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The Chechen-Russian Conflict: A Discursive Identity Transformation

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Resumen

Este trabajo estudia los dos mayores conflictos checheno-rusos desde 1991 hasta 2009 en relación a las transformaciones identitarias discursivas de los chechenos quienes pasaron de ser denominados “luchadores por la libertad” a “terroristas” en menos de una década. Esto es realizado mediante un análisis de discurso de acuerdo con el post-estructuralismo en Relaciones Internacionales, por ende, enfocándose no solo en lo explícitamente dicho, sino en el contexto y la legitimidad involucradas en las relaciones de poder existentes. Debido al relativo desconocimiento sobre estos conflictos, el trabajo se estructura para describir por separado las dos instancias más importantes de los conflictos para posteriormente señalar los contrastes y similitudes entre ambos. Los conflictos son también contextualizados con los eventos mundiales relevantes, especialmente su relación al 9/11 y la Guerra contra el Terrorismo debido a que la fe musulmana de los chechenos fue crucial para las transformaciones identitarias observadas. Los propósitos de esta obra son mostrar cuán susceptible y poderoso es el discurso actualmente y cómo este interactúa con las estructuras actuales de organizaciones internacionales y los medios de comunicación. Adicionalmente, busca llamar atención a un conflicto que, si bien ha amainado, está todavía presente, pero es ignorado por la mayoría. Finalmente, busca mostrar cómo la comprensión del lenguaje y el discurso puede prevenir la manipulación política.

Palabras clave: Chechenia, Rusia, Dzhokar Dudayev, Vladimir Putin, luchadores por la libertad, terrorismo, 9/11, análisis de discurso, transformaciones identitarias, legitimidad.

Abstract

This paper studies the two major Chechen-Russian conflicts from 1991 to 2009 in relation to the discursive identity transformations of the Chechens who went from being denominated “freedom fighters” to “terrorists” in less than a decade. This is done through post-structuralist discourse analysis in International Relations, hence focusing not only on what was explicitly said, but also the context and legitimacy involved in the existing relations of power. Because of the relatively unknown nature of these conflicts, the paper is structured to describe both major instances of conflicts separately and then, draws the contrasts and similarities between them. The conflicts are also contextualized within major happenings of the world, especially their relation to 9/11 and the War on Terror because the Chechen’s Muslim faith was crucial in the identity transformation observed. The aims of this work are to show how susceptible and powerful discourse is nowadays and how it interacts with the current structures of international organizations and the media. Additionally, it seeks to call attention to a conflict which, while subdued, is still present but largely ignored by most. Finally, it strives to show how understanding language and discourse could prevent political manipulation.

Keywords: Chechnya, Russia, Dzhokar Dudayev, Vladimir Putin, freedom fighters, terrorism, 9/11, discourse analysis, identity transformation, legitimacy.

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Introduction

Every generation experiences certain events whose magnitude is so significant that they may change history. Whether it is war, revolutionary technology or incredible scientific discoveries, they become the center topic of discourse production of an era. In the case of the 90s, the end of the Cold War following the fall of the Berlin Wall characterized an optimistic and revolutionary decade upon which a new world order was speculated. The early 2000s had a different defining event: the terrorist attacks of September 11 on the Twin Towers in New York. This event captured worldwide attention, as the United States declared a War on Terror with the support of most states which considered a new threat coming from non-state actors. However, little is known about the previous existence of a similar terrorism narrative that had taken place on the other side of the globe and in which the United States had been involved, yet not in support of the denouncing State. This is the case of the Russian Federation and relatively recent sovereignty-related conflicts over the territory of Chechnya.

This paper analyzes a conflict that thrived in the 90s but was relegated to the media's backburner as the new millennium came to wage its War on Terror. This is the case of the First and Second Chechen-Russian Wars in 1994-1996 and 1999-2009 respectively. Because these conflicts were based on a territorial dispute in a single state's territory, one could argue that domestic affairs were not of global interest. However, that was not the case. As the end of the Cold War involved the Soviet Union and its successor, the Russian Federation, the 90s attention was set on these newly independent and changing territories. Under that light, the independentist efforts on part of the Chechens were seen with empathy by most of the Western powers much to the frustration of the Russian state. It is then intriguing how, less than 5 years after the end of the conflict and during the second confrontation, the tides changed to favor the Russians. The author of this paper believes such change came from the existing discourses in the global context of each conflict, and how while

the former was enclosed in narratives of optimism and globalization, the latter suffered from the spillover of a pervasive narrative of terrorism and radicalization that portrayed them as a threat to the status quo of a State-centered world order.

This proposal will study the subject through a post-structuralist lens, utilizing discourse analysis to study how the different narratives affected the perceptions and identities of the parties of the conflicts. In order to do so, the key concepts of power relations as shaped by discourse will precede the presentation of historical descriptions of both conflicts. While the focus will be on the description of the happenings in the war themselves, these will be accompanied by brief descriptions of important events on a global scale, as they had the relevance to influence the discourses and dynamics of the conflicts. Then, once it is clear how the events happened, comparisons will be drawn between the two conflicts and the discourses present in both circumstances in order to assess similarities and differences that may contribute to explain the different attitudes that the actors took towards them.

Literature Review

The present paper relies on discourse analysis by the poststructuralist tradition in international relations striving to question the different identity transformations that will be described. As such, it pays careful attention to language considering it “a social system with its own relational logic, [which] produces reality for humans” (Neumann 2009, 61). From language, individuals interact and create representations by which they try to understand the world while simultaneously shaping it through their own productions. These individual representations grouped together allow the abstraction and interpretation of power relations as they exist and act as anchoring points for the strategies of power itself (Foucault 1987, 121). Those linguistic productions are then dynamically reproduced and modified by society through the interactions of the actors (Neumann 2009, 60-61), as they partake in dialectic processes in which actors share and modify discourse through their own agency thus shaping social structures because of the actors’ behavioral changes or lack thereof (Phillips and Hardy 2002, 6). It is then, through the set of different social productions, actions, and representations that power relations are created and give rise to social and political interactions (Campbell 2013, 235). Thus, discourse will not be only understood as the spoken or written word but rather as a narrative (Kubiak 2004, 295) and will be analyzed within the historical setting that shaped them and was thus shaped by them aware that while history might try to be all-encompassing, it is also unavoidably nuanced (Foucault 2000, 55-61).

Following the aforementioned processes, normalization takes place and usually binds some identities to particular discourses by the means of metaphors that create an antagonistic narrative between actors with the goal of institutionalizing that discourse (Neumann 2009, 61). While institutionalization usually conveys the idea of conventional forms of power such as law, the concept of power will be treated as practically omnipresent in the social sphere as it exists in and is produced (and reproduced) by all sorts of relations ranging from familiar to production-oriented

(Foucault 1980, 141-142). Because of this, key considerations for the analysis are immanence, continuous variation, double conditioning and especially the principle of tactical polyvalence of discourses and its relation with silences.

On the previous observation, it is important to point out that neither discourse nor silence submit to power or antagonize it, rather they shape it and transfer it as well as limit and expand it (Foucault 1987, 123). Discourses and silences are constitutive elements of power and thus they should be understood as precursors of action (Neumann 2009, 62). By this reasoning, the paper explores the way in which the constructed identity of the Chechens experienced transformations through the official Russian discourses, and those of foreign powers. As the principal actors of interest, one observes the management of both strategic and communicative uses of language by both Russians and Chechens, noting that frequently the lack of a common ground of meaning interferes with mutual understanding (Fierke 2002, 348). In addition to sharing conceptual common ground, the legitimacy of a discourse depends on the ethos of the speaker—their trustworthiness and knowledgeability on the topics (Tedford 1990, 6). Particular attention is given to Russian discourses because of the consideration of legitimacy that a state commonly holds as well as its interactions with the silences into which minorities or rebels, in this case referred to as terrorists, are commonly confined as they follow certain “rules” described by Fierke (2002):

A "game" involving a global coalition of states and terrorists relies on a different structure of rules than a balance of power. Given the multiplicity of language games, the patterns evident in human behavior cannot be captured in propositions that mirror the logical structure of the world throughout time. They are rules that govern how we reason and interact with others in different contexts of social or international life. These rules are a basis for attributing meaning to both the material world and social interactions within it. (...) The pattern governing interactions with "rogue states" or "terrorists" differs from that of interacting with recognized states. (...) [The Cold War] provided a framework for attributing meaning to any number of other conflicts, from ethnic wars to terrorism to economic transactions. (338)

On that note, when approaching the notions of the legitimacy of discourse, it is crucial to understand that the author does not question or strives to validate or not the Chechen identity of resistance towards Russia. However, the way in which that resistance was portrayed at different

moments in time is what will be analyzed both through academic sources such as journals and news articles in order to try and balance the subjectivity of history in retrospect. As Foucault noted, resistance is not external to power but exists within and because of it as targets for its implementation, as antagonists or even as scapegoats for the exercise of power (1987, 116-117). While this analysis will focus on the Chechen-Russian conflicts specifically, by no means it tries to portray the Chechens as a sole or key embodiment of resistance to the Russian power. Resistance entails a multiplicity of actors and productions which form a web throughout the power discourse and -if numerous enough- may be responsible for the orchestration of a revolution (Foucault 1987, 117 - 118). The subject of this paper is set on this population because of the significance that it had, acknowledging that its resisting character interacted with other forms of resistance by Russians themselves, the media or by both states and non-state actors. Nevertheless, one needs to be aware that the Chechens were by no means a monolithic entity because of their own kind of organization, mostly under various competing warlords (Russell 2005, 107). Hence, while they could appear and act as a united front against a common enemy during war times, the different leaders of the Chechen factions had their own political, economic and even religious ends to pursue which were, most often than not, incompatible with those of other Chechens (Walsh 2006, The Guardian 2010).

Now, it is following the notions of power and discourses that some discourses of interests will be explained: globalization and terrorism. For one, globalization as discourse is here understood particularly in the context of a post-Cold War world, especially on the repercussions of it creating a “new world” (Selchow 2017, 90). This specific understanding of the discourse is behind this paper’s consideration of the reactions and contributions of international actors in a relatively domestic issue as a secessionist/independentist conflict can be. Considering that the wars in question are strongly related to the Soviet Union’s break down and the independence of several territories, this narrative on globalization is deemed adequate for analysis. Taking on Foucault’s understanding of discourse as processes that allow for the production of the objects they refer to, the

globalization discourse that will be herewith used follows Selchow's proposal of it "as a moment in the re-production of a web of meanings that brings out an 'object', which I call 'new world'" (2017, 95). This "new world" begins to exist in the post- Cold War period as it constituted the end of a decades-long international narrative centered on a bipolar balance of power and thus left a conceptual vacuum (Selchow 2017, 91), which was attempted to be filled with new paradigms such as Huntington's "Clash of civilizations" or Fukuyama's "End of history".

The aforementioned conceptual vacuum allowed for other discourses to be questioned and became a fruitful time for new discourses to arise while old ones renewed themselves, such as the centuries-lost Chechen autonomy one which strived to become a modern-day state rather than return to their previous existence as a clan. The rising new power dynamics called for a different global strategy (Foucault 1980, 142) which would be that of globalization-discourse and its power to create and shape a "new world". Now, since power was reshaping itself within the new strategy, so was the resistance within that power and that is part of how the terrorist narrative became relevant in post-Cold War Russia as will be explained below.

The terrorist narrative is not new; however, it could be seen as a particularly contemporary discourse because of its marked presence in everyday life after the events of September 11, 2001 (Kubiak 2004, 296). Operative definitions of terrorism as a phenomenon can be traced back to 1930 when it was understood as "the method (or the theory behind the method) whereby an organized group or party sought to achieve its avowed aims chiefly through the systematic use of violence" (Laqueur 1977, 3). This kind of definition allowed it to be distinguished from governmental action and political stances as well as mass uprisings or other forms of organized violence. As a discourse, terrorism is commonly paired with notions of rebellion and protest and with a negative interpretation because of illegitimate use of violence against what is considered the status quo (Laqueur 1977). Along those lines, it is also frequently associated with resistance and the demand

of righting -usually historical- wrongs (Laqueur 1977, 9-13), even if that understanding has been cast aside in the most recent manifestation of this narrative due to the War on Terror after 9/11.

An additional consideration in the Chechen case is that of their status as a different ethnic group and a minority -regardless of being the largest one of the Caucasus (Russell 2005, 103). This condition also influences the narratives about them both domestically and internationally. For one, they are relegated to a generalized non-identity (JanMohamed and Lloyd 1987, 16) as non-Russian. Simultaneously, they are subjected to condescending and victimizing discourses (Radhakrishnan 2006, 44) that can be counterproductive to assertive and revendicating actions on their part (JanMohamed and Lloyd 1987, 7-8). JanMohamed and Lloyd (1987) refer to non-identities as ones created by those in power as they acknowledge the subdued (minorities) as “others” who exist within their society but do not belong to it while simultaneously ignoring and, on occasion, undermining their form of self-identification (16). In this case, it goes back to the Russian empire and the Chechens’ reluctance to be a part of it, and even worse, to accept to be referred as “Russians” but facing the struggle of not being allowed to identify as Chechens (Souleimanov and Ditych 2008, 1209). The dynamics of negative-based identities remained until the 90’s as the Chechen people suffered from deportations, forced exile and even “indirect” genocide during the Soviet order, especially under Stalin’s rule (Russell 2005, 103-104). Additionally, during the 90’s plenty of the international discourses that surrounded their struggles tended to victimize them (Doukaev 2014), which served their cause to gain empathy and support, but did little to change their situation. Both victimization and negative identities are witnessed throughout the conflicts, yet the reader should bear in mind that they both interact with one another and even overlap.

First Chechen-Russian War: 1994 -1996

The Conflict

The historical overview needs to start before the war officially began in 1994 in order to understand how it came to be. As a general observation, it should be noted that Chechen-Russian relations and the resulting conflict are centuries old, with confrontations dating back to the 19th century and the expansion of the Russian empire under the Romanovs (Menon and Fuller 2000, 33). Taking into consideration the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Chechen territory -or province- held elections that were won by General Dzhokar Dudayev who promptly unilaterally declared Chechnya as an independent state from the Russian Federation (Souleimanov and Ditych 2008, 1209). However, little attention was given to these claims by the then-president, Boris Yeltsin. He approached the issue by allowing certain liberties and concessions to the religious organization in the Chechen territory even if he passed economic restrictions and sanctions up to the point where he declared a state of emergency in the region (Souleimanov and Ditych 2008, 1209).

Most notably, Yelstin recognized Islam as a “traditional religion” allowing for the construction of mosques and public practice of Islamic customs which had been previously prohibited, giving way to a Muslim resurgence of sorts (Dannreuther 2010, 212). However, on the political aspect, Chechens exercised a *de facto* independence in their laws and procedures for while the religious concerns were recognized and taken advantage of, it was conceived as a disguise of sorts for their national struggle according to Dudayev’s statements such as: “I would like the Chechen Republic to be an institutional secular state” (Souleimanov and Ditych 2008, 1209). The increasingly more daring actions and liberties that had been taken by the Chechens eventually met several military exercises and attacks from the Russian forces in 1993 (Gass 1997, 983). After these, Dudayev declared war on Russia in September 1994 which led to a Russian invasion meant to eradicate the independentist movement in November of that same year (Gass 1997, 983). As this conflict would last until August 22nd, 1996 and would take the lives of approximately 200,000

civilians, almost one-fifth of the Chechen population, it encapsulated the Chechen identity as that of “freedom fighters” as far as the worldwide media was concerned (Mirovalev 2014).

The Discourses

Nevertheless, while the Russian government tried to legitimize the repression and actions against the Chechens because of their secessionist actions, the Islamic radicalization discourse was not used by the state during Yeltsin’s period (Dannreuther 2010, 112). On the contrary, religious discourses of radicalization were used by the Chechens against one another, exemplified by this account of a warlord’s mercenary: “We’re too busy fighting amongst ourselves to care about the militants” (The Guardian, 2006). To understand this claim, one notes that because of the exile and the existence of different branches of Islam, once Yeltsin allowed for Islam to reflower in Chechnya, the different representatives frequently blamed and accused one another of being “radical” and “dangerous” (113). This happened as political and religious leaders accused one another of spreading fake faith because while some defended a Russian-Islam, others accused them of being jihadist and “Wahhabis”, being the true anti-Russian faction (Dannreuther 2010, 113). Because of this internal instability and competitiveness, radical Islamic discourse could be seen as one of the debilitating and internally destabilizing factors that came from the Chechens and was later on used by the Russian government.

In contrast, the Russian government expressed a rather different source of worry: the potential spread of ideas of independence and uprising by their neighboring Caucasian peoples such as the Karachai, the Tartars, the Ossetians and the Lezgins (Gass 1997, 983). In addition to the very worrying prospect of losing even more territories after the collapse of the USSR, these territories held strong value for the Russian Federation because of their richness in natural resources, namely oil (Mirovalev 2014). All in all, some would argue that the Russian concerns were more in line with the true threat that the Chechen movement posed to their sovereignty, as conflicts in the North

Caucasus in the early and mid-90s were approached as being ethnonational rather than religious (Dannreuther 2010, 114). This was because the possibility of the different peoples of the Caucasus bonding over Islam's sacred war was rather unconceivable but collaborating or simultaneously engaging in uprisings against the Russian State for their own quests for independence was a risk that the Russian authorities could not afford.

However, it should be noted that under post-structuralism both denominations would not be mutually exclusive and could easily coexist and/or complement one another, as each party interpreted their own reasons for engaging in war. The usage of each, can prove fascinating as the ethnonational denomination served Russia to avoid certain responsibility on the conflict and blame violence on competing Caucasian clans (Dannreuther 2010, 119) but also exposed it during the First Chechen war to a discourse of an oppressing state against a minority (Doukaev 2014). Putin tried to avoid international censure before 9/11 by strategically professing multi-national policies such as declaring November 4th "National Unity Day" to celebrate Muslim minorities (Dannreuther 2010, 120). However, after 9/11 Putin made sure to stress that radical Islamist terrorists were the problem as by 2004, he declared the Caucasus as "rich soil for extremist propaganda" (in Snetkov 2007, 1357) and it was his duty to defend Russia's statehood.

Now, the First Chechen-Russian War is considered to be brief because of its duration of 20 months (BBC News 2018). As the Russian troops had invaded Chechen territory, most of the damages and human loss affected the Chechens. However, for context, it needs to be addressed that even if the Chechens had lived a couple of years following a state's structure, Chechnya had historically been a land of warlords, mafias, and guerrillas (Russell 2005, 105). Such was the case that the traditional Russian image of the Chechens during the 19th century used to be that of a "lone outlaw" or "noble bandit" under the word *abrek* (Russel 2005, 103). However, after the forced exile under Stalin's rule and the eventual recolonization of their land, the 20th century witnessed a transformation from the rather mysterious, albeit somewhat romanticized, image of noble bandits to

thieves (*wor*), especially as Chechen mafia crimes became known because of their unmatched violence and brutality (Russell 2005, 104-105). With that track record, it was hard to justify plenty of the Chechen's actions, and yet, the world did and compared the Chechen-Russian conflict as a new manifestation of the tale of David against Goliath (Russell 2005, 107).

Hostage Situations

On that line, the events that truly captured the attention of the world and could have risked losing the international support for the rebels were several hostage crises, especially those in Budyonovsk in June 1995 and Kizlyar in January 1996. Before delving into the situations, the numbers of both perpetrators and victims are approximations since no real evidence of the figures was found. After Russian troops had seized Grozny -the Chechen capital- in February 1995, the conflict spread out from the capital (Gass 1997, 894). In an effort to fulfill the threats to spread the war to other territories, several Chechen rebels led by Shamil Basayev went to a hospital in the Russian city of Budyonovsk to do so (Specter 1995). There a group of approximately 100 Chechens took hostages (presumed to be as many as 1,000) of which a hundred were killed both by the rebels as well as by the Russian forces during the rescue operation (BBC News, 2004). Before that rather Pyrrhic victory, the Chechens had expressed the following demands: "that Russian troops withdraw immediately from Chechnya, that President Boris N. Yeltsin beg[a]n talks with General Dudayev and that the rebels be permitted to meet with reporters" (Specter 1995). While the second demand was met and eventually failed as dialogues were abandoned, the first demand was blatantly ignored and the third was partially conceded. No such "luck" would accompany the Kizlyar crisis.

While the aforementioned attack had been publicly denounced by President Dudayev as "such attacks can only discredit the Chechen people" (quoted in Specter 1995), the next hostage situation in Kizlyar (Dagestan), where 3,000 hostages were detained in a hospital by approximately

200 Chechen militants, received no such chiding (BBC News, 2004). Because their demands for Russian troops to abandon Chechen territory had not been heeded, the same violent methods were applied. However, after Budyonnovsk a heavier oath hung in the air during negotiations as President Dudayev's had vowed to ensure that Russia would "burn in hell" (Specter 1995). And burn they did. As the Russian forces acquiesced to the demand of letting the rebels get back to the Chechen territory, most hostages were freed even if some had already been executed -or at least pretended to- and some others served as shields and guarantees for the rebels' safe travel (BBC News 2004). Another unsuccessful rescue mission failed and took the lives of around 60 hostages, more than 100 Chechen rebels and some 160 hostages used as human shields to assure safe passage (Barber 1996). The losses for each side could be debatable because plenty of the rebels in both hostage situations wore a very particular item to negotiations, green ribbons that identified them as self-declared suicide warriors (Specter 1995) which would probably modified their own perception of "losses" as far as human lives were concerned.

The usage of the green ribbons accounts for another aspect of this conflict, that while the Russian State-enforced tactics meant to invade and overpower other armies, their opponents had engaged in a guerrilla war with a deadly twist (Menon and Fuller 2000, 41-42; Mirovalev 2014). Because of the guerilla tactics, rarely did the Chechens actually confronted the Russians as a single or coordinated front (Trenin 2000). Several Chechen groupings would seize control of strategic locations, often secluded, rural areas from where they would operate to sabotage Russian bases and equipment, stage ambushes and would often recruit along the way (Trenin 2000). The suicide warriors identified themselves to know who accepted to be left behind from an attack, or who would participate in highly risky operations (Trenin 2000), or as in the described case, who would participate in negotiations under the risk of being imprisoned or ambushed. On that note, some speculated that under circumstances when capture was inevitable, it was also meant to be a "permission" to be killed to avoid being taken alive as they believed in "svoboda ili smert!"

(freedom or death!)” (Gasperini 1995), but that was never confirmed nor denied. Notoriously, this suicidal approach to confrontations was what made their usage of guerrilla techniques more aggressive and lethal than the standard. However, they should not be confused with suicide bombers, who appeared in the second conflict and were mostly women, the infamous “Black Widows”.

Resolution (or lack thereof)

As violence continued to spiral, the war became a jihad, even if only in name, as figures such as Akhmad Kadyrov—Chechnya’s supreme mufti appointed by Dudayev in 1995—officially declared jihad and preached for each Chechen to kill at least 150 Russians (Brennan 2004). Eventually, the war ended without a clear victor, or so indicated the agreement of a ceasefire in Novye Atagi on August 22nd, 1996 between Chechen General Maskhadov and Russian General Lebed (Asatiani 2007). This was later formalized on May 12, 1997, known as the Khasavyurt accords which contemplated giving compensation to Chechens that had been affected by the war as well as other economic concerns (Asatiani 2007). Having achieved a *de facto* independence, the Chechens started their new chapter under General Mashkadov’s leadership as elected president (Menon and Fuller 2000, 41). The resulting negative peace for the next 3 years was considered a victory for the Chechens and a defeat for the Russians, an association which would characterize the Yeltsin period and a heritage from which Putin would do his best to distance himself (Dannreuther 2010, 215).

Second Chechen-Russian War: 1999 - 2009

The in-between Period

Just before the Second Chechen-Russian War occurred, Maskhadov's presidential period was filled with destabilization attempts on behalf of Moscow (Menon and Fuller 2000, 41). These were mainly carried out by providing support to previous rebels Shamil Basayev and Salman Raduyev who became warlords and continued the independentist movement from a revolutionary Islamic perspective (Menon and Fuller 2000, 41). However, one particularly useful ally that Putin found once he became Prime Minister of Russia in 1999 was none other than Akhmad Kadyrov, who lost his status as supreme mufti in 1999 when he became a Pro-Russian militant and fostered great enmity with Maskhadov (Brennan 2004). This became rather apparent as he received official support to establish a new capital for a new "interim administration" in the city of Gudermes, while Maskhadov held the democratic power in Grozny (Brennan 2004). Putin figured out that the safest and most effective way to win over Chechnya was not only to divide and conquer but to actively nourish pro-Russian feelings with the help of those warlords that had their own political agendas, such as Kadyrov (Dannreuther 2010, 115).

In 2003, those efforts would bear fruit as the Chechen elections would show 82% of approval for Akhmad Kadyrov, who was publicly accused of fraud in allegiance with Moscow, yet never faced trial for it (Brennan 2004). While Akhmad Kadyrov was promptly assassinated, his successor held office only long enough for his son Ramzan Kadyrov to take over the presidency once he reached the legal age of 30 (Markosian and Matloff 2012, 50). This transition was less smooth than it could appear as after the assassination of his father, Ramzan did assume the leadership and became a warlord for his father's followers before taking power "officially" in 2006 (Hauer 2018). This contributed to an increase in violence and lawlessness which was accompanied by an almost counterintuitive reconstruction of Chechnya with Moscow's funds (Steele 2008). However, these strategic plays by Putin were only the beginning for several events that would make

his pro-Russian and anti-Chechen campaigns much more effective both domestically and internationally.

The Conflict and Its Discourses

Governance difficulties kept on appearing for Maskhadov as bombings on apartment buildings in Buynaksk and Volgodonsk between September 4th and 16th, 1999 which left at least 300 civilians dead (Dannreuther 2010, 114). Moscow was only too quick to thrust the blame upon the Chechens even if President Aslan Maskhadov and rebel leaders Shamil Basayev and Emir Khattab adamantly denied their involvement (Dannreuther 2010, 115). However, even if the masterminds behind the attacks are still a mystery to this day, Putin planted the seed of doubt and mistrust in very fertile minds whose national pride had taken several hits. If anything, not only were these attacks a starting point for the renewal of the conflict, but their implications brought forward one who would become a principal character in Russia's future: Vladimir Putin. Before the attacks, he was the relatively unknown security chief of the Federal Security Service (FSB) who in the wake of the attacks, got promoted to Prime Minister (Russel 2005, 107). By March 2000, Putin, the newly elected president of Russia, decided to fulfill his promise of establishing a 'dictatorship of law' (Sawka 2008, 879). With a campaign focused on a zero-tolerance policy and directed towards the recovery of Russian identity and pride, Putin's election marked the start of a new era for Russia. Since the aforementioned apartment bombings, Putin would find very easy excuses for the "anti-terrorist operation" that the government would develop, as this conflict was not portrayed as a "war" on the Russian side (Dannreuther 2010, 115).

Now, on other particulars of the conflict, one definite tactic that became emblematic of the Chechen conflict was that of the suicide bombers, an unforeseen technique that would shape the Chechen party's identity into that of a terrorist front that was absent and actively avoided during the first conflict (Russell 2005, 112; Weir 2002). Perhaps the most curious aspect of this tactic was the

involvement of women in a rather sexist context (Reuter 2004, 26). Increasingly negative attention was garnered by the “Black Widows”, female suicide bombers that started their lethal modus operandi (MO) in 2000 (Jamali 2017). Regardless of the rather sexist practices and increasingly controlling policies of the Kadyrov regimes instituted based on Sharia law (Markosian and Matloff 2012, 50), the Black Widows took a front role in the terror activities of the warlords and Wahhabists’ jihad. Eventually, this MO would lend itself to draw parallels with the War on Terror waged in the Middle East by 2002 (Russell 2005, 112). The ever-spreading suicide attacks allowed the government to formally change the “issue of Chechnya” for the “situation of the North Caucasus” (Dannreuther 2010, 115), even if the political measures to solve it involved military actions almost solely around Chechnya (Snetkov 2007, 1358). Understandably, this could appear contradictory, and that is because it is. As previously mentioned, most of the rest of the North Caucasus was not Muslim and the little Muslim presence over the area was due to the previous forced exile and small refugee settlements of those who fled the first conflict (Russell 2005, 103-104). To better understand this, bear in mind the declarations of the Russian Justice Minister, Yuri Tchaika who referring to the conflict in 2004 as an: “invisible threat without borders” (Translated in Snetkov 2007, 1353). That phrase condenses one of the key arguments that the Russian authorities used in their discourse to justify their counter-terrorism operation to prevent the “infection” of radical Islam to spread throughout the Caucasus.

As explained above, suicide bombing was a new technique for an old conflict and it accounted for most of the panic that civilians reported in surveys (Snetkov 2007, 1353; Russell 2005, 112). Simultaneously, news coverage repeatedly informed about increasing suicide attacks, conveniently leaving out that most targets had been military settlements or government facilities with little-to-none civilian presence (Reuter 2004, 36). Nevertheless, the Chechen party still resorted to their tried and true method, hostage-taking, to drive their demands across albeit with opposing effects than those observed during the first conflict. Particular attention will be given to

the two biggest crises during this conflict: the Moscow Dubrovka Theatre siege in 2002 and the Beslan School siege in 2004 which were both hostage situations not unlike the Budyonnovsk and Kyzlar events but with entirely different perceptions from the Russian and international public.

Hostage Situations

On the one hand, the Moscow Dubrovka Theatre siege could be considered another example of a Pyrrhic victory, however this time favoring the Russians. On October 23rd, 2002, 979 people were turned into hostages as 53 armed men and women would seize control of the place for the next 58 hours (Snetkov 2007, 1352). Like previous hostage situations negotiated between Russians and Chechens, Dubrovka had an exorbitant number of casualties as 128 hostages died by poisoning due to the rescue mission on October 26th (Snetkov 2007, 1352). While no party came through clean-handed, the Russian party defended its actions as sufficient and appropriate for the threat even if some evidence shows that careful planning could have reduced the casualties with minimum effort. One would argue that the significance of the attack derived not only of the tragedy and mourning that such a number of casualties stirred in the Russian people, but rather because it was performed in the heart of Russia, not unlike 9/11 taking away a distinctive symbol from the US. In a fashion akin to 9/11, the press, which had become strictly regulated, kept the event on everyone's mind all the time (Snetkov 2007, 1358). These actions served to elicit rage and promote sensations of otherness from the Russians to the Chechens, but also contributed to desensitize the population to the measures that would be taken in retaliation.

On the other hand, the Beslan School siege adds other elements to the analysis of the hostage situation. On September 1st, 2004 the new school year inauguration ceremony was interrupted by 38 armed people who took 1200 hostages at once and mined the building (Snetkov 2007, 1352). And, if Dubrovka had enraged the Russian population, Beslan squeezed and tore at their hearts as by the time they escaped on September 3rd more than 300 civilians had died of

which half of them were children, and 200 people were missing not to mention the hundreds wounded (Snetkov 2007, 1352). Beslan differs from Dubrovka not only because it happened in a small and far-off town, but also because it involved a large number of children which was unsettling even before there was a death count. Not only had the Chechens lost most of the empathy, or even disinterest that the Russian population had for them, these terrorist acts of such a large magnitude only worsened the international image that they used to have. This further contributed to the notions of otherness, dehumanization and even demonization to which Chechens were being subjected, a phenomenon which went as far as to create the term “Caucasophobia” (Hawkes 2011; Russell 2005, 112), exemplified by this extract of the *Moscow News*:

Most city residents of peasant origin in Russia blame Jews or "Caucasians" (people who come from the Caucasus) for all their woes. Despite the fact that Caucasians (being Caucasians) are largely white-skinned, common Russians call them blacks or black asses. Police officials have even come up with a term "a person of Caucasian nationality". (Russell 2005, 105-106)

Resolution

While the “official” end of the conflict was announced on April 16th, 2009, the direct confrontations had already mostly ceased by 2007 (Schwartz 2009). However, it should be noted that since this conflict was not outright recognized as a war, but rather an antiterrorism mission by the Russian state, it was not until a document had been issued to conclude the operation that the decade-long confrontation had a semblance of closure. Nevertheless, President Ramzan Kadyrov had been instructed since 2007 to take charge of the reconstruction of Chechnya, particularly, Grozny (Schwartz 2009). In an impressive turn of events, not two years after the informal ceasefire, Grozny could not look any more different from its wartime appearance. Nonetheless, regardless of this healthy and thriving image with international brands and businesses working (Steele 2008), Chechens had not yet healed and some causes of the clash were still present, such as poverty and one of the highest rates of unemployment in the Russian Federation (Markosian and Matloff 2012, 54).

As if that were not enough, while the Kremlin's sponsoring of Kadyrov had been a well-known "secret", the reconstruction processes funding that came from the centralized government quieted some of the critics (Steele 2008). It should be mentioned that the funds came only after Russia started to participate in the oil market, coincidentally the very same resource that is rather abundant in the Chechen territory to which Moscow had finally gained access (Steele 2008). Some of the "moderate" Chechens that supported Kadyrov considered his change of allegiance as a strategy to get resources for their own troops on Moscow's penny and that another Chechen uprising would take place (Steele 2008). However, a decade has passed since then and Kadyrov is just as -if not more- comfortable than he used to be, taking liberties because of his relative importance to the Russian officialist regime as well as to the Chechens themselves (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty 2008). Kadyrov's identity is conflictive because while plenty consider him a traitor because of his political allegiances and radical policies (Markosian and Matloff 2012, 50) several others would begrudgingly admit that thanks to his actions the war came to an eventual end, not counting the rising aggressions that would come in the next decade as Kadyrov became too comfortable with his power and his death squad, the Kadyrovsty (Walker 2019, Kalyapin and Reiter 2011). The words of political analyst Stanislav Belkovsky help to understand his standing both in relation to Russia and Chechnia: "For years, Vladimir Putin saw the pacification of Chechnya as his main achievement, (...) In that respect, Putin has a colossal psychological dependency on Chechnya and Ramzan Kadyrov who ensured the pacification" (in Mirovalev, 2014).

Similarities and Differences Between the Two Conflicts

As both conflicts have been briefly described, comparisons and contrasts will be drawn in relation to the nature of the conflicts, the notions of sovereignty, the role of the media and the effects of 9/11. The comparisons will be made as they relate to actors involved, actions taken or content of discourses. Attention will be drawn towards whether it was the discourse or the context that changed and shaped the transformations of the Chechens. The reader should be aware that several of the quotes included are translations because the original material was in Russian, hence some of the context could get lost in translation. However, when possible, further insight into the Russian and Chechen ideologies will be given. It is also noted that because of the differences in duration of the conflicts, some of the information for the second conflict might experience its own transformation.

Nature of the Conflicts

The first comparison entails how the conflicts themselves are understood and even named. On the one hand, the first conflict (1994-1996) has been described as an ethnonational conflict that took place in the Russian region of Chechnya and was in fact recognized as a war, albeit of a civil nature. On the other hand, the second conflict (1999-2009) was described as a religious conflict associated with a global jihad and terrorism that took place in the North Caucasus and was officially known as an “antiterrorism operation” rather than a war, at least by the Russian Federation. These particulars allowed for different interpretations to be made, first of all, because a war gives a notion of two Parties who could be in the right or wrong while an “operation” has a principal actor complying with those orders with a receiving/reacting party which is less legitimate. In this case, while the first conflict had a David v. Goliath kind of narrative, the second case had a good v. evil model. This was a key difference that allowed for different interpretations and reception both by Russian citizens as well as international news readers who readily forgot about their previous

support to the mid-90s “freedom fighters” in the face of the fear and rage against the 2000s “Islamic terrorists” (Russell 2005, 102). In the war between two unmatched parties, people readily supported the cause of the underdog and showed empathy to the Chechens, feelings which were lost and replaced by demands of justice and retribution to the ‘evil terrorists’ of the second conflict even if their actions like hostage-taking, bombings and military ambushes were mostly the same in both scenarios.

In addition, while the ethnonational denomination conveys a domestic interpretation of a conflict by which separatism could pose a threat to a State’s stability, the jihad label of the second conflict allowed for it to be enlarged to cover the area of the Northern Caucasus and inserting it in the global War on Terror. So, while President Yeltsin was encouraged to approach and negotiate with President Dudayev and strongly criticized for not doing so in 1994 (Muratov 2014), most of Putin’s decisions went unquestioned (Dannreuther 2010, 115). This could be explained by understanding that while Yeltsin’s actions concerned his own citizens (reluctant to be so, or not), Putin’s counterpart was a threatening non-state actor, hence the differences in the acceptance they received for their courses of action. Such is the case that while Yeltsin tried to defend himself by declarations such as “Dudayev’d never pick up [the phone]” (Muratov 2014) Putin could excuse his actions by minimizing the Chechens’ power of decision by stating that “Chechens are only their errand boys” (quoted in Snetkov 2007, 1353) and reaffirming that Russia “does not negotiate with terrorists” (quoted in Dannreuther 2010, 116). In that way, the responsibility for negotiation and peace, as well as the allowance for the use of power, was radically different in both cases. And, as the second conflict progressed, in 2002 Putin went as far as to say: “they [the terrorists] and those who stand behind them, are precisely scared of the future ... stabilisation in the Chechen republic” (quoted in Snetkov 2007, 1356) claiming that he cared about the wellbeing of the people of the North Caucasus without explicitly mentioning the Chechens, starting to transform the “Chechen issue” into the “North Caucasus issue” in the political agenda.

On Sovereignty and the State

Russia went through various accelerated and massive changes after the dismantling of the USSR, hence issues like sovereignty were rather malleable and delicate and experienced several transformations before consolidating. Now, recalling the start of Yeltsin's period with the new Russian Federation there is one particular quote of his that could act as the first nail in his own coffin when on August 6th, 1990, he addressed regional leaders and encouraged them to: "Help yourself to as much sovereignty as you can swallow" (Muratov 2014). That started a process referred to by Gorbachev as "the parade of sovereignties" (Muratov 2014). However, not everyone was allowed to participate in that parade, as the Chechen case shows. The conditions of abundance of oil in the Caucasus prevented the recognition of the Caucasus' independence because of Yeltsin's decision to structure the state in favor of Russian elites while trying to become competitive in a global market economy (Sakwa 2008, 880) for which oil was an invaluable asset. Yeltsin made the mistake of offering something he was not going to provide and consequently weakened his credibility and power over the territories that had already organized themselves apart from Russia. Hence, the *de facto* independence achieved by the Chechens after the first war was taken as the closest thing to that promised sovereignty.

Now, while Putin received that model from Yeltsin and did not change it much, he presented a strong case for the need of a "sovereign democracy" (Dannreuther 2010, 123), a need to rescue the integrity of the state (Sakwa 2008, 881) and the strategic creation of the "Chechenization" proposal to bring peace to Chechnya (Dannreuther 2010, 116). These efforts by Putin painted the efforts in Chechnya in a different light, that of preventing a state to be further broken and separated. This can be seen in 2002 after the attacks when he expressed that: "of course one of the main aims of the terrorists was to humiliate Russia. Those who were involved in the rescue operation did not let international terrorism bring Russia to its knees" (in Snetkov 2007,

1358). He defended the notion of Chechens belonging to Russian identity without claiming that they were Russian themselves. Thus, he attempted to invisibilize the distinction of identities with the “good Chechens” like Kadyrov who allied with the central government interests and creating otherness in the “bad Chechens” who wanted independence. Now, under the Kadyrov regime, Chechnya has a different -and debatable- sort of liberty, that of federal authority over their territory which while more “legitimate” than the *de facto* independence with Yeltsin, is also more limited and regulated in the best of cases.

Access of the Media to the Conflicts

This section relates in particular to the information available during both periods, which can be better exemplified by focusing on the respective hostage crises of each conflict. During the first conflict, one notices the abundance of information that eventually becomes unreliable approximations of figures for the number of Chechens present and their hostages. In the second conflict, that is almost non-existent. Take, for example, how in the Budyonnovsk hostage situation the figures presented were that the hostages were around 1,000 and the rebels were 100 and in Kizlyar around 3,000 hostages and 200 Chechen militants (BBC News 2004). The author chose these estimates because they seemed to be averaged from several other sources. The research turned up government-controlled media which tried to either reduce the number of hostages and rebels (especially when the death toll was reported) or increase the number of arrests and killings of the Chechens while reducing the number of those who escaped. On other private Western media such as the *New York Times*, the Guardian or the Independent the figures changed by dozens and sometimes hundreds, giving a sense of confusion rather than reliable information. During the second hostage crisis, the Dubrovka Theatre would report 979 hostages and 53 armed Chechen men and women together with 128 civilian casualties with Beslan reporting 38 Chechens and 1200 hostages with 300 civilian deaths and 200 injured (Snetkov 2007, 1352). The reason why most

articles -both academic and news- agreed on those numbers was that they were the ones available and provided by the authorities.

A lesson learnt by Putin from Yeltsin's experience was that of the importance of controlling access to information. Yeltsin worsened his credibility by accusing Dudayev of being inaccessible while journalists managed to easily talk to him on the phone (Muratov 2014) and not regulating the presence of journalists on the battlefields (Russell 2005, 105). His efforts proved counterproductive as while he denied interviews with both local and international media, his counterpart Dudayev and other Chechen leaders were accommodating and open (105-106) resulting in good reviews, favorable reporting and widespread sympathy and empathy for the underdog that they represented. It was especially important when Yeltsin decided to demonize Chechens in the national media accusing them as "bandits" and "terrorists" while also referring dismissively to them as "wolves" (stereotypical Russian slur for Caucasians, especially Chechens) (106). To his dismay, the Chechens embraced that attempt to dismiss them to the extent that:

The Chechens adopted the wolf as their national symbol; it featured on the flag of independent Chechnya - Ichkeria and figured in the first line of their national anthem. A Chechen fighter was proud to be called a *borz* (wolf) and strove to uphold the spiritual affinity between the *abrek* [lone outlaw that resisted Russian rule] and the courageous, lone wolf silhouetted against the moon. (106)

In contrast, Putin acted strategically about the press and the media, for one, making it almost impossible for international correspondents to get to Russia much less to Chechnya and by controlling the local news media (Snetkov 2007, 1349-1350). Now, the next step had been to institutionalize the use of "terrorists" as the main—and practically sole—acceptable denomination for all activities by the Chechens (1360-1361). In addition, access to international media was restricted to most of the Russian population and the local media was in charge of showing authorized and mandatory content that insisted on the violent, aggressive and even savage nature attributed to the Chechens with an almost non-stop coverage of the sieges, suicide bombers, etc.

(1359) not unlike the 9/11 coverage by the media. Yeltsin's previous efforts suited Putin well enough as:

The wolf, however, figures large in the Russian imagination (...). Perceived to be a fearsome, cunning, fierce and untameable opponent, for the Russians the wolf came to symbolise the Chechen, a worthy enemy, but one that was wild and dangerous enough to warrant only destruction. Lupine epithets were given to the Chechen leaders: Aslan Maskhadov (President of Chechnya-Ichkeria from 1997) 'the wolf with a human face', Shamil Basayev 'the lone wolf and Salman Raduyev-'the loony wolf. (Russell 2005, 106)

The Effects of 9/11 and Islamic Radicalization

On the one hand, Islamic radicalization was not a concern during Yeltsin's presidential period in the sense of a global threat. Even more, it was Yeltsin's reforms which allowed for Islam to reflower in Russia and the Caucasus (Dannreuther 2010, 212) and during Dudayev's rule, independence was conceived to become a secular state (Souleimanov and Ditych 2008, 1209). While there was some evidence of Wahabbist's presence during the 1994-1996 war, such was mostly under the rule of certain warlords rather than a generalized approach (Jamali 2017). On the other hand, Bush's War on Terrorism would introduce radical Islam as a worldwide problem. Unbeknownst to Putin, his claims in 1999 of being the first front to "a vital link in the fight against terrorism and in the protection of the Western civilization" (in Snetkov 2007, 1361) would eventually become validated within that global discourse. The renewal of aggression in 1999 helped Putin get to power aiding his presidential campaign for 2000, as he promised different and stronger management of the "Chechen issue" in contrast to the shameful and unsatisfactory performance of Yeltsin. Nevertheless, such is the case that even if included in his presidential campaign proposals, starting in 2002 the "Chechen issue" became actively removed from the political agenda by 2004 both domestically and internationally as will be further explained.

After the 9/11 attacks, Putin was quick to express the following: "What happened today underlines one more time the importance of the Russian proposal to unite international forces in the

fight against terrorism. That is the plague of the twenty-first century. Russia directly knows what terrorism is and for that reason we understand the feelings of the American people” (Quoted in Snetkov 2007, 1351) Putin seized the chance to validate the traumatic experiences of one of its previous most critical allies, the United States. Together with Bush, they were able to justify military actions that would have not been approved of if the global atmosphere of fear had not been there. As Putin was able to define his course of action as a counterterrorist operation, “The military were given *carte blanche* to conduct the war in whatever way was necessary to bring decisive victory” (Dannreuther 2010,115). It is because of this exception kind of mentality, that the abuses that took place were allowed since he had learnt from the previous conflict that a guerilla war was not to be confronted as a state’s strategy and thus created gray areas to justify a new kind of war (119).

For a while, Russia had the United States’ support evidenced by its provision of weaponry to “submit” the terrorists (Souleimanov y Ditych, 2008, 1202) as well as intelligence such as that provided by the US State Department about Middle East countries funding the Chechens with at least \$1000 million USD in the early 2000s (1206). However, as the conflict progressed, Russia parted from the US discourse and centered on managing the situation by the aforementioned use of “moderate” Chechen leaders who they could buy into compliance such as the Kadyrovs and more or less give the illusion of democratic institutions and fragile peace (Harding 2009). This is better expressed as follows: "It would be difficult to describe Chechnya as peaceful. But Kadyrov has achieved 'stability' in the Russian and Chechen definition of the word," (Sergei Markedonov quoted in Harding 2009). This arrangement was even more beneficial as it allowed Russia access to the Chechen oil and this profit was used to further elaborate the scheme of a pacified Russia.

To conclude, the similarities between the conflicts surpass the differences that can be found. Arguably, the most significant change was in the religious discourse which went from being used by the Chechens against one another, to be used against them by Putin. Largely, the context of the

War on Terror made it possible to legitimize Putin's claims and turn the tides against the Chechens. The other defining factor was the role of the media to allow for the Chechens to be heard, rather than to be relegated to a silence under the power relation established by a dominant Russia. This can be seen as, apart from the introduction of the Black Widows, the Chechens MO of guerilla war tactics and hostage-taking was mostly the same on both circumstances. However, because of an unforeseeable history-changing event such as 9/11, a new global discourse was constructed and thus allowed for the discursive manipulation of the Chechen's identity while the absence and persecution of the media deprived the Chechens of the opportunity to defend themselves.

Conclusion

The first and second Chechen wars murdered Russian democracy in its cradle, for when the cannons sing the people thirst for blood and opponents of government become traitors to the nation; elections lose their meaning and parliament ceases to be a place for discussion.

- Dmitry Muratov, “The Chechen wars murdered Russian democracy in its cradle”

As one of the few Russian journalists that tried to provide reliable and unbiased information throughout the conflicts, Muratov’s quote resonates as it implies that the price Russia paid was the loss of the main aspiration after the downfall of the USSR, democracy itself. It suggests that the nascent-Russian state had its own desire for democracy and freedom that was not achieved whether due to corrupt inadequate leaders who led them to war or the fragility of a state that broke itself apart for keeping too strong of a grip on its past. What this quote exemplifies is that even the winning side faces losses and makes sacrifices, which is why both conflicts could be considered Pyrrhic victories both for Chechnya and Russia, respectively. While one never achieved their true independence, the other one relinquished the opportunity to create its own identity rather than try to stick to one of its predecessors, namely, the Russian empire and its domination of the Caucasus.

The main conclusion drawn is that discourse is a powerful tool that all actors use and contribute to perpetuate and/or modify power relations. However, regardless of the fact that all parties participate in the creation of discourses, their relative power, legitimacy, and context will affect how they are perceived. Especially now, in a highly technological world where information technologies allow for the spread of instant data and the possibility to know about things happening all around the world in real-time, a key concern is no longer the lack of information but the overabundance of not entirely reliable information. Readers, be them academic or not, need to be aware of the implications of vocabulary and language choices around them and how they shape their way of thinking and interpreting reality.

Additionally, in a world that keeps such a fast pace, another challenge is that of consistency. In the case of the Chechen-Russian conflicts, it seemed uncanny how a topic that used to be so representative because of its presence on the news media and even on the entertainment business could suddenly be abandoned and replaced by “the next big thing”, namely, 9/11. Political action should be concerned with the ways in which memory and attention affect mobilization, support and provide legitimacy to political movements around the world. Young generations that grew up in this era of information need to find a way to work out how they can use their tools and advantages for the future without letting the past fade away. The risk of this unconscious consumption of information being that people become desensitized to the happenings around the world and do not realize that things happening on the other side of the world have very real consequences on domestic issues.

Finally, Chechnya’s experience can be seen as a large-scale case of a self-fulfilling prophecy that derives from the power of discourse. On the one hand, it involves the analysis that as long as actors have a voice and are able to participate in a narrative, they are capable of shaping their identities more fully. On the other hand, it shows how being subjected to the discourse of another that builds an alternative -and negative- identity does not only affect the perception of the “external” receptors of that discourse, but it may even affect the involved Party’s identity and reshape it to fulfill the discourse. This observation comes from the power of the language in creating expectations whether of the other’s behavior or nature, be it that of a defensive or an aggressive behavior or that of “rational and human” nature in contrast to an “irrational and savage” nature which were part of both of the Chechens identity respectively. The suppression of their voice from the narrative allowed for them to be deindividualized, dehumanized, and, ultimately, demonized. Not only was that the Russian and international perception of the Chechens, but it also started to shape their own identity perception when they started normalizing terrorist-like behavior and expectations to their courses of action in order to call attention to their cause and be heard—

even if briefly and to their detriment in the long term. The power of discourse can be seen as bigger than those that wield it and for that reason, more attention and critical thinking is necessary by both the general public and academia to understand and decode the information that is not only available, but mass-spread.

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