Ethnicity versus Religion:

Conflicting Sources of Political Mobilization in the North Caucasus

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A Thesis

In the Humanities Program

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Humanities)

at Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 2012

ABSTRACT

Ethnicity versus Religion: Conflicting Sources of Political Mobilization in the North Caucasus

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Concordia University, 2012

My dissertation analyzes the impact of ethnic identification and religion on the formation of the post-Soviet political system, national ideology and sources of political mobilization taking place in the non-ethnic Russian regions of the North Caucasus such as Chechnya, Dagestan, and Karachay-Cherkessia since the late Soviet period, during the tumultuous transition phase under Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999), the autocratic rule of Vladimir Putin (2000-2008), and quasi-liberal presidency of Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012).

In conducting this research, I exposed the theoretical underpinnings of the relevant literature on ethnic and religious identity, the rival visions of national identity, and the competing theories of nationalism. The study is to a large extent designed as a reaction to the mainstream claim that the degree of national consolidation and stability of these North Caucasian republics are primarily a result of ethnic clan politics. The most salient inconsistency with existing explanations is that they limit themselves to assessing the reasons for the emergence of political mobilization in specific circumstances. Due to the fact that these explanations are not concerned with the process through which this mobilization evolves into a powerful political force, they focus primarily on the rational

behavior of political elites as the key explanatory variable in determining the timing and location of ethnic or religious mobilization.

This research is an attempt to move beyond these narrow elite-focused explanations of why ethnic or religious mobilization takes place. The main question motivating the research is not *why* but *how*. In the following chapters, I explain how ethnic and religious movements emerge on the political scene as a result of government-sponsored policies, how they mobilize resources to form organizational structures, how they frame their demands to meet expectations of their target groups, and how they recruit their supporters. I argue that it is neither religious nor ethnic identity that is most appealing to people from an individual perspective as a basis for political mobilization. Rather it can be the one that it is perceived as being crucial from the point of view of the access to material resources and collective security arrangements. I conclude that the identity that is chosen for political mobilization is defined as a result of amalgamation of resources and politics, rather than a hangover of deep primordial beliefs. However, the pre-existence of strong identities provides the propitious context in which such identities can be recruited for political mobilization.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Csaba Nikolenyi without whom my return to academia would not have happened and this thesis would have never seen a glimmer of light. I am grateful to him for illuminating discussions, which helped me shape out the argument, focus on methodology and structure. It is only due to his pedagogical wisdom, flexibility and strong faith in me that this project became possible.

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Caucasian Peoples

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Mongol
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— Republic, oblast, or kray boundary

0   100 Kilometers
0   100 Miles

734538 (R00397) 1-95

Sourse: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Caucasus_ethnic.jpg

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Map 2. The North Caucasus Federal District

Source: John O'Loughlin, Edward C. Holland, Frank D.W. Witmer *The Changing Geography of Violence in the North Caucasus of Russia, 1999-2011: Regional Trends and Local Dynamics in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria.* University of Colorado at Boulder, 2011, p.5.

Map of Dagestan

Source:

Map of Chechnya

Source: www. wikipedia.org

Map of Karachay- Cherkessia

KARACHAY-CHERKESSIA

Source: www. wikipedia.org

"A nation is a group of persons united by the common error of their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbors."

Karl Deutsch, "Nationalism and its Alternatives".

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1.   Background

The North Caucasus is the most unstable part of the Russian Federation. The political and social history of the North Caucasus has been little explored, and in consequence little known or understood. When Michael Gorbachev was contemplating liberal reforms in the Soviet Union, no one could envisage what an explosion of ethnic problems was to take place. This unprecedented case of state collapse inevitably left behind fifteen republics with feeble state capacity, torn apart by power struggles between the ex-Soviet elite and predominantly nationalist movements. One of the reasons for such a rapid decline of law and order was the multiple roles ethnicity and nationalism played as the most accessible and understandable foundations for group mobilization during the break-up of the centralized power and communist ideology in the late 1980s. Another cause of this "unexpected" decline was the rather contradictory and voluntary nature of the nationality policies conducted by the political elite in response to the ethnic challenges. The political traditions of Marxism-Leninism combined two characteristic features in themselves as detrimental to the function of a democratic mode of government in multi-ethnic societies: first - a doctrine and practice of ethnic nationalism, and second - a policy of double standards which allowed both declarations of self-determination and suppression by force. This research aims to explain the emergence and development of ethno-religious movements and the

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variations in support for these movements in three ethnic regions of the North Caucasus: Chechnya, Dagestan, and Karachay-Cherkessia. It accomplishes this task by focusing on the Soviet ethno-federal institutions as structural foundations of political mobilization in post-Soviet Caucasus and by studying the similarities and differences in the evolution of ethno-religious movements in these regions during the protracted period of post-Soviet transition. In doing so, it goes beyond traditional discourse about the elite-centred explanations of ethnic and religious mobilization to focus on how this mobilization process is structured by the Soviet institutional legacy.

Geographically, the North Caucasus region stretches along the high peaks of the Caucasian mountain range, from the shores of the Black Sea in the North West to the coast of the Caspian Sea in the South East. This region at the crossroads of Europe and Asia has been acclaimed by anthropologists for its extraordinary ethnic and linguistic diversity. However, what unites many of the peoples of the North Caucasus is a distinctive Caucasian identity. There are three types of landscape that define centuries-old way of life: the coastlines along the Black and Caspian Seas, the fertile plains and the high mountains. Animal husbandry and grazing combined with handicrafts, the exploitation of natural sources and terraced gardening dominated the highlanders' economy. In the lowlands, semi-nomadic cattle-breeding along with small trading and traditional farming prevailed. Besides, the North Caucasus people share very similar behavioural patterns and cultural traits due to similar life conditions enforced during their engagements against outside invaders and in internal fights against each other. During the last century the highlanders were forcefully moved from the high mountains to the lowlands under the slogans of collectivization, industrialization, and urbanization.

Thus, the whole region became totally dependent economically on the Soviet centralized planning system. At present, even though the Caucasian society offers equal opportunities to women and men, traditional gender relations and family patterns are maintained and therefore male values prevail in public life, because local customs and tribal codes of conduct had a profound impact on Islam as it developed throughout the North Caucasus.

Historically, the North Caucasus peoples have repeatedly resisted attempts to conquer, and it was not until the late 18 century that the territory was incorporated into the groining Russian Empire. Following the 1917 Socialist Revolution the North Caucasus region was incorporated into the Soviet Russian Federation with the creation of nine administrative units. During the Stalinist purges whole peoples were deported during the Second World War under pretext of collaborating with the German Army during its occupation of the region in 1942. Partial and selective rehabilitation for the deported peoples came only in 1955. During several decades the peoples of the North Caucasus were largely forgotten and ignored by the outside world. The region was plunged to barely justified atrocities against the peoples with their forced incorporation into the Soviet State, which affected individuals as well as entire peoples, resulting in forced population transfers within the region and deportations of entire peoples, fostering feelings of victimization and marginalization. As Krag and Funch emphasize, "victimization by conquering powers is still a very strong component of Caucasian identity. Although there is a very long pre-Soviet history of brutal attempts to invade and conquest, it is the Soviet period which has left the strongest imprint of disenfranchisement among the peoples of the region" (1994:3).

The Caucasian peoples began to reassert their ethnic and national identity, as part of the growing ethnic and national awareness that was a salient point of the Gorbachev reforms in the late 1980s. However they continue to question the creation of titular nations which was a unique feature of the Soviet period. There has been an explicit connection between the concepts of ethnicity and territory: many of the groups which are minorities within the North Caucasus feel that the only means of securing their rights is to push for ethnically defined territories and creation of political and constitutional arrangements to protect and promote the rights of all groups within a given administrative unit. While the situation is relatively under control, there are many unresolved issues and claims which need to be addressed if violent conflicts are to be avoided. Assumingly, all ethnic groups in the region are actively seeking to reconfigure the nature of their relationships, both with neighbours and with federal authorities. Economically, the North Caucasian republics have become heavily dependent on Moscow subsidies and direct material support. A number of post-Soviet socio-economic reforms and privatization have also led to elevated fears about the redistribution of land and natural resources. During the late 1980s, however, the political changes which were taking place in the Soviet Union, gave rise to new hopes for equal participation in decisions concerning self-governance and self-determination. With the abrupt break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the North Caucasus has now become a border region of renewed geopolitical emulation. As a result, most ethnic groups aspire to redefine their identities, their territorial claims and their lines of cooperation, engaging vehemently in an ongoing discussion of their future and forming constantly shaky political alliances. "Historical memories, particularly Russian colonization policies and Soviet deportation

practices, play a decisive role in the current claims and grievances, serving as criteria in legitimizing ethnic and national identities." (Krag and Funch 1994:2) Invoking primordial ethnic bonds with clear historical rights to certain territories going back to antiquity is popular these days although no ethnic group in the region, whether speakers of vernacular, Turkic or Iranian languages, or adherents of the Jewish, Islamic or Christian faith, can convincingly state if they stem from one group of intruders or natives - mythology and imagination has become the accepted norm, giving rise to the propagation of myths and the distortion of facts in the political debate (Krag and Funch 1994). Complex internal grievances and absence of constructive policies and political will to implement them, coupled with a growing antagonism between the region and its political centre have led in some areas to cruel open conflicts. Any new attempt to enforce externally-devised solutions and ignore local claims will only add to the feeling of estrangement and feed nationalistic aspirations among North Caucasian peoples. This contributes to a general feeling of uncertainty and insecurity in a region which could become subject to major turmoil and violence. The North Caucasus is therefore a region not only at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and of different cultural and political norms, but also at a distinct crossroads concerning its future development. Although ethnic tensions have a long history in the region, the religious aspect has always served as a rallying point for ethnic groups to assert their struggle against the oppression. Back in 1877, the people of Chechnya and Dagestan revolted against the Russian authority. As Akhmadov, Doss and Kumosov (2009) point out, even though the rebellion was a complete failure that served primarily to produce new tactics on the part of the Sufi brotherhoods of the North Caucasus, the victorious Russian authorities

responded unexpectedly not with further oppression but rather with tolerance toward the Islamic religion. The religious tolerance of the post-rebellion years (1877 to 1917) has led Caucasians to speak of Tsarist colonialism with some respect (Akhmadov, Doss and Kumosov 2009).

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, throughout the 1990s, ethnic minorities, particularly in remote rural areas of the Caucasus, were mainly ignored by the central authorities, because the lack of communication between the central and local entities was believed to secure stability and ensure that the incumbent political elites could stay in power. Whereas constitutional provisions have been crafted in a way as to display certain principles of equality and promotion of ethnic diversity, nothing has been done to enforce it. Institutional weaknesses, economic stagnation and pervasive corruption were to blame for neglecting minorities.

On March 28, 2011 the Russian State Statistical Service released the preliminary results of the 2010 census. The country's net population loss comprised 2.2 million people or 1.6 % of the general population, which declined from 145.1 million in 2002 to 142.9 million in 2010 (RSSS 2011). The Russian Federation continued to follow the same pattern of the previous years, with very low birth rates, high male mortality and a relatively low level of immigration. On the contrary, the North Caucasus showed a significant growth trend. In particular, the population of the North Caucasus Federal District reached 9.5 million in 2010, as it added 6.3 % to its 2002 number. Dagestan and Chechnya became the two regions of the Russian Federation with the highest growth rate, 15.6 % and 15 % accordingly. Karachay-Cherkessia's population grew by 8.9 % in the same period - the fourth highest result in the Russian Federation. Although

Muslim-populated republics of the North Caucasus, known for high birth rates and low mortality, raised expactations for substantial population growth, the 2010 census provided some surprising results showing population declines in Ingushetia (11.6 %) and Kabardino-Balkaria (4.6 %). Traditionally, the North Caucasus republics have high rates of unemployment, contributing to a constant outflow of people, mostly to inner Russian regions. As indicated in the 2010 government strategy for North Caucasus development, the region's net loss of population due to migration in 2008 was 11,900, and almost all of it (9,800) was contributed by Dagestan. Dagestan's population grew from 2.5 million in 2002 to 3 million in 2010, that is suspiciously astounding spike of population. With no significant migration flows into this republic during this period, the growth is hard to explain (prior to announcing the 2010 census results, estimates were around 2.7 million). Chechnya's population added nearly 200,000 since 2002 and numbers now officially 1,275,000 that is widely viewed as artificially increased during the 2002 census to cover up the massive loss of lives during the Russian-Chechen wars. In reality, the announced increase of Chechnya's population is probably a cumulative effect of a real inflow of Chechen refugees after 2002, primarily from Ingushetia, a high birth rate and a cumulative statistical addition of perceived population growth. The astonishing growth of Karachay-Cherkessia's population from 440,000 in 2002 to 480,000 in 2010 appears to be framed as well. According to the 2002 census, ethnic Russians comprised barely over one-fourth of the republican population, and have been reported leaving this impoverished "dual identity "republic in large numbers. In fact, official statistical reports documented a dwindling population trend in Karachay-Cherkessia up until 2009, when its population was estimated at 427,000 (FSSS 2011).

The results of the 2010 census thus reflect not only the actual population growth or decline in a given North Caucasian region, but the local administration's ability to exercise a certain bureaucratic solidarity and solidify its bargaining positions with Moscow for future concessions. While Chechnya occupies a special place, since Moscow itself is interested in pacifying its population by all means, Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia continue to demonstrate unwavering strength in its bargaining positions with Moscow, demonstrating ostensible solidarity among its ruling elites to manipulate the population figures to their advantage. Moreover, the federal government also appears to have a vested interest in skewing the figures since they have become so politically sensitive and ingrained in socio-economic calculations. The local bureaucracy of the North Caucasus republics habitually tries to beef up the size of their populations mainly because under the current Russian system of state budget redistribution, it gives certain advantages in terms of getting more subsidies to satisfy the needs of the allegedly bigger population. The chase for larger population numbers breaks down into separate city administrations and districts, especially in a diverse, multiethnic republic like Dagestan, where each city mayor and each ethnicity try to back up their social standing with impressive population figures. In Chechnya's case, the local administration's ambitions to have a sufficiently large population are matched by Moscow's anxiety to cover up the results of the devastating wars it inflicted upon this republic. With other problems to tackle, such as frozen conflicts, widespread corruption and abject poverty, international organizations have generally ignored the inadequate policy framework in relation to national and religious minorities. In the North Caucasus, non-governmental actors are to a large extent dependent on foreign grants, and projects

initiated by local organizations tend therefore to adopt priorities set by their grant-givers, and thus, follow the same pattern. Overall, there is a yawning gap between the promotion of civic identity and the protection of minorities, resulting in tensions between the central government, local elites and minority communities.

1.2. Nature of the Problem and Scope of the Study

The "classical" notion of nation-building considers ethnic difference as pre-modern patterns of social differentiation which hampers development and therefore should be removed. Karl Deutsch, in his classical 1953 study "Nationalism and Social Communication," viewed nation-building as the rate of assimilation and mobilisation. Deutsch defined the rate of assimilation as an increase or decrease of groups within a particular population who spoke the dominant language. Likewise, the rate of mobilisation was defined as an increase or decrease of those groups, which ceased to live in traditional systems of communication and integrated into national communication patterns (1953). Thus, assimilation and social mobilisation led to a fading of traditional forms of social differentiation in clans and tribes. According to Deutsch (1953,1969), nation building is inextricably linked to social transformation in the form of modernisation in the context of interaction between the Western polities and traditional social structures, emanating from the specific response of the local people to global modernisation challenges. However, the "classical" concept of nation-building may also be questioned for potential to undermine the right to self-determination which has been widely recognised as a fundamental human right. The focus on nation-building is often inconsistent with the driving forces of self-determination. In fact, self-determination will, sooner or later, challenge this status quo because it is not self-

evident who the subjects of self-determination are. After World War II, the principle of self-determination served as an unbeatable argument for claiming independence. The very concept of nation-building has gradually developed into an important source of income and glamour for a plethora of actors who were involved in it for decades. However, the critique of nation-building has its own flaws. First, to what degree violent conflict, which involves ethnic markers, is really an expression of competing ethnic identity claims. In relation to this point, I shall explain that the persistence of ethnic markers cannot explain conflict but is rather a demonstration of conflict. Second, I argue that the critique of nation-building bends to ethnocentricity in that it downplays non-ethnic factors of political and social behaviour.

Types of violence, as well as the ideologies and the myths that inspire them, and salient lines of cleavage, vary enormously. Identifying etiology under these conditions is a daunting task by definition. The solution is to divide the problem into discrete parts, the sensible assumption being that various forms of violence require different explanations. The causes of interstate wars are presumably different from those of revolutions, which are different from those of ethnic or religious conflicts. Separating ethnic conflict, for example, from clan, religious, regional, or other kinds of internal conflict is difficult, because any single conflict is likely to involve various mobilizing ideologies, lines of cleavage, and political objectives, each of which can change over time. Moreover, I believe that the adjective (ethnic, national, clan, regional, or religious) matters rather less for explanatory purposes than is typically assumed. For example, the structural factors typically adduced as causes of ethnic conflict (modernization, state collapse, poverty, unemployment, social policy, inequality, globalization, or cultural

propensity to violence) appear to be equally applicable (or equally inapplicable) to other forms of collective political violence. Why inadequate social policy , for example, is any more likely (or less likely) to produce ethnic conflict than class or religious conflict is not only unclear but rarely addressed by theorists of ethnic conflict or any kind of collective violence.

Answering all these questions is well beyond the scope of this research. Instead, I shall focus on the more specific question of whether ethnic conflict is different from religious conflict, and if so, whether theories of ethnic conflict are equally applicable to religious conflict, with particular reference to the question of militancy inspired by radical Islam in the North Caucasus. I do not mean to suggest that all internal conflicts are alike or that distinguishing among types of collective political violence is without value. On the contrary, I argue that theorists of collective political violence (Ikle 1971, Modelski 1964, Pillar 1983, Kaufmann 1996, Walter and Snyder 1999, Posen 1993, Stedman 1991, 1997) should be careful to distinguish the kind of violence they are trying to explain and to consider whether the explanation they offer is really unique to that type of conflict. I also argue that theories of violence should consider whether they can explain why particular conflicts change over time and why certain kinds of collective violence are more prevalent at particular moments in history. The challenge is to explain why Islamism is such a potent mobilizer of internal violence in the North Caucasus today, whereas thirty years ago it was Marxism while fifteen years ago it was ethno-nationalism. Relational factors help explain variation in modes of resistance (e.g., why we get suicide terrorism today but not yesterday) and perhaps overall levels of violence (militants learn about how to conduct violence more effectively). If so, I

believe we would still see considerable variation in violence over time and space, a variation that is best assessed through the changing mobilizational capacity of different ideologies of resistance. In other words, it is neither the structurally engrained demand for militancy nor potential of violence that matters most, but the changing supply of ideologies of resistance and by the degree to which particular ideologies discredit themselves in everyday life.

The twentieth century saw a number of cyclical increases in the number and intensity of ethnic revolts, implicitly suggesting that democratization unleashes ethnic tensions and gives rise to ethnic-based conflict. Furthermore, ethnic rebellion is often viewed as impediment to democratization, leading to its reversal. Thus, a variety of theories are employed to examine the conditions under which transition to democracy affects ethnic conflict and the conditions under which ethnic conflict affects democratization: elite persuasion, political opportunity, competition, modernization, and internal colonialism (Yemelianova 2005). The general explanation is that democratization contributes to reduction of ethnic conflict that supports political opportunity theory. Likewise, there is a general correlation between the level of democracy and ethnic revolt. In underdeveloped societies, the ethnic revolt has a negative effect on democracy and that the effect varies by the level of development a society has achieved. The disintegration of the command administrative economy in the Soviet Union and its swift transformation into a quasi capitalist system in post-Soviet Russia was a reaction by the Soviet elite to emerging threats to their privileges and administrative power by Andropov and later Gorbachev in the late 1980s. Threatened by the inevitable dilution of its privileged status, the Soviet elite responded to the by

transforming itself into an official bourgeoisie that could legally claim the power and property it had already controlled by rushing ahead with laws that destroyed the socialist planning economy.

According to Gurr, ethnic conflict is often defined as anti-state action taken on behalf of a marginalized or at risk ethnic group (2000). Ethnicity, in its turn, is generally rooted in common language, religion, cultural practices, and a shared history or myths of common experience. Marginalized minorities are groups that are considered to be at risk based on a history of discrimination against them, a situation of disadvantage due to past discrimination, or if they have organized political groups that advocate for greater group rights (Gurr 1993). Ethnic nationalism has long proven to be an ideological competitor of democracy. More precisely, ethnic nationalism is incompatible with democracy because it establishes rights based on group membership rather than equality for all (Snyder 2000). Nationalism promotes the ideological moorings for ethnic movements and ultimately ignites ethnic conflict. Ethnic conflict on the crest of rising ethnic sentiment results in the reinforcement of ethnic cleavages that inevitably leads to the dominance of group rights over individual rights - a situation incompatible with liberal democracy. Not only democratic political culture is shrunk when society is divided along one line and cross-cutting cleavages are weak, but elections become a formal way to legitimize one party or ethnic group. This usually leads to a one party regime with essentially ethnic domination. In more diverse societies, different interests form crosscutting cleavages and prevent this from occurring. In fact, in societies with deep ethnic cleavages, minorities may tolerate authoritarian regimes, knowing their political treatment could be much worse in a democracy (Horowitz 1991).

Unlike class-based cleavages with relatively permeable borders, nationalism and ethnic movements are alike in that they claim legitimate authority over a certain territory or population, pitting them against the state and democracy, which claim legitimate authority over the same territory or population, undermining the legitimacy of the concept of a single nation existing within one administrative unit (Olzak 1998). In addition to economic, cultural, and social factors that influence a country's ability to adopt democratic methods of governance, the existence of ethnic conflict also contributes to alienation of democratic norms and practices. Democratization is most likely in the absence of significant political competition ignited by elites, because violent ethnic conflict represents a serious challenge to the status quo. Ethnic conflict also consolidates ethnic boundaries and thus inhibits the formation of cross-cutting cleavages widely known to be crucial to democracy. Besides, confidence is also important in societies attempting democratization, but violent conflict interferes with interethnic confidence, significantly reducing it. Moreover, ethnic conflict inhibits grass-root popular support for democracy as people tend to value stability over civil rights and freedoms, and will often trade both for increased security, either real or virtual. Although ideological challengers to democracy, such as fascism and communism, have widely contributed to long-term democratic reversals, recent trends suggest that ethnic based nationalism is more potent ideological challenger, which is inevitably accompanied by ethnic conflict.

1.3. Topic of Research, Relevance, and Contribution to Field

My research investigated the phenomenon of changing religious identities and practices and changing religious and political attitudes among people of such republics as Dagestan, Chechnya, and Karachay-Cherkessia. I explored political mobilization, and potential or actual conflict that are of interest both to public policy debates and to theoretical discussions. First, to what extent is Islam becoming a more salient identity in these regions, and why? Second, under what conditions religious ideology becomes the basis for mass mobilization and violent conflict? More precisely, how, when, and why does Islamic identity become a factor in conflict with other religious confessions and nationalistic elites? Third, why do we see great variation in the degree to which Islamic identities have spurred mobilization throughout the North Caucasus? Fourth, is political Islamization at the social level a cause or consequence of violence, repression, and state's failure to provide ethnic groups with equal access to basic constitutional provisions?

My research has been particularly concerned with the impact of ethnic identification and religion on the formation of the post-Soviet political system and national ideology in post-Soviet Chechnya, Dagestan, and Karachay-Cherkessia. I focused on the above-mentioned ethnic republics of the North Caucasus as most similar cases that differ on the dependent variable I sought to explain and the independent variables that cause the differences in the dependent variable. Since it is impossible to provide a representative sample of a population that varies on so many potentially significant variables using only three cases, I developed the hypothesis by using the case comparison method. This method is useful in small-*N* studies because it identifies the

cases for which the hypothesis is least likely to hold true. If it does hold true for these cases, it is quite likely that it would also hold true for other cases where conditions are not as adverse for the theory in question. In particular, I have sought to map the ways in which religious and ethnic minorities have responded to the challenges of modernization and globalization as well as to systematize and describe the complex political, social and religious situation in the region, above all, the key problems and conflicts, which give rise to the religious and ethnic nationalism. The extent of popular support for ethnic mobilization is measured in several ways, including electoral support for nationalist candidates, the size and frequency of public protests, and responses to public opinion polls and surveys conducted by international NGOs and human rights groups. Analysis of the nationalist movements and religious groups are based primarily on a content analysis of the local press, interviews with nationalist activists, government officials, and local experts and on archival materials detailing the development of ethnic and religious institutions. The primary sources used are almost exclusively in the Russian language. The lack of primary sources in the local languages does not bias the results of the research. All scholars and political figures, including nationalist and religious activists used Russian at least as frequently as they used their native language. Nationalist leaders in all of the regions published their programs and ideas in local Russian-language newspapers. While it is true that additional nationalist writings were available in the native-language press, I do not believe, based on reading several translated articles from these sources, that this additional material would have changed my findings in any way.

In my view, the key problem with existing institutional explanations is that they tend limit themselves to explaining the reasons for the emergence of this mobilization in specific circumstances. Due to the fact that they are not concerned with the process through which this mobilization becomes a powerful political force, they continue to focus almost primarily on the behavior of political elites as the main explanatory variable in determining the timing and location of ethnic and religious mobilization. As I emphasize in the next chapters, most institutionalist explanations boldly assume that the crucial political decisions are made by the ruling elites, who then incite the masses to follow their agenda. This research is an attempt to move beyond these narrow elite-focused accounts of why ethnic and religious mobilization takes place. The key question motivating the research is not *why* but *how*. I therefore explain how ethnic and religious movements emerged on the political scene as a result of government-driven liberalization, how they compete for resources to form organizational structures, how they frame their demands to meet expectations of their target groups, and how they recruit their supporters. The nature of these processes, I argue, is largely determined by the institutional design of what is established by the state.

In the post-Soviet sphere, these questions are puzzling and pressing empirical issues. For example, we have little understanding of why Islamic identity became increasingly salient and powerful in mobilizing Chechens against federal authorities. Will the pattern of Islamic militancy and Islamist political opposition we have witnessed in Afghanistan similarly occur in the North Caucasus where Islamic cultural and religious identities are not that strong? If so, we should anticipate that nascent militant Islamist groups in Dagestan would gain popular support over time. Yet, we still need to

explain why Islamists fail to mobilize the population in other cases where Islam nonetheless pervades society? Conversely, why has Islamic identity played little role in the conflict in Karachay-Cherkessia, and only recently been politically mobilized in Dagestan? In conducting this research, I exposed the theoretical underpinnings of the relevant literature on ethnic and religious identity, the rival visions of national identity (including civic versus ethnic, and the significance of language, boundaries and institutions), and the competing theories of nationalism. Moreover, with regard to contemporary Caucasian identity, I explained the essential role that democratization has contributed to the facilitation of elite manipulated identity construction. I examined the trajectory and characteristics prevalent in the idea of identity over three periods and will explain why certain concepts of identity have succeeded while others have failed. The political environment in democratizing societies in the North Caucasus created a situation of intense inter-elite rivalry. As competing elites groups strive for political control, the difficulties in forming political coalitions and coherent policy platforms result in the need to rapidly mobilize mass support, and the most effective instrument for doing so is the manipulation of nationalist sentiments and religious believes. Thus, elite manipulations construct alternative visions of national and often religious identity and, therefore, the more virulent strains of nationalism intensify when there is an increase in the proportion of individuals who have a say in political and public discourse (Snyder 1993:90). However, before any examination of the Caucasian identities' formation can be interpreted, it is imperative to shed light on the historical antecedents of Soviet nationalities politics and expose the essential role that ideological political clichés had on the consequent institutionalization of these salient identification markers

under the Soviet regime and reveal how Marx, Lenin and Stalin addressed the "nationalities question".

My research explored these issues by analyzing theoretically and empirically the trends in religious and political identification, taking place in the North Caucasus since the late Soviet period. I explained how the non-ethnic Russian regions of the North Caucasus such as Chechnya, Dagestan, and Karachay-Cherkessia pursued their particular pathways and inspect how the idea of national identity changed during the tumultuous democratic transition under Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999), Vladimir Putin (2000-2008), and Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012). I looked at the social level to understand how identity plays out among ordinary people, and why religious identification has been changing. The data I have gathered also helps to explain why the trends differ from region to region, and to try to understand what motivates Islamist groups to use religion as a source of political opposition. Despite much theoretical writing, there is very little empirical data and case study work on religion and politics and the rise and decline of Islamist opposition movements in the North Caucasus region. A large segment of my research is devoted to arguments about religious identity and conflict, religion and democracy, and empirical studies and counters to common assumptions about ethno-religious conflict. The actual situation is characterized by a high diversity of social, economic and cultural forms of development and modes of governance in different regions. Each of the nine North Caucasian regions have now their own development trends, sets of problems, levels of violence, etc. Chechnya, Dagestan, and Karachay-Cherkessia are selected for a comparison of similar socio-economic, geographic and ethnic features but different strategies of ethno-religious

conflict development and resolution: a full-fledged war with massive human casualties and much collateral damage in Chechnya, a relatively successful record of defusing the tensions that arose in the early 1990s in Dagestan, and a potentially dangerous escalation of conflict (especially in 1999-2003) in Karachay-Cherkessia, where, in contrast, there is still a high level of ethnic tension, conflicts between different religious groups, and open criticism of the regional authorities.

Is ethnic conflict different from religious conflict? It has become common to argue that the terms "ethnicity" and "ethnic group" are nebulous and ambiguous, and that it is subsequently difficult to grasp what "ethnic conflict" means or how to distinguish ethnic wars from other kinds of sustained internal violence. Usually, an ethnic group is viewed as an objective category with different linguistic and cultural characteristics. As Walker Connor put it in his article on conceptual confusion in the study of nations, nation states, and ethnic groups: "An ethnic group may be readily discerned by an anthropologist or other outside observer while an ethnic group *may*, therefore, be other-defined, the nation *must* be self-defined" (Connor 1994:103). In contrast, many scholars agree that "nation should be treated as a subjective category" in Benedict Anderson's much-cited formulation, a nation is an "imagined political community" aspiring to some form of political self-determination (Anderson 1991:3-4). According to Connor, members of an ethnic group, unlike nations, are not expected to identify with a distinct cultural community. Subsequently, ethnic conflict would be determined by outside observers on the basis of observable behavior that is indicative of cultural difference, using objective criteria such as language, religious practices as "ethnically" different.

One obvious problem here is that the great majority of so-called "ethnic conflicts" involve struggles between collectivities inspired by nationalism, with one or more parties appealing to the common lineage. However, in reality, language appears to be the decisive factor. If people from different regions with different cultures speak the same language, they are typically not considered different ethnicities, and conflict between them is typically not classified as ethnic conflict. That said, ethnic conflict is where combatants in a violent internal conflict speak different languages. If so, then conflict between Sunnis Tallish-speakers and Sunnis Lizgin-speakers in Dagestan would be ethnic conflict, but conflict between Russian-speaking Shiites and Sunnis would be religious one. Nonetheless, I suggest that language is not determinative factor either. The objective line of cleavage is not religious or linguistic, because each of the groups has a clear sense of national consciousness. It has been suggested that any individual has many identities that can be activated by different circumstances. If so, then virtually any form of collective violence would qualify as an identity conflict. Likewise, religion is not a less important factor than class, citizenship, or institutional affiliation in most cases. In real world, however, what seems to matter most is whether, by virtue of political/academic fashion or changing political circumstances, external observers chose to characterize a particular conflict at a particular moment in history as "ethnic", or "religious". Then, I suggest that we continue to draw more careful delineation with regard to internal conflicts by distinguishing among three different classificatory criteria: (1) the *dominant line of cleavage*; (2) the *objectives* of the parties to the conflict; and (3) the dominant *mobilizing ideology* of resistance involved.[1] In

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[1] Explaining why those committed to political violence engage in suicide terrorism rather than insurgency does not

other words, there is a high probability that a sustained conflict in a particular area will go along any of these dimensions.

I assumed at this point that it is possible to separate "ethnic conflict" from "religious conflict". The next question is whether the etiology of the former is different from the latter. Are the roots of Islamist-inspired violence, for example, significantly different from those of ethnic conflicts? While symbols and symbolism play an important role in provoking ethnic conflict, why this would not be true for other kinds of collective political violence? Why are ethnic symbols believed to be more emotionally potent than symbols that appeal to religion, tribe, class, or political ideology? It turns out that religion, as well as kinship, has been often used to bind together political communities, one of many means by which "imagined political communities" are constructed, being responsible for more violence than "ethnic wars." The relationship between ethnic conflict and modernity pushes for an implicit claim that nationalism in general and ethno-nationalism in particular are products of modernization, whereas religion is anachronistic (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Smith 1986, Marx 2003). The advantages of linguistic homogenization, along with the spread of Anderson's print capitalism, create the need and opportunity to "invent the nation". Why should we be led to believe that faith-based ideologies are more anachronistic as driving forces of violence that ethno-nationalism? As for the Caucasus, even if we accept that a common language and culture are salient prerequisites of modernization, it is still not clear why religion is less potent as a basis for nationhood than language, particularly given the nature of the state boundaries left behind by the Soviet Union. Is

explain why we get collective political violence in the first place, or why we get a particular kind of conflict (ethnic or otherwise).

the political project of Islamists in Karachay-Cherkessia less plausible than the project of the pan-Turkists who wish to construct a nation out of Turkish speakers? I also argue that it was not clear why rationality and reason would be more effective than religion and mysticism in mobilizing militant resistance, as modernization was inevitably associated with liberal democracy and its consequences that many militants find very objectionable. Moreover, religious and anti-rationalist ideologies of resistance are at least as potent as secular ones in offering persuasive explanations and prescriptions, identifying who is to blame. In sum, religious ideologies have the unbeatable advantage over reason-based ones: secular and rationalist ideologies require positive proof of the validity of their claims and can be easily discredited in practice. Put it simply, it is not at all clear why ethnic conflict is significantly different from other kinds of conflict in terms of etiology, including those inspired by religion.

In conducting this study, I explored the theoretical frameworks of the relevant literature on ethnic identity, the rival visions of its components, and the competing schools of nationalism (primordial, constructivist and instrumentalist). Moreover, with regard to contemporary post-Soviet identity, I elaborated on the essential role that democratization has contributed to the facilitation of elite manipulated identity construction. By looking into the trajectory and characteristics prevalent in the idea of identity, I explained why certain concepts of identity have succeeded while others have failed and examine the development of identity construction under the Soviet regime and reflect on how Marx, Lenin and Stalin addressed the "nationalities question". Then, I evaluated the results of this process and the centralized attempts to construct individual identities around the idealistic conception of the "Communist Man" and

explore what place different ethnic groups had in the system. Furthermore, I investigated how Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Chechnya pursued their particular national pathways and inspect how the idea of ethnic or religious identity changed during the controversial transition period under Boris Yeltsin. This period was marked by the materialization of new identities, which ranged from exclusionary to moderate nationalism. The final empirical period looks at how current ruling elites address the issue of national identity and nationhood. It should be noted that in conducting this study, I tried to avoid any in depth treatment of the former Soviet legacies and focused primarily on the post-Soviet era.

1.4. Research Questions and Research Design

Several scholars have pointed to Soviet institutional legacy as the main explanation for ethnic and religious mobilization during the late 1980s. Thus, Brubaker (1996) clearly describes the core features of Soviet ethno-federalism and emphasizes that the structure of the Soviet state played a critical role in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Roeder (1991) points out that the extent of mobilization depended on a republic's position in the Soviet ethno-federal hierarchy. His argument stipulates that the Soviet regime sought to control ethnic politics by delegating control of ethnic regions to indigenous elites, by punishing them sought to use nationalism to gain popular support, and by granting the loyal elites to enjoy a monopoly over mobilizational resources within particular ethnic community. Laitin (1991) introduces elite incentives to the institutionalist model, explaining that regional political elites incited nationalist or religious movements not whenever they had the resources to do so, but only under those circumstances when doing so would consolidate their power versus

the federal government. Furthermore, Treisman (1997) elaborates on this work by spelling out how regional elites employed the institutional resources provided by ethnic or religious institutions to gain advantage in their struggle for power with the center. The above-mentioned scholarship has greatly increased our understanding of the role played by state institutions and by ruling elites in fostering ethnic or religious mobilization. My research continues their effort by extending the institutional explanation beyond the political elites. While the existing scholarship has largely focused on the role of political elites in mobilizing ethnic minorities, I argue that the support of political elites is not an extricable component of ethnic or religious mobilization. Moreover, even though these authors have emphasized the connection between administrative status and resource allocation and the importance of these resources for the political mobilization of ethnic and religious movements, they have not explained the process by which differences in administrative status affect political mobilization.

My main research methods have been textual analysis of the media (periodicals, radio, and TV), reports produced by both Russian and international NGOs, official statistics and analytical materials released by relevant state institutions (primary sources), as well as relevant academic scholarship and literature on the subject (secondary sources). The research has been undertaken over a period of ten years (2000 – 2010). It included consultations with region-based analysts, academics, NGOs, political activists and religious leaders in order to gather descriptions of local religious and ethno-nationalist discourses, structural factors that contribute to them, rhetoric that relates to them and local assessment of problems and grievances. In this regard, many

grievances articulated are pervasive and common to the entire region, but those experiencing them do not have the advantage of an overall comparative perspective. They are usually not part of some coherent agenda but some may resonate for different groups according to the underlying circumstances. Socio-economic problems in the region are directly associated with growing tensions and social pressures. Ethnic and religious rhetoric intertwines with the search for ideals, ideologies, and solutions that the post-Soviet Caucasus is witnessing, and to which, for instance, the social justice aspect of Islam may contribute.

Another methodological approach that I used is a study of institutional mechanisms that can shed light on intricate collision of mobilizing ideologies in the region. The interface between sociology, geography and political science and the key unit of analysis is the institutional framework of the republics chosen – Chechnya, Dagestan, and Karachay-Cherkessia. Institutional framework means the hybrid combination of institutions that derive from the Soviet institutional legacy, from unofficial institutions that emerged as a reaction to the organizational deficits of the Soviet system (such as a black market economy or networks of patronage) and from "traditional" institutions that have survived the Soviet system. Focusing on the institutional framework allowed me to catch and to understand the micro politics of local development impulses and to place it in the wider context of a successful or failed state building. The analysis considers formal and informal central (federal level) and local (republican) institutions that may facilitate cooperation and hinder violent conflict. This research takes up three related questions:

(1) what is the difference between ethnic and religious conflict;

(2) are theories of ethnic conflict equally applicable to religious conflict; and

(3) can available theories of collective violence explain why the nature of internal conflict changes over time, either with respect to line of cleavage or mobilizing ideology? My argument is that distinguishing among types of internal conflict and its driving forces is more difficult than is often assumed and that theories of ethnic conflict typically explain not ethnic conflict as distinct category but sustained internal violence in general, including "religious" conflict. While these theoretical frameworks usually try to explain why stand-off breaks out in some multiethnic regions but not others, they do not seek to explain us why conflict when it happens is "ethnic" rather than "religious". The following narrative of ethno-religious mobilization in three republics of the North Caucasus reveals how institutional differences led to variations in resource availability that in turn caused the observable regional differences in the ability of nationalist leaders to mobilize the population and achieve their goals. In particular, I sought to explain (1) how and why the movement leaders choose to launch the mobilization process; (2), how the movement leaders convince others to support the movement; and (3) how and why a significant proportion of the population actually joins the movement.

"Merely quantitative differences, beyond a certain point, pass into qualitative changes."

Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

Studies of the political mobilization of ethnicity immediately confront a number of conceptual issues. First, what is an ethnic group? Second, what is political mobilization and how can it be compared across time, countries, and groups? This literature review provides a non-exhaustive overview of recent thinking and research on political mobilization in the studies of politics of collective identities. It does so in two sections. The first section defines the term "ethnic group"' and situates the literature on ethnic politics within a larger body of scholarship on political mobilization in conflict-prone societies. The second section considers the main theoretical approaches in the study of political mobilization of ethnicity. Given this range of issues, this chapter outlines the dominant literature and then articulates the rationale for the approach and case-studies used in the subsequent chapters.

Nationalism and Ethnic Mobilization as Subjects of Study

While a plethora of theorists dealt with the rise of nationalism, ethnic mobilization and nationalist ideologies, I evaluate certain claims made by Breuilly (1993, 2008), Anderson (1991, 1994), Brubaker (1992, 1996, 2004), Gellner (1983, 1988), and Deutsch (1953, 1961, 1969) . Even though these authors may not directly address the propensity of a given nation to mobilize behind a   particular nationalist ideology, they provide theoretical grounds of a broader subject with which I am

concerned: the conditions under which nationalism arises and becomes militant. More precisely, I am concerned with the more specific conditions that cause ethnic groups to mobilize behind a nationalist or a religious ideology.

The above-mentioned scholars are addressing the broad question: what are those conditions under which most group members adopt or reject a particular set of ideas about the nation? In answering this question, these authors base their narrative on a range of separate processes. Thus, Anderson points to the rise of print capitalism and its role in promoting the idea of the nation in Western Europe and then spreading the concept to its overseas colonies. Breuilly highlights the rise of the modern state and the nationalist opposition created by this development. Deutsch links the rise of nationalism to the emergence and growth of mass communications, shared socio-economic preferences, and the social processes unleashed by industrialization. Gellner deals with nationalism in terms of the imperatives of industrialization and its influence on creating standard high cultures. Horowitz (1985) argues that in deeply divided societies the degree to which ethnicity is pervasive is variable. In those societies, ethnic affiliations impact not only family and social life, but also formal institutions. In his view, distinguishing between ranked and unranked systems, centralization of groups, and severity of group cleavages is important. He also argues that ethnic groups are bounded by kinship in such a way as to maximize the effective use of the political institutions and provide many services that are substitutes for what the modern state fails to provide. The main reasons for the persistence of deeply divided societies are ethnic institutions that reproduce ethnic cleavages over time - ethnic or nationalist political parties. Even though Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) scholarship on cleavages acknowledges that

political institutions may be crucial to generate cleavages, most political scientists argue for endogenous political explanations based on institutionalism. As Mann (2004) points out, it is simply erroneous to assume an automatic process of mass mobilization in connection to elites' political agenda. Likewise, we should not assume that ethnic political parties or armed outfits spring up instantly. Given the importance of ethnic mobilization, we need more research in this area. Indeed, these theories explain convincingly why nationalism is the pervasive variable in political science. Nonetheless, the factors involved in these claims are far too general to explain significant variations between cases. In attributing nationalist mobilization to the institutionalization of nationhood, Brubaker highlights a factor that existed throughout much of the post-Soviet region and falls short when confronted with the challenge of explaining why Chechens exhibited a higher degree of nationalist mobilization than other national groups. Furthermore, Brubaker cannot explain why the nationalist ideologies supported by the former nations were more extreme than those adopted by the latter. In other words, if the above-mentioned theoretical frameworks are debilitated by an inability to account for differences between nations, they fail to explain variations within nations as well. With regard to my research, they cannot adequately explain why a given group's nationalism is directed against certain groups but not others. While, by focusing on a nation's feeling of relative deprivation towards groups that are culturally and linguistically different, Gellner attempts to provide an answer to this question, Brubaker suggests an alternative approach for understanding which group a particular nation will mobilize against. I believe that a workable theory of nationalism should be able to explain not only why nationalism exists, but also why particular nationalism will be

directed against some groups more than others. The re-emergence of militant nationalism as a leading mobilizing force in the post-Soviet space has refocused the attention of scholars towards the question of timing. Why did nationalism re-emerge in the 1990s as an unquestionable mass-mobilizing phenomenon? Brubaker, in his turn, lays out a set of means to explain the timing of nationalist mobilization, marking an advance over previous accounts of nationalism, which focus on factors that tend to be unchanging over time. On the basis of these factors, my assessment will show how the opening of political space was part of a broader process of state disintegration, a process that provided the crucial condition for nationalist mobilization in the North Caucasus.

Even though the political ideology of nationalism dates back to the early 19 century in Europe, there is no fixed definition of such an ideology, but a general consensus of what it means, depending on how and what is being analyzed (Dekker, Malova, and Hoogendorn 2003). Dekker, Malova and Hoogendorn demonstrate how the conceptualization of nationalism differs when it is being defined as an ideology, movement, process of nation or nation-state building, and one's political stance (2003). Thus, it is important to set the boundaries of this ideology. Chatterjee argues that nationalism is perceived as a dark, elemental and an unpredictable force of primordial nature threatening the orderly calm of civilized life (Chatterjee 1999). Brubaker argued that we need to stop dissecting nations based on dichotomous contest. Instead, we should look at the possibility to connect the national minorities and study each position in terms of a field of activity, of differentiated and competitive positions on stances (Brubaker, 1996). While nationalism focuses on collective identities and prioritizes collective rights over individual rights, the liberal view of the nation is not based on

these so called "collective" and "subjective" identities. Liberals have studied and overtly classify nations as being individualistic and objective. Renan clearly asserts that a nation is a large solidarity constituted by the sentiment of sacrifices and defines the nation as a group of people who choose to live together by free will, rather than social determinism (1996). According to Greenfeld (1992), the nation is defined as a linguistic group; a factor that nations commonly belong to. Nationalists emphasize that one needs to belong to a nation in order to be a nationalist. The self-interest, survival and the self determination of a nation is most important. Gellner's (1983) definition of the nation is clearly subjective. He states that individuals need not belong to a nation by birth. As long as there is solidarity between the individuals; this may constitute towards nation-building. Renan argues that there is no connection between nations and cultural or racial groups. Instead, it is all political in nature. Haas (1997) views nationalism as an aspect of modernization and he maintains that its followers do not necessarily wish to endorse a secular form of modern life. Nationalism, according to Haas, is a social construct. It was constructed to make life better for collectivities suffering through the transition to modernization. Haas argues that identities, in particular, national identities are chosen and are subject to change.

The theoretical discourse within theories of nationalism is centered on two pair-wise opposites: 1) Instrumentalism vs. Primordialism; and 2) Modernism vs. Perennialism. Primordialists emphasise emotions and reflective constraints as legitimate explanations, whereas instrumentalists think of ethnicity as a dependent variable. Ethnicity is therefore crafted for its strategic utility in achieving material or political gains, formally in the name of the group, but in fact exclusively to the elites' advantage.

Modernists attach the formation of nations to the rise of modernity, whereas perennialists see them as enduring, inveterate, century-long phenomena, certainly predating modernity (Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm 1990, Anderson 1991, Greenfeld 1992, Breuilly 1993, Smith 1998). The existing consensus among social scientists postulates that identities are not inherited but rather constructed and as such are always subject to reconstruction. This defies assumptions that social categories are static and are fixed by human nature rather than by social contracts and practices; this is called "everyday primordialism" (Fearon and Laitin 1999:849). Nonetheless, there is a lingering question – why identities are socially constructed? Fearon and Laitin (1999) claim that identity itself refers to specific social categories: largely unchangeable and socially consequential attribute. As such, an individual's label is definable by the rules of membership, which dictate who is and is not a member, through the expected behavior of members with their beliefs, desires and moral commitments as well as by the social valuation of members relative to one another. In addition, an individual's identity is given meaning through historical and personal experiences, and through the acknowledgement of shared losses and triumphs (Barany 1998:240). Yet, it should be mentioned that an individual's identity changes with the level of aggregation and society is replete with cultural entrepreneurs who constantly offer new identity classifications to followers in the hope that they will become the group's tacit leaders (Laitin1998:11-14). Individuals in every society have a number of identities based on specific contextual circumstances. These identities are usually associated with language, stereotypes, traditions and customs. "An individual's identities contribute to the creation and recreation of discourse and social cognitive structure; at the same time, those

identities are constrained, shaped, and empowered by the very social products they have a hand in creating" (Hopf 2002:1). Furthermore, the multiplicity of identity is usually dependent on the absence of external conflicts which may cause individuals to give priority to one identification marker over another. According to Eriksen (1995), individual and collective identities change both contextually and historically. The demand for identity is a by-product of individual efforts to meet basic human needs, which include psychological factors. In this context, religion often contains more cultural meaning that contributes to the construction and maintenance of individual and group identities and defines the broadest range of possible relationships – to God, the self, allies and enemies (Seul 1999). Overall, critiques of nationalism tend to see it as being destructive and potentially conflict-prone. This ideology to them is heavily embedded in aggression and ethnic cleansing. Other scholars, like Ernst, make an effort to demonstrate that this view of nationalism is historically simplistic and morally misleading (Haas 1997). They argue that while nationalism may share conflict attributes within a given society, it does not mean that it has always displayed these attributes in the past. For them, nationalism lies at the core of human society's organisation.

The pervasive claim that identities are both recent and elite driven is a belief that is congruent with the modernist and post-modern schools of ethnic and nationalist literature positing that the political phenomenon now known as "nationalist" or "ethno-nationalist" was unknown prior to the French Revolution. Instrumentalists argue that the creations of identities are recent constructs of elites bent on preserving order which tap the emotions of the masses and provide them with social and psychological security (Smith 1998:125). This school of thought questions primordialist explanations for the

origins and existence of differing ethnicities and nationalist groups. For their part, primordial theories view ethnicity as genetic in that an individual is born with certain organic characteristics, which can neither be abandoned nor adopted by an individual not born within the parameters of a given group (Geertz 1993:259). Even though instrumentalist analyses view ethnicity as mainly cohesive (meaning that any extraneous individual may become a part of it by adopting certain behavioral patterns) and elite driven, they do not hesitate to note that political elites are not free to select any variable with which to mobilize mass support. Indeed, in order for the elites to claim legitimacy the choice of symbols must in some way be related to existing cultural or social traditions. Instrumentalists speculate that ethnic and national identities are convenient tools at the hands of rival elites competing for mass support in the universal struggle for "wealth, power and prestige" (Smith 1986:9). Thus, instrumentalist explanations are popped up by rational choice theorists, who concur with those scholars who view ethnic or nationalist groups as self-interested collective actors, maximizing material values through the vehicle of communal identity (Young 1993). Constructivist theories often overlap instrumentalist arguments and share similar beliefs that identities are continually redefined and reconstructed in response to the changing conditions of the political environment and the manipulations of political elites. Constructivists also argue that culture is shaped by the perceptions of those living in a particular community and is usually spurred by emerging elites who "invite the masses into history" in an attempt to get their support (Ozkirmli 1999:218). Ethnicities, according to Young are "social constructs, not inherent properties of human communities". (1992:75)

Identity formation is constructed and maintained through three processes of social influence. First, there is compliance whereby individuals conform to another's expectations to secure favorable treatment. Second, there is identification when individuals adopt the behavior of another because this further assists the achievement of an individual's need for positive self. Third, internalization occurs when an individual aligns with others and adopts aspects of their behavior because it is congruent with the individual's values. Furthermore, when a particular "social identity is made salient, individuals are likely to think of themselves as having characteristics that are representative of that social category…social identity, in other words, leads to self-stereotyping" (Brewer and Brown 1999:560). Another integral component of identity formation is the necessity of the "other". Social identities are, according to Eriksen (1995), by default relational in that they are defined in contrast to other individual or group identities; thus, the "self" requires the "other" to generate its own identity (Hopf 2002). Hence, it is intrinsic that the "we" is absolutely contingent on defining who "we" are not (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Identities play a role in homogenizing and simplifying, making the "unfamiliar familiar in terms of the identity of the Self…once an individual assigns an identity to someone else, the other person becomes a member of a class assumed to have a particular set of discursive practices". (Hopf 2002:6) When this dynamic is applied to national identities, the other can be constituted by either internal actor – such as the Chechens have been constructed in the post-Soviet period. Yet, as Hopf (2002:1-38) illustrates, the "other" need not necessarily be represented by another individual nor does the relationship have to be intrinsically antagonistic. The dichotomy between the self and the "other" is a fundamental variable in explaining

modern Caucasian identity and ascertaining the dynamics of the state's "identity crisis" following the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Ethnic Group as a Definition

The difficulties regarding determinations of ethnic groups and what activities constitute mobilization are considerable and consume the energy of a significant amount of the literature. The literature on the political mobilization of ethnic identity falls into two broad categories: those who argue that ethnic identities will give way to national ones, and those who find that ethnicity has a recalcitrant character despite the pressures of the so-called "melting-pot". The former dates back to the older tradition of Marxism exemplified by Deutsch: A decisive factor in national assimilation or differentiation was found to be the fundamental process of social mobilization that accompanies the growth of markets, industries, and towns, and eventually of literacy and mass communication (1966:188). For Deutsch, ethnic identity emerges as technology makes individuals aware of group differences, either directly through increased communication networks or indirectly by bringing individuals from disparate groups together in common arenas, such as the industrial workplace. Although in the short run significant differences may lead to conflict (Deutsch 1961:502), ethnic individuals are compelled, through further capitalist development, to surrender their particularistic identity to larger national identities as a result both of the capitalist experience and state efforts to further capitalist expansion by inculcating a national identity. Economic development, therefore, generates ethnicity, initially amplifying the sense of difference between groups, but eventually serving to assimilate sub-groups into the larger identity. Other scholars, while agreeing with the analysis of Deutsch and the assimilationists more broadly, point

instead to the efforts of governments to homogenize their populations as critical in understanding the trajectory of ethnic mobilization. While the range of such strategies runs from ethnic cleansing to arranging the redrawing of boundaries, neither of which is today considered desirable as policy goals, these analyses tend more to focus on the assimilation strategies governments undertake, referred to as building the "state-nation" (Rejai and Enloe 1969, 142-144). Such efforts may include the establishment of an official language or religion, the adoption of the cultural symbols of one group as state symbols, and the use of state-controlled means of socialization to advance a particular identity (Linz and Stepan 1996, 28-30). "Nationalizing state policies", while not seen as inevitably successful, are viewed as critical to state integrity, democracy, and capitalist development. Thus for these scholars subnational ethnic identities are seen as at least potentially transitory, with capitalism or state policies eventually homogenizing the population. However, in 1972 Walker Conner published some dramatic findings: of 132 existing states, only 9% could be described as homogenous, with another 19% having a single ethnic group in excess of 90% of the population (1994:29). Moreover, Connor found 30% of states had no ethnic majority and 40% of all states were constituted of at least five ethnic groups. As a result, a number of scholars began to question the hypothesis that ethnic sub-cultures would melt away, finding instead that development may contribute to the saliency of ethnic identity over longer periods as a result of factors intrinsic to development itself.

The dominant model exploring this ethnopolitical mobilization asserts that, at their base, these movements are economic in nature, arguing that where economic disparities between ethnic regions and the national centre are pronounced, ethnic groups

will mobilize. The prevalence of uneven regional economic development would seem to provide significant support for this model. Michael Hechter formulated the simplest description of this model is that of "internal colonialism". For Hechter, where economically backward regional boundaries coincide with an ethnic identity, mobilization for improved economic conditions will emphasize ethnic rather than class identity. However, while economic equalization might, therefore, be desirable in contributing to social harmonization, these peripheral areas serve as "internal colonies" and the subordination of the regions to the core becomes entrenched as labor becomes culturally divided, with the poorer regions representing areas of less-skilled labor. As a result, elites from these areas have few opportunities to penetrate the political hegemony of the center (Hechter 1999:39-42). From this perspective, ethnic groups suffering from perceived economic backwardness when compared to some standard, such as more developed areas in the country or some expected level of development, will mobilize in an attempt to fix this imbalance through domestic policies (Gurr 1970, Runciman 1966). In other words, the ethnic group is not so much a function of relative deprivation; rather, it represents a basis for political mobilization to address economic underdevelopment. Another model follows Deutsch, but argues that increased contact between ethnic groups under conditions of capitalist development will not eventually assimilate; rather, inter-group conflict increases and persists. These conflictual models, such as that of Smith (1981), agree with the assumptions and logic of the economic development models, but find that ethnic elites are unable to penetrate the political structures dominated by the national group, similar to Hechter's argument. However, the conflictual model differs from internal colonialism in that it finds ethnicity to be

stimulated by the failure of these elites to penetrate the core, after which they return to their ethnic groups to mobilize for institutional change (Smith 1981:125-129). A fourth model expands the notion of economic discrimination to include ethnic regions which are more economically advanced than the center. In this case, the relative success of some ethnic regions leads their elites to mobilize for the retention of their relative gains rather than "subsidizing" the remainder of the country (Basques and Catalans in Spain). Thus the critical factor becomes the magnitude of economic disparity between the national center and an ethnic periphery, rather than simply the relative backwardness of the latter.

As stated earlier, even though models focusing on economic factors impacting ethnic mobilization dominate the literature, there are also two competing models of mobilization to be considered. The first model, as outlined by Suzan Olzak (1992) and Joseph Rothschild (1981), argues that ethnic mobilization is an attempt by elites to generate mass support for their struggle for political power. Mobilization may be generated by competition among ethnic groups for particular sectors of employment; however, the emphasis by either economic or political competition models is on the dynamics of competition on mobilizing ethnic identity (Olzak and Nagel 1986:9). Ethnic identity can be seen, therefore, as a potential base of political power used by elites unable to generate alternate sources of support. A second alternative model focuses on ethnic mobilization in which ethnic identity is made increasingly salient by corresponding elites. Hroch (2000) argues that ethnic movements begin as small cultural organizations (especially literary movements) dedicated to promoting the propagation of literature in the minority language. Under certain conditions, political elites may use

these groups to generate mass support for their positions, shifting from advocates for particular accommodations to explicit representatives of the ethnic group (Hroch 2000: 14-17, 25-30). This argument finds economic variation or competition as neither necessary nor sufficient for the political mobilization of ethnicity.

One of the more difficult issues to be addressed in studies of ethnic mobilization is the determination of what elements differentiate an ethnic group from other social groups. From this fundamental problem arises a related question: what is the difference, if any, between nations and ethnic groups? In many respects the two types are similar: identifying markers can include language, culture, shared history, religion, race, and others. As a result, many scholars tend to conflate the two. Oommen (1997) argues that that, for most scholars, a nation is a particular group with aspirations for their own state, the ostensible goal of nationalist movements. Ethnic groups often have political goals. When these goals include independence, for some scholars ethnic groups become nations, but groups with political aspirations short of independence are seemingly not so classified; Smith (1981:24), Connor (1994:40-43), Worsley (1984:247) find ethnicity to be latent nationalism, merely awaiting political mobilization. Groups characterized by cultural, religious, linguistic, historical criteria yet lacking claims to territory would appear to also be ethnic groups, yet nations seemingly require claims to territory as part of their aspiration to form an independent state. Furthermore, this dimension would seem to juxtapose nations against ethnic groups, sub-cultures, immigrant communities, and racial minorities. For Oommen, the critical distinction is that a nation combines culture with territory and, therefore, has some potential basis for political institutions, whereas an ethnic group, lacking territory, does not (1997:34). Another dimension

leading to confusion, in addition to those of political aspirations and territory, is the sense of inclusiveness: Erikson argues that the crucial distinction is between insiders and outsiders; ethnic boundaries are determined through the mutual recognition of them by members of the group as well as those excluded (1991:265). As a result of these ambiguities, which represent a significant part of the literature on ethnicity and nationalism, Hugh Seton-Watson argues: "no 'scientific definition' of a nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists (1977:5)." Studies of ethnicity and nationalism must nevertheless attempt to circumscribe the groups they are exploring. At present, there are two areas of discussion within these debates: 1) What characteristics are markers of ethnic groups; and 2) Are those characteristics relatively fixed (primordial) or subject to human construction? The existing literature offers little agreement as to those specific traits of group identity that constitute ethnicity, point generally to socially constructed elements, rather than empirical ones. A shared history and common symbols continue to dominate the theoretical discourse. Shared religion may be based partially in "empirics", in that groups may have these traits without active attempts to create them, but the recognition of them as representing distinctive group identity likely requires conscious effort. Finally, the mix of elements reflects both empirical and constructed features, with little agreement as to which quintessentially define ethnic groups. Despite the lack of general agreement as to what characteristics define ethnic groups, there does seem to be an emerging consensus regarding the primordialist/constructivist debate: ethnicity is comprised both of empirical elements and of features that can be shaped by ethnic activists.[2] There appears to be an interaction

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[2] For example, while ethnic symbols (such as a flag, anthem, or holiday) represent empirical facts, they are

between empirical features and conscious attempts to manipulate and manufacture elements to differentiate their group from the larger national or civic identity. Ethnicity is often defined as action of identification with a community of shared ancestry that stretches beyond everyday face-to-face interaction. Salient cultural markers like language, religion, customs and phenotype are used by ethnies to demarcate their boundaries. Meanwhile, *nations* are integrated communities of certain territory that have certain political aspirations. By contrast modern states are political units which have a monopoly on the use of force within a well-demarcated territory (Francis 1976, Weber 1978, Smith 1991). Finally, *ethno-symbolism* questions both biology and instrumentalism and accepts the constructed nature of ethnicity, but refuse to confine it to the modern period. Subsequently, ethno symbolists prioritize such social facts like traditions of territoriality, myths of genealogical origin and symbolic boundary markers which pass through the generations. Religious institutions and rituals are considered as especially important in forging pre-modern ethnic sentiment. The certain role of the personal or group interests is recognized and acknowledged by the majority of scholars writing about the subject of violence in the North Caucasus. However, there is a remarkable difference between the approaches of Western scholars and those from the region that is indicative of the degree of geographical presence in the region. The Western scholars (Bonvicini 1998, Coppieters 1996, 2001, Wright 1996) tend to approach the situation in the Northern Caucasus as a case study in a row of similar conflicts in different regions of the world, and do not go into the details of analysis of the interests and motives of particular actors. They usually limit their assessment of the

consciously produced by ethnic activists precisely in an attempt to more clearly define the group.

material by admitting the role of the personal interests of individuals and groups in the conflict. On the contrary, the scholars from Russia go into the details of establishing the connections between the events and the interests of certain individuals to obtain more nuanced and credible information. Such Russian scholars as Chervonnaya (1994), Malashenko (2001, 2002, 2004), Trenin (2004), Shermatova (2003), and Tishkov (2001, 2004) seek to explain the present situation in the region by the dominance of personally-biased agendas over long-term strategy, and significant influence of personal motivation and unwillingness to negotiate.

The Political Mobilization of Ethnicity

As mentioned above, a significant part of the literature focuses on distinctive groups seeking political independence; for many this is the fundamental distinction between ethnic groups and nations. However, there are many similar groups that hold more limited goals, seeking institutional accommodation of their particularistic identity rather than statehood. Indeed, this is a commonly used demarcation between ethnic and national groups. At its most basic level, however, the political mobilization of these separate categories is the same: groups seeking to realize accommodation of their distinctiveness through a variety of organizations from cultural organizations to paramilitary groups and political parties seeking institutional accommodation or advocating secession. As Miroslav Hroch argues, this range of goals may be a function of the level of mobilization of a group rather than qualitative categorical differences: a single group may, over the course of its history, adopt different goals and strategies without transforming into something qualitatively new (2000: 22-24). More recently the term "ethnopolitics" has come into use to reflect the broad spectrum of behavior and

goals short of seeking independence: ethnopolitics encompasses aspirations short of the creation of a nation-state and the congruence of culture with polity. Further, "the concept of ethnopolitics has the advantage of including politics that are not conflictual; although ethnopolitics can be conflictual, it can also be cooperative" (Ishyama and Breuning 1998, 3-4). While these scholars continue to differentiate between ethnopolitical and nationalist mobilization, determining varying levels of "ethnopolitical mobilization" becomes more difficult. Even when group mobilization is presented as a continuum, factions within a single group may pursue different strategies reflecting different goals. As a result, many studies rely on data reflecting the more mobilized end of the spectrum: mass protest and / or votes for ethnic political parties. Yet while political expediency and ease of data collection may justify this narrow focus, significant insights into the broader phenomenon may be compromised.

Post-Soviet Russia experiences a particularly dramatic spike in ethno-political activism and communal stand-off in the North Caucasus. Assessing and explaining the causes, development, and consequences of ethnic conflicts poses a major challenge to contemporary scholarship. This challenge is coupled by the general unpreparedness of the Marxist tradition in the Russian social sciences to deal with issues of ethnic conflict that had been discounted as obsolete in a society of "mature socialism". In responding to the driving forces of ethnic resilience in a context of profound political change, Russian social scientists had not only to address new domains of research but also had to change their theoretical moorings, learning from and drawing upon the mainstream non-Marxist theoretical approaches and applying them to Russia's realities. Most debates of nations and nationalism begin with the presumption that nations exist and

debate how they came into existence. According to V. Tishkov (1992), a monistic ideology and a totalitarian style of thinking and of nationalism have produced a powerful system of the scientific management of society. The party and the state bureaucracy get this knowledge from reliable scholars who can penetrate and reflect "objective realities" because they are armed with "the only scientific and right teaching - the theory of Marxism-Leninism", which includes as an important ingredient "the Marxist-Leninist theory of nation and of the national question" (Gellner 1988; Connor 1984). For most scholars, however, nations and nationalism are seen as constructed; therefore, it becomes important to explain why and how nations developed. Modernist approaches claim that nationalism developed slowly over time because of economic, political, or cultural aspects of modern life. The modernist works are divided generally into three categories — socio-economic modernization, political modernization, and cultural modernization. Furthermore, three specific authors (Gellner 1998, Smith 1981, 1986, and Anderson 1991) are identified as exemplifying the three different approaches. These three authors, and their respective works, are widely held to be the most influential positions within the study of nationalism. This opinion is substantiated throughout numerous works on the study of nationalism. For instance, Brubaker's *Nationalism Reframed* argues that there exists a large and mature "developmentalist" (or modernist) literature on nationhood and nationalism, which traces the long-term political, economic, and cultural changes that led, over centuries, to the gradual emergence of nations. Furthermore, Brubaker finds the work of Gellner (1998), Anderson (1991), Smith (1991), and Hobsbawm (1990) most salient within this literature. In Brubaker's view, three approaches (socio-economic modernization,

political modernization, and cultural modernization) focus on three elements that are most relevant for problematizing and complicating the category of nation: (1) the transition from multiple, non-literature low cultures to a single literate and specialized high culture; (2) the process through which ethnic unity is made coincident with political unity; and (3) the manner in which state language and popular language are made concurrent. Brubaker suggest a broad theoretical perspective on post-Soviet nation building by assessing it in terms of the relations between the nationalisms of national minorities, newly institutionalizing states and the external national "homeland: (Brubaker 1996: 8). Bruce Ware and Kisriev apply a consociational approach to the study of central political institutions in Dagestan, which they perceive as an example of "third wave plural societies" (Ware and Kisriev 2001: 128). In contrast, Hughes and Sasse argue in favour of combining institutionalist and behaviourist approaches, due to the greater role of the personal factor in Russian politics (2001:25). However, these studies, although contributing a great deal to a better understanding of post-Soviet communities in transition, overlook some other key dimensions of this transition, in particular the role of informal non-institutional networks (Yemelianova 2005). To address the subject in all its complexity, we need to take into consideration a constructivist understanding of the relationship between ethnic identity, political power and nation formation. It must also be instrumentalist in studying the way in which ethnic and religious affiliation is currently employed in competition for political power. It will also primordialist in dealing with the way in which primordialism is presented in local elite agendas. In particular, this approach allows us to reveal the mechanism by

which the political elite mobilize primordial elements such as clan- or region-based networks for the consolidation and perpetuation of its power.

The problem of conflict development and perpetuation has been approached in different ways, with each approach focusing on specific aspects of conflict, and therefore prescribing different remedies to resolution. Early studies argued that the issues at stake in conflicts are indivisible, and therefore negotiated settlements are nearly impossible (Ikle 1971, Modelski 1964, Pillar 1983). This approach was later adopted by many scholars studying ethnic conflict, leading some to argue that the only solution is partition (Kaufmann 1996). Assessed from the point of view of causes of conflict, conflict is seen as the violent expression of unresolved political issues and inequalities. The answer to this situation is often a political solution of democratic governance (Lake 2001, Rothchild 1997, Sisk 1996). Others scholars put more emphasis on the termination of conflict with stable peace agreements, arguing that conflict termination is hindered by security dilemmas and spoilers (Walter and Snyder 1999, Posen 1993, Stedman 1991, 1997). The proposed solution is a power-sharing agreement ensured by a credible security guarantee from international actors. These approaches, however, tend to focus on static factors in the conflict, rather than acknowledging the organic and changing nature of conflict, assuming that what initiated the conflict is what keeps it going, and that the groups in conflict prefer peace to war. In contrast to these political and security approaches, a different approach looks at the economics of conflict and the motivation of greed (Berdal and Malone 2000, Collier 1999, Collier and Hoeffler 2000, Keen 1998, Reno 1998). This approach postulates that parties may not only finance their war efforts through economic and political networks, but also get rich

while doing so. Indeed, this argument explains reasons why conflicts persist in resource-abundant regions, and also raises a question to the assumption that belligerent groups prefer peace to war. The groups involved in the collective violence range from small networks or loosely connected organizations of individuals or paramilitaries to government and religious bureaucracies groups. Quite often members of dominant groups or political elite inflict damage on members of subordinate groups. Besides, problems of explanation stem from the varied scope and endurance of collective violence. In studies targeted specifically at ethnic or religious violence, collective violence has largely remain understudied as an object of explanation; it has often been woven into the larger and more vague category *ethnic or religious conflict* as well as undistinguished from other potential outcomes: nonviolent types of conflict, diffuse social violence, and others. Situations have often been coded dichotomously (conflict/no conflict), and many scholars have viewed collective violence "as a *degree* of conflict, rather than as a *form* of conflict" (Brubaker and Laitin 1998:24:425.) Thus, the study of ethnic or religious violence was cut off from the study of other social processes that remain closely connected to it. Before the early1990s, studies of collective violence and that of ethnic conflict remained largely isolated; generic theories of collective violence tended to ignore ethnicity or to subsume it within larger analytical categories of collective violence, arguing that there is nothing substantive about ethnicity that would distinguish it from collective violence. At the same time, scholars focusing on ethnic conflict have tended to assume that ethnic violence stemmed from the intensity of cultural allegiance, and that these emotional attachments constituted the single, cohesive set of motivations for acts of violence; any evidence of other motivations like personal

rivalries, revenge, or self-enrichment have been bracketed. It should be noted that identities by themselves do not produce conflict and violence. Therefore, it is logical to shift attention from theorizing ethnicity and identity formation to assessing ethnically motivated behavior, in particular, how ethnic identity influences behavioral patterns and actions that lead to conflict. At present, the hypotheses that address particularistic identities of peripheral communities with distinct cultural characteristics as caused mainly by their underdevelopment (Hechter 1975, Nairn 1977, Blaut 1987) have lost much of their credibility. Indeed, the claims that successful modernization should low the salience of ethnic identities and reduce ethno-national strife (Deutch 1966, Haas 1966, Lipset and Rokkan 1967) remain unsubstantiated and even self-contradictory, since modernization is always uneven and differential. Obviously, in the politics of identity, ethnicity remains the most controversial aspect. Ethnic identities are alternatively characterized as irrational and based on false consciousness (Hobsbawm 1990, Ignatieff 1994, Banks 1996), as contextual and constructed (Eriksen, 1993), or as a primary source of all other identities (van den Berghe 1981, Schöpflin 2000).

Many scholars that address the relationship between ethnicity and conflict focus on the ways in which internal ethnic conflict becomes internationalized. Steven Lobell and Philip Mauceri (2004) discuss the internationalization of ethnic conflict by investigating two types of interstate conflict: diffusion and escalation. Authors such as Posen (1993), Lake and Rothchild (1996) also use the security dilemma to evaluate why ethnic groups may fight one another. They examine the causes of internal ethnic conflict and argue that ethnic conflict is usually caused by an ethnic group's collective fears of the future. Lobell and Mauceri (2004) are not the only scholars that examine the

international dimensions of ethnic conflict by focusing primarily on the internal origins of conflict. The concept of diffusion or "spill-over" is also discussed by Douglas Woodwell's (2004), who is particularly interested in analyzing the role of domestic ethnic rebellion in promoting international conflict. He finds that the likelihood of ethnic spill-over into bordering states is higher if one of the ethnic groups involved in the dispute constitutions a majority population in one of the states. Other authors also use the concept of the "escalation" of internal ethnic conflict to explain the magnitude of ethnic conflict. Saideman (1997, 2001) explores several theories that have been used to explain outside support for secessionist conflicts. In particular, if threatened by another state, states will likely to intervene to support secessionist movements in that state; states will be more likely to support secessionist movements in strong states; and states are more likely to support secessionist movements in states with which they share borders (Saideman 2001). Saideman argues that none of these explanations is entirely satisfactory. Specifically, the vulnerability argument does not empirically hold, as many "vulnerable" countries do, aid secessionist movements in other states. In addition, he argues that this theory is incomplete since it suggests that countries may or may not be able to support secessionists. Both the vulnerability and realist arguments do not account for the domestic ethnic politics of these countries, which he finds to be, arguably, one of the most important elements in explaining why countries would intervene. Saideman presents an alternative argument, where he suggests that the domestic ethnic politics must be considered in order to determine why some countries choose to support secessionist movements within other states.

In contrast to theories of ethnic based nationalism, another manifestation of individual and group sentiments is classified as civic nationalism. Whereas ethnic nationalism is attractive to individuals on the basis of communal culture, language, tradition, and race, civic nationalism is distinguished by appealing to a collective allegiance to certain constitutional principles and/or institutions which are perceived as just and effective (Snyder 2000). Civic nationalism is often viewed as an effective substitute to ethnic nationalism because of its tolerance and inclusiveness. Moreover, civic nationalism ostensibly allows any individual who adopts the state's political creed acceptance into the group and it depends primarily on birth or long term residency. However, it would be erroneous to presume that civic nationalism is benign in contrast to essentially exclusionary ethnic or religious nationalisms. In case of the North Caucasus, where the quasi civic nation is primarily composed of political elites from the same religious or ethnic group, the idealistic values are exceptionally vulnerable to becoming instruments of repression. Obviously, the probability is augmented exponentially during periods of social upheaval and political transformations such as the transition of a totalitarian regime to a democratic one.

The so-called "Islamic awakening" concept, actively pushing forward by Iranian clerics, as the central cause of the violent actions in the Northern Caucasus attracts my attention due to the deep split between the opinions expressed on the topic by different parties. First of all, if accepted as the initial cause of the conflict, Islamic awakening does not explain all the manifestations of violence in the Northern Caucasus. Thus, the most ardent jihadist Shamil Basaev attacked Dagestan's villages in the fall of 1999 killing mainly Muslims in the first place. This fact was interpreted by some scholars as

the proof of the inappropriateness of classifying Basaev's actions as jihad, since his actions were aimed against the Muslims. However, from the strictly theological point of view, for those who view the events in the Northern Caucasus as jihad, the refusal of the people of Dagestan to support the insurgents and to fight the federal troops can be seen as revolt against Islam calling for punishment (Polonskaya 1986). Such widespread criminal activities as trade in hostages and dead bodies, kidnaping trafficking in drugs and weapons do not only run counter to the theory of Islamic awakening, but also roughly defy the principles of Islam. This contradiction between the Islamic rhetoric and manifestly secular profit-oriented activities, which are obviously incompatible with Islamic faith, gives me reason to look at the rhetoric of Islamic Awakening in the Northern Caucasus as a mere disguise for justifying the large scale criminal activities and struggle for power. Another vision of the role of Islam in the Northern Caucasus is coupled with ethnicity and used instrumentally by the leaders to rally the forces and unite a group around some common idea. Thus, Lieven (2002) describes the scheme that explains why ethnicity-based struggle sometimes appears as religion-based to external observers[3]. Due to the threat, the ethnos develops a stronger attachment to its religion and especially those forms that allow for military and/or cultural resistance. During the struggle, new religious forms and institutes may also emerge. Therefore, the struggle lead by this group appears to the external observer as religion-based, while actually it is based on ethnicity (Lieven 2002). Islam appears to be an especially convenient religion for rallying people for violence, because this particular religion

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[3] During several centuries, a certain ethnos or ethno-cultural identity is being formed, possessing a strictly distinguished formal religion (although this formal faith may disguise actually pagan beliefs and rituals).

regulates all aspects of life, and therefore "serving Islam" gives legitimization to actions that would be otherwise disapproved or found sinful". (Malashenko and Trenin 2002:69) Taking into consideration different aspects of social, economic, and cultural situation, this interpretation of the role of Islam views Islamization of the Northern Caucasus as a consequence rather than as a cause of the events in the region; therefore, the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism is explained as reactive. As Malashenko and Trenin (2002) point out, the radicalization of Islam in the Northern Caucasus appears to be a reflection of economically disastrous situation combined with endemic corruption and massive deviation from Muslim norms and values by the post-Soviet ruling elites. In this respect, Islamic fundamentalism is seen as the only way out. Indeed, return to the norms of Islam provides the young males of the Northern Caucasus, marginalized materially and socially due to the general decline in the economic and cultural spheres of life, with the opportunity to assert them. The young Caucasian males balance the social humiliation and lack of prospective, especially painful due to the traditional Caucasian values of pride, by associating themselves with the ideology that fills their deprivation with meaning. Islam gives them motivation to reject, on the basis of religious beliefs, the benefits of which they are already devoid. Malashenko and Trenin (2002:88) illustrate their argument by describing the phenomenon of "New Muslims"; educated university students from Northern Caucasian cities, who favorably distinguish themselves from the rest of the population by their devotion to the Muslim faith and observing all the tenets of Islam. However, most scholars express serious doubts about the actual possibility of creating an Islamic state in the Northern Caucasus, even granted the consent of the Russian Federation.

During the Soviet years, traditional and Muslim law systems were strictly prohibited, and even ethnographic research in this field was not welcome, which limited scholars interested in this field limit their research to pre-revolutionary years. New specialists, educated rather hastily, often demonstrate striking ignorance not only in the field of traditional and Muslim law, but also in general legal culture (Bobrovnikov 2002). For example, despite the large number of Muslim educational institutions in Dagestan, their programs are mainly limited to the study of the Arabic language and the rules of reading the Qur'an. None of the rectors of Muslim universities in Dagestan have either institute or university degree. This precarious situation inevitably leads to an extremely low level of education, which is often strikingly evident; i.e., in Northern Caucasian Wahhabis center Karamahi the name of a Sharia court on the front of the building shows rough spelling mistakes (Bobrovnikov 2002:280). Another conspicuous problem with implementing traditional or Muslim law system in the region is linked to the lack of unity within Muslim community. Since some of the Islamic leaders of the region belong to Wahhabis group, and some to the Sufi brotherhood or the pro-official Spiritual Board, newly established Sharia courts as well as other Islamic institutions become a fierce battle field about the true understanding of Islam, which often end up in violent clashes (Bobrovnikov 2002). Some scholars also express the opinion that Islamic leaders themselves realize the practical impossibility of actual creation of an Islamic state, and therefore the struggle for an Islamic state becomes the banner cry for self-realization.

Scholars writing on the topic of violence in the Northern Caucasus offer a wide spectrum of opinions and explanatory theories. The theories developed by the authors

vary according to several criteria. First, the persuasiveness of a theory largely depends on the degree of objectivity with which the author approaches the issue; the objectivity is reflected in the interpretations offered by the scholars as well as in their choice of terms. The second factor affecting the coherency of a theory is the breadth of the focus on different aspects of violence in the region and the time frame of the events taken into consideration. The review of pertinent literature completed in this research shows that the choice of variables made by the authors while commenting on the subject of violence in the Northern Caucasus is generally characterized by professional neutrality. Some scholars, however, poised to explain the violence in the Northern Caucasus, can be singled out by the selective approach to facts, which results in assumptions that propagate the author's opinion rather than reflect the actual situation. The problem of selective approach to facts is closely linked to the question of choosing the focus on the different aspects of violence in the region. Although the manifestations of violence in the Northern Caucasus are numerous and diverse, disregarding the close interconnection between different aspects of violence in the region leads inevitably to the omission of important factors contributing to the impartial assessment of the situation.

The current review of scholarship allows me to conclude that the most persuasive assumptions are those that study the violence in the region as a complex phenomenon, rather than as a number of independent events and unrelated facts. Indeed, scholarship characterized by the close attention to particular spheres of violence in the region is valuable due to the fact that it offers a deep incursion into many aspects of the topic, i.e. the history of its development, its causes, consequences, implications for the participants and so on. However, such scholarship often fails to place the facts within a

larger picture that significantly undermines the overall value of its assumptions for understanding the situation in the region and crafting workable solutions. Another important problem consists in the fact that most of the authors writing on the topic of mobilizing ideology of violence address it only once. The scholarship resulting from such an approach reflects the state of affairs at a particular point of time, but overlooks the dynamics inherent to the conflict. The static approach to the situation also results in the failure to pinpoint the trends in the development of the conflict that weakens the ability of the scholars to make well-supported assumptions. There is a number of scholars whose works can be described as being perfunctory for understanding the situation in the region in question: Karny (2000), Seely (2001), Avtorkhanov (1991, 1992), and Chervonnaya (1994), whose works may be better described as interesting due to their literary quality but leading towards emphasizing the findings that interest them and neglecting the rest of the picture seriously undermining their scholarly value. I am not in the position to judge whether this selectivity is a result of an honest failure of a scholar to encompass all the aspects of relevant information, or a deliberate attempt to misrepresent the situation in favour of the side with which a certain author sympathizes. There is also a cohort of researchers, who do not ground the question of violence in the Northern Caucasus as central in their scholarship, but nevertheless make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the issue: Bobrovnikov (1995, 2001, 2002, 2006), Girenko (2001), Karpov (2001), Kazantsev (2002), and Polyakov (2001).

There is also a common trend that appears to be the manifestation of the same misbalance between the focus on the particular types of violence in the Northern Caucasus and their place within the larger picture - simplification of the events and

fitting them into certain categories analogous with those of other seemingly similar conflicts in other parts of the world or in different epochs. The on-going salience of ethnicity and nationalism in the North Caucasus is often explained by competition between the central and elites or as a manipulative ideology employed by political elites to secure their power base. While the term *ethnocracies* has become popular in Russian scholarship, it remains unclear to what extent and why the ethnic elites are securing the support of their brethren. The elite-manipulation explanation of ethnic and religious conflicts has many grey zones. It assumes that the ethnic groups are incapable of making rational decisions about their own lives, and it fails to explain why ethno national forms of identity have become so successful, while others fail to attract sufficient support (Moore 2001:12). It is still unclear whether, in the post-Soviet context, ethnic solidarity is mainly based on historical memory (real or constructed and manipulated) and common experiences, which constitute usually legitimation myths, or if it is a straight rational response to the plethora of social, political, cultural, and economic factors. It is also important to explore at the degree to which ethnic politics provide real or perceived benefits, for example, social and professional advancement, new economic opportunities, or cultural reproduction, to the members of corresponding groups. Numerous attempts to fit the situation in the Northern Caucasus into pre-existing typology, heftily borrowed from the study of other conflicts are of little value, if at all. While the degree of subjectivity and the tendency towards simplification vary from one author to another, there is a common feature that characterizes the majority of the reviewed scholarship - approaching the issue from a somewhat one-sided perspective, which depends on the disciplinary background of the particular scholar. As

a matter of fact, scholars studying violence in the Northern Caucasus in all its diversity, come from different disciplinary fields, and their theories often lay parallel to each other in the study of the same issue from the different angles. However, due to the lack of integration between the different theories developed on the subject, the theories belonging to different disciplinary fields often proceed in parallel. Amalgamating the findings and conclusions made by the scholars belonging to different disciplinary fields would be highly beneficial for assessing the situation in the North Caucasus. Among scholars whose theories appear to be most successful in encompassing the major spectrum of the ideology of violence in the region and simultaneously prove to be acknowledging the complexity of the problem and making an effort to accept the maximally broad perspective at the issue of violence in the Northern Caucasus are Lieven, Coppieters, Furman, Tishkov, Debiel and Klein, Malashenko and Trenin. The analytical approaches developed by these scholars take into consideration the vast scope of manifestations of violence and understanding the intricate nature of their interdependency. More important, they admit the impossibility to provide a coherent explanation rather than resort to simplistic temporal explanations.

Conclusion

As my research deals with the regions of the North Caucasus, pertinent literature varies widely in scope and approach, and there are frequent cross-references between them. In general, however, the literature provides valuable insight into the political processes since the early1990s, and especially into the growing Islamization of initially secular ethnic movements and Moscow's failure to react adequately by none-violent policies. It will also discuss the importance of informal power structures, and observes

that in the Caucasus, personal networks have more weight than formal structures and even governments. The common argument drawn from pertinent scholarships is that most ethnic and religious conflicts stem from the struggle of individual elite leaders for positions in government and economy; the mobilization of the rest of the ethnic community, from this point of view, is mainly a product of "ideological manipulation" (Gammer 2008:29). Historical references give an overview of the relation between religious and secular spheres in the Caucasus from the 19 century to the present.

Chapter 3 - Ethnicity and Religion in the North Caucasus

Introduction

The chapter focuses upon ethnic groups in terms of historical perspective. It also sheds light upon the role of these groups in the process of the revival of national identities after the break-up of the Soviet Union. It particularly deals with the geopolitical factors and cross-national linkages in regional and multinational interests in the formation of the ethnic identities and nationalistic elites. My argument is that ethno-nationalism is the outcome of this peculiar ethno-federalist administrative structure and bureaucratic hierarchy, where ethnic minorities struggle to consolidate their presence. The other argument is that decades of the Soviet monopoly on national questions caused pervasive alienation of ethnic groups from Soviet and later Russian ethno-cultural environment. I analyze how the large ethnic minorities were recognized and granted a *de facto* privileged status, while smaller ethnic minorities and those without formal recognition deprived of the same rights.

Among the numerous consequences of Gorbachev's reforms and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 has been the rise of ethnic nationalism. In the non-Russian parts of the North Caucasus, this process has been accompanied by the resurrection of clan and other primordial social networks, which under Soviet regime had been held at bay. This chapter examines political and social transformation in post-Soviet era with particular reference to nature the identity-building policies of the ruling elites, and their relationship with the clan system and religious confessions in the North Caucasus. It will be also concerned with religious revival and radicalism in the region and their correlation with related policies. The chapter will clarify some debatable areas

in the current academic discourse on ethnicity and nationalism and suggest a conceptual framework to the study of post-Soviet societies in the Caucasus. The ethnic factor that played a significant role in late Soviet and post-Soviet politics, contributed to the rapid transformation of the ethnic organizations into political movements and parties. Due to the fact that the Soviet Union was an asymmetric federation that consisted of territorial units with different status, the lines of all violent conflicts in the Caucasus can be traced back to the system of ethno-federalism in the USSR. On the first level, there were the fifteen Union republics (SSR, Soviet Socialist Republic). According to the Soviet constitution, union republics were sovereign states and possessed such institutional prerequisites for statehood as political institutions and symbols, a constitution, borders, and a titular nationality, as well as education and mass media in the language of this titular nationality. Besides, they had the constitutional right to have their own armed forces, and to secede from the Union. (the Constitution of the USSR 1977).

Historical Background

The Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was defined as autonomous territory of a national minority within a union republic. The ASSRs also possessed political institutions, borders, a constitution and a titular nationality, as well as education and mass media in the language of this nationality. However, an ASSR did not have the right to secede from the Union, but could be transferred to another SSR, provided that the center and both the relevant SSRs agreed. The next level down from the ASSR was the autonomous region, which was also the territory of a national minority within a Union Republic. The autonomous region had a high degree of control over local affairs but had lesser privileges than the ASSR. The language of the titular

nationality of an autonomous region was considered to be an official language, but was not entitled to national universities or media outlets in the local language. It also had no bureaucracy of its own and had to share functionaries with the administration of the union republic, which meant that key administrative positions were distributed at the republican level.

Even though all federal units were completely controlled the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the Soviet system of ethno–federalism granted the members of the titular nationality a high degree of control over local affairs, education, services and positions in the administration (the Constitution of the USSR 1977, article 6). The most important aspect of this system was that each federal unit had its own titular nationality on a particular territory. Once central control weakened, this linkage of a territory to an ethnic group provided a propitious breeding ground for a groundswell of secessionist aspirations. Socialist ethno-federalism had provided the titular nationalities with a clear cut territory, a state bureaucracy, mass media, an education system and national symbols. These were tangible assets that considerably reduced the negative costs of secessionism. By 1991, nationalities had been given a chance to assert themselves and they intended to take it to its logical conclusion of autonomy if not independence. During the "Parade of Sovereignties", while the Russian state was at its weakest point, the status of several ethnic autonomous formations was even increased: the Adyghea, Altai and Khakassia autonomous oblasts were constituted as separate republics. This idea continued to be upheld as bi-lateral treaties were also made with all the North Caucasus regions, giving them almost full autonomy. This period of asymmetric federalism has been characterized as both positive and negative in

terms of the creation of post-Soviet identity in the Russian Federation (Gammer 1999, Hughes and Sasse 2001, Walker 2003, Hirsch 2005).

During the early period of Yeltsin's presidency (1991-1994), the Kremlin administration made a number of vigorous efforts to solidify a civic identity among Russian citizens, always referring to the people of Russia and not to the ethnic Russians. Yeltsin needed to get popular support for these policies and so when it seemed people were no longer responding to the idea of the Russian civic identity he changed his position, focusing on a highly exclusive definition of Russians during the Russian presidential elections in 1996. After he had won the presidency, Yeltsin's nationalist rhetoric died down again. He introduced several new policies that were clearly aimed at taking away power from the ethno-territorial basis of the Federation and moving to a more civic identity: and the Russian national passport reform (Tuminez 2003, Walker 2003). The National Cultural Autonomy Act was passed, aimed at fulfilling the promise of the Russian Constitution to confer extra-territorial rights on all ethnic groups regardless of place of residence. NCAs were formally set up throughout the country to address national and cultural rights of citizens outside any national territory. In 1997, in a clear move towards a civic identity for Russia people were no longer required to define their nationality or ethnicity as they had been throughout the entire Soviet period. However, the passports were only produced in the Russian language and the old imperial Tsarist double headed eagle was put on the cover. This produced anger on both sides of the spectrum. Nationalist Russians were angry that their ethnic identity was being erased. Minorities were angry that their languages were being ignored and feared the threat of further Russian assimilation.

Initially, Vladimir Putin' presidency (2000-2008) had nothing to do with regional populace or elites. He closely followed the suggestions of Valery Tishkov on how to galvanize a civic identity in Russia. In particular, Tishkov claimed that the propagation of common civic values and symbols among citizens of the Russian Federation is crucial for state building purposes. In fact, Putin went much further by resuscitating the music from the Soviet anthem that everyone knew and had the same composer write new words to the same tune. The Red Soviet flag became the flag of the armed forces to appease Russian nationalists and aging communist party's functionaries, while the tri-color flag was accepted as the national flag and the double-headed eagle became the new national emblem. Tishkov's also stood for complete re-organization of the federal nature of the Russian Federation in such a way that it was no longer based on ethno-territories to avoid (or at least slow down) the inevitable disintegration of the Federation. The partial solution was found in the form of seven federal administrative districts that overlapped ethnic boundaries: Central Federal District, Northwestern Federal District, Far Eastern Federal District, Siberian Federal District, Urals Federal District, Volga Federal District, and South Federal District (which covered the North Caucasus republics as well as neighboring Stavropol krai, Krasnodar krai, Adyghei republic, and Rostov oblast) Although these federal administrative districts are run by central bureaucracy and headed by President's direct appointees, local elites managed to adjust themselves quite rapidly to such a new type of vertical federalism. The last and the most controversial of Tishkov's recommendations on precedence of individual over collective rights and guaranteed representation of ethnic minorities in government has only been implemented in part due the yawning gap

between declarations and actions of Putin's vertical quasi democratic superstructure and its ideological paucity. However, Putin has allocated many resources to shape a viable civic identity for the people of the Russian Federation in his desperate attempts at re-creation of a strong state. In theory, a civic identity needs to be based on a sense of common purpose and identification with the institutions of the state. The people of the Russian Federation seem to be showing by voting for Putin, that a strong paternalistic state matters much more to them than nebulous democratic ideals or civil liberties. This has nothing to do with historical memories of the Caucasian peoples, because it is not an imperial paternalistic state that they could identify with and aspire to build their own identity upon. Moreover, a number of Putin's appeals to Russian Orthodox nationalists in his direct political and financial support of the church are further alienating the Muslim communities of the North Caucasus. In addition, the never-ending indiscriminate military operations to mop the ground with whoever is caught dissipate the remnants of any over-arching civic loyalties over there.

3.1. Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Religion

This section explores the intricate triangle relationship between manifestations of nationalism, ethnic identity and religious affiliation. State failure always generates uncertainty, breeds fear between groups, and opens windows of opportunity for all kinds of political entrepreneurs, thus elevating the risk of violent conflict. What is at stake is eventually the right to impose the new rules. In short, during a chaotic transition, the cost of seizing power by violent means dwindles, while the potential for gains grows. Concurrently, the opportunities granted by the option of peace decline together with the crumbling former regime. The risk of violent conflict increases, especially when

weapons and ammunition are widely available. This was the case in the Caucasus, which was flooded with weapons to such a degree that neither successor states nor rebel groups encountered any difficulties in arming their supporters from the arsenals of the dissolving Soviet army. In the North Caucasus, more than elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the so-called shadow economy by the early 1990s had evolved into a particularly complex social phenomenon that successfully co-opted multi-level bureaucracy and established its own norms and rules as a basis for the organization of local communities. Agriculture and tourism became two major pillars that were particularly involved in shadow economic activities. The former stimulated growth of networks that connected the producers of high-value products, primarily fruits and flowers, with the markets across the USSR. The latter brought the growth of local networks aimed at servicing millions of unregistered tourists, who were not allowed to travel outside the Soviet Union. The shadow economy has also successfully adapted to the post-Soviet situation. The most conservative estimates put its share at 55 - 60% of GDP in the North Caucasus regions. Clan politics, an unavoidable attribute of the ethno-social environment in traditional and transitional societies, is the most crucial element in assessment of the distinctive features characterizing the socio-political and economic environment in the post-Soviet Caucasus. In addition, clan politics is often a contributing factor to conflicts. As Russian social scientist Oleg Tsvetkov noted, "in many regions (republics), the elites' (clans') hold on power is made possible only by the constant and ruthless suppression of competing clans, which leads to the constant reproduction of conflicts rather than their settlement" (Avksentev, Gritsenko, and Dmitriev 2007: 66–67). It is necessary to make an important distinction here that ethnic clans are not identical to

ethnic groups and, therefore, need not be ethnically homogeneous communities. As a rule, a few closely related families form such groups and then, to ensure their functioning, recruit individuals who are not related by blood to the clan founders and may not even belong to the same ethnic group. According to Avksentev et al., a clan's ethnic makeup becomes significant to its members only when the clan comes into conflict over economic or political resources with another clan primarily drawn from a different ethnic group (2007). Furthermore, when such conflict unfolds, ethnicity plays a much greater role as clans recourse to ethnic mobilization to achieve a decisive competitive advantage and both sides increasingly identify themselves as opposing ethnic communities. Many scholars have pointed out the negative role played by extended family networks in the post-Soviet Caucasus. Indeed, the so-called "ethnic-clan capitalism" developed not only because the state failed to guarantee contracts but also in response to decades of Soviet regime characterized by unprecedented arbitrariness toward citizens that led to pervasive public distrust of that state.

In the North Caucasus, the degree of compliance with the law among post-Soviet citizens, where ethnic traditions and blood ties were no less important than the law, turned out to be much lower than similar indicators in the West (Rozmainskii 2004: 64). In this juncture, the institutional environment itself gradually fell under clan rules of either a planned or a market economy (Oleinik 2000:175). The most salient aspect of economic cooperation in an ethnic-clan economy is the clear division between "us" and "them", because deals are limited to relatives or people in the same clan. All other agents find themselves in the category of "them." Moreover, a significant number of clan deals take place, in whole or in part, in the shadows, because participants need to

hide their connections from "outsiders" (Rozmainskii 2002: 48–57). Thus, as former President of Karachay-Cherkessia Mustafa Batdyev admitted, the shadow economy and unpaid taxes in his republic account for at least 70 % (Semenov 2005). Opportunism is another aspect of economic pattern in an ethnic-clan economy that impedes efficient resource distribution - in a situation where the state does not guarantee enforcement of contracts, everyone is a bold opportunist. As a result, inadequate and contradictory laws; the spread of opportunism and near-sighted investment as behavioral norms; limited rationality in economic behavior; an orientation toward self-enrichment among individuals; relations based on family and clan ties; a large share of barter and cash in trade; a significant shadow sector and the gradual erosion of boundaries between legal and illegal types of activity—all these characteristics of ethnic-clan capitalism are indicative of complex degradation in the region (Kosals 2000). Under such circumstances, political power has become the main capital resource in the republics of the North Caucasus, where ethnic clans scramble to obtain power at all cost precisely reflect their views of the methods needed to ensure their economic well-being. The quasi-democratic presidential campaigns in Chechnya, Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia have demonstrated a desperate struggle of ethnic elites for political power and for an ethnic division of interests. At present, ethnic and family clans have become real political and economic actors in the republics of the North Caucasus. As political practice in Dagestan, Chechnya, and Karachay-Cherkessia proves, economic development and modernization are absent from the group of interests shared by actors in the ethnic-clan economic mindset. Their main goal is to ensure access to federal transfers and control the branches of the economy that offer immediate profits.

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Moreover, they do not use material and financial resources extracted from the local economy to modernize means of production, encourage innovation, or improve education or other areas that traditionally lay a foundation for modernization. Instead, they invest these resources in operations that provide quick returns, usually real estate transactions outside their own republic or country (Ware and Kisriev 2002, Vaskov 2010).

All violent conflicts in the North Caucasus developed for a certain period into markets of violence, in which military and law enforcement operations were combined with profitable economic activities (Torbakov 2005). The interpenetration of markets of violence and shadow economy may explain the lack of any progress in resolving the Caucasian conflicts, since endemic corruption and pervasive budget money-laundering does not produce credible economic alternatives. Once a highly profitable market of violence is established, there is a strong rationale for the parties to stabilize the *status quo*. If local officials get a share of the revenues from the market of violence, or are themselves acting as warlords, they have an interest in preserving the violence at low levels. In such cases, sustaining low-intensity conflict with reduced risks of violent clashes becomes a quite rational objective of both the separatist and the bureaucracy at all levels. Historically, the operational pattern of imperial Russia's conquest of the territories of the North Caucasus as well as the corresponding social, economic and political arrangements it made to integrate it, established the main frames of the region's current conflicts. The Soviet rule only exacerbated the pre-existed tensions and grievances and pre-determined Russia's failure to develop viable democratic mechanisms to address these legacies. Historically, Russia's advancement in the North

Caucasus took place in the context of the rising competition with Persia and the Ottoman Empire and of growing concerns about the involvement of European states in the region. The strong geopolitical basis of Russia's engagement with the North Caucasus and the convoluted process of conquest and incorporation resulted in a complex set of policies being applied towards the North Caucasus and its peoples. As a result various communities in the North Caucasus have had very nuanced relationships and collective memories with the central government over the past two centuries. While some groups were incorporated peacefully, others offered a fierce resistance, leading to widespread violence and the mobilization and consolidation of local identities, including religious ones (Broxup 1992). Large areas of Chechnya and Dagestan were conquered by Russia by the 1780s. In response, a fierce resistance movement emerged under a succession of figures that combined religious and political leadership, the most famous of which was Sheikh Mansur. This was to become the first organized military action to unify the mountain peoples of the North Caucasus, in this case the Chechens, Cherkess, Ingush, Kabards, Ossetes and various peoples of Dagestan. In 1829-1859 the North Caucasus was the place of an armed uprising (the Great Gazavat) that brought various local communities together to fight for or against Russia (Gammer 2006). The enduring resistance crystallized a number of leaders, including Imam Shamil, who led it for 25 consecutive years until his surrender in 1859. There were regular *gazavats* in the region during the next 60 years. The recent conflicts in Chechnya are often referred to by the insurgents as *gazavats*.

The subsequent Russian domination in the North Caucasus had an important impact on all aspects of life in the region, including religion. Not only did Islam gain

broad base support among local peoples, but it also became a powerful tool for the Sufi Islamic orders and a variety of other religious groups to mobilize resistance against Russian domination. In response, Russia quickly adopted policies to divide and rule the different Muslim communities and the Caucasian low intensity conflicts acquired a strong religious dimension that resulted in damaged relations with all Muslims in the Russian Empire. Even though the annexation of the North Caucasus created a large Muslim enclave in the Russian Empire, it was not the largest one. Muslims were an important element in Orthodox Russian society from the early 1700s. The Russian authorities always sought to use to transform religious authority into an instrument of imperial rule, imposing legal requirements to declare religious allegiance and to submit to the authority of the relevant clerical estate rather than to an imperial authority (Crews 2006). In fact, Russia made Islam a pillar of imperial rule, as a wide variety of Muslim clerics and lay persons became a forum for the resolution of conflict between Muslim communities, and was thus able to present itself as a conservative guardian of Islamic piety. This situation led to a complex intermeshing of Sharia law with Russian imperial legal system. Thus, the character of Islam and its political and social functions were transformed by exposure to broader currents of modernity that affected the Muslim communities of the Russian Empire during this period while, at the same time, being subordinated to imperial authority.

The successful military campaigns of the 18th and 19th centuries shaped new dividing lines in the Caucasus, and many of these divisions were institutionalized and legitimized by imposing territorial and administrative arrangements to secure its effective control over the various communities. In particular, Dagestan was

administratively separated from Chechnya. The introduction and enforcement of new forms of territorial administration along with new policies of economic development was often accompanied by punitive land redistributions in which non-Caucasian re-settlers benefited at the expense of the indigenous population. These swift changes led to the emergence of sizeable towns to accommodate the Russian military command, civil administration and emerging business infrastructure. Annexation also brought with it significant changes in the demography of the entire region. Indeed, demography was the key to Russian imperial and later Soviet rule in the North Caucasus: conquest and partial russification were accompanied by large population shifts from the mountains to the plains and lowlands. The gradual demise of the Russian Empire after World War I and the revolution of 1917 left the North Caucasus in chaos until 1923. Within the North Caucasus, competing ethnic and religious groups struggled over alternative political projects for the region. Confronted with a serious challenge to its control of the North Caucasus, the Soviet regime fed Muslim communities with promises of national self-determination (Walker 2003, Tuminez 2003). This policy proved particularly effective since, while the majority of the former religious elite rejected the revolution, the Soviets were able to secure the support of some Muslim activists attracted to nationalist ideas. The success of the Soviet military and political strategy brought with it new difficulties, especially with respect to the religious authorities. Initially, the Soviet regime demonstrated much caution and hesitation in limiting the role of Sharia law and religious institutions that had been introduced after the 1917 revolution.

The claim that national identity is easier to build on an ethnic basis than on a civic one is particularly true in Russia, where Marxist-Leninism and Socialism were

portrayed and fostered by the Soviet Union as the key to its identity (Lenin 1914, 1916).

Since 1991, there were numerous attempts at creating a new concept of identity for the

Russian Federation on the basis of different ideologies, but the pendulous nature of

policies has had divisive as well as amalgamating effects. The official Soviet national

policy, from its very inception, acknowledged the difficulties posed by the existence of

the many different nationalities within it, as a positive rather than a negative feature.

Initially, people were encouraged to foster a dual identity as a Soviet citizen as well as a

person from a certain nation. In theory, all national identities were expected to lose all

ethnic bases and become the political and class identity of the Soviet citizen. With this

in mind, Vladimir Lenin crafted a federal system for managing the different regions

within the Soviet Union. Nations were differentiated and given a measure of national

self-determination within the boundaries of the Soviet state (Davis 1967). This did not

only apply to the national republics in the Caucasus such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, or

Armenia but smaller territories within the republics were also given ethnic labels even

when the titular nation was not a majority in the region. The official unifying ideology

for the Soviet Union was Socialism but in the early days of the Civil War Lenin quickly

realized that nationalism could be heftily used as a strong motivating factor for people

and as a useful tool for strengthening the Soviet state. A lesson was learnt from

experiences of the Tsarist Empire; nationalist aspirations could be a strong destabilizing

force that added potency to revolutionary movements. In Lenin's view, complete

institutionalization of ethnic identity would bring its powerful potential under control.

Thus, he founded a new federal structure in such a way that it manipulated national

manifestation and, to some extent, even encouraged it (Page 1950). The so-called

"Literacy policy" meant that indigenous cultures that previously had no written language could be formalized and allowed greater expression. Each of the national republics was allowed to use their own languages and have institutes of science and culture. During this period the people of the newly formed Soviet Union experienced more freedom than they ever had before. Nations were granted the right to secede from the Union if they chose to do so. Naturally this was more in theory than in practice. The crucial aspect of Lenin's policy towards nationalism emphasized the eradication of Great Russian Chauvinism (Chulos 2000). Russia had always held a privileged role in the Tsarist Empire which was the cause of much resentment by the other nations (Lenin 1914, 1916). Lenin decided to overcome this resentment to the point of excluding any references to Russia in official documents simply referring to "the Workers' State". Lenin's national policy was meant to bring the different nations together in a voluntary union, not just one enforced from Moscow (Page 1950, Davis 1967). The identification of different nations was supposed to be supranational, gradually the nations were meant to merge, and the only identity would be that of a Soviet citizen, nationalism would simply disappear. In the North Caucasus, the Soviet national policy continued the imperial policy of divide and rule towards the Sufi sheikhs and succeeded in reshaping the political and socio-economic character of the North Caucasus, disarming the local population, along with set of policies to weaken the clerics and the nationalists who had initially supported the revolution. As a result, both sharia courts and the imperial system of muftiates were abolished in 1926 and scripts based on the Cyrillic alphabet were imposed on the languages of the region, breaking the links created by the common use of Arabic and Turkish. The public assaults on religious symbols launched in

conjunction with the compulsory collectivization of agriculture provoke fierce resistance and the region was once again plunged into the wave of indiscriminate reprisals and ideological intolerance (Wixman 1980, Tekushev and Shevchenko 2011).

Following Lenin's death, Stalin selected the most questionable aspects of Lenin's nationalities policy, and then proceeded to consolidate the Soviet state under these principles despite his own Caucasian origin. Not only did Stalin clearly reinstate Russian ethno-cultural supremacy drawing on Russia's heroic past to encourage national spirit during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), but he also reintroduced old Tsarist policies of the predominance of the Russian language and culture (Suny and Martin 2002). To some extent, this concept was espoused by all of the subsequent leaders of the Soviet Union and was still mentioned in official propaganda on the eve of its collapse in 1991. The idea of an over-arching Soviet identity was most enthusiastically carried out in the Caucasus. As the Soviet Union began to falter and its outlying Caucasian territories set out to formulate their ethnic claims, the Russian Federation was in the unique position of having based its national identity on its civic identity as the statutory leader of all other nations. The abrupt loss of Russia's leadership role and the end of Soviet socialist ideology left Russian identity in a state of limbo. By 1936, still apprehensive about pan-Islamic solidarity, the Soviet regime set out, alongside its continual efforts to undermine the position of the religious authorities, to redraw the region along broadly ethno-linguistic lines, establishing new ethno-territorial political entities. This policy created numerous anomalies, because natural diversity of the population ensured that the new borders cut across regional, linguistic, ethno-religious and clan ties (Hirsch 2005). The artificial division of the administrative

units (such as the repeated subdivision of the Circassian people of the north-western Caucasus into the 'new' nationalities of Adyghea, Cherkessians and Kabards) as well as the forced fusion of different nationalities into single territorial unit (for example, the creation of the Kabardino-Balkaria autonomous oblast in 1922) further exacerbated ethnic tensions. Under these conditions, the formation of a new cohort of dependable ethnic and religious elites became a central part of the Stalinist social engineering project. The new appointees took a central part in the subsequent campaign to extend Moscow's control over the region and to drive forward the Soviet project of transformation and modernization. They were also prominent in the series of anti-Islam campaigns conducted during this period. The destruction of mosques and desecration of Islamic values was widespread in the Muslim parts of the North Caucasus, which despite the hardline policies remained the most troublesome zone of the Soviet Union up until its collapse. As a result of the pervasive anti-Islam campaigns of the late 1920s, much of the intellectual culture of Islam in the North Caucasus, which had prospered and persisted until 1917, was obliterated. In particular, the destruction of mosques and Islamic educational institutions disrupted the system of Islamic confessional education, while the switch from the Arabic script ensured that new generations were cut off from previous Islamic scholarship. The religious life of ordinary Muslims, who were deprived of opportunities to worship openly, became confined to Sufism with a focus on local traditional rites and practices. Stalin's death in 1953 allowed the North Caucasus to enter a period of relative stability. To a great extent, Islam enjoyed resurgence in the decades after World War II and acquired a conspicuously political character. In particular, adherence to the *tariqas* increased among the Chechen and Ingush as a result

of their period of exile when the *tariqas* became symbols of ethnic affiliation and an effective instrument of community survival. Once again, religious and ethnic aspects were fused as Sufism merged with the social and economic organization of the community 27. The mere fact that not a single mosque was allowed to function in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR for almost 20 years after the return from exile is still remembered as both discrimination against Islam and a violation of national rights. There is ample evidence that Islamic practices and networks developed covertly throughout the North Caucasus, especially among the younger generation. These networks contributed much in strengthening national identities in sharp opposition to Russia, and in diverting youth from ubiquitous Soviet ideology and public life (Ro'i 2000).

Despite the growing scholarship on Islam in the North Caucasus, the North Caucasus Muslim community remains largely "a thing in itself", posing more questions with every passing day. First, how many Muslims are there in Russia? Second, who can be considered a Muslim at all? Taking the whole spectrum of opinions into account, one can find that at the turn of the 21 century the number of Russian Muslims is anywhere between 15 and 35 millions (Malashenko 1998:7), but the number most often mentioned in scientific publications and the mass media is around 20 million. In 2001, scholars at the Russian Academy of Civil Service indicated that the number of those "who adhere to Islamic traditions" in Russia is 15 million (Mukhametshin and Dubkov 200:155). However, this calculation left out of calculation both legal and illegal Muslims immigrants living in Russia for decades. For example, according to various sources, the number of Azerbaijan citizens alone is between 1 and 1.5 million. In the late '90s they

opened in the Moscow district of Otradnoye a Shiite mosque, and there are contentious plans to open Shiite mosques in other cities as well. The second largest migrant Muslim ethnic group in Russia is Kazakhs: their number is just under one million. Therefore, the total number of Muslims in Russia must be more than 15 million. There are two opposite views on that lingering question. First, the number of devout Muslim believers in Russia is not above three million. The *Monitoring.ru* opinion-sampling service found that Muslims constituted around 5% of the total number of believers in Russia, which this source estimates to be approximately 55% (Tulsky 2001). Second, according to the Moscow Institute of Sociological Analysis, in 1997, Muslims made up 6.2% of the total number of believers, and 6% of the overall population (Zubov 2000).

Who is to be counted as a true Muslim? There is no reliable confessional statistics in Russia, and so the data collected both on the federal and regional level, including the republics of the North Caucasus, fail to give a coherent answer as to who can be considered a "true Muslim." Respondents are usually asked how many times a day they perform prayers, how often they go to the mosque, how profound their religious knowledge is, whether or not they know the suras of the Quran, and so on. On the basis of such criteria a conclusion is drawn whether a person can be regarded as a believer. However, in the case of Islam such an approach does not seem useful, because it does not make it possible to gauge the number of Muslims in Russia and about the role the Islamic factor plays in present-day Russia; the main problem is that religious observance has nothing to do with a person's self-identification within a larger collective identity (Malashenko 2005). Thus, a different approach is more often used to determine whether a person is a Muslim or not. This approach has nothing to do with a

person's observation of the religious rites or his knowledge of religion. A person's connection to Islam is determined by his self-identification, the environment in which he was born and grew up. Finally, Muslims comprise ethnic minorities, and their confessional self-identification is a most important part of their national self-identification (Malashenko 2005). Especially in the North Caucasus, belonging to Islam actually becomes equivalent to belonging to an ethnic group. The logic behind this approach is simple. An individual who has a Muslim name becomes a Muslim believer, because he was born Muslim. Islam then turns out to be a consolidating supra-ethnic factor in front of the Russian majority. Consequently, the self-awareness of a person as a bearer of a minority's religion is further reinforced by the increased xenophobia in Russian society, and Islamophobia in particular. It is important to note that unlike the large Muslim minority groups in Western Europe, the Russian Muslims are mainly autochthonous. As a matter of fact, Islam penetrated the territory of the present Russian Federation before Christianity. In the year 642 the Arabs penetrated the territory of what is now Dagestan and began spreading Islam further across the Caucasus. In 2000 (1420 on the Muslim calendar), the Russian Muslims celebrated the 1400th anniversary of Islam's advent to Russia. However, acoording to Malashenko, the indisputable fact that Muslims are part of Russia's indigenous population and that Islam has been present on Russian soil centuries has not yet led to the formation of a consolidated Muslim community having common interests and being able to express them politically in one voice: the three regional Muslim enclaves – the Volga river Area, the North Caucasus and Moscow continue to remain quite isolated from one another (2005).

As ethno-nationalism crystallized as the dominant factor determining political conflicts in the North Caucasus in the early 1990s, the region also experienced religious revival. Decades of intensive anti-Islamic campaigns had depleted Islam, both institutionally and intellectually, as the Soviet authorities had tried to rewrite a legitimate past for Islam by selling it as a secular attribute of national cultures (Hunter 2006). The fusion of nationalist aspirations thus provided a major stimulus for a religious resurgence that was initially fragmented along ethnic lines. By 1992 the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the North Caucasus was replaced by independent bodies for each republic, as the formerly underground parallel Islam displaced much of the pro-Soviet religious hierarchy in the region. In particular, a number of violent conflicts broke out between followers of traditional forms of Islam, various branches of Sufism, and adherents to more radical forms, the Salafists.[4] A lack of understanding of the complex ethnic, religious, and social situation in the North Caucasus kept the federal authorities on the margins of events and they were left no choice but to side with the proponents of traditional Sufi Islam. At the same time, both Chechnya and Dagestan emerged as the key locations for the standoff between different versions of Islam in the region. Even though the clandestine penetration of Salafists groups in the region began on the eve of the collapse of Soviet Union and the subsequent deep economic and social crisis, the power of the movement was to be found not so much in socio-economic grievances as in the destruction of local Muslim culture and the social upheavals to which Muslims in the North Caucasus were subjected in Soviet times (Bobrovnikov

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[4] Salafism is a radical fundamentalist movement within the Sunni branch of Islam that advocates a return to the 'pure' Islam supposedly practiced by the Salaf, the first three generations of Muslims, including the Prophet Mohammed. In the North Caucasus, Salafis are also referred to as Wahhabis.

2002). Despite the fact that both traditional Islam and Salafism co-existed in Dagestan during the early 1990s, Dagestan has historically been the main bulwark for the former in the North Caucasus.

When the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan was established in 1990, the Sufi sheikhs quickly seized control of it as well as the corresponding system of religious education (Shikhsaidov 2004). However, this institutional arrangement did not establish the dominance of traditional Islam over the numerous Salafist groups. In Dagestan, traditional Islam is very sensitive to ethnic lines, and some Sufi groups do not recognize the new muftis, who predominantly descend from the Avar ethnic group. Within a few years, rivalry over the Islamic institutions quickly merged with the republic's internal power struggle, in which ethnicity played a key role. In sharp contrast to the followers of traditional Islam, who secured influence through control of the official Islamic institutions, the Salafi pragmatics positioned themselves explicitly above the egregious amalgamation of corruptive bureaucracy with official Muslim institutions. Most important, being equally distant from both the authorities and from ethnic rivalry, the Salafists were able to use their radical ideology to enjoy respect and support by transcending ethnic and clan considerations. The indifference of the self-contained authorities and the traditional clergy to resist the spread of crime, corruption and perceived moral degradation created very propitious grounds for reaching out to young people who were especially attracted to the movement's combination of piety and rejection of religious hierarchy. Step by step, Salafist groups made impressive headway in the North Caucasus during the 1990s. Moreover, new converts were able to seize even political power in a few mountainous villages Karamakhi, Kadar and

Chabammakhi that were then governed according to narrow interpretations of the Sharia law.

With the establishment of a necessity alliance between secular and religious elites, the central authorities dispatched additional army units to Dagestan to stamp out the self-proclaimed Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan in August of 1999, as combat troops surrounded the Dagestan villages of Chabanmakhi, Kadar and Karamakhi and took them by full-front attack. Subsequent sweeping arrests of Salafist clerics in the North Caucasus were not long in coming. The indiscriminate repressive actions, combined with the unintelligible slogans of sovereign democracy, served to consolidate the Salafist groups and helped them to overcome their internal divisions (Makarov and Mukhametshin 2003). It also drove the Salafists underground and shifted their agenda from a struggle with traditional Islam to one with the regional and central authorities. Furthermore, the fierce persecution of Salafism resulted in the rapid propagation of radical Islamist movements across the region and, in particular, in Kabardino-Balkaria, in Nogai communities in Stavropol krai, and in Karachay-Cherkessia. However, Salafism's intolerance of national cultural traditions coupled with rigid social, religious and ethical demands on adherents proved incompatible with the majority of region's population who was grown up in the Soviet Union and further limited its propagation.

As a rule, organizational structure of the Salafist jamaats does not overlap the traditional Muslim communities, which are organized along territorial principles, incorporating the population of a village or city district grouped around a mosque. The Salafist jamaats are extra-territorial and dispersed. One jamaat can encompass many

small groups, united in one or several networks. Even though the membership of the separatist jamaats is diverse, their base is the Muslim youth of the region. A growing number of students and young bureaucrats are joining the Islamist movements, demonstrating that separatist views are spread among the intellectual elite in the North Caucasus republics, particularly in Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia. When social injustice and endemic corruption are rampant, the best response seems to be the introduction of Sharia law. The jamaats unite not only members of different ethnic groups, but also representatives of other countries: Tajikistan, Pakistan, and the Middle East. Official propagandists usually describe these outsiders as mercenaries, even though many of them arrived for ideological reasons. Although the separatist groups get financial and logistical support from foreign donors, the biggest portion of funds comes as kickbacks from local shadow business and corrupt bureaucracy (Malashenko and Trenin 2004).

The Salafist/Wahhabist ideology of the separatist movement in the North Caucasus leads to a literal interpretation of this principle with very strict limits and prioritizes an armed battle for faith against the enemies of Islam, including other North Caucasus Muslims who do not support the separatists. As a result, there is indiscriminate use of force against ethnic Muslims who serve in the government, military, or law enforcement. Such a dogmatic position also serves to justify killings of those Muslims who have no relationship to the authorities. In the early 90s, the secular nationalists used to bargain with Moscow for some level of autonomy as well as for personal entitlements. This kind of arrangements worked well enough to contain groundswell of nationalistic aspirations in relatively stable legal frames. It does not

work anymore since the separatists' ideology does not allow any compromise with the "infidels." Moreover, the Islamist core of the North Caucasus separatists' ideology sets very clear long-term goals of this movement. It is no longer the separation of Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia or Dagestan from Russia, but the destruction of the Russian Federation as the only tangible impediment to the proclamation of Sharia-governed territory that would ultimately unite all Muslims in the Caucasus in a single political space. Thus, ethnic identity will be once and forever subdued by religious identity (Malashenko and Trenin 2004, Markedonov 2007).

For most of the Caucasus communities, religion serves as a component of their ethnic and regional identity, but is not their primary collective identity. For example, solidarity on an Islamic basis with Muslims beyond the Caucasus is still minimal, although beginning to rise among such ethnic groups as Avars, Dargins, Nogais, Karachays and Kumiks. Most communities of the region hold in high regard their local cultures, and they are not particularly susceptible to identification with the broader Muslim world. Furthermore, my argument is that Islam rarely serves as a unifying ideology of primary identity uniting the Muslim residents in the region, and many conflicts prevail among members of the same religion. The ghost of "religious fundamentalism" has served to feed prejudices, planting essentialist cultural views of Islam and justifying the authoritarian regime in Chechnya and numerous post-Soviet bureaucracies in Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia

3.2. Divisions of Power and Ethnic Identity

This section examines the relationship between ethnic identity and power balance in the North Caucasus at different periods of its history with particular focus on

three case studies: Dagestan, Chechnya, and Karachay-Cherkessia. With the rapid advance of the German army in the Caucasus, the Soviet authorities began to fear that some ethnic groups might shift their fragile loyalties. Thus, the Soviet regime officially recognized Islam and reanimated mufti for the North Caucasus. Having reached the North Caucasus in 1942 on its way to sever the Caucasian oilfields from the Soviets, the German occupational authorities disbanded all collective farms, reopened mosques and vowed to guarantee religious freedom and sovereignty for those groups that were willing to cooperate. What happened then was one of the darkest periods in the history of the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus. Between November 1943 and March 1944, on the basis of decrees signed by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, entire ethnic groups (the Balkar, Chechens, Ingush and Karachay) were evicted, loaded into cattle wagons, and transported to Central Asia and Siberia with exceptional security measures under the pretext of mostly unfounded accusations of collaboration with the German authorities. Those who managed to flee the deportation were apprehended and executed. It was not until 1957, when the remnants of exiled peoples were officially rehabilitated and shortly afterwards around 90 000 survivors returned to the North Caucasus to reclaim their land and property. Their return provoked enormous tensions all across the North Caucasus, some of which persist today. Shortly afterwards, the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the Kabardino-Balkaria Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Karachay-Cherkessia Autonomous Region were brought to being in 1957, but not all of their former territories were returned to them. Areas of the former republics that were retained by Dagestan, Georgia, North Ossetia, and Stavropol became sources of intense disputes over land ownership.

The concept of "mature socialism" proclaimed in the late 1960s as result of the Communist Party's assessment of Soviet reality assumed that Islam and its clerics had been fully integrated into the Soviet system (Evans 1977). Strictly speaking, the decades of heavily centralized rule during the Soviet period had a significant impact on social organization in the North Caucasus. Confronted with the apparent complexity of social relations in the North Caucasus, Soviet national policy was strongly shaped by a perception of the dominance of social institutions and loyalties defined principally by clan, tape, and kin. Obviously, this assessment of the nature of the region's socio-political character stems from the imperial Russian approach to the region as well as a reflection of the so-called "orientalist tradition" in Russian scholarship and colonial policy (Jersild 2003). The skillful manipulation of these cleavages for political purposes was an important element in both regimes' efforts to enforce law and order in the Caucasus. This concept did little to contribute to the social modernization of the region and mainly served to further entrench traditional modes of social organization. There is empirical evidence that, in the relative stability of the post-Stalin era, it even promoted the informal economic activities and bureaucratic machinations that have laid out the basis for the pervasive of corruption following the collapse of the Soviet regime.

In the mid-sixties, the Soviet policy of promoting national identities in the North Caucasus began to gain tangibles results, as clear signs of a growing national consciousness were emerging, and larger fragments of the indigenous populations were making significant social, economic and political progress. The advancement of multi-layer national bureaucracies pushed the urbanization and modernization of the region's non-Russian inhabitants. Concurrently, growing numbers of the indigenous peoples

found their way into higher education, contributing to the emergence of national elites. These complex developments coupled with the resurgence of Islam, challenged Soviet regime in the North Caucasus in a number of ways. In particular, the advancement of the non-ethnic Russian populations weakened the domination of the ethnic Russian settlers over the predominately rural societies of the indigenous peoples, eroding the central government's control. This process not only weakened the Soviet regime's ability to forge loyal local cadres but also undermined the position of the Russian language and the center's control over the educational institutions, the key economic sectors and the regional executive bodies (Evans 1977).

Gorbachev's reforms allowed, for the first time, a public sphere where dormant political ambitions could be articulated. Among the first to occupy that public space were nationalist movements in the Union republics. A common feature of these mass movements on the periphery of the ailing Union was that initially they set off as pro-democratic movements. However, by 1989, the national movements of the Baltic republics and popular fronts of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia had turned to enforcing more radical positions, increasingly exploiting the ways and means of secession from the Soviet Union. Then, a number of the first partly-free elections to the republican and local representative organs increased the political weight of popular movements. Having obtained democratic legitimacy after elections of 1990, local bureaucracy initiated the dismantling of the vertical hierarchy of the Communist party to secure its new political capital and administrative resources. On March 6 1990, facing open confrontation with local elites, Gorbachev had to allow a multiparty system by abolishing the article 6 of the Soviet constitution, which guaranteed the primacy of the

Communist Party. Once a vertical chain of command was shaken, both the Union republics and the Autonomous republics grasped as much sovereignty as they could. For most republics, sovereignty, in this context, did not yet mean independence, but in the first place control over resources, property rights, taxation, and legislation. However, from spring of 1990 until its collapse, the Soviet regime was locked in a devastating multi-level power struggle. By the end of 1990, the power balance in the Soviet Union had rapidly shifted away from the center to the republics, and within the republics, towards the so-called national-democratic movements. In a desperate attempt to save the union, Gorbachev presented a draft of a new union treaty that involved some decentralization of power to the republics but maintained a strong federal center. Although this union treaty was accepted by 70 % of the Soviet citizens in March 1991, it did not stop the republics from taking control over resources and property rights, thus approving a *de facto* dismantling of the Soviet system. As soon as the Soviet Union ceased to exist and the unprepared republics were left to deal with this unexpected independence internal violent conflicts flared up in Tajikistan, Moldova, and all across the Caucasus.

Gorbachev's reforms had another dramatic impact on the North Caucasus. During the years of selective political and economic restructuring, the weakness of central political authority along with the unmasked decomposition of the Soviet bureaucratic apparatus allowed the emergence of a plethora of grass-root political and religious movements imposing diverse visions of the region's future. Nonetheless, it was not Islam that became the primary gear to mobilize popular support against ailing Soviet - Russian domination. Rather, a variety of nationalist movements that sought to

push for self-determination and to advance cultural and linguistic demands sprung up all across the North Caucasus. During this period, the legacy of Soviet territorial division and nation building was questioned by every single ethnic group. Previously dormant border disputes and conflicts erupted in North Ossetia and Ingushetia and in several other locations, including along Russia's border with Azerbaijan (Hunter 2006). With the demise of the Soviet Union, much of the older Islamic elite, many members of which were tainted by collaboration with the Soviet-run Islamic institutions, were aggressively challenged by a younger generation of religious scholars and alike. A variety of parties claiming their inspiration from versions of Islam appeared. Porous frontiers along with political liberalization also exposed Muslims to long-awaited external influences - Salafism began to spread in the North Caucasus, starting from western Dagestan and later from Chechnya (Hunter 2006).

The intricate nature of Russian imperial and Soviet policies in the North Caucasus provided the fertile ground for many conflicts, which followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The mobilization process that accompanied the decline of the Soviet regime was initially challenged along the lines of ethnicity and nationalism was due largely to the legacies of the Russian imperial and Soviet endeavors to coddle ethnic cleavages, including separate national identities. Surprisingly, the post-Soviet rulers did little to question this heritage in the North Caucasus and rather served to accelerate the crumbling of over-arching loyalties and to provoke even further fragmentation. In the early 1990s, it was primarily the structural legacy of the Soviet Union's territorial administration policies that determined the nature of the conflict over political power and access to resources in the North Caucasus. During this period, a

spate of interlinked tensions and conflicts spread across the region, ignited primarily by ethno-national issues. The federal government had to cope with increasingly belligerent demands for territorial delimitation and structural reforms, stemming from the repeated border changes and the mass deportations of the early 1940s. In addition, a yawning crisis of leadership at the regional level and in the relationship between the North Caucasus republics and the federal authorities culminated in Boris Yeltsin's famous appeal to Russia's regional elites to "take all the sovereignty they could swallow"[5] that only further accelerated nationalist mobilization in the North Caucasus. Soon afterwards, in 1991 the Russian Parliament passed the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples, which moved the issue of the return of land to former deportees to the top of the political agendas of the North Caucasus, providing a legal justification for redrawing the borders and redefining the status of many of the administrative units in the North Caucasus. The secession in 1992 of Ingushetia from Chechnya flamed a dispute between the Chechens and Ingush over Sunzhensky administrative district and fueled tensions between the Ingush and the North Ossetians over Prigorodny administrative district. Russia's continual failure to clarify Ingushetia's borders led to a violent conflict between Ingushetia and North Ossetia in the autumn of 1992 with nearly 600 deaths, tens of thousands of internally displaced people, and continued tensions over the issue throughout the 2000s. Yeltsin's propagandistic support for the revival of the Cossacks, who had also been repressed during the Soviet period, within the framework of the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples also rekindled

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[5] In September 1990, President Yeltsin repeatedly reiterated this sloagan during his visit to Tatarstan.

tensions between non-Russian communities and the Cossacks who had a long history of military standoff with the native peoples of the North Caucasus.

Due to considerable institutional ambiguity with an uncertain division of responsibility for policy towards the North Caucasus between different ministries, the parliament, the presidential apparatus and growing security agencies resulted in Russia's failure to respond effectively to the spiraling conflicts over territory with a coherent policy. Instead, relations between federal center and the regions were further obfuscated by conflicting pieces of legislation on the distribution of authority between the center and the regions: the 1992 Federal Treaty, the 1993 Russian Constitution, and a set of bilateral treaties between Russia Federation and its regions. With no definitive legal base for federal relations and absence of a well-defined institutional framework, Russia resorted to improvised solutions with temporal measures to address the conflicts in the North Caucasus in particular. In part, this situation was a reflection of an underlying challenge with regard to what kind of state the new Russian Federation should become. At an ideological level, this challenge was boiled down to two irreconcilable positions: Russia as a genuine, modern, and democratic country and Russia as centralized, paternalistic great power to ensure its territorial integrity and incremental influence on the former Soviet republics. In the meantime, unscrupulous post-Soviet bureaucracy was primarily centered on its relationships with local elites as the principal means for reinserting influence in the region. Even though the North Caucasus joined with the rest of Russia in creating formally democratic regional institutions and in conducting direct elections for regional leaders, the obvious shortcomings of this approach became particularly salient as these institutional

arrangements were easily manipulated by incumbent elites. In desperate need to contain mounting ethno-religious conflicts and secessionist aspirations, Yeltsin' cohort grew more reliant on the local elites to guarantee stability of his ailing regime that was often institutionalized in the form of bilateral agreements and personal relationships. These internal bureaucratic arrangements resulted in unabashed expansion of the prerogatives of the regional functionaries accompanied by omnipresent corruption and patronage politics at all levels of administration. Within one decade, the North Caucasus became a chaotic aggregation of privatized pseudo-democratic constructions reaching out to criminal outfits and extremist groups, including those drawing on religious ideas. While the local elite had little interest in changing the so-called "status quo" that might harm their positions, the situation in the North Caucasus continued to deteriorate questioning the very existence of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin's hand-pick appointment as prime minister took place at a time when there was a pervasive sense of crisis in Russia and an acceptance of the population for the authorities to enforce law and order at all cost. Therefore, Putin made relations between the federal government and the regions a key policy target with the North Caucasus in the first place. In Putin's view, the only cost-effective way to bring the situation in the North Caucasus under his control was the direct system of centrally appointed high-ranking regional officials, administrative restructuring, and intensive militarization. Under pretext of fighting international terrorism and religious extremism, he quickly consolidated his power base for further centralization of power and curtailment of political and civil liberties.

The invasion of Dagestan launched by Chechen Islamist militants in 1999 gave the Prime-Minister Putin another unbeatable argument for launching a campaign to

solidify the so-called "vertical power' intended to restore Russia's dominance in the North Caucasus. As early as May 2000, Putin insisted on introduction a set of measures designed to strengthen central executive power over the regions. Thus, seven federal districts were created, each comprising several regions under the guidance of a presidential plenipotentiary envoy (Smirnov 2007). All federal institutions in those regions were completely refashioned to fit the new vertical structure. Until 2009, the North Caucasus republics along with South Russian regions were incorporated into the Southern Federal District. Federal authorities demanded immediately that the regions' constitutions and legislation be brought into compliance with the federal constitutional provisions and legislative norms. The key task of Putin's centralizing reforms was designed to undermine the ability of the regional elites to challenge the center and to address the concern that Russia's territorial integrity was questioned by the increasing power of the regions. Due to the peculiar nature of the socio-political situation in the North Caucasus, Putin's plans had quite limited effect. Within one year, the federal bureaucracy of the Southern Federal District bogged down in local crisis management, rather than challenging the entrenched positions of the regional clans. By 2005, Putin still could not break the power of the post-Soviet elites in their own regions and lacked the political leverage to do so. His vigorous efforts to replace the self-contained bureaucracy were therefore backed up by public appeals to curb the growing instability by more authoritarian measures.

In response to mounting obstacles to his growing authority, Putin set about dislodging local nomenclature who did not meet his expectations either professionally or personally. However, replacing this type of ethnically-elected bureaucracy initially

proved difficult, but the 2004 terrorist slaughter in Beslan provided Moscow with a long-awaited pretext to abolish elections for regional leaders in favor of direct appointments and to downgrade regional parliaments to puppet roles in local power balances. The painful replacement of the long-serving leaders of the North Caucasus republics reflects the growing confidence of the Federation in addressing both the religious hard-liners and the clan-style politicians. On the one hand, Putin's incremental pressure on loyal local elites through direct intervention and distribution marks a return to Russian imperial and Soviet politics of maintaining control in the region. On the other hand, it is now clear that this strategy of undermining clan structures and extremist networks has only intensified tensions and produced new conflicts that result in power shifts within the system rather than changing the system itself (Perovic 2006).

The above-mentioned situation highlights the essential weakness of such an approach: lack of local legitimacy of the hand-pick appointees who have not gained their positions through a democratic scrutiny. Thus, patronage politics, personal relationships, and clan ties continue to dominate the region, increasing the regimes' reliance on law enforcement and military. The 2010 year became another failure for the federal government's project of seeking to invest money in the region in exchange for stability as   Aleksandr Khloponin, who was designated by the Kremlin as the experienced manager for the project, did not succeed in turning the situation around by additional infusions of money from the central government into the bottomless budgets of local ethnic republics (Rosbalt News Agency 2010). He seems to fail to make local top officials to resolve their issues through his apparatus, rather than by circumventing it (as in case of Ramzan Kadyrov, who continues to do so in public without any

reservation). Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, in the end had to admit that the Khloponin project did not meet his expectations (Rosbalt News Agency 2010). In reality, there were very few, to say the least, willing to invest something in a region where there is a permanent war, and even then those who did had received personnel assurances from the Kremlin for all the risks associated with the instability in the region. The Kremlin's bold administrative move to split the Southern Federal District into two administrative units, one of which, called the North Caucasus Federal District, covered most of the region's national republics – Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia – as well as the Stavropol krai. However, Adyghea, an integral part of the North Caucasus region, was bracketed and remained within the Southern Federal District. In desperate attempts to remain in power, the governors of the North Caucasus republics have been adopting the tactic successfully employed by Ramzan Kadyrov, in which priority is given to the paramilitary structures directly subordinated to them. However, a strategy to counter the insurgents by paramilitary units composed of representatives of the loyal indigenous population of a particular republic is unlikely to result in something even remotely similar to what has been allegedly achieved in Chechnya, because it ignores the many differences between the organization of Chechen society and that of the other multi-ethnic republics. Although the aggravation of the situation in the North Caucasus had multifaceted manifestations, including social, political, economic and religious, the dominant and defining factor overshadowing all of them was the ongoing armed insurgency that compelled the Russian authorities to confess that the situation in the region in 2010 indeed significantly worsened compared to 2009. While in 2009, the

violence and unrest was concentrated mainly in Ingushetia, in 2010 the much larger Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria came to the forefront. This conflagration of violence is now viewed to have an impact on Russia's Black Sea area, where it hopes to host the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. Russian government's decision to hold these games in the Chircassian historical homeland along with the assassinations of leaders of Chircassian nationalistic organizations in 2010 might be indicative of a policy aimed at further exploiting interethnic and inter-ideological tensions.

Sociological data provided by the Russian Public Opinion Centre (Press release #1398, October 24, 2011), the Levada-Centre (December 12, 2011) and the Public Opinion Fund (December 15, 2011) attest that between May 2009 and December 2011 all the positive ratings of the state's leaders and of the party in power have tended to diminish and the negative ratings have tended to grow. The negative dynamics of approval ratings are practically the same for the President Medvedev, the Prime Minister Putin and the "United Russia". This means that the emerging trend is about the political system as a whole, indicating a process of its diminishing legitimacy. Qualitative surveys (focus groups) conducted by the Center for Strategic Research Foundation in 2010 and 2011 substantially enlarge the picture of the ongoing changes. Although the method does not appear to be rigorous enough, it has considerable prognostic power compared with qualitative surveys. The forecast horizon may be between eight and twelve months. The forecast is based upon the emergence within the focus groups of new opinions which have not yet become widespread, but have never previously been voiced at all, or upon the prevalence of opinions that previously were only occasionally expressed. Quantitative surveys are usually tardy in detecting such

changes (Belanovsky and Dmitriev 2011). Belanovsky and Dmitriev believe that the key change in the political consciousness of Russians is not only diminishing confidence in the Putin-Medvedev tandem, but a growing demand for a new leader, a third leader (2011). Putin, unlike Medvedev, has preserved part of his traditional electorate, but his supporters form their opinion of him on the basis of his past accomplishments, mainly the post-Yeltsin stabilization. But the same people agree that the situation in the country has deteriorated and that there are no signs of improvement. In the former years Putin practically had no anti-electorate, with the exception of the politicized part of the Moscow middle class. Now such an anti-electorate may be observed even in the quantitative surveys published by the Public Opinion Fund in 2011. There are many angry pronouncements at the focus groups about the situation in the country and against the country's leaders, something that was not the case before. There is yet another subjective factor that diminishes Putin's personal legitimacy. In the early 2000s Putin's image gained a lot because he was comparatively young, especially in contrast to the negative memories of ailing Brezhnev[6] and Yeltsin. After the negative experience of Brezhnev and Yeltsin, the Russian people categorically do not want to see an old and ineffectual leader (Belanovsky and Dmitriev 2011).

The 2011 parliamentary elections exaggerated victory of the ruling "United Russia" party in the North Caucasus and played a key role in enabling the ruling "United Russia" party to win over 50 percent of the mandates. The North Caucasus' vote was more important this time than in previous elections, in 2007, when "United

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[6] Leonid Brezhnev (1906 - 1982) was the General Secretary of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), presiding over the country from 1964 until his death in 1982.

Russia" still enjoyed considerable popular support opinion across Russia. The ruling party partially compensated for its profound loss of popularity in ethnic Russian regions with the help of the North Caucasian vote, which is largely seen as having been fraudulent, believes the well-known Russian analyst on the North Caucasus, Konstantin Kazenin (Dzutsev 2011b). Dagestan and Chechnya were the two top Russian regions where "United Russia" added votes in comparison to the 2007 elections. In Dagestan, the party improved its performance from 89.4 in 2007 to 91.4 this time. In Chechnya, the ruling party received 99.5 percent of the vote this time, 0.1 percent more than in 2007. In stark contrast to ethnic Russian regions, United Russia's results were on average approximately 30 percent lower than in 2007, amounting to what appears to be a crushing defeat for the Kremlin (Dzutsev 2011b). The rigging of the vote took on perhaps its most grotesque forms in Chechnya, due to the republic's quasi-dictatorial regime installed and supported by Moscow. According to Chechen officials, voter turnout was 99.45 percent. On December 2, Chechen officials announced that the total number of registered voters in the republic was 608,797. On December 5, summarizing the election results, Chechen officials announced that a total of 611,099 ballots had been cast – that is, 2,302 more ballots cast than the total number of registered voters. Chechnya's central electoral commission quickly responded to the criticism by raising the official number of voters to 614,109 (http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/197042/, December 5, 2011). On December 6, the Russian Communist Party's branch in Dagestan staged an unprecedented protest in Makhachkala against the elections, which they said were unfair and rigged. "False elections – rotten authorities" was one of their slogans. Members of the Russian liberal party Yabloko joined the Communists in

protesting. The Communists said they were supported by half of the republic's population in the December 4 election, while according to the official results they won just 7.5 % of the vote (Dzutsev 2011b). The Moscow-installed authorities in the North Caucasus have no other choice but to provide winning results for the ruling party. They can hardly use this as a bargaining chip. Rather, the reverse is true: Moscow could use bad results for the ruling party as a pretext for dismissing regional governors. In the current situation, however, when the North Caucasus vote has become so pivotal, Russian nationalists and democrats alike might focus on how voting in the North Caucasus contributes to inhibiting democracy's progress in Russia. So, paradoxically, the rigged votes in the North Caucasus further contribute to preventing the democratic evolution of Russia, while official Moscow's demands and expectations of the North Caucasus elites contribute to hampering the political development of this region (Dzutsev 2011b).

3.3. The Roots of Instability and Ethnic Clashes

This section outlines the nature and roots of ethnic conflicts in key regions of the Northern Caucasus – Dagestan, Chechnya, and Karachay-Cherkessia. The demographic numbers provided are very mostly approximate, since the exact numbers of ethnic groups in the territories are not available until 2013 (expected official release of the 2011 census). The analysis will move along the "east-west axis" because there are significant cultural and economic differences between the western and eastern territories. The western regions contain a higher percentage of ethnic Russian (i.e., 70% of the population in the Krasnodar and Stavropol territories, but only 10% in Dagestan). The level of industrialization and urbanization also decline as one moves east, just as

the relative importance of the Islamic factor rises in the east. Since the early 2000s, in Russia there has been salient shift toward an undisguised racist contempt and suspicion toward ethnic minorities, especially Caucasians. When moving to other parts of the Russian Federation, people from the Caucasus face discrimination in the workplace, public space, and harassment from law-enforcement personnel. Likewise, in the post - Soviet Caucasus, the search and definition of the new Russian "we" has perilous and deadly consequences. New Russian social identity is being deliberately constructed as a binary and antagonistic relationship with an historic, internal "other" in an overtly confrontational manner. The enduring effects of this process have caused mutual animosity between a numbers of ethnic communities that had nonetheless managed to coexist for a significant time. What this research has shown is that, for example, when levels of hostility between Russians and Caucasians are rising, there is a deliberate coordinated effort to increase the distance between communities and the conceptualizations of "self" and "other". Conversely, under periods of relative peace, no explicit attempts at distancing occur while limited efforts to close the gap transpire. In both of these social processes, the state-owned media has had a leading role. What are the implications of these findings? Certainly, the mutual ethnic distancing continues and Russian authorities have increasingly embraced radical Orthodoxy as a mechanism to further solidify the existing dichotomy between Muslim non-Russian "they" and ethnic Russian "we".

This new post-Soviet xenophobic surge has contributed to certain trends among non-Russian minorities: to remain as much as possible within their own ethnic territory; to increase ethnic power and autonomy within those territories; to consolidate their

economic and social position at the expense of the neighboring ethnic Russian population; and to resuscitate their traditional culture, native language and, in the first place, the Islamic faith. The exodus of the ethnic Russian population from the republics of the North Caucasus is among the key reasons behind the surge of separatism in these regions. It should be realized that by now Chechnya and Ingushetia have grown practically mono-ethnic (FSSS 2011). The exodus of the Russian population is taking place in all of the regions of the North Caucasus which used to be homes to considerable Russian communities such as the Kizlyar and Tarum districts in Dagestan, the Prokhldnensky and Maysky districts in Kabardino-Balkaria, Adygea, and the Zelenchuk and Urup districts in Karachay-Cherkessia. Moreover, even in traditionally Russian administrative units of the Stavropol krai (Neftekumsk and Levokumsk) this trend has taken an irreversible direction. In fact, such republics of the North Caucasus as Chechnya, Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkessia, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria are already governed by ethnocratic regimes deliberately assisting the expulsion of the ethnic Russians, who face discrimination at all levels of the local bureaucracy, while a system of economic and legal entitlements for the titular ethnic groups is being overtly upheld by Moscow. Despite the fact that between 70-90% of the budgets of the republics of the North Caucasus come from the federal subsidies, clan social structure with its narrow-minded rent-seeking agenda keeps the population predominantly frustrated with the functioning of state institutions, and this frustration in many cases acquires ethnic or religious dimensions (if not both).

The Russian Federation is faced with an intrinsically complex situation in as much as this meant that many competing visions of national identity could be

introduced into the political discourse (Tolz 1998:993). Yet, despite the unique Russian situation, political elites still had to grapple with the central issue facing any attempted nation building, namely reconciling mutually exclusive ethnic and civic allegiances. Moreover, according to Holmes (1997:299), "the uncertainty and instability of early post-Communism lead many citizens to search harder for their own ethnic identity – in language, territory, and history…seeking to strengthen one's own identity involves becoming more exclusionary towards others – to seek clearer demarcation from "them". Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) was the first post-Soviet leader to grapple with the complexities of the Russian identity problem including the territorial aspects of constructing a Russian national identity answering the question of "what are the boundaries of the Russian nation" and "who are we the Russian people?" Moreover, Yeltsin had to react to demands from non-Russian regions to obtain as much autonomy from Moscow as possible. These demands, often exclusionary by definition, can be classified broadly as those on the right, who projected a national identity premised territorially along the borders of the Russian Empire, versus those on left, whose territorial vision bent on the former Soviet borders. These rival conceptualizations of Russian identity were allowed to flourish because of the societal void and the lack of robust political institutions (Snyder 2000).

The Russian Federation, like the former Soviet Union, is an example of the asymmetric ethno federation, in which only certain federal units are based on ethnicity. Finally, in the Russian Federation, again as in the former USSR, autonomous ethnic territories are regrouped into categories according to their status in the federal structure and degree of autonomy. The highest-level autonomies are called "republics" and were

headed by "presidents" up until May 2011; lower-level autonomies are called autonomous provinces or autonomous districts. Historically, the origin of ethno-federalist debates can be traced to the years before World War One in two of the three vast multi-ethnic empires that then still dominated the landscape of Eastern Europe - Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires. The best-known participants in these debates were such theorists of the international socialist movement as Plekanov, Lenin, Martov, Luxemburg, Schachtman and Trotsky. They all shared the same hope to direct looming disintegration of the empires into sovereign ethnic states by transforming them into democratic federations with some scope to ethnic self-expression. Such an agenda deviated from both imperial conservatives and from socialists like Rosa Luxemburg who promoted a working class politics overriding ethnic loyalties or Vladimir Lenin, who sought to satisfy ethnic aspirations by creating autonomous ethnic territories (Rees 1991, Milner 2011).

In Russia, the new Soviet regime succeeded in reconstituting most of the empire winning decisive support among non-Russian ethnithities by allowing them territorial autonomy within an ethno-federal framework - a concession that their monarchist adversaries in the civil war were not able to make. Later, this ideological writ gave rise to the Soviet ethno-federal model that still exists in certain parts of the post-Soviet world, including the Russian Federation (Hirsch 2005). The most important variable of the Soviet ethno-federal model was the extent to which the formal autonomy of ethnic territories has been filled with real content. In the 1920s the administration of autonomies was largely entrusted to indigenous Soviet and Communist elites (where such elites pre-existed) who were allowed considerable autonomy. Under Stalin,

however, these elites were repressed as "bourgeois nationalists" and the real autonomy was reduced to formal existence on paper. The post-Stalin period saw the gradual emergence of new indigenous elites and a concomitant expansion of autonomy. Gorbachev's reform of the Soviet system led to acceleration of this trend, with many autonomies aspiring "sovereignty". The process of autonomization reached its peak under Yeltsin in the early 1990s, when many autonomies were able to negotiate special relations with the federal government. In the early 2000s, President Putin put the process into reverse and reduced the real autonomy of autonomies to the lowest level since Stalin's era. Even though affluent representatives of the federal political elite in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods have looked at the ethno-federal system as an inconvenient and irrational obstacle inherited from the past, the Russian ethno-federal model has not been formally abolished. As Russian political scientist Alexander Kynev argues, the aversion to asymmetric federalism is largely psychological and emotional in nature, although it does have a salient political dimension. Indeed, the asymmetric character of ethnic autonomies is perceived as a chronic deficiency that undermines symmetry. By the very fact of their existence, they seem to justify the right of regions to develop their own political and institutional mechanisms, thereby threatening the unity of the country (Kynev 2010). One obvious reverberation of elite hostility to territorial ethnic autonomy in the post-Soviet period has been a revival of the "Austro-Marxist" idea[7] of extraterritorial ethnic autonomy that have then been presented as more genuinely representative of the ethnic group concerned than the leadership of any particular autonomy in an attempt to delegitimize the latter (Shenfield 2011). Putin's

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[7] Historically, the so-called "Austro-Marxist" advocated alternative extraterritorial schemes for autonomous ethnic institutions in the fields of education and culture.

impetus to recentralize governance in Russia has dramatically reduced the autonomy not only of autonomies but of all federal units. In order to strengthen central control, Putin installed his plenipotentiary representatives in seven federal districts created over the federal units and unilaterally refused to recognize the validity of the federal treaties concluded by Yeltsin (Kynev 2010). The crucial step came in 2004, when popular elections of heads of federal units (regional heads) were replaced by what amounted to a system of presidential appointment following formal consultations with members of the regional elite. The Council of the Federation (the upper chamber of the Russian parliament) was also reformed in such a way that regional leaders lost an important channel of influence over national policy.

These swift changes lead toward the emergence of a new generation of regional high-ranking bureaucrats, answerable exclusively to the federal authorities and the Russian president in the first place. Over the period 2003-2008 the Putin administration waged an unprecedented campaign to make contiguous federal units to merge to form larger units. Despite the widely advertised rationale for reducing the number of federal units in favor of administrative convenience and economic efficiency, all the mergers sought by the Kremlin involved the absorption of autonomies into larger neighboring non-ethnic territories, revealing that the amalgamation campaign was actually another attack on the founding principles of the Russian Federation. As a result, when the campaign was tacitly wrapped up in 2008, only six federal subjects had been eliminated, reducing the total number of federal units from 89 to 83. In the other three federal subjects as well as in Adyghea, resistance at both popular and elite levels was sufficiently strong and persistent to resist pressure from the Kremlin. The on-going

Putin-Medvedev reign is also far from being a monolithic dictatorship. Real power still remains widely diffused among various national and regional political and economic elites with diverse and often conflicting interests both inside and outside Russia. Moreover, much effort is made to maintain the appearance of legality and democracy. Even though the amalgamation campaign was actually initiated by the Kremlin, the law of 2001 on which the campaign was based required the initiative for each specific amalgamation to come from the federal units concerned. Thus, even a passive position was capable of thwarting the Kremlin's designs. As Andrei Zakharov explains the durability of ethno-federalism in Russia, in theory the Russian Constitution could be revised overnight to eliminate federal principles, and yet despite all the "centralist rhetoric" of the Putin-Medvedev years this idea has never even been seriously considered (Zakharov 2010). The main reason is that a hypothetical obliteration of federalism would unavoidably exacerbate the so-called "ethnic question" – Russian's worst nightmare. This circumstance sharply reduces the number of options at the disposal of those who would like to reform the administrative-territorial system, which constantly bents toward the same solution—that of combining the territorial with the ethno-territorial principle in organizing the country's political space.

3.4. The Elite-Society Conflict and Religious Radicalism

"Reality must be faced. The main problem confronting your country is not one of private ownership, freedom and economy; your problem is the absence of true faith in God, the very problem that has dragged, or will drag, the West to vulgarism and an impasse. Your main problem is the prolonged and futile war you have waged against God, the source of existence and creation."

From Ayatollah Khomeini's letter to M. Gorbachev (January1, 1989).

Contrary to common expectations after the ignominious defeat in Afghanistan, Soviet Muslims were not instrumental in bringing about the fall of the Soviet regime. In fact, Islamic reaction was well enough mixed as the abrupt collapse meant that they would no longer enjoy imperative social and material benefits which they had relied on for more than a half century (Polyakov 2001, Makarov and Mukhametshin 2003, Hunter 2004). In addition, the fall from relative Soviet stability occurred rather instantaneously and plunged many Islamic communities into dire economic conditions created a fertile soil for the construction of new identities. When the local elite took advantage of the absence of an over-arching authority to engage in self-enrichment, it resulted in increased crime and failure of basic social services regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation. In such an environment of socio-economic devastation and ideological vacuum, a plethora of foreign and domestic Islamic radicals, espousing a return to pristine Islamic values, capitalized on ethnic and religious identities to push their own parochial objectives.

The process of Islamic revival that started in the early 1990s made the Russian Muslims aware of being part of the Islamic civilization and the world Muslim umma. These are the main results of the so-called Islamic "Renaissance": increased religious conciseness and appreciation of being Tatars, Avars, or Chechens, being not just an ethnic group but part of a rising civilization; rebirth of the Islamic religious customs along with an unprecedented growth in the number of mosques and religious schools; formation of the Islamic spiritual elite; and finally, politicization of Islam that made it one of the most popular subjects with the Russian mass media, especially in view of the latest events in the North Caucasus. The post-Soviet politicization of Islam in this

region of the Russian federation has taken three inter-connected paths. First, the formation of political organizations based on the principle of Islamic ideology and involving Muslim clergymen in politics. Second, the creating conditions for secular politicians and representatives of ethnic elites to be responsive to Islamic values. Third, the engagement of Islam as both domestic and foreign policy factor by political subjects to gain advantage.

The first Islamic political organization in Russia was the Islamic Rebirth Party (IRP), created in the Soviet Union in June 1990. Although this party was not meant to become one of Russia's influential organizations, it gave an impetus to Islam's politicization after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s the IRP had around 5,000 active members, most of them residing in Dagestan. The party's agenda was limited to holding press conferences, articulating verbal support to the Muslim activists and publishing its leaders' speeches in the press. Even though IRP rapidly bogged down in endless rows of its leaders and ceased to exist in 1994, it created a precedent for the appearance of an Islamic political organization recognized by the authorities. Beyond the IRP, several Islamic movements, both national and regional, appeared in in the mid-1990s : the Muslim Public Movement "Nur" ("Light"), the Union of the Muslims of Russia (UMR), Dagestan's Islamic Democratic Party (later renamed the Islamic Party of Daghestan), and the Islamic Center "Kavkaz." Among other smaller groups the espoused religious ideology were branches of international Muslim organizations (such as the "Muslim Brothers"), formed mostly on an ethnic principle. While taxonomy of political Islam is still an open question, I have found two salient trends of its manifestation. The first trend is represented by the UMR and "Nur"

vowing to become established on the national political scene as defenders of the social and religious interests of the Russian Muslim community, while at the same time cooperating with the central and local government bodies and trying to influence them as much as possible.[8] Historically, both the UMR and "Nur" appeared at a time when the political situation was very unstable and therefore unpredictable. Despite their claims of independence, in order to survive, they had to side with one of the influential secular political forces. During the 1995 parliamentary elections "Nur" got 0.58% of the votes in the whole of Russia (393,500 voters). In Chechnya and Ingushetia it got 23%, in Tatarstan 5% and in Bashkiria 1.25% of the votes (Malashenko 1998:141). After the 1995 parliamentary elections and the 1996 presidential elections won by Yeltsin, massively employing both anti Chechen and anti-Islamists rhetoric, the activity of these Muslim organizations began to decline. With no seats in the Duma[9], both the UMR and "Nur" receded into the political oblivion. The second trend crystalized as a response to on-going deterioration of socio-economic conditions of the Muslim community. For instance, in the UMR's numerous press releases and the speeches of its leaders it was repeatedly pointed out that the rights of Muslims were neglected, and that the Kremlin openly violated the principle of neutrality towards Russia's main religions, Russian Orthodoxy and Islam, in favor of the former. Parochial interests of the local opposition, as a rule, do not care much about what image it has in the eyes of the central authorities. On the contrary, the main goal was to mobilize as many frustrated Muslims as possible to advance their agenda on the regional level, criticizing the local authorities for paying

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[8] By the end of 1995 there were "Nur" party cells in 72 regions of the Russian Federation.
[9] As a result of additional elections in Dagestan only Nadirshakh Khachilaev managed to become a member of the Duma in 1996.

little attention to the needs of the Muslims and for doing nothing to counter the degradation of the Islamic values.

Contrary to the official Russian rhetoric asserting that the politicization of Islam in Russia is caused by the countries of the Middle East, I would rather argue that the above-mentioned radicalization and politicization of Islam are proceeding against the background of unceasing resentment felt by the Muslims against the Russian autocratic regime which, while being unable to overcome Russia's lingering economic difficulties, has bogged down in corruption, nepotism, embezzlement, and created unlimited rent-seeking opportunities for its immediate bureaucratic apparatus, preventing ordinary citizens from taking any active social position. The amalgamation of the peculiarities of historical development and Islamic tradition with the present deep socio-economic crisis has predetermined the use of Islam by the local opposition as a tool for satisfying their political ambitions and promoting their agenda of transforming the region. In particular, the idea of an Islamic alternative to chaos and disarray that has become widespread in the North Caucasus is encapsulated in the three levels of the Islamic project comprising its own plan for the organization of society and of the political space: 1) North Caucasian; 2) sub-regional (Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan; 3) local, that is, suitable for mostly rural enclaves (Malashenko 2001). Vigorous attempts to establish an Islamic state have failed in both Chechnya and Dagestan where the majority of the population opposed the idea of Islamization of the social and political spheres. The demands of the fighters for the purity of Islam - the home-grown Salafites - to renounce their multi-century customary form of religious belief, Tarikatism (a variety of Sufism) were rather frightening than uniting. There was one particular reason for this failure - the

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Dagestan's local elites justly believed that such unification would inevitably lead to redistribution of power and of the material resources in favor of the Chechens. Although the radicalization of Islam in the turbulent 1990s revealed its limits, on the municipal level, however, there still are opportunities for a selected implementation of the Sharia law. Indeed, some politicians and experts in politics of collective identities consider it possible to employ the Sharia law on a limited scale in order to keep it within the supremacy of the secular federal laws. Thus, Leonid Syukiyainen (1997), a major authority on Muslim legal system in Russia, believes that the prospect of Sharia being included in the legal system should be regarded not as a necessary evil but as a natural process of the restoration of legal traditions which in the North Caucasus go back many centuries. In addition, the majority of Russia's Muslims belong to the most liberal Hanafi School of religious law, while in the North Caucasus Shafi'i school is the second most tolerant.[10]

In the North Caucasus the local authorities have recorded manifestations of radical Islamic views being spread by graduates of educational institutions in Saudi Arabia (King Fahd University), Kuwait, Tunisia ("az-Zeituna"), Egypt ("al-Azhar") and Morocco ("al-Karaviin"). The most active international Islamic organizations, which spread Islamic fundamentalism by popularizing among the North Caucasus Muslims extraneous interpretations of religious and socio-political questions, are: the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (headquartered in Saudi Arabia), the "al-Haramein" (Saudi Arabia), the Ibrahim al-Ibrahim charitable foundation, the Kuwaiti organization

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[10] There are four Sunni theological schools in Islam: Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki and Hanbali that are popular in the Middle East and in North Africa.

"Da'ava al-igasa", the Sudanese International Association of the Islamic Appeal. Beginning with the engagement of the Soviet Army to Afghanistan in 1979, the Soviet Union, and then Russia, was continually involved in conflicts in which it had to oppose Muslims both inside and outside the country. Now Islamophobia is spreading in Russian society aggravating tensions not only in areas where Muslim and Slavic populations live in close proximity to each other – in the North Caucasus, but also in several other regions where the number of migrants from the Caucasus is rapidly growing (Kudryavtsev 1998:170-171). There is no doubt that today, several decades later, ethnic Russians resent the opening of mosques, religious centers, and Muslim cemeteries.

Rinat Mukhametov, a much-cited expert on Islam, told the Kavkazsky Uzel (www.kavkaz-uzel.ru, March 17, 2011) website that the election of the muftis in the North Caucasus had hardly any influence on the lives of believers in the region. According to Mukhametov, the estrangement of the official clergy from the believers is common all across Russia, but nowhere is it as evident as in the North Caucasus. Mukhametov said that the "modernization" of the official Islamic bodies was needed in order to overcome the gap between the Muslims and their clergy. Instead, Mukhametov pointed out that the government tried to employ controversial figures like Allakhshukyur Pasha-zade, the previously unknown chairman of the Caucasus Muslims' administration who is from Azerbaijan, which is a Shia country, while the Muslims in the North Caucasus are Sunnis (www.kavkaz-uzel.ru, June 21, 2011). Ruslan Kurbanov, another expert on Islam and the Caucasus with the Russian Academy of Sciences, told Kavkazsky Uzel: "Republican governments strive to press ahead with the most convenient candidate for them for the mufti's position. The fact that he will not

have any authority with the majority of believers does not bother the government a bit."
Kurbanov said Kabardino-Balkaria is "shivering" because of the growing fighting
between the militants, the police and the relatives of the victims who want to take
revenge. In Kurbanov's opinion, the situation in Karachay-Cherkessia was improving,
while the infighting between very active Muslims, Russian Orthodox and followers of
traditional religions in North Ossetia was jeopardizing the situation in that republic
(www.kavkaz-uzel.ru, June 21, 2011).

Dictatorial policies to impose control over the Muslim community in the North
Caucasus seem to be not only proving ineffective, but also are contributing to further
regional destabilization and protest. Almost all top Russian high-ranking officials,
including the president, the head of the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor
General's Office and the Minister of Interior have had to acknowledge the worsening
situation in the region. Even according to official information, the total number of
militant actions against Russian authorities in 2010 increased by three times compared
to 2009 (Trud. 2010). Independent sources, basing their data on open news reports,
indicate the losses among the civilian population, including those killed by the Russian
law enforcement forces, totaled 117 people in 2010 (Kasparov 2010). During 2010 the
North Caucasus insurgency movement suffered several major blows among its ranks as
more than 300 insurgents were killed in the North Caucasus in 2010, a majority of
whom were liquidated in Dagestan during the last four months of the year (Rian News
Agency 2010). These numbers, however, include a certain percentage of those whose
participation in the ranks of the resistance movement has not been proved. Thus, the
federal security forces liquidated in special operations such prominent figures as Said

Buryatsky (Alexsandr Tikhomirov, killed on March 4, 2010); the chief ideologue of the military resistance to Russia, Emir Seifullah (Anzor Astemirov, killed on March 24, 2010), the leader of the Kabardino-Balkaria Jamaat who was one of the major ideologues of the radical wing of the militants; and Magomedali Vagabov (or Emir Seifullah of Gubden, killed on August 21, 2010), the leader of the Dagestani Jamaat. For the first time in decades of insurgency in the North Caucasus, a prominent field commander was apprehended alive in a special operation – Akhmed Yevloev-Taziev (captured on June 9, 2010), the chief of the Ingush Jamaat. In response to federal anti-terrorist operations, a group of the most famous and capable of Chechen commanders – Emir Aslanbek (Vadalov), Emir Hussein (Gakaev), Emir Tarkhan (Gaziev) and Emir Mukhannad announced the voluntary resignation of the leader of North Caucasus insurgents and founder of the Caucasus Emirate, Doku Umarov, and the election of Emir Aslanbek Vadalov as their new leader. But at the request of the radical wing of militants (especially of those who live far away from Chechnya and the North Caucasus), Doku Umarov soon changed his mind about resigning, thus triggering a serious crisis in the ranks of the armed resistance. As a result, today virtually all of the Chechen commanders (nearly 90 % of rebels who continue to fight) remain outside of the control of Umarov, reporting instead to Emir Hussein (Gakaev). Umarov, on the other hand, enjoys the support of non-Chechen jamaats, such as those in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria, who refused to recognize Emir Hussein as their legitimate leader. Doka Umarov demoted and put under the Sharia court all of those who disobeyed him, but the harsh measures have had little impact on the schism (The Jamestown Foundation 2010).

As reported by the Russian Prosecutor General's Office, there were 529 armed attacks on law enforcement and military personnel in 2010: insurgents killed 218 and wounded 536 people (Interfax News Agency 2010). The current situation in the North Caucasus is more often described as a "low-intensity civil war". The statistics given by the Caucasian Knot website paint a more detailed picture. In particular, the number of terrorist attacks increased dramatically in Kabardino-Balkaria (from 12 in 2009 to 41 in 2010) and Dagestan (from 69 in 2009 to 112 in 2010), and decreased substantially in Chechnya (from 62 in 2009 to 39 in 2010). Stavropol Krai that had not been hit by terrorist attacks targeting civilians in 2009, did see such attacks in 2010. Strikingly, the numbers given by Russian law enforcement agencies are no longer trusted by President Medvedev himself, who has literally said that all these figures for the North Caucasus are nothing but "nonsense" (RIA Novosti News Agency, November 19, 2010).

According to the Russian Interior Ministry, during the period of January-November 2011, "300 participants in underground banditry, 366 rebel bases and ammunition caches were neutralized; over 1,400 small arms, 175,000 units of ammunition and over 500 kilograms of explosives were confiscated" (http://vvmvd.ru/news/news_2862.html). Another government source informs us that 300 militants were killed by Russian Interior Ministry troops (www.rosbalt.ru/main/2011/12/02/919650.html). If this figure is correct, then all the other force agencies, such as the police, regular military, FSB (Federal Security Service) and GRU (the Defense Ministry's Main Intelligence Directorate) killed only several people during the course of the year (Vatchagaev 2011). Vatchagaev considers that the statistics, concerning the situation in the North Caucasus in 2011, is not improving, as

the federal authorities in the Russian Federation would like to present it (2011). The republics in which the most insurgent activity is going on change, but the general amount of violence across the North Caucasus remains more or less at the same level. He then asserted that the security situation in the North Caucasus is profoundly deteriorating, given that there is a growing radicalization not only of the region's Muslims, but also of its nationalists. The primary problem with Russian information sources is their inconsistency (Vatchagaev 2011).

The statistics that the Russian military, police and other law-enforcement agencies provide invariably evoke multiple questions, since the different agencies, such as the military, police, FSB and prosecutors, continue to employ different methods of counting. For the purpose of my research, the data provided by the Kavkazsky Uzel (Caucasian Knot) website is the most valuable because it sheds light on the dynamics of the conflict in different regions of the North Caucasus. In 2010, the insurgents were the most active in Kabardino-Balkaria in percentage terms, not in absolute numbers. Dagestan was the hottest spot, whereas Chechnya occupied the second position in terms of casualties and damage (Vatchagaev 2011). According to Kavkazsky Uzel, the issue of kidnappings and disappearances is also a growing problem: in 11 months of 2011 there were 64 such cases, 28 of which took place in Dagestan, 20 in Chechnya, 13 in Ingushetia and three in Kabardino-Balkaria. Overall, there were 1,205 victims of the conflict in the North Caucasus, including 683 killed and 522 injured, during the first 11 months of 2011. In 2010, the total number of casualties in the region was 1,710 (Vatchagaev 2011).

The federal authorities do not seem to be particularly optimistic about the situation in the North Caucasus. Thus, Deputy Prosecutor General Ivan Sydoruk stated that since the beginning of 2011, the number of terrorism- related and extremism-related crimes in the North Caucasus increased by 29 percent in comparison to the same time period in 2010 (www.yuga.ru/news/246467/). Dagestan is far ahead of other territories in terms of casualties. There were 685 casualties in the republic from January to November of this year, of whom 372 were killed, including 156 rebels, 93 law-enforcement agents and 123 civilians, while 313 people were wounded. Chechnya held second place as of November 30, with 202 victims of the fighting between the republic's rebel underground and security forces. A total of 92 people were killed in the republic, including 63 rebels, 21 servicemen and 10 civilians, while 110 people were wounded. Kabardino-Balkaria had 158 victims during the same period, of whom 116 were killed (76 rebels, 28 servicemen and 15 civilians) and 42 were injured. Ingushetia suffered 103 casualties, of whom 69 were killed (40 rebels, 19 servicemen and 10 civilians) and 34 were injured. North Ossetia had 25 casualties (including 15 rebels and 6 servicemen killed and nine people wounded). Karachay-Cherkessia had 24 casualties, including six rebels and six servicemen killed and nine people w wounded). In Stavropol region there were eight casualties, including three people killed and five injured (Vatchagaev 2011).

Aleksandr Khloponin, the special representative of the Russian president in the North Caucasus Federal District, was forced to admit on November 30, 2011: "There are still cases of young people leaving for the forest [joining the rebels]. There is certain tension in Karachay-Cherkessia, where there are pockets of underground banditry, so a

lot of work lies ahead".[11] As a result, a number of officials at different levels have started to talk about a deterioration of the situation in Karachay-Cherkessia. During a visit to this republic on November 17, Russian Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliev called the situation in Karachay-Cherkessia "protractedly tense" and compared it to Dagestan (www.xn--c1adwdmv.xn--p1ai/news/kavkaz/kar-cher/1468253.html). This stark statement was against the backdrop of the relocation of the Russian military base from Botlikh in Dagestan to Maikop in Adygea, it can be assumed that the government expects tensions in this part of the North Caucasus to rise prior to the Olympics in Sochi in 2014. However, following the destruction of the Karachay jamaat by security forces in 2006-2007, the armed opposition in the form of the jamaat showed few signs of activity (Vatchagaev 2011). Interior Minister Nurgaliev also reported that the law enforcement agencies had prevented over 50 terrorist attacks this year as of September. He added that 313 rebels were neutralized and 399 participants in the illegal armed formations were arrested.[12] Note that Nurgaliev's figures for the number of rebels killed in nine months of 2011 are greater than the figures his own ministry gave for 11 months of the same year. In addition, it is unclear why the number of wounded people was lower than the number of the killed, as normally more people are wounded than killed (Vatchagaev 2011).

In other words, even the head of the Russian state had to admit what had been obvious for so many analysts working on Russia and specifically on the North Caucasus - the information released by Russian officialdom should be treated with great

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[11] I am reffering here to one of Khloponin's remarks on proliferation of radical religious ideologies in Karachay-Cherkessia made on numerous occasions in public on November 30, 2011 http://interfax-russia.ru/South/main.asp?id=276976 (accessed January 11, 2012).

[12] As cited by RIA News Agency (http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20111116/490310056.html).

suspicion. At the beginning of the 21 century Islam's influence on the political life in Russia has become an indispensable factor, widely exploited by both the seemingly secular political establishment in the center and the regional elites in the Muslim-populated regions of the North Caucasus in its own interests. In my view, this process of a gradual radicalization of Islam is determined by the religious form of expressing social protest, which is natural for a part of the Muslims, and by the aggravating ethnic and political tensions in the Muslim-populated areas of the North Caucasus. Even though terrorism is broadly viewed as the key permanent threat across the North Caucasus, the decision-making in this e sphere still mainly relies on the analysis of particular information, macroeconomic indicators, and diverse criminal statistics. This matrix typically ignores views that terrorism, separatism, and xenophobia should be viewed not only from the legal but also from the social and psychological positions, and the corresponding phenomena have to be assessed on the basis of broader behavioral statistics. Indeed, it is among the Muslim population that the activity of the ideologists of terrorism meets with the most favorable response. The ideologists knowingly exploit the complexities arising in the course of the revival of Islam in post-Soviet Russia as well as and the numerous shortcomings of the regulation of the activity of religious institutions. These are the most salient reasons making it easier for the ideologists of terrorism to push for their coarse: (1) demography and migration; (2) socioeconomic depression, pervasive corruption, and marginalization of the majority of Muslims regardless of their ethnic affiliation; (3) the shortage of Muslim theologians trained by local religious institutions to address challenges posed by radical missionaries, extraneous to the North Caucasus.

3.5. The Mountain Jews: Certain Aspects of Ethnic Identification and Political Orientation

Even though the ethnic factor played a significant role in Soviet and post-Soviet politics in the North Caucasus and contributed to the rapid transformation of the ethnic organizations into political movements and parties, one ethnic group, the Mountain Jews, stands out as an exception. Unlike other ethnic groups, no Jewish community in the North Caucasus has ever mobilized politically to get official acknowledgment on the basis of its ethic and religious identity. Why? The answer to this question lies in explanation of certain aspects of ethnic identification and political orientation of this ethnic group discussed in this section.

The Mountain Jews represent a unique sub-ethnic group in the North Caucasus. They use the so-called Jewish-Tat language, based on a Middle Persian dialect that includes a vast body of lexical borrowings from the Aramaic and Hebrew together with elements of the contemporary Russian and Azeri languages (Semenov 2003:169). The Mountain Jews have preserved almost no written records of their arrival and settlement in the North Caucasus. The Jewish presence in the North Caucasus, however, is indicated not only by remains of abandoned cemeteries with Jewish gravestones, and, in many mountain villages, epigraphic inscriptions, and fragments of Jewish sacred books, prayer books, and other temporal evidence (Semenov 2003:170). Culturally, the Mountain Jews belong to the Iranian Jewry with which they had been maintaining close ties even before the Eastern Caucasus became part of Russia in the early 19 century. These ties are linguistically confirmed by their knowledge of the Zeboni imrani, the

language common to all Iranian Jews who spoke different dialects within their ethnic groups. In the 18 -19 centuries a great number of Iranian Jews, mainly from Gilyan, moved to the Eastern Caucasus where they joined different ethnic groups of Mountain Jews. Many of these Mountain Jews, who sometimes call themselves Tats, insist that they are descendants of Israel's Lost Tribes who began their wanderings after the destruction of Jerusalem's first temple in 722 B.C. From generation to generation, the Mountain Jews have passed on the tale of their lineage from the Israelite captives of the Assyrian-Babylonian conquest of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. The original places of their settlement are designated as Babylonia ancient Media and Iran up to the eastern Caucasus. Other stories say that the Mountain Jews migrated north from Persia around 300 years ago, at the invitation of a local khan, and were separated from their kin in Iran as the borders of empires shifted. However, a different theory suggests that the Mountain Jews are what remain of the mighty Khazar nation, an indigenous Caucasian people who converted en masse to Judaism in the eighth century, in a vain attempt to resist Orthodox Christian Russians and Islamic Arabs. "According to Kings II, when ancient Israel was destroyed, some citizens headed, in the eighth century B.C.E., to the conquering land of Assyria and beyond to Media on the Caspian's southern shores. A hundred or so years later, descendants of these exiles, along with other monotheists, were joined by Jews of the Babylonian diaspora. They lay the foundations for Persian Jewish society, some of whom apparently headed north to the Caucasus, with those in the areas that would become Azerbaijan and Dagestan eventually acquiring the identification of Mountain Jews." (Funke 1999) The Talmud also mentions the existence of a Jewish community in Derbent, and some prominent

Talmudic sages are known to have either come from or established Yeshivot in Derbent and other cities in the North Caucasus (Brook 2009). It is possible that the Mountain Jews are descendants of Persian-Jewish soldiers who were stationed in the Caucasus by the Sasanian kings in the 5 or 6 century to protect the area from the onslaughts of the Huns and other nomadic invaders from the east (Blady 2000).

The available historical evidence indicates that the influx of Jews from Iran into the North Caucasus took place under the Achaemenid dynasty (7 century – 4 century B.C.) and Sasanid Persia (3 century B.C. – 6 century A.D.) (Ikhilov 1960). The migration of the Jewish tribes into the highlands of the North Caucasus increased dramatically during Arab and Turkish conquests of the Caucasus and the spread of Islam. In the North Caucasus, where religious tolerance and cultural diversity co-existed for centuries, the Mountain Jews found propitious conditions for their new homeland. As Blady points out, a literate, monotheistic people, well versed in trade and finances, who existed as a distinct community and actively supported the mountain peoples and the Khazars in their wars with the Persian (and later Arab) conquerors, the Mountain Jews became active in the economic and cultural development of the region (2000). In Blady's view, Judaism evidently became the state religion in the 8 century, the formative period of feudalism in the North Caucasus. Indeed, the acceptance of Judaism as the official religion in pagan Khazaria can be explained by the presence of such an active Jewish population and by the desire of the Khazar aristocracy to show, by their acceptance of Judaism, their independence from both the Muslim Arab caliphate and of Christian Byzantium (Saffron 1997). However, after the destruction of the Khazar Khanate to the Arabs and the Russians by the end of the 10 century, some Khazars

migrated to the Volga and the Crimea, and many Khazar Jews flee to the intractable areas of mountainous Dagestan. When the Arab caliphate fell to new conquerors such as the Persian shahs and Turkish sultans, the Mountain Jews found themselves under the control of local rulers with the legal status of dependent peasants. In 1813, after the inclusion of Azerbaijan and Dagestan into the Russian Empire, the Mountain Jews accepted Russian citizenship. The development of capitalism in Russia and the drawing of the North Caucasus into the mainstream of trade and financial relations contributed to the intensive socio-economic stratification of Mountain Jewish society (Blady 2000).

The restrictive religious policies of the Russian Empire coupled with traditional anti-Semitic attitudes of the Russian paramilitary units known as Cossaks, further alienated the Mountain Jews, and they found themselves particularly impoverished during the years of the civil war (Ikhilov 1996). Among other millions of Jews who had been settled down within the borders of the Russian Empire, the Mountain Jews remained within the limits of Soviet Russia and their status was to a large extent defined by the nationalities policies of the Soviet regime. Under the influence of assimilated Jews, who carried significant weight in the structures of the socialist leadership of Europe, the Soviet authorities regarded integration and assimilation as the only solution of the lingering Jewish problem. This solution was already sharpened during the bitter discussion at the early 1900s between the Bolsheviks (headed by Lenin) and the Bund (led by Kremer).[13] Invoking K. Marx, K. Kautsky, and O. Bauer, Lenin stated that there was no basis for a separate Jewish nation and national Jewish culture—the slogan of the

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[13] The General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, known simply as the Bund, was founded in Vilna in October 1897 by a small group of Jews who were profoundly influenced by Marxism. Led by A. Kremer (1865–1935), their goal was to attract East European Jews to the emergent Russian revolutionary movement (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bund).

rabbis and the bourgeoisie—this was the slogan of our enemies. (Lenin 1903) After Lenin's death, Stalin further solidified official position on the Jewish question in his work "Marxism and the National Question" (1913). Stalin argued unambiguously that a nation was a stable community of men, which came into being by historic process and has developed on a basis of common language, territory, and economic life. Since the Jews lack this common basis they are only a "nation on paper," and the evolution of human society must necessarily lead toward their assimilation within the surrounding nations (Stalin 1913). After the October Revolution and in accordance with Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policy, especially regarding the nationalities of the Caucasus, a number of policies were undertaken to rekindle Mountain Jewish culture and economic activities. To this end, a special set of measures for economic and cultural transformation was implemented (Ikhilov 1996).[14] Within this context, subgroups were designated as working class, collective farmers, and intelligentsia (Ikhilov 1996).

Khanin (2002) points out that "according to various estimates, between 600 000 and 1.3 million Jews lived in the former Soviet Union in the early 2000s" (see also Tolts 1996, Gidwitz 1999). However, the overall population of Mountain Jews numbered only around 60 000 people (Chlenov 1984). By the end of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s more than half of Mountain Jews left for Israel, the United States, Canada, and Germany (Khanin 2003). They were driven away mainly by instability and lack of security in the North Caucasus. In general, despite waves of mass migration of Jews after the break-up of the Soviet Union, as well as negative demographic trends, the post-

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[14] A writing system, a literature, a newspaper, theater, and schools were created in the Jewish Tat language. This Tat-language literacy of the Mountain Jews replaced the Old Hebrew literacy of the past, which had existed until the shift to a Latin alphabet, and then to the Cyrillic alphabet in 1938.

Soviet political space still contains the second largest concentration of Russian-speaking Jewry (after Israel) in the world. At present, Mountain Jews are mainly concentrated in the so-called Caucasian Mineral Waters zone (Piatigorsk, Essentuki, Mineralnye Vody, and Kislovodsk). There are still around two thousand Mountain Jews living in Dagestan (Semenov 2003).

Traditional Ethnic Identification

Igor Semenov suggests that the Mountain Jews can be treated as a homogeneous sub-ethnic group the identification of which is based on the following elements: a common ethnic name—*juhur* (plural: *juhuru*)[15]; a common language—*Juhuri;* a common religion—Judaism, as well as many common features in religious rites and religious ideas (2003). As Semenov puts it, these identification criteria (the elements of the *edah* of Mountain Jews) helped the Jews scattered across the Caucasus from Shirvan to Kabarda to recognize their kinship in the 19th and 20th centuries. Despite certain cultural distinctions, Jewish ethnic groups were always prepared to recognize their kinship; even marriages with members of other Jewish sub-ethnic groups (Georgian, and Central Asian Jews) were rare. The greater part of mixed marriages was with Ashkenazim. In general, the Mountain Jews displayed obvious endogamy (Semenov 2003:170). Semenov points out that it was the Russian military administration that coined the term "Mountain Jews" in the 19th century to distinguish between the East Caucasian and European Jews, while the Russian administrators applied the term "mountaineer" to all Caucasian peoples without discrimination and irrespective of the areas of their traditional settlement (2003:171).

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[15] The written language created for the East Caucasian peoples (the Mountain Jews included) was based on the Cyrillic alphabet.

The Mountain Jews, while connecting themselves to the world of Caucasian culture, are still aware of their Jewish roots. This strong connectedness to the Caucasus culture unites them with other Caucasian ethnic groups in front of non-Caucasian cultures. In Semenov's view, when comparing the Caucasian and Russian cultural traditions, the Mountain Jews invariably prefer the former, referring themselves to the Caucasian world, and the Caucasian peoples among whom they live do the same (2003:171). The Caucasian peoples place them apart from the Ashkenazim and in all cases prefer Mountain Jews whose mentality is closer to their own and who respect their traditions. They share many customs and, though the Mountain Jews belong to a different confession, the indigenous ethnic groups look at them as one of the Caucasian peoples, speaking about the Ashkenazim as *Russian* Jews and about the Mountain Jews as "*ours*" thus emphasizing that they belong to the Caucasus (Semenov 2003:171).

In the last decades of the 20th century Mountain Jews were moving out of the Caucasus in great numbers, yet they did not abandon certain traditions and preserved many traits of Caucasian mentality. This happens not only because they have preserved their ethnic self-awareness but also because everywhere everybody, Ashkenazim included, look at them as people from the Caucasus (Semenov 2003:172). Historically, close contacts between Mountain Jews and Ashkenazim were established soon after the Caucasian War. In the 1870s there was a great number of Ashkenazim living in Daghestan: in Temir-Khan-Shura (Buinaksk), Derbent, and later in Petrovsk (Makhachkala), as well as in Vladikavkaz, Grozny, Nalchik, and Baku (Semenov 2003:172). From the outset, the two sub-ethnic groups had been treating one another with dislike of which philologist I. Anisimov wrote in his time (1888, 1932). In Baku,

Derbent, and Vladikavkaz the Ashkenazim deemed it necessary to build their own synagogues, though there were synagogues used by the Mountain Jews (Anisimov 1932). Semenov believes that, apart from purely religious differences, the mutual desire to live separately was prompted by the difference in their mentalities and their ideas of what it meant to be a Jew (2003:172). Under the Soviet rule this division continued to grow as all Soviet Jews suffered implicit administrative, political, and societal anti-Semitism for decades and the rich political tradition of the Ashkenazim Jewry had been almost lost. In the post-Soviet period, a Jewish institutional infrastructure began to develop, leading to the political advancement of Jewish communal elite (Ryvkina 1996, Chervyakov, Gitelman and Shapiro 1997, 2000). However, the political institutionalization of the Jewish movement has become somewhat controversial and there is still some unfinished business as to its ultimate character (Khanin 2002).

Tatization of Mountain Jews in the Soviet Union

Igor Semenov points out that since 1930s the Soviet authorities were imposing the "Tat" ethnonym on the Mountain Jews of the North Caucasus. However, it was not until the late 1970s when Mountain Jews began to describe themselves as Tats, not as a Mountain Jew or simply a Jew (2003). The word "Tat" is a blanket Turkic term applied to subjugated settled peoples, mainly Iranians, and carries not so much an ethnic as a social meaning (Miller V. 1963:196). In particular, this word was applied the Iranians of the Eastern Caucasus whose ancestors had been moved away from Iran in the 6th century and later. They used to live in compact groups between the Apsheron peninsular in the south and Derbent in the north. Early in the 20th century there were several hundreds of thousands of them (Miller B. 1927:7). However, these ethnic groups based

their self-identity mainly on their religious confessions—either *Muslim* or *Christian,* and never called themselves Tats because the term sounded derogative to them and described their language as *Parsi, Porsi* or *Forsi* (Miller B. 1927:12-13). The term "the Tat language" was first used in the 19th century by scholars Boris Dorn, Nikolai Berezin, and Vsevolod Miller (Semenov 2003:172).

In the early 20th century, those who lived in Tat villages were Christians and called themselves "*Ermenis*" (Armenians). It was late in the 19th century that the Turkization of the Tats started (Khanykov 1977). In the 1920s, B. Miller formulated an idea of a single Tat ethnos divided by three religions: Islam, Judaism and Christianity (Miller B. 1927:13). In Semenov's view, this theory was absolutely unfounded and was very much in line with the atheism of the Soviet authorities; the fact that neither the Mountain Jews, nor the Muslim Tats, nor the Christian Tats ever called themselves Tats was ignored by the scholars of the time (2003). Even though B. Miller was aware of the physical and anthropological features that contradicted his theory about the ethnic kinship of the Mountain Jews and the Tats of the Caucasus, he continued to insist on its validity. Admittedly, under political pressure, philologist N. Anisimov also accepted the Miller's view on the single religiously divided Tat ethnos, because this much questionable theory was rapidly adopted by Soviet activists and Communists party functionaries from among the Mountain Jews. On their initiative a congress of Mountain Jews held in Moscow in 1927 adopted a declaration that registered the term "Tat" as one of their self-names (Anisimov 1932). With the beginning of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union and with an active anti-Israeli campaign in the Soviet press in the early 1970s, the Tat nationality was actively imposed on the Mountain Jews

of the North Caucasus (Semenov 2003:174). In the context even a formal acceptance or rejection of the myth was a sort of a loyalty test (Chlenov 2000:183-184). Semenov believes that four factors coincided negatively to further dilute the identity of the Mountain Jews.in time: a possibility (mainly theoretical) of emigration; Israel's victories in the wars of 1967 and 1973 and the anti-Israeli campaign in the Soviet press that went together with them; stepped up campaign to impose the Tat ethnonym on the Mountain Jews; changing Soviet passports in the late 1970s (2003:174-176).

Drawing on historical evidence, however, Mikhail Chlenov indicates that the fairly successful process of Tatization of the Mountain Jews was rooted in the sad experience of the World War II, when Nazis exterminated nearly all Mountain Jews in the Northern Caucasus (the villages of Bogdanovka and Menzhinsk); only those who lived in Nalchik avoided death because the local people presented them as Tats (Chlenov 2000:185-189). As Semenov argues, "the process of Tatization was rooted in the abandonment of religion that corroded the Mountain Jews' traditional identity, and psychological discomfort caused by their association with Ashkenazim " (2003:177).[16] Ibragimov believes that the process of Tatization caused "ethnic re-orientation" or "change of identity." (Ibragimov 2000:9) This is not completely correct: the larger part of Mountain Jews is now living in Israel where the results of Tatization are not obvious.[17] "There is a fairly large group of Mountain Jews from Azerbaijan who has settled in Moscow—they, too, remained unaffected by Tatization. There is another larger community (from 10 to 20 thousand) who stayed behind in Azerbaijan"

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[16] Since in the Russian language the term "Jew" is mainly associated with the Ashkenazim, many Mountain Jews tried to drop their ethnic name even though it was somewhat diluted with the term "mountaineer."

[17] In Israel Mountain Jews are called "Caucasian Jews" while the Georgian Jews are called Georgians according to the country they came from.

(Semenov 2003:177). In March 2001 Moscow hosted an International Symposium "Mountain Jews: Past and Present" attended by academics and members of the largest communities. The latter rejected the term "Tat" as applied to their people while the former refused even to discuss the term as false and unsubstantiated. The same happened at other forums on the history and culture of the Mountain Jews.[18]

Political Orientation in the post-Soviet Caucasus

Ethnic identity that played an important if not a dominant role in post-Soviet politics, promoted the quick transformation of ethnic cultural organizations into political movements and parties (Khanin 2002). However, the Jewish community is an exception - no Jewish community of the former Soviet Union ever formed a "sectarian" political structure in order to get official recognition in government (Khanin 2002). In Khanin's view, the realization of ideological, cultural, and social aspirations in the Jewish public square has had a predominantly elitist character (2002). Khanin argues that, in political life, Jewish leaders and activists are guided by a sophisticated combination of pragmatic and idealistic motivations for their activities, and the division of these interests became the basis for ideological, cultural, social, and other cleavages in the community of the Mountain Jews (2002). These cleavages naturally have a predominantly elitist character, and are seen through the confrontation of different political orientations, connected to the above mentioned ruling groups of the Mountain Jewish community, religious leadership, and business elite (Khanin 2002). In particular, Rabbis and Jewish businessmen provided a place and funds for advancement of the semi-formal power

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[18] International scientific and practical conference "Mountain Jews of the Caucasus," Baku, April 2001; Scientific session dedicated to the 140th birth anniversary of ethnographer I.Sh. Anisimov, Moscow, Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences, July 2002.

structures to leverage communal interests. For instance, Zaur Gilalov had emerged in recent years as one of the most active donors in the Mountain Jewish community both in Russia and Azerbaijan. Gilalov, who until his assassination on March 5, 2004, was responsible for the construction of two synagogues serving Caucasus Jews, one in Moscow and one in the Israeli town of Tirat Carmel, near Haifa. In 2003, he helped to set up the World Congress of Mountain Jews, an umbrella organization representing an estimated 250,000 Jews living in Russia, Azerbaijan, Israel and North America (Krichevsky 2007)**.** These power structures, to some extent, became channels for mutual adaptation and competitive cooperation of various post-Soviet Jewish elites in the North Caucasus.

Khanin believes that many Jewish public figures see national and Jewish politics as mutually exclusive (2002). As a result, leaders of Jewish organizations carefully acknowledge the political neutrality of their institutions. In turn, public figures of Jewish origin, widely represented among city mayors, ministers, legislative deputies at all levels, those in the governing organs of the different parties, as well as among the bureaucratic and business elite, often distance themselves from the organized Jewish movement, and are not particularly interested in Jewish ethnic issues (Khanin 2002). An opinion poll conducted in Russia at the end of 1997 showed considerable opposition by the local non-Jewish population to an increase of Jewish participation in government (Krichevsky 1999). As a result, the use of personal connections by Jewish communal leaders became the basis of their political influence in the North Caucasus and far beyond. However, the political institutionalization of the Mountain Jews in the North Caucasus has never taken any organizational form because, as Khanin points out, the

political culture and historical experience of Soviet Jewry delegitimizes the very idea of ethnic mobilization in politics largely because of a traditional emigrationist orientation among Jews (2002).

Conclusion

The chapter examined ethnic groups in terms of historical perspective and highlighted the role of these groups in the process of the revival of national identities after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It particularly dealt with the geopolitical factors and cross-national linkages in regional and multinational interests in the formation of the ethnic identities and nationalistic elites in post-Soviet space. The findings support my argument that (1) ethno-nationalism is the outcome of this peculiar ethno-federalist administrative structure and bureaucratic hierarchy, where ethnic minorities struggle to consolidate their presence, and (2) decades of the Soviet monopoly on national questions caused pervasive alienation of ethnic groups from Soviet and later Russian ethno-cultural environment. As my analysis demonstrated how the large ethnic minorities were recognized and granted a *de facto* privileged status, while smaller ethnic minorities and those without formal recognition deprived of the same rights. However, my analysis shows that one ethnic group, the Mountain Jews, has never taken any organizational form because the political culture and historical experience of this group delegitimizes the very idea of ethnic mobilization in politics regardless of their official status within political regime due to the fact that Mountain Jews had never relinquished their ethno-cultural affiliation with their brethren beyond the Caucasian mountains.

Chapter 4 - Chechnya

"We are fighting very cruel people – beasts in the guise of human beings who do not and do not want to understand in what time and world they live. Our response must be equal to the threat they present to modern civilization."

Russian Federation President V. Putin at a news conference in Amsterdam, 2 November 2005[19]

Introduction

Chapter 4 examines political and social transformation in post-war Chechnya, traditionally structured on polycentric elites, the nature of the nation-building policies and evaluates the main expalnations for the rise of the authoritarian regime of Ramzan Kadyrov (2003-present) that is often referred to as clan based and fully dependent on the federal center, which provides him with financial, administrative and military resources. In this chapter, I seek to explain why Kadyrov's regime produced highly personalistic elites based on strong ties of kinship, personal loyalty, Islamic tariqa and identify the most significant stages in the dynamics of the political mobilization in Chechnya and offer an account of the key factors that were present in each stage. Section *Record of Violence and Ethnic Mobilization* introduces relevant scholarship exploring the implications of the Russo-Chechen conflict in terms of Caucasian geopolitics, Islamic fundamentalism, and international terrorism, referring to the present conflict as the result of a centuries-old ethnic struggle between the Russian and Chechen peoples in a broad historical context. Section *Religious Mobilization versus Cultural Norms and Traditions* looks into the intricate interrelationship between Islam and traditional values of Chechen society, the existence of archaic social and religious institutions which have always mobilized and rallied together whenever some external

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[19] Hanuska, Karl. "Putin, Dutch PM Spar over War in Chechnya." *The Moscow Times*, 3 November 2005.

force posed a threat to this ethnic group, and the Chechen self-consciousness which is largely ignored by the international religious conservatives who continue to impose values formed outside the ethno-cultural space of the Caucasus on Chechen society. Section *Russo-Chechen Wars: major causes and driving forces* accounts for the most common propositions regarding causes and driving forces of the Russian – Chechen violence in the 1990s. The main argument here is that it was triggered not only by long-held ethnic aspirations coupled with religious beliefs but the complete state failure that devolved into a crime-ridden and crime-exporting quasi-state plagued by permanent internal power struggles.

Hstorical background

The territory of the Chechen Republic is 15,677 square kilometers. Approximately, one-third of the territory is in the plains north of the Terek River that crosses Chechnya from west to east. Another third in the southern part is covered by intractable mountains. All major settlements (Argun, Gudermes, Urus-Martan, and Grozny) are in the middle part of Chechnya, between the mountains and northern lowlands. The total population of Chechnya in 1989 was close to 836,000 (73% or 629,000 Chechens, 26% or 224,000 Russians). Chechnya along with neighboring Dagestan was always among the poorest regions of the Soviet Union and has been always subsidized by both Soviet and post-Soviet central authorities. Starting from the early 1980s, Chechnya had high unemployment, and in 1991, it was as high as 30% of the workforce (Vasileva 1994: 58). During the last months of the Soviet regime, the Congress of the Chechen people was founded under the leadership of its chairman, General Dzokhar Dudaev, the movement quickly evolved into a political organization

which started to demand reforms from the local Supreme Soviet and to advocate a more nationalist course. Already in June 1991, events developed into what was soon dubbed the "Chechen revolution." The Congress renamed itself the National Congress of the Chechen People, declared Chechnya an independent state outside the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, and announced that all power in Chechnya was temporarily taken over by its executive committee.

As the revolutionary energy in Chechnya was further fuelled by crumbling central authority in August of 1991, Dudaev was quick to organize huge rallies in favour of Chechen independence. In a matter of a few days, the Soviet system was completely dismantled and in early September, Dudaev forced the Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet, the main bulwark of the Soviet political system, into self-dissolution. Dudaev and his followers took complete control of the local law-enforcement apparatus and the partial control of the military units stationed in Chechnya seizing a huge amount of the weapons and ammunition. On October 27, Dudaev won presidential elections with 90% of the vote; his first presidential decree was to declare Chechnya a sovereign presidential republic. Due to the fact that Chechnya's nationalist elites were not able to consolidate their regime and engage in the process of state-building, that period between Chechnya's declaration of independence and the first Russian invasion in 1994 is still considered a time of lost opportunities. Within one year, Chechnya became chaotic and endemic elites' power struggle became omnipresent. President Dudaev, far from succeeding in establishing statehood in Chechnya, engaged in a protracted power struggle with political rivals and the parliament, and became more and more dependent on his paramilitary groups. Chechnya had not only become a sort of safe haven for

criminal operations mainly targeting the oil sector, but also a crime exporter. In the summer of 1994, the North Caucasus saw a series of public transport hijackings by Chechens, overtly provoking the Russian authorities.

Record of Violence and Ethnic Mobilization

Almost two decades of violence in Chechnya gave rise to an extensive body of literature on the subject. Up until 2006, much of this material focused on the Russian actions against the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria with almost daily clashes with Chechen rebels (insurgents or terrorists), their international allies, and endless reports of international non-governmental organizations (Chesnov 1996, Gall and de Waal 1998, Smith 1998, Anand 2000, Tishkov 2004). Starting from 2006, there has been a qualitative shift in relevant scholarship exploring the implications of the conflict in terms of Caucasian geopolitics, Islamic fundamentalism, international terrorism, regional emulation and the repeated violation of basic human rights and freedoms (Russell 2007, Gannushkina 2007, Schaefer 2010, Furman 2011). Although this scholarship is primarily concerned with contemporary issues, much of it refers to the present conflict as the result of a centuries-old ethnic struggle between the Russian and Chechen peoples. The most recent body of literature on the North Caucasus situates the protracted Russian Chechen stand-off within a broad historical narrative. Starting with the revolts under Sheikh Mansur (1785–1791) and the Imam Shamil (1834–1859), this literature argues that this struggle for national liberation links 18th- and 19th-century Chechen aspirations with upheaval in the 20th century with the wholesale deportation of the Chechen people to Central Asia in 1944 under pretext of

collaboration with the Nazi invaders.[20] As Hitler's armies neared the breakaway region, the Chechens revolted, seeking to break free from the Soviet Union. Stalin responded by deporting all the territory's inhabitants to Central Asia; this included almost the entire Chechen nation. They began to return to Chechnya in 1956-1957, only after Khrushchev declared a general amnesty following Stalin's death (Knezys and Sedlickas 1999).

Historically, Chechnya's goal was not to secede from Russia, but to be considered a federal republic by Moscow, a prestigious upgrade from that of "autonomous region." "Moscow's lack of response to [then-Chechen President] Dudaev's demands had a radicalizing impact on the Chechen nationalist agenda" (Yemelianova 2002:177). Most importantly, this impact includes the shift of political agenda from ethnicity/nationalist based to religious-based.

> *"Where any religion prevails over the secular constitutional organization of the state,*
> *either the Spanish Inquisition or Islamic fundamentalism will emerge."*

Former Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudaev in an interview with Literaturnaya Gazeta, 12 August 1993[21]

Henze argues that "though some journalists and political figures in Moscow raised the specter of an Islamic fundamentalist uprising in Chechnya and accused Dudaev and his supporters of planning creating of an Iranian-style Islamic Republic, there is little evidence of radical Islamic motivation or extremist Islamic content in the events of 1991 or their aftermath" (1995:31) Dudaev himself initially showed no inclination toward Islamic militancy, and for the first two years after he came to power, he explicitly ruled out the creation of an "Islamic republic"(Lieven 1998: 363) Pre-

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[20] Chechnya declared its sovereignty in 1918, shortly after the Russian Revolution, but this was short-lived, and by 1920, Russia had forcibly occupied the territory.
[21] Lieven, Anatol. *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998: 363.

existing socio-economic conditions may in part explain how the Chechen aspirations for self-determination evolved into militant pro-Islamic society. For instance, just after the fall of the USSR, approximately 30 % of Chechnya's population was unemployed and income for collective or state farm workers averaged only 74.8 % of the Russian Federation wage. Other factors contributing to discontent included poor health services, heavy environmental pollution, forced economic migration, and the fact that Russians dominated the lucrative oil industry (Lyon 2002:119). As I have already pointed out, Dudaev had come into power expecting to promote a secular republic, independent of Russia, which would respect Chechen traditions that had been subdued by the Soviet regime. His model was the independence movement of Estonia, where he had been stationed as a Soviet air force general before being drawn into Chechen politics. Yet the more Moscow resisted making concessions to Chechnya's claims of sovereignty the more Dudaev fell back on Islamic forces –including some outside the country – for support." (Evangelista 2002:72)   Moreover, the Chechen people are particularly resilient, having for centuries rejected the psychology of submission to the Russians. As Yemelianova points out, the intertwining of the Chechens' struggle for freedom with their Islamicization loomed larger and more influential the longer Moscow ignored Chechnya's assertions (2002:177).   Dudaev increasingly incorporated Islam into his politics, whereas previously he had stressed the national character of the Chechen movement for independence. "Dudaev's appeal to Islam had an important propaganda function: it sought to attract international Islamic support for the Chechen cause." (Yemelianova 2002:181). Thus, as Islam was co-opted for political gains, it is important to note that "Islamic radicalism in the Northern Caucasus is of a pseudo- religious

character and is…a manifestation of nationalist and strategic aspirations by specific political groups – as a rule, remote from Islam." (Dobaev 2000:84) Few Chechen leaders "turned to Wahhabism in the mid-1990s when they realized that support for their secessionist goals was not forthcoming from western states and international institutions such as the U.N."(Giuliani 2005:211) Although effectively bringing much-needed finances to Chechnya to conduct the conflict, Wahhabism did not prove to be the decisive factor the Chechens had hoped. The turn to Wahhabism gave an opportunity for extremist Islamic leaders with ties to groups in Yemen, Afghanistan and other centers of radical Islam to hijack the Chechen conflict (Fredholm 2000:315). "Wahhabism primarily has attracted nonreligious young men, many of whom were unemployed after the end of the first war. They embraced its ideology of armed jihad rather than its Islamic doctrines." (Giuliano 2005:210) "Youth centers were established in Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia, packed with state-of-the-art printing and computer equipment which provided spiritual education, computer training; they also published literature." (Akaev 2000:139) The strict monotheism of this doctrine objects to the more mystical aspects of Sufism that include rituals, veneration of saints and claims to hidden knowledge. The Wahhabis' vision of a fundamentalist Islamic society was quite extraneous to most Chechens, who tend to be quite secular and typically follow no more than a few basic religious norms. Although Islam is a vital block of Chechen identity, "the eruption of armed Wahhabi gangs attempting to force women to wear the veil or erecting roadblocks to search for alcohol in cars provided a serious shock." (Smith 1998:xxxiii, xxxiv) As Miller put it, "although Wahhabi intervention became a principal reason why the Chechens garnered support from neighbouring

regions and countries, their infiltration into Chechnya led to considerable internal chaos and confusion…Toward the conclusion of the first war in Chechnya, however, relations between the Wahhabis and Chechen Sufis abruptly deteriorated, as the Arab *mujahideen* continued their *jihad* against Russia and nonbelievers." (2002:149)

Most scholarship on the subject carries on to the "perestroika" years, when regional tensions again flared in response to the disintegration of Soviet regime and the subsequent resurrection of Chechen aspirations for self-determination., linking the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria's declaration of independence under Dudaev in 1991 to what is colloquially referred to as a 200-year war. The quite narrow take on the contemporary ethno-religious aspects has tended to offer only a cursory reference to the history of the region at a time when unrest and the inaccessibility of local archives have hampered more thorough historical investigations. Even the most scrupulous scholars have been led to found their work on surprisingly perfunctory and problematic sources. Thus, much of the developing English-language material on the historical background to the contemporary Russo-Chechen relations can be attributed to Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov, a Chechen immigrant whose almost unquestioned authority stems from the fact that he was present in Chechnya in the late 1930s. From the late 1940s until his death in 1997, Avtorkhanov wrote extensively about his people, whom he routinely conflated with the neighboring Ingush in view of these ethnicities' common administrative borders and similar historical experience. His seminal *Genocide in the USSR*, a long manuscript originally drafted in 1948 for the United Nations and published repeatedly in different languages, opens with a brief excursus on the pre-revolutionary history of the North Caucasus before focusing on the period following

1917. According to Avtorkhanov, Soviet rule was established in this restive region during the Civil War through guarantees of local autonomy—agreements that were subsequently abrogated as Soviet authorities consolidated power during the early 1920s. Forced collectivization in Chechen territory sparked widespread rebellions that raged for over a decade before finally being quelled in 1944, when Stalin ordered the deportation of every Chechen to the barren steppe of Central Asia. According to Avtorkhanov, Chechen resistance from the 19th century onward should be seen within the context of a broader "national liberation movement." Although the early 1920s were marked by a major rebellion led by Said Bek, a descendant of the Imam Shamil, it was violent collectivization and that caused the region to revolt. Such circumstances make it critical to approach the literature on this troubled region with considerable caution, differentiating between coverage of the contemporary crisis and the historical framework within which it is frequently situated. Many of the most problematic accounts require little refutation, as in the case of allegations of two centuries of uninterrupted ethnic strife or facile comparisons of the present power balance with Russian colonial rule. Subsequently, many scholars rely on accounts of Chechen nationalism during the 1920s and the 1930s to link the current conflict to the Caucasian wars of the 19th century, basing their analysis on either Soviet-era archival documentation or memoirs by dissidents such as Avtorkhanov.

From a Western perspective, Chechnya—whether as an autonomous federal unit, a potentially sovereign state, or a conflict zone—has never drawn much attention on its own. It has always been no more than just another case within Russia to strife for self-rule and self-determination. However, after the dramatic events of September 11, 2001

and given the role of Chechen separatist groups in a number of brutal attacks on civilians (bombings of Russian multi-story buildings in 1999 that killed more than 300) and the hostage-taking of a Russian theater in 2002 that resulted in the deaths of 130 Russians and 30 rebels), the belligerent rhetoric of Islamic fundamentalism and the terminology of international terrorism has brought the Chechen question to the forefront of international concern (Trenin and Malashenko 2004:45). I argue that roots of the conflict in Chechnya, which have produced two bloody wars with the Russian Federation over the past two decades, are defined neither by terrorist activities or the Islamists who have recently come to typify the most virulent of the separatist rebels; rather, the origin is in the centuries long forging of a group identity that has suffered continual persecution from the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation. Ethnicity coupled with a fundamentalist religious ideology has greatly complicated a struggle that has benefited the economic and political interests of groups as disparate as elected officials, crime bosses, business leaders, and international governments (Politkovskaya 2003). In fact, devastating war has not only resulted in the economic and social collapse of Chechnya but energized radicals rebels, mobilized moderates to further distance themselves from the pro-Russian regime, and is increasingly brought to the realization that Chechen Russia cannot exist in this modern Russia (Tishkov 2004, Oliker 2001). Even though any solutions to end this conflict and determine the final status of Chechnya was avoided by both sides up until 2007 (Trenin and Malashenko 2004:2), tenuous interactions between wirds[22] and teyps[23] in Chechnya

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[22] Sufi Islam in the Northeast Caucasus functions through the *Naqshbandiya, Qadiriya, and Shazaliya* Tariqahs, which are broken down into smaller religious fraternities—*wirds*. The principle of religious-political organization of the wird fraternities is not based on affiliation with only one teyp.

was being analyzed more astutely by scholars in Rostov-on-Don, Moscow, and St. Petersburg to understand the social structure and religious situation in Chechen society. However, these vigorous efforts reduced the subject to horizontal teyp relations, ignoring the fact that the Chechens, as many other nations of the former Soviet Union, went through different stages of Soviet transformation, and elements of democratic and civil origin are traditionally strongly developed in their society. Despite the centuries-long fragmentation among wirds, Islam in Chechnya is nevertheless united.

Religious Mobilization versus Cultural Norms and Traditions

The Chechen Muslims are Sunnis, who adhere to the theological-legal school founded by Muhammad ash-Shafi'i, which rejects the Sufi traditions recognized by most of Chechnya's Muslims. Obviously, for many Chechens, the spiritual-cultural traditions remain primarily homogeneous, although the diversity of the teyps and wirds often gives rise to contradictory situations in which inter-religious unity is temporarily violated. However, despite the existence of archaic social and religious institutions Chechen society has always mobilized and rallied together whenever some outside influence posed a threat to the ethnos. As indicated by A. Salamov (1964), S. Umarov (1985), and V. Gadaev (1987), the common principle of religious-political organization of the wird fraternities is not based on affiliation with only one teyp. These scholars identified the total number of wird fraternities (or murid communities), revealed the forms of their activity, described the holy places (*ziarats*) in Checheno-Ingushetia, and showed their political and spiritual role in the life of believers. Despite their inevitable

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[23] Unlike kin, teyp is a union consisting of different families living on the same territory and entering into certain sociocultural relations.

ideological bias, these studies contain valuable information and still retain their empirical significance today. According to M. Mamakaev (1973), Chechen society comprises 135 teyps, and the number of wirds amounts to 30. According to some expert evaluations, wirds encompass approximately 80% of the believers, 60% of which belong to the Qadiriya wirds, among which followers of Kunta-Haji's wird are the most numerous, and 20% are followers of the wirds of Naqshbandiya. However, 15% of all believers do not belong to wird fraternities, and 5% are indifferent in the religious attitude. The procedure for establishing interaction between the teyps and wirds, particularly recognizing their coincidence, is in our view a largely artificial and incorrectly treated problem. Most researchers think that the Chechen kin and teyp are identical concepts. In fact, a teyp is not a kinship and not a tribal structure, it is a union consisting of different families living on the same territory and entering into certain sociocultural relations. Wirds play a very perceptible role in the social and political mobilization of the Chechens. As I noted above, certain political figures during political campaigns, including elections at different levels, were at times compelled to turn to authoritative wird leaders in search of support, who often mobilized their flock to achieve these goals. In addition, wird authorities play a key role in reconciling hostile sides, particularly those involved in blood feuds. The descendants of the sheikhs or wird authorities often wield greater weight in Chechen society than teyp authorities. Sociocultural traditions imbibe valuable universal features, but neither are they deprived of conservative aspects. Religious traditions have played a significant role in contemporary Chechen society, which was accompanied by opposition to extremist manifestations. With the passage of time, the ethnic component has become more firmly

embedded than the religious. The believer often faces an identity dilemma: is he a Muslim or a representative of the ethnos?

This problem was raised in particular during the confrontation between the supporters of neo-Wahhabism and the representatives of traditional Islam. The former believed that religious affiliation, particularly to Jamaat groups with their sights set on creating a caliphate, was higher that kinship and ethnic relations, while the latter preferred the ethnic component, seeing a threat to spiritual and cultural traditions in the ideology and practice of the radicals. Although ethnicity predominates in the Chechen self-consciousness, which is also characteristic of many other peoples of the Northern Caucasus, this was largely ignored by the international religious conservatives who continue to impose values formed outside the ethno-cultural space of the Caucasus on Chechen society. As I have already mentioned, since the first face-to-face conflict between Russians and Chechens four centuries ago, the common identity of Chechens has been centered on an opposition to the hostile rule of Russians and their political descendants. During the First Gazavat in 1785 Chechen forces were able to repel the imperial forces and defend the core principles of their society: freedom and equality (Gammer 2006:6). Lacking traditional social organization, the notion of a hierarchy of governance is alien to Chechen society and is an element that obstructs attempts to resolve conflict through carefully negotiated bargain until today (Gammer 2006, Tishkov 2004). Independence and a lack of social cohesiveness were short lived: a fifty-year war that stretched throughout the Caucuses and lasted until 1867 resulted in the complete subjugation of Chechnya to Russian imperial control (Nikolaev 1996:8). Complete domination over Chechnya by Russians (regardless of their ideological

imperatives) gradually contributed to the transformation of Chechen ethnicity into a nationalist desire that continues to fuel the modern drive for autonomy.

According to Tishkov, Lenin's policy of indigenization, that created state institutions within Chechnya, nourished autonomous rule, provided for the merger of Chechnya and Ingushetia into Chechno-Ingushetia, and the artificial creation of a Chechen language apart from the reliance on Arabic via the widespread practice of Islam, further developed a Chechen national identity (2004:21-22). Started in the early 1930s, indiscriminate institutionalization resulted in the deaths of up to 200,000 Chechens and, alone along with the forced deportation of nearly one million Chechens in February 1944, is widely considered to be the most salient to the common sense of distrust held by Chechens of Moscow's rule (Nikolaev and Malashenko 2004; Tishkov 2004; Jaimoukha 2005; Gammer 2006). Thousands are thought to have died during the forced deportation to the Central Asian Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) and the eventual repatriation to Chechnya from 1957 to 1960 resulted in even further confrontation as ethnic Russians who had taken control of the homesteads and farms of Chechen deportees resisted their return violently (Tishkov 2004). Tishkov explains "the theme of deportation and its untold suffering dominated Chechen political discourse…and later [was the topic of] youth pop songs….People believed that to end any continuing discrimination against them, the Chechens had to regain control over the republic" (2004:32). The culmination of hundreds of years of common suffering, the forced deportation and repatriation resonates today as primary source of Chechen defiance of Russian rule. The Gorbachev's political and economic liberalization allowed "ethnic nationalism" to emerge as "a great mobilizing power…[while] the granting

every Soviet ethno-nation its own state was viewed as natural, desirable, and democratic" in the eyes radical democrats in Moscow at the moment of the Soviet Union's dissolution (Tishkov 2004:57).

While religion has played a significant role in recent years, it is Chechen nationalism within the collective experiences that has shaped its ethnic identity is broadly supported within the literature on the conflict (Henze 1995; Trenin and Malashenko 2004; Tishkov 2004; Meier 2005; Gammer 2006). Thus, the First Chechen War (1993-1997) was fought "under the slogan of ethnic separatism...[Leading] to the emergence of a new and potentially even more serious threat to Russian security" (Trenin and Malashenko 2004:2). This threat, sooner or later, would necessitate the institution of religious precepts into the state antithetical to the makeup of the federation) and would question the fragile stability of federal governance in a post-Soviet Russia. As pointed out by Gammer (2006), while radical democrats supported the development of quasi-states within the Russian polity, actually allowing a former Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic such as Checheno-Ingushetia to realize popular calls for independence might precipitate a domino effect nationwide calling for more authority, autonomy, or even outright succession. Thus transition to democracy during the final years of the Soviet Union collided with a Chechen long-held aspiration for ethnic separatism and national independence.

The rise of Dhozkhar Dudayev defies all reasonable explanation given the traditional abhorrence by Chechens over hierarchy and the rule of written law. A major general in the Soviet Army (and as the only Chechen to ever achieve such military rank), Dudayev was asked to chair the Second National Chechen People's Congress in

July 1991. The result of the session was that the Chechnya would remain neither part of the Soviet Union nor join with the Russian Federation, thus proclaiming *de facto* independence from Moscow, and that elections would be held for a president and a parliament (Tishkov 2004:61; Trenin and Malashenko 2004:9). In the coming months, Dudayev would manage to consolidate power through dissolving parliament, closing the constitutional court, threatening members of opposition parties, and directing personal purges of Russian officials operating on behalf of the federal government within Chechnya (Trenin and Malashenko 2004). From 1991 to 1994, Russia relied increasingly on the unrecognized government of Dudayev to govern Chechnya, going so far as to withdraw federal troops in 1992 under threat of siege, thus providing the separatist government with a considerable amount of modern guns, ammunition, and supplies (Trenin and Malashenko 2004:10). Even though Dudayev's separatist conducted continuous raids against federal institutions, military, and objects of critical infrastructure within Chechnya, Moscow limited its policy tools to two failed assassination attempts against Dudayev and sporadic reliance by Moscow on the repressed internal opposition parties (Trenin and Malashenko 2004:21). On the eve of the outbreak of war in 1994, Russian President Boris Yeltsin authorized negotiations with a high-level delegation of Chechen representatives on the delimitation and mutual sharing of powers, but talks were dismissed by Dudayev prior to their completion (Tishkov 2004:66). Dudayev's reluctance to engage in a political solution has largely been attributed to the refusal by successive Russian presidents to meet with him, which would signify on their part his legitimacy as the elected head of Chechnya (Trenin and Malashenko 2004). Negotiations with Dudayev failed for two critical reasons: first, "the

Chechen political culture resists in principle the granting a monopoly of power to any single individual. Dudayev's authoritarian style was therefore particularly at odds with this tradition in Chechen society" (Trenin & Malashenko 2004:19). Second, Dudayev, like many involved with the Chechen war, was becoming fabulously rich off of the continuation of the conflict—so much so that the Chechen Wars have often been called commercial wars for their effect on the sale of oil and the liquidation of Russian reconstruction aid (Trenin 2004:66). Dudayev was known to have personally insulted Russian leaders, called for a holy war against Russians, and threatened terrorist action in order to prevent negotiations from occurring (Nikolaev 1996:74). However, Dudayev's interests in personal wealth and authority are not wholly to blame for the lack of a political solution to the issue of Chechen sovereignty. If Russia was to treat Chechnya as sovereign and allowed it membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States, it "would have created a dangerous precedent for the other regions of the Russian Federation" (Trenin and Malashenko 2004:22). Thus allowing it a measure of independence demanded in order to stop hostilities would have been far greater than the level of autonomy granted in the landmark agreements with other republics. Thus, after three years of Chechen *de facto* independence, federal troops invaded Chechnya in December 1994. According to Tracy German, given Russia's desire to end the war, "the death of Dudayev made it far more probable that a negotiated, political settlement would be achieved" (2003:145). As such, resolution of the First Chechen War was reached at the first formal negotiations following Dudayev's death in August of 1996. Moshe Gammer notes that this agreement and the resulting Moscow peace accord of May 1997 "symbolize the Chechen victory, especially as [it] symbolized the Chechen

victory [and] came close to recognizing Chechen independence *de facto*" (2006: 209). However, a decision on the final status of Chechen autonomy was delayed until presidential and parliamentary elections could be held in 1997, thus leaving the *de jure* status of Chechnya in the same precarious and ambiguous position as had existed since 1991.

Russo-Chechen Wars: major causes and driving forces

The most common proposition regarding causes and driving forces of the Russian – Chechen violence in the 1990s is that it was triggered not only by long-held ethnic aspirations coupled with religious beliefs but the complete state failure that devolved into a crime-ridden and crime-exporting quasi-state plagued by permanent internal power struggles. It is estimated that the decline in industrial production in Chechnya in 1992 was 30% (Hill 1995:3). Consequently, after 1991, Chechnya's dependence on the profits made from locally extracted oil dramatically increased, and between 1991 and 1994 oil profits made up for about one-third of the state budgets (Gall 1997:127). Oil reserves as a causal factor of violence were of little importance in Dudaev's struggle for independence. As the "subjects" of the Russian Federation gained greater sovereignty after 1990, local elites experienced little trouble in legally appropriating the profits from the mineral wealth of their territories. The costly and risky construction of an independent state was not necessary for this goal. Oil profits cannot thus count as a motive for the Chechen rebellion. Likewise, oil cannot serve as a causal explanation for the Russian intervention. The oil yield comprised 2.6 million tons in 1993 (less than one percent of Russia's entire production) and is thus far too little to be of strategic interest to Russia. It has also been alleged that Chechnya is of

considerable importance to Russia as an oil transit country between the oil fields of the Caspian basin and the Russian export port of Novorossiysk. This argument does not hold either: Chechnya is easy to replace as a transit territory. A pipeline circumventing the republic was planned in 1996 (as transit negotiations were conducted) and was built in 2000-2001 without great difficulties. Geography as a causal factor for the outbreak of violence did not have a significant impact either. During the first war, all the heavy fighting that occurred was aimed at controlling the few larger cities. The decisive battle that ended the first round of the war was the recapturing of Grozny by Chechen rebels in August 1996. However, the existence of mountainous and forest-covered terrain plays an important role in explaining the durability of the Chechen resistance because a large part of their supplies were delivered via mountain paths, and Chechen units encounter little difficulty crossing the borders into neighboring Georgia, Dagestan and Ingushetia, where they can supply, regroup, and rest. Neither can ethnic division serve as a causal factor in explaining the organization of violence. However, the clear ethnic dominance of the Chechens (74%) versus the Russian minority (22%) significantly reduced the cost for the Chechen rebellion. The Russian minority never appeared to be a political actor, even though the history of violent colonization by the Russian Empire and brutal deportation under Stalin was inextricably linked to Russian nationalism. It should be noted, however, that the Chechens and Russians had lived after World War II without major clashes in the same state, and that the level of inter-communal violence remained low. The outbreak of the second Chechen war is a textbook example of the hypothesis that violence is likely when the cost of organizing violence is low, because the war stocks and the organizational structures for waging war are still functional. It was the

opportunity of an inexpensive war that tempted Chechen warlords to carry the war to Dagestan.

Obviously, the single most important factor that actually triggered the Chechen rebellion was the rapid demise of the Soviet state. It was the breakdown of central hierarchies that went hand-in-hand with this collapse which dramatically reduced the costs of the Chechen revolution. Only the implosion of the Soviet state cleared Dudaev's way to a very swift takeover of power. The minor resistance he met came only from the Soviet parliament (in Chechnya), which was still controlled by the Communist leader Doku Zavgaev. The police, the security forces of the ministry of the Interior, the KGB and the decaying Soviet army, lacking leadership and having lost the state they served, did not resist. Most of them even handed over their weapons. The Chechen revolution and *de facto* independence came at a very low cost. The internal fragmentation and state-building failure in Chechnya can be explained by a somewhat different set of factors. First, regime transition in Chechnya occurred through revolution, rather than through evolution. In neighboring Dagestan regime transition was managed by old soviet and communist party's elites, which managed to use the political institutions of the Soviet Union as pillars around which to reconstruct their statehood. In Chechnya, the military-minded Dudaev radically dismantled the old Soviet structures and tried to build a new state from scratch. As a result, Dudaev was dependent on the muscle of his proxy gunmen, who were therefore more interested in short term economic gains than in state-building. Second, the Dudaev regime was mainly financed by semi-legal or criminal operations, such as the trade of non-taxed goods or the profits made from exporting Russian commodities to international markets.

As I already noted, entrepreneurs of the Soviet shadow economy made huge profits, using *de facto* independent Chechnya as a hub for their transactions. These entrepreneurs had a vested interest in a weak Chechen state, out of the reach of the Russian state, but with access to the international markets.

Although the financial flows seem to have declined dramatically since 2000, there still seems to be enough investment for sustained violence. Diaspora support, donations from mainly Islamic donor organizations and locally extracted oil (which is then refined in hundreds of so-called household refineries) seem to be the main financial sources for the rebels. It is noteworthy that Chechen leaders after 1996 were unable to centralize the oil profits from the illegal extraction, from the illegal refinement, and from the tapping of the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline. The so-called household refineries became, after 1996, a branch of the economy, in which a number of groups and single households participated. After the second Russian invasion and the occupation of most parts of Chechnya by the Russian army, Russian commanders also shared in the profits from the illegally-extracted and refined oil. This increased the army's incentive to prolong the war, and decreased its incentives for winning it. Third, competition over the considerable oil profits was a major contributory factor to the permanent power struggles and frequent changes of alliances by the entrepreneurs of violence, which further promoted fragmentation and state failure.

My argument is that it was primarily Russian domestic politics that constantly nurtured military action. Internal struggles in the Kremlin were hurting the ailing president's popularity. Yeltsin and his inner circle hoped for domestic political dividends from a short and successful military campaign. In addition, by advocating for

a successful war, the hardliners in the Kremlin hoped to boost their position in the permanent power struggle versus their soft-line opponents. The fact that the *de facto* independent Chechnya had turned into a safe haven for organized criminal activities (mainly in the realm of the lucrative shadow economy) became a source of real concern for the Kremlin. Finally, Yeltsin and the political elite of Russia were also afraid of the precedent that the *de facto* independence of Chechnya would set for other mainly Muslim regions in the Russian Federation. However, the notion of fighting Islamic fundamentalism did not play any role, either in the public statements of the Yeltsin administration or in the actual decision-making. Following a February 1995 agreement with Tatarstan on the extent of autonomy granted to the autonomous *oblast*, Yeltsin authorized continued negotiations, including direct consultation with Dudayev (an implicit recognition of his role as legitimate) (Trenin and Malashenko 2004:70). However, continued assaults on Russian garrisons by Chechen forces (as directed by Dudayev's government and other rebel groups) resulted in the January 15, 1996 order by Yeltsin of a full ground invasion of Chechen territory and the assassination of Dudayev by guided missile in April 1996. In total, 11 separate offers of negotiation were made by Russia to Dudayev's government (Nikolaev 1996:67).

When a former police officer and successful dealer of the shadow economy, Bislan Gantemirov, organized the first paramilitary group in Chechnya, it became the core of Dudaev's "National Guard," which in August and September 1991 added muscle to the Chechen revolution. In 1994, just before the Russian attack, this National Guard numbered barely more than 500 men. According to Maskhadov, the Chief of Staff of the rebels, the total number of trained fighters under his command did not

exceed 1,000 when the war started. Only 200 of them, the so-called Abkhazian battalion of Shamil Basaev, had gained combat experience from fighting with the Abkhazians against Georgia (Gall 1997:207). However, once the war had started, volunteers from every village and every extended family filled the ranks of the rebels. When the Russian army started their assault on Grozny in January 1995, the rebels already had around 7000 fighters in town (Gall 1997:208). In a completely decentralized environment, each field commander had to recruit his own unit and to take care of its financing and training. As far as combat units were formed mainly on the basis of village communities and extended families, most Chechen fighters know their comrades and their teyps beforehand. The Chechen combat units can be broken down into three main categories. First, there were the well-equipped, disciplined and experienced fighters, who belong to one of the well-known field commanders. Some of these units also provided extensive protection to organized crime beyond the North Caucasus in return for financial entitlements. Thus, these units disposed of sufficient financial resources to fund a long-term guerrilla war. A second category of combat units consisted of occasional fighters, who joined a group for a period of time or warfare necessity. A third category included the self-defense militias that have been formed in almost every village to protect the inhabitants. In some cases such militias have forbidden the rebels from quartering themselves in their village, lest they provoke Russian retaliatory strikes (Smith 1998, Torbakov 2005, Russell 2007, 2009).

The weaponry and military ammunition of the Chechen rebels originated primarily from the inventory of the Soviet army. In June 1992 the Russian authorities withdrew their military forces from Chechnya, unexplainably leaving behind all major

arsenals that they had piled in Chechnya for decades. Moreover, the porous borders with Georgia and via Dagestan to Azerbaijan provided easy access to the post-Soviet arms markets in those countries. In addition, significant quantities of military supplies were acquired from the Russian army, either from the Russian garrisons in Georgia and Armenia, or directly from the Russian army in Chechnya, whose corrupted servicemen regularly traded in weapons with Chechens. For good reasons it is impossible to obtain figures on the financing of the Chechen rebellion. The data disseminated from time to time by the Russian security service (FSB) must be treated with much caution. Since 9/11, it has made continuous attempts to link the Chechen rebels with international terrorism, thus downplaying the core element of the conflict, namely the Chechen fight for national self-determination. Despite these difficulties, some observations concerning the financial background of the Chechen resistance can still be made.

From 1991, Chechnya, which had *de facto* independence, possessed an international airport and international border with Georgia, but was still fully integrated in the Russian economic zone. This meant that Chechnya had access to cheap and exportable Russian natural resources; and to the Russian consumer markets, eager for consumer goods. Obviously, such a precarious situation made Chechnya a "dream land" for the shadow economy generated financial flows for Dudaev's regime and, later, the protracted war. The position as a semi legal hub between international and Russian markets proved to be extremely lucrative. Consumer goods were imported duty free via Chechnya, while natural resources and weapons were exported to world markets without any regulation. Not surprisingly, Dudaev's independent Chechnya was supported and used by entrepreneurs in the shadow economy, who exploited the *de*

facto free trade zone of Chechnya. Subsequently, they had a vital interest in ensuring state weakness in Chechnya in order to maintain their freedom of activity. The oil business in Chechnya was also profitable. Conservative estimates put the share of the oil profit in this period at 300 million USD. In 1993, the yield of locally extracted oil was still 2.6 million tons, which at world market prices commanded a value of 250 million USD. The income from the illegal re-export of cheap Russian oil was even higher. Despite the economic blockade, which Russia imposed on Chechnya after 1991, oil continued to flow from Siberia to Chechnya. Officially, 23 million tons were exported via Grozny between 1991 and 1994 (Gall 1997:127). One can safely assume that the actual exports were many times higher. Even though the profits from the illegally exported oil ceased to flow due to mounting pressure of the Russian military, the local oil production was never completely halted and easily started up again after the main fights were over in 1996. The wells had suffered relatively little damage, since both sides had left the infrastructure intact, in expectation of future profits. Although the amount of oil extracted may have been smaller than before the war, locally extracted oil became the single most important source of income in inter-war Chechnya, and we can safely assume that the most important warlords enjoyed a large share of the profits. A further source of income was the systematic tapping of the pipeline which carried oil through Chechnya to the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. Another common source of income was kidnapping, especially in the interwar period devoid of any law-enforcement activity. In fact, since 1996, hundreds of people in Chechnya and in the neighbouring republics, especially in Dagestan, have been kidnapped. According to the

Russian Interior Ministry, from 1994 until 2000 there were 1,811 persons kidnapped in the North Caucasus, most of them in Chechnya.

It is worth noting that the Russian army was also involved in this trade. It is common practice for the Russian army to sell the bodies of dead Chechens to their relatives and to obtain ransom for the return of Chechen detainees. The most important source of funding for Chechen rebels is both legal and illegal economic activity inside Russia. According to statistics of the Main Directorate for the Struggle against Organized Crime, in the year 2000, up to 4,000 enterprises in Russia were under the control of so-called ethnic mafias. Chechen diaspora groups, donating part of their profits to the rebels, controlled a substantial number of these businesses (Borisov 2001:7). The 350 000-strong Chechen diaspora in Russia, at least in part, supports the struggle for independence with voluntary donations. These donations were coupled with international contributions. In this regard, Russian law-enforcement and intelligence agencies regularly point to a number of countries: the Arab Emirates, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, and especially Turkey and Azerbaijan.

The first engagement turned into a humiliating disaster for the badly-trained and poorly-motivated Russian army. The Russian invasion had unified the various Chechen factions, and the overwhelming majority of the population supported the war (Hughes 2001). On August 6, 1996, the Chechen forces recaptured Grozny. Estimates of human casualties in 1994-1996 war vary from 4379 military and 20 000 civilian dead, with no accounting of wounded (Lieven 1998:108), to 80 000 dead and 240 000 wounded, announced by Aleksandr Lebed in Izvestia newspapaer (September 4, 1996). The official Russian numbers are just over 3000 military killed. The amount of Chechen

military and civilian casualties is unknown (Hughes 2001). On August 25, 1996, Yeltsin's envoy Aleksandr Lebed, secretary of the Russian Security Council, and the Chechen military commander Aslan Maskhadov signed the Khasavyurt agreement. The parties agreed to cease hostilities and to achieve a solution to the question of the future status of Chechnya prior to 31 December 2001. The Russian Army completely withdrew its forces. After the Russian ignominious military and political retreat, parliamentary and presidential elections were held in Chechnya on 27 January 1997. The Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) provided organizational and financial aid and sent election observers. Aslan Maskhadov won with 59.3% of the vote in the first round, coming in well in front of the most popular field commander Shamil Basaev (25.3%) and the incumbent president Yandarbiev (10.1%). However, this internationally-applauded democratic ritual did not conceal for long the fact that Chechen statehood was literately absent. In reality, the state in Chechnya was a fragile coalition of field commanders who had organized the resistance extremely effectively during the war, but proved utterly unable to establish state institutions. Moreover, the coalition proved itself to be short-lived and unstable. Armed clashes between the various groups were soon a common feature. Few attempts to integrate these armed groups into state institutions, and thus subordinate them to a common command and bring them under civil control, failed. As a result, different governmental and administrative branches had control of their own troops: the President had the National Guard and an anti-terrorist unit at his disposal; the ministry of State Security commanded the *Sharia* Guard and the so-called Islamic regiment. The National Security Service took control of the border check-points. In fact, these armed units continued to

remain the proxy troops of their respective field commanders, who increasingly exploited the market of violence that had emerged in Chechnya during the war. Profits from the extracted oil were supplemented by proceeds from the kidnapping "business" and racketeering, as well as funds which flowed from the diaspora. In post-war Chechnya, the rationale choices of the key players were increasingly dominated by short-term economic gains; therefore weak statehood was not only a result of the war, but it became an objective of the warlords. Few charismatic warlords also gained access to international Islamic donors, spreading Islamic fundamentalism among layers of society and moderate warlords. Radical Islamism led to a further fragmentation of Chechen society and was used as a tool in the power struggle between a coalition of warlords and President Maskhadov. Trenin and Malashenko describe the interwar period (1997-1999) as a vacuum of leadership within Chechnya (2004).

In December 1998, a coalition of radical warlords opposed to President Maskhadov decided to form a so-called state *Shura* - a consultative body to which the president and the parliament should transfer their powers (Isayev 1998). President Maskhadov swiftly responded by stripping the parliament of its legislative power, calling for his own *Shura*, and working on an "Islamic" constitution. Thus in the spring of 1999, the dismantling of the Chechen state was complete: there was a president without real power, a parliament that had been stripped of its legislative powers, there was no constitution and no constitutional court, and two opposing *Shuras*, one belonging to president and one belonging to the warlord coalition. It turned out that field commanders had not only won the battle against the Russian army, but they had also won the battle against a weak president trying to build a state. Thus, the internal

fragmentation of the Chechen rebels has dramatically increased the possibility of another war, as Russia had no negotiating partner and faced a serious commitment problem on the Chechen side. The internal fragmentation along with overt disobedience led to complete state failure and established the market of violence. The strategic actions of the entrepreneurs of violence became therefore more and more driven by short-term gains and economic activities that characteristically combined legal business activities, organized crime, and small-scale warfare.

As a result, in August 1999, a few hundred fighters under the leadership of radical field commanders Basaev and Khattab invaded the neighboring republic of Dagestan with the declared aim of liberating it and uniting it with Chechnya to form an Islamic republic. The Chechen Islamists encountered fierce resistance from the local population of Dagestan, who rapidly received support from the Russian security forces and army. Not without difficulty did the Russian army drive the Islamists back into Chechnya, but this action quickly escalated into a large-scale war against Chechnya. The humiliated Russian army, which had clearly been waiting for an opportunity to strike back, attacked positions within Chechnya with air strikes and heavy artillery and invaded Chechnya in October 1999. According to Jaimoukha, the Russian response - a military bombing campaign that redressed the error of the First Chechen War by completely destroying Chechen cities, leaving no hiding space for urban warfare— "already drawn up, was set into motion" (2005:70). Beginning October 1999, federal forces recaptured lowlands, eventually controlling 80% of its territory, where it installed a new federal government to divide separatist opposition and proceeded to drive the remaining separatist forces into the Chechen highlands to the north and south of

Grozny, the Chechen capital (Trenin and Malashenko 2004: 35-41). Whatever the motives of Basaev and Khattab for undertaking the raid into Russian territory were, it is clear is that the Chechen warlords dramatically overestimated the strength of the Islamic movement in Dagestan. Instead of broad support, they met with fierce resistance from local security forces, backed by the overwhelming majority of Dagestan's population. The Chechen warlords also underestimated the willingness of the Russian army to launch such a rapid and massive counter- offensive. Apart from miscalculations, the most plausible motivations for this suicidal raid are twofold. First, the position of warlords is threatened if there is no war. The gradual attempts of the Chechen President Maskhadov to cut back the influence of the most radical warlords posed a real threat to Basaev and Khattab, so they decided to carry the war to Dagestan. Second, after 1996, Basaev and Khattab had been receiving generous donations from Islamist fund-raisers outside Chechnya. It is reasonable to suggest that the raid into Dagestan, labeled as glorious "Islamic liberation," was meant as a return on the investment of these donations.

Since 1994, between 75,000 and 150,000 of the republic's one million inhabitants have died from conflict-related causes, and more than 300,000 have fled Chechen territory (Gordadze and Thornike 2004). Pervasive human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law – rape, summary executions, arbitrary detention and torture, and kidnappings have been committed virtually with impunity by both Chechen and Russian forces. At first glance, this type of violence appears to be a textbook demonstration of Samuel Huntington's famous "clash of civilizations" thesis: Muslim Chechnya against mainly Christian Russia (1996). "The warlords' cynical use

of Islamic symbols and rhetoric, as well as their use of funding from international Islamist groups, has convinced many Russians that the war in Chechnya is a religious rebellion rather than a nationalist one." (Giuliano 2005) While Huntington's thesis and fault line theory seem to be relevant to the conflict, it is critical to understand that ethnicity, and not religion, is the root of the current conflict in Chechnya. Although there have been severe tensions between Chechens and the Russian Empire, the USSR, or the Russian Federation for centuries, there is little evidence that any significant popular mobilization along Islamic lines had occurred before the violence broke out in 1994. The Chechen resistance concerned the right of the Chechen people to establish an independent nation-state, though not an Islamic one. Chechen leaders, ignored by Moscow, simply co-opted Islam to achieve their political goals. It is also important to note that while religion was not the cause of the Chechen resistance, it was certainly a main factor in the continuation of bloodshed, and a main ideological tenet (Malashenko and Trenin 2004). Islamic fundamentalism, like a seed dormant in the black Caucasian soil, was cultivated and nurtured by the collapse of the Soviet Union, Chechnya's ensuing political frustrations with Moscow, and most recently, the spread of Wahhabis doctrine from neighboring Muslim states (Giuliani 2005).

Due to the traditional lack of respect for hierarchy and unitary rule, administration of Chechnya not imposed by force (either by Dudayev's voluntaristic presidency or the Russian federal army) has failed to produce a functioning government. For example, in 1999 president Aslan Maskhadov, a moderate Sufi Muslim, was unable to stop the more radical Basayev from venturing into Dagestan (thus provoking the Second Chechen War) and was forced by more radical elements within his government

to declare a limited form of shari'a law (with Islamic courts included) (Tishkov 2004:34). The result has largely been a diarchy of governance, of secularists versus the radical militia commanders, thus preventing the process of negotiation with Russian forces from beginning (Trenin and Malasehnko 2004: 33). Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian author and harsh critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin who was murdered in Moscow in 2006, notes in her 2002 survey *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*, "Maskhadov is no longer commander-in-chief…All of his former field commanders are on different pages now; each has his own view…[and] they all viciously hate each other" (178). In discussions with Akhmed Zakayev, an envoy of Maskhadov, concerning the failed negotiations of November 2001, she notes that even Putin cannot control the situation; that the Russian military is completely in control of the Second Chechen War (2003:205). The Russian Ministry of Defense was unanimously supported by Russian public opinion following the school massacre in Beslan in 2004, the hostage-taking in a Moscow theater in 2002, and apartment bombings in 1999. As Trenin and Malashenko state, "at the beginning of the second campaign the public would settle for nothing short of total victory" [2004:50], which further demonstrate how the rhetoric of "Caucasophobia" and "Islamophobia" have been successful in ensuring that the second war ends in a better position for Russia than the first [2004:58-63].) If neither Maskhadov (who was finally ambushed and shot dead in 2004) nor Putin could have the authority to stop the violence and guarantee the safety of the Chechen people, there was little reliable expectation that the final status of Chechnya's autonomy can be settled on paper.

For Russia, the threat posed by radical Islam is so great that no solution besides complete eradication is acceptable (Trenin and Malashenko 2004:74). The Russian position, then, remains that "the Federation's territorial integrity is non-negotiable and therefore Chechnya will remain a constituent part of the Federation" (German 2003:160). German finds this an impossible position, given that Chechnya has been ungovernable and reconstruction of "the republic which [Russia] helped destroy" has been less than complete (2003:160). For Chechens, whose lives have been defined by post-war economic stagnation and continued dependence on conditional Russian subsidies, the struggle for independence is still seen as the only viable solution to ensure the long-term security of the Chechen people in light of a struggle in common for nearly four hundred years (Trenin and Malashenko 2004; Politkovskaya 2003:212). Moreover, as "the demand for Chechnya's independence has become coupled with the cause of creating an Islamic state," which is especially salient in the eyes of the separatist militias that continue the war today, the interests of the Chechen people are often mischaracterized and a single negotiating position to satisfy all active parties is non-existent (Trenin, Malashenko and Lieven 2004:101, German 2003, Tishkov 2004). The resolution of the protracted Chechen War and a final determination of the level of autonomy of Chechnya have considerable impact on several groups not involved directly in hostilities. Given the dispersion of separatist fighters throughout the Chechen highlands following the Russian invasion in 2002 and the rise of demands for the creation of an Islamic state that would encompass the entire North Caucuses, the Dagestan peoples are especially interested in maintaining stability over the region. However, for other ethnic minorities living in largely homogenous regions with some

autonomy elsewhere in Russia, a Chechen victory or acquiescence to additional Chechen sovereignty by Russia would signal that taking up arms against the Russian government could have a positive outcome, thus possibly resulting in extensions of ethnically-based warfare throughout the federation. Moreover, given that Chechen separatists have been radicalized via the rhetoric of Islamic terrorism by the world media and Western governments alike, the West is interested in ensuring that a Chechen victory is not realized, nor that it becomes an impetus for the further spread of fundamental Islam to the South Caucasus. However, in the view of Western nations, such repression of Chechen separatism must also be equated with the assurance of human rights given the repressive nature and "escalating brutality" of conflict, especially in light of Russia's recent move towards more consolidated (if not more authoritarian) governance (Trenin and Malashenko 2004:42).

Several obstacles stand in the way of any long-term solution to the Russian – Chechen stand-off in the North Caucasus. The main obstacle is Russia's fear that Chechen secession would be the final drop to unravel the Caucasus, and then the Russian state. "From Russia's standpoint maintaining political control over the territory was very important to prevent the new Russian Federation from falling apart." (Lyon 2002:119) Russia is home to "at least 89 ethnic minorities with some kind of pretension to autonomy," and thus successful Chechen secession could "trigger additional declarations of independence and plunge into the chaos of civil war a vast area stretching from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea and from Kaliningrad to the North Pacific." (Skurbaty 2000:128, O'Loughlin et al 2004:12) The ethnic Russians, many of whom had lived in the region for centuries, began leaving Chechnya on the eve of the

so-called "Chechen rebellion," connected with the spike of Chechen nationalism in the early 1990s.[24] Around that time, the Chechens began to look for arms, and their relations with the Russian-speaking population changed dramatically. According to official statistics, over 20 000 ethnic Russians were killed over this period. The Chechens were primarily interested in taking over property and assets by forcing the Russians to leave. While many Chechens easily robbed and humiliated the Russian-speaking population of Chechnya, they did not generally seek to kill them unless they tried to put up resistance. The younger generation of Chechens has known nothing but war. "Its only image of Russia is of troops raping, killing, kidnapping, torturing. The brutality of the federal soldiers has convinced it beyond the shadow of a doubt that Russia is the eternal enemy and that its soldiers respect nothing, not women, not children, not the elderly, not the dead." (Gordadze 2004:194, 195) Likewise, this generation of Russians has only ever been told that Chechens are terrorists who likewise have no regard for human life – who do not even bat an eye to take children hostage or blow up commercial airliners. "For many Russians, a bearded man holding a Kalashnikov automatic rifle and wearing a green headband has become the symbol of Chechen separatism and the stereotypical image of a Chechen." (Trenin and Malashenko 2004:71)

Since the early 1990s Russian authorities have employed a number of strategies in desperate attempts to clamp down on Chechen belligerent separatism. These strategies include economic blockades, the use of proxies, alienation and exclusion, coercion and control, compromise and negotiation. It turned out that none of these

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[24] In 1990, the Russian-speaking population numbered more than 300,000. Since then, as many as 200,000 have left.

strategies managed to subdue the long-held aspirations of the Chechen people to self-rule and making it a stable unit of the Russian federation in the future. Instead, this set of chaotic strategies resulted in massive loss of life and complete destruction of the infrastructure of Chechnya. In addition, protracted conflict with Chechnya has also been immensely damaging to transition to democracy in post-Soviet Russia, undermining its further institutionalization, eroding the rule of law and abandoning fundamental constitutional freedoms, and fuelling racist attitudes not only against Chechens but all peoples of the North Caucasus. The deleterious long-term effect of this protracted stand-off has radicalized positions on both sides. As a result, the ethnic bargaining, institutionalized in an asymmetric federal system under Boris Yeltsin that effectively contained ethnic and religious challenges in other potentially secessionist federal units is now under mounting pressure of civic nationalism inextricably linked to Russian nationalism and Christian Orthodoxy. Since 2005 legal autonomization and broad political accommodation of local ethnic aspirations seem to be increasingly viewed as unnecessary appeasement and a betrayal of the Russian national interests. If Yeltsin's asymmetric federalist model was not easily reconcilable with the claims for self-rule made by Chechens, more symmetrical federation gradually crafted by Putin-Medvedev regime on the principles of resurrected vertical command system will be nothing but return to the Soviet era.

The arguments presented here suggest that no single factor can be valuably employed to explain one of the most viral internal conflicts in history of the North Caucasus. The causes of this conflict lie in a multi-level combination of historical and contingent factors, where political leaders, war lords, sectional and corporate interests

with Russia and within the Caucasus have acted as conflict detonators, haphazardly instrumental zing it for political and economic ends. One of the most salient reasons that gave rise to this conflict was the way Russian elites adjusted to a post-Soviet reality. All across the political spectrum, the conflict-prone Russian elites under Yeltsin, tended to see Russian national identity as being legitimately congruent with the Russian Federation's inherited territorial boundaries of the Soviet Union. The Chechen society under the leadership of Dudaev was equally committed to the secession with very small leeway for any compromise on independence. The only fact that Chechen separatist aspirations are taking place within the official borders of the Russian Federation must in part account for indiscriminate use of military power tacitly tolerated by Western governments in return for a number of political and economic concessions. In Chechnya, the Kremlin continued to rely on handpicked former field commanders, providing them with abundant funding and turning a blind eye to the egregious embezzlement and pervasive corruption in the region as well as those leaders' heavy-handed governance. In return, the puppet politicians pledge loyalty to Moscow and provide an overwhelming pro-Moscow vote during elections. By neglecting its own responsibility for law and order in Chechnya, federal center seems to be much more concerned about security in Russia at large, as security priority for Chechnya has been simply to contain violence so it would not spill outside the region.

Maskhadov was elected president of Chechnya in January 1997 in a vote monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Even though he was officially congratulated by Boris Yeltsin, Chechnya's status remained undetermined. This period in modern history of Chechnya is often described as a long

chain of failures of Maskhadov to deliver on the mandate he was given. Within months Chechnya slid into chaos. As Akhmadov (2010) writes, Maskhadov was unable either to get any Russian funds for the reconstruction of Chechnya or to get approval to seek them. In July 1999, on the eve of the next war with Russia, when Chechnya was plunged into internal violence between field commanders who had won the first campaign, Akhmadov accepted Maskhadov's offer to be foreign minister of the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. Quite unexpectedly for Maskhadov, Western countries recognized him as Chechnya's democratically elected leader but then offered no practical help of any kind for the next two years. Indeed, the majority of the Chechen population, the 60 % of them who voted for Maskhadov, almost certainly cared more about stable jobs and reconstruction than about achieving absolute independence. While well-organised insurgent fighters turned their skills into profiteering through kidnapping and racketeering, ordinary Chechens suffered most of all. After war broke out again in 1999, the ferocious battle inside Chechnya itself had intensified between those who saw it as a sovereign Islamic state and those willing to pact with Moscow and reach out to the Western democracies. Western critics of Russian strategy in the North Caucasus accuse Moscow of disproportionate use of military force. I am convinced that the problem is that here is no independent civil control over this strategy that allowed for inconsistencies and voluntarism to dictate available policy options. For example, in 1997, Boris Yeltsin met Maskhadov in the Kremlin, called him the "president of Ichkeria" in public, and signed a treaty banning the Russian use of force against Chechnya. In 2000, Yeltsin's successor Putin refused even to communicate with Maskhadov and labeled him the most wanted terrorist. Subsequently,

major Maskhadov's envoys, Akhmadov and Zakayev were also excluded from legitimate negotiators, even though they explicitly condemned terrorist attacks.

Obviously, there is no any consensus among central authorities on what to do with Chechnya. On one hand, the direct application of force is no longer effective because federal military presence in the region fuels hostility among local people and only further escalates tensions. On the other hand, it is unrealistic and even dangerous to give full authority to local bureaucracy, given the widespread lack of respect they have among the people. Even as the Kremlin keeps on regularly allocating multi-billion transfers from the federal budget to finance Chechnya in spite of its own poor economic situation, Kadyrov nips in the bud every possible real or imaginable opposition to his rule. As an absolute dictator, Kadyrov commands a personal army that primarily consists of former insurgents that carry out official reprisal missions in the North Caucasus and far beyond it. Chechnya is gradually transforming from a *de facto* independent territory associated with Russia into a *de jure* independent state that could request and receive recognition of its independence from other countries (with Georgia in the first place). At present, Kadyrov seems to have opted for informal international recognition, pointing to his uniqueness and his nominal demonstration of loyalty to federation to gain additional concessions from Moscow. That is essentially what has been resulting in the broadening of geographical reach of Kadyrov's authority and in obliterating all competition and obstacles in the way. How far is too far? Sooner or later, the Putin-Medvedev's tandem will inevitably be forced to reconsider worn-out policy of appeasing Chechnya, largely because of its own near-sighted policies, especially in relation to the Caucasus. Present-day Chechnya confounds many previously made

assumptions. First of all, the violence in the North Caucasus is no longer about Chechen independence. Many Chechens became disillusioned with the idea of full secession after the bitter experience of *de facto* self-rule from 1991 to 1994 and 1997 to 1999. The core component of Moscow's agenda here is no longer colonial domination or suppressing militant Islam; it is about keeping control of the region at any cost. Armed resistance is now a region-wide phenomenon: radical Islam is the main ideological driver, pitting itself against not only mainstream Islam but also Russian rule. In his new, scrupulously researched book, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Schaefer (2010), a U.S. Army Special Forces officer, reports that Chechnya's neighbors, Ingushetia and Dagestan, are becoming now more violent than Chechnya itself. In 2009, according to Schaefer (2010), at least 332 pro-Russian combatants were killed and at least 636 were wounded in the North Caucasus—numbers he believes to be an underestimation but which, as they stand, exceed U.S. casualties in either Afghanistan or Iraq in the same period.

Official Russian propaganda continuous to stigmatize, though implicitly, Chechens as being "bandits" and "terrorists" with a natural inclination to savagery who somehow missed out on the modernization. However, memoirs by former Foreign Minister Ilyas Akhmadov (2010) provide necessary information to understand this complex situation. In Akhmatov's view, a modern Chechen identity began to form among intellectuals that inevitably drew on Russian sources and education. It was centered on the capital city Grozny, the largest infrastructural hub in the North Caucasus. National self-esteem had its internal tensions from the beginning, between city and village, highland and lowland, cultural adaptation to Russia and the

proclamation of something entirely opposite to it. Dudaev, the strong man who emerged spontaneously as national leader, was himself an outsider who had a very Soviet identity, a Russian wife and a passion for the poetry of Lermontov. A child of the deported, he grew up in desperate poverty in Kazakhstan and was schooled in the brutal Soviet military, eventually becoming the first Soviet Chechen general. Dudaev never lived in Chechnya full-time before he returned to head the national movement in 1991. Most of the initial cohort of intellectuals who formed that first Chechen National Congress was quickly ousted by poorly educated people residing in the villages, descendants of the Stalinist deportees who felt an instant pride in a strongman with a military background. This segment of the Chechen population propelled him to become the first president of the breakaway Soviet republic and would-be independent Chechnya in 1991. Following the killing of Dudayev by a Russian guided air-to-surface missile in early 1996, Maskhadov became Chechnya's next strongman, who gained wide public support because he did not just protect the population from the ravages of the Russian army, but negotiated agreements with various Russian counterparts (especially with Alexander Lebed, Moscow's security chief at the time and a former general) that ended the first Chechen war. In late 1996, Russian troops pulled out of Chechnya.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that Moscow's policy continues to be near-sighted to primarily driven by personal political ambitions, not to mention personal loyalty to those who occupy higher political positions. The creation of the so-called "North Caucasus Federal District" by president   Dmitri Medvedev in 2010, and led by

Aleksandr Khloponin, a man who simultaneously holds the position of Vice-Prime Minister of Russia, runs counter against Putin's Chechen appeasement strategy, whose only pillar is multi-billion support for Kadyrov's regime. Due to this influx of federal money coupled with overwhelming war weariness, violence in Chechnya dwindled but not disappeared. This type of shaky arrangement has been built and polished by myths of a stable and federalist Chechnya on three highly volatile substances: federal money, immunity, and the loyalty of men, many of whom fought against Moscow, including Kadyrov himself. Kadyrov's increasingly provocative behavior defying traditional Chechen values based on his vision of a new Chechnya is becoming a long way from being supported by ordinary Chechens. For example, construction of huge mosques in a predominantly Sufi society or imposition of a head-scarf obligation on Chechen women along with other elements of Sharia law (that is completely incompatible with Russian legal system, not to mention other much more consolidated democracies), inevitably alienates many. Armed insurgency is not a mainstream movement and the "Caucasian emirate" has no record of building schools or mosques, as do Hamas and Hezbollah. Furthermore, the relationship to al-Qaeda and the international jihad is far-fetched, even though both sides have a vested interest in bulging it up. Instead, there are relatively small groups ideologically influenced by the global Islamists but still getting most of their recruits, weapons and money from local sources. At the same time, my findings show that Schaefer's (2010) argument that the current insurgency is the heir of the Islamist resistance campaigns of the Russian Empire, led by Shamil Basayev's namesake Imam Shamil and his allies in the 19th century is groundless, as modern insurgents' radical Islamic rhetoric is in conflict with much of the Chechen society and

can be held at bay effectively by dictatorial methods of Ramzan Kadyrov under tacit approval from the Kremlin. My point is that, even though Chechen state under Kadyrov is now functioning more efficiently than ever in its modern history, financial schemes of reconstruction are completely non-transparent, and corruption is pervasive. Thus, in the absence of any institutional checks and balances, full impunity combined with high level of violence against political opponents, created a regime that could be hardly more personalized and more based on kinship and personal loyalty. Short-term political expediency and personal ambitions are only driving Russians and Chechens further apart because neither ethnic identity nor religious identity of Chechen people is taken into consideration by the federal center.

Chapter 5 - Dagestan

Introduction

Judging by the composition of its population and its ethno-cultural diversity and cultural and religious history, scholars usually describe Dagestan as a unique case study of politics of collective identities in the former Soviet Union. This chapter focuses on Dagestan and provides insight into the three major causes of conflict in the republic: (1) inter-ethnic tensions; (2) electoral politics, and (3) the home-grown indigenous religious movements. These major causes feed on particular grievances, as different ethnic elites employ their own tools of mobilization to maximize profitability of relations with Moscow and retain power with corresponding entitlements. The central argument of this chapter is that Moscow's attempts to enforce constitutional compliance, while ignoring rent-seeking clan system, will result in further weakening Dagestan's institutional ability to channel grievances and maintain order, widening the cleavages between ethnic clans, and further consolidation of supra-ethnic pan-Islamic identity as the main mobilizing ideology of future conflicts.

Politics of Collective Identities in Historical Perspective

The Republic of Dagestan borders Azerbaijan to the south, Georgia and Chechnya to the west and the Caspian Sea to the east. Dagestan is also one of the oldest Islamized territories in the North Caucasus (Roshin 2011). Its diverse population includes many indigenous ethnic groups as well as Turkic- and Farsi-speaking peoples. Dagestan is still unique in that no one ethnic group dominates: Avars - 29.4 %, Dargins – 16.5 %, and Kumyks – 14.2 %. It is rather a complex fusion of ethnicities, competing Islamic groups, and a unique political system that has traditionally brought stability to

what could otherwise be a very ungovernable polity given the considerable ethnic diversity. Given the severe economic deprivations and extreme ethnic pluralism, Dagestan has remained remarkably stable and has avoided protracted ethnic conflict (Roshin 2011). Dagestan is not organized as a titular system, meaning that no one ethnic group has been accorded privileges purely on ethnic criteria, a Soviet legacy that still characterizes the ethno-federal policies in other subnational administrations. Rather than elevating and institutionalizing ethnic identities, both Soviet and post-Soviet policies were markedly inclusive, particularly of the 14 largest groups in a political system that could best be described as quasi-consociational, a model that is accommodative, designed to bridge the chasms between the constituencies (Ware and Kisriev 2001a). Despite early nationalist movements during the transformation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Dagestan has achieved a degree of solidarity, much of which is attributable to the development of a political system based on ethnic partisanship through a system of proportional representation. Therefore, although ethnicity is certainly salient in politics, the structure has been one designed to mitigate cleavages and foster accommodation, a system now seriously threatened by religious radicalism that would most likely politicize and heighten ethnic cleavages and exacerbate conflict, the growth of religious radicalism as a response to abject poverty, rampant unemployment, political corruption, and disillusionment with traditional Islam and the excesses of modernization pose a serious threat to the government's legitimacy and long-term stability in the region.

Scarce scholarship on Dagestan in the post-Soviet period has noted that the republican leadership has had to "walk a tightrope between nationalism and Islam"

(Gammer 2002:139) in order to maintain political stability. Discussions of nationalism are commonly contrasted against institutionalist studies of the breakup of the Soviet Union, which emphasize the role of the Soviet federal structure in cultivating distinct identities resulting from the geographical partition of political space (Roeder 1991, Suny 1993, Kaiser 1994, Brubaker 1996). In particular, this institutional model was closely examined by Bremmer (1993) using the concept of the so-called "matreshka" nationalism that summarized the layering of multiple identities, associated with Soviet federalism, and explained how ethnicities asserted their political autonomy. Activists representing their titular groups with their own union republics positioned their political actions against Moscow, while those on the lower three tiers, the autonomous republics, autonomous oblasts, and autonomous okrugs, positioned themselves against the union republics and their titular nationalities (Holland and O'Loughlin 2010). Dagestan's noted ethnic diversity, with 34 ethno-linguistic groups, made the assignment of a singular titular nationality to the area impossible. Thus, territorial fragmentation was not in place to spur nationalist opposition; rather, identities in the republic were overlapping, territorialized at multiple scales, and associated with various social and political communities (Walker 2001). Political instability in Dagestan during the post-Soviet period is therefore most frequently attributed to the rise of Islamism, linked to the radicalization of the most marginalized elements in Muslim communities in the region as a result of the two Chechen wars (Yemelianova 2007, Russell 2007). An Islamist state has been viewed as a potential solution to the social and economic problems, including high unemployment, endemic poverty, and corruption, suffocating the republic (Yemelianova 1999, Gammer 2007). Therefore, while nationalism is rarely

perceived as a threat to Dagestan's political integrity, Islamism and the violence associated with it are interpreted as an imminent threat to the republic's stability (Gammer 2002, Hahn 2007). This general distinction between nationalism and Islamism, however, downplays group-specific positions towards Dagestan's political system, specifically on questions of political power and institutional control, and, most importantly, the potential consequences of the rise of radical Islam in the republic (Holland and O'Loughlin 2010).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of movements for national independence also emerged in Dagestan. Unlike Chechnya, these movements utilized existing Soviet political institutions, primarily the regional parliaments (Soviets), as a means for mass mobilization. In April 1991, 39 out of 54 regional Soviets supported a resolution to create a sovereign Dagestan Republic, independent from the Russian Federation (Tsagolov 1998). National groups that wished to secede from Dagestan dominated the 15 Soviets that opposed this resolution. The political leadership of Dagestan was quickly led to understand that the price of secession from the Russian Federation would be the secession of some of the ethno-national groups with devastating consequences for the entire region. From that time on, Dagestan's secession from the Russian Federation was no longer on the political agenda. As in most other regions of the Russian Federation, the political leadership in Dagestan is largely made up of the former communist functionaries, affiliated with successful entrepreneurs (Memorial Human Rights Center 2011a). Whereas power struggles for influence and power between clans are common, violent clashes between incumbent elites and contenders have been generally avoided. Another factor contributing to stability is the

fact that the old communist elites traditionally represent all of the key clans and ethnic groups. Particular ethnic interests are thus already represented at the government level. However, the multinational political elites of Dagestan are aware of the importance of the ethnic balance and fair representation of ethnic groups both in the parliament and in the executive.

Dagestan has generally avoided large-scale violence despite its proximity to Chechnya. However, a few hundred republican and federal bureaucrats, law-enforcement and security personnel, politicians, ministers and journalists have been killed since 2003 (Memorial Human Rights Center 2009). The militant Islamist organization "Shariat Jamaat" claims responsible for much of the violence. Some of its leaders fought in Chechnya, but its extremist propaganda has found propitious soil among unemployed youth. This home-grown extremism, espousing jihadi theology and employing terrorist methods, is being on the rise since the early 2000s. Mounting counter-terrorist efforts to end the street war have been ineffective and often counter-productive due to the fact that Moscow, while supporting vigorously loyal local elites, has very a feeble record of implementing a comprehensive anti-corruption policy and reintegrating youth into the economic and political spheres. The so-called "street warfare" has dramatically spiked since early 2003 and has now by far eclipsed inter-ethnic conflict over land, resources and employment as the main source of violence. In reply, the republic's security apparatus, reinforced by federal units, are conducting special mopping-up operations against allegedly Islamic militants that result in yet more indiscriminate violence. The cycle of attacks and reprisals has rapidly evolved into a spiral of violence, which has taken life on its own.

Even though secession and self-rule have no support among Dagestan's peoples and its Islamist movements have historically had different agendas, the porous border with Chechnya allowed for convergence of Dagestan and Chechen Islamists, culminating in joint attack on Dagestan and declaration of a unified Chechen-Dagestan Islamic State in August of 1999 (International Crisis Group 2008). After a short disarray and consternation, federal authorities responded by massive military campaign throughout the North Caucasus and resumed full-fledged war with Chechnya. Under Moscow's pressure, Dagestan adopted an "anti-Wahhabism" law that has in effect criminalized unequivocally even many moderate young Muslims, rather than deprived radical Islamists of operational capabilities, as they have little difficulty recruiting young people who are chronically unemployed, traumatized by social injustice, and therefore predisposed to universal Islamic slogans.[25] The law granted new administrative powers to the republic's traditionalist Muslim organization, the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Dagestan that was empowered with regulating activities in order to obstruct the proliferation of Wahhabism. Pervasive corruption and nepotism feed their grievances and drive them into radical Islamist movements with militant tunes. Indeed, indiscriminate repressions against moderate Islamists, high youth unemployment and a long-held sense of disempowerment and resentment against self-sufficient elites, have been very helpful to reach out to younger generation which now embraces radical militant ideology and joins extremist groups like Shariat Jamaat. Although corruption is widespread in many regions of the North Caucasus, in Dagestan,

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[25] The "Law of the Republic of Dagestan on the Prohibition of Wahhabi Activity or any other Extremist Activity on the Territory of the Republic of Dagestan" was adopted on 16 September 1999. Article 14 prohibited all Wahhabi activities and any other extremist activity.

being coupled with a flourishing illegal markets and clan-based economic system, it has been unquestionably intertwined with society. According to the Memorial Human Rights Center (2009, 2011a), violence in Dagestan is mainly caused by militant Islamist groups, not inter-ethnic tensions. Although competition for land and political appointments always goes along ethnic lines, Dagestan's ethnic complexity has mitigated tensions by encouraging allegiances between groups and has prevented the emergence of a dominant one. However, protected conflict between Avars and Dargins has been rekindled after an Avar, Mukhu Aliyev, became president. According to the International Crisis Group, electoral reforms in 2006 sought to "de-ethnicise" politics by ending ethnic electoral districts and introducing a general voting list (2008). As a result, the March 2007 parliamentary elections appeared to be a relative success: the elections were less an inter-ethnic competition then a personal duel between Aliyev and Said Amirov, a Dargin, for political and economic power (International Crisis Group 2008).

There is a common yet unexplained tendency to analyze Dagestan in reference to Chechnya (Memorial Human Rights Center 2009, 2011a, 2011b; International Crisis Group 2008). Although these republics share a history of struggle against the Russian Empire's expansion (most importantly during the fierce resistance organized by Imam Shamil in the 19 century that was defeated in Dagestan in 1859) many historical commonalities end there. Dagestan became an "autonomous" Soviet republic in the early 1920s. Russia, first under the Tsarist rule and later in the Soviet era, exerted tighter control over it by haphazardly playing on the balance between the many ethnic groups and creating both allegiances and cross-cutting cleavages. In the meantime, Chechnya endured territorial divisions and massive repression of its population that fed

a cycle of revolts and sustained secessionist aspirations. Unlike during the first war (1994-1996), when Dagestan welcomed and supported internally displaced persons, Chechens did not receive any kind of similar treatment during the second war, which started after field commanders Ibn al-Khattab and Shamil Basaev invaded Dagestan in August 1999. As I have already mentioned, separatism never had great appeal in Dagestan due to its ethnic complexity and centuries-long traditions of accommodating different ethno-linguistic groups. Likewise, proliferation of radical religious views had predominantly theological character without any secessionist tints. However, widespread poverty and resentment against indiscriminate governmental attacks on Islamic values continue to nurture connections between extremist Islamist movements throughout the North Caucasus regardless of their original ethnic propinquity. By default, all militant Islamists are associated with the Shariat Jamaat formed in 1999 by Rasul Makasharipov from his followers. Later, Chechen warlord Dokka Umarov employed pure Islamist ideology to promote an international concept of jihad and to reach out to younger generation to join local Islamist movements and to adopt the universal goal of establishing a North Caucasian Emirate through the so-called "Unified North Caucasian Front" (Memorial Human Rights Center 2009).

Ethnic Representation and Electoral Politics

Dagestan is the largest republic in the North Caucasus and the most ethnically diverse territory in the Russian Federation. Its predominantly Muslim population of 2,576,531 includes indigenous Caucasians, who can be divided into those belonging to the Dagestani linguistic family, whose largest groups are the Avars, Dargins, Laks and Lezgins, and the Nakh linguistic family represented by the Chechen-Akkins. There are

also Turkic speakers (the Nogais and Kumyks), Persian and Russian speakers. Traditionally, each clan, or *tukhum,* unites a group of families related to each other by a common mythological male ancestor. Each clan has its historical area of habitation" (Yemelianova 1999:608), and these clans form villages or groups of villages known as *jamaat,* which make up the 34 ethnic groups (Ware and Kisriev 2000:5, 8). The internal life of the clan is regulated by strict patriarchal norms, customary law (*adat*) and S*hariat* (Yemelianova 1999: 608). According to Ware and Kisriev (2000), the political, kinship, and ethnic systems overlap and interlock, and people generally respect the customs and traditions of their neighbors despite occasional tensions, nationalist or separatist movements never attracted much interest. Avars are the largest ethnic group in the republic (29 %, 758,438 people); Dargins are second (17 %, 425,526); Kumyks are third (14 %, 365,804); Lezgins are fourth (13 %, 336,698).[26] The smallest ethnic groups are the Laks, Chechen-Akkins, Tabasarians, Aguls, Rutuls, Tsakhurs and Azeris. The proportion of Russians in the population has dropped from 9 % in 1989 to 5 % in 2002 (Alieva 2005). Historically, none of these ethnic groups has ever had its own state, but Avar and Kumyk principalities existed before colonization by the Russian imperial army. Traditionally, major ethnic groups populated certain parts of the republic. For example, Lezgins are mainly concentrated in the south, on the border with Azerbaijan, as are Tsakhurs, Rutuls and Aguls; Nogais inhabit the northern steppes; Kumyks have historically lived in the central plains; Avars and Dargins live in the mountainous regions, with strong concentrations of the former in the west and south west and of the latter to the south west of the republican capital city of Makhachkala. At the same time,

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[26] www.perepis2002.ru, the official source of the 2002 census.

many administrative districts include villages inhabited by entirely different ethnic groups than their majority population. Even though such an ethnic diversity has never meant large-scale inter-ethnic conflict, tensions between groups emerge at regular intervals. Obviously, the neutralising effect of several ethnic groups, none of which has a demographic majority or economic dominance, is one reason why Dagestan's post-Soviet transformation has taken less violent forms compared to its neighbors. Unlike the majority of Chechens who always see Russia as colonial empire, many Dagestanis chose to pledge allegiance to it and formed alliances among ethnic groups (Baev, Koehler and Zurcher 2002). Thus, inter-ethnic tensions and ethnic politics frequently arise over administrative positions and land. For instance, when Dagestan was ruled from 1990 to 2006 by a Dargin, Magomedali Magomedov,[27] the Avars, the largest group in the republic, made increasingly spirited demands. October 2006 changes in the electoral law and a new president, an Avar Mukhu Aliyev, have again shifted the balance. In Soviet Dagestan, formal and informal mechanisms for distributing political positions and respecting ethnic plurality for other important jobs (at universities, state enterprises and in public administration) were carefully crafted to satisfy the largest ethnic groups. That is why the three key positions (first secretary of the Communist Party, president of the Supreme Soviet and president of the Council of Ministers) were assigned to persons from the three largest national groups: Avars, Dargins and Kumyks. Moreover, there was an unwritten law that the most important political position would

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[27] After a career in the Communist Party institutions of his district (Levachinski), Magomedov presided over the republic's Council of Ministers from 1983. In 1987 he was elected president of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Dagestan; in 1990 he was elected president of the Supreme Soviet of Dagestan, and in 1994 he became president of the republic's collegial executive body.

be filled by a national and the second in rank by an ethnic Russian (or a Ukrainian) to channel unofficially information directly to Moscow.

As Walker (2001) noted, Soviet authorities classified the mountain populations of Dagestan into nine distinct ethnic groups. The Avars and Dargins were the largest ones, in part because have have capitalized on their large numbers to become the two most influential ethnic groups in the political institutions of the republic, both during the Soviet period and following the breakup of the Union. The Avars have viewed themselves as the leading ethnicity in Dagestan, because of their numeric superiority and because the republican ruling elite has traditionally hailed from this ethnic group[28]. However, Dagestan's most important leadership position, as Chairman of the State Council, was held by Magomedali Magomedov, a Dargin. Despite the guarantees provided in the republic's 1994 Constitution stipulating that the Chairmanship would rotate between ethnicities, Magomedov was consistently able to split the Avar bloc to extend his tenure as Chairman (Ware and Kisriev 2001; Blandy 2006; Holland and O'Loughlin 2010). Said Amirov, also an ethnic Dargin, was elected mayor of the republic's capital Makhachkala in February 1998. This gave the Dargins control of Dagestan's two most important political positions, a monopoly they maintained until Aliyev, an Avar, replaced Magomedov in February 2006. Cornell (2001) has argued that the rivalry between the Avars and the Dargins has led to the increased marginalization of other, smaller ethnic minorities within the republic's political structure and nascent interethnic tensions. In response to the pre-eminence of the Avars and Dargins in the Dagestani political system, other ethnic groups in the republic have

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[28] This prominence also has an historical basis; Imam Shamil, the leader of the Caucasian resistance in the 19th century, was an ethnic Avar.

at times reacted to their marginalization with increased political mobilization. Through their national movements, some Kumyks, Lezgins, Laks, and Nogays pushed for secession from the Russian Federation during the transition period of 1989–1991. Ibragimov and Matsuzato point out that "the nationalist movements in Dagestan during 1990–1992 were characterized by a tendency to demand that Dagestan as a multiethnic republic be dismantled in order to create mono-ethnic republics." (2005:238) A Lak national movement "Tzubars" in an attempt to force new elections and the resignation of certain government ministers organized the attack on the State Council building in Makhachkala in May 1998. At the same time, the Nogay national movement "Birlik" vowed for the creation of a Nogay autonomous region in the north of the republic, which would unite Nogays in Dagestan with kin groups in neighbouring Chechnya and Stavropol krai (Ware 1998). Likewise, "Sadval" advocated for the political unification of Lezgins living in Dagestan with those across the now-internationalized border in the south with Azerbaijan, either within Dagestan proper or as a distinct territory (Matveeva and McCartney 1998, Holland and O'Loughlin 2010). There is another salient example of ethno-political mobilization during the Soviet period. The Kumyks were uprooted from their traditional homeland in the lowland around Makhachkala and they composed less than a quarter of the total population in their historical areas of habitation by 1991 (Kisriev 2004). The most radical elements in their national movement "Tenglik" were eager to go as far as to establish ethno-territorial self-governed unit and to resettle ethnic Laks, who had been previously moved to the western border of Dagestan after the large-scale deportation of Chechens to Central Asia, in the outskirts of Makhachkala (Holland and O'Loughlin 2010).

With Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms and subsequent repeal of Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution in 1990 to remove the single party principle hit Avars, who traditionally held the post of first secretary of the Dagestan Communist Party. Soon afterwards, they felt consequences of being deprived of this exclusively important administrative leverage, as other ethnic groups rapidly turned it to their advantage. The peculiarities of this transitional period were reflected in the constitution that Dagestan ratified on July 26, 1994. That constitution established a system of consociational democratic political institutions that was unique in the world (Ware and Kisriev 2001a). Quite surprisingly, Dagestan's system conformed to standard descriptions of consociational democracy, such as the one provided by Arend Lijphart (1977), that occur in ethnically and/or religiously segmented societies when political elites from various social segments cooperate through distinctive political institutions. The Dagestan's system was consociational in the sense that it responded to the challenges of an ethnically segmented society in four main ways: (1) an executive body that was designed to promote interchange, consensus, and mutual trust among major groups; (2) ministerial appointments and legislative elections that ensured proportional representation; (3) a veto power that was meant to prevent any damage to the group's interests; (4) regional autonomy for traditional ethnic territories. Indeed, Dagestan's State Council (121 deputies), consisting of one representative from each of its 14 major ethnic groups, was the only collegial executive in the Russian Federation. Members of the State Council were chosen every four years by the republic's Constitutional Assembly through a sophisticated process that tended to avoid ethnic tensions by encouraging candidates with interethnic appeal. This made the State Council not just the

only collegial executive in the Russian Federation, but also the only executive that was not chosen by popular vote. This system functioned quite successfully and addressed the following key challenges: (1) suppression of separatism and prevention of the republic's partition; (2) mitigation of the inter-ethnic tensions through public discourse; (3) encouragement of political participation across ethnic and religious lines; (4) prevention of any secessionist movements or radical religious ideologies from gaining political weight and influence on political decision-making.

Proportional representation was guaranteed in the legislature by an ethnic electoral system that reflected a group's size and by system of "packet replacement" that filled multiple high administrative positions, whenever the replacement of a single minister was required in order to preserve ethnic proportionality. However, this consociational system had some inherent inconsistencies and procedural flaws. For example, the Chair of the State Council never rotated, as was required, among the Council's 14 ethnic representatives. Instead it was usurped by the ethnic Dargin, Magomedali Magomedov, who resorted repeatedly to complex political bargains and constitutional manipulations in order to retain the position. [29] On the one hand, a collegial executive body was well suited to Dagestan's ethnic heterogeneity and to its traditions of ethnic toleration and accommodation, which prohibit the exclusion of any group regardless of its size. Yet on the other hand, the collegial nature was inevitably a source of frustration for Dagestan's larger ethnic groups, and particularly for the leaders of those groups who competed for a dominant position in the republic. Nevertheless,

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[29] After 1996, when Magomedov once again managed to secure his position as the chair of the State Council beyond his initial two-year term, Avar leaders overtly voiced their grievances and threatened to withdraw from previous consociational arranges.

Dagestan is among the few territories in the North Caucasus region that have not fallen to protracted ethnic conflict or religious conflicts despite being the most ethnically heterogeneous republic the poorest republic in the Russian Federation.

In 2000, President Putin created seven super districts overseen by plenipotentiary representatives. Beyond Dagestan, the South Federal district (YFO) also included Chechnya, Ingushetia, Ossetiya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kalmykia, and Adyghea, along with Krasnodar and Stavropol krays, and the Rostov and Astrakhan oblasts. The primary role of the Moscow-appointed representatives was to ensure that local constitutions and legal norms conformed to the federal ones and to enforce all federal policies in the region. Furthermore, Moscow also passed a law granting the Russian president authority to discharge executive heads of the federated entities and to ask the federal Duma to dissolve their legislative bodies. These drastic measures have significantly curtailed regional autonomy to the extent that local politics is now largely supervised by the plenipotentiary representatives and the Russian president. Although Dimitri Kozak, who was appointed in 2000 the plenipotentiary representative in the South Federal district, might be aware that corruption and criminality were feeding the spiral of violence and both could appear in a variety of forms at all levels in a society where the rule of law was subordinated to the use of force or intimidation, his analysis of the situation in Dagestan went so far as to consider the risk of the republic's violent dissolution due to the clan-based local elites and the widespread corruption. Kozak also cited Dagestan's growing potential as a breeding ground for extremism. To bound vested interests of local clans and stop the republic's sliding into chaos, Kozak came forward with the plan to introduce of a direct

presidential rule (2007). Under populist slogans of national self-identification and self-rule, this plan was rapidly wrapped up because of its vital threat to both local and central rent-seeking corrupt bureaucracy. However, Moscow managed to establish a military base in Botlikh and to limit the autonomy of the republics based on the size of their subsidies. Before he left his plenipotentiary position in September 2007 to become minister of regions, Kozak participated in a Makhachkala conference on combating extremism at which he heavily criticized Dagestan's "ineffective" law enforcement agencies.[30] Despite his vigorous efforts and the republic's much anticipated anticorruption legislation, bribery and racketeering continue to stifle its society.

Violent clashes between Chechen-Akkins and Laks in the district of Novolakski on 24-25 May 2007 is another textbook example that dates back to the 1944 deportation of the Chechen-Akkins (Issaev 2007). As soon as the victims of political repressions were officially rehabilitated and allowed to return to their homeland, a number of fierce conflicts with the Laks erupted in 1958. Despite the fact that Dagestani authorities pledged to implement a program on rehabilitation of Chechen-Akkins,[31] nothing was done and all campaign was softly wrapped up in the next few years. Other ethnic groups that have clashed over land and natural resources include: Kumyks and Avars in 1991 and 1995-1996; Kumyks and Laks; Azeris and Lezgins; Avars and Chechens in the district of Khasavyurt in August 2007 (Markedonov 2008). Between 1994 and 2006, Dagestan's ethnic diversity was successfully dealt through an inter-ethnic cohabitation

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[30] In his speech at the Makhachkala conference, D. Kozak called into question the effectiveness of the authorities in the fight against extremism, UFO administration, 6 June 2007, at www.ufo.gov.ru/news/1414.html
[31] In particular the Dagestan Decree, Council of Ministers, 18 February 1992 and the 17 January 1997 decree of the Dagestan republic on the deadlines for implementing the federal law on rehabilitation of victims of political repression. The acts adopted are reproduced in R. Kurbanov and J.M. Kurbanov, *Dagestan: deportation and repression.* Makhachkala, 2001, pp. 248-258.

system, including representation of the fourteen largest ethnic groups in an executive body, the State Council. Magomedov was both the State council's president and head of the republic. The whole system of governance was crafted to counterbalance centrifugal forces, as much as clashes, by appeasing the aspirations of ethnic groups. As the International Crisis Group's Report (2008) points out, "between 1994 and 2006, Dagestan's diversity was managed through an inter-ethnic cohabitation system, including representation of the fourteen most important ethnic groups in an executive body, the Gossovet (State Council)". Thus, Magomedov, as head of the republic, presided over the State Council. Even though the introduction of the office of president of Dagestan was repeatedly rejected in referendums in 1992, 1993 and 1999, it was finally set up in 2003.[32] Even when this cohabitation system was still in place and the most important economic clans in the republic, regardless of ethnicity, were able to adapt to the changing rules of the game, the 2006 nomination[33] of an Avar, Mukhu Aliyev, as president alienated the Dargin economic elite and exacerbated their grievances.[34] The ethnic clashes that erupted in March 2007 in the Karabudakhkent district highlighted the significance of ethnic alliances and negotiated political appointments. These clashes took place between Kumyks majority (who believe they have been consistently deprived of administrative positions) and Dargins (who are only 23.1 % of the district population) over the 25 March 2007 replacement by a Dargin of the local chief of police, a Kumyk. Kumyks grievances culminated in protest marches, while the inhabitants of the Dargin villages of Gubden and Gurbuki vowed to support

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[32] After the 2004 terrorist attack on Beslan's school, which resulted in more than 300 deaths, President Vladimir Putin abolished elections for heads of local government throughout the Russian Federation.
[33] In 2004 Vladimir Putin replaced free elections of local presidents by direct nomination through puppet parliaments.
[34] Since November 2004, Russia's federal units only vote in federal parliamentary and presidential elections, local parliamentary elections and referendums.

the new chief of police, Magomed Isaev (International Crisis Group 2008). The Dargins viewed his appointment as recognition of their political weight and partial compensation for the loss of the republic presidency in 2006. The Kumyks, who enjoyed significant prestige and status before the 1917 revolution, appealed to their "historic right", arguing that the Dargins had arrived after them. As demonstrations (estimated to be around 8000 men armed with small weapons) seemed to devolve inevitably into bloodshed, riot police had to intervene to avoid further escalation and slipovers to neighboring administrative districts. Dargins responded quickly by demanding to redraw the Karabudakhkent district to include their villages. Dagestan's authorities were left no choice but to reinstate that the internal republican administrative borders were permanent and not negotiable. However, fearful that outspoken demands for creation of a new ethnic district would set a dangerous precedent of internal separatism, the Dagestan interior minister's revoked appointment of Isaev. Despite the fact that the new police chief was an ethnic Russian, this nomination only reinforced the Kumyks' feeling of defeat (Caucasian Knot 2007).[35]

As soon as the Congress of the Peoples of Dagestan, at its first meeting in October 1992, called for the creation of a federative structure in Dagestan with the guarantee of the right to political self-determination for its constitutive ethnic groups, Dagestan's government has taken vigorous steps to muffle such calls for autonomy by drafting of the republic's constitution, which formally inscribed a consociational political system that built on the historical legacy of the territorially- and historically-based political communities (Ware and Kisriev 2001). Even though overtly secessionist

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[35] www.kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1177440.html. February 17, 2007 (accessed May 5, 2010).

national movements have been marginalized and in some cases disbanded, the political undercurrents in the region, however, remained salient, with continued political posturing by ethnic elites (Tsapieva and Muslimov 2007). These omnipresent fears of fragmentation along ethnic lines arose in response to the transition to a presidential system in the republic in 2006. The "quasi-consociational" (Ware and Kisriev 2001:110) system was significantly altered in 2003, specifically in response to the centralizing policies of President Vladimir Putin's shake-up of the republic's political institutions, as structured in the constitutional document, away from the fourteen-member State Council, in which each of the eleven titular ethnic groups as well as the Russians, Azeris and Chechens was represented, to a directly appointed (with formal parliamentary improvement though) executive (Holland and O'Loughlin 2010).

As Kisriev and Ware point out, Dagestan's officials evaded and resisted federal pressures for more fundamental changes that would have significantly affected its legislative and executive branches, and the 2002 election of Dagestan's third State Council conducted in accordance with the provisions of the 1994 constitution (2005). However, in 2003 Dagestan was forced to yield to federal pressures for the fundamental transformation of its political system that included three stages: (1) the alteration of Dagestan's ethnic electoral system prior to the election of its National Assembly in March 2003; (2) the acceptance of a new constitution in July 2003; (3) the change of regional electoral rules pushed forward by Vladimir Putin in 2004. On September 13, 2004, President Vladimir Putin announced drastic electoral changes in Russia's 89 regions. Putin's argument was based on the assumption that this reform would strengthen federal control by giving the Russian president power to nominate regional

executives (both governors and presidents) with the formal consent of regional legislatures (Kisriev and Ware 2005). Putin immediately used his power to appoint a regional executive to topple Magomedali Magomedov, a Dargin, and replace him with the Chair of the People's Assembly, Mukhu Aliev, an Avar, in February 2006. As soon as Aliev was declared Dagestan's first president, there was an attempt to downplay the role of ethnic identification in regional politics through greater emphasis on political parties; the system was first implemented in the March 2007 parliamentary elections. While this did not result in an increase in interethnic tensions, there was fierce competition between the republic's political elites and reports of election-related violence (International Crisis Group 2008). President Aliev further consolidated the policies of the Dagestan's government with regard to inter-ethnic relations: improved relations with Azerbaijan (in spite of vehement protests of radical elements among the Lezgins who continued to call for the redrawing of borders between the two states), as well as increased funding from the federal center, regarding the issue of Chechen repatriation in Novolakskiy administrative district (Shvedov 2009). Aliyev even called the issue of Chechen-Lak resettlement "the most difficult and most complex of all issues in the field of interethnic relations in Dagestan" (Shvedov 2009:67). Although the 2006 Moscow-imposed change in executive leadership was initially viewed as a step towards combating the republic's endemic corruption and preventing the Islamist insurgency from gaining more strength, the Aliyev strategies experienced mixed results in achieving these two goals (Smirnov 2006).

Furthermore, in 2004 Putin eliminated the single mandate constituencies that accounted for half of the seats in the Russian State Duma, thereafter requiring that all

Duma representatives be seated from compiled federal party lists. Such a radical move effectively eliminated independent deputies in the Duma, reduced the number of federal parties to the pro-Kremlin ones, and allowed to alter the Constitution. Although a plethora of pro-Putin's functionaries have vehemently argued that new electoral rules would reduce local corruption, simplify decision-making, and consolidate government response to national security threats, Dagestan's ethnically segmented and traditionally pluralistic political system any appointment was tacitly sabotaged by local elites. Whereas local elites were previously bound by their need for a local political base, the Kremlin's expanded influence has increasingly become the basis for their power and has contributed much to their insulation from local accountability. As a result, this vertical centralization has led to resentment among village leaders and municipal activists who previously constituted the core of local political bases, but who are now finding their roles to be increasingly irrelevant. It rapidly turned out that central appointments eventually increased local corruption because local bureaucracy was no longer accountable to local constituencies, which might otherwise have continued to exert some pressures to find common grounds for conflict-free relationship. In other words, centralized appointments inevitably reduce political access, so that if a corrupt official is in power position there will be fewer opportunities for local contenders to appeal it. Whereas opposition figures in Dagestan have previously looked to Moscow for support and advice, a system of centralized appointments leads to anti-federal sentiments among opposition as it resents the imposed forms of exclusion or suppression. Obviously, if there is greater corruption and abuse within a smaller circle of elites coupled with fewer channels for local political expression, more young men may feel humiliated, angry, and

pre-disposed toward radical views. Indeed, the North Caucasus is already full of young men who see no prospects other than those afforded by radicalism and violence. After decades of social and economic collapse, the only growth industries in the region now are law enforcement, drug-trafficking, and terror, each of which is inextricably linked to the others.

Contrary to Putin's slogans of counter-terrorist response to a series of blatant attacks in Russia, the sweeping electoral changes that he introduced voluntarily only increased insurgency in Dagestan and elsewhere in the Caucasus. These changes along with further implementation of federal party lists in the Duma elections proved counterproductive because such common electoral irregularities as vote-buying and pre-election violence were no longer identified, protested, and investigated. Indeed, if Dagestan's federal elections have regularly been characterized by fraud, and the above-mentioned massive irregularities have usually favored the party in power, it would be irresponsible to suppose that such practices have occurred simply on orders from Moscow.[36] Rather, it appears that federal election manipulation has always served the interests of the local elites in the first place. Put it simply, federal electoral fraud in Dagestan seems to benefit primarily Dagestani ruling elites. Kisrieve and Ware argue that for many Dagestanis, it makes no difference as to who is running Russia so long as enormous budgetary subsidies are received on time with few strings attached (2005). While Dagestanis are unlikely to manipulate single mandate district races among local candidates, they are more likely to manipulate party list elections to the Duma in a way that satisfies the tacit expectations of Moscow ideologists and maximizes the number of

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[36] I am referring to the 2000 electoral analysis "Special Report: Election Fraud 2000". *The Moscow Times,* November 18, 2000.

representatives from Dagestan. As a result, Putin's move to sway federal elections entirely away from single-mandate districts in favour of party lists is likely to increase the degree of federal electoral fraud in Dagestan as well as in other regions of the North Caucasus. It appears that the central appointment of regional governors is likely to exacerbate current Dagestan's trends including the contraction of political elites, increasing corruption and economic disparity, and a growing sense of alienation, frustration, resentment, and anger. All of this seems likely to help sustain if not increase radicalism and terrorism in Dagestan. However, a shift toward greater dependence upon national party lists in future Dumas lists is likely to increase electoral fraud in favour the party of power, leading to increasing corruption along with the alienation and radicalization of the broader population (Ware 2008).

The March 2007 parliamentary elections were the first to be held under the new law that aimed to "de-ethicize" local politics. Rather than replicating inter-ethnic cleavages (as true inter-party rivalry is non-existent in contemporary Russian politics), the polls became a highly personalized struggle between President Aliyev and the mayor of Makhachkala, Said Amirov, for control of the local branch of President Vladimir Putin's "United Russia" party and numerous economic entitlements. The new electoral law did not eliminate lingering ethnic cleavages, but it also did not stimulate greater inter-ethnic tensions. During the 2007 electoral campaign electoral abuses generally did not targeted people on the grounds of ethnicity. Under the 2006 electoral code, which created significant obstacles to participation for smaller parties, state control of political parties shifted balance in favor of the pro-Kremlin United Russia's with vast migration from the Communist Party, which had always maintained broad

support in Dagestan. President Aliyev, a former first secretary of the local Communist Party, joined United Russia without reservation. Within days, entire local administrations that had been identified as communist or worked for a communist mayor or member of parliament defected to United Russia, something which as recently as the 2003 elections had seemed impossible (Glukhova et al 2003). To be on the ballot a party needed to have at least one candidate in each of the republic's 53 districts. These deliberately crafted provisions made electoral campaign utterly chaotic and unfair as it was very difficult to find so many candidates in such a short time span, and those succeeded were physically pressured to withdraw. Finally, five parties contested the March 2007 polls: United Russia, Patriots of Russia, the Communist Party, Fair Russia[37] and the Agrarian Party. Although such abuses as vote-buying and ballot manipulations are also common in the North Caucasus,[38] the fever that gripped Dagestan before, during and after the polls showed that the electoral changes had indeed increased tensions (Aliev, Magomedova and Dzutsev 2004). The struggle for parliamentary seats, which guarantee immunity, was fierce. Unlike in Russia's thirteen other federal units, ten days elapsed between voting and the announcement of results, due to complete recounts in seven polling stations. United Russia gained 47 of the new assembly's 72 seats (63.67 %), Fair Russia eight seats (10.68 %), the Agrarian Party seven seats (9.12 %), the Communist Party five seats (7.22 %) and Patriots of Russia five seats (7.07 %). This electoral campaign served as a clear demonstration of

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[37] This party, created on a federal scale in the autumn of 2006, claims to be the centre-left opposition, though it always supports Putin.
[38] The Putin's score was between 94 and 99 % in these republics, compared to 71% in Russia as a whole.

Dagestan's fragile political fabric, hidden ethnic animosities, and the weakness of its rule of law.

Religious Affiliation and Political Mobilization

In religious context Dagestan also shows certain peculiarities that differentiate it from the Islam found in the rest of the former Soviet Union. These include peculiarities first and foremost an Arabic-influenced tradition more developed than anywhere else in the ex-Soviet Orient and one that continued until the Soviet era. Muslims in Dagestan also stand out in terms of their affiliation to the Shafi'i legal school, whereas other post-Soviet Muslim communities adhere to the Hanafi legal school. From early times, the Islamic scholars were highly influential and had a great deal of contact with the Arabic world. Prior to the 1917 Soviet Socialist Revolution, there were more than 2,500 mosques and some 2,000 religious schools where more than 40,000 pupils studied Arabic language, literature and theology. Even under the early Soviet rule, thousands of Islamic scholars formed a broad and well-educated class (5% of the population in 1917). In Dagestan, Islam was deeply rooted in written tradition – in contrast to Muslim regions of Eurasia and old Arabic manuscripts were carefully preserved as sources of religious traditions. The study of Arabic literature and religious texts contributed to the endurance of Islam under the Soviet rule. Arabic culture along with deep-rooted Sufi traditions with their forms of worship and a network of holy places shaped particular character of the local Muslim community. The anti-colonial resistance supported by Sufi brotherhoods continued into the 20 century. Notwithstanding the defeat of the last Muslim stronghold in the early 1920's by the Red Army and the creation of the Dagestan Soviet Socialist Republic in In January of 1921, tribal traditions and religious

rites continued to play a decisive role in spite of fierce persecution of the Sufi clergy who chose to not cooperate with the Soviet regime.

Over 90% of the Dagestan people are Sunni Muslims of the Shafii legal school, making Dagestan the most heavily Islamic subject in the federation (Yemelianova 1999: 626). Majority of practicing are under the direction of the traditional Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Dagestan, which is closely tied to the political elite and now has broad-based quasi-governmental responsibilities over Islam and Islamic education in Dagestan (Yemelianova 1999, 619). The second largest group belongs to the Sufi Tariqat order with 15 brotherhoods all across the republic. This group is mainly focused on the development of many educational programs for schools and universities. They are not as political, emphasize toleration, and maintain high moral principles (Ware 1999). The Sufi Tariqat crystalized during the 19th century into a radical political force that resisted Czarist Russia under the heroic leadership of Sheik Mansur and Imam Shamil but was forced underground when the mosques were closed during the Soviet rule (Ware and Kisriev 2002: 3). By August 2000, there were 1,585 mosques, a remarkable increase from the 27 mosques that survived the Soviet Union. In addition, there were "12 Islamic institutions of higher education … 33 branch institutions of higher education, 136, and 203 maktabi, elementary schools operated by mosques" (Ware and Kisriev 2002:4).

Since 1994, there has been one officially recognized spiritual board (*Mufiyat),* in Dagestan: the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan (dominated by the Avar elite) and was designated the official dominant Islamic spiritual organization in Dagestan under a 1999 law outlawing Wahhabism (Ware and Kisriev 2002). Moreover, it has been given considerable quasi-governmental powers, is the "only recipient of

government and foreign Islamic funding and has been put in charge of the rapidly growing Islamic infrastructure: mosques, madrassas (Islamic schools), and Islamic colleges and universities" (Yemelianova 1999:619). Whereas there was a clear separation of Islam and the state, the Islamification of the political process resulted in increasing tension between the Avar-dominated SBMD and the Dargin-dominated government (Ware and Kisriev 2002), although the Muftiyat has worked with the government and has taken a pro-official position. In particular, it has advocated making Friday an official holiday, the gradual Islamization of education, and the introduction of some elements of the *Sharia* into the legal system (Yemelianova 1999). Disillusionment with traditional Islam gave a way to the Wahhabite critique of moral degradation, social irresponsibility and the corruption of the religious and political establishment consequently found an eager audience among the least fortunate mountain villages. Although only 2 to 3 % of the population of Dagestan expressed solidarity with Wahhabis, the actual percentage is probably closer to 7% of the population and is rapidly increasing (Ware and Kisriev 2002:9).

Dagestan is largely characterized by conflicts between self-interested ruling elites (descendants of the Soviet legacy), impoverished population, and "Islamic renaissance" with its strong supranational appeal. As noted by Bobrovnikov (1995), clerics and Islamic scholars once again have an influential role in local government and parliamentary elections. Yet Islam has not managed to melt the various peoples in Dagestan into a religious society (umma). Nor does it seem to resolve lingering ethno-political and ethno-territorial conflicts due the considerable ethnic differences in the various parts of Dagestan and ideological fragmentation of local clergy. However, all

ethnic movements always return to Islam as the founding block of their cultural identity. As a result, Islam has become a common denominator for the Dagestan's multi-ethnic system, just as it did centuries ago when Arabic was the language widely spoken. All this makes Dagestan an interesting subject of study in the ethno-religious aspect of Islam in the former Soviet Union. Its multi-ethnic structure prevents both a monolithic Islamic movement and a dominant titular nationalism (Murray 1994).

Relations between Dagestan and Chechnya have never been simple, as divergences between their political, ethnic and religious agendas attest. Dagestan's political elite, unlike its Chechen counterpart, has traditionally been loyal to Moscow. The first war in Chechnya only reinforced this trend and weakened separatist aspirations in Dagestan. The August 1999 incursion of Chechen insurgents into the Kadar zone increased popular support for the local elite's policy of maintaining relations with Moscow. Obviously, Islam has facilitated grassroots activities between Chechnya and Dagestan, but only to a certain degree. In the early 1990s separatist Chechen warlords turned to Dagestan's religious community for theological assistance to reinforce their own credentials and to rekindle a sense of pan-Islamic solidarity. From time to time, Dagestani Islamists sought refuge in Chechnya during numerous counter-terrorist operations, and ultimately the migration of Islamists between the republics destabilized Dagestan and forged links between rebels committed to spreading jihadi Islam (Ware and Kisriev 2000). In 2005, according to the Government Committee for the Religious Affairs of Dagestan, there were already 1,766 mosques (including 1,107 cathedral and 621 neighborhood mosques) and 15 Islamic institutes and universities. These numbers, however, differ from the official statistics, provided by the Dagestani Ministry of

national politics, religious affairs and external relations in 2010: 1276 Sunni mosques, 827 neighborhood mosques, and 243 preying houses. There are also 13 Islamic institutes, 76 medrese, 2 cultural centers, one Union of the Islamic Youth, and 19 Shia organizations. The total number of students in institutions, medreses, and maktabas (primary religious school) is 8872 чел.[39]

The establishment of Sufism – first by Sufi sheikhs in the eleventh century, which led to Derbent becoming famous Sufi center – was consolidated during the nineteenth century Caucasus War and is crucial to religious identity in Dagestan.[40] Throughout the Soviet era, Sufism was banned, and the authorities controlled religious practice through an official body, the Spiritual Board of Muslims in the North Caucasus. However, a post-Soviet religious revival, leading to profound changes in Dagestan's religious fabric not only made it possible to practice Sufi traditions freely but also enabled Sufi clerics to ask for reconsideration of the role of religion in everyday life. At the same time, younger generation of Dagestanis who had been previously sent to major Islamic centers began to contest the way of praying of Sufis, whom they called "pagans" and "polytheists". The Sufi clerics, supported by official propagandistic apparatus) responded vehemently by labeling these young radical Muslims "Wahhabis", even though they considered themselves Salafis.[41]

From the mid-1990s, two conflicted theological streams crystalized. The first stream was promoted by the moderate Salafi Akhmad-Kadi Akhtaev, who founded an

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[39]Data provided by the Dagestani Ministry of national politics, religious affairs and external relations http://www.minnaz.ru/news_open.php?id=126 (accessed January 10, 2012).

[40] There are four brotherhoods in Dagestan: Naqshbandiya, which played a very important role in the resistance led by the Imam Shamil during the Caucasus War in the nineteenth century, Shaziliya, Dzhazuliya and Qadyriya.

[41] Wahhabis, unlike Salafis, look to the Hanbali legal school for guidance. The term "Wahhabi" has been used in the former Soviet Union to designate dissident Islamic trends, however, and is generally mistakenly applied to all Salafis.

organization to spread his teachings, Al Islamiya, which advocated the peaceful spread of Islam and its complementarity with Christianity, and the second one was led by the radical Bagauddin Kebedov, who adopted a confrontational approach, establishing a religious school in Kizilyurt to advance a Sharia society. Kebedov also used the Islamic Jamaat of Dagestan in 1989,[42] as a platform to spread his jihadi teachings, and agitated residents of the villages of Chabanmakhi and Karamakhi in the Buynaksk district[43] to refuse to recognise secular Russian law in 1997. After a number of encounters with law-enforcement agencies, Bagauddin was forced into exile and took refuge in Gudermes (Chechnya), to where he moved his Jamaat and continued his teachings. Thus, Chechnya became a primary breeding ground for Islamists, who set up training camps, as Islamists from far abroad were generous in providing financial support and ideological moorings. Reportedly, in 1997 and 1998, Chechen and Dagestan political leaders and Islamists clerics who sought to establish a Chechen-Dagestan Sharia state met several times. It turned out, however, that their ideology and goals were quite different. At that time, secession of Chechnya from Russia was the main goal for Chechen insurgents and Islam was meant to galvanize the movement and prevent support for any projects conciliatory towards Russia (Malashenko 2001), while severing Dagestan from the Russian federation was not viewed by Bagauddin and alike as a viable resolution of their aspirations.

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[42] The term *jamaat* (community) has had different meanings in Dagestan. Historically, it referred to the village communities that managed local defence and subsistence. In the post-Soviet era, the Arabic term was reinstated in religious language, first with reference to the Islamic organisation created by Bagauddin Kebedov and subsequently to groups of rebels in Chechnya and throughout the North Caucasus attached to the separatist Chechen military leadership.

[43] In June and July 1996, the chiefs of the Karamakhi and the Kadar administrations were killed by Wahhabis. In May 1997, Wahhabis attacked Sufis in those villages.

In Dagestan the anti-Wahhabis discourse became official policy, executed by local authorities backed by federal resources. Despite the fact that Salafism had spread through Dagestan, this anti-extremist discourse was shared by large parts of the population because of the highly traumatic Chechen incursion in August 1999 and subsequent murderous attacks on local targets. As a result, numerous mosques were closed; Islamist literature outlawed and the most visible religious leaders were arrested or forced into exile. However, it is increasingly clear that such groups as Shariat Jamaat not only persist but are taking active roles in the escalating street war. Although a number of multiple Islamist organizations operate underground in Dagestan, Shariat Jamaat is the only one clearly affiliated with the Unified North Caucasian to spread armed resistance throughout the entire North Caucasus. Its videos, statements and press releases reproach the authorities of being "under Moscow's thumb" and vow to eliminate "these *munafiks*" (hypocrites) and *kafirs* (infidels) – all terms applied to the representatives of law enforcement agencies. For example, according to a 30 March 2007 interview given by its press secretary to Radio Svoboda, Shariat Jamaat seeks to create an Islamic state in the Caucasus. With no room for political negotiations Shariat Jamaat's main goal is to free Muslim lands from Russian occupation and build a Sharia-complying state. Accordingly, it is legitimate to target even unarmed members of the police, the ministry of internal affairs (MVD), the Federal Security Service (FSB), and all those who question the establishment of Allah's laws, or those who help the enemy.[44]

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[44] I am reffering here to a number of consequitive statements of the so-called Shariat Jamaat's activists posted regularly on http://kavkaz-jihad.blogspot.ca/

An independent survey conducted by the Institute for Studies of Ethnicity and Religion in Dagestan in 2001 found that 20 percent of the republic's youth consider themselves moderate Salafis. Only 10 percent of the respondents referred to themselves as Sufis – traditionally the main Muslim branch in Dagestan. The survey also found that 12 percent of the respondents favor the radical methods of struggle adopted by the North Caucasus militants. This survey was carried out in Dagestan's largest cities – Makhachkala, Kaspiisk, Khasavyurt, Derbent, Izberbash and Kizilyurt – among 6,000 respondents, including high school teens and university students.[45] All of those surveyed described themselves as religious believers. Gereyev told the Kavkazsky Uzel (Caucasian Knot) website that a widening gap between rich and poor, rampant official corruption and discrimination against Muslims leave radicalization as the only attractive option for some young people (Dzutsev 2011a). If two years ago the insurgency consisted mainly of people aged 25 to 40, today the insurgents range in age from 18 to 30 years old. One can understand why the government is losing this battle for young people's minds if all it is doing is trying to scare them into submission without providing career and other life opportunities. An expert with the Russian Muftis' council, Rinat Mukhametov, pointed to the paradox that better religious education was likely to prevent the radicalization of young people. According to Mukhametov, although there is no direct link between education and radicalization, there are no people highly educated in Islam among the militants (Dzutsev 2011a). Support for

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[45] According to a Dagestani expert on Islam, Ruslan Gereyev, the survey was conducted only in cities, and support for the rebels would have been even higher had the interviews been conducted in rural areas. (www.kavkaz-uzel.ru, December 9, 2011).

Salafist groups in Dagestan among the local population is now at all-time high and that this republic is now the epicenter of a regional insurgency.

According to Vatchagaev (2007), insurgents are mainly recruited from the Avar, Lak, Kumyk and Dargin ethnic groups in Makhachkala, Khasavyurt, Izberbash and Buynaksk, and the districts of Tsuntinski and Botlikh. The most conflict-ridden areas are Buynaksk, Khasavyurt and the capital, Makhachkala, where groups like Seifullah (the Sword of Allah) and Dzhundullah (the warriors of Allah) have the strongest support base (Vatchagaev 2007). Even though these groups operate with limited funds and scarce training, weapons (especially guns) are not in short supply as a flourishing underground market also meets local demand. With a major restructuring of the separatist underground underway, the current situation in Dagestan strongly resembles the Chechen, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkarian cases, where jihadi ideology has been taking root, causing violence to spread. Taken together, the cases demonstrate a shift from the 1990s, when separatist movements in the North Caucasus were predominantly secular and nationalist; now Islamist militants are increasingly adopting separatist rhetoric and violence (Sagramoso 2007, McGregor 2006, Hahn 2007). With appointment of Kadyrov president of Chechnya in March 2007, relations between Chechnya and Dagestan have become more contentious, mainly because of Kadyrov's unmasked ambitions to extend his power beyond Chechen borders. The level of mutual trust is dwindling from meeting to meeting as Aliyev and Kadyrov regularly trade recriminations, both refusing to accept responsibility for proliferation of violence in the region. Kadyrov's repeated arguments assert that the "anti-terrorist campaign" in

Chechnya is over and the challenge to Chechen stability now comes from neighboring republics, including Dagestan in the first place.

In return, Dagestan authorities accuse Chechen administration of involvement in forced disappearances near the border. During an October 2006 meeting in Makhachkala at which the disappearances were raised, Aliyev claimed that 47 men had been kidnapped since 2003. Indeed, Forced disappearances have become a serious problem in Dagestan. A conference organized on 25 June 2007 in Moscow by human rights groups produced alarming figures. According to the Moscow Helsinki Group, 68 people were kidnapped in 2006 in Dagestan (Gannushkina 2007). The Dagestan law enforcement officials continue to blame the Kadyrov's personal militias for conducting illegal operations that undermine law and order in Dagestan. In the meantime, Shariat Jamaat, that has taken responsibility for much of the violence, shows growing recruitment capabilities among young people motivated by an explosive mixture of frustration due to widespread corruption, economic exclusion and anger at the impunity police gets when carrying out raids against suspected religious extremists. Young people seek revenge against local law enforcement for arbitrary arrests, detention abuses and fabrication of evidence.

Already present in the Caucasus during the Soviet period, black market, corruption and nepotism have become inextricably linked all aspects of everyday life in post-Soviet Dagestan to such an extent that president Aliyev himself acknowledged that the black market economy was at least 70 % of the republic's GDP with a loss of tax revenues of approximately 6 billion roubles or around 290 million USD (Markedonov 2007). During a July 2006 speech at a regional meeting on criminal processes and

Dagestan's financial market, Aliev admitted that: "Nearly 40 per cent of the active population works in the unregulated part of the economy, meaning a very large loss of earnings in fiscal terms and a large section of income stemming from illegal activities". (Bobrovnikov and Roshchin 2006) In public perception, corruption is usually associated with the high levels of federal subsidy: 92 % in 2005, 87 % in 2006. In 2008, the Dagestan's budget was 37.7 billion roubles (roughly 1.5 million USD), of which 30.3 billion will come from the federal budget (80.37 %). The 2008 figures are expected to double in 2011. Despite the lowest gross domestic product, economic wealth is mainly concentrated in the hands of a few ethnic clans with powerful positions both inside and outside Dagestan. Pervasive corruption and exclusion push young people into radical Islamist groups, where they tend to switch rapidly from moderate Suni beliefs to Salafism because it challenges both the omnipresent, corrupt political elite and submissive pro-official religious functionaries. The armed resistance has become the only receptacle for younger generation who is excluded from an economic and political system controlled by Dagestan's 200 richest clans. (Smirnov 2008) Gerber and Mendelson (2009) report low levels of trust among young Dagestan's males in the local government and the region's courts. More recently, events in the republic have further undermined the credibility of the local political leadership. The October 2009 mayoral election in Derbent, Dagestan's second-largest city, was widely viewed as indisputably fraudulent. A municipal court invalidated the results, a decision that was upheld by Dagestan's Supreme Court and further supported by Moscow. This was seen as one of setbacks for Aliyev, who was viewed as a mentor to the improperly elected candidate, and opposition to the appointment by Moscow of an ethnic Russian to the post of

Dagestan's Chief Tax Inspector (Leahy 2010). This resulted in Aliev being replaced in February 2010 by Magomedsalam Magomedov, the son of Dagestan's former president, Magomedali Magomedov (Holland and O'Loughlin 2010).

Conclusion

Although Moscow's support of the "traditional" elite, with which it has worked since the Soviet period, has prevented the Chechen conflict from spreading into Dagestan, it has not resolved decades-long problems. Federal policy (primarily based on personnel relationships between high-ranking officials) has only increased the gap between Dagestan's society and its politicians and consolidated the ownership of the republic's wealth by a small percentage of its population. By ignoring egregious violations of social justice in return for a certain degree of stability, Moscow has facilitated the continued exclusion of those on the fringes of society who now exhibit their dissatisfaction through violence. Along with the challenges from Moscow to bring the Dagestan constitution into closer compliance with the Russian Federation constitution, Putin has enacted measures to bring power back to the center. This was power that Yeltsin relinquished in the early years of the federation to appease the rent-seeking local elites and prevent further separatist movements from gaining strength. The reforms have not agitated much negative response from the Dagestanis "who would welcome external control if it were sufficiently comprehensive and consistent to root out political corruption, institute the rule of law, and stimulate economic development" (Ware and Kisriev 2001b:8). However, Moscow's attempts to enforce constitutional compliance, while ignoring rent-seeking clan system, might well result in further weakening Dagestan's institutional ability to channel grievances and maintain order,

widening the cleavages between ethnic clans, and further consolidation of supra-ethnic pan-Islamic identity as the main mobilizing ideology of future conflicts. Moscow's greatest limitation in Dagestan is that it cannot afford to employ comprehensive political reforms because this would mean essentially introducing participatory politics and democratization. This is impossible for two reasons: (1) it would require that Moscow allows the same reforms in Russia's inner regions as well and (2) it would create conditions under which the North Caucasus starts questioning its status within the federation as soon as people are allowed to choose their own form of government.

Chapter 6 - Karachay-Cherkessia

"We see the Sochi Olympic Games as a chance to reconcile the past atrocities perpetrated against the Circassian people. We believe that recognition of this historical tragedy will be a step towards peace in the Northern Caucassus."

Cihan Candemir, President of the Federation of Caucasian Associations in Turkey, November 6, 2011.

Introduction

This chapter will explore ethno-religious composition and similarities between the use of religion and ethnicity as mobilising identities in Karachay-Cherkessia. I start by describing the socio-political context which preceded the mobilization, namely the emergence of mass political protest which transformed into a separatist movement, and resulted in deep societal cleavages between two titular ethnic groups. Then, in the section *Ethnic Nationalism as Mobilizing Ideology* I proceed to the analysis of the most explosive issues of concern to contemporary Cherkessian political activism and explain why the ethnic consolidation of the Circassian peoples within the boundaries of distinct administrative and territorial formations becomes a powerfully destabilizing factor when the current political order in the Northern Caucasus breaks down further. I conclude that t is no longer the armed resistance that is pressing for the separation of the region from the Russian Federation: the Russian authorities' actions and policies are essentially advancing the same cause by tacitly encouraging hostilities between two titular ethnic groups in the North West Caucasus.

Historical Background

The Karachay-Cherkessian Autonomous Region was formed on April 12, 1922. By a law of the Russian Federal Socialist Republic (SFSR) of July 3, 1991, it was

transformed into the Karachay-Cherkessia Soviet Socialist Republic as part of the RSFSR. For the purposes of upgrading constitutional legislation, the words Karachay-Cherkessia Soviet Socialist Republic were replaced with the words Karachay-Cherkessia Republic in December 1992. The administrative Center of the republic is Cherkessk. The republic is situated in the foothills of the Northwest Caucasus. It is bounded on the west by Krasnodar Territory, on the north and northeast by Stavropol Territory, and on the east by the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic. The southern boundary runs along the Main Caucasus range with Georgia and Abkhazia. Karachay-Cherkessia occupies an area of 14 300 sq. km. Its population is about 500 700 people, 44% of them live in urban areas and 56% in rural areas. The population density is 29.9 people per sq. km (FSSS 2011).

Ethno-Religious Composition and Historical Grievances

The original inhabitants make up 40.9% of the population of the republic; they include Karachays (31.2% or 129 400 people) and Cherkessians (9.7% or 40 200 people; also known historically as Circassians). (FSSS 2011) Altogether, there are 155 900 Karachays in Russia, 83% of whom live in their native republic and 8.5% in Stavropol krai. The Karachays were among the so-called "punished peoples" exiled to Central Asia in 1944 and only returned to the region in 1957. The trauma of unjustified repression remains with them. As a result, Cherkessians, although smaller in number, controlled many of the privileged positions in the old Soviet system. As a result, a Karachay nationalist movement "Djamagha" has been actively pushing for an autonomous Karachay province since the late 1950s. Public support for this has waned, however, since higher Karachay birthrates look to push them above 50% of the

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population in a few years and give them the ability to exercise "Karachay power". This perspective frightens both Cherkessians and Russians, who are currently more allied than confronted. Large communities remain in their places of deportation in Kyrgyzstan (2500 people) and Kazakhstan (2000 people). There are 52 300 Cherkessians in Russia, 76.9% of whom live in their native republic and 5% in Stavropol Territory. The rest are dispersed in small groups in the Caucasus and former Soviet republics. About 150 000 Cherkessians live in Turkey (in Turkey, this ethnic designation also includes Abkhazians, Adygheans, Ossetians, and others). Russians make up 42.4% of the population of the Karachay-Cherkessian Republic, Abazians, 6.6%, and Nogais, 3.2% (FSSS 2011). There are also members of other ethnic groups, including Ukrainians, Ossetians, Tatars, Armenians, Greeks, and Kabardins.

The Cherkessians are one of the indigenous peoples of the North West Caucasus. Their self-appellation is *Adyge* and they are titular nations in the republics of Adyghea, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria. Smaller numbers of them are also found in adjacent Russian regions. Cherkessian, as much dispersed in their homeland as in diaspora worldwide, live in several constituent units of the Russian Federation that are cut off from each other both geographically and administratively. According to the 2002 Russian population census, there were a total of 730 000 Cherkessians living in the Russian Federation at the time. Henze (1992) describes the Circassians as a people with a common language, common pride in their history and fierce adherence to traditions, but without a written language or recorded laws, and with an absence of administrative structure and of organisation to provide for their own defence. Even though Circassians and several other steppe and mountain peoples have interacted and mixed, some

Kabardin princes traced their ancestry back to an ancient leader named Inal, believed to have returned from Mamluk service in Egypt. The country was divided among several local princes. Like the ancient Greek cities, Circassian tribes were never united politically and raided each other and took prisoners and hostages and then met in councils on neutral ground to regulate relations between tribes and clans, debate political issues, and then hold games and festivals, but their feeling of common nationality was not institutionalised beyond this level (Henze 1992). In both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, the terminology used in Russian academia and the administrative structures to define the Cherkessian was somewhat inconsistent. The official Soviet bureaucracy defined them as Adyghean, Cherkess, Kabardian and Shapsough depending on their place of residence and the dialect of the Cherkessian language spoken. The first Russians to come into regular contact with Cherkessians were paramilitary Cossacks, who established their settlements in the plains north of the Kuban River in the 16 century to patrol the Russian Empire's southern frontiers. Cossacks, who included men of very diverse origins, struck up alliances with these leaders and married and intermingled with both Cherkessian and Nogay Tatars, adopting to a large extent their customs and style of life which was in many respects of a higher quality than the Russians had attained at the time (Henze 2007).

The Cherkessian diaspora came about as a result of the Russian Empire's conquest of the Northwest Caucasus in the1860s, when approximately a million people were forcibly removed from their land and deported to the Ottoman Empire. Up to a third perished from hunger and disease in the Russian controlled coastal areas before their departure, on overcrowded ships or in refugee camps on their arrival in Anatolia

and the Balkans. The descendants of those who survived the deportation, which Cherkessians and an increasing number of scholars and journalists call the "Cherkessian Genocide," currently number around 3 million in Turkey and 400,000 elsewhere in Syria, Jordan, Israel, the USA and Western Europe. It is important to note that to the extent that disputes have arisen they are not inherently ethnic, but rather are social and economic with an ethnic component. In the early Soviet period ethnic disputes were subdued and practically nonexistent due to a well-functioning system of the social and economic incentives. The course of events in Karachay-Cherkessia demonstrate that, even in a multinational society where there are many prerequisites for ethnic tensions, responsible government attempting to provide a decent niche for successful economic development may be able to prevent conflict, because people who have some prospects of economic prosperity are not willing to sacrifice that perspective to the selfish interest of nationalist politicians. Ethnic divisions are also suppressed as a result of cross-cutting cleavages within ethnic groups in Karachay-Cherkessia. Among the Karachays, the pre-revolution social classes included *Bii* (barons), *Uzden* (yeomen) and *Kul* (serfs). The Soviet regime led to the extermination or exile of the *Biis,* the dispossession of the *Uzden*, and the usurpation of power by *Kuls.* Despite representing only 40% of Karachays today, *Kuls* continue to hold most important social and political positions. Traditionally, Russians and Cherkessians tend to live in the lowlands, while Karachays populate the highlands, terrain suitable for root vegetables and sheep breeding.

Even though ethnic tensions in Karachay-Cherkessia have calmed down after an intense conflict erupted in 1999-2001 over disputed elections, the risks of their conflagration still come from three sources: traditional Karachay-Cherkessian tensions;

animosity between these ethnic groups and the Cossacks, who are widely perceived to be a part of Moscow's control system; and growing Islamic supranational groups drawing on local Muslims who have been marginalized by their respective ethnicities and often implicated in a series of attacks on local police and civilians. The potential source of conflict with the Cossacks has been overshadowed by the rift between the Karachay and the Cherkess since the election of Semenov as president (a retired general and a paternal descendant of one of the Karachay's clan) in 1999. Unlike in Chechnya, Moscow always demonstrated a willingness to mediate, demonstrating a proactive attitude rather than the reactive Under Moscow's pressure Semenov did not dispute the results of the 2001 parliamentary elections, suggesting that no one in the region is willing to replicate the fate of the Chechens. However, the growing power of radical Islamic groups associated mainly with ethnic Karachay and the response to this by federal authorities are becoming now of greater concern.

The Karachays are a Sunni Muslim Turkic people who closely related to the Balkars and Abkhaz, and less closely to the Nogai and Kumyk of Dagestan. The Karachays group identity and cohesion, although relatively low compared to other ethnic groups due to strong tribal (rather than communal) identification, is in the process of crystalizing and solidifying due to the inferior socio-economic status coupled with enticing slogans of pan-Turkic and Islamic solidarity. They have lived in their native land for centuries, and, like many of the Muslim groups of the region, suffered tremendously under both Russian Imperial and Soviet regimes. In the 19th century, imperial Russia after decades of fierce battles conquered the peoples of this mountainous region, forcing thousands to flee to Turkey. Further displacement occurred

in 1943, when particularly the Karachays were accused of collaborating with the Nazis and deported by Stalin to unpopulated areas of Siberia and arid lands of Central Asia. Those who survived and returned from exile were not allowed to return to all of their traditional lands, creating tensions and disputes that carry on to the present. Notwithstanding the fact that the Cherkess and Kabardins are closely related Cherkessian peoples living in the north of these republics, and the Karachay and Balkars are Turkic people living in the south, two ethnically divided republics, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria, were created as part of the "divide and rule" policy of the Soviet regime. Thus, instead of two ethnically homogenous republics, Stalin created two mutually contemptuous (if not hostile) units laying the foundations for ethnic strife that began to reassert itself with the first presidential elections in Karachay-Cherkessia in 1999.

In 1999, Vladimir Semenov, an ethnic Karachay, won a run-off against Stanislav Derev, a Cherkess. Accusations of electoral fraud led to demonstrations and scattered acts of violence, as the Cherkess and another kin minority, the Abazins, began to vow for secession from Karachay-Cherkessia. Only Moscow's intervention with unprecedented resources deployed to the region prevented violence. Semenov retained power until the 2003 presidential elections when, in contrast to 1999, only ethnic Karachay candidates ran for office; Semenov was narrowly defeated by Mustafa Batdyev. From time to time, Karachay-Cherkessia experiences waves of terrorist attacks associated with ethnic Karachay involvement in Islamic extremist organizations, such as Hizbu at-Tauhid, aiming to establish an Islamic state in the Caucasus. These type of attacks involves small car-bombs killing police and some ambushes targeting pro-

governmental civilians on trains and in towns and lead to a series of reprisal arrests (Vatchagaev 2011). These attacks are also viewed by authorities and regional experts to be part of a wider Islamic campaign involving Chechens and other ethnic groups. While there are no official policies of discrimination against Islam, there have been an increasing number of radical Islamic groups in the region that are associated primarily with the ethnic Karachays (Vatchagaev 2007). Already grievances have been expressed by Karachay over some official policies, such as the refusal to open a Muslim Institute and the denial of permission to build more mosques. This remains a disturbing trend especially with the continuation of series of attacks committed against Cherkessian leaders in Karachay-Cherkessia, Adyghea and Kabardino-Balkaria.

Ethnic Nationalism as Mobilizing Ideology

Since 2005, the Cherkessian nationalist movement has been moving in a new direction as Cherkessians around the world have begun to mobilize demanding international recognition of the 19th century atrocities committed by the Russian Empire in its conquest of the Northwest Caucasus. However, numerous appeals for recognition of their brutal deportation as genocide have been rejected twice by the Russian Duma in 2006[46] and in 2011 (Dzutsev 2011). Unlike the Chechens, who at least received an apology from the Soviet regime, the Circassians remain the only ethnic group in the North Caucasus omitted from any sort of apology from Soviet or Russian authorities for the historical injustices they experienced in the 19th century. In the international arena, however, the Cherkessian diaspora has been much more successful in approaching this goal. Thus, on March 19-21, 2010, representative Cherkessian from

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[46] The State Duma of the Russian Federation. The Duma Committee on Nationalities' Official letter 3.18-30/10. Jan. 27, 2006.

six different countries participated in an international conference organized in Tbilisi, Georgia: "Hidden Nations, Enduring Crimes: The Cherkessians and the Peoples of the Caucasus Between Past and Future." The conference offered an unprecedented opportunity to examine the problem as the Georgian parliament had begun to examine evidence from historians and scholars as to whether the above-mentioned deportation committed against the Cherkessian constitute genocide. After some deliberations, on 20 May 2011 Georgia's parliament formally recognised the Cherkessian Genocide which took place towards the end of the Russian Empire's conquest of the region, culminating in 1864. Georgia became the first country to recognize 19 century forced deportations of Cherkessians by the Tsarist Russia in the northwest Caucasus as "genocide".[47] Such conferences attended by US, Turkish, and European scholars (out of curiosity rather than professional interest) are held in the countries where Adig communities influence local politics and able to provide favourable media coverage. The Adig nationalist ideology is also diffused particularly among the younger Adig generation through a number ethnic organizations (the Cherkessian Congress in Adyghea; the Kabardin Congress, The Independent Public Research Center, and the Public Human Rights Center in Kabardino-Balkaria). Karachay and Balkar activists are also actively engaging into interpretations of myths about the history of their kin, being convinced that the Karachay and Balkar peoples who are actually of the Turkic origin are Alans and thus are somehow entitled to the territories formerly owned by the latter. Beyond

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[47] The Georgian Parliament passed it with 90 votes to 0 a resolution saying that "pre-planned" mass killings of the Circassians by the Tsarist Russia in second half of 19 century, accompanied by "deliberate famine and epidemics", should be recognized as "genocide" and those deported during those events from their homeland, should be recognized as "refugees."

the abundance in mass media of materials espousing religious extremism and intolerance, the teaching of history in republican educational institutions also contributes to inter-ethnic tensions in Karachay-Cherkessia as the proliferation of history textbooks presenting the past from narrow ethnic perspectives found propitious ground for perpetuating hostilities between various ethnic groups.

Many experts believe, however, that Georgia took obviously a political decision (de Waal 2011, Dzutsev 2011). Apart from the fact that it is clearly a result of Georgia's current post-war rhetoric with Russia, if Georgia really aspires to the moral leadership of the Caucasus, it may also recognise the Armenian genocide, something Armenian groups have requested on several occasions. Moreover, as Thomas de Waal (2011) rightly points out, it is striking that Georgia has only recognised as genocide the Tsarist murder of Cherkessians and not the very similar murder of Abkhaz in 1867 and 1877. If it would also recognise deported Abkhaz as refugees, it would be hard to disagree with Abkhazian efforts to bring about the return of its diaspora. It would also undermine Georgia's claim that Abkhazia's independence project is rejected by a majority of the people who have a right to live there. It seems unilateral for the parliament of Georgia to be contemplating a resolution declaring the 1864 deportations of the Cherkessians to be genocide. Cherkessians and Abkhaz are ethnically and linguistically related and the 1867 deportations were a continuation of what the Russian imperial government had done in Circassia just to the north only three years before (de Waal 2011). Any outbreak of fighting between the two groups would not quickly end before the international community could understand what was happening. Clashes between the two ethnic groups would likely force Russia to militarily intervene on behalf of peace and stability

creating ethnic repercussions in Kabardino-Balkaria and Adyghea. Shebzukhov's assassination is only the most recent in a series of attacks committed against Cherkessian (Adige) leaders in Karachay-Cherkessia. In the two other Cherkessian republics of Adyghea and Kabardino-Balkaria, political leaders have been assaulted and hospitalized, but rarely has a murder taken place so openly and demonstratively.[48] With the 2014 Sochi Olympics on the horizon, the Kremlin could be gambling that a low-intensity conflict in Karachay-Cherkessia would dampen the activity of the Cherkessian nationalist movement (both in the Caucasus and among its 7 million strong overseas diaspora) by diverting the attention of Cherkessian nationalists away from their plans of opposing the 2014 Sochi Olympics. Thousands of Cherkessians around the world are mobilized annually to protest against the Sochi Olympics as they prepare to mark Cherkessians Memorial Day on May 21. The eruption of inter-ethnic strife in Karachay-Cherkessia in effect could neutralize the Cherkessians movement and be Moscow's first step to redrawing the map of the Northwest Caucasus.

The first wave of Cherkessians nationalist activism crystalized in the early 1990s during Boris Yeltsin's period. Within a few years, it gained popular support and became a key player in the struggle for power in the North Caucasus. Even though most of the demands of the nationalists were heard and acted upon by the federal authorities[49], in Karachay-Cherkessia they found themselves locked in a secondary position under the Karachay majority. After Putin became President, the International Cherkessian Association was gradually taken over by the pro-Moscow functionaries of the ruling

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[48] Fral Shebzukhov, an adviser to Karachaevo-Cherkessia's President Boris Ebzeyev who was in line to become Prime Minister, was murdered on May 12, 2010 in Cherkessk.
[49] For instance, Adygheya's status was upgraded to a republic.

Kabardin elites. By 2000 some of the leading members who refused to be co-opted, including Ibragim Yaganov and Valery Khatazhukov, had been excluded from the political scene, leaving no functioning independent nationalist organisations. Thus, post-Soviet local bureaucratic elites, who had already adapted to post-Soviet political realities firmly restored themselves to positions of influence and integrated these nationalist movements into the pro-Kremlin organizations (Tlisova 2008, Light 2008). Various religious movements began to fill the social vacuum that had been created first by the collapse of the Soviet Union and then by the subsiding appeal of nationalism. This vacuum has been rapidly filled by radical Islamists indiscriminate law enforcement brutalities and political marginalization radicalized those, who were already alienated youngsters affected by social vices such as alcohol and drug abuse, a breakdown of moral values and lack of employment. In spite of the fact that the Cherkessian nationalist movement are still run by veterans of early 1990s, the situation has been changing. A younger generation of activists, unlike the veterans, has no experiences of the war in Abkhazia and is not bounded by the traditionally unquestioned authority of the elders in Cherkessian society. At present, Cherkessian politics in the Northwest Caucasus is shaped by two major approaches:

The International Cherkessian Association (ICA): the ICA, which was founded in 1991, is actually an umbrella organisation comprising the main Cherkessian organisations of the time in the Caucasus and in the diaspora in Turkey, Europe, the USA, Syria and Jordan. It was very influential during the war in Abkhazia in 1992-93 and then in Karachay-Cherkessia during the political power struggle in 1998-99 between the Karachay and Cherkessians. However, after falling under the full control of

the pro-Moscow Kabardin elites in the early 2000s, the ICA leaders have repeatedly stated that they no longer intend to engage in ethnic politics and are merely concerned with the cultural and linguistic needs of the Cherkessian community. Nevertheless, the Adige Khases in Adyghea and Karachay-Cherkessia, under the respective leaderships of *Arambi* Khapai and Mukhammed Cherkesov, have begun actively engaging in ethnic politics. Their position on political issues such as the unification of Cherkessian peoples or the Cherkessian Genocide thus differs significantly from the official position of the ICA, of which both organisations are members though.

The non-aligned groups of Cherkessian activists that have a different support base pursue different recruitment strategies and are very keen to engage with international political actors for their cause, all of which distinguishes them from the ICA. "The Cherkessian Congress", "Youth Khase" and "Khase" in Adyghea, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria come into this category as all of them have come into being in the late 2000s. As a common reason, they were born out of frustration with established organisations and their perceived political inactivity and rent-seeking. The leading figures are Ruslan Keshev, Ibragim Yaganov, Murat Berzegov and Fatima Tlisova. The last two have been hiding in the US after being repeatedly subjected to threats and physical attacks for their political and journalistic activities.

There has been another surge of activity of various Adig organizations (Adyghe-Khasa, the Cherkessian Congress, the International Cherkessian Association) in the late 2000s (Tlisova 2008, Besleney 2010). The radical wings of these groups – in many cases based outside of Russia – advocate for a narrow-minded historical vision and assessments of historical events and the latest developments without recourse to

scientifically-substantiated facts and artefacts , and vehemently vow for "restoring the historical justice" for the Adygs. From this perspective, the inevitable amalgamation of Russian and worldwide Adyg groups pursue the following objectives:

- Russia is to be compelled to recognize the genocide of the Cherkessian people that took place during the 19 century Caucasian War;

- Ethnic Cherkessians who are descendants of emigrants and reside abroad are to be granted Russian citizenship through a simplified procedure;

- A new subject of the Russian Federation is to be established that would unite the territories historically inhabited by the Cherkessians (Adyghea, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia, and Krasnodar krai) with possibility of self-rule. The latest objective was already articulated in public through unanimous endorsement by a conference that convened at the University of Columbia in April, 2009. A number of leaders of the Adyg community went as far as to call on delegates to form an Adyg government in exile.

Mr. Cihan Candemir, President of the Federation of Caucasian Associations in Turkey, delivered a speech to European deputies on 6 November 2011 detailing the history of conflict in the Caucasus and the current struggle of the Circassian people to maintain their language and cultural identity listed the following actions that must be taken to ensure the survival of their national identity:

"1. A new constitution respecting human rights must be established: A new civil and modern constitution based on basic human rights and freedoms, in accordance with universal norms, should be established. Any restrictions on languages, religions, and cultures of citizens must be removed. All international conventions guaranteeing human

rights and the development of language and cultural rights must be ratified and applied without reservation.

2. Identity and cultural rights must be guaranteed: All obstacles to the declaration and preservation of Circassian identity must be removed and the existence of Circassians as a community and culture must be recognized. Circassians must be able to give Circassian names to their children and the places they inhabit. There must be an active fight against discrimination and any kind of racism, and a particular focus on eradicating all expressions encouraging discrimination and hatred on the basis of language, religion, ethnicity and gender in school books.

3. Education is native languages must be guaranteed: The government must be supportive, not only permissive, of preservation of the language and culture of its citizens. In this regard, there must be Circassian language classes starting from primary school and all the restrictions impeding language teaching in kindergartens and associations must be removed. Language courses must be started by public training centres and similar institutions and language teachers must be trained. In addition, we call for academic research in any language to be allowed and for graduate and under-graduate programmes to be opened.

4. Circassian TV and radio broadcasting must be established: Full-time radio and television broadcasts must be aired solely in Circassian languages and private publication/broadcasting agencies must be supported.

5. Non-governmental organizations pertaining to Circassian culture must be supported: All non-governmental organizations working for preservation and

development of Circassian culture must be given active support by the Turkish government.

6. Right to repatriation must be given: 21 May must be adopted as the symbolic date for the genocide and the exile of Circassians. In addition, Circassians should also be given the right to return to their homeland. To ensure this ability, transfer of social rights must be guaranteed for those Circassians who would like to return to Caucasia and agreements on the transfer of these rights must be entered into immediately.

7. Relations with Northern Caucasian Republics must be strengthened: Economic relations with Northern Caucasian Republics, where the relatives of the Circassians in Turkey live, especially the Republics of Adyghey, Karachay-Circassian, and Kabardino-Balkaria must be strengthened. Citizens who settle in Northern Caucasia or those who enter business relations with this region must be supported, and scholarships must be granted to the students studying at universities in these countries.

8. Abkhazia and South Ossetia must be recognized: Abkhazia and South Ossetia must be recognized as sovereign states. Transport between Trabzon, Istanbul and Sokhum must be re-established immediately. Military aid to Georgia must be suspended. Economic, cultural, and educational cooperation among institutions and organizations in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Turkey must be developed."[50]

Thus, the most explosive issues of concern to contemporary Cherkessian political activism are:

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[50] Cited from Cihan Candemir's *Speech Addressing Participants in Circassian Day at the European Parliament,* http://www.unpo.org/article/13522 (accessed December 20, 2011).

The 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi[51]

Skakov and Silaev argue that one factor behind the intensification of interest in the historical grievances of the Cherkessians is the 2014 Winter Olympics in Krasnaya Polyana, a settlement that was created on the site of the Cherkessian mountain village of Kbaade (2010:3). There is a broadly accepted perception amongst the Cherkessian peoples that Sochi was the last bulwark in their resistance to the Russian Empire's conquest of Chircassian lands. As such it holds a significant place in the collective Cherkessian consciousness. For this reason there was indignation at President Putin's speech to the International Olympics Committee in July 2007 when he listed the ancient Greeks, Kolkhi and Cossacks amongst the former inhabitants of Sochi, but did not make any mention at all of the indigenous peoples – Cherkessians. To make thing worse, the Russian Olympic Committee invited a Cossack dance troupe to the Vancouver Olympics to represent the culture of the region.[52] As Skakov and Silaev point out (2010), several Cherkessian activists, however, speak of an allegedly joint Russian-Abkhazian position in favour of holding the games in Sochi. The reason for these differences can be found not only in the traditional arguments between the Cherkessian and the Abkhazians national movements, but also in considerations of the very materialistic nature. The Olympic Games in Sochi are expected to bring significant

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[51] An additional factor behind the tension between the Russian authorities and the Cherkessians in the run-up to the Olympics is the creation in 2010 of the Northern Caucasus Federal District (NCFO), which officially divided Adygea (and Shapsugia) from the other administrative subdivisions containing a Cherkessian ethnic element, (the KBR and the KChR), and created a bureaucratic obstacle to the inclusion of Cherkessians of the NCFO in activities connected to the Olympics.
[52] Historically, the paramilitary Cossacks units were primary combat forces who played a pivotal role in the demise of historical Circassia, so this was just adding insult to injury.

profits for quasi-sovereign Abkhazia from tourism, supplying construction materials, and smuggling, while the elite of the Cherkessian community remains marginalized.[53]

In his assessment of Cherkessian position on the issue of holding the Winter Olympics in Sochi, declared by President Medvedev to be another "Russian National Project", Besleney points out three distinct attitudes (2010). First, few organisations, such as the Cherkess Congress, want the Games to be cancelled. They insist that the Olympics cannot be held on land where thousands of Cherkessians were murdered in the Russo- Cherkessian War and that 2014 is the 150th anniversary of what they call "the Cherkessian Genocide". Second, other groups, including the Adige Khase of Adyghea and many intellectuals and academics in the Cherkessian world, want increased and visible Cherkessian participation, similar to the role of North American and Australian natives in past Olympics. The third attitude was that of the ICA and reflected the official Russian position that there should be no special Cherkessian dimension at all (Besleney 2010:2). However, a vigorous campaign of increased public attention mounted by the other groups in recent months has somehow forced the ICA and its member organisations towards a gradual acceptance of the second approach. In addition, the Adyghea Parliament made an appeal to the Russian Government for the inclusion of what they called a "Cherkessian cultural element" in the Olympics. Even Alexander Khloponin, the first appointed head of the newly-created North Caucasus Federal District, keeps saying that the Games should have a Caucasian flavour, given that there has been none at all in the preparatory discussions over the past three years

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[53] Nonetheless, the most important source of mounting tensions in the run-up to the 2014 Olympics is not the over the provenance of the Sochi region, but the problem of relations between the Russian authorities and Cherkessian/Abkhazian society as a whole.

(Besleney 2010). Under such pressure of the looming international pro-Cherkessian media coverage, the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) grudgingly supported the inclusion of Cherkessian themes in the cultural programs at the Sochi Olympics in 2014, a concession to those Cherkessians who felt Moscow had been planning to ignore them and a transparent effort by Russian officials to derail the efforts of other Cherkessians who hope to block the Sochi games. It is likely that some Cherkessians activists will indeed decide to back away from the efforts to block the games in return for financial entitlements in the coming months. This latest decisions by the ROC suggests that Moscow is increasingly concerned about the ongoing Circassian campaign against the most vociferous propagandistic events, especially because that effort is gaining support not only among Circassian diaspora in Turkey, Jordan, Europe and the United States but also because it is drawing the attention of European politicians and environmental activists.

The issue of "Cherkessian Genocide"

There is an almost universal agreement across the whole spectrum of Cherkessian society on the concept of the Genocide against the Cherkessian nation by the Russian Empire. Furthermore, the parliaments of both Kabardino-Balkaria and Adyghea passed laws, in 1992 and 1996 respectively, officially recognizing what they named "the Cherkessian Genocide" and also appealed to the Russian Duma for such recognition (Besleney 2010). This issue becomes divisive, as Besleney points out ,when organisations want to elevate the problem to international dimension by co-opting with the Cherkessian diaspora (2010). A good example of this would be the protest actions of some diaspora Cherkessian activists against the Sochi Olympics during the last Winter

Olympic Games in Vancouver. More recently in March 2010, following a conference on the issue in Tbilisi, an official appeal was made by Circassians delegates to the Georgian Parliament to recognize the Cherkessian Genocide (Besleney 2010). These efforts resulted in Georgia's parliament formally recognised the Cherkessian genocide which took place towards the end of the Russian Empire's conquest of the region, culminating in 1864.

As I have already mentioned, Georgia became the first country to recognize 19 century forced deportations of Cherkessians by the Tsarist Russia in the northwest Caucasus as "genocide". While new activists want to further push the issue wherever possible, the established or state sponsored organisations are prone to a more conciliatory position with regard to the Russian authorities (Besleney 2010). On the one hand, it is a factor in the collective historical memory of the Cherkessian peoples, in their allegiance to a common historical narrative. On the other hand, the narratives of the numerous sacrifices attributed to the Cherkessians during the war with the Russian Empire from 1820s to the 1860s, and during their subsequent resettlement in the Ottoman Empire, are often used by the local elites of the Cherkessian republics to exert pressure on the federal authorities for further subsidies and subventions. At the same time, some specialists cast doubt upon the validity of applying the term "genocide" to the policy of the Russian Empire (Skakov and Silaev 2010). This critique stems not only from the fact that this term came into use in international law only after the Nuremberg trials, but also with the fact that the Russian empire did not seek to murder entirely the Cherkessians as an ethnic group. Rather, it is more appropriate to describe the policy of enforced resettlement in the Ottoman Empire as ethnic cleansings. However, the

outright denial of the Cherkessian sufferings as genocide does nothing to facilitate interethnic dialogue in the North Caucasus, but rather solidifies more radical position of the Cherkessian diaspora (Skakov and Silaev 2010). Even though after the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992-1993, in which volunteers from the Cherkessian republics also played an active role by virtue of their ethnic kinship with the Abkhazians, the consolidation of the Cherkessian peoples had reached a new level, sufficient to transform the Cherkessian national movement into a new political player in the Caucasus, it did not happen (Skakov and Silaev 2010).

Despite repeated attempts to create a single leadership for the Cherkessian national movement, there has been no visible success. Experts indicate that the reasons behind the failure of the Cherkessian national movement to come up with consolidated position are multiple. At present, various associations and centers aspire to represent the interests of the Cherkessian ethnic group. A few of them engage in cultural and educational activities, while others look out for opportunities to be active in politics, intervening frequently in the interests of various political actors in the region. As a result, Turkey-based Cherkessian organizations split in their attitude towards Russo-Georgian in 2008 as well as in their intention to raise the question of Russian responsibility for the Cherkessian genocide carried out by the Russian Empire at the international level before the 2014 Olympic Games (Skakov and Silaev 2010). Political analysts suggest that contrary to the fact that Cherkessians have expected Turkey to back their efforts to restore justice in their homeland, Turkey's geopolitical aspirations and domestic situation, together with Russia's ability to play on both, severely limited Ankara's ability to play that role. In his article written for the Prague-based information

agency "Caucasus Times", Murat Kardanov outlines the main reasons why Turkey, despite the presence of a large Cherkessian diaspora and the role its members play in the Turkish armed forces, will never be the ally Cherkessians had hoped for. First, Turkey is extremely reluctant to press for Russian recognition of the genocide of the Cherkessians because that it will immediately change Russia's stance toward the 1915 mass murder of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, something the Turks are desperately trying to avoid. Second, Turkey is unwilling to play an ethnic card against Russia because it recognizes that Russia could play an ethnic card back with greater success, targeting the Kurdish national movement in Turkey in particular. Third, Turkey is vigorously trying to assert itself as a key player in the larger geopolitics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, a possibility that requires some level of cooperation with Moscow and that many in Ankara believe would be undercut if the Turks became more heavily involved in Cherkessian issues that temper with Moscow's internal affairs.

The republican status of Adyghea is another cause of continual friction between Cherkessians and the federal centre, as Moscow seems to have made plans to merge it with Krasnodar Krai, in which Adyghea is a geographical enclave. Among other issues Cherkessian activists currently have with Moscow are: the erosion of federalism and the diminished political autonomy of the Cherkessian republics under Putin's administration; the abolition of presidential elections; the lack of local independent representation; the removal from passports of sections in non-Russian languages; forced changes to republican constitutions; general lack of freedom of expression and democratic rights. There are also serious conflicts between Cherkessians and the Mountain Turks (Karachay-Balkars) in both Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-

Balkaria over political power and ownership of certain strips of land, both historically and currently, which have destabilized these republics for the past decades. There have been calls from Cherkessians for separation from Karachay-Cherkessia and for the reinstatement in the form of a republic of the Cherkessian Cherkessian Autonomous Oblast, which existed before 1957. Conversely some Balkar organisations have repeatedly voiced their desire to secede from Kabardino-Balkaria in order to establish a Balkar republic. The counter project supported by many Cherkessian activists (except for ICA, of cause) demands the creation of a single Cherkessian republic within the Russian Federation comprising Cherkessian populated lands in the Northwest Caucasus and Cirkassian diaspora. This idea is generally supported by all Cherkessian organisations as first significant step towards resolving other lingering problems. In particular, they want the Russian Federation to acknowledge responsibility for the historical injustice the Cherkessians suffered under its predecessor, the Russian Empire by granting the Cherkessian diaspora special rights and some financial assistance to enable them to return to their historical homeland. In fact, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria republics already had specific legal provisions covering the return of the diaspora in the early 1990s. However, these legal provisions were amended to comply with Russian federal laws, removing the Cherkessian diaspora's any special status. Without this status, very few foreign Cherkessians will want to obtain Russian citizenship and resettle in the Cherkessian republics.

The importance of the Cherkessian factor is nevertheless systematically muted by the Russian authorities, as well as by the international community of independent political analysts, insofar as it affects, first, policy towards Abkhazia, and, second, the

situation in the Northern Caucasus. Due to the presence of an extensive and influential Abkhazian diaspora in Turkey, that country was and will remain a most important external partner for Abkhazia, on an equal footing with Russia (Skakov and Silaev 2010). Indeed this was so even before Russia recognized Abkhazia, and will, to all appearances, continue to be so in the future. In the current context, Abkhazia's "horizontal ties" with the diaspora may be more important than Ankara's official position with respect to the political status of Abkhazia. The Cherkessian factor is also reflected in the attempts made by the Abkhazian government to find ways of surmounting the demographic problem posed by the dwindling Abkhazian population of the republic, immediately addressed by the repatriation of Abazins from countries in the Near East and Russia (Skakov and Silaev 2010). In those republics of the Russian Federation that contain a Cherkessian ethnic component, more complex and multilevel processes are taking place during the past two decades: the privatization of budgetary allocations by local elites; the almost absolute freedom from supervision and pervasive corruption at all levels of governance, and the transformation of the law-enforcement and the judiciary into an instrument serving the rent-seeking ethnic clans. The slogan of ethnic consolidation has been also actively manipulated by local elites as they deemed necessary, both to garner additional subsidies from the federal center, as well as to block those political initiatives that might undermine their privileged status (Besleney 2010, de Waal 2011, Dzutsev 2011).

Under conditions of yawning social gap within local ethnic groups, radical Islamists have begun to take upon themselves the role of spokesperson for the interests of marginalized social strata, acting on a supranational level. For example, in 2006,

when the federal government put forward the project of uniting Adyghea with the Krasnodar krai, the local elite in Maikop effectively played the ethnic card that Adyg rights were once again being violated, despite the fact that there were no major human or material resources standing behind the protest actions. Afraid of another ethnic conflict, Moscow backed away. Diversity of local conditions can explain differences of the ethnic factor in various republics that contain a Cherkessian component. Thus in Kabardino-Balkaria the Cherkessian factor is directed towards preserving the unity of this republic in face of rapidly growing religious extremism. In Karachay-Cherkessia, where the Cherkessians are in the minority, their ethnic consolidation is directed, on the contrary, towards the delimitation and creation of their own republic (Skakov and Silaev 2010). In Kabardino-Balkaria, the Kabardins (i.e. Cherkessians) form a majority and traditionally dominate local politics, whereas in the Karachay-Cherkessia the Cherkessians is a minority. In both republics, the Cherkessians' opponents are the Karachai and the Balkars, two closely related peoples, known prior to 1917 by the name of "Mountain Tatars" or "Mountain Turks". Since both the Karachays and the Balkars advocate the division of "dual-identity" and the creation of a single Karachai-Balkar unit, the competition between these two hypothetical ethno-national projects (Greater Cherkessia and Greater Balkaria, depending on the circumstances) is intensified by the complex of mutual territorial and political claims as well as the role of religion in public space. The ethnic consolidation of the Cherkessian peoples within the boundaries of distinct administrative and territorial formations, alongside the broad development of the radical Islamist movement, could become a powerfully destabilizing factor in the event that the current political order in the Northern Caucasus breaks down further. It is

more than likely that the elites of the Federation's Cherkessian administrative subdivisions (Adyghea and the KBR) and the social activists of the Cherkessian movements (Adyghea and the KChR) will try to garner additional resources for the maintenance of stability in the region by playing on the idea of promoting security at the Games, a sore point for the federal center. The Circassian issue highlights once again how the breakdown of participatory political institutions and the absence of a free media make it excessively hard to resolve important political issues in Russia. Since there are no legally legitimate representatives of the people, it is very hard to arrive at any lasting agreements, and that makes the odds for Moscow and the Circassians finding common ground extremely low (Dzutsev 2011).

On February 28, 2011 President Medvedev appointed two heads of North Caucasian republics, Karachay-Cherkessia and Chechnya. Ramzan Kadyrov was reappointed to continue to rule Chechnya since his first term as head of the republic was about to expire. Karachay-Cherkessia received a new leader, 35-year-old Rashid Temrezov, while the previous president of the republic, Boris Ebzeyev was dismissed from his post before completing his first term, which should have lasted until 2013 (RIA Novosti, February 28). Although the Medvedev's decree cited "his own request" as the reason for Ebzeyev's dismissal, the slow socio-economic development of Karachay-Cherkessia was widely viewed as the primary reason (RIA Novosti, February 26, 2011). However, an activist from Karachay-Cherkessia, Murat Gukemukhov, told the Voice of America that Boris Ebzeyev failed control the republic. As late as February 24 2011, when he tried to rally the local parliament to support him to block his dismissal from the office, only 30 of 73 deputies of the republican parliament turned up. Gukemukhov

asserted that Ebzeyev lacked influence among high-ranking officials in Moscow, respect among local elites, and the necessary management skills to be in charge of this complex republic (www.voanews.com, February 26, 2011). Boris Ebzeyev's sudden dismissal was evidence of one of the most spectacular failures of the new model for appointing regional governors in the North Caucasus, given that he was the first among Medvedev's regional appointees and was unable to survive even for one full term. Having an extensive professional background as a professor of law, Ebzeyev was one of the contributors of the Russian constitution and served as a judge on Russia's Constitutional Court from 1991 to 2008. The newly appointed head of Karachay-Cherkessia, Rashid Temrezov, stated on March 1 2011 that his main goal would be improving the socio-economic situation in the republic and reducing its dependency on Moscow's financial aid (www.kavkaz-uzel.ru, March 1, 2011).[54]

On March 16, 2011 Ismail Berdiev was re-elected in Karachay-Cherkessia as republican mufti for another five-year term. Berdiev said 100 mosques were functioning in the republic and another 30 were under construction. Having said that underfunding was the main problem of the republic's Muslim community, Berdiev unexpectedly revealed that Muslims had been supported in previous years by the Russian presidential fund for the support of Islamic culture and education. The government fund for the support of Islamic culture, science and education was established in December 2006. Its website is in both Russian and Arabic. Curiously, no government body is listed among the founders of the fund, although the website admits the fund was

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[54] It must be noted, however, that during his predecessor's presidency, republic's dependence on centralized budgetary funds was in fact reduced from 71% in 2008 to less than 66 % in 2010.
http://openbudget.karelia.ru/budnord/russian/north-caucasian/karachi-cherkess-republic/resp_cherkesia.htm (assessed on July 5, 2011).

established with the Russian presidential administration's involvement. The fund's website does not specify where its funding comes from, saying only that it does not come from "budget sources" (www.islamfund.ru, accessed on June 22, 2011). The principal advisor of the Russian presidential administration's department for internal policies, Aleksei Grishin, who is also on the board of the government fund to support Islam, stated that the fund was created to help "install a clear barrier to radicalism and the proliferation of extremism." In Grishin's view, much depends on imams "on the ground" and called on local clergy to set up Islamic media outlets to fight extremism (Dzutsev 2011).

On June 21, 2011 the Russian Public Chamber's[55] working group on the North Caucasus held a public hearing on the problems of divided peoples who involuntarily found themselves separated by state boundaries. The Cherkessian issue was one of the most discussed themes, as a majority of ethnic Cherkessians have lived outside their homeland in Russia's North Caucasus since the expulsions by the Russian empire in the nineteenth century. Besides the Cherkessians, the working group also recognized the Lezgins, Avars, Tsakhurs and Rutuls as divided peoples. The participants in the hearing produced a list of recommendations for the Russian government that particularly targeted Cherkessians. They advised the authorities in Moscow to make adjustments to Russian law in order to grant members of the Cherkessian diaspora the status of compatriots with a simplified path to Russian citizenship. The government was also asked to examine the possibility of organizing resettlement programs for members of

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[55] Technically, this is a non-governmental public organization that is supposed to represent all major interest groups in the Russian society. In fact, its creation was initialized and approved by the incumbent political regime to legitimize its monopoly on decision-making processes in Russia (http://top.oprf.ru/news/3355.html).

the Cherkessian diaspora willing to return to their historic homeland in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Adyghea, the Krasnodar and Stavropol regions and the Mozdok district of North Ossetia. Zamir Shukhov, the leader of the Cherkessian organization "Khase" in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, emphasized in his report for the Russian Public Chamber the benefits Russia would obtain from allowing the Circassians to return to their homeland in the North Caucasus. "[If] the correct political assessment [is present], the Russian authorities may find a solution to the Circassian issue before the start of 2014 Olympic Games, on the eve of the 150th anniversary of the Russian-Caucasian war's end," Shukhov stated. The world would evaluate the maturity of Russia's democracy based on how Russia resolved the Cherkessian issue, Shukhov claimed. According to Shukhov, there are about 8.5 million Cherkessians in the world, of whom only about 10 % (900,000 people) live in Russia, mostly in the North Caucasus. An estimated seven million Cherkessians live in Turkey, 200,000 in Syria, 130,000 in Jordan, 150,000 in EU countries, 40,000 in Iraq, 30,000 in Libya and about 30,000 in North America (Dzutsev 2011).

For the post-Soviet type of ethno-religious activism, the pivotal role of the electronic means of communication (with internet in the first place) is akin to the spread of print technology in the 16 century, described by Benedict Anderson as "print capitalism" in his *Imagined Communities*. Unlike many indoctrinated bureaucrats believe, this is not a centralized process: it consists of independent processes taking place both in the Caucasus and the communities in the diaspora worldwide, breaking down the hegemony over information. As long as the legal, financial and administrative restrictions on the media in Russia are in place, I assume that the means of mass

communication will continue to play its crucial part for Cherkessian activism in the foreseeable future. Possible avenues for the resolution of problems connected with the Cherkessian factor in the Northern Caucasus may be found in the realm of rapid reforms: full-scale privatization of landownership; implementation of the provisions of federal law for municipalities; and effective action against corruption at the level of the administrative subdivisions of the Russian Federation. These transformations would permit a significant portion of the population to return to normal economic activity, which is currently impossible, and would thus automatically reduce the unhealthy interest in politically charged questions of ethnic identity (questions of genocide, questions surrounding the Sochi region, questions of relations between neighbors of different ethnicities) and in radical Islamism. However, the Russian government shows no signs of readiness for such transformations in the republic, or even of an understanding of their necessity. Thus, ethnic identity will continue to be the main driving force of political mobilization of Karachay and Cherkessian peoples in the North Caucasus.

Conclusion

The core of the Circassian problem for the federal authorities appears to be the existence of a multi-million strong Circassian diaspora outside Russia that is still ignored by Moscow. The conflict in Syria has further galvanized Circassian activists, and the more the Kremlin postpones finding a resolution to the Circassian problem, the more negative is the international informational background. In spite of Moscow's persistent attempts to soft-pedal and ignore the Circassian problem, this issue has gained momentum due to the changing map of the Middle East, rising Circassians activism,

and Russia's own actions in the Caucasus, which have convinced Georgian policymakers to adopt a proactive strategy toward the North Caucasus. The ethnic consolidation of the Circassian peoples within the boundaries of distinct administrative and territorial formations, alongside the broad development of the radical Islamist movement, becomes a powerfully destabilizing factor in the event that the current political order in the Northern Caucasus breaks down further. The Circassian movement will evolve further and consolidate during the upcoming years before the 2014 Sochi Olympics, stopping the polarization inside the movement and the creation of a strong centrist strand.

The Circassian movement has already developed a clear ideology and made significant efforts toward achieving its three strategic goals. The Circassian Genocide has been recognized by the parliaments of Kabardino-Balkaria (1992), Adygea (1996), Abkhazia (1997), and Georgia (2011). The opportunity to address – both in positive and negative approaches – the holding of the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, the last capital of Circassia, on the 150th anniversary of the Circassian Genocide, created new possibilities for the Circassian movement, especially after the recognition of the Circassian Genocide by Georgia. After the 2012 presidential elections Russia has not yet developed coherent policy to address the Circassian issue which allows regional pro-government elites to come forward with provocative grass-root initiatives. On the one hand, the Kremlin cannot take any effective repressive measures against the Circassian movement because it has already become an international issue and it would further damage Russia's reputation and undermine the very meaning of holding the prestigious Olympic Games. On the other hand, the Kremlin cannot positively resolve the Circassian issues because

that would put it in direct confrontation with other nationalistic movements, which are also gaining strength in the North Caucasus. In the absence of political will for dialogue and compromise, the Russian government will try either to ignore the Circassian nationalism or to split it by gaining control over a number of Circassian activist groups. It is no longer the armed resistance in the North Caucasus that is pressing for the separation of the region from the Russian Federation: the Russian authorities' actions and policies are essentially advancing the same cause by tacitly encouraging hostilities between titulat ethnic groups in the North West Caucasus.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

A great number of articles, analytic reviews, monographs and books have been written about terrorism, religious radicalism, ethnocratism, clan-based organized crime, and the amalgamation of government structures with criminal groups in the North Caucasus. The study of these variables prevent experts from working on more important factors behind the regional developments – the systemic, functional and moral degeneration of state power, and its legislative and executive branches. Throughout Russian history, all constructive and destructive projects have been conceived and implemented from above. The half-decomposed state institutions in the republics of the North Caucasus are the main source and catalyst of highly dangerous social tendencies. Unlike the incessantly hesitant and pensive intellectuals, the professional bureaucrats know well what they want to achieve and how to do it. However, the ruling elites will never relinquish its own interests voluntarily and will continue to ignore this objective reality until the branch of the tree they are sitting on and chopping at the same time finally falls down along with the Russian statehood.

This dissertation sought to shift the emphasis in studies of ethnic and religious mobilization from attempts to explain why this mobilization occurs to an effort to explain the process through which nationalist and religious movements emerge, develop, institutionalize, and fade or aggravate. In doing so, it focuses on the role of the institutional structure in promoting the development of ethnic self-identification and in strengthening ethnic and/or religious identities. It also sought to extend the institutionalist analysis of ethnic mobilization beyond elite-focused explanations by focusing on the mass-based nature of most nationalist and religious movements.

Analysis of ethnic and religious institutions can account not only for the behavior and motivations of nationalist leaders, politicians, and government officials, but also how these actors attempt to persuade potential followers to join these movements and why these followers accept or reject these efforts. In moving beyond elite-focused accounts of ethnic and religious mobilization, I emphasized the importance of collective identities and social networks in spreading the message beyond its initial staunch supporters. In doing so, I argued that ethnic groups are not easily manipulated and are able to mobilize at will in order to achieve their political ends. In order for members of an ethnic group to join a nationalist or religious mobilization effort, they must become convinced that they would gain either materially or psychologically from their participation. Many recent studies of nationalist and religious mobilization emphasize the role of ruling elites in the development of mobilization. According to the commonly shared "ethnic entrepreneur" view of nationalist mobilization, the emergence of nationalist movements in the North Caucasus is a function of the interaction between central and regional ruling elites in divided societies (Linz and Stepan 1996, Gorenburg 2003). Mobilization is usually described as part of endeavors by local elites who belong to ethnic minorities to increase their weight versus   central elites by advocating ethnic claims (Deutsch 1961, Smith 1991, Chaganti and Greene 2002). The mobilization of popular support for these efforts is also viewed as a means of putting additional pressure on Moscow. In this research, however, I argued that mass ethno-religious mobilization could also arise independently of internal elite power struggle. The formation of nationalist movements in the ethnic republics of the North Caucasus can also be fuelled by a broader coalition

of intellectual, professional, and spiritual leaders, who at first opposed the emerging movements.

This dissertation has analyzed competing sources of political mobilization, regime-building and political integration in the three most unstable regions of the North Caucasus: Chechnya, Dagestan, and Karachay-Cherkessia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The cases of the above-mentioned republics offered a window into socio-political contexts in which traditional identities and institutions constrain political actors in favor of informal institutions and trust networks, provided a comparative analysis of informal patterns of social integration and assessed their role in political mobilization. The dissertation adopted an interdisciplinary approach drawing on historical, social, and political science data and literature. My arguments were constructed primarily in supplement and opposition to the literature on ethnic and religious politics in the region. The findings of this research suggest the following conclusions.

The period of political stability in Russia has come to an end. If the trends presented in this research sustain and nothing is done in response, the country would be heading for political cataclysms comparable to the crises of the early 1990s. Signs of a systemic crisis are mounting rapidly in the social and political spheres in the North Caucasus. By far the signs of an impending crisis are: plummeting support for Putin and Medvedev, the melting electorate of the "United Russia" and growing criticism of the political system they incarnate. If confidence in the authorities continues to fall over the next year a full-scale political crisis in the Russian Federation is a distinct possibility. In terms of intensity the future crisis may well surpass the upheavals of the late 1990s (when Russia defaulted on sovereign debt) and may be almost as grave as in the late

1980s which saw the breakup of the USSR (Belanovsky and Dmitriev 2011). The situation in the North Caucasus will become a special and the least manageable factor of the political crisis. It may get out of control at any moment: either as a result of the internal political crisis or under the impact of the international crisis in the Middle East. The situation in the North Caucasus will continue to deteriorate to the point where it would inflict a heavy and possibly crippling blow at the existing political system. The ability to control the situation in the North Caucasus has been a major source of legitimacy of the system crafted by Putin over the past eleven years. If a new spiral of destabilization in the North Caucasus begins later due to aggravating internal political contradictions it will make it much more difficult for the federal authorities to overcome the political crisis and sustain a stable political system. In the worst-case scenario it may trigger processes of disintegration. The possibilities to contain a new conflict in the Caucasus would be limited because its scale may be larger than all the previous conflicts in recent history.

The fundamental question for the North Caucasus is its place within the Russian Federation. The future of North Caucasus hinges on whether it can gain an equal place within the Russian polity. The intricate nature of the region requires an in-depth understanding of options that may lead towards permanent stability. In spite of the plethora of ethnic and religious groups and the implicit rivalry between Sufi brotherhoods and radical Islamists, the additional deployment of Russian military to the region has managed to unite all of them against a common enemy. The indiscriminate brutality of Russia's campaign in the Northern Caucasus along with its protracted socio-economic problems has rekindled the spirit of disobedience and resistance among many

Muslims. While Chechnya still remains the focus of regional developments, the diverse Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia are experiencing similar problems – marginalization, popular dissatisfaction, ethnic hostilities, abject poverty, corrupt local leaders, and the complete dependence on the federal subsidies. The further alienation of the North Caucasus and the subsequent reshaping of borders would mean that a country named Russia in its present form would cease to exist. This tough prognosis of the foreseeable future will occur as inevitably as a cyclical natural phenomenon if the current tendencies continuo to develop according to their natural logic. Protracted discussions over particular features of a state failure in the post-Soviet Russia eclipse the fact that the same features has become fully applicable to the North Caucasus. Insurgency warfare has acquired a tenacity and regularity in that region. Events that were at one time confined to Chechnya are now propagated all across the North Caucasus. These events seem to have devolved into a systemic process with deep-lying sources of reproduction. That said, numerous official explanations that low-intensity ethno-religious conflicts are nothing more than a residual reaction to the suppression of Chechen separatism and chaotic acts of revenge turn out to be unfounded. Even though the immediate and tentative causes of the current situation in the region are widely known and already assessed, the experts, however, have a propensity to look out for more arguments of a speculative and ideological nature. Destabilizing factors in the North Caucasus are intertwined in a complicated and chaotic way, often making it hard to identify the primary and secondary elements. Nonetheless, my objective here is to find effective answers, especially to the challenges whose origins and etiology are fairly well known.

Since 1991, Russia has been slowly but surely losing influence in the North Caucasus. The whole region has been pulling out of the legislative framework of the Russian Federation in two directions, which can be described as "chaotic" and "premeditated." The chaotic element of this process stems from the realities of everyday existence that discourage the population from observing Russian legislation. Indeed, the extremely controversial Russian legal framework is widely looked at as a source of fabulous wealth for bureaucracy with affiliated entrepreneurs and a source of abject poverty and marginalization for others, inflicting irreparable damage on the region's image and reputation in the eyes of its inhabitants, not to mention the international community. Moreover, feeble legislative framework inevitably creates a social, political, economic, ideological, cultural, and psychological environment that gives broad leeway to individuals with highly specified interests. Whatever the case, such interests always pose the major and most ominous threat of a total loss of touch with society, driving it to the verge of a social and political collapse. The very nature of corrupt power cancels out its ability to perform. Nonetheless, Moscow's continuous to bargain support in a standoff between different contentious groups. While building partnerships with local ruling elites, it corrupts clan leaders, religious authorities, influential intellectuals, or generally anyone in the regional political arena who deviates from an accepted pattern and is hence dangerous. In order to secure the uninterrupted functioning of the corrupt administrative machinery, the ethnocratic regimes seek to prove that they are irreplaceable and trustworthy if stability is to be maintained. However, stability implies a commitment to law and order and, therefore, threatens to undercut power and material entitlements of those people who are accustomed to enjoy

the existing precarious situation. To perpetuate this status quo, local elites carefully aggravate tensions in all spheres of social relations, never allowing them to rise to the point of losing control, nor permitting them to completely vanish. Local ethnocratic regimes desperately need low-intensity emergency situations as an effective tool of proving to Moscow their importance that makes the federal government ignore the administrative and judiciary voluntarism as it continues to pay off the loyalty regardless of the ongoing collapse of the system of local government. It has become customary to describe the North Caucasian crisis as systemic. This system, however, will flourish as long as the federal center and the ruling elites of the North Caucasus republics, which live by the same corporate norms, have vested interests in maintaining it for their own benefit. The marginalization of the North Caucasus means that a country named Russia in its present form would cease to exist if the current trends develop. With every passing day, the resource of public trust in the Russian Federation is melting down as people in power continue acting in their personnel interests with no benefits for society.

The turning point of ethno-religious mobilization and crystalizing sub-federal authoritarianism in the North Caucasus is related to three major events. (1) The financial crisis of 1998, which demonstrated the exclusive importance of stable relations for development and formed a public demand for re-centralization from major nation-wide political and economic actors (Mitrokhin 2001:74). (2) The active involvement of regional elites in the coalition "Fatherland – All Russia", which lost during the 1999 State Duma elections to the pro-Kremlin bloc "Unity" that was approved by Vladimir Putin (Golosov 2004, Hale 2006). (3) The economic growth of the early 2000s that led to the expansion of business groups from Moscow to the periphery and encouraged their

aspirations for the dismantling of bureaucratic barriers to local markets (Zubarevich 2002). As a result, the recentralization of the government, initiated in 2000 by Putin (Gelman 2009, Reddaway, Orttung 2004-2005), became a major response to these challenges that aimed to re-establish Moscow's control over coercive and distributive capacities of the Russian state and diminishing the resource base of regional elites. Administrative recentralization (including imposition of federal control over regional ministries) and concentration of financial resources (which concentrated financial flows in federal budget) became the major consequences of this turn. The re-establishment of the federal control over regional affairs led to immediate shift in province-center power balance when governors and chairs of regional legislatures lost their seats in the Federation Council (because single-member districts were abolished in the State Duma elections in favor of federation-wide party lists). According to Golosov, the use of the centralized state bureaucracy was the only enforcement tool of the Kremlin grip over regional nomenclature and demonstrated limited capacity to impose control over sub-federal authoritarian regimes that managed by the early 2000s to cut on autonomy of potential oppositional local actors, such as local business, legislatures, branches of federal political parties or NGO's (2008:25-26). Under these circumstances, Moscow secured new arrangement to exert direct influence over regional and local politics – institutional changes and, in particular, advancement of party politics (without party competition) to the sub-federal level. In the context of political democratization, unlike in the Latin American cases, where these arrangements were oriented toward the dismantling of sub-national authoritarianism, in Russia, they were oriented toward co-

optation of regional authoritarian regimes into federal authoritarian settings (Gibson 2005) to nip growing ethnic and religious mobilization of the local peoples.

Since early 2003, the Kremlin imposed the use of mixed electoral systems on regional legislative elections in order to beef up the influence of federal party "United Russia" at the sub-federal level (Gelman 2008, Reuter and Remington 2009). The imposition of de-facto appointment of regional chief executives paved the way for a new informal contract between the Kremlin and regional ruling elites that resolved the problem of mutual commitments and eliminated barriers toward transformation of "United Russia" into the fully-fledged dominant party (Reuter and Remington, 2009). Thus, formation of centralized party-based sub-federal authoritarianism in Russia in the 2000s became a logical consequence of major trends of Russia's development: recentralization of the state against the background of economic stagnation (Gelman 2009, Petrov 2007), and building of an authoritarian regime, based upon the dominant party (Gelman 2008, Golosov 2008, Reuter and Remington 2009). This centralized authoritarian regime is able to produce more sustainable effects that are based on (1) the concentration of coercive and the distributive capacity of the federal center, which is able to prevent undermining of the status quo in regional politics «from above», and (2) the lack of potent actors, who are able to undermine it «from below». In this juncture, we should not expect that in short-term perspective regional authoritarianism in the North Caucasus will be substantially weakened or collapsed without deep liberalization and democratization of political regime in the Russian Federation. On the contrary, the preservation of federal authoritarian regime will lead to the conservation of sub-federal authoritarianisms on regional and local levels, at least, in the foreseeable future.

Public opinion in the North Caucasus is not endlessly loyal to the idea of further strengthening the vertical structure of state power. It demands that words finally give way to deeds. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union that removed Russia's supra-identity of a strong power, the peoples of the North Caucasus re-adopted ethnic, clan, corporate and other highly marginalized forms of self-identification, restoring traditionalist patriarchal relations dating from the early 17 century. In particular, this pattern legitimizes clan hierarchy with struggle for top positions on the hierarchic ladder, a system of subordination akin to that of vassals and suzerains, and the practice of subservience and tributes with a respective distribution of community wealth, collective cover-ups of crime and arbitrary punishment, implemented through the sporadic revival of common law. As Degoyev and Ibragimov (2006) point out, post-Soviet experience demonstrates that building parties and democracies in small traditionalist societies becomes a plausible and "civilized" cover for inter-clan conflicts and organized crime's activities. During nearly three hundred years Russian politics in the North Caucasus was a dilemma of choosing between "much violence" and "little violence." The Caucasus war in the middle of the 19 century embodied a war between two civilizational projects – the Russian Imperial and the pan-Islamic Fundamentalist. After decades of fierce battles, the Caucasus elites were finally convinced that the Russian Empire could effectively provide both external and internal security arrangements to protect its subjects (Degoyev and Ibragimov 2006).

Followers of radical Islam have a clear-cut message for propagation among impoverished, multiethnic, corrupt, ethnocratic Caucasian societies with a shortage of order, justice and perspective – a supra-national spiritual identity based on the

commandments of pure Islam that oppose human and social vices, nationalism, and crime, on the one hand, and Russia's immoral secular dominance as the embodiment of all those vices, on the other. In a situation where the Kremlin does not have a counter-project with a comparable moral charge, these ideas are gaining momentum in people's minds and hearts, especially among the younger generation. Taking into consideration such factors as high unemployment, a high level of crime, complete dependence of the local budgets from federal subsidies, a high level of migration of the ethnic Russians from the North Caucasus republics, the deepening Islamization of the region, growing anti-Caucasus sentiments in Russian society and rising nationalist feelings in the North Caucasus, give us no reason to assume that the situation in the North Caucasus is changing for the better despite Moscow's vigorous efforts. Besides, Georgia is emerging as a competitor and an alternative to Russian power, capable of influencing the situation in the region. In 2010, Tbilisi dramatically reconsidered its policy toward the North Caucasus and now seems to be poised to play a more active role in this part of the region. Russia will have to either ignore the changing circumstances or embark on a more aggressive policy toward Georgia, which looks unlikely against the background of its own problems.

In Chechnya, where Russia had engaged in two atrocious wars with humiliating consequences, the Putin-Medvedev regime has empowered President Kadyrov to clamp down on both ethnicity and religion as potent mobilizing ideologies. Starting from 2010, however, even inhuman methods have failed to keep Chechnya free from violence. A growing number of deadly attacks on police and administrative officials have been reported since early 2011. It is no longer possible to explain the spike in

violence on the seasonal factor (as insurgents are most active in the spring and summer) or international terrorist brotherhood. However, as the terrorist attacks began to decrease, Kadyrov's highly valued service and his loyalty to the Kremlin secured him impunity despite the fact that his tenure has been rife with abominable human rights violations. Kadyrov's rivals and enemies have been methodically eliminated all across Russia and even beyond its borders. Today, Kadyrov is generously granted "free rein"; enjoying more autonomy than his insurgent predecessors ever hoped to achieve. What started as the Kremlin's project to "Chechenization" of the conflict by converting it into a domestic struggle rather than one between Russian troops and local population has now turned into a so-called "Kadyrovization" of the problem, with all of its numerous drawbacks, humongous political and human costs. As a result, Moscow is becoming increasingly annoyed with Kadyrov's absolutism and the way his meretricious loyalty to the Kremlin is coupled with gradually successful attempts to transform Chechnya into something bordering on an independent sultanate. Finally, there is yawning frustration in Moscow over Kadyrov's dictatorial ambitions to extend his political influence beyond Chechnya to include the entire North Caucasus region with Dagestan in the first place. His persistent attempts to extend his control over neighboring Ingushetia has caused much anxiety in both Moscow and Ingushetia, and has also aggravated many people with his continual attempts to interfere in Dagestan's internal affairs. Nonetheless, as long as Kadyrov's regime is be able to subdue effectively both ethnicity and religion in order to maintain order and generate political support for whatever Vladimir Putin contemplates, there will be no room for any kind of political

mobilization in Checnhya. Nor will Chechnya become a model for democratic solution to the challenges of ethnicity and religion in the North Caucasus.

It has been a decade since Moscow began to dismantle systematically Dagestan's previous political structure, based on general principles of consociational democracy. Dagestan's political authority is now rapidly diverging from its traditional social structure and turning away from the ethno-parties (Ware and Kisriev 2001a), the traditional village-based interest groups that have provided the Dagestan's political system with an internal flexibility, resilience and stability. Personal political weight is no longer based upon internal political conditions, but upon the bureaucratic authority, leaning for power on higher-level administrative organs that are connected ultimately to the Kremlin. The revival of the old Soviet centralized political structure is likely to deprive Dagestan of its traditional ethnic tolerance and to conflict-avert politics. From now on, the ruling elites no longer consider their service to local population as an indispensable condition of their support base, leaving terrain to a number of alternative ideological appeals. Large-scale warfare is unlikely to develop in Dagestan, but violence is expected to continue because of competition over resources and administrative jobs, Chechnya's influence and the rise of local radical religious groups. The roots of the present spike in violence lie in the "hunt for the Wahhabis" carried out by the Dagestan's authorities after the 1999 Chechen incursion and the arbitrary persecution of pious youth by local law enforcement units. The violence in Dagestan's streets is also fuelled by the Islamist militants across the porous border with Chechnya, as well as by the republic's omnipresent corruption and criminality. Reprisals by local and federal security forces have fail to subdue the violence; instead they seem to be

further escalating it. If neither traditional Islam, the Dagestan authorities, the federal government, nor a combination of these institutions is able to alleviate the staggering economic problems, social injustice, and clan system, radical Islam is likely to have increased appeal and will become a powerful substitute for the above-mentioned institutions. This substitution will replace centuries-long ethnic divisions in favor of supra-ethnic religious affiliation as the most acceptable and legitimate source upon which new law and order are established.

Karachay-Cherkessia is now at an important crossroads. Violence in the republic reaches unprecedented levels, as the insurgents have already expanded their insurgency activities and their recruitment propaganda aimed at young people in the republic. In February 2011, insurgency leaders called for mobilization of all their forces in response to the announcement of the counter-terrorist operation in both Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria. Regular reprisal actions against insurgents' relatives also reflect the growing tensions between insurgency and local populations. As an inadequate response to the terrorist actions, the Parliament of the KBR released a new initiative to place legal charges against insurgents' families. Also, an unknown group identifying themselves as an anti-Wahhabi militia named the "Black Hawks" has threatened counter-violence against insurgents' relatives. The new wave of terrorist attacks in the second half of 2010 demonstrated that the younger generation of insurgents has reconsidered their ideological positions. In the past, violence was mainly targeted against security forces as insurgents avoided terrorist acts against civilians. Now, civilians are also becoming targets in growing numbers. If the insurgency developed tactics of interfering with political events and even siding with political groups in

Karachay-Cherkessia, it could mean that terrorist acts might increase after the parliamentary (December 2011) and presidential (March 2012) elections. Instead of engaging in various programs to promote political participation and social integration among young people and to create a channel for political opposition that offers a non-violent alternative to voice political and religious grievances, authorities continue to rely on repressive policies. While officially supporting the ideologies of moderate and traditional Islam against radical Islam, the government continues to interfere with nationalist ideology, which could effectively take part in the battle to win the hearts and minds of the young people and limit the influence of radical Islam on them. Nationalist ideology has been emerging in the last two years in connection with the upcoming 2014 Sochi Olympics, which coincides with the 150th anniversary of the Cherkessian exile in 1864. Up until 2010, neither the federal authorities nor the Islamic radicals have paid much attention to the issue of the Cherkessian ethnic cleansing that took place in Sochi, the last stronghold of independent Cherkessia. The former used to denounce the very existence of the Cherkessian issue, which makes followers of the nationalist ideology more active in their support for the insurgency. The case of Karachay-Cherkessia suggests that if no political solution is put forward to counter insurgents' propaganda and recruitment, further destabilization of the republic along ethnic lines (Karachay – Cherkess) will result in escalation of violence, spilling over to adjacent Stavropol and Krasnodar krais on the eve of the 2014 Winter Olimpics.

When President Dmitry Medvedev participated in a meeting of the presidential council for the development of civil society and human rights, which was held in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria on July 5, 2011, the council's members harshly criticized

the law enforcement agencies in the North Caucasus in such a way that even Medvedev's barely defended his government or denied the abuses that law enforcement agencies regularly commit in the North Caucasus. Medvedev not only silently listened to the facts, but, most strikingly, he did not make any standard promises to change the situation. According to Emil Pain, a prominent Russian expert on ethnic politics, Medvedev was unequivocally informed that the situation in the North Caucasus is rapidly deteriorating and the government has to provide legal ways for constructive civil expression in the region. Otherwise, as Pain put it, the fact that in 2011 "for the first time for all the years of surveys" over half and up to 60 % of the Russians agree with the slogan "Get rid of the North Caucasus!" In Pain's words, the North Caucasus is a "painful problem that Russian society does not understand, but perceives just as a wound" that does not seem to be going away. He further noted that very different Russian political forces, like nationalists, liberals, conservatives and imperialists, are united in the idea of Russia's complete withdrawal from the North Caucasus (http://kremlin.ru, July 5, 2011). Aleksander Khloponin's task as the incumbent presidential envoy in charge of the new North Caucasus Federal District seems to be about sorting out the situation with financial support for the North Caucasus republics and ensuring that at least part of the multi-billion transfers sent from Moscow actually reach their intended recipients. It is obvious that the problem is not that the Kremlin does not see the North Caucasus as an indispansable part of the Russian Federation in the future. The problem is that the Kremlin's near-sighted rent-seeking agenda has driven itself into a complete dead-end, and instead of facing the real challenges that are clearly mentioned in this research, it is able only to make a public show of action on the

eve of a number of crucial political campaigns: imaginary peace in Chechnya for the presidential elections, abolition of major constitutional rights and freedoms, or the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. The 2012 presidential election campaign inflicted another potent blow at the legitimacy of power because political manipulation was evident (International Democrat Union 2012). The continuation of that trend will keep the political crisis simmering and sooner or later it will erupt into the open. According to Belanovsky and Dmitriev (2011), there are a number of factors contributing to the spread of the political crisis in the North Caucasus which at a certain point may lend it a systemic character:

1. Given the silent conformism of the majority, which favored the authorities by expanding the passive support base and ensuring political equilibrium on the basis of status quo, in the context of diminishing confidence in the authorities conformism will turn into its opposite and will create a new political equilibrium based on the majority of society opposing the authorities. Mass disapproval of the ruling elites will turn a critical attitude to the authorities into a behavioral norm. The conformist majority in the North Caucasus will rally more actively around alternative centers of influence such as ethnic clans (Chechnya and Karachay-Cherkessia) and religious groups (Dagestan). Such a shift will take place not only at the grassroots' level but within the "United Russian" party and state bureaucracy. Protest sentiments will also become widespread within the security and military establishments and they will be much harder to contain by targeted financial entitlements.

2. Another aspect of the ongoing crisis in the North Caucasus is the final loss of moral and ideological leadership by the authorities at all levels; the authorities become

the target of universal criticism, ridicule and discontent. Devaluation of the words and ideas emanating from the ruling elites will only aggravate the crisis. Under such circumstances the authorities will expose themselves to ever greater risk by putting forward new initiatives. The right to put forward popular slogans will gradually shift to new political leaders and opposition movements based on ethnic (Chechnya and Karachay-Cherkessia) or religious grounds (Dagestan). The appearance of such attractive slogans will totally discredit the former policies that emanated from the authorities. Being unable to adjust the new challenges, the authorities will have to poach ideas from the opposition that would only boost the influence of their opponents. The utterly controversial parliamentary (December 2010) and presidential (March 2012) elections will trigger the spread of the systemic crisis from central regions to the North Caucasus, because the electoral mechanism no longer ensures a meaningful dialogue with the majority of population. Even managed elections have barely provided the tiny majority in the Duma to the "United Russia" (50,1 %). Moreover, the parliamentary elections have further catalyzed the deligitimization of elections in principle and put into question the legitimacy of the presidential election and the elected candidate. Conditions will be created for the political crisis to grow after the elections.

3. The mounting hostility towards any official actions and initiatives creates a favorable environment for protest actions. Given a low level of overall support for the authorities even an insignificant event can trigger protest actions that would be practically impossible to contain. The existence of a strong law enforcement apparatus provides nothing, but an illusion that it is possible to maintain stability by brute force. Any attempt to use force will, however, quickly turn against the authorities because they

will lose any legitimacy in the eyes of the population and cause an escalation of conflicts on that basis. Belanovsky and Dmitriev further argue that "the use of force will also be constrained by international pressures that become more real as a result of the holding of a serious of major international events in the North Caucasus, notably the 2014 Sochi Olympics and the 2018 World Football Cup. The failure of any one of them would mean loss of face in the eyes of local communities and would further complicate the internal political situation (2011:6-7). Having failed to contain protests, the authorities will increasingly make concessions to the protesters. In turn, the success of early protest actions will contribute to their spread. Further degradation of socioeconomic indicators will continue to undermine unpopular administrations in their respective communities at all levels.

The common assumption that the boundaries of a state and its national identity have the same border or cover the same area is quite problematic in the North Caucasus where contemporary communities are defined by an overlapping ethnic and/or religious identity in terms of their spatial organization. By doing comparative analysis of grass-root mobilization potential in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Karachay-Cherkessia, I suggested that both radical religious and nationalistic elites are using diasporic practices of identity formation as a means of generating economic and political support in an increasingly competitive environment. Furthermore, this balance between a territorially defined administrative units and extra-territorial practices of collective identity formation is rapidly shifting toward the later. Moscow's attempts at socio-political engineering through the appointment of regional governors in the North Caucasus have proven ineffective and self-aggravating. As Moscow seeks to introduce complex

bureaucratic constructions in place of competitive elections for regional leaders, the appointment system in the North Caucasus provokes further deterioration of the situation and complete loss of control over the regional processes. My analysis has also demonstrated how state bureaucracy, leaders of ethnic groups, and emissaries of religious movements in order to achieve recognition and political support, use words that carry special meaning and reanimate within it mystical arguments - a reaction to traumas mainly experienced by previous generations. Collective identity, as a matter of fact, exists on a variety of levels in the North Caucasus: family or clan, ethnic group, religion, territory and, for some, a certain "Soviet" identity. Ethnicity and religion is only one of the multi-layers of identity of the peoples, and not necessarily the primary. I am convinced, however, that unifying religious affiliation will gradually eclipse multiple ethnic identities in Dagestan and will perform a leading role in the politics of the republic. In Chechnya, where internal stability of the Kadyrov's regime is completely dependent upon Moscow's willingness to tolerate it, both religion and ethnicity will be held at bay by brute force as long as material and financial resources continue to flow in. The rise of Cherkessian ethnic nationalism is irreversible, because it has already gained unequivocal support of the Cherkessian diaspora, attention of a number of international none-government organizations, and substantial on-going media coverage in major European languages. Although the possibility of recreating a Cherkessian homeland is contingent upon the ground-breaking concessions on the part of the Russian government, there would still be major obstacles to overcome, both locally and at the international level.

The research has examined differences and similarities between the use of religion and ethnicity as mobilizing ideologies in three republics of the North Caucasus. It has argued that while the underlying causes of conflict generally emanated from a combination of conflicts over control of resources and distribution of federal subsidies, both religious and ethnic identities play a pivotal role. In all case studies, I have found a number of overlapping religious and ethnic identities that changed over time. Even though one or the other identity was clearly dominant at certain periods of time, both identities might be employed instrumentally to identify and differentiate competing groups. According to Fearon and Laitin, despite the fact that there are more ethnicities than religions in the world, only a very small proportion of potential ethnic conflicts turn into actual conflicts (1996). However, while both identities are clearly used instrumentally by activists as mobilizing ideologies, comparative analysis of the case studies shows that religious leaders have a stronger belief in their cause than ethnic activists who essentially exploit ethnic identities rather than believe in them. That is why religious leaders are much more appealing and convincing in their fight for the cause and the necessity to kill or die for it. In the case of religious mobilization, different historical events and ancient scriptures might be invoked and reinterpreted to the advantage of religious leaders. In the case of ethnic mobilization, there are no such scriptures to draw upon or external resources to rely on. While effective mobilization for conflict requires organization, training and support that are provided by both religious and ethnic organizations, religious mobilization also has a strong institutional advantage over ethnic groups that often lack clear organizational forms. Moreover, the potency of religious mobilization is usually multiplied by its ability to reach out to

external resources, both domestic and international. The research suggested that if competing groups differ in both religion and in ethnicity, there is some leeway as to which is employed for political mobilization. Two factors influence which ideology is chosen: which ethnic identity is used politically in the allocation of resources and the demographic situation with the mobilizing identity being one that unites a large and effective group. It is neither religious nor ethnic identity that is most appealing to people from an individual perspective as a basis for political mobilization. Rather it can be the one that it is perceived as being crucial from the point of view of the access to material resources. These findings support the conclusion that the identity that is chosen for political mobilization is defined largely instrumentally, and is a result of amalgamation of resources and politics, rather than a hangover of deep primordial beliefs. However, the pre-existence of strong identities provides the propitious context in which such identities can be recruited for political mobilization.

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