchee vremya (2019) Novye presledovaniya geev v ChechnePravozashchitniki govoryat, oni budut prodolzhat'sya [New Persecution of Gays in Chechnya. Human Rights Activists Say They Will Continue], 11 January, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/lgbt-chechnya-persecution/29705200.html> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Nemzer, Anna (2020) *Zapreshchennaya pamyat' chechenskikh voin* [*The Banished Memory of Chechen Wars*], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1RF-py72yI&t=291s>.

Nemzer, Anna (2022) Ideology Is in the Absence of Ideology. Delayed Violence. Historical Illiteracy. Etkind, Nemzer. *TV Dozhd*, 25 July. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9AAiaDfyys&t=695s> (accessed 14 March 2023).

OVD News (2016) Rodstvenniki pokhishchennogo v Chechne barda soobshchili o bezdeystvii politsii [Relatives of the Bard Kidnapped in Chechnya Report Police Inaction], 4 April, <https://ovd.news/express-news/2016/04/04/rodstvenniki-pohishchennogo-v-chechne-barda-soobshchili-o-bezdeystvii> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Snyder, Timothy (2022) We Should Say It. Russia Is Fascist, *New York Times*, 19 May, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/opinion/russia-fascism-ukraine-putin.html> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Trutnieva, Olena (2022) Dobroho vechora! Mi z Ukraini! [Good Evening! We Are from Ukraine!], *Facebook*, 4 April, <https://www.facebook.com/trutnieva/posts/5135219266515816> (accessed 14 March 2023).

Yurchak, Aleksey (2021) *Eto bylo navsegda, poka ne konchilos'. Poslednee sovetskoe pokolenie [It Was Forever, Until It Ended. The Last Soviet Generation]*, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Moscow.

John Russell

Shamil Basayev: Mythical Chechen or Murderous Terrorist? A Polemical Essay

Abstract: Few individuals in recent decades have epitomised the freedom fighter–terrorist dichotomy more than Shamil Basayev, the charismatic Chechen insurgent who masterminded the terrifying sieges at Budennovsk, Dubrovka (Moscow) and Beslan. In today's increasingly polarised world, it is more important than ever to avoid, in any conflict, simplistic determinations of who the "good guys" are and who the "bad guys" are. This short polemic, therefore, revisits the context in which Basayev operated and demonstrates that there are at least two sides to every story. It also seeks to illustrate how fundamental shifts in Western policy can lead to inconsistencies and a lack of even-handedness in pursuing the perceived best interests of the West. Although this research covers events that occurred a decade or more ago, it has been updated to ensure its relevance to the currently fragile state of East–West relations. Particular emphasis is placed on the invaluable role of independent front-line journalists in reporting the truth as they see it, at great danger to themselves.

Keywords: Chechnya, Russia, Ukraine, Terrorism, Basayev, Conflict Resolution, Peace Studies

> *The line separating good and evil passes not through states,*
> *nor between classes, nor between political parties either –*
> *but right through every human heart.*
>
> *—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (Gulag Archipelago, Volume II, Part 4, Chapter 1)*

For those of us who witnessed and wrote about the Russo-Chechen wars (1994–1996 and 1999–2009), Putin's "Special Military Operation" against Ukraine since 24 February 2022 has evoked a feeling of déjà vu. The brutal flattening of cities and utilities, the underestimation of the opponent, the gross overestimation of Russian capabilities, the lack of concern about civilian casualties amongst their adversaries or the welfare of their own troops, as well as the demonising of their military opponents as radicals, fascists or terrorists, have all been very familiar.

What *was* different was the reaction in Western capitals to Russia's attacks. In contrast to the critically significant military, economic and

political support that has been given to Ukraine in its struggle against the "evil (Russian) aggressor", Chechnya was treated as an international pariah. Yet it is the conflict in Ukraine that provides grounds for re-examining whether the West was right to support Vladimir Putin's Russia against Chechnya and, for the purposes of this essay, for reassessing the role, conduct and legacy of the Chechen guerrilla leader Shamil Basayev.

Characterising the Russo-Chechen confrontation as "Russian might against the Chechens' right", we called in vain for democratic Western governments to understand what the Chechens were fighting for and to recognise that the odds were overwhelmingly against them. Back then, however, we were led to believe that the greatest threat to Western security was (Islamic) terrorism; especially after 9/11, this belief morphed into the "global war on terror". Russia was welcomed as a stalwart ally in this struggle, particularly in the years 2001–2004.

Unfortunately for Basayev's reputation in the West, it was during this period that he claimed responsibility for organising the gruesome hostage crises in a Moscow theatre (Dubrovka, 2002) and a school in Beslan (2004). Basayev and the units he led were classified as "terrorist", even though he was not present at either siege and, in both cases, the vast majority of victims were killed by Russian "rescue" forces and not the hostage-takers. Consequently, few tears were shed in the West when he was finally "eliminated", purportedly by Russian forces, on the eve of the G8 in St Petersburg in July 2006.

At least amongst Western allies, the verdict on Basayev seemed final: the Chechen was a murderous terrorist and the world was better off without him. However, before (2005) and after (2007) Basayev's death,[1] I utilised both insurgency theory and a non-dualistic approach to the Russo-Chechen confrontation to conclude that, while he certainly was an entrepreneur of violence (in an already extremely violent conflict), he was by no means the crazed, cowardly, evil and savage psychopath he was portrayed as in the West and Russia. Indeed, as there are Chechens fighting on both sides in the current conflict in Ukraine, it is tempting to consider which side Basayev and his troops would have chosen. In October 2022,

1 See John Russell, "Basayev: The Beast of Beslan", in Stephen Shenfield's Research Report *Chechnya and Russia: A Post-Beslan Symposium*, published in *Johnson's Russia List*, *No. 9024*, 29 January 2005; reworked and updated in my *Chechnya – Russia's "War on Terror"* (Russell, 2007: 114–121).

the Ukrainian *Rada* approved legislation to recognise the Chechen state of "Ichkeria" as an independent colony of Russia, and – admittedly in a case of mistaken identity[2] – recognised Basayev as a key figure in the freedom struggle.

Basayev's high point in the Chechen resistance came in June 1995, within eleven days of losing eleven close relatives (including his wife, children, mother and sister) in a Russian bombing raid on his Chechen home (Smith, 2004). It is impossible for most of us to put ourselves in the 30-year-old Basayev's position following this terrible personal tragedy. Given the role of the blood feud and a warrior's dignity in Chechen culture, this raid must have been calculated to elicit the most violent of responses. One of the pioneers of terrorism theory, Alex Schmid, wrote in 1988 that, during a time of violent politics (which Chechnya certainly experienced in its wars with Russia), if the state resorts to assassinations, state terrorism (torture, death squads, disappearances, concentration camps), massacres, internal war or genocide, then one can expect the non-state actor to resort to terrorism, massacres, guerrilla war and insurgency (Schmid, 1988: pp. 58–59).

Basayev took his revenge by leading a group of fighters to occupy a hospital in Budennovsk, across the border in Russia. In a scenario that was to be repeated in the sieges in Moscow and Beslan, almost all of the 129 civilian victims were killed not by the hostage-takers, but by the Russian forces attempting to storm the hospital.[3] The negotiations with the Russian prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, screened live on Russian TV, and the safe passage back to Chechnya granted to Basayev and his fighters, made Shamil a national hero. They also helped bring the first war to its conclusion, marked by the signing of the Khasavyurt peace accord in

---

2 On 18 October 2022, *The New Voice of the Ukraine* misinterpreted a tweet by Oleksiy Danilov, Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, in which he praises Chechen independence fighters, from Shamil to Dudayev, confusing the nineteenth-century Avar leader ("Imam Shamil") with Basayev, who is described as a "Chechen soldier, leader of the Chechen movement for freedom from Russia, one of the leaders of the Republic of Ichkeria" (The New Voice of Ukraine, 2022).

3 In a popular Russian film, *Chistilishche* (Purgatory), released in 1998 by ORT Video, the director, Aleksandr Nevzorov, presents a heroically successful rescue mission by Russian forces in a hospital seized by Chechens, a clear allusion to (and distortion of) the events at Budennovsk.

August 1996.[4] Surely Basayev's status as the embodiment of the mythical Chechen warrior was safe for all time.

Yet, as Winston Churchill discovered in Britain in 1945, even the greatest wartime heroes do not always fare well in post-war elections amongst populations craving peace above all else. In January 1997, Basayev's failure to be elected by a Chechen electorate, which opted instead for Aslan Maskhadov, clearly hurt his pride. Predictably, he became a thorn in the side of moderate leaders such as Maskhadov and Akhmed Zakayev. As his former financial backers (notably Boris Berezovsky) withdrew their support and offered it instead to Maskhadov, Basayev's reliance on funding from external Islamic organisations grew and he became more militant in rhetoric and action. Publicly, he identified less with traditional Chechen Sufi-based religion and more with Wahhabism, a stricter brand of Salafi Islam imported by, amongst others, Basayev's fellow guerrilla leader, the Arab Ibn al-Khattab. This was good news for the Russian authorities, which sought to label all Chechen oppositionists, from Maskhadov to Basayev, as "terrorists". There is reason to believe that it was Basayev's desire to regain his former power and influence that led him, along with Khattab, to undertake the ill-fated invasion of neighbouring Dagestan in August 1999. This, alongside the deadly apartment block explosions the following month in Moscow and other Russian cities, which were falsely attributed to Khattab and Basayev (and are still the subject of heated controversy to this day), provided Putin with the pretext to launch the second Russo-Chechen war.[5]

Unsurprisingly, the renewed Russian assault on Chechnya, as in the first war, brought a degree of unity to the hitherto deeply divided Chechen opposition. Basayev again demonstrated his personal bravery when, in the evacuation of Grozny in January 2000, he stepped on a landmine and had his foot amputated, with only local anaesthetic, by the celebrated Chechen surgeon Khassan Bayev. His audacious guerrilla attacks on Russian forces and their Chechen proxies proved once more what a skilled insurgent leader he was. Without doubt, however, it was the spectacular hostage-taking of civilians in Moscow and Beslan that earned him the title of "Russia's Terrorist No. 1" (Fuller, 2006) and "Russia's Osama bin Laden"

4 It is instructive to note that, during the Moscow theatre siege, Putin declared that there would be "no more Khasavyurts, no more Budennovsks" (Felgenhauer, 2002).

5 For an excellent account of warring Chechen factions during the inter-war period of independence (1996–1999), see Souleimanov (2005).

(The Washington Post, 2006), as well as putting a $10 million bounty on his head.

The Moscow theatre siege of October 2002 remains the subject of conspiracy theories to this day and there is no doubt that not all the salient facts have been released in the public domain. It is generally accepted that virtually all the 130 civilian victims were killed by the toxic gas pumped into the theatre by Russian special forces.[6] Suffice it so say that the incident seriously undermined the World Chechen Congress, which opened in Copenhagen days after the siege had ended and had been convened to seek a peaceful solution to the Russo-Chechen war. That such an outcome manifestly served the interests of both Putin and Basayev has led to as-yet-unproven claims of some level collusion between the two.

While doubts linger about who should be held responsible for the Moscow tragedy, it is unanimously agreed that, in September 2004, Basayev went too far at Beslan. In a series of interviews following the school siege, Basayev not only confessed that he had been wrong, but also sought to provide the context in which the operation had been planned. He cited the 40,000 Chechen children that had been killed thus far in the conflict and admitted that he regretted the deaths of almost 200 children in Beslan. He claimed that he had underestimated Putin's determination to end the siege at any cost and warned that violent attacks would continue to be carried out until Russia ended its genocidal war against the Chechen people.[7] Basayev's message to Putin was simply: "You stop your war crimes and we will stop ours."[8]

In subsequent interviews screened on ABC's *Nightline* (29 July 2005), with the independent Russian journalist Andrei Babitsky (see below), and on Channel 4 in the United Kingdom (3 February 2005), Basayev attempted to justify his actions in detail in terms of seeking a negotiated settlement with Putin both to end the war and lead to an independent Chechen state within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), that is, "not in

---

6 In addition, all forty of the hostage-takers, including the notorious "black widows", were shot dead while unconscious by Russian forces. For a comprehensive analysis of this and the Beslan siege, see Dunlop (2006).

7 The original declaration was published in full on the pro-independence Chechen website *Daymokh* (no longer available). However, the full text was recently reproduced in Zakaev (2022: pp. 333–340).

8 For a detailed analysis of who was to blame for the siege, see Ó Tuathail (2009).

Russia, but with Russia". He called for the Russian president to stop the violence or resign. Clearly, in 2005, Russia was still a strategic partner of the West and Chechnya was deemed unready and/or unfit for international recognition; however, with the benefit of hindsight, had Basayev's solutions not been dismissed so peremptorily, might we not have been better prepared for Putin's strategy and tactics in Ukraine today?

The dilemma over Basayev's legacy is best characterised by the divergent views of two brave women journalists, one Russian and one American, who were both effectively assassinated due to their opposition to Putin's wars: Anna Politkovskaya (to whom my 2007 monograph on Chechnya was dedicated) and Marie Colvin (who was the first to review the book). Politkovskaya had been an intermediary at Dubrovka and was due to play a similar role in Beslan, but she was poisoned en route. (She survived this poisoning only to be shot dead outside her Moscow apartment in October 2006.) Back in 1995, after the Budennovsk siege, she had refused a request from Basayev for an interview on principle, accusing the Chechen of cowardly attacks on civilians and children.[9] Colvin, who travelled alongside Basayev's guerrilla fighters during the early years of the second Chechen war, noted his courteous acceptance of her presence, along with his obvious leadership skills (Colvin, 2007). A Russian rocket killed her in Homs, Syria, in February 2012.

A third courageous and independently minded journalist who played a significant role in the Chechen conflict was the aforementioned Andrei Babitsky, who was also prevented by Russian security forces from going to Beslan to serve as an intermediary. Previously, in 2000, he had been "traded" by the Russians to a Chechen field commander in exchange for two Russian military prisoners (on the mistaken assumption of the Russian authorities that this would rid them of this persistent critic once and for all). Instead, he turned up in London in 2003 to help acquit Akhmed Zakaev on charges of terrorism and, of course, provided the American ABC TV channel with the controversial interview with Basayev. The Russian authorities, particularly the security forces, regarded Babitsky as a traitor and life in Russia became dangerous for him.

---

9 For her own account of the poisoning and her refusal to interview Basayev, see Belfast Telegraph (2008).

Paradoxically, in 2014, according to Babitsky (though this is denied by his employers), he was sacked by *Radio Liberty* for supporting the right of Crimeans to vote on whether or not to join Russia. He went to live in separatist Donetsk and tried to set up a radio station called "Dialogue" to promote discussions between what he called the two cultural traditions in Ukraine. He died of a heart attack, aged 57, in Donetsk on 1 April 2022 (RFI, 2022), as he witnessed his well-intentioned initiative metaphorically going up in flames. In a remark reminiscent of Solzhenitsyn's observation in the epigraph to this essay, he commented: "Humans should remain human in any circumstances, and that is difficult to achieve in times of war. Hatred towards the enemy twists human feelings and we need to hear calm voices" (Walker, 2015).

It is worth taking note of Babitsky's justification for his opposition to the wars in Chechnya and how he linked this to the post-2014 situation in Ukraine: "At that time I felt for the Chechens, because I thought that if these people want to live by their own traditions and move away from Russia then they should be able to. Probably we should have listened to those moods and not killed so many people." While, in relation to the situation in Ukraine in 2015, he writes: "It's the same here. I think Russia is playing a significant role here, but the reasons are not to be found in Russia, they are internal. This is a civil war, where the interests of two parts of Ukraine that consider themselves linked to two cultural traditions are clashing with each other" (Walker, 2015). Whether or not one agrees with Babitsky's conclusions, it is refreshing to hear such a cool, rational voice, informed by experience, amid the increasingly heated exchanges relating to political and military conflicts, be it in Ukraine or Chechnya. Unfortunately, those who insist that their viewpoint alone is valid are currently drowning out such voices of reason.

Clearly this applies to both Chechnya in general and Basayev in particular. Understandably, the victims of Budennovsk, Dubrovka and Beslan, and their relatives, are unlikely to regard Shamil Basayev as anything other than a murderous terrorist. On the other hand, those tens (hundreds?) of thousands who have suffered at the hands of Russian forces in the long-running conflict are more likely to share the view of Chechnya-Ichkeria's current prime minister in exile, Akhmed Zakayev. He was quoted by the BBC as saying, on 12 July 2006, when commenting on his erstwhile colleague's death, "There is simply no justification for what happened in the school and I know that Shamil Basayev regretted it in his heart and soul

… Yet I do not believe that history will remember Shamil Basayev primarily for Beslan, but for his 15-year fight against Russian occupation" (BBC News, 2006).

Such polarised viewpoints have become commonplace in our world, suffering as it is from extreme "complexity fatigue". Surely, it is argued, both sides cannot be right, so we are left with a winner-takes-all, either-or situation. Yet, as I have attempted to demonstrate, both sides have their own perceptions of reality, framed largely by how the world is presented to them through the media and other sources of information that they consume.

Of course, as a citizen of a Western liberal democracy with a background in Peace Studies, I do not condone, let alone glorify, Basayev's violence. However, one cannot ignore the context – the blatant provocations and the brutality endured by Chechens, historically and today – even if the conflict has been "chechenised" under Chechnya's pro-Putin leader, the controversial Ramzan Kadyrov (Matejova, 2013). For, although Kadyrov's present autocratic regime has succeeded in reducing the levels of violence, its long-term relationship with Russia (as against that with Putin) has yet to be determined. In many ways, in contrast to Basayev's formulation in 2005, this relationship may be characterised as "in Russia, but not (always) with Russia".[10]

In conclusion, we should avoid taking the easy option of concluding that Shamil Basayev was, in reality, *both* a mythical Chechen (for some) and a murderous terrorist (for others). For most people, he can only be one or the other. Personally, I suspect that the real truth is that he was neither!

References

BBC News (2006) *Rebels' Dilemma after Basayev Death*, 12 July, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5168984.stm> (accessed 10 January 2023).

10 On Kadyrov's creation of "a state within a state", see Lipman (2015); on the reduction in violence under Kadyrov, see Russell (2014), Chapter 7.

Belfast Telegraph (2008) *Anna Politkovskaya: Putin, Poison and My Struggle for Freedom* <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/anna-politkovskaya-putin-poison-and-my-struggle-for-freedom-28200615.htm> (accessed 17 January 2023).

Charlton, Angela (1999) *Solzhenitsyn Backs Russia Campaign*, AP News, <https://apnews.com/article/3488b2f1da509a324cc2ca013e7f7675> (accessed 12 January 2023).

Colvin, Marie (2007) *Review of "Chechnya – Russia's 'War on Terror'"*, Frontline Club, <http://frontlineclub.com/news/2007/08/chechnya---russias-war-on-terror.html> (accessed 17 January 2023).

Dunlop, John B. (2006) *The 2002 Dubrovka and 2004 Beslan Hostage Crises: A Critique of Russian Counter-Terrorism,* ibidem-Verlag, Stuttgart.

Felgenhauer, Pavel (2002) After the Theatre, the Drama Continues. *New Statesman,* 4 November.

Fuller, Liz (2006) *Chechnya: The Rise of Russia's 'Terrorist No.1'* <https://www.rferl.org/a/1069537.html> (accessed 10 January 2023).

Lipman, Maria (2015) Ramzan Kadyrov: A Challenge to the Kremlin. *Commentary*, 28 April.

Matejova, Miriam (2013) Russian "Chechenization" and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya. *International Journal of World Peace* 2, 9–34.

The New Voice of Ukraine (2022) *Ukraine Recognizes the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria*, <https://english.nv.ua/nation/nv-analyzes-rumors-of-top-level-political-shake-ups-ukraine-news-50277622.html> (accessed 17 January 2023).

Ó Tuathail, Gearóid (2009) Placing Blame: Making Sense of Beslan. *Political Geography* 28, 4–15.

RFI (2022) *Russian War Reporter Andrei Babitsky Dies at 57*, 1 April, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/russian-war-reporter-andrei-babitsky-dies-at-57> (accessed 12 January 2023).

Russell, John (2007) *Chechnya – Russia's "War on Terror"*, Routledge, Abingdon.

Russell, John (2014) Ramzan Kadyrov's "Illiberal" Peace in Chechnya, in *Chechnya at War and Beyond* (eds. Anne Le Herou et al.), Routledge, Abingdon.

Schmid, Alex P. (1988) *Political Terrorism*, North-Holland, Amsterdam.

Smith, Sebastian (2004) *Viewpoint: Top Chechen Commanders*, BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5168984.stm> (accessed 17 January 2023).

Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr (1973) *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956*, HarperCollins, New York.

Souleimanov, Emil (2005) Chechnya, Wahhabism and the Invasion of Dagestan. *Middle Eastern Review of International Affairs* 9(4), 48–71.

Walker, Shaun (2015) Former Kremlin Critic Changes Tack to Launch Television Station in Donetsk, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/10/putin-russia-donetsk-andrei-babitsky> (accessed 10 January 2023).

The Washington Post (2006) *Death of a Terrorist Shamil Basayev, a Chechen Warlord Was Russia's Osama bin Laden*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2006/07/11/death-of-a-terrorist-span-classbankheadshamil-basayev-a-chechen-warlord-was-russias-osama-bin-ladenspan/34f705cd-889c-4c92-b68c-7a39db9f671e/> (accessed 10 January 2023).

Zakaev, Akhmed (2022) *Russia, Chechnya, and the West, 2000–2006*, Academica Press, Washington, DC.

Photos (Part V)

Since 2022, several streets in Ukraine (picture: Kriviy Rig) were renamed after personalities of the Chechen movement of independence (source: Harold Chambers, <https://twitter.com/chambersharold8/status/1612049328432115712/photo/2>, accessed 12 March 2023).

Concluding Thoughts

The Role of Memories in Conflict and Statebuilding in Chechnya (1986–2023)

The title of the book, *Fighting for Self-Determination, Participation and Control in Chechnya: Conflict, Statebuilding and the Role of Memory Narratives*, captures, firstly, the different functions that collective memory has assumed in Chechnya since the beginning of Perestroika in the mid-1980s. Secondly, it refers to the political background against which specific memories were activated. These two primary conceptual tasks – to examine the role of memory narratives and to place them in the context of state collapse, statebuilding and conflict – are approached differently in the individual contributions: some authors specifically address issues of collective memory, while others focus more on the political context in Chechnya and Russia. This concluding part will relate these two main thematic threads to each other conceptionally, in a spirit of "grounded theory", based on observations inspired by the contributions to this volume.

If we now draw some final conclusions about the conceptual connection between statebuilding processes and conflicts on the one hand and historical memories on the other, two main findings emerge from the analysis of developments in Chechnya between 1986 and 2023.

Observation 1: Narratives as a Link between Memories and Political Action

It can be observed, firstly, that memories themselves have no automatic impact on political action. Rather, as the mobilising role of the memory of the Stalinist deportation in pre-war Chechnya in the early 1990s shows, memories connect to a backdrop of historical traumas and structural grievances, which can be activated in certain contexts by certain actors. This activation of memories in certain contexts happens not directly, but

by associating the memories with broader narratives transmitting certain political messages.

This observation is supported by the developments in Chechnya, where historical memory can take on different political or military roles depending on the narrative in which it is embedded.

Five general periods were examined in this book, each of which demonstrates specific socio-political functions of historical memory.

During the first two periods, that is, the period of Perestroika (1986–1991) and the period of Chechnya's de facto independence under Dzhokhar Dudayev (1991–1996), references to the traumatic past of the North Caucasians were linked to a general narrative of decolonisation, propagating Chechnya's detachment from the Soviet Union and the creation and consolidation of a (specifically North Caucasian) statehood. However, the two periods diverge in terms of their ideas of what this statehood should look like. During Perestroika (1986–1991), the Chechen national movement, which was, at that point, still with the Ingush and not explicitly anti-Russian, fought for more self-determination and sovereignty, but not yet for independence. In relation to the representation of the past, this meant that a new, locally specific historiography was emerging, narrated by North Caucasians for North Caucasians, but still connected stylistically, linguistically and in terms of content via a strong umbilical cord to the "womb" of Soviet historiography. The second period (1991–1996) involved a more radical form of nationalism and marked the first phase of Chechnya's de facto independence. If history and historical memory were used in the previous period to consolidate the North Caucasians' right to self-determination, they now served political and military mobilisation, and emphasised the difference or enmity between Grozny and Moscow.

The third period discussed in the book, representing the second phase of Chechen de facto independence (1996–1999), was marked not only by state collapse and other political and military post-war turbulences in Chechnya, but also by an intensifying confrontation between different religious groups. It is interesting that during this phase the political use of historical memory tended to fade into the background. This demobilisation of memory most likely relates to memory being replaced by religion in its mobilising role, with the followers of Sufi Islam (President Aslan Maskhadov) and those of Islamist-Salafist faith (Shamil Basayev and other local politicians and warlords) as the main actors. On the Russian side, too, there were strong internal divisions over how the "Chechen question"

should be handled in terms of political status and bilateral relations. The proponents of a cooperative solution, who tried to "rehabilitate" Chechen history and Chechen national heroes as an enriching element of the past of the Russian Federation, saw themselves confronted by hardliners who insisted on a forcible political and socio-cultural reintegration of Chechnya and the Chechens into Russia under Moscow's control. These hardliners gained the upper hand in the years that followed the conclusion of the Khasavyurt ceasefire agreement in 1996, and especially upon Vladimir Putin's coming to power in 1999.

As a logical continuation of these developments, the fourth period under consideration in this book (1999–2021) unfolded in a context of increasing authoritarianism and the delegation of the monopoly of power to the local elites under father and son Akhmad and Ramzan Kadyrov ("Chechenisation"). History was not only used, but actively constructed to re-define and consolidate the new political alliances. On the one hand, an increasingly eccentric cult of personality was constructed around the Kadyrovs. This cult is linked to the communication of a certain political interpretation of the past, namely as a history of friendship and cooperation between Chechnya and Russia, and to the repression of all alternative mnemonic narratives that could somehow compete with this official version of history. On the other hand, however, from different oral histories and communicative memories discussed in this book, it is clear that large parts of Chechen society, in Chechnya itself and in the diaspora, remembers the two Russian invasions as traumatic and cruel events, and thus sees Moscow and its local proxies as enemies. However, it would be simplistic and therefore wrong to claim that the latent conflict in Chechnya is limited to a juxtaposition of the traumatised, nationalist, pro-independence population and diaspora, on the one hand, and the authoritarian representatives of the state in Moscow and Grozny, on the other. Rather, the major patterns of conflict are always reflected within Chechen society, with sections of the population supporting the underground and other sections swearing allegiance to the local government (and thus Moscow). These intra-societal splits, which are always fuelled by opposing narratives of the past, make a possible future re-escalation of the Chechen conflict so dangerous because it would no longer be "only" a conflict between between territorially defined ethnic groups, or between society and state; instead, the dividing lines would run right through Chechen society and sometimes even through families.

As reflected in Part V (2022–2023), in this ambiguous, not to say schizophrenic, situation of increasing internal mnemonic divisions in society, the new generation of Chechens that has grown up since 1999 is more radical and more contradictory, as is reflected in the ambivalent role of Chechens in the Russian-Ukrainian war. In the context of the new war that began in February 2022, historical memory has once again become an important tool of (military) mobilisation, although the respective narratives with which it is associated are diametrically opposed: on the one hand, members of the Chechen diaspora in Europe fight on the Ukrainian side and refer to "Ichkerian" heroes to invoke the claim of Chechen independence and to discredit the pro-Russian government under Ramzan Kadyrov. On the other hand, local elites in Grozny cultivate the historical image of the great Soviet "war" and "victory" of 1941–1945, in which Russians and Chechens fought side by side. This memory confirms, since 2022 more than ever, the official narrative of Grozny's loyalty to Moscow and underlines the importance of the Chechen leadership, expecially Kadyrov and his comrades in arms, as security partners and guarantors of stability in the region.

Observation 2: Memories as a Display of Agency and Political Power

The importance of political actors as mnemonic "storytellers" and translators of the past and the political present is a second, crucial finding that emerges from the analysis of the situation in Chechnya since 1986. From the Chechen and Russian political elites to the mnemonic actors in civil society, all make ample use of images from the past in the formulation of their political narratives. This reference to collective memories is by no means only about recounting the past; rather, it is about justifying the present and building the future (Wertsch and Batiashvili, 2012: 37). Moreover, the competition and sometimes aggressive dominance of certain mnemonic narratives also highlights the distribution of power between the different actors. Since actors and their political projects have changed significantly

between 1986 and 2023, the dominating topics and versions of the past have too.

As we have seen from the various contributions in this book, the social representation of one and the same event varies and can perform different functions depending on the context in which it is activated by different actors with differing political narratives. For instance, two contributions in Part IV both deal with the collective memory of the two Chechnya wars. Marat Iliyasov studies the wars from the perspective of the Chechen diaspora, in whose memory they are framed as part of the traumatic experience of 300 years of oppression by Russia; this in turn serves as political legitimisation of the struggle for decolonisation and independence. In contrast, the narrative of Chechen officials from 2000 onwards, as examined in Evgeniya Goryushina's chapter, performs a mnemonic balancing act by presenting the second Chechnya War in particular as a victory for Russia and the "good" Chechens against the Islamist threat from abroad and extremists in Chechen society. The political intention behind this narrative is to justify the regime of counterterrorism and other repressive measures taken by the Moscow Kremlin and its local proxies in the face of any contestation of Russia's military and political control.

Moreover, authoritarian memory narratives, as expressed in Chechnya, are often combined with a pronounced cult of personality. The reference to some key actor, often post-mortem, "preserves", so to speak, the political narrative and the memories he promoted. In Chechnya, as was discussed in various chapters and as emerges from primary materials in this book, this was the case with Dzhokhar Dudayev, who has become, since his death, the subject of cult-like idolisation. In general, his memory represents the political idea of Chechnya as a fully independent state, and Dudayev's political importance for Chechnya is underlined, for example, in the symbolic renaming of the capital Grozny to "Dzhokhar" after Dudayev's death in spring 1996. A second figure, controversial but also revered by many, is Shamil Basayev; he embodies the armed struggle for Chechen independence and is an often-romanticised figurehead for the decolonisation movement, as well as for the increasing Islamisation of the independence movements in the North Caucasus. And finally, of course, there is the prominent cult of Akhmat and Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya. The intention behind the battle of portraits and other symbolic

acts underlining the outstanding merits of the two Kadyrovs is to support their central narrative and to construct the past in such a way that it justifies their political choices in the present. Thus, the cult of Akhmat and Ramzan Kadyrov promotes a new Chechen religious and political identity, and at the same time justifies the Russian policy of counterterrorism and Chechenisation.

In summary, with regard to the conceptual links between historical memory and processes of statebuilding and conflict, two key observations have been made in the case of Chechnya: firstly, the narrative framing of memories as a precondition for their impact on political (and military) mobilisastion, and secondly, the importance of actors, their political agenda and methods, and their political power position for the emergence of certain topics and the consolidation of mnemonic discourses linked to them.

The method used in this book of localising mnemonic narratives, as they are expressed, for instance, in public speeches, oral histories or historical monuments, on the timeline of political events and processes has proved to be a useful methodological tool for systematising and visualising the link between memories and their broader context at local (Chechen), regional (North Caucasian), national (Russian Federation) and international levels. We invite the readers to consult for this purpose the table of events and processes (Appendix 1), as well as the corresponding visualisation of the mapping available in the digital repository of the University of Bern at <https://doi.org/10.48620/228>.

The analytical puzzle presented in this book on the role of historical memories in processes of statebuilding and conflict in Chechnya is by no means complete. Rather, the book represents a first interdisciplinary step into a field of research that has hardly been explored so far, and much more empirical data must be collected, studied, shared and discussed, in the difficult, authoritarian and (post-)conflict context of Chechnya. However, we hope that our collection of analyses and primary materials will motivate future researchers and academics internationally to do more to advance this new, exciting field of research at the intersection of memory, conflict and post-Soviet area studies.

Reference

Wertsch, James V., and Nutsa Batiashvili (2012) Mnemonic Communities and Conflict: Georgia's National Narrative Template, in *Trust and Conflict* (eds. Alex Gillespie and Ivana Marková), Routledge, London, 37–48.

Appendix 1 – Events and Processes (1986–2023)

A visualisation of the timeline and the detailed table of the chronology of mnemonic debates, political events and processes in and around Chechnya can be accessed via the permanent link of <https://doi.org/10.48620/228>, or by using the following QR-code:

Date	Event	Explanations. Related processes and contexts
13 May 1986	Regulation on amateur association and clubs	Perestroika (1986–1991, federal context): liberalisation and democratisation; emergence of (pan) national movements throughout the Soviet Union; Soviet dissident movement; Empowerment of civil society (1986–1999, federal context): civil society at all levels actively engaged in political processes.
16 November 1988	Estonian declaration of sovereignty	Perestroika (…); Decolonisation and democratisation (1986–1991, regional context): pluralisation and decentralization of political and economic structures; democratisation of memories in the republics of the Soviet Union, e.g. on deportation; new understanding of the own history;

Date	Event	Explanations. Related processes and contexts
		“Parade of sovereignties” (1988–1991, federal context): various Soviet republics successively declare political and economic sovereignty and in a next step full independence from the Soviet state.
14 March 1990	Adoption of constitutional amendment (N 1360-I)	The adoption of the Constitutional amendment N 1360-I de facto meant the abolition of the Communist Party’s monopoly of power and the introduction of a multiparty system. Related processes: Perestroika (…); Decolonisation and democratisation (…).
12 June 1990	Russian declaration of sovereignty	Perestroika (…); Decolonisation and democratisation (…); “Parade of sovereignties” (…).
25 November 1990	Chechen declaration of sovereignty	Perestroika (…); Decolonisation and democratisation (…); “Parade of sovereignties” (…); Empowerment of civil society (…).
26 April 1991	Adoption of Law on Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples (N 1107-I)	Perestroika (…); Decolonisation and democratisation (…); Empowerment of civil society in the peripheries (…).
19 August 1991	Military coup	Coup prepared by the “Governmental Committee on the State of Emergency” (GKChP). Related processes: Political rivalries in Moscow (1986–1993, federal context): Competition for power among political elites, Yeltsin vs. Gorbachev;
		Disintegration of the Soviet state (1991–1993, federal context): state collapse, statebuilding (creation of new nation-states); Perestroika (…); “Parade of sovereignties” (…).

Date	Event	Explanations. Related processes and contexts
August to November 1991	Chechen Revolution; Dzhokhar Dudayev elected president (27 October 1991)	The "Chechen Revolution" initiates the first phase of Chechnya's de facto independent statehood under Dzhokhar Dudayev's presidency (1991–1996). Related processes: Chechen nationalist movement (1986–2004, local context): claim for sovereignty, self-determination, and independence; Chechen de facto independence (1991–1999, local context): emergence and consolidation of Chechen de facto independent statehood under Dzhokhar Dudayev and Aslan Maskhadov as presidents; Intra-society conflict in Chechnya (1991–1994, local context): tensions between local pro-commmunist/pro-Russian and nationalist elites; Moscow could have solved by pushing for dialogue, but decided not to do so – instead the Russian government tries to develop leverage by supporting the anti-Dudayev opposition; Russian population leaving Chechnya (1991–1994, regional context): during the first years of Chechen independence, 200,000 ethnic Russians leave the Chechen Republic;
		Confrontation between Grozny and Moscow (1990–2003, federal context): Chechen contestation of Russian central power; lack of inclusion, impossibility to reach political claims by non-violent means; Decolonisation and democratisation (…).

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
30 November 1991	Referendum in Ingushetia	The Referendum in Ingushetia marks the split of the former Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic into two separate political entities. Related processes: Ingush nationalist movement (1986–1992, regional context); disintegration of the Chechen-Ingush republic; Ingushetia opted for status of an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation; Ossetian-Ingush conflict (November 1992, regional context): clashes between Ingush and Ossetian armed groups; the Ingush claim the right to return to Prigorodny Rayon of North Ossetia-Alania, from where they had been deported in 1944; Chechen nationalist movement (…); Perestroika (…); Decolonisation (…).
8 December 1991	Belovezhsk agreement	Soviet state ceases to exist; Russian Federation created as an independent state. Related processes: Disintegration of Soviet Union (…); Political rivalries in Moscow (…); Perestroika (…); "Parade of sovereignties" (…).
31 March 1992	Anti-Dudayev Opposition attempts to seize Grozny TV station	Intra-society conflict in Chechnya (…).

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
28 May 1992	First round: RF-Chechen "Dagomys" negotiations (on status etc.)	Window for Russian-Chechen negotiations (1991–1993, federal context): the window closes in 1993, when Moscow changed strategies towards Chechnya and started using local opposition instead of direct armed force; Confrontation between Grozny and Moscow (…).
19 February 1993	Adoption of new Constitution in Chechnya	Dudayev building independent statehood in Chechnya; radicalisation of nationalist claims; introduction of presidential system; consolidation of Dudayev's power; dissolution of Chechen parliament; beginning of armed opposition to Dudayev. Related processes: Chechen de facto independence (…); Intra-society conflict in Chechnya (…);
25 December 1993	New constitution of the Russian Federation	Constitutional crisis and militarisation of Russian security policy (1993–1996, federal context): conflict between political elites in Moscow; as of Nov 1993, Yeltsin enters agreement with security sector for support, which alters his domestic and foreign policy (militarisation of crisis management); Yeltsin's government in a weak position; consolidation of power of the security sector; Political rivalries in Moscow (…).
16 January 1994	Renaming of Chechnya to "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria"	By presidential decree, the Chechen Republic is renamed "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria"; the renaming symbolises a new level of independent statehood and of separation from Moscow. Related processes: Chechen nationalist movement (…); Chechen de facto independence (…).

Date	Event	Explanations. Related processes and contexts
26 November 1994	Attempted storming of Grozny by anti-Dudayev opposition	Intra-society conflict in Chechnya (…); Confrontation between Grozny and Moscow (…).
11 December 1994	Presidential decree on "Restoration of constitutional order" (the First Chechnya War begins)	Beginning of First Chechnya War (1994–1996): grievances of civilian population; in-war radicalisation, military mobilisation of Chechen youths; political mobilisation of Russian and international civil society. Among others, the Russian government justified the invasion by a potential spill-over of conflict from Ingushetia, and by Dudayev's confrontation with Chechen oppositional forces. Related processes: Confrontation between Grozny and Moscow (…); Constitutional crisis (…); Ossetian-Ingush conflict (…); Intra-society conflict in Chechnya (…).
31 December 1994	Storming of Grozny by Russian armed forces	First Chechnya War (…).
7 April 1995	Samashki massacre	The Samashki massacre is often referred to as an example for genocide committed by the Russian Armed Forces in Chechnya. Related processes: First Chechnya War (…).

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
14–18 June 1995	Budennovsk hostage crisis	The Budennovsk hostage crisis is post-factum presented by Russian sources as the first in a long chain of "terrorist attacks" committed by Chechens in Russia; justification of Russian counterinsurgent and counterterrorist measures in the North Caucasus. Related processes: Radicalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency (1995–2007, local context): individual Chechen and North Caucasian field commanders opt for Islamism, in order to get support from international jihadi networks; OSCE Peace negotiations (1995–1996, federal context); Yeltsin pre-election campaign (1994–1996, federal context); First Chechnya War (…).
20 April 1996	Peace conference organised by anti-Dudayev opposition	First Chechnya War (…); Intra-society conflict in Chechnya (…); Radicalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency (…).
22 April 1996	Dudayev killed	Dudayev cult in Chechnya (1991–2000, local context); First Chechnya War (…); Intra-society conflicts in Chechnya (…).
1996	Grozny renamed Dzhokhar	Dudayev cult in Chechnya (…); Chechen de facto independence (…).

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
1996–97	Series of armed attacks on Russian public transport	Moscow Metro bombing (11 June 1996), Nalchik bus bombing (28 June 1996), Moscow bus bombings (11 and 1207.1996), etc. The perpetrators were not identified, but the Russian investigators considered a "Chechen trace" as one of the options. Related processes: Russian "counterterrorism" (1999–2023, federal context): Narrative on legitimisation of violence changes from "territorial integrity" to "counterterrorism"; RF increases counterinsurgent activities in Chechnya and throughout the North Caucasus; "no negotiation" approach and "securitisation" as key elements of the Russian strategy of counterterrorism, excluding civil society from decision-making; Confrontation between Grozny and Moscow (…); First Chechnya War (…); Radicalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency (…).
6–20 August 1996	Battle of Grozny; recapture by Chechen armed forces	First Chechnya War (…); OSCE Peace negotiations (…).
30 August 1996	Khasavyurt ceasefire agreement signed	OSCE Peace negotiations (…); Yeltsin's pre-election campaign (1994–1996, federal context).
27 January 1997	Aslan Maskhadov elected president in Chechnya	Chechen de facto independence (…); Political and military rivalries in Chechnya (1996–2003, local context): Maskhadov vs. Basayev, Sufism vs. Salafism; Radicalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency (…).

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
July 1998	Conflict between Salafist groups and Chechen government in Gudermes	Regionalisation and Internationalisation of the North Caucasus insurgency (1998–2015, regional context): Co-optation of some Chechen elites into the global jihadi movement; provision of financial and socio-cultural resources; Political and military rivalries in Chechnya (…); Radicalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency (…).
August 1998	Ruble Crisis	Economic crisis in Russia.
September 1999	Basayev and al-Khattab raid in Dagestan (Second Chechnya War beginns)	Second Chechnya War (1999–2009). Political and military rivalries in Chechnya (…); Regionalisation and Internationalisation of the North Caucasus insurgency (…); Radicalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency (…).
14–16 September 1999	Appartment bombings in Moscow, Volgodonsk and Buynaksk	The apparment bombings are referred to also as "Black September" in Russian media. Russian investigators considered a "Chechen trace" as one of the options. Related processes: Radicalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency (…); Russian "counterterrorism" (…).

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
23 September 1999	Presidential Decree No. 1255c on counter-terrorist operations in North Caucasus region (KTO)	The onset of the Counterterrorist Operation marks the beginning of the Second Chechnya War. Related processes: Russian "counterterrorism" (…); Neo-authoritarianism and marginalisation of civil society (2000–2023, federal context); repression of critical thinking and marginalisation of civil society throughout Russia and in the North Caucasus; Putin to power (1999–2023); International agreement on non-interference (since 1999, international context).
18–19 November 1999	OSCE Istanbul Summit	At the 1999 Istanbul summit of the OSCE, the international community agreed with Moscow that the conflict in Chechnya is considered an internal conflict of Russian Federation. In turn, Russia backed off on Abkhazia, Transnistria and former Yugoslavia. Related processes: Russian "counterterrorism" (…); International agreement on non-interference (…).
1 January 2000	Vladimir Putin enters office as President of the Russian Federation	Socio-cultural alienation of the Caucasus (1999–2023, federal context): radicalisation of RF society; increasing xenophobia and attacks against Chechens and North Caucasians in other parts of Russia; lack of non-state dialogue and cooperation possibilities hampers RF-Chechen reconciliation and trust-building;

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
		Policy of "theft of memory" (2000–2023, federal context): banning certain types of memory and highlighting others; instrumentalisation of memory; Second Chechnya War (…); Russian "counterterrorism" (…); Neo-authoritarianism; marginalisation of civil society (…).
20 April 2000	Colonel Manilov announces the end of the military part of the operation in Chechnya	Changing narrative of Russian counter-insurgency: the official end of Russia's "military operation" (i.e. war) in Chechnya marks the beginning of "counterterrorist special operations"; tactic switching to liquidation of individual terrorist formations and their leaders. Related processes: Chechenisation (2003–2023, local context): delegation of monopoly on military and political power to local political elites under Akhmat and Ramzan Kadyrov in Grozny; co-optation of Sufi networks by local authorities; Purges in Chechnya (2000–2006, local context): Targeted killings and brutal purges of Chechen elites and civilians, filtration camps, extrajudicial executions; Victory narrative (2000–2023, federal and local context): Russia and the "good" Chechens have defeated the "bad" North Caucasian and international terrorists; Russian "counterterrorism" (…);

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
12 June 2000	Akhmat Kadyrov appointed head of the pro-Russian "Temporary Administration" of the Chechen Republic	Russian "counterterrorism" (…); Chechenisation (…); Purges in Chechnya (…); Victory narrative (…).
2001	9/11	Global War on Terror (2001–2014, international context): securitisation of Islam in global politics; counter-terrorist narrative in Chechnya as part of the global "War on Terror"; Radicalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency (…).
23–26 October 2002	Dubrovka hostage crisis	Armed attack by Chechen combatants on Dubrovka theatre in Moscow; Russian special forces use poisoned gas to break the siege; numerous civilians are killed. Related processes: Russian "counterterrorism" (…); Purges in Chechnya (…); Neo-authoritarianism; marginalisation of civil society (…); Global War on Terror (…).
23 March 2003	Referendum in Chechnya (Constitution)	Statebuilding and post-war reconstruction (2003–2010, local context): consolidation of Kadyrov's political power; minimising grievances of society through economic reconstruction; attempt at sustainable statebuilding;

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
		Window of opportunity for political solution (2002–2003, local context): war fatigue on all sides as a potential basis for negotiating a viable post-war order; a democratic legitimisation of political power could have helped to transform the armed conflict into a political debate; Chechenisation (…); Russian "counterterrorism" (…); Neo-authoritarianism; marginalisation of civil society (…).
5 October 2003	Akhmat Kadyrov elected President of Chechnya	Rivalry for political power in Chechnya (1999–2007, local context): Chechen insurgency expelled from Russian territory, pushed to exil and/or underground; increasing importance of the Chechen diaspora (e.g. Chechen-Ichkerian government-in-exile in London under A. Zakaev); Statebuilding and post-war reconstruction (…); Chechenisation (…); Russian "counterterrorism" (…);
9 May 2004	Assassination of Akhmat Kadyrov, President of the pro-Russian government in Chechnya	Radicalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency (…); Regionalisation and Internationalisation of the North Caucasus insurgency (…); Chechenisation (…); Purges in Chechnya (…); Russian "counterterrorism" (…).

Date	Event	Explanations. Related processes and contexts
1–3 September 2004	Beslan hostage crisis	Armed attack by Chechen combatants on school No.1 in Beslan (North Ossetia, Russian Federation); Russian armed forces use massive shelling to break resistance; numerous civilians are killed. The Beslan hostage crisis de facto marks the end of the Chechen nationalist insurgency and movement for independence, since terrorism de-legitimised the struggle for the Chechen cause. Related processes: Purges in Chechnya (…); Radicalisation and Islamisation of the insurgency (…); Regionalisation and Internationalisation of the North Caucasus insurgency (…); Russian "counterterrorism" (…).
8 March 2005	Assassination of Aslan Maskhadov, President of Chechnya-Ichkeria	Purges in Chechnya (…); Russian "counterterrorism" (…); Rivalry for political power in Chechnya (…).
7 October 2006	Assassination of the journalist Anna Politkovskaya in Moscow	Neo-authoritarianism; marginalisation of civil society (…); Chechenisation (…).
7 October 2007	Proclamation of Caucasus Emirate	Dokku Umarov proclaims the abolition of the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria" and the formation of the "Caucasus Emirate". Related processers: Regionalisation and Internationalisation of the North Caucasus insurgency (…); Rivalry for political power in Chechnya (…).

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
August 2008	Russian-Georgian War	During the Russian-Georgian war, the Chechen battalion "Vostok" participates on the side of the Russian armed forces. Related processes: Chechenisation (…); Global financial crisis (2007–2008, international context).
16 April 2009	Kremlin declares end of Counter-terrorists Operation in the North Caucasus (KTO)	Chechenisation (…); Russian "counterterrorism" (…).
22 July 2009	Assassination of Natalya Estemirova, leading member of Grozny "Memorial"	Neo-authoritarianism; marginalisation of civil society (…); Chechenisation (…).
8 May 2010	Opening of the Akhmat Kadyrov "Memorial Complex of Glory"	The heroisation of Akhmat Kadyrov is an attempt to overcome the ideological vacuum after the war and to construct an alternative identity as opposed to the Islamist and nationalist insurgency. Related processes: Akhmat cult (2005–2023, local context): Construction of Akhmat Kadyrov cult and "Akhmatisation" of memory politics; Kadyrov senior as a symbol of state power and a source of legitimacy for Kadyrov junior;
		Repression and tabooisation of alternative memories (2003–2023, local context): memories opposing the official narrative (e.g. traumatic memories of Chechnya wars) are repressed; incomplete dealing with the past and transformation of conflict creates dangerous potential for re-escalation of violence (in the future); Victory narrative (…).

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
February 2011	Official Chechen "Day of mourning" transferred from 23 February to 10 May	Mixing up the remembrance of the 1944 Deportation (23 February) with the day of Akhmat Kadyrov's death (9 May); wave of arrests of Chechen "memory activists" (R. Kutayev, O. Titiev, etc.). Related processes: Repression and tabooisation of alternative memories (…); Akhmat cult (…); Victory narrative (…); Neo-authoritarianism; marginalisation of civil society (…).
20 July 2012	Introduction of federal Law on "Foreign Agents"	New protest movement in Russia (2012–2021, federal context); Neo-authoritarianism; marginalisation of civil society (…).
2012–13	Protests on Bolotnaya Square, Moscow	New protest movement in Russia (…); Neo-authoritarianism; marginalisation of civil society (…).
February–March 2014	Russian annexation of Crimea, beginning of War in Ukraine	The "Ukraine crisis" leads to increasing geo-political tensions between Russia and the "West"; Chechens fight on both sides: Kadyrov units on the side of (pro-) Russian formations, the battalion "Dzokhar" on the Ukrainian side; increasing crack-down on civil society in Russia; Kadyrov fully supports the annexation. Related processes: Chechenisation (…); Neo-authoritarianism; marginalisation of civil society (…).
27 February 2015	Oppositional politician Boris Nemtsov killed in Moscow	Neo-authoritarianism; marginalisation of civil society (…); Chechenisation (…).

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
23 June 2015	Proclamation of the “Caucasus vilayat” of the Islamic State	Proclamation of the Caucasus as a regional unit of the Islamic States means the end of the regional project of a “Caucasus Emirate”; exodus of combatants from the North Caucasus to Syria; co-optation of insurgency into global jihad. Related processes: Regionalisation and Internationalisation of the North Caucasus insurgency (…).
2017	Creation of Hashtag «#Akhmat – power!» («#Ахмат – сила!»)	Akhmat-cult (…); Repression and tabooisation of alternative memories (…).
11 December 2019	25th anniversary of the beginning of the First Chechnya War	Active commemoration in civil society (public discussions of witnesses, veterans, NGOs, …); official actors remain silent; contexts: Repression and tabooisation of memory (…).
24 February 2022	Start of RF “Special Operation” in Ukraine	Russian military invasion of Ukraine; Chechens fight on both sides; Kadyrov’s battalions “Akhmat-West”, “Akhmat-East”, etc., on the Russian side vs. battalions “Dzhokhar”, “Sheikh Mansur”, etc., on the Ukrainian side; battle of memory symbols, Akhmat cult vs. “Ichkeria” cult; re-naming of Ukrainian streets in honour of “Ichkerian” heroes. Related processes: New contestation of power in Chechnya (2022–2023, local context): increased political and military contestation of Kadyrov’s legitimacy by exiled leaders of the Chechen insurgency; important role of the diaspora; Chechenisation (…); Akhmat cult (…).

Date	**Event**	**Explanations. Related processes and contexts**
8 February 2023	Ramzan Kadyrov nominated "father of the country" (Chech. "Mekhkan Da")	Ramzan cult (2022–2023, local context): Ramzan Kadyrov's self-legitimisation of power; "Ramzanisation" of memory politics; Chechenisation (…).
28 February 2023	Adoption of law on re-naming of Chechen courts by State Duma in Moscow	Courts in Grozny renamed in honour of historical figures from Chechnya and Russia, related to R. and A. Kadyrov, the Caucasian War (nineteenth century), and the "Great Patriotic War" and victory over Nazi Germany. Related processes Chechenisation (…); Victory narrative (…); Akhmat cult (…); Ramzan cult (…).

March 2023

Appendix 2 – Communicative Memories (All Periods)

Excerpts from Focus Group Discussions (2021)

The following selection of quotations is taken from two focus groups conducted in the North Caucasus in summer 2021 by the team of the research project "Memory-Conflict-Peace" (University of Bern, Switzerland), one of them with women activists in Nalchik the other with memory activists in Grozny. The quotations are arranged according to thematic foci of communicative memory in relation to specific historical events and topics.

About the Importance of Remembering in Order to Overcome the Trauma of the Past

Respondent A: The tragedy occurred precisely because people hoped to wait. A great many people suffered. The worst thing was that the Chechen population fled to the villages, while the Russian-speaking population wanted to wait, and many had nowhere to go. It turned out that many found their grave in their homes. To this day there are many missing persons, and there is also a huge mass grave area where they don't even want to erect a monument today. People just know that it is a communal grave where different people are buried, military, Chechens, Ingush and Russians – all who were there. By the way, we raised the question of building a memorial because thousands of people are buried there. But they have forbidden it.

(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

Respondent A: The return of the refugees is a great hope. I have observed that for those who have returned, it has been both bad and good in terms of what they have experienced; it is a trauma they still carry. But as a psychologist, I say that for those who fled and never returned [to the place of the tragedy], it was worse. They never said goodbye. They wanted to leave

for a while, but it turned out to be forever. And later, when I talked to those who returned [to Chechnya] and those who did not return or even left Russia – I was shocked. Because I saw people who were traumatised as if it had happened yesterday, even if 15–20 years had already passed. I feel very sorry for these people (crying). When I spoke to them, I told them, “Make up your mind, go home, say goodbye. You will see and you will be better”. Because that is indeed the case. And the amazing thing is that the people who listened to me and visited their old home said, “We can let go now, thank you”. They were really relieved because this ritual of saying goodbye, it has to be completed. Against this background, my colleague and I raised the question of whether we should create some kind of memorial for the dead, even if it is not in Chechnya. Even if it is not in this cemetery, but there must be a memorial where people can come and say goodbye. Why are these memorials being set up everywhere, for example in Beslan? There, the number is a thousand times smaller. Here [in Chechnya], officially 200 thousand people died, and people carry this trauma inside them.

(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

Respondent A: We know what a tragedy it was during the deportation, and people carry that tragedy from generation to generation. It remains fresh, and these people are scattered. And that trauma prevents people from building normal relationships, from building their lives in a positive way. And we understood that a small thing, in principle, would help people to work through it. To unite around this tragedy, around a memorial, to mourn it. We came to the understanding that the symbol of a monument, of a memorial of some kind – it plays a big role. It is necessary for a person to be able to return to this place internally, symbolically. First, this is about the process itself. It is not for nothing that many religions say that while you are walking, some inner process is underway. You are closer to God. The same happens when a person comes to a memorial. He or she goes, works through it, connects with it. And when the number of such people increases, a united and supportive group of peers is formed, and the person works through the trauma and gets relief personally. Attitudes change, people start looking more to the future, they are no longer stuck in the past. The former trauma of this person becomes more a memory, a history. The person already sees a perspective and makes plans for the future. However, unfortunately, even this small task [of the memorial] could not be completed,

no matter how many times we raised this issue. We realise that we have to lobby for it somewhere else.

(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

About the Specific Role of Women

Respondent B: It comes to mind now, how during the first military campaign and before and during the second one, and during the purges, women acted as defenders of men at checkpoints. All men were checked from adults to teenagers, there was a strict control. When they were singled out, they could be abducted, they could be beaten up, whatever you wanted. And I remember going on public transport, there were up to 20–25 checkpoints around the city you had to pass. Every half-kilometer there was another checkpoint. The military would come in and check. A terrible picture is before my eyes, when the military look into the bus, and young boys, 17, 16 years old, they want to hide, they are ashamed that they are men and want to hide. They are afraid, they understand that if they get caught, they will be taken away and they do not know what will happen to them. And there is nothing you can do to help. And this is it… in such moments women very often tried to surround and close up, and in such a way that the boy did not understand that they were hiding him. So that he would not feel humiliated. [To be hidden] was very hard for him, degrading, morally difficult […]. I say Chechen women should be given a monument for those two wars, because they were heroines. There are very few examples in history of what a woman has done in so many ways. And I remember that in the market, during the mop-ups, women very often threw themselves on the invading soldiers. They were taking young men away, they were running, grabbing the soldiers' machine gun. They were told that they would be shot, but they continued. There is a myriad of such examples.

(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

On the Chechens as a "Punished Nation"

Respondent B: I believe that 1944 is my family's personal pain, because everyone heard about Khaybakh, my relatives were shot there. I think, and this is my personal opinion, everyone should know history. Everyone

should know about the Deportation, what was going on then. 1944 is our parents' generation. We [i.e. Chechnya as part of Russia] are 400 years old. Every 50 years… look into history. Into history further. If there had been no Dudayev, they would have found another, Magomadov or Avanasyan, they would have found another surname. I believe it is not the people's fault that these events are taking place. I would ask you, if there is a possibility to write somewhere, I would very much like you to mark Khaybakh in your research. I will help you in any way I can, there are materials available. I am just afraid that we have almost no old people left who have been exiled. They tell stories, which I have written down a lot. I have been doing this for two years. Each story sounded different. It's scary, it's genocide over a people. But they still don't acknowledge it. What was happening was happening to us. I believe it was a terrible war, it was a counter-terrorist operation. There was no counter-terrorist operation. When we fled to the basements in 2000 there were no guerrillas. They came in, carried out checks, cleared the entire village and began bombing for two or three hours. They bombed the village without ceasing. Peaceful people lived there, there were a lot of refugees […]. 1944 influenced 1994. Supporting Dudayev. [The years] are clearly marked, [the connection] was directly visible. And Dudayev used it. In 1994, when he waged an information campaign, he referred to the Deportation, the deportations, the Ingush events.

(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

Moderator: The memory of deportation was activated, it was used? Between the wars, from 1996 to 1999 was this also the case?

Respondent A: It was not used, people just remembered. The memory was refreshed by what happened. People wrote more about it, that there was a deportation, how it happened. But on the other hand, people were comparing it to what we experienced during those two wars. And that in terms of the number of casualties this was even bigger, and much more… there was more brutality in those campaigns than in the deportations. It was brutal, both the first campaign and the second campaign. [The second one] even turned out to be worse than the first one.

Respondent G: I wanted to say something similar, but referring to the return. In May 1957, people from our district returned from exile, from Kazakhstan. They were not allowed to return to their villages, and a

tent city was set up in the former district centre. That May turned out to be very rainy, and they had exactly three months of summer to get wood from anywhere, anyhow, to build and go back… to return to their homes, because at the end of August we already have the first snow. It gets cold, we need to heat the ovens. It was May 1957, they returned [from the Deportation]. And in 2000, in the same place, in the plains, on the territory of the communal administration near the Argun, a tent camp was erected again, and people again settled there. And my father said: “May 1957 and here we are in 2000, a tent camp in the same place.”

Respondent A: History is repeating itself.
(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

Respondent I: As one of my colleagues correctly said, it has been going on since the eighteenth century. And this memory is kept in the family, I cannot even tell you the exact moment, but from time to time this topic came up. When they were telling the story of their grandparents, this was in Turkey, one died or disappeared, or something else. Then there was 1994, one died or disappeared there, too. And these stories still resurface, we have regular interaction with our grandparents, because our society is very patriarchal. From further down the line, in 1992 [during the conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia in Prigorodniy Rayon] there was a genocide too, and a large mass of people were deprived of their place of residence, property, rights, in fact. And nothing has really been restored until now. And it appears, as XXX says, if all these problems have not been settled, until a full-fledged legal, political, I do not know, some other assessment has not been made, we constantly have the feeling that we are being treated unfairly. And we live with this memory. Moreover, this whole timeline is in fact an accumulated act of injustice towards our people. And every such act of injustice triggers such flashbacks, no one needed us then and no one needs us now. We were second-rate people then and we are second-rate people now. Hence, for me, for example, the first powerful reminder in my adulthood was 1992. And subsequently, whenever I come across something that, because I am an Ingush or a Caucasian woman, it all comes back to me, discrimination does not exist officially, but in fact I bump into it all the time. In little things, on a daily basis. These are the reminders that keep me from forgetting who I am, what my roots are.

So it is a never-ending process, as it turns out. I do not want to remember it, I would like not to remember it, I would like to live happily ever after. At the airport in Moscow, they choose me out of a huge queue for inspection because I have a headscarf and a face of, well, Caucasian nationality. And my passport is inappropriate, with an inappropriate surname and propiska. I understand that technically, the authorities have grounds for this, because, yes, there are people who have committed terrorist attacks, who belong to the same people and come from the same area. But I do not understand why I have to pay the price today for those whom I do not know. And if it was done in some, well, acceptable form, that's fine, well, it is understandable. There are safety measures. But when I am rudely, unceremoniously, disrespectfully searched, I get angry and remember, "Aha, so my ancestors were right. This power does not like me, the power does not want me, even though I am a useful member of society." I constantly… I have the feeling that I can be picked up and deported at any moment. There is no feeling of security and no feeling that you are a full-fledged citizen. This, of course, makes it hard to forget, makes it hard to relax."

(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

Respondent J: History has always been relevant. I remember, when I was a child, my uncle on the mother's side and his third cousin had notebooks in which they wrote out everything they had read somewhere about the Chechens. This was actualised after 1989, when the law[1] was passed. There was some hope of restoring justice, but apart from this piece of paper nothing was actually done. In general, all history, which was written and taught in Soviet times, was connected only to the history of Russia. Ten years ago the subject of the Caucasian War was raised again, and at the Chechen History Department we were told to abandon the subject. Unlike our neighbours, our Dagestani brothers, they said it is better not to talk about it, not to speak about it and so on. Now they are pushing us into it again. Next, there was not a single word about the Deportation even in scientific publications that were published in Soviet times. There was no mention at all, as if it had not taken place. For

1 Editor's note: probably the respondent refers here to the Law on Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples (N 1107-I), adopted 26 April 1991.

example, my grandfather was a war veteran, he lost his leg at Stalingrad, and they arrested him like a traitor and deported him. And during the exile only two people survived – my grandfather and father. My mother, my brother – they all died in Kazakhstan, starved to death, died of disease. And this is what then [began] in the early 1990s. This desire for independence, it was like a defense mechanism against a repetition of this experience, [a hope] that if we become independent we would no longer be hanged, tied up and labeled as enemies of the people. Whether consciously or unconsciously, this [claim of independence] was some kind of defensive reaction to what we were forbidden to say, to study. When we were deported, all Chechen settlements were renamed. Our gravestones were removed from the cemeteries… Any memory of our people in publications, any mention of Chechens in libraries – those pages were torn from the books […]. I witnessed a conversation in Chechen on buses, and people would stop talking and shout: "Speak in a normal language!". I heard it with my own ears. In those "accordions", the big buses that circulated in Grozny. And now 23 February [i.e. the day of the Deportation of the Chechen and Inglush in 1944] has been officially moved to 10 May. Nevertheless, a few years ago somebody posted on Grozny's main street, "We remember 23 February". Some people at that day open the gates as a sign of mourning. In our country when a person dies, they open the gates. Somehow people resist twisting and forgetting this history and all that it means. Those atrocities that happened in Samashki, in Aldy. When the Chechens were deported, about 700 people were burnt alive in Khaibakh. Nothing is said about this, nothing is spoken about. When it is not talked about, when the authorities either supress or deny what people know, of course this leads to appearance of these passionaries, who then have to be disposed of in various ways. And they do not say, "Yes, this has happened, but let's do it in a new way now", but we are not there yet and it is not to be expected soon that this is acknowledged and said. Until they recognise it and say it, God help us, of course… The events of 1990–1994, all this is connected to one chain of memories, to a sense of injustice. And the sense of justice is one such crucial element in any society.

(Focus group with Chechen memory specialists, Grozny 2021)

Women as Carriers of Memory

Respondent C: In 1988 I was born […]. In 1995 my father died […]. In 2002 there were mop-ups in the village and many people from our surroundings died. I cannot say that they were relatives, at least not close relatives, but fellow villagers and friends. And we became a lot more adult because of that. Before, we romanticised the war a lot […]. Half of our friends they were picked up and did not come back. For us this was very disturbing. In 2003, before the elections of Akhmat-Hadji, there were big mop-ups, too. And all those who feared for their lives at that time, they went into the forests. And if they were found, they were killed very brutally. The year 2003 is here [sign of a cutting knife at the throat] for my people. Many young people were killed very brutally. Because, as it was said at that time, they could create discomfort in the republic.
(Focus group with Chechen memory specialists, Grozny 2021)

Respondent G: The tragedy of 1944. When I was a child, I remember, my grandmother told me that in the Argun gorge, where she lived, they heard this kind of roaring coming from Khaibakh, when people were being burnt. They heard it. They [i.e. the grandmother and her family] were deported. First they were loaded on vehicles, then they were driven down from the mountains. And they could hear it, this screaming that was coming from there, when they burned those people. And the hardships they endured and the way they came back […]. It is not about nations; it is not about nationalities. It is about specific persons regardless of one's nationality. Indeed, a bad person has no nationality. The second Chechen campaign [i.e. the Second Chechnya War, 1999–2009] was more tragic. A great many people died. Mahmoud Isinbayev was severely criticised for what he said in the first Chechen campaign: "It would have been better for us to be deported than this war." He was condemned for those words. But he was right. Because during the two campaigns people lost a lot more people than during the Deportation. A lot more. And speaking of historical memory, I go back to where I started. It is at my genetic level. It goes back to the eighteenth century. That's where it comes from. And all the events from 1994 to the present day, they are with me. Pain, of course, it can come back to me. I have not forgotten anything of what I was told or what I experienced. XXX still laughs at my words from a few years ago. I tell them, having no

children of my own, to my nephews, and I will tell them here: As long as I live and breathe, I will be telling this story of mine since the eighteenth century, to my nephews and grand-nephews, because it is your story, it should not be forgotten, it should be remembered. You should not take revenge, but you should remember the history of your family and people, you should know it in order to avoid stepping into other, maybe harder traps later.

(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

Respondent C: There were different activists there, lawyers, psychologists, and we decided, let us at least collect the stories of our families. At first we wanted to collect stories specifically about the war period, as there are already many stories about the Deportation. But after thinking it through, we decided that it was not safe and said that we would collect the stories of families across the generations and not emphasise the topic of war. We were four activists, and we collected these stories. […] I interviewed my aunts, my grandmother, my peers. In this way, we have collected experiences across generations. Those who remember spoke about the Deportation. My aunt's mother talked about the war in Chechnya, and my generation, my cousins, told about how we live today in Chechnya… We wanted to publish the result of this, I was in contact with YYY, who has this website about the Deportation. However, the lawyers from our team said that due to the sensitive content, it could not be published in this form, because we would fall under the article of incitement of something, the fifth, the tenth. Thus, we decided to "comb through" our text and hired an editor, but he "combed through" thoroughly that we ended up with some "neutral water". I am still in possession of all those stories. For this was a personal story, and it would have been relevant. Our media started actively publishing exactly about the War a few years ago. Before, there was no such thing, everything was secret, no one talked about it. And now I see productions where the songs of our bards may be used, some pictures. Now [2021] it is more openly allowed, but [the Chechnya wars] are referred to in a context that there were some "guerrillas", bad people, while everyone else was good.

(Focus group with Chechen memory specialists, Grozny 2021)

Clashes Between Official and Popular Memories

Respondent C: …For me this was important. For instance, my father fought in the war, as Kadyrov Junior did. And it was humiliating for me, when they called him a guerilla. He defended his village and died there. My uncle, my father… And it is humiliating that now these people are guerrillas. They were combatants, they were betrayed, they were this and that. It is important for me to remember, for my children to remember [their relatives] not as combatants, but as people who believed in independence, believed in this idea and died not for money, but simply for this idea, defending their families. There is an official version that the defenders of this idea are negative heroes, militants who fell for an idea that was impossible from the beginning. At that time this was not perceived like that.
(Focus group with Chechen memory specialists, Grozny 2021)

Respondent H: I just wanted to say that, unfortunately, the history that is now being taught in the textbooks of our children, it says that this [i.e. the second Chechnya War] was a counter-terrorist operation. The children are the nephews and grandchildren of those who took part in the First War in Chechnya, they have to sit through these lessons and swallow this injustice. I think this again is an [ideological] foundation being laid now for what will happen in 10, 15, or even in 5 years. That is, they will pull these guys out on […] this patriotism, on this repression, on what happened in the past, on this memory. And this will be done not to give a positive direction, not for development and stability, but, on the contrary, for war. Why? Because today, one historical memory lives at home, and when they come home with their textbook, they are told, "Don't look at what's in the textbook!" But at school they are forced to learn from the textbook, they are forced to go to the blackboard, they are forced to voice what they have read. And as a result what conflict does that child have inside? When they know it was not like that, but they have to say it was… It is like a déjà-vu. My biggest fear is how all this will explode in 5 or 10 years, in which direction it will explode. Again, we, that is those children, could become an instrument of manipulation.
(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

Respondent K: If you take Chechen history, as far as I understand, Chechen history as a whole was actualised after the collapse of the Soviet state. The older generation tells us that during the Soviet Union one was not allowed to study our history, one was not allowed to study the Chechen language, Chechen culture. There were older people who said that in the colleges and universities where they studied, when they asked about the history of Chechnya, they were told: "The Soviet Union gave you history". That was it. As far as I remember, during the entire period of Soviet statehood, the history of Chechnya was not particularly well studied. Only once Khasbulatov founded the Chechen History Department this policy softened somewhat. This was during the Brezhnev period. […] There were moments after the 1944 deportations, in early March in the central square, where the mosque is now located, when the history of Chechnya was publicly humiliated, documents were burned […]. And during the first war, in 1994, the first airstrike struck the national library and the archive. Which means that there was a deliberate destruction of Chechen history. It seems to me that the relevance of studying the history of Chechnya only came after the collapse of the USSR.

(Focus group with Chechen memory specialists, Grozny 2021)

Chechnya-Ichkeria: Political Context, Memory, and Mobilisation (1991–1999)

Respondent A: In 1992, there was a coup, [the Kremlin-loyal leader] Zavgaev was toppled, Dudayev came and took over. People stood up very much [mobilised] for rallies. In 1992 there was also the Ossetian-Ingush conflict. Because Chechnya opted for self-determination and got separated. Ingushetia was left without administrative apparatus, without state authority and institutions, because all power was concentrated in Chechnya […]. 1993, the assault on the White House. 1994, deployment of troops [to Chechnya]. But before the troops were deployed, in the summer there was an active war… Military and political actors in Russia repeatedly said that Dudayev had won the information war. And it is true. In 1994 he won the information war, because there was active coverage on local television throughout the summer: "Look what happened during the Ossetian-Ingush conflict. Look, Russian troops came,

told the Ingush that they would protect them, but then Ossetian militia arrived and slaughtered the entire population." And he showed videos from the archive. In principle he used what had happened during the Ossetian-Ingush conflict to mobilise the Chechen people. So that they would defend their lands. Because not everyone shared Dudayev's ideological principles and his programme [of statebuilding]. A large part was against his coming to power.

Respondent E: The intelligentsia was against [Dudayev].

Respondent A: But it was because he disposed of and tactically correctly used the information about the Ossetian-Ingush conflict […]. Thus, people did not get on the move for Dudayev, but they went to defend their homes. And this unity of the people, this spirit helped in the military campaign to win. 1995, the end of active fighting. Return of refugees to their homes. Back in 1994, I will briefly describe the state of the population, people had not believed that there really would be a war. [And they continued to do so] even after the first anti-Dudayev troops arrived from the direction of Tolstoy-Yurt in the Nadterechny district. And worst of all, most of the civilian population wanted to endure the first campaign and to wait at home. And no one expected it, even when the first bombings happened, everyone hoped that the state could not… […] No one believed they would bomb, everyone stayed at home quietly. "It's a big country, they are smart, they are professionals. They will send some experienced special forces here, they will replace the government, isolate or liquidate them, and that will be it, and order will be restored."
(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

Respondent F: When the first war started, I worked in a hospital. Because it was the only place that still paid, there were no more salaries otherwise. There were some private… to be honest, the hospitals were taking money from people, because doctors and nurses were not getting paid [from the state]. And everyone set some kind of price, they were paid. And in the hospital, that was in Zhdanov, it was one of the social hospitals and apparently Russia allocated money to it, we were getting paid. We had a doctor, whose namesake was Dudayev, Ramzan. About historical memory. The thing is that in my family they never talked much about the Deportation. We were not told that we were exiled, that we

had suffered. And I understand that it was the right thing to do, I had Russian friends. We were thirty-three people and seven nationalities in our class. No one told us that we had been deported and we had to take revenge. No. Although later I understood that two houses away lived Basayev's uncle, and he owed money to my father. My father remembered him as a fierce hater of everything Russian. I could not understand what it was all about. But when the second campaign started, and Ramzan was saying, "I understand that you were being evicted, and your bladders were bursting." Bladders were bursting because it is not customary for us to empty our bladders, when men are around. And men [could not do so], when women are around. And people's bladders were just bursting because no one was stopping, livestock wagons, people were transported. And for me it was just a shock. These small details, and the fact that this old man was among those who were deported, and he had been waiting for 13 years to return to his homeland. And he sees that the same thing can happen again. And we had a surgeon, an Armenian. And when the war started, he said, "It means that somebody needs this war." Dudayev was not even supported by 30 per cent of the population. I say this with full responsibility. He was not! It is not true that everyone was for him. He just had the resources, the television was behind him. Anyone from the street could come in and say anything. There were rallies. But 30 per cent was the edge. It is not true that everyone was for him. And when there was a campaign that bombs were thrown at you and you could see that you were going to be betrayed, and there were also the Ingush events. And this surgeon told me that they are making a big mistake, that this was the end. Now there will be not a just war but a great lawlessness. Some men would not have listened Dudayev for another hundred years, but they would still be defending their women, their home, and their honour. At least just their honour. And this historical memory of 1944 has greatly affected the distrust in the authorities. Just a total distrust in power.

Moderator: Distrust in which authority, exactly?

Respondent F: In the Russian one. Because we understand that in 1991 there was a collapse, the Soviet government no longer exists, the Russian one does. And you are counting on it. And I understood that they

needed this conflict. Because the oligarchs were making money. With military equipment from Germany… they were making money. Like in any war, prostitutes and generals make money. If they had wanted to, they could have easily deposed Dudayev. This conflict was necessary. To make money. Berezovsky was there then. It is called commercial war.
(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

Respondent J: 1992. I finished school and went to university the same year. Then there was a rift within our class, which seemed so friendly from the outside, the Dudayevs, and the opposition. 1993. My youngest brother was born. And a memory, from October 1993, I woke up in the morning to such a roar. It was on the outskirts of Urus-Martan, an armed clash, involving the use of machinery. Again, the opposition, Dudayev. The year 1995. It was the first year I personally buried a friend who was killed in that war. He was younger than me, we rode his bike together to our first date. 1999. It was our change of residence (if you can call it a change of residence) from Grozny to Komsomolskoye, where we got into trouble again. Our house was destroyed to the ground. When we left the village, the luggage we had packed into a pick-up was all gone. The only thing I was worried about were the nine boxes of books I had brought from my library. In Grozny I sat and selected them. While the pick-up was being loaded, I sat and selected the books. We were left in what we were wearing. I said, "The house was old, we'll build a new one, the loot was old. But where are my books? Where, how am I going to get them?" The year 2000. That was our move to Sernovodsk. That move alone was worth it! We had no documents and the head of Komsomolsk had written our personal data by hand on a paper with a wolf's seal [emblem of Chechnya-Ichkeria]. We had to drive through almost half of Chechnya, there were checkpoints almost every 100 metres. In front of us… […]. And we, four brothers, with these documents for which we could just be… We drove through the whole of Chechnya. With these wolf-tickets, written by hand.

Respondent C: It was fortune.

Respondent J: Yes, [fortune] must have been saving us for something.
(Focus group with Chechen memory specialists, Grozny 2021)

Chechnya in the Russian Context Since 2014

Respondent D: And further, for me, the world, the perception of the history of modern Russia is divided into before 2014 and after 2014. "Crimea is ours" and all these stories. I have a lot of classmates who have left [Chechnya] for Russia. My first rule is that we either do not discuss it, or I immediately say that my position is that "Crimea is not ours". If you do not want to communicate with me, that's fine. I do not think that [the annexation of Crimea] was done well. I am not saying the Russians should have spilled more blood, but in Crimea they did very wrong. I think Crimea is Tatar in general. But Ukrainians at least let them live and did not interfere, and we do not let them live there normally anymore. 2014. It affected Putin's rating. It improved it a lot. He needed this, of course. When a man wants to see himself in the history book, understandably, he no longer cares for domestic politics.

Respondent E: Retaining power.

Respondent D: Yes. 2015, Nemtsov's murder is the scariest. It's not just power retention, it's total lawlessness. It is terror against any opponents. The whole political field is being scorched. When people ask me, "Who else but him?" … The hampering factors became harder, first there was a 5 per cent barrier for parties, now they come up with all sorts of other obstacles. People can't even get through to the Moscow government.
(Focus group with Chechen and Ingush women activists, Nalchik 2021)

Respondent A: There is a potential cause of conflict for today, which is often repeated in social media and everywhere else. Because the point has not been made that it was a mistake, that it was wrong. That it was done unfairly. Today you see that even in scholarly circles they say "they were right to expel, they were traitors" and so on. It turns out that again, if something is done to the people… even after those Wars, many Russian citizens write that "they were traitors then, and now they were right, and they should all have been repressed and destroyed." The worst part is this, yes. The events are terrible. But the fact that today a considerable number of people approve, support and think that it is necessary to continue in the same direction, that is scary. And the reason is that

one never came to a conclusion. Because our population is post-Soviet, it still perceives official media as the last instance that tells nothing but the truth. How it broadcasts is how we perceive it. I often hear from older people, I travel a lot in Russia: "That is what they say on TV, that is the truth". And there was no campaign that said it [the Deportation, the Chechnya Wars, etc. was a mistake, that they apologise, or repent. People do not want material compensation, except maybe for some isolated cases. But most of the people are not satisfied, they did not feel it, and I think what they want is an apology. People are ready [to forgive] because they've been carrying it with them for a long time, they want to say goodbye to it. And when they are given a chance, they are ready for that opportunity, if there finally is respect. Because on this basis, and being aware of this injustice, a very large group of our population that was subjected to expulsion during the Soviet Union and also afterwards, tried to prove this stereotype, this untruth, and to show their loyalty. Through heroic deeds, sacrifices, service to the people, awards, recognition. Victims perform heroic deeds and die in the process, precisely to prove… we prove once again that it was not true. That we are different. We prove with our own blood. And there are many such examples.

(Focus group with Chechen memory specialists, Grozny 2021)

Note on contributors

Yavus Akhmadov is a professor and academician at the Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic (affiliated with the Russian Academy of Sciences, RAS) and a leading researcher at the Institute of Humanitarian Research of the Chechen Academy of Sciences and the Complex Research Institute of the RAS. His academic focus is the Caucasus policies of Russia, Turkey and Iran in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, Russian–Chechen relations in the past and present, and contemporary problems of historical and political development in Russia and the Caucasus, including Chechnya. Among his key publications are textbooks and monographs such as *Essays on the Political History of the Peoples of the North Caucasus in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1988); *History of Chechnya in Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* 2005); *Islam in the North Caucasus: A Divided People* (2009; co-authored); *The Battle for Chechnya. A War of Historiographies or an Information* (2015); *Chechen–Russian Relations in the Eighteenth Century. Research and Materials*, Vol. 1 (2019); *Thunder over the Caucasus. Imam Mansur* (2022; co-authored).

Cécile Druey holds a PhD (2016) in International History and Politics from the Graduate Institute on International and Development Studies in Geneva, as well as a Master's (1999) in Russian language and literature, and in Islamic Studies from the Universities of Fribourg and Bern (Switzerland). Beyond her work as researcher and lecturer at the University of Bern (Swituzerland), she has also gained experience as a practitioner peacebuilding, notably during her positions at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the Swiss Peace Foundation swisspeace, and as a co-convenor and participant of various peacebuilding projects. Her main academic interests are the conflicts and peace in the former Soviet space, with a special focus on Russia, Ukraine and the Caucasus.

Evgeniya Goryushina holds a PhD in Political Sciences. She is a Senior Research Fellow at the Laboratory of Political Science and Law of the Southern Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Rostov-on-Don,

RF). Her research interests include regional security and political instability in the Caucasus and Southern Russia, taking into account the role of historical memory and its impact on contemporary socio-political processes. She has collected over 150 in-depth interviews with former combatants and/or eyewitnesses of armed violence in wars and conflicts in the post-Soviet period (2017–2022). She is the author and co-author of numerous publications, including five monographs. From 2013 to 2014, Goryushina was Erasmus Mundus Action 2 research fellow at the Department of History, Culture, Religion and the Centre for Research and Cooperation in Eurasia, the Mediterranean and Black Africa Regions (CEMAS) at La Sapienza University in Rome, Italy.

Marat Iliyasov is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Miami University of Ohio (United States). His research interests include Memory Politics in Chechnya and Russia, discursive self-legitimation in authoritarian Chechnya, demographic procreation in conflict and post-conflict Chechnya. As a part of the Wisconsin Russia Project, he conducted research at Wisconsin-Madison University and worked as a researcher at Vytautas Magnus University (United States).

Vassily Klimentov is a Swiss National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Researcher and Visiting Fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute in Florence. He is also a Visiting Lecturer in International Affairs at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, where he is affiliated with the Centre on Conflict, Development & Peacebuilding. He holds a PhD in International History and International Relations-Political Science from the Graduate Institute in Geneva. His research interests include the Cold War, Russian domestic and foreign policy, and political violence in the post-Soviet space.

Anna Nemzer is a journalist, writer and documentary filmmaker studying the historical memory of wars in the post-Soviet space. She is a presenter on TV Dozhd (aka TV-Rain – formerly the only independent TV channel in Russia, now working in exile); a scholar at Bard College (United States); a co-founder of the Russian Independent Media Archive (RIMA) dedicated to the preservation of all Russian independent media as the most important evidence of the era.

John Russell is Emeritus Professor of Russian and Security Studies in the Department of Peace Studies and International Development at the University of Bradford, United Kingdom. Author of *Chechnya – Russia's "War on Terror"*, and many articles on Russia, Chechnya, international terrorism and East–West relations, he has delivered papers, lectures and media interviews on these topics worldwide. He worked as a simultaneous interpreter for NBC News throughout the Gorbachev era and was an expert witness at Akhmed Zakayev's extradition trial in London, 2003.

Victor Shnirelman is a Doctor in History, Senior Researcher in the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, in Moscow, Russia. His scholarly field is cultural anthropology. His research interests include nationalism, racism, ethnic conflicts, neo- Paganism, social memory, politics of the past in the Soviet and post- Soviet world, eschatology and conspiracy theories. He is the author of more than 500 scholarly publications, including more than thirty books.

Murat Shogenov is an independent researcher from the North Caucasus, Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria. He has a PhD in social psychology and spent most of his academic career at Nalchik University (Russian Federation). His general research interests are the relationship between identity politics, nationalism and conflicts in the region. Over the course of his academic career, he has explored these issues in a number of international research projects. Among them are "From Understanding Local Conflicts to Using Development Opportunities" (2010–2013), "Intra- and Inter-Societal Sources of Instability in the Caucasus" (2010–2013), "Institution-Centered Conflict Studies" (2014–2016) and "Remembering the Past in the Conflicts of the Present. Civil Societies and Contested Histories in the Post-Soviet Space" (2018–2023). He is author and co-author of several dozens of scientific articles and books.

Valentina Tanaylova has a Master's degree in Social Anthropology from the Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH). She is currently a researcher at the Centre for Ethnopolitical Studies at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow (Russian Federation) and is finalising her PhD. Her dissertation deals with the contested memory of the Caucasian War in contemporary North Caucasian societies. Furthermore, Valentina is a participant in the

project 'Urban memory scapes: conflicts and transformations' Centre for Independent Social Research in Berlin (Germany). Her research interests include: memory studies, trauma studies, anthropology of war. She has a number of publications in these fields.

Mairbek Vatchagaev is co-editor in chief of the journal *Caucasus Survey* and host of the podcast on the history of the region, *Chronicle of the Caucasus with Vatchagaev*, on Radio Free Europe/RadioLiberty. Current research interests include the history of the Mountain Republic (1917–1921); mountain emigration in Europe in the 1920s–1940s; issues of adaptation and integration of the Chechen diaspora in Europe and the Middle East.

Index

A
Abrek 53
Adat 53, 188, 340
Akhmadov, Yavus 111, 136
Akhmat (Kadyrov), Akhmat cult, Akhmatisation, Akhmat heroisation 26, 111, 126–129, 255, 283–300, 327, 352, 387, 405
al-Khattab, Ibn 179, 192–193, 374, 399
Authoritarianism, Increasing authoritarianism 64, 252, 340, 385
Autonomous Mountain Socialist Republic (1921–1924) 42, 54–55, 89
Avturkhanov, Umar 111, 143–153, 170–171

B
Babitsky, Andrey 342, 375–377
Banished memory 256, 325, 345–367
Bart (journal) 42–43, 83–84, 93, 98–99
Basayev, Shamil 82, 142–144, 147, 152, 176–179, 190–196, 224, 233, 240, 246–247, 371–378
Berezovsky, Boris 149, 267, 374, 422
Beslan (hostage crisis) 273, 331, 371–378, 404
Bisultanov, Khozh-Akhmed 86, 89, 93, 142
Blood revenge 60, 64–65
Budennovsk (hostage crisis) 152, 215–222, 247, 273, 373–377, 397

C
Caucasian War 19, 52, 57, 62–65, 78, 89, 187, 211–235, 264, 270, 274, 408
Chechen Revolution (1991) 15, 60, 76, 82, 109, 137–140, 188, 393
Chechenisation 25, 30, 194, 251, 255, 314, 385, 388, 401
Chechnya War(s), Memory of the Chechnya War(s) 29, 109–113, 135–153, 175–81, 211–235, 251–257, 303–320, 329, 345–367, 396, 399, 405
Chernomyrdin, Viktor 152, 165, 214–217, 221, 246, 373
Chosen trauma 32, 116, 119, 123
Colonisation 32–33, 44, 53, 181
Communicative memory 78, 109
Confederation of Caucasian Peoples 66
Counterterrorism, Russian counterterrorism, counterterrorist operation 179, 251–254, 352, 387–388, 397, 398
Cultural memory 17, 78, 113

D
Day of Remembrance and Mourning 125, 270
Decolonisation, Decolonisation of memory 32–33, 41–44, 75–94, 113, 384, 391
Democratisation, Democratisation of memory 43, 75–91, 137, 391
Deportation, Stalinist Deportation 17, 43, 48, 56, 62, 78,

86, 89, 112–113, 115–129, 157, 181, 255, 270, 296, 303–310, 326, 352–354, 383, 406, 412
Diaspora, (Chechen) migrants 61, 111, 179, 185, 198, 203–205, 251, 256–257, 303–320, 339–342, 357, 385
Dubrovka (hostage crisis) 273, 371, 376–377, 402
Dudayev, Anti-Dudayev, Memory of Dudayev 17, 48, 60–63, 66, 85, 88, 103, 109–113, 115–129, 135–153, 158, 159, 161–169, 170–171, 175–181, 189, 219, 221, 239, 246–247, 269, 294–295, 341, 351, 373, 384, 387, 393–397, 412, 419–422

E
Estemirova, Nataliya 124–125, 256, 405

G
Glasnost 41, 44, 75, 119
Gorbachev, Mikhail 41–45, 75–91, 119, 166, 189, 191, 213–216, 392
Gudermes crisis (1998) 178, 192, 399
Gushmuzulaev, Zelimkhan 54

H
Historical memory, Role of historical memory 31, 41–45, 75–78, 86–90, 98, 109–113, 117, 120, 176, 180–181, 264–265, 341, 346, 384–388, 416, 420–421

I
Ichkeria, Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Ichkeritsy 61, 76, 83, 110–113, 135–153, 161, 177, 180, 185–207, 232, 240, 241–247, 251–257, 268, 283–284, 294–295, 341, 352, 356–357, 373, 377, 386, 395, 404, 407, 419–422
Imam Mansur, Sheikh Mansur (1762–1794) 44, 50–51, 113, 186, 190, 341, 407
Imam Shamil (1797–1871) 44, 52, 62, 113, 180, 229, 373
Imarat Kavkaz, Caucasus Emirate 54, 196–199, 252, 256, 404, 407
Islamic Revival Party 191
Islamic State (IS) 197–200, 407
Islamism, Islamist 20–21, 69, 175, 181, 190, 192, 198, 202, 212, 214, 223–224, 228, 230–231, 256, 384, 387, 397, 405
Israilov, Khasan 55, 113

K
Kavkaz society, Kavkaz club 75–90, 142
Khadzhiyev, Salambek 143, 151, 153
Khaibakh, Tragedy of Khaibakh (1944) 56, 126, 415–416
Khasavyurt agreement, Khasavyurt accord 153, 175, 177, 211–212, 242, 266, 268, 335, 373, 374, 385, 398
Khasbulatov, Ruslan 138, 146–147, 166, 194, 216
Kozyrev. Andrey 212, 214–216
Kunta-Haji (Kunta Kishiev) 44, 62, 187, 190, 204
Kutayev, Ruslan 127, 233–234, 298, 406

L
Lebed, Alexander 216–218, 226

M
Mamadayev, Yaragi 63
Marsho (Freedom) Party 64, 143
Maskhadov, Aslan 63–69, 135, 147, 153, 175–181, 189–196, 223–224,

226, 231, 233, 240, 242–247, 252, 352, 374, 384, 393, 398, 404
Medvedev, Dmitry 125
Memorial (Human Rights Centre, Grozny) 353, 405
Memory, collective memory, memory conflict 17–18, 22–27, 29, 32–33, 42, 44, 49, 76–78, 86–90, 111–113, 115–129, 229, 255–257, 259–274, 278, 283–284, 288, 293–294, 299, 303–307, 318–319, 329–333, 346–355, 384, 387, 401, 407
Mountain Republic (1918–1919) 54, 113
Murid 52, 186–187, 190, 195, 204
Murtazaliyeva, Zara 356

N
Nakh 64
Naqshbandiya, Naqshbandi 48, 62–63, 185–186, 190, 194
Neformaly 76, 80, 83, 85, 88–89
Nemtsov, Boris 216–217, 256, 406, 423
Niyso (Justice) Party 83–85, 92, 142–143
Nokhchi, Nokhchi-cho 61

O
OKChN (National Congress of the Chechen People) 85, 94, 120, 137–139

P
Parade of sovereignties 120, 392
Perestroika, post-Perestroika 19, 23, 41–45, 68, 75–91, 99, 104, 119, 137, 142, 153, 191, 383–384, 391
Prigorodny rayon/district 56, 394, 413
Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic 111, 139, 145–148, 151, 158, 170–171, 269
Putin, Vladimir 30, 180, 251–255, 265, 273, 289, 317, 328, 339, 345–349, 351, 355–356, 363, 365, 367, 372–378, 385, 400, 423

Q
Qadiriyya, Qadiri 48, 62, 69, 186–187, 190, 194

R
Ramzan (Kadyrov) 15–16, 18, 25–26, 30, 123, 125–127, 194, 196, 252, 255, 283–300, 340–341, 345, 355, 363, 378, 385–388, 401, 420–421
Regionalisation of the Conflict 179, 181, 399
Russian-Ukrainian war, War in Ukraine 11, 15–16, 25–26, 126, 194–195, 202, 304–306, 339–342, 345–347, 358–367, 371–378, 386, 406, 423

S
Salafism, Salafist movement, Salafist opposition 176–181, 191–196, 204–207, 311, 313, 374, 384, 398
Samashki (massacre 1995) 151, 273, 396, 415
Securitisation (of historical memory) 265, 274
Serganova, Taus 346–363
Sharia, Sharia Court, Sharia Guards 52, 69, 177–179, 186, 188, 192, 196, 202, 204, 206, 230, 231, 241, 242, 285
Sheikh Mansur, Imam Mansur 44, 50–51, 113, 186, 190, 341, 407
Sheripov, Aslanbek 56
Sovereignty 18, 65, 79, 82, 85, 90, 103, 120, 137, 139, 177, 226, 265, 351, 365, 384, 391

Sufism, Sufi brotherhoods 25, 48, 62–63, 68–69, 113, 176–181, 185–207, 374, 384, 398
Syria, Syrian War 191, 197–199, 200–202, 205, 288, 367, 376, 407

T

Tariqa 48, 62–63, 185–186
Teyp 48, 59–65, 188, 206, 315
Titiev, Oyub 256, 347, 353, 359, 406
Troshev, Genady 216
Tukhum 48, 60

U

Ukraine 26, 126, 195, 199, 202, 214, 253, 303, 339–342, 345–347, 358, 361, 365–367, 371–373, 376–377, 381
Umarov, Dzhambulat 128, 348–350, 353

V

Vainakh, Vainakh Democratic Party 54–56, 61, 65–67, 84, 93, 167, 168
Victimisation 65, 116, 119, 123
Victory narrative 259–274
Vinogradov, Vitaly 56–57
Vird 62–63, 186–188, 190

W

Wahhabism, Wahhabi 48, 63, 68–69, 176, 228, 285–286, 311, 374

Y

Yandarbiyev, Zelimkhan 63, 67, 138, 176, 190
Yeltsin, Boris 79, 82, 109–110, 135, 138–139, 149–150, 166–167, 175, 177, 179–180, 189, 211–235
Yermolov (General) 52, 122, 124, 232, 314

Z

Zakayev, Akhmed 190, 374, 377
Zavgaev, Doku 57, 61, 81–82, 137–138, 215, 285, 419
Zhirinovsky, Vladimir 217, 221, 226

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES
ON CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Edited by
Nicolas Hayoz, Jens Herlth, Julia Richers

This series focuses on the political, economic and cultural changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. It offers a platform for inter-disciplinary research on this multifaceted part of the world. The focus lies mainly on current and recent developments in societies and political systems; but research on cultural and historical backgrounds has its place here, too. The range of disciplines includes political science, history, and social anthropology, but also philosophy, cultural studies, and literary criticism. The articles are written in English.

Band 1 Nicolas Hayoz, Andrej N. Lushnycky (eds.)
Ukraine at a Crossroads.
269 pp. 2005.
ISBN 3-03910-468-3, US-ISBN 0-8204-7157-7

Band 2 Nicolas Hayoz, Leszek Jesień, Wim van Meurs (eds.)
Enlarged EU – Enlarged Neighbourhood.
Perspectives of the European Neighbourhood Policy.
392 pp. 2005.
ISBN 3-03910-624-4, US-ISBN 0-8204-7167-4

Band 3 Nicolas Hayoz, Simon Hug (eds.)
Tax Evasion, Trust, and State Capacities.
How good is Tax Moral in Central and Eastern Europe.
379 pp. 2007.
ISBN 978-3-03910-651-6, US-ISBN 978-0-8204-7168-6

Band 4 — Andrej N. Lushnycky, Mykola Riabchuk (eds.)
Ukraine on its Meandering Path Between East and West.
Interdisciplinary Studies on Central and Eastern Europe.
210 pp. 2009.
ISBN 978-3-03911-607-2

Band 5 — Leonidas Donskis (ed.)
A Litmus Test Case of Modernity.
Examining Modern Sensibilities and the Public Domain
in the Baltic States at the Turn of the Century.
314 pp. 2009.
ISBN 978-3-0343-0335-4

Band 6 — Marta Dyczok, Oxana Gaman-Golutvina (eds.)
Media, Democracy and Freedom.
The Post-Communist Experience.
246 pp. 2009.
ISBN 978-3-0343-0311-8

Band 7 — Josette Baer (ed.)
From Post-Communism toward the Third Millenium.
Aspects of Political and Economic Development in Eastern
and South-Eastern Europe from 2000–2005.
272 pp. 2011.
ISBN 978-3-03911-773-4

Band 8 — Galina Michaleva, Andrey Ryabov (eds.)
Russian Challenges.
Between Freedom and Energy.
240 pp. 2011.
ISBN 978-3-0343-0529-7

Band 9 — Nicolas Hayoz, Leszek Jesień, Daniela Koleva (eds.)
20 Years after the Collapse of Communism.
Expectations, achievements and disillusions of 1989.
679 pp. 2011.
ISBN 978-3-0343-0538-9

Band 10 — Claire Gordon, Marko Kmezic, Jasmina Opardija (eds.)
Stagnation and Drift in the Western Balkans.
The Challenges of Political, Economic and Social Change.
325 pp. 2013.
ISBN 978-3-0343-1152-6

Band 11 Christian Giordano, Nicolas Hayoz (eds.)
Informality in Eastern Europe.
Structures, Political Cultures and Social Practices.
490 pp. 2013.
ISBN 978-3-0343-1455-8

Band 12 Jens Herlth, Christian Zehnder (eds.)
Models of Personal Conversion in Russian Cultural History
of the 19th and 20th Centuries.
266 pp. 2015.
ISBN 978-3-0343-1596-8

Band 13 Viktor Stepanenko, Yaroslav Pylynskyi (eds.)
Ukraine after the Euromaidan.
Challenges and Hopes.
271 pp. 2015.
ISBN 978-3-0343-1626-2

Band 14 Ghia Nodia and Christoph H. Stefes
Security, Democracy and Development.
In the Southern Caucasus and the Black Sea Region.
380 pp. 2015.
ISBN 978-3-0343-1300-1

Band 15 Anna-Katharina Hornidge, Anastasiya Shtaltovna
and Conrad Schetter (eds.)
Agricultural Knowledge and Knowledge Systems
in Post-Soviet Societies.
396 pp. 2015.
ISBN 978-3-0343-2006-1

Band 16 Mirjam Zbinden, Janine Dahinden, Adnan Efendic (eds.)
Diversity of Migration in South-East Europe.
229 pp. 2016.
ISBN 978-3-0343-2137-2

Band 17 Vedran Džihić, Magdalena Solska (eds.)
Crisis Governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina,
Croatia and Serbia. The Study of Floods in 2014.
230 pp. 2018.
ISBN 978-3-0343-2747-3

Band 18 Giga Zedania (ed.)
Modernization in Georgia
Theories, Discourses and Realities
304 pp. 2018.
ISBN 978-3-0343-3213-2

Band 19 Magdalena Solska, Florian Bieber, Dane Taleski (eds.)
Illiberal and Authoritarian Tendencies in Central, Southeastern and Eastern Europe
376 pp. 2018.
ISBN 978-3-0343-2681-0

Band 20 Adnan Efendic, Bojana Babic, Anna Rebmann
Social Capital, Migration, Ethnic Diversity and Economic Performance.
Multidisciplinary Evidence from South-East Europe.
183 pp. 2017.
ISBN 978-3-0343-2772-5

Band 21 Alexander Filippov, Nicolas Hayoz, Jens Herlth (eds.)
Centres and Peripheries in the Post-Soviet Space.
Relevance and Meanings of a Classical Distinction
286 pp. 2020.
ISBN 978-3-0343-2705-3

Band 22 Eric Gordy, Adnan Efendic (eds.)
Meaningful reform in the Western Balkans
Between formal institutions and informal practices
212 pp. 2019.
ISBN 978-3-0343-3727-4

Band 23 Arben Hajrullahu, Anton Vukpalaj (eds.)
Forging Kosovo: Between Dependence, Independence, and Interdependence
332 pp. 2021.
ISBN 978-3-0343-4221-6

Band 24 Valentina Gevorgyan, Yulia Antonyan (eds.)
Armenia after 2018
Social and Political Transformations
191 pp. 2024.
ISBN 978-3-0343-4586-6

Band 25 Cécile Druey, Murat Shogenov, Valentina Tanaylova (eds.)
Fighting for Self-Determination, Participation and Control
Statebuilding and the Role of Historical Memories
in Chechnya (1986 – 2023)
432 pp. 2024.
ISBN 978-3-0343-4426-5