Chechnya at War and Beyond

The Russian–Chechen wars have had an extraordinarily destructive impact on the communities and on the trajectories of personal lives in the North Caucasus Republic of Chechnya. This book presents in-depth analysis of the Chechen conflicts and their consequences on Chechen society. It discusses the nature of the violence, examines the dramatic changes which have taken place in society, in the economy and in religion, and surveys current developments, including how the conflict is being remembered and how Chechnya is reconstructed and governed.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK
First published 2014
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Chechniya at war and beyond / edited by Anne Le Huéròu, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski.

pages cm -- (Routledge contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe series; 56)

Summary: “The Russia-Chechen wars have had an extraordinarily destructive impact on the communities and on the trajectories of personal lives in the North Caucasus Republic of Chechnya. This book presents in-depth analysis of the Chechen conflicts and their consequences on Chechen society. It discusses the nature of the violence, examines the dramatic changes which have taken place in society, in the economy and in religion, and surveys current developments, including how the conflict is being remembered and how Chechnya is reconstructed and governed”-- Provided by publisher.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

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Acknowledgments

This book has been made possible thanks to the support of a large number of people and institutions. First of all, the Paris city administration (Mairie de Paris) which funded a three-year research program entitled “Understanding Violence in Russia: War, Institutions, Society.” Thanks to this financial support we have been able not only to publish this book, but also to carry on our own researches on Chechnya, and organize an international conference on the war in Chechnya in October 2012. Our activities have also benefitted from the support of research centers, scientific journals or specific grants: the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme (Paris), Centre d’Etudes du Monde Russe, Caucasiens et Centre-Européen (CERCEC, EHESS/CNRS, Paris), Université Libre de Bruxelles, Centre d’Etudes Franco-russe de Moscou, *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, and the ACCES program of the French ministry of Higher Education and Research.

We would like to express our special thanks to the translators from French and Russian and the editors who worked hard and under time constraints to transfigure the authors’ thoughts into English. This book would not have been possible without Judith Andreyev, Ian Appleby, Katherine Booth, Martin Cruse, Roger Deplegde, Dilia Gumirova, and Catherine Librini.

We are grateful to all the contributors who have accepted to collaborate with us during the manuscript preparation process, and who have agreed to discuss and revise their chapters.

The cover picture has been provided by Maryvonne Arnaud, whose photographs on Chechnya are full of humanity – many thanks to her indeed.

A lot of field work in Chechnya would not have been possible without
the expertise, the knowledge, and the kindness of informants and interviewees. We can not thank each of them individually but they will find here the expression of our deep gratitude.

The Editors
Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin,
Amandine Regamey, and
Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski
Introduction

In a little over twenty years, Chechnya has undergone two massive, bloody wars that have caused tens of thousands of dead, wounded, and disabled, and the virtually total destruction of its capital Grozny. This small republic on the southern borders of Russia, which proclaimed its independence in 1991 following the other Soviet republics, has also seen four pro-independence presidents and one installed by Moscow die violently since 1996.\(^1\) In the early years of this century, more than 100,000 men of the Russian Federation armed forces were deployed over a territory smaller than New Jersey. Even now, episodic armed confrontations have not stopped and asylum-seekers continue to flee the region to seek refuge in Europe.

The collapse of the USSR in 1991, therefore, opened up an age of violence that Chechnya still has to cope with, even though its forms and rationales have changed. Historically, Russo-Chechen relations have been marked by phases of extreme violence, from the wars of the nineteenth century to Stalin’s deportation of the Chechens in 1944,\(^2\) and also periods of stability and coexistence among the various communities. Our aim here is to focus on the post-Soviet period, and more closely on how the periods of armed conflict and periods between or after wars have transformed power and society in Chechnya.

Chechnya and Russia: reassessing the chronology

A number of authors have shown the correlation between the wars in Chechnya and political developments in post-Soviet Russia (Dunlop 1998; Lieven 1998; Furman 1999; Evangelista 2003; Le Huérou et al. 2005; Vinatier 2006; Hughes 2007; Russell 2007; Sakwa 2005). One may mention as one of a number of factors for the 1994 military intervention, three years after General Dudayev’s declaration of Chechen
independence, the fear of a “domino effect” Chechen independence might have on other entities in the Russian Federation. Chechnya was part of the intricate games over the distribution of power in post-Soviet Russia, and played a role in each internal political event: Boris Yeltsin’s re-election in 1996 following a cease-fire, his abdication in 1999 in favor of a prime minister, Vladimir Putin, whose popularity was rising because of the war.

A brief review of key dates in these relations between Chechnya and Russia may be in order: Chechnya’s declaration of independence in November 1991, followed by a political and economic test of strength between Moscow and Grozny; Moscow’s military intervention in December 1994 with the official aim of “restoring constitutional order” and “disarming illegal armed bands”; Grozny retaken by Chechen fighters in August 1996, then signature of the Khasavyurt Agreement following a cease-fire; election of the pro-independence Aslan Maskhadov in January 1997 to head Chechnya and withdrawal of Russian troops; then, after a chaotic period of three years, incursions by the warlords Basayev and Khattab in the neighboring republic of Dagestan in August 1999, serving as a pretext for a second war, described this time by the Russian authorities as a “fight against terrorism,” and never recognized as a war.

This breakdown into key political events does not necessarily coincide with the chronology as experienced by local people and leaves open the question of dating the end of the second war. Did it end militarily in February-March 2000, with the fall of Grozny and the capture of groups of fighters in Komsomol’skoe, when the open war of massive bombing gradually turned into a war of occupation with repeated “cleansing” operations by the army and police? Should one use an institutional date, such as 2003 when Chechnya was officially re-integrated into the arms of the Russian Federation (new constitution in March 2003, “election” in October 2003 of Akhmad Kadyrov, already appointed head of the provisional administration by Moscow in 2000)? Is it the assassination of the pro-independence President Maskhadov in 2005 and the end of the political project of Chechen independence (Gilligan 2009), which may be taken as the political end of the conflict? Should one take 16 April 2009 as the official end of the “anti-terrorist operation,” even though confrontations still continue between fighters and law enforcement forces, including the few Federal military units still present (Kavkazskii
Researchers’ opinions vary, including among contributors to this volume, and we have not attempted to unify their positions.

Furthermore, since the middle of the first decade of the century, a cycle of violence has spread to other republics in the North Caucasus, with 700 dead and 525 wounded in 2012 (ICG 2013: 3), leaving victims among the law enforcement forces, underground fighters, and civilians hit by explosions or special operations. As Jean-François Ratelle points out, developments in the North Caucasus may be analyzed in terms both of a spread of violence from Chechnya and of features internal to each republic. The lack of economic prospects can explain the attraction exerted by Islamist discourse and project. Another factor is the rejection by part of the society of the policies of corrupt elites dependent on Moscow, which guarantees their re-election in return for their loyalty and a pretense of order in the region (Sagramoso 2007; Merlin 2009; Shterin and Yarlykapov 2011; Tekushev 2012; ICG 2012a, 2012b).

**Violence in Chechnya: continuity and interruptions**

The wars in Chechnya have been fought in a context that has also been extensively studied, whether concerning Moscow-Grozny relations (Malashenko 2009) or the attitude of Russian society towards the war (Gerber and Mendelson 2002; Le Huérou 2007) and towards natives of the North Caucasus, increasingly perceived as an “internal abroad” (Malashenko 2012). Outside, the international community’s silence reminds us that the war in Chechnya belongs to the discursive and diplomatic category of the “regime of global counter-terrorism” (Bigo et al. 2008) that emerged after September 11 (HRW 2004; Dunlop 2006; Francis 2008; Le Huérou and Regamey 2008). In this volume we focus on variations in the violence practised in Chechnya itself, and the continuity and interruptions that have marked the last twenty years.

A major distinction between the two wars may be identified in the way Moscow sees the conflict. In military terms, some analysts have wondered, “is the Russian bear learning?” (Hodgson 2003), since the second war featured a more marked strategy from the Russian forces, including systematic bombing of towns to avoid the lethal urban fighting of the first war (Facon 2001; Oliker 2001), increasing use of kontraktmiki, volunteers more experienced than the massive numbers of conscripts deployed in the first war. In this volume, Natalyia Danilova
shows how this evolution also corresponds to the shift from seeing the soldiers who died in the 1990s as victims to a selective presentation of them as heroes in the early 2000s.

Politically, the attitude toward the adversary also changes: the negotiations and alternating cease-fires and renewed fighting of the first war were followed as soon as the second war started by a campaign to totally delegitimize the pro-independence Chechen fighters. Moscow even refused to negotiate during spectacular hostage crises (Dubrovka theatre in October 2002, Beslan school in September 2004), however bloody their outcomes after the intervention of Russian forces (Dunlop 2006) whereas Chernomyrdin, Yeltsin’s prime minister, was not reluctant to call Basayev to release hostages in Budennovsk in June 1995. Extending this delegitimization to the Chechen pro-independence elites, Moscow sought internal political “normalization” by co-opting loyal leaders and “Chechenization” in transferring operations to Moscow-loyal Chechen forces. The new strongman in Chechnya in 2004–5, then officially president from 2007, Ramzan Kadyrov constructed an undivided power system, gradually bringing together under his orders the Chechen law enforcement forces and enrolling, often forcibly, former pro-independence fighters by the hundred (Lokshina 2007; Dannreuther and March 2008; Russell 2011).

The membership of the Chechen resistance and developments in its internal forces may also be seen as another element distinguishing the first war from the “second.” The increasing Islamization of the insurgency has been extensively described (Wilhelmsen 2005; Hughes 2007; Moore and Tumelty 2008; Sagramoso 2012). Whereas the former Soviet officer Maskhadov and his circle represented demands based on a project of national liberation, marked by the secularization of the Soviet period, there emerged in the early 2000s increasing references to Islam in both the public demands and the profile of the fighters, where the extent of the presence of foreign Jihadists has been variously evaluated (Moore and Tumelty 2008; Schaefer 2011; Tekushev 2012). This discursive development became more marked on Maskhadov’s death in 2005, when he was replaced by Sadulaev and then Dokku Umarov, the declared supporter of an Emirate that would cover the whole of the North Caucasus.

Many signs of this shift of position and discourse among Chechen political and military figures were perceptible during the inter-war period
1996–99. Ekaterina Sokirianskaya’s contribution gives a precious overview of the rationales operating during this period as yet studied by only a few authors (Tishkov 2004; Malashenko and Trenin 2004; Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010). Analyzing the rise of radical Islamist currents, she also points out the importance of economic issues throughout the period. The hostage crises addressed in Mikhail Roshchin’s contribution were part of a twofold collapse of state power during this period: the failure of attempts to build a Chechen state, and the inability of the Russian government to protect its own citizens on a territory that for several years was a grey area.

A society at war

Various political and military rationales in Russia fed the war and violence: the objectives set for Russian troops, the designation of all Chechens as potential enemies (Russell 2005; Zvereva 2005; Regamey 2011), the violence inherent in the Russian police, prison, and army system (Le Huérou and Sieca-Kozlowski 2012), a situation of (post-)colonial domination and huge asymmetry in power relations, plus a generalized impunity that only provoked renewed violence (Memorial 2003; Merlin and Sieca-Kozlowski 2008). The various articles in this volume are intended to explore the interconnections between the various macro- and micro-sociological scales of the analysis of violence, and focus on the experience of civilians, the main victims of that violence, and the impact the war has had on Chechen society.

How to qualify the crimes committed during a war, to designate perpetrators and victims, is often a controversial matter, and Chechnya is no exception, especially since the conflict has occurred largely in secret. The number of dead in the two wars is still a matter of debate (Cherkasov 2004; Maksudov 2010), but at all events the work of NGOs would suggest tens of thousands of dead, and since 1999 the number of missing is in the thousands: between 2 and 5,000 according to Memorial (Cherkasov 2012). The extreme nature of the violence against civilians is well attested: the massive bombing of Grozny where residents were required to leave the city or be considered as terrorists and eliminated; massacres of civilians in the city’s districts and outlying villages by Russian troops when they entered the area; arbitrary arrests, mistreatment and torture, sexual violence, forced disappearances particularly during “clean-up” operations and in “filtration camps” (Amnesty International
2000a, 2000b; FIDH 2000a, 2000b, 2003, 2007; Gilligan 2009; Le Huérou and Regamey 2012). Although these practices could be found during the first war, their extent and systematic nature is such that they have often been called war crimes and crimes against humanity (European Parliament 2003; PACE 2003; HRW 2005; Chelysheva et al. 2009).

War was also an intrusion into domestic life, with anxiety about physical survival blending with the more insidious upheavals of daily life (Lokshina et al. 2007; Zherebtsova 2011; Grazhdanskoе Sodeistvie 2013b). Shortages of water and fuel, schools closed, virtually no transport, all produced a situation in which war entered all aspects of daily private life, as Amandine Regamey sees it, while the fear of dying and physical abuse were frequent occurrences.

Here, women’s experience may differ quite significantly from men’s. Whereas men, perceived as potential fighters, were particularly targeted by Russian troops, women increasingly took on not only their family’s material survival (market trading) but also the survival of their loved ones (searching for men under arrest, resisting Federal forces during the cleansing operations) and even gruesome negotiations (ransoming dead bodies). Sexual violence affected both men and women (Regamey 2010, 2012). The discourse of honor and the dominant idea “better dead than raped” added an additional burden for women and men who might find it equally hard to put up with social demands (maintaining “face,” not showing fear or pain).

The experience of war differed by gender, age, income, and membership of solidarity networks, and was also mediated by a set of behavioral rules and demands that define what it is to “be a Chechen,” requiring people not to publicly display their feelings or personal relationships, even in situations of danger. But in such a small territory, there was no village, no family, that was not affected by this experience of war and violence. Often trapped between fighters and soldiers or police and involved in complex networks of allegiance, the population got entangled into “a social world structured around secrecy” (Suarez Bonilla 2012: 135).

The avenues to be explored here are innumerable if we wish to understand and analyze what war has done to Chechen society, particularly in terms of “retraditionalization,” shaped by deep-seated social reasoning but also by political exploitation. The most visible
development in the post-war period is probably the campaign against women under Kadyrov described by Tanya Lokshina in this volume. This desire to control women is part of a wider “backlash” following wars like the Second World War or the Algerian War of Independence (Amrane 1999), which brought about radical changes in gender relations and the place of women (Capdevila et al. 2010). Alice Szczepanikova’s paper also describes these upheavals via her study of three generations of women in exile. The anthropologist Ieva Raubisko, who managed to spend many months researching in Chechnya, mentions the discourse frequently encountered in that society, especially among women, of a moral disintegration, represented by the loss of traditions, a discourse that reveals a loss of frameworks with which to perceive the world (Raubisko 2011).

Tradition is a notion that is often used and highly controversial. Kadyrov applies it in a range of domains, whether in clothing or religion. He takes his stand on an Islam defined as “traditional” in the sense given to that word in Russia, namely those practices historically present in Russia and still attested during the Soviet period. In persecuting the fundamentalist Islam of the Salafists he makes an increasing appeal to the legitimacy of Sufi Islam, ignoring the complexities of the relationships between brotherhoods and multiple solidarities that Mairbek Vatchagaev analyzes in this volume. Kadyrov’s opponents accuse him rather of destroying traditions, particularly respect for older people, and argue that in the nineteenth century, women did not wear the veil. Others claim that bride kidnapping and other so-called traditional practices are actually only window-dressing for Kadyrov’s excessive power over minds and bodies.

The society living in present-day Chechnya, transformed, mutilated, and disrupted by war, has in twenty years also become a largely “monoethnic” society, after the departure in the 1990s and early 2000s of the various nationalities that lived in Soviet Grozny, analyzed by Walter Sperling as still forming a “virtual” but also “real” community. In 2013, the dominant impression our authors have gained in the field or from conversations is of a society which depends on policy decided in Moscow, but which is also in a sense a “prisoner of itself,” and in particular of its elites, who hold society in a grip that combines violence and politico-economic allegiances.
The war may be over, but violence continues

Although war lives on in individual memories, the word “war” is usually referred to in the past by people in Chechnya, because the situation since 2006–7 is so different from what went before. The economic reconstruction analyzed by Musa Basnukaev in this volume is a key element, even if the recovery of the productive apparatus remains slight (Basnukaev and Merlin 2013). However, the fire that engulfed a skyscraper in the Grozny City business district in April 2013 revealed doubts about the quality and nature of this glitzy reconstruction, and the forms of violence that persist behind the scenes require further analysis.

“Post-conflict” is a difficult term to use because the border between war and post-war violence is a hazy one (Duclos 2012), whether the observer reports on the limitations or failure of the reconstruction or reconciliation process, or emphasizes the continuities between war and non-war and the long-term transformations of the social and political order due to the war (Bazenguissa-Ganga and Makki 2012). Nevertheless, a certain number of contemporary situations do have in common the fact that they are defined by a set of war exit policies or arrangements. For Chechnya in the 2010s, as has already been pointed out (Merlin 2010; Le Huérou and Merlin 2012), there were neither programs for demobilization/reintegration into civilian life, nor any transitional justice mechanisms.6

The absence of any negotiations between the parties to the conflict during its second phase (from 1999), and of any minimum recognition of the purpose of the conflict (a claim of independence versus qualification as terrorism) were major factors in the impossibility of building a “positive” peace, to use Galtung’s terminology (Galtung 1969), or devising a post-war settlement based on a social consensus and shared norms.

In Kadyrov’s Chechnya, the continuity between the violence of war and various forms of political violence is a topical question, since the post-war situation is not founded on a pluralistic and negotiated political project but is rather a case of “dictatorship making peace.” The pros and cons of this “illiberal peace” are examined by John Russell while Anne Le Huérou analyzes the action of the law enforcement agencies under Kadyrov, and the way this monopoly of force contributes to perpetuating everyday violence.

Although, in a way, the war is “over,” violence itself is not. Violence
persists, less as the result of an underground war than as a consequence of the social upheavals caused by the war and of the logic inherent to an authoritarian government.

This perpetuation of violence also extends into Europe, where more than 100,000 Chechen refugees now live. The import into the diaspora of the political and social rifts to be found in Chechnya culminates in the penetration of political violence into the territory of the European Union, as in the case of Umar Israilov, who had testified to the repressive nature of the Kadyrov system. His assassination in Vienna in 2009 showed the Kadyrov regime’s ability to exercise its power on European territory (FIDH 2012). Violence may also come from other groups, particularly the Islamist groups in the diaspora. The terrorist attack on the Boston Marathon in April 2013 committed by the Tsarnaev brothers was probably a sign of the radicalization occurring among the diaspora. While the perpetrators’ origins make them susceptible to a discourse of identity, this radicalization may also take particularly unanticipated form because it is deterritorialized and unconnected with any personal experience of war in their country of origin.

**Violence in Chechnya: sources and approaches**

For security reasons (military operations and risk of kidnapping) Chechnya has been to a great extent inaccessible since the end of the 1990s, or accessible only for short periods, and under strict security conditions. It remains difficult to carry out research in Chechnya, because of a climate of fear and distrust, and concerns not to endanger informers and respondents. In addition, the current Chechen authorities’ frequent use of scholarly issues for political purposes is a further obstacle. Evidence of this is the emphasis placed on Chechen heroism during the Second World War, as Aude Merlin shows in this volume.

A number of topics are still poorly investigated and deserve greater attention from researchers, particularly Chechnya in the late Soviet period and the early 1990s. The second war has been more thoroughly examined than the first, as is reflected in these papers. Access to fighters on both sides is still particularly difficult. On the Russian side, soldiers’ experience of the war remains to be told: not much research is devoted to them, except for a few studies of veterans (Sieca-Kozlowski 2013). It is necessary to look beyond the propaganda films and official speech-making to discover what the soldiers have to say, often via fiction or
literature (Gordin and Grigoriev 2003; Prilepin 2005; Babchenko 2007). Although the reasons behind the mobilization of Chechen insurgents, men and women have been analyzed (Akhmedova and Speckhard 2008; Moore 2012; Ratelle 2013), the inevitably clandestine nature of their activities, difficulties of access on the ground and the fear of revenge and reprisal make it hard for researchers to do their work, unlike what has been to some extent possible for conflicts in, say, Latin America and Africa (Debos 2013; Guichaoua 2011; Arjona and Kalyvas 2011).

For years, NGOs proved to be for many issues the only regular and reliable source both in terms of access to the field and providing data, so that this is an invaluable contribution to the production of knowledge on the conflict, its aftermath, and Chechen society. At the same time, it tends to give a reading of the events which could be mostly human-rights oriented, especially in the description of violence and its logic. We are well aware of this and have deliberately sought out differing approaches and varied methodological viewpoints for this volume.

The collection also benefits from the privileged access some of the contributors gained. Either because they are from Chechnya themselves, or thanks to their work for human rights or humanitarian organizations, they had the opportunity to access Chechnya during the 1990s and the 2000s, and have developed an intimate knowledge of Chechen society.

As they work on a recent conflict, phenomena of extreme violence that are not yet over, and subjects that may be called “detestable” (Zawadzki 2002), the contributors share a common concern: the ethics of research and the concern not to endanger or worsen the condition of their informants (Sémelin 2002; Le Pape, Siméant and Vidal 2006). Given the sensitive nature of the subject, it is hardly surprising that the authors’ views do not coincide, particularly in their assessment of Ramzan Kadyrov’s regime (Lokshina 2007; Merlin 2010; Russell 2011). Nor is it unusual to see researchers personally involved in their research topics, as seen in the number of papers written in the first person, telling of personal experiences or attempting to cope with moral or normative judgments. This multiplicity of viewpoints is indeed what for us makes up the wealth of this volume as the various dimensions of the war are addressed in their “polyphonic” or multiple aspects and varied interpretations.

Our choice to dedicate the first part of the book to memorial issues and traces of war, between remembrance and erasing stems from the
acknowledgment that Chechnya has concentrated violent episodes of Russian and Soviet history, from the conquest of the Caucasus to the recent wars, not to mention the 1944 deportation. In a rather paradoxical way, the book opens with an alternative view of the peaceful Grozny of the late Soviet period by Walter Sperling showing how people reconstruct a “common” home they belong to. The politicization of history and the use of space, which are inherent to memory policies, are deciphered by Aude Merlin in her analysis of the commemorations practices of the Kadyrov regime. As a counterpoint on memory policy, Nataliya Danilova offers a picture of the war memorials commemorating Russian military casualties. Musa Basnukayev addresses the material traces of war and analyzes a reconstruction that is emerging between economic ressources and political demands.

The second part focuses on the actors and rationales of violence at work in Chechnya during the wars, the interwar and post-war periods. Analyzing violent practices from both state and non-state actors, the contributions examine how and by whom the state monopoly of violence was challenged during the interwar period of 1996–99 (Ekaterina Sokirianskaya), in particular by such a phenomenon as hostage taking (Mikhail Roshchin). Two chapters address today’s situation in Chechnya, assessing the Kadyrov regime as a controversial state of “illiberal peace” (John Russell) and questioning the violent logic of local law enforcement agencies, caught between an unsolved post-conflict situation and the systemic features of Russia’s law enforcement practices (Anne Le Huérou). Jean-François Ratelle’s chapter places the Chechen insurgents within a broader context to discuss the theory that the Chechen conflict is spilling over into the North Caucasus.

The third part of the book is dedicated to the consequences of war and violence for Chechen society. It starts by rereading the testimonies collected by human rights organizations, so as to underline the material dimensions of the violence experienced by civilians (Amandine Regamey). A chapter is dedicated to Islam and developments in the forms of sociability, and also the political engagement of the Sufi brotherhoods (Mairbek Vatchagaev). Special attention is paid to the situation of women: in Chechnya, a post-war “backlash” tallies with the strategy of political elites to confine women to a dominated position under the pretext of tradition (Tanya Lokshina), whereas in exile various generations of women cope differently with the consequences of the war.
Notes

1 The first pro-independence president, Dzhokhar Dudayev, was assassinated by the Russian secret service in April 1996. Aslan Maskhadov, elected president in 1997, died during a special operation of the Russian forces in March 2005, and his successor was eliminated a year later. Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, president for a short period before the election of Maskhadov was liquidated by Russian services in an extraterritorial operation in Qatar in 2004. Sadulaev, the successor of Maskhadov, was killed in 2006. Akhmad Kadyrov, appointed by Moscow and father of the current head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, was killed in a bomb attack on the Grozny stadium on 9 May 2004.

2 The conquest of the North Caucasus by the Tsarist army in the nineteenth century provoked major resistance, and the best-known episode is the insurrection led by Imam Shamil (1834–59) (Gammer 2006; Hoesli 2006; Kozlov and Polian 2011). After the Great Caucasian war, in 1859, the number of Chechens was less than 90,000, whereas they had been estimated by Russian geographers to be 200,000 in 1818 at the start of the war (ethnographer A. Bergé estimates, in Vatchagaev and Merlin 2008). After a brief independent self-proclaimed Mountain Republic, the peoples of the North Caucasus were sovietized but continued to evoke the mistrust of the Soviet authorities, which repressed four North Caucasian Muslim peoples during the Second World War, including the Chechens and the Ingush. On 23 February 1944, accused by Stalin of allegedly collaborating massively with the Nazis, hundreds of thousands of Chechens and Ingush were deported to Central Asia and Siberia (Werth 2006; Campana 2009); thousands of deportees died during the transfer or the first year of deportation, while the territories bearing their names were deleted from maps, and Slavic populations or other Caucasian peoples were settled there. These historical episodes lie behind the common story in Chechnya that “every fifty years” the Kremlin plays the Chechen card to solve internal Russian problems at the risk of turning the war into a war of extermination.

3 There are many in Chechnya who speak of “little localized wars” in 1995, call the entry of fighters into Grozny in August 1996 a second war, and therefore the one that began in 1999 the third war.

4 In Russian the term “near abroad” refers to the former republics of the USSR, which are no more under the domination of Moscow, though they stayed under its sphere of influence. “Internal abroad” is used by Malashenko as a counterpoint/figure of style to define those territories inside the Russian Federation which live, at least partly, according to their own rules, but also to
refers to the North Caucasians who appear increasingly as “foreigners” for the Russian population (and are not seen differently than the labor migrants from Central Asian [near abroad] states).


6 Other North Caucasian republics set up reconciliation commissions, not always successfully: as in Dagestan (until Abdulatipov’s appointment in January 2013; no longer operative), or, to a lesser extent, Ingushetia, where overtures were made to non-violent fundamentalist groups, although the repression policy was not stopped (ICG 2012b: 30–33; Memorial 2012).

7 One of these groups has been blamed for the attack on a young couple in August 2013, during Ramadan, at the Eisenhüttenstadt asylum-seekers’ center in Germany, on the pretext that their behavior was indecent (focus.de 2013). While the number of asylum seekers is on the rise (Goble 2013), the policy of the European Union adds a new layer of violence when they return asylum-seekers to Russia (Grazhdansko Sodeistvie 2013a), despite the risks incurred.

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University Press.


Part 1

Traces of war

Between remembrance and erasing
1 Grozny as it was before the war

Remembrance and reconciliation in “virtual” and “real” post-Soviet communities

Walter Sperling

On the 5th of October 2012, the people of Grozny celebrated the birthday of Ramzan Kadyrov and City Day, which was organized and orchestrated by the government of the Chechen Republic. With “money sent by Allah,” as Kadyrov often joked, the regime had rebuilt the ruined city in a few years. The money also allowed the regime to invite movie stars from Moscow and abroad, most prominently the French actor Gérard Depardieu, to the celebration.¹ As in previous years, new buildings were opened, e.g., the National Museum of Chechnya built in the historic center of Grozny. “For us,” Kadyrov said in his official statement, the capital, Grozny, “is a symbol for the rebirth of the Chechen people after the war” (Chechnya.gov.ru 2012a). We all know that Grozny was not only a Chechen city. Before the end of the Soviet Union, before the First Chechen War, it was home to a multinational community, which shared in everyday life not only the Russian language, the *lingua franca* of the empire, but also the city’s urban space.

To some degree, Grozny was a typical city of the late Soviet Union whose ideologues were especially proud of the “friendship of the peoples,” who had fought together for a “normal” socialist life.² Grozny had a lot in common with a number of cities on the Soviet periphery. Besides Chechens and Ingush, the titular nations of the autonomous republic, Grozny had large communities of Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Jews, and a number of other nations.³ Like inhabitants of cities of other national Soviet republics, they not only struggled with the breakdown of the industrial sector, which was key to the urban economy (Tishkov 2001; Guseinova 2001; Ibragimov 2008), they also had to cope, since the late 1980s, with the radicalization of nationalist discourses
which helped finally to dissolve the USSR as a “communal apartment” of ethnicities and nations (Slezkine 1994; Beissinger 2002; Brubaker 1996).

As both *perestroika* and the fight against its agendas became radical in tone, the multi-ethnic communities felt more and more uncomfortable. As nationalization turned into the ethnic violence that escalated, most conspicuously in 1988, first in Sumgait in Azerbaijan and then in other places in the Caucasus and Central Asia, many of the citizens of those communities left their hometowns. In Chkalovsk in Tadzhikistan, Karaganda in Kazakhstan, Baku in Azerbaijan or, even, Grozny in Chechnya, violence could make one’s hometown a desperate place (Maksudov 2010: 216–20; Tishkov 2001: 217–18; Surkov and Turchina 1998: 176–77; Gakaev 1997: 140, 203; Gakaev 2005: 24). Indeed, Grozny became a “small corner of hell” one had to escape from in order to survive the crime, ethnic violence, civil war, and two post-Soviet wars. The wars called the everyday life people had hitherto shared into question. Their brutalization and terrorism destroyed the common ground that local communities had evolved over generations. Shared experiences and values were replaced by a powerful binary opposition established through public media and popular discourses that divided people on ethnic grounds into “them” and “us.” Those fleeing from Grozny shared their destiny with millions of others who were forced to leave the Soviet and post-Soviet periphery (Pilkington 1998; Flynn 2004; Kosmarskaia 2006). But, in contrast to most post-Soviet migrants, they did not have the possibility to visit their hometown because the machinery of war had destroyed Grozny almost completely.

In the aftermath, the polarization among ethnicities through war and violence appears final. But, what happens when people refuse to forget where they come from? What if they try to re-establish their local roots and remember their family homes? What happens if they return to look for their old neighbors, classmates, and friends? Finally, what do the answers tell us about the post-Soviet, post-war societies and the imperial legacy?

In this chapter I will examine the forms of popular memory and reconciliation that go beyond narratives of violence and war which dominate both Western and Russian media and public discourse. Specifically, I am interested in how the people of Grozny deal with loss and how they seek possible ways to overcome their violent past. As I will
show in the following, the lost past nostalgia that is often perceived as a paradoxical feature of post-Soviet society employed only by the losers of the transition period should not be considered unreal in the case of Grozny (Oushakine 2007). Even as grass-roots efforts to reclaim the Grozny of the past rely on (often consciously) selective memories, they have their origins in real-life, multi-ethnic communities which had developed a shared culture and common language. At the same time, the efforts to rebuild a lost community point to the evolution of a multi-sited but locally defined “civil community” that, in general, exists below the media’s radar. The reinvented civil community deserves our attention as much as the trauma of war and the dividing lines in its aftermath do.

In order to depict the community of the non-violent and, in their own words, “international” (“internatsional’nyi”) people of Grozny, I will trace out their social networks, describe their practices, and analyze the semantics of their communications. In so doing, I will employ the concept of belonging rather than the concept “identity,” which seems unsuitable for mapping the complexities of social relations in the Caucasus, a former frontier region with multiple loyalties and changing alliances (Derluguian 2005; Barret 1999; Khodarkovsky 2011). As Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have argued, identity implies either too much or too little: it can be criticized as either an essentialist idea or a constructivist concept (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Certainly, neither social groups nor societies simply have an identity, but, on the other hand, meanings, practices, and networks are not merely invented by powerful actors such as the state, intelligentsia, or mass media. A sense of community, people’s desire to belong, emerges from lived experience; it is built on trust, focused on places, connected to biographies, and includes those roads of life which were and were not taken. Thus, the concept of belonging puts emphasis on the processes of association within concrete situations and particular contexts. This perspective does not provide a useful tool for measuring the extent of social or political affiliation. However, it does help us to understand how people navigate through the challenging and ambivalent world (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2012: 12; Lovell 1998).

Surveying the virtual landscape of Grozny’s communities

Initially, the politics of remembrance were not at the center of my interest. As a historian of everyday life in the late Soviet and early post-
Soviet periphery, I had an instrumental perspective on the communities of the former inhabitants of Grozny. Browsing the web in the initial phase of my research, I came across some sites with surprisingly personal accounts of the city which many people were forced to leave. First, I found the MOST-page of former students of the famous Oil Institute of Grozny. Then, I discovered the site “Groznyi virtual’nyi” which already included interactive elements of web 2.0. Only later did I find the less popular “gorod Groznyi.” And, finally, I ended up at “Grozny city,” the biggest virtual archive of old Grozny, “the city of my childhood,” as one of its authors declares on the site, and also the most remarkable forum for past and present Groznentsy.

I spent hours, days, maybe even weeks on these sites. I read old books and memoirs that were uploaded and glanced at old postcards and maps provided by administrators and the users of the sites and forums. I skimmed through gigabytes of photographs – of a city that does not exist any longer and of its people not knowing whether they would survive. I listened to the sound of Grozny’s folk singers and rock bands and watched old documentaries on the city and amateur footage filmed with the first video cameras in the last years before the war. I spent nights trying to make sense of thousands and thousands of conversations the Groznentsy held in the forums. Later on, I realized that this was a passion I shared with the Groznentsy who were searching for their old city on the Internet.

“When these things appeared on the Internet,” one of my respondents stated, “I went to work only in order to be online, to read about the city of my childhood and youth, and to chat with people from my hometown.” Since 1990, she has lived in Moscow, a city that became the destination for the diaspora from nearly every region of the former Soviet Union. Thus, it was easy for her to stay in touch with some of her friends from Grozny who had also moved to Moscow. But, keeping in touch with friends is something different from remembering one’s hometown, neighbors, and classmates. The urge to remember that she and other people from Grozny felt points to their realization of their loss. The realization took place especially after the Russian army had bombed the city to the ground in the winter of 1999/2000. The pictures of the completely ruined city broadcast by the media showed the people of Grozny the impossibility of returning. Starting then many of them tried to go back to their city in imagination. “I was not only in Grozny by
day,” another female interviewee said, “but also at night. Every night I was there, I walked through my old neighborhood, breathed the air of our lovely corner; I could feel the wind from the Caucasus touching my hair.”

The former inhabitants of Grozny told me that the hey-day of these particular webpages and online forums has already passed. Just a few years ago, the communities of the Groznentsy moved to virtual social networks, most notably “odnoklassniki,” the very popular Russian version of “classmates.com.” The largest group of Groznentsy in that social network has more than 35,000 members. Besides this group, there are a number of Grozny-groups with more than 5,000, and some with more than 10,000, subscribers. Among these are “In memory of Grozny,” “We from Grozny,” “Grozny – the best city in the world,” “People from Grozny – it sounds proud!” and, simply, “Grozny.” “We no longer live in Soviet times,” said a female moderator of one of these groups. She added, “If you want, you can have your own group – why not?” During one of my research trips in 2012, a former Groznenets invited me to become the moderator of one of the smaller virtual communities with about 2,200 members – an offer which I, of course, had to turn down. This group had begun two years before, and now its founder does not have enough time to manage all of the contributions. “You are surfing for professional reasons,” he suggested in a message, “you seem to have time for this.”

In the age of online forums and social networks, tens of thousands of people from Grozny are eager to re-establish ties with their hometown, at least virtually, and take part in the virtual life of these networks. They post photographs, pictures, and postcards; they comment on themes and share memories; at the least, they actively take part in vivid discussions on past and present Grozny. But, this is only the tip of an iceberg. Because “odnoklassniki” asks everyone to name his or her school, every school in Grozny has its own group. But, almost every factory and institution and nearly every neighborhood are represented online as well. Most of these are closed communities. One has to be accepted by the moderator in order to get access. But, the communities I was able to join consist not only of former Groznentsy of different nationalities but also new inhabitants who moved to Grozny or were born there after the Chechen War.

Mapping the landscape of the virtual Grozny, one could optimistically
conclude that the new medium has created a new common ground for people after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet war, and the terror of the regime in the Northern Caucasus. Indeed, the virtual space helps one to forget the cruelties that happened only a few years ago. It enables people to go back in time. It gives rise to nostalgic dreams at night for the former Groznentsy and lets them come true by day. At the least, it helps people to overcome the spatial isolation of the post-Soviet period which separates former classmates, neighbors, and friends. The reinvention of Grozny’s communities in virtual space prepared the ground for reunions offline. Or, this is how it looks from afar, but the everyday life of the virtual and the real might be more complicated.

**Coming together after the war**

On one rainy day in August 2006, a bus was waiting at a train station in Moscow for people from Grozny. One after another, men and women showed up. Some came alone; some arrived in small groups. Some of them quietly took seats on the bus; some got on telling jokes, and, some shouted out enthusiastically after recognizing former classmates from Grozny’s school no. 9. Most of them had not seen each other for at least 15 years, a fact that did not hinder them from hugging each other. When the bus arrived at a guesthouse close to Moscow, the passengers were in a good mood. On the way through Moscow’s outskirts and *dacha* colonies, they chatted, laughed, and sang old songs they once had sung together in school. Most were between 40 and 50 years old, but in front of their old teachers and the school’s old principal, they felt young again, back in better times.

When the bus arrived, its passengers met other former students from school no. 9 who lived in Moscow and had come by car. Initially, the reunion’s organizers – a former teacher and a Moscow-based former student – had booked rooms for 70 people. However, 110 former students had arrived by the end of the day. Most of them came from the central regions of Russia. Some came from afar, e.g., Siberia, although the largest Russian subgroup came from the south where the largest number of Groznentsy had decided to settle in the 1990s. “Former schoolmates came from all over the world to this reunion,” I was told. In fact, only a few came from abroad, e.g., Israel or Kazakhstan, Russia’s neighbor state. However, the remark fit well with the story that is usually told that the breakup of the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet wars were
like explosions that scattered the *Groznentsy* to the four winds.

The former schoolmates spent two days together which they experienced as a time of utmost euphoria. What could be regarded as an ordinary reunion of schoolmates, however, seemed extraordinarily dangerous to some. Looking at the passports of the arriving guests, the managers of the guesthouse became alarmed, for all of the guests were born in Grozny, and not a few of them were registered (and some still are) as permanent residents of Grozny or other places in Chechnya. So, they called the police who immediately sent two minibuses carrying a squad of OMON-officers (a special unit of the Russian police) to the guesthouse. Because there was no sign from inside the house of any acute danger, the officers decided not to intervene and instead to wait outside the grounds until the departure of the “strange people.” They wouldn’t have been noticed if one of the guests had not been an FSB officer. He was later interviewed by his colleagues about what had happened there beyond the guesthouse’s walls.¹⁹

Despite fear of the police, nothing unexpected happened. The main reason for this seems to be that the guests did not attend the reunion in order to fight with each other or settle old scores. On the contrary, they came to reconnect with their classmates who once had lived in a particular neighborhood in the southern part of Grozny called *Oktyabr’skii raion* and who for that reason alone had become friends for life. They came, as one of them put it, hoping to regain the home that all of them had lost. It seemed that the loss itself was for them a more important shared experience than how they had lost their home. Nothing went wrong because the event was orchestrated in accord with routines that were familiar to everyone who had grown up in the Soviet Union. Every former class had its representative which made it easy to keep control of such a large group. With the help of some of the participants, the organizers prepared a program for the two days. The program certainly did not determine what would happen, but it definitely structured the event.

Because of the program, there was a time for the dinner party; what was called the “cultural part,” which included semi-official speeches; the recitation of poems bemoaning the loss of their hometown; and the declaration, “We did not need this war.” The event culminated in an outbreak of emotions when slides of the old Grozny were projected while the city’s non-official hymn from Soviet times played in the background
all of which, of course, had been prepared beforehand. “When I saw it,” an organizer said twice in an interview, “everyone was crying, men and women, simply everyone.” In the course of the reunion, they felt united by the suffering they had endured during the war which, they believed, had been caused by someone other than themselves.

With tears in their eyes, the participants formed a “community of loss” which, according to the social anthropologist Serguei Oushakine, was a constitutive feature of post-Soviet, Russian society. In Russia, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was experienced as a trauma because for a number of generations the Soviet past had been part of their individual biographies. In contrast to societies in central Europe, the people of Russia could not imagine where the transition would lead and why it was necessary to go through a long period of hardship, violence, and loss. In making sense of the troubled present, as Serguei Oushakine argues, they developed new languages and established new symbolic practices that helped them to retain continuity in times of radical change (Oushakine 2009a: 4–6; Oushakine 2009b)

In this period, the former inhabitants of Grozny also actively bemoaned the loss of the security of the past. They did so within their families and small networks while helping each other to cope with the resettlement outside the Caucasus and deal with the aftermath of the war. Hitherto, they had regarded themselves as individuals suffering through the tragedy of the Soviet or Russian or Chechen people. However, events like school reunions enabled them to redefine themselves as people from Grozny. They reinvented themselves as a community whose members had once shared a common ground which had been lost during the catastrophic times. The former students of school no. 9 felt united by loss despite their different national identities. This loss could not be better symbolized than by the ruins of their former school building which had been destroyed by bombs and artillery shells. School No. 9 was razed to the ground, as was the Kirov Palace of Culture which had been picturesquely situated a little ways up a hill between two neighborhoods.

However, loss was not the destiny of that community, as Oushakine observed in the course of a study of communities of loss in a Siberian city. For, the Groznentsy at the reunion of school no. 9 could not have joined their community except with tears in their eyes. Former members of a children’s choir remembered the old songs they once performed on socialist stages throughout the city. Two now grown-up boys from the
neighborhood—“our rockers Musa and Sergei”—took their guitars and performed all the pop songs they once had sung in the streets on warm summer nights. There were jokes everyone could laugh at, songs everyone could join in singing, and the lezginka, the “national dance” of the Caucasus that nearly every Groznenets and Groznenka is able to perform (Martin 2001; Hirsch 2005; Zhemukhov and King 2013). These were the moments when the participants I interviewed felt a strong personal connection not only with their city but also with the Caucasus and its way of life. As one of them, whose Russian grandparents were born in that region, put it, “We too are from the Caucasus and the Caucasus is about strength.”

The reunion took place at a time when Internet forums like “Groznyi virtual’nyi” and “Grozny city” were becoming increasingly popular within the small and isolated communities of Groznentsy. Not only was this large event, probably the first large reunion of former Groznentsy, made possible by the Internet but news of its occurrence was disseminated through the Internet too. The news was shared and so were the pictures, provoking the desire to meet. Interestingly, subsequent large meetings followed more or less the same dramaturgy with projected slides of the old, the destroyed, and the rebuilt city; tears; songs; and the lezginka at the end. In some cases, people met who had fought on different sides of the barricades during the war. But, as far as my interviewees could remember, they too did not want to renew the conflict; instead, they complained that it was corrupt politicians, not themselves, who had caused the destruction of their hometown. Apparently, this version of the post-Soviet narrative helped them to create a real and a virtual space that allowed them to “return” to “their” Grozny from before the war.

**Becoming good neighbors again?**

Although in the last two years the former Groznentsy have gotten used to meeting each other in the real world, they come together in virtual space more often. Seeking conversation, they chat with people from their former hometown, for example, in a chat room within the group “Grozentsy” on the “odnoklassniki.” Here it is possible to open a chat room where only members of the group can enter, post messages, and engage in real-time chat. In contrast to private chat rooms, every member
of the group—every one of the 35,000 members of “Grozantsy”—is able to read the conversations. Furthermore, this chat room is not anonymous. Every statement can be traced back to a member and his required profile. It is, therefore, difficult to reinvent oneself totally on the virtual social network “odnoklassniki.”

Initiated in January 2010 by a former inhabitant of Grozny, the chat room I will focus on here is still active today and contains more than 18,500 posts. The title of this chat room already sets the tone for conversation—“kak u nashego sosedya vesela byla beseda” (“amusing talks with our neighbors”). In his first statement, the initiator of this chat room, V.I., explained what was welcome and what was not:

Unluckily, many of us had to start our lives a second time and had to begin from scratch. But, we will not remember these sad stories because we already have shown to ourselves and to others that we are people from Grozny; we are strong! … Here it will be possible to talk about everything, but a sense of humor is welcome since humor makes it easier to understand each other”

(Kak u nashego sosedya … Online posting by V.I., 20 January 2010)²⁴

V.I., a retired entrepreneur in his early 60s, told me in an interview that this was not the first chat room he had initiated. But, the other chat rooms were difficult to get started. People did not chat with each other, he complained. Apparently, he understood that communication does not just happen spontaneously. But, he did not give up. Instead, he tried to find subjects in which everyone was interested and was happy when conversations eventually got started.²⁵ Although V.I. had moved to St. Petersburg in the early 1980s, he still does not feel at home in the northern region. Longing for his former hometown and the Caucasus, the “Russian south,” is a leitmotif that runs through the novels and short stories he has published on the Internet.²⁶ When he came across an online announcement of a Grozantsy meeting, he attended it but was bitterly disappointed, for he discovered the difference between the longing for and the confrontation with real people. To put it simply, he met neither former classmates, colleagues, nor old neighbors but a group of much younger people from Grozny with whom he had little in common. However, V.I. is not one to despair quickly. Instead, he turned
once again to the possibilities of the World Wide Web. About the beginnings of his “neighbor-chat-room” he wrote, as the Russian saying goes, “How the boat is called, so the journey will be.” Having named his boat, he put a lot of effort and much wit into making it sail towards the harbor of nicely chatting Groznentsy.

During the first four days, more than a dozen people actively took part in conversation. All of them had come from Grozny, but only two were still living there. The others had settled in different regions of Russia, some in the Northern Caucasus. With one exception, all of them were older than 30. The majority was between 45 and 65 years old and held at least a college degree. Nearly two-thirds were female, but, quite often, male members dominated conversation. A constant group soon formed and lasted for several weeks. At the time, the Eurasian continent was in the midst of an especially cold winter. Thus, members chatted at night sitting in front of their computers, night after night, in the warmth of their homes. Later on, they also chatted from their offices during the workday, though the conversations were more intense at night.

The group attracted a number of readers who occasionally entered, made comments, and disappeared without leaving further messages. It is not possible to say anything definitive about such passive readers of the chat. However, it is the discursive practices of active participants at which I will look.

As V.I., the site’s initiator, first suggested, participants talked about everything: the weather, the corrupt Russian police, women, and men. But whatever they talked about, they always returned to the subject of their lost city. They spoke about the weather, the food, and the city’s public spaces and repeatedly expressed their desire to return to Grozny. “I will go back to my homeland,” wrote a woman from St. Petersburg, “because for us, the people from the Caucasus, it is difficult to stand the frost” (N.J., 29 January 2010). When talking about nature, they agreed that Russia was beautiful, but, that did not stop them from thinking about the impossible return to their hometown. “I’m longing for the past,” one of them wrote while remembering the city district she had lived in. “Would it be possible to catch … a train which would bring us back into the past?” VI. asked. All of the participants knew that no such train exists, that their Grozny can only be visited in nostalgic memories. That is why another participant referred to a popular song from the late Soviet period that plays with the idea of the garden as a heterotopy—“I’m lying
under a pear tree taking part in everything …” (N.J., 29 January 2010). In other words, lying under a tree or sitting in front of a computer one is able to imagine oneself travelling to places and living within communities that do not exist any more.

The past is gone. Every participant of this chat room knew that it was impossible to recreate the city of their memories. But as long as the words flowed, the idea of old Grozny was quite real. It was there. It was alive and so was the idea of the community of the former Groznentsy, an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) whose members clung to this idea and, therefore, to each other. “Oh my dears, how good it is to be back home,” a Grozny-based male member said greeting all of his virtual neighbors one winter day. A couple of days later he had the same feeling again. Spending another night in the forum he exclaimed, “As I said, we are at home” (Z.L., 29 and 31 January 2010). This virtual home had become a place where he and others were not only able to chat but also tease each other and laugh together as is only possible with people who are close to each other, at least in some ways.

Since these virtual neighbors were longing for their home, they were eager to establish good relations with everyone and avoid conflicts at any cost. They wanted their forum to be free of “anger and badly hidden hatred,” as the site’s initiator had put it at the beginning (Z.L., 27 January 2010). Nevertheless, the cruelties of the past sometimes surfaced. When the same Groznenets called himself “prostoi naezdnik,” that is, a simple horseman, ironically playing with the Orientalized stereotype of the mountaineer, he provoked a biting remark from a Russian woman. The trope of the noble savage reminded her of the “roaring” 1990s under president Dzhokhar Dudayev when “violent entrepreneurs” ruled the streets of Grozny and she – as most other non-Chechen inhabitants – was cast out of the city. Immediately, V.I., trying to maintain good relations among everyone, reminded participants that such remarks are “evil” and that “we are good people” (V.I., 29 January 2010).

However, striving not to provoke hatred does not mean that it doesn’t exist. For example, V.I. was once making jokes about the traffic police in Grozny and the ordinary drivers usually not bothering themselves with traffic rules. In doing so, he apparently tread on the foot of a hitherto passive reader. The young man from Grozny replied aggressively that Chechen drivers were as observant of the rules as any other drivers in Russia. Clearly, V.I. was misunderstood, for he was ironically
remembering Grozny in Soviet times. Yet, he did not ignore the young man but tried to explain in detail what he had intended to say. The other participants obviously understood what had happened. In order to prevent VI. from being offended by the man’s reply, one female participant wrote that the young man was not used to V.I.’s humor. Referring to the war crimes Russian troops had committed in Chechnya in the last decades, another female participant added that V.I. should not feel offended because the young man had other reasons for reacting aggressively (V.M., D.N., and N.J., 30 January 2010).  

Although the recent Chechen Wars were taboo in the chat room, the issue was hard for participants to avoid. For example, when some Groznentsy were talking about the books they had once read and the authors they liked, one of them mentioned the Soviet writer Vladimir Soloukhin. Soloukhin was a slavophile representative of “village prose” (Brudny 1998; Mitrokhin 2003). However, he was not described as a Russian nationalist but as a reasonable man and a peacemaker who at the start of the First Chechen War wrote a newspaper article with the title “I’m ashamed to be a Russian.” “Shame on us,” one participant concluded. “Whosoever will provoke us, we should not make war in the Caucasus” (Z.L., 9 February 2010). What elsewhere could have served as the starting point for a heated discussion about the causes of the war and national pride was here interpreted by everyone as an expression of pain coming straight from the heart. It had to be allowed and the emotion should be shared by all of the virtual neighbors. As with the post-Soviet “communities of loss” described by Serguei Oushakine, expressions of trauma helped to build common ground for the Groznentsy. But, contrary to the findings of Oushakine, expressions of loss were not ends in themselves. Instead, participants referred to loss in order to open the way to a better future. “When everyone begins to think in this [peaceful, WS.] way,” one participant wrote in reference to a remark about the war in the Caucasus, “the world will become a better place” (S.K., 9 February 2010). However, the participants of this chat room felt that thinking this way alone was not enough. In order to rebuild the lost community, one had to cultivate good relations within the chat group.

And, indeed, most participants of the chat room tried to maintain good relations with everyone. They respected each other’s cultural differences accepting, for example, the different gender roles in their societies. When a Chechen participant described where in Grozny his two daughters were
studying, he also mentioned that his wife kept house, as is the custom in the Caucasus. The participants that night were predominately female and included women who had had successful careers. However, none of them blamed the Chechen patriarch for inhibiting his wife’s professional ambition. Instead, he was praised for taking care of his wife and family. Although one of them labeled herself “emancipated,” she was ready to accept that the only “true men” are “men from Grozny,” which included men of different nationalities, who are cultivated, caring, and, at the same time, strong (V.M., D.N., and N.J, 29 January 2010). Confronted with this ideal of manhood, some male participants openly regretted that women in Russia did not dress as they thought women should, in skirts rather than trousers. Yet, none of the “emancipated” women took affront at this. Instead, they explained the style of dress in terms of the cold of the Russian north and the challenge that women from Grozny faced with the end of Soviet Union: “Having left Grozny, many women had to become ‘breadwinners,’ which means that they had to take on ‘male’ responsibilities. That is why they started wearing trousers!” (S.K., 30 January 2010). Thus, chatting about cultural differences blurred the dividing lines between people with different national identities. In these discussions, members felt more connected with than divided from each other, for everyone was from Grozny; everyone was different from the rest of Russia; and everyone was influenced by the cultures and inspired by the traditions of the Caucasus.

After chatting for some weeks, the virtual neighbors got used to greeting each other every day as “good friends,” sending each other virtual flowers or glasses of beer as symbolic presents, and wishing each other a nice day and a good night. Eventually, several participants began to explore the mystery of their “harmonious companionship” (“druzhnaia kompaniia”). They guessed that they must have more in common than the simple fact of having been born and grown up in the same city. “From the very first day,” one female participant wrote, “I had the impression that back then in Grozny we knew each other very well and were already close! Then we were separated by fate, but now, to the pleasure of all of us, we are together again!” Others agreed that they might have met in the cinemas, on the boulevards, at parties or, simply, at work; after all, the city was not that big. But, for one female participant in her early 60s this speculation was too prosaic. She supposed they had more in common: “In any case, one can feel that we
are soul mates!” (S.O., 17 February 2010). Not everyone felt comfortable with a metaphor based on the romantic concept of love. Another female participant, a schoolteacher who often insisted on having the final say, stated again and again that this metaphor was misleading. However, the discussion ended when another participant proposed that they think of themselves as a family of nations – a metaphor they had known very well since Soviet times (Clark 2000: 114–35; Günther 1997; Beissinger 2006). She wrote that they had been alone for a long time. “But now we have found a new family … and for now the challenge is to prevent it from being destroyed” (N.J., 17 February 2013). A family can be found and lost, as the metaphor implies. However, one’s family isn’t a matter of choice.

“Families” and communities in the ruins of empire

Enjoying a warm September night in Grozny in 2012, I received a text message full of exclamation points, smileys, and kisses. “Welcome to our harmonious little family of Groznentsy,” K.A. wrote from Moscow.28 I was sitting in a café drinking tea with some of her former classmates from school no. 9 and two new friends she had made during her trip to Grozny three month before. It had been her first visit to her hometown since 1992. The number of former Groznentsy coming together and remembering their happy times as good neighbors is growing. Due to the relative calm of the Chechen Republic in recent years, the number of Groznentsy visiting their hometown is also growing.

It is certain that not all of the former Groznentsy are eager to come together again, as M.Q., a physician in Grozny and a friend of K.A., told me. We were talking about his former neighbors who once lived in a famous house in the center of the city. The house burned to the ground on New Year’s Eve, 1994, the first day of the Russian assault on Grozny. In Moscow, I interviewed an elderly man who had lived in the same house in Grozny. As this man was known in the city’s cultural circles, I asked M.Q. if he knew him. “His son twice tried to become a friend of mine on ‘odnoklassniki,’ ” the physician told me, “but I declined.” I and two of his friends, both native Groznentsy, asked him why. His answer was pretty simple. He and the son were neither friends nor foes in Soviet times; thus, he saw no reason to invent a friendship that had never existed in the past. “I have already found those I was looking for,” he added referring to some of his Chechen and non-Chechen classmates and
friends. Every former *Groznets* longs for his hometown and his old neighbors, I concluded, but everyone does it in a different way and for different reasons.

What actually drives the *Groznets* to become good neighbors again and to visit their hometown? Some of the *Groznets* I interviewed said that they do it “to calm the soul,” some mention the graves of their parents, and some, referring to an old literary trope, declare that they are and will forever stay “voluntary captives of the Caucasus.” Though the people I interviewed seldom used the trope of captivity, it reminded me once more of the cultural background the empire has left. Recently, the anthropologist Bruce Grant has argued that the trope of captivity has to be seen “as an ‘art of emplacement’, one that generates a powerful symbolic economy of belonging in a highly charged setting” (Grant 2009: 16). In the narrative that has been told since Pushkin’s “Prisoner of the Caucasus,” the captive is adventurous but innocent. He did not come to the Caucasus to leave a bloody mark, as the troops of the Russian empire did. Instead, he was attracted by the mountaineers’ spirit of freedom and the beauty of the rocky landscape. Captured and imprisoned by a tribe of highlanders, he falls in love with a Caucasian girl who is also an innocent character. Love is universal; it can bridge the gap between different worlds, but this relationship in the Caucasus ends tragically. Thus, the Russian hero was unrewarded for his seemingly unselfish gift of love. These popular myths of Russian captives, as Bruce Grant argues, “were very much gifts of empire, generating recognition of givers in their own courts first and among recipients second, if at all” (Grant 2009: 16). To put it differently, the trope of captivity is about the cultural sovereignty of empire and not just about belonging. For those who employ this trope, it may justify Russian history, the Russian presence in Chechnya, and, perhaps, a Russian future in the Caucasus.

There is something to this interpretation, for many former *Groznets* are inscribing themselves into the discourse of the “Russian south” which is going to be lost. After 1991, as the literary scholar Edith W. Clowes has suggested recently, the discourses of Russian identity have shifted from national progress to national space (Clowes 2011). From this point of view, the migration of Russians from the Caucasus and the increase of non-Russians in that region can be understood as a tragedy of the Russian nation. I discovered Russia’s impulse to keep its foot in the door of the Northern Caucasus somewhere I did not at all expect – in a well-
known Moscow-based NGO with branches in different regions of the Russian Federation. One can sometimes spot an attempt, under the cloak of charitable aid, to keep a hold on contested terrain because “Grozny is our city and a Russian city too,” as an interviewee said.30

The aim of regaining territory on the southern periphery is certainly not the only, and probably not the most important, motivation for dreaming of one’s former hometown. However, another former inhabitant of Grozny, who now works for the same NGO I mentioned above, disagreed. “Grozny was an international city,” she said, and I was immediately convinced. We were talking at a dinner party of Groznetsy in Moscow,31 and all of the guests claimed to be international. Some of them were not even from Grozny. To my left sat a woman from Dagestan, to my right a family from Moldova. I myself came from Germany, and from Karaganda, Kazakhstan, too, but for the Groznetsy this was not a problem. “We are an international family,” one of the organizers of the party, a former Komsomol activist in Grozny, explained. “Thus, guests from other nations are always most welcome.”32 At the end of the party, we danced lezginka; after all, it was a dinner party of people from the Caucasus taking place in a restaurant with the proud name “Olympian” run by a Chechen businessman and located on the bank of the “Russian” river Moskva.

At evenings like this, I started to understand that the impetus to remember and to revitalize old friendships, relations with past neighbors, and networks comes from the people, not from the former empire. The Groznetsy I talked to are most often driven by a sense of the community that they once shared in their everyday lives. In recalling the late Soviet Union, when their communities were still intact, they are not falling back into nostalgia, which is how we usually misunderstand rosy reinterpretations of the past (Todorova and Gille 2010; Todorova 2010; Boym 2001). They simply remember that something was there that isn’t present today. Relying on the tropes of captivity and the family of nations generated by the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, they are striving for their own sovereignty in a challenging world full of uncertainty. As we might have known from post-colonial theory, power derives not only from institutions and discourses but also from people who negotiate, interpret, and perform (do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan 2005: 98–100; Ashcroft et al. 2006: 309–12). Nostalgic longing for the multicultural Soviet past in virtual and real spaces is, thus, a way
to re-empower oneself.

Remembering their communities, the people from Grozny are in a certain way rebelling against the dominant discourses of the Russian and Chechen nations. Their lives simply do not fit the tropes of primitive highlanders, on the one hand, or ignorant colonizers, on the other. From their own experiences, which include violence and war, they know that everyday life on the Soviet periphery and, apparently, in the metropolis too, was different, much more complicated, and ambivalent. This is why they are building bridges to their old hometown, searching for people they lived and worked with, and chatting with those who recall the common places no one else is now able to share. They came together as a “community of loss”; however, they are striving to re-establish themselves in the post-Soviet present as the explicitly “civil community” that they imagine they were in the past.

Notes


2 When I asked how life was in the late Soviet Union, most Chechen interviewees answered “normal’no” (normal) thus reflecting representations of a “good life” in a socialist society as it was imagined by the elites of Brezhnev’s time. On the re-interpretation of Soviet language in the late Soviet period, see (Yurchak 2006; Rics 1997).

3 According to the last Soviet population census (1989), 121,350 Chechens and 21,346 Ingush lived in Grozny. These two groups constituted 35.9 percent of the population of the capital of the autonomous republic. However, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians together represented 55.8 percent of the total population (397,680) (Tishkov 2001: 122).

4 The violence that broke out in Grozny in 1991 did not always have an ethnic quality, as interviewees reported. Still, violence was most often directed against the Russians and the non-Chechens. Furthermore, to justify violent actions, perpetrators often employed the same anti-colonial metaphors as were in the popular discourse in support of that violence. Although it is difficult to reconstruct this discourse from documents, one can easily spot it in the pleas of the Chechen national elite in the newspapers to stop the ethnic violence (see for example, Sadulaev 1992).

5 To quote the English title of Politkovskaya (2007), A Small Corner of Hell:
Dispatches from Chechnya.


7 See www.moct.org (Memories of College Times, to be read as “bridge” in Cyrillic letters) (accessed 31 May 2013).


11 In doing so, I am inspired by the anthropologists’ perspectives on “social media” as integral parts of “social reality” (Miller 2011).

12 I was not able to read sites in Chechen language. However, as far as I can see there are only a few dedicated to old Grozny. Furthermore, most Chechens who lived in Grozny in Soviet times are due to the school curriculum much more fluent in reading and writing in Russian than Chechen language.

13 Author’s interview with K.A., Moscow, September 2011. Nationalist ideologists suggest people think and behave according to their national identity. I do not name the nationality of my interviewees right away in order to avoid “methodological nationalism” (Amelina et al. 2012). Instead, I will indicate the nationality when the national affiliation is important for my inquiry.

14 Author’s interview with L.B., Moscow, August 2012.

15 According to odnoklassiki.ru, as of January 2013, more than 205 million people have used its services. More than 40 million users are using the social network pages daily.

16 Author’s interview with L.B., Moscow, March 2012.


19 The FSB officer declined to be interviewed in February 2013.

20 Author’s interview with K.A., Moscow, September 2011.

21 Phone call to K.A., Moscow, September 2011. In Russian: “… a Kavkaz – eto sila.”

23 See www.odnoklassniki.ru/group/42742317514849/topic/49622772547681 (accessed May 2013). In order to visit this web page, one has to become a member of the forum. Since the participants of this forum are protected from the general public, I do not cite real names.
24 All further statements in this subpart are online postings on this chatroom. To allow an easier reading, the source is not repeated each time.
25 Author’s interviews with V.I., St. Petersburg, March 2013.
27 For crimes committed by both sides during the two recent wars, cf. Orlov and Cherkassov (2010).
28 SMS from K.A. (September 2013).
29 Author’s interviews with M.Q., Iu.R., and A.S., Grozny, September 2012.
30 Author’s interview with N.T., September 2012.
31 Author’s interview with R.U., March 2013.
32 Author’s interview with B.V., March 2013.

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2 Remembering and forgetting in Chechnya today

Using the Great Patriotic War to create a new historical narrative

Aude Merlin

In Itum-Kale, a village in the mountains of southern Chechnya, there is a large monument commemorating the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45. On the left side of the monument the inscription in Russian reads: “Nikto ne zabyt! Nichto ne zabyto!”: “Noone is forgotten; Nothing is forgotten!” On the right side the inscription in Chechen reads: “Khoman bits lur botsu turpalkhoi”: “Do not forget the national heroes!” As the photograph from October 2012 shows (see Figure 2.1), the dates are inscribed on the two outer walls (despite having recently been erected, the right side has already lost some of its letters … ), and on the central wall hang steles bearing the Chechen names of those national heroes.

It wouldn’t be surprising to see a monument like this one practically anywhere in Russia, from Smolensk to Vladivostok, such is the omnipresence of references to the “Great Patriotic War” in the memorial patriotism brought back to life in the 2000s after its insistent presence during the last Soviet decades (Voisin 2011; Dubin 2004; Gudkov 2005). But a monument to the “heroes” of the war is likely to be unexpected in Chechnya, the scene of a traumatic event: accused of massive collaboration with the Nazis (Campana et al. 2009; Denis 2009; Werth 2006; Burds 2007), on the 23rd of February 1944 and the days following, on Stalin’s orders, Chechens were deported on an immense scale, as were the Ingush on the same day, and just as the Karatchais had been in November 1943 and the Balkars would be in March 1944.

The complexity of the bond between history and memory is nothing new, either to the social sciences or to the post-Soviet era. But this case is unique and requires deeper study, so entangled have history, memory, and memorial policies become. The decision to commemorate the
Chechen heroes of the Great Patriotic War represents a new approach and major turning point in the historical narration of the post-Soviet era. On what historical writings does this memorial policy rest? How does the policy pursued in Grozny connect with the official memory of World War II developed by Moscow, for which it represents a fundamental event? How do these historical narratives compare, and how does the celebration of the memory of the “Great Patriotic War” fit in with the episode of deportation, and in particular, with accusations of collaboration with the Nazi invaders? This question is all the more important since the first pro-independence Chechen president, D. Dudayev, included the tragedy of deportation in the crucible of collective identity, thus heightening support for independence.

Figure 2.1 Monument dedicated to WWII Chechen heroes, Itum-Kale, Chechnya, October 2012. “Noone is forgotten; Nothing is forgotten!” (in Russian, left) “Do not forget the national heroes!” (in Chechen, right)

Doubtless, the imagery of a “Great Patriotic War,” meets several objectives: not only does it legitimize Kadyrov’s power for Moscow and for Chechen society, but by promoting an official public memory policy that focuses on a war from a more distant past, it tends to erase the more
visible memories of the two recent wars (1994–96; 1999) or at least change the dynamics between the focus of the memorial and its narration. This chapter proposes to explore the fragile composition of symbolic and memorial investment in the “Great Patriotic War” of 1941–45, the selective commemoration of the 1944 deportation, and the negation of the two recent wars in the public sphere of collective memory.

In order to look more deeply into these questions, I carried out a fact-finding mission to Chechnya in October 2012. Field research conditions in Chechnya are tricky, as access to certain people and raising certain subjects is limited by the risk of putting interviewees in danger. Nevertheless, careful observation of monuments, museums, and codes used in public spaces as well as attention to news media and official discourses provided irreplaceable information on the construction of a memorial policy. Interviews were carried out simultaneously with professors at Grozny University, journalists, writers, a Chechen veteran of the “Great Patriotic War” and “ordinary citizens,” even if the atmosphere of political control forced us on occasion to read between the lines. Additionally, contemporary literature, memoirs, and academic papers also provided invaluable information, and we requested complementary interviews, some by email with researchers and Chechen informants living in exile.4

Glorifying heroes rather than commemorating victims

Until 1938, Chechens were not drafted into the Soviet Army, but first conscripted in 1939. In 1941, at the start of the Great Patriotic War, there were approximately 9,500 Chechens in the Red Army and despite defection,5 their numbers continued to increase with mobilization. Although in 1942, the Ministry of Defense decided to stop drafting Chechens, in 1943 an appeal to volunteers was launched: Chechens were allowed to join on a voluntary basis (Werth 2006; Denis 2009; Burds 2007; Oshaev 2004). But on the 23rd of February 1944, Red Army Day, the entire Chechen and Ingush people were deported from their Republic (Campana et al. 2009; Alieva 1993; Brauer 2002). Approximately 16,500 were directly deported from the front, while over 500,000 Chechens and Ingush were deported directly from Chechnya-Ingushetia (Nekrich 1978; Werth 2006: 357).6

Described collectively as traitors, the thousands of men among these
“punished people” who participated in the resistance against German troops were never officially recognized during the Soviet period. Exceptions were only made for individuals like Khanpasha Nuradilov, a Chechen from Dagestan and hero of Stalingrad, a machine-gunner credited with the killing of 920 Nazis. Some military commanders even declared Chechens or other “punished people” among their troops under another nationality in order to keep them at the front (Aydamirova 2005). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, four other Chechens were decorated by Yeltsin: Visaitov, Uzuev, Abdurahmanov, and Umarov. But it was precisely in line with and in the aftermath of the policy of Chechenization, followed by that of “Kadyrovization” (Dannreuther and March 2008) that this participation was presented openly and in the public space, as a collective phenomenon.

Chechen authorities promoted this policy with a solemn ritual on the 9th of May, the day of the “Victory against German fascism.” For example, on the 9th of May 2012, for the 67th anniversary of the Soviet victory against German fascism in 1945, the “Ramzan” and “Putin” clubs took part in an initiative in Chechnya known as “Thank you for victory.” The schoolchildren of Grozny went to the home of Vakha Gakaev, a Soviet Chechen veteran of the Great Patriotic War with gifts and letters and put up a plaque on his house in Khanpasha Nuradilov Street. When I remarked that Vakha Gakaev lived on a street named after another Chechen hero of World War II, my guide answered: “Well, if his street hadn’t already been named after a great war hero, we would have renamed it Vakha Gakaev street.” Indeed, several streets are named after veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Chechen veterans of the Great Patriotic War and their families benefit from special attention from the authorities: various administrations provide them with goods, gifts, and material support (Caucasian Knot 2013c). Hence, in the lead-up to the 60th anniversary of victory, a book on the Chechen contribution to victory was published, to add to other works in recent years (Khatuev and Ibragimov 2005; Bersanov 2010; Oshaev 2004). This book clearly announces its intention to fill in a gap in history. In a text entitled “For the historical truth”, Khatuev and Ibragimov underline that:

historical literature has already mentioned what the Chechen people did for the victory against fascism. … Nevertheless, this problem is presently one of the “white spots” in the common history of the war
that touched our country. First, there are still no works presenting in its entirety the complexity of the worthy contribution of the Chechen people to the Victory against fascist Germany. Secondly, the question of Chechen participation in the Great Patriotic War has long been forbidden for historians or scientists of the Soviet Union.

(Khatuev and Ibragimov 2005: 5)

Another book published in Russian and Chechen to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the Victory (Bersanov 2011) mentions in its introduction the participation of Chechens in the defense of the Brest-Litovsk fortress, and in the battles of Sebastopol, Leningrad, and Stalingrad.

The biographies of the Chechens who fought against Nazism are brought to light in different publications. Apart from the most well-known names, those of Khanpasha Nuradilov, Matash Mazaev (Seshil 2002: 68) or Visaitov, recent books (Oshaev 2004; Bersanov 2011) publish the biographies, heroic acts during the war, or memories of Beybulatov, Dachiev, Idrisov, Abdurahmanov, Magomed-Mirzoev, Uzuev, or Umarov. These works describe their native villages and brave deeds, reconstitute their individual itineraries. Movladi Umarov, for example, left his village in 1939 as a volunteer, fighting against Finland first and taking part in battles against Germany beginning in 1941. In 1996, he was decorated posthumously by the Russian president. Historical figures outside the Soviet Union are also mobilized. Such is the case with General De Gaulle’s “Commander André,” in fact a Chechen from Urus-Martan, his real name being Alaudin Ustarkhanov, who fought with de Gaulle. Today, many documentaries on André appear on Chechen television. He was detained by the Nazis in Germany during World War II, but managed to escape and joined the French resistance, where he met the General.

Thus, along with the material reconstruction of Chechnya glorification of the countrymen who sacrificed their lives in the war against Nazism has been incorporated into the construction of a new, official national Chechen narration. This could be qualified as an attempt to create a new form of Chechen patriotism, linking together the local dimension and formal marks of allegiance to Moscow. The rhetoric of loyalty based on glorification of the Great Patriotic War exploits an image of the Chechen people as part of the Russian people: in their
letters, children celebrate the liberation of Russia. The Soviet Union is not mentioned; instead, we find the more abstract “motherland” and “our country,” and sentences such as “Thank you for allowing us to live in a free country.”

The political and symbolic dimensions of the motherland are being reformulated, even, one might say, “reformatted.” This type of “layered” patriotism is a reflection of the integration of the Chechen nation into the Russian entity (Russian citizens, rossiiskii) and revives the duality of the Soviet era individual, whose identity within the “ethno-federal” system articulated between Soviet citizenship and ethnic identity. It thus cancels out Chechen patriotism of the early 1990s, expressed first in words and later by Dudyayev’s armed resistance against Moscow. What we are witnessing is a new form of narration formulated at the behest of, and supporting the current political order and aimed at legitimizing the Russian federal order and the current Chechen regime.

**Legitimating the new political order: from the Chechen heroes of the “Great Patriotic War” to the figure of Akhmat-Khadzhi Kadyrov, “Hero Of Russia” and “Savior” of the Chechen nation**

Any memory policy will lead to a selection process, and face a complex equation between “weight of the past” and “choice of the past” (Rosoux 2012). These choices make it possible to skip entire pages of Chechen history and are reflected in the vague, all-purpose phrases found on memorials when heroes are not clearly identified, thus allowing ambiguity. The dedication below a monument of Visaitov riding a horse, “To the warrior-counrmen defenders of the Fatherland” (Slavnym voinam-zemliakam-zashchitnikam otechestva) is linked to the Great Patriotic War, but the same rhetoric could have been found in the interwar period (1996–99) to evoke fighters for independence – heroes from the first Chechen war (1994–96) (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010; Merlin 2012).

The inscription “Eternal Glory to the heroes” is only a few steps from a bas-relief of Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov, “first President of the Chechen republic, Hero of Russia.” V. Putin’s epigraph is also about victory: “he has gone undefeated.” The merging of references to Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov and to the Great Patriotic War also strikes the
visitor to the museum that opened on the 9th of May 2010, World War II victory day in Russia, and is dedicated jointly to the figure of the “first President of the Republic of Chechnya and to the Great Patriotic War,” in a mix of eclectic symbols – a celebration of the life of the first president and a tribute to the Chechen veterans of the Great Patriotic War.

The visitor is caught in a scenography that mixes hagiographic discourse on the itinerary of Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov with photos of him in primary school, poems in his honor, a narrative of Chechen deeds during WWII, and a series of portraits of Chechen veterans and others born in the Chechen-Ingush Republic. On the museum roof – the museum itself is partly underground – an obelisk with the red star honors the Soviet victory over fascism; underneath it, the eternal fire of the unknown soldier is surrounded by bas-reliefs representing scenes from the Great Patriotic War. Aesthetics are of the monumental Soviet style, and at the same time we are shown photographs of people wearing the traditional clothes of the region, a *Papakha*, for example, the astrakhan wool hat worn by men from the Caucasus. Bas-reliefs of veterans clearly show they are Chechens, Ingush or were born in Chechnya-Ingushetia.

Here we see a conventional combination of identities in which the ethnic identity is enshrined in a larger Russian (instead of the former Soviet) identity. Like culture in Soviet times, “national in form, socialist in content,” here too we observe the same two-storey arrangement, one that builds on local identity and glorifies sacrifice on behalf of a larger group, namely the “Soviet” group, which embodies victory against fascism (on the similar historiographical construction of the Tatar hero Musa Jalil, see Daucé 2011).

Nevertheless, while this articulation between the local and the larger group was typical of dual-level Soviet patriotism and more recently has characterized Russian patriotism, it is also a new rhetoric in the case of Chechnya, considering the stigma that weighed on the entire Chechen people throughout the period following World War II. Apart from a Nuradilov street and a few articles published in the journal *Groznenskii rabochii* on the 9th of May in the 1970s and 1980s, there was no grand monument to the glory of the “children of the country” who sacrificed their lives during World War II.

Moreover, linking Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov with the Great Patriotic War makes Kadyrov into a hero par excellence, even if he was born after
the war and the most relevant link between him and the Great Patriotic War is probably the fact that he lost his life while celebrating victory over the Nazis – assassinated in Grozny on the 9th of May 2004, as Ramzan Kadyrov reminds the public when he accompanies veterans laying flowers on his father’s grave (see Figure 2.2). This link is neither accepted nor appreciated unanimously, as shown by a few skeptical judgments on the part of local intelligentsia:

![Image of the monument in Grozny](image)

*Figure 2.2* First President of the Chechen Republic, Hero of Russia Akhmat Khazdzhi Kadyrov (1951–2004). V. Putin’s epigraph: “He has gone undefeated”.


To be honest, I have to admit that I found it surprising and incomprehensible that the museum dedicated to the Great Patriotic War was named after Akhmad-Khazdzhi Kadyrov. I find this disrespectful to the veterans themselves. Celebrating his memory can be done, but it should be done separately from the memory of the veterans.  

But this link between the new official memory of World War II and the figure of Akhmad-Khazdzhi Kadyrov, as far-fetched or artificial as it may seem, is easily understandable from the point of view of the will to
legitimize the new regime. This historical shortcut provides the cornerstone for a new historical narration that proclaims national cohesion and writes off any event that does not fit in (Littell 2009; Merlin 2010). Together with other forms of mobilization used by R. Kadyrov’s regime to court part of the population (financial retribution for political loyalty, distribution of material goods, apartments, cars to selected groups, use of sport and mass culture, funding of Hadj and social aids by the Kadyrov fund, construction of mosques), historical narration is one of the vectors for the cult of personality of Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov.

**How can the commemoration of the 1944 deportation and celebration of the heroes of the Great Patriotic War coexist?**

How does the memory of deportation coexist with this new official narration? One would imagine the two not quite at ease with each other. Is it possible to simultaneously celebrate war heroes fabricated by the Soviet regime and commemorate the victims of that same regime? Does the memory of deportation belong to the private sphere of individual memory rather than to official memory?

In 2011, the Archives department of the Chechen government and the Youth Committee, with the support of the Chechen Parliament, set up a website devoted to the 23rd February of 1944 deportation, http://deport-chr.ru. On the front page, the site featured a video of the Republic’s leader Ramzan Kadyrov with the slogan “Forbidden to Forget.” Launched in February 2011 on the eve of the anniversary of the deportation, the site presents testimonies of survivors, pages with reports of “special settlers,” articles and historical documents. Witnesses’ accounts of the deportation were collected and uploaded, and the site was expanded with biographies.

In the context of the 1944 deportation, a massive phenomenon affecting all families (Iakhiaev et al. 1991; Digiev 2009; Alieva 1993) – everyone interviewed remembered stories about life in deportation told by their parents and grandparents17 – it seems normal for a Chechen political leader to appear in solidarity with this history, this legacy. No Chechen political leader, separatist or “pro-Russian” seems able to distance himself from what seems to be a true “Chechen identity
software.” In that sense, if Dudayev and Maskhadov strongly engaged the memory of deportation to support the legitimization of the separatist project, so-called “pro-Russian” Chechen leaders also mobilize this common heritage: it allows them to express solidarity and to indicate their belonging to the national group, therefore not to pass for traitors in front of their own people, showing themselves to be aware of the weight of that heritage, which they carry as individuals and as families.

If necessary, they can use this memory as a tool during negotiations with Moscow on the payment of financial and symbolic compensations for reparation of that state crime and thus, can become spokesmen for a society presented as being united and of one mind. At the same time, the memory of a “victimized people” is put forth less than that of heroes. As we see in a number of examples, it is engaged selectively – in the issues of the memorial to the deportation, the day of national mourning and finally, the issue of defamation and negationism.

**Break with the Dudayev “legacy”**

The deportation played a central role in Dudayev’s discourse, and after the proclamation of Chechen independence, a memorial formed by tombstones grouped together under a sword pointing to the sky was erected in 1992. The building of the memorial was a strong symbolic act, since it made publicly visible a language that could be mobilized by separatist rhetoric “*Duhur dac! Dolkhur dac! Die a diyr dac!*”: “We shall not weep! We shall not be brought down! We shall not forget!

A mixture of pride, dignity, and the vivacity of memory, according to various testimonies this monument was widely appreciated in Chechen society. Since the entire population had been deported and sufferings were still alive, here was a visual symbol that reflected the founding reality of a collective memory (Alieva 1993; Campana *et al.* 2009). However, since 2008, the deportation memorial has been hidden by a tall fence.

To justify its closing, R. Kadyrov put forward the site’s poor location, with no room for car or bus parks, no possibility to pray or organize *zikrs*, sufi rituals for celebrations of important events and commemorations. At the same time he announced the construction of a new “grandiose” memorial complex (Caucasian Knot 2008b) in a more spacious location outside the city. According to some observers, the
reason why the first monument was hidden was simply that it was an annoyance for the head of the Republic. “For Ramzan Kadyrov, it was intolerable to see a monument to the deportation erected by Dudayev enjoy such great appreciation on the part of the people, which does not mean he wanted to erase the memory of the deportation, only the traces of a monument not of his own making.” In Chechnya, questions about this monument were met with awkward smiles in October 2012. As a matter of fact, in February 2014, Chechen authorities dismantled the Memorial to the 1944 deportation and transferred the gravestones to the territory of a complex dedicated to the victims of terrorism, namely the fallen employees of the Chechen power structures. By doing so, they definitely renounced to erect the previously promised complex, and contributed to an ongoing blurring of the memory (Kavkaz Uzel, 14 February 2014, accessed 4 April 2014).

23rd of February: an embarrassing date?

Hoping to transform the pain and crushing weight of this memory fighting for its very life, Dudayev had planned to declare the 23rd of February the official day of the renaissance of the Chechen people. It was, however, a difficult card to play. How could one celebrate rebirth on a day of affliction? The attempt to transform mourning into a “revival” festival was not a success. During the Ichkerian era, the preferred festival day was the 6th of September, the day of independence, which recalled the toppling on the 6th of September 1991 of the Supreme Council of the Chechen–Ingush Republic by nationalist separatists close to Dudayev. At the same time, the 23rd of February remained a day of mourning widely celebrated in families. Tainted with ambiguity and malaise from the start (hadn’t deportation been organized in the midst of World War II, precisely on that same day of celebration of the Soviet Army?) this date continues to cause difficulty for the different Chechen authorities.

Only in 2010, precisely on the 23rd of February, did Ramzan Kadyrov suddenly announce a decree to make this date a national and official “day of memory and mourning,” despite the fact that it was the “Day of the Defender of the Homeland” in post-Soviet Russia, in perfect continuity with the 23rd of February celebration of the Red Army during the Soviet era (Caucasian Knot 2010). Then in 2011, the authorities about-faced:
23rd of February was abandoned as a day of mourning, and a single day of mourning was instituted: the 10th of May … the day of Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov’s burial (Caucasian Knot 2013b). As a Grozny intellectual said, this was “to avoid being sad during a celebration,” which would have been the case had the 23rd of February been maintained as a national Chechen day of mourning, and also if the 9th of May (also a day of mourning for the assassination of Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov) had remained a day of dual celebration – mourning on one hand, celebration of the victory over Nazism on the other.

Thus, in order not to mix sadness and pride, the “coincidence” of dates – Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov’s assassination while he was celebrating the anniversary of the 1945 victory – even prompted the possibility of celebrating the 1945 victory on the 6th and 7th of May, as was the case in 2006, so as to devote the 9th to a mourning day for Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov (lenta.ru 2006).

It was after long discussions in an ad hoc commission, bringing together historians, political figures (among whom was the president of the Chechen Parliament D. Abdurahmanov, also a historian by training), religious figures, and elders, that the 10th of May was chosen, and named “Day of Memory and Grief of the nations of the Republic.” Faced with this discussion, a writer rebelled and was reprimanded. Everyone attending the discussion was expected to adhere to the choice made: expressing the slightest doubt would be perceived as a lack of loyalty to the powers in place.24

At his meeting on the 9th of April 2011 with the members of the organizing committee, the Head of the Republic made a decisive statement:

There have been a lot of tragic days in the history of our people. There was Stalin’s deportation of the Chechen people on the 23rd of February 1944, the burning of the residents of the village of Khaibakh, hundreds of thousands of peaceful citizens who perished in the territory of the republic during the first and second military campaigns, the tragic death of our first President Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov on the 9th of May 2004. All these are tragic dates in the history of the Chechen people but I would not like them to fall on the nationwide Russian holidays.

(Caucasian Knot 2011)
Immediately after, Dukvakh Abdurahmanov, speaker of the Chechen Parliament pointed out that on the 10th of May, the late head of the Republic, Akhmad Kadyrov, who perished “at the traitors’ hands defending the integrity of Russia and the right of the peoples of the Chechen Republic for a peaceful and fair life” was buried. The designation of traitors resounded with the glorification of Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov, a hero – the exact contrary of the separatists. And the speaker of the Chechen Parliament added: “The Chechens must celebrate the 9th of May and the 23rd February, like all Russian citizens” (Caucasian Knot 2011).

This name, Day of Memory and Grief of the Nations of the Republic, which erases the uniqueness of the repressions to which the Vaïnakhks were subjected, both in the Tsarist and Soviets eras, thus particularly the 1944 deportation, gave rise to strong reactions. The return to a sort of internationalism of the peoples cohabiting in Chechnya – whereas the Republic is in its quasi-totality “mono ethnic” – and this new name “requiring” celebration of the memory of a man, but neither the 1944 deportation, nor other episodes of massive crimes, is still an issue. The blogger L. Hamzatov enumerates several episodes in Russo–Chechen colonial history that affected the Chechen people massively, to question that “an order be given to mourn” the memory of one man in particular (Hamzatov 2011). One inhabitant, questioned by Caucasian Knot, also rebels, going so far as to assimilate the choice of date to a falsification of history:

February 23rd has always been and still is one of the most tragic days in the history of our people. It is immoral and inhuman to demand from the Chechens that they celebrate this date as the Day of the Defenders of the Fatherland as they do in other regions of the country. To my mind, establishing the republican Day of Memory and Mourning on the 10th of May is the same sort of falsification of our history as the provocative publications on Chechen history appearing in some of the Russian mass media from time to time. I do not think this innovation will make our people forget our past and our common national tragedy of 1944.

(Caucasian Knot 2011)

This mixing of mournings in a single day-symbol led to a rather baroque
and comical scene capable of creating confusion: on the 10th of May 2013, on the Alley of Glory leading to the Akhmat-Khadzhi Kadyrov museum (museum of the Great Patriotic War) did no one see the sealed rail car surrounded by barbed wire on which was written in big letters 1944–57? As an official from the office of the head of the Republic and government said on the 10th of May:

Religious events and sacrifices dedicated to the memory of our first president, Akhmad Kadyrov, were held yesterday at various locations and mosques across the republic. Today, on the Day of Memory and Grief of the Nations of the Republic, Chechnya also hosts a variety of events on the occasion of several tragic dates in the history of our people, namely, first and foremost, the Stalinist deportation in 1944 and other nation-scale tragedies, including, of course, the death of Akhmad Kadyrov.

(Caucasian Knot 2013b)

Despite the public celebration of the 23rd February on the 10th of May, as one interviewee put it: “the 23rd of February is still the day of mourning when every family sacrifices a lamb and gathers together to celebrate the occasion in private.” Official events nonetheless occur on that day in different places, particularly in schools, but it is no longer a national holiday. A day for the commemoration of a tragic event, it is accepted – tolerated – only “on condition” that it be dissociated from the stigma of collaboration in 1944, which created lasting and negative stereotypes of Chechens.

**Chechen authorities crusading against defamatory stereotypes?**

On the 22nd of June 2013, in a perfectly official and strongly symbolic spot, a presentation took place of the re-edition of T. Chagaeva’s book on the 1944 massacre of Khaïbakh, in which the 700 inhabitants of the village were burned alive in a barn by NKVD men. The presentation of that tragic deportation episode took place in the Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov museum in the central hall housing portraits of the heroes of the Great Patriotic War and in the presence of numerous officials of the Republic, among them the head of the Chechen Parliament secretariat and the mufti Mirzayev, head of the Spiritual Board of Muslims DUM. The presentation was reported on Chechen state television news. During
the testimony of a survivor, Salamat Gaev, the voice-off report made the point that some people continue to deny the very fact of deportation; the camera then showed Dzhambulat Umarov, head of the Chechen Parliament secretariat, speaking of a bill aiming to legally punish anyone who denied that deportation had taken place.

Such a scene is not surprising if we situate it in the context of the 2010 period. Determined to dissociate any possible defamation from the date of February 23rd, to rid that date of all suspicion or allegation of a possible betrayal or non-loyalty, academic and political circles were increasingly on the lookout for possible errors or slander against the Chechen people during World War II. In 2010, two published works presenting a negative image of the Chechen people (labeled mass deserters and scoundrels) caused a stir in Chechnya. The cases of the 58th volume of the *Great Russian Encyclopedia* and a textbook on the *History of Russia* (1917–2009) by Barsenkov and Vdovin certainly left their mark. The ombudsman of the Republic, N. Nukhzhiyev himself wrote to the president of the Council of the Federation, S. Mironov, to the president of the Duma, M. Gryzlov, to the public prosecutor, I. Chaika, joining expertises from researchers from the Institute of Orientalism and demanding that the editors of the Great Encyclopaedia present their excuses to the Chechen people, and that the editor-in-chief of the Encyclopedia be brought before the court, that volume no. 58 be withdrawn from the public, and that the public prosecutor analyze the article mentioned from the point of view of the Penal Code regarding calumny and incitation to racial hatred. He prepared a lawsuit against the publishing house, Terra. On the 5th of April 2010, the Zavodskoy District Court in Grozny ruled the article “extremist,” and the Supreme Court of Chechnya confirmed this ruling.

The affair went to Moscow and to the Civic Chamber, where Svanidze, president of the Commission on Inter-ethnic Relations and Freedom of Conscience, returned the expertise of those texts to the public prosecutor and the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia’s Interests. On the basis of the expertise, the commission concluded that the articles represented extremist literature. Barsenkov and Vdovin then wrote to N. Nukhzhiyev, repenting for not having verified their sources and for having used only those of the NKVD, which claimed “63 per cent of Chechens to be deserters.” They then
requested that the case not be brought before the courts. In the wake of this incident, the Chechen political authorities, via the Ministry of Education, commissioned an expert’s examination of all Russian history textbooks, an unprecedented move.

It was in the midst of this legal battle that the project to award Grozny the title of “hero-city” was launched. The award was hardly based on fact – there was no deadly bloodbath in Grozny as there had been in other cities crowned with that title in the Soviet Union – Leningrad, Stalingrad, Sebastopol, and others, but nothing could better serve the aim of masking historical complexity beneath massive and monolithic glorification.

Without effacing the deportation, but by inserting it in another narration, Chechen authorities were playing on the interpretation of facts and the questioning of the colonial and Soviet past. This is probably only partially paradoxical: when and if the Chechen authorities put themselves in a position of loyalty towards Moscow, they could once again take up the symbolic and political rhetoric tried and tested in Moscow without any negative consequences. This ambivalence of “with or against Moscow,” found at all levels of policy of the so-called “pro-Russian” Chechen authorities, is clearly present in the field of history and memory.

It is part of what a Chechen intellectual in exile sums up as a form of bargaining on the part of Grozny:

It’s almost blackmail, like a red warning flag over Moscow’s head – that makes Chechnya a spoiled child with special status in the Federation. What the authorities in Grozny are saying to Moscow is in fact this: “Support me, fund me, give in to all my whims or I’ll make trouble!” And in view of the recent past, that rings a worrying bell for Moscow. As if Chechnya were threatening to return to the maquis, take up arms and sow disorder in Russia.

Thus in a way, it is the raw wounds of the two recent Russo-Chechen wars that seep through in this attitude, which also affects the payment of compensations for the deportation. Bargaining is a strategy of the “pro-Russian” leaders, Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov and Alu Alkhanov, particularly in 2004–2006 (Zaytseva 2005), while Ichkerian authorities were focused on a political aim that did not seek material means from
Moscow, but political freedom. Furthermore, the sum offered by Moscow in the beginning of the 1990s had been considered an insult to the memory of the dead, in a context where the road to war hardly facilitated relations between Grozny and Moscow (Campana et al. 2009).31

The black boxes of history

Across from the central mosque, right in the center of Grozny and facing a photographic mural of Grozny in ashes, are the grey stone steles dedicated to the “victims of terrorism”: when you ask if there is a memorial monument to the two last wars, this is where some inhabitants of the city will direct you.32 Each stele represents a district of the Chechen Republic, and each one bears a list of the names of policemen and heads of the administration (the administration led by Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov as of 2000) who lost their lives in the name of the fight against terrorism – in other words, political and institutional figures taken as targets by separatist and Islamic combatants.

Official imagery thus consists in paying tribute to the memory of the heads of the administration and policemen, without saying a word about the extent of abuse and violence suffered by civilians. This imagery is part of the construction of an official memory of the two recent wars, which takes on both the official name of anti-terrorist operation and the construction of a discourse according to which the federal authorities intervened to save the Chechen people from its terrorists. A Troshev Street, named after one of the generals of the seizure of Grozny in 2000, a monument to the glory of the parachutists of Pskov, a stele on the military base of the 45th regiment of airborne forces in Khatouni are all public signs of this official memory. On the other hand, there is no visual memory to pay tribute to the thousands of victims of the federal armed forces.

Having seen what happened to the city and its inhabitants over the last 20 years, driving through Grozny in 2012 often seemed like a hallucination. J. Radvanyi uses the term “cauterized” for this city, reconstructed after the two wars (Radvanyi 2013: 222). How can one put into words the gap between this exhibition of an official memory and what lives on in individual memories? If, as V. Rosoux says, “the time of an individual and that of an institution rarely coincide,” we can nonetheless only be struck by a form of schizophrenia in the public space
– certainly a matter of symbolic violence, whereby “damage is inflicted on people’s identities and negatively affects their self-representations” (Braud 2004: 161). A matter of foreclosure?

The legal term “foreclosure” refers to the closing of a case due to expiry of the statutory time limit. The notion was introduced in psychoanalysis to describe a psychological process that goes beyond suppression, leading one to “forget” an event to such an extent that it is perceived as never having occurred. The creation of memorials referring to an “older” memory (of the Great Patriotic War) seems to be bringing closure to a more recent memory, a very vivid memory that is kept quiet and removed from public view. The Chechen authorities have not opened the “black box” of recent memories, and to a great extent conduct a policy of “forgetting,” in which we can observe the five forms described by Johann Michel: forgetting-omission, forgetting-repression, forgetting-manipulation, forgetting-command and forgetting-destruction (Michel 2011).

It is thus in these places, where a recent past is forced into oblivion (Portnov 2010), that a décor is constructed in space and a new relationship with time is gradually staged. Whereas on a narrative level, Chechens are “bound” to unite around a historical and political consensus, a political figure and peaceful coexistence within Russia, this underlying foreclosure hinders progress regarding the “black boxes” of recent history.

Notes

1 It is important to note that the term “Great Patriotic War” contains a significant emotional connotation in Russia. The dates 1941–45 refer to the period during which the Soviet Union was itself actually at war against Nazi Germany. This choice of term was also inspired by the term used for the 1812 war against Napoleon’s Army. The human price paid by the Soviet population was horrifying – as much as 26 million deaths according to more recent studies carried out during the perestroika era (Graziosi 2005). The adjective “patriotic” is extremely ambiguous, such is the variety of approaches, positions, and also repressive measures that divided or polarized Soviet society. The issue of the mid-war deportations of 1943–44 colors the adjective “patriotic” in a bitter way, putting into play the semantic weight of the term “homeland” and highlighting the repressive strategies used and the labels given to certain peoples accused of being the enemies of the Soviet people.
2 As has been shown by historians having worked on the subject (Nekrich 1978; Werth 1999; Burds 2007), the situation in the North Caucasus was particularly complicated. There were desertsions and refusals to obey conscriptions, but also anti-Soviet guerillas, including those of Hasan Israilov, Mayrbek Sheripov, and Imam Djavotkhan Murtazaliev, who controled six Chechen districts at the end of 1941. According to Nicolas Werth “The German penetration into the Kuban and parts of the Northern Caucasus (excluding Chechnya-Ingushetia), and the disarray of Soviet authorities, stimulated the formation of new bands as well as series of assassinations of party and NKVD personnel. … Later on, the NKVD accused the ‘bandit leaders’ of close contacts with German ‘fascist parties’, such as ‘The National Socialist Party of the Caucasian Brothers’ (led by Xasan Israilov) or ‘The national Socialist Underground Chechen Group (led by Mairbek Sheripov). These very dubious labels were clearly invented by the NKVD report compilers. Another accusation, put forward to ‘justify’ the deportation of half a million people in February 1944, was that ‘practically every single Chechen and Ingush took an active part in terrorism and banditry against the Soviet power and the Red Army’. The reports of the NKVD Anti-banditry Department show however, that the numbers involved in ‘bands’ remained in the range of a few thousand, which had been a fairly constant figure over the previous two decades” (Werth 2006: 355). There were on the other hand isolated acts of collaboration, but as N. Werth writes in another article “Recently available archival documents have shed no new light on the supposed collaboration of the mountain peoples of the Caucasus, the Kalmyks, or the Crimean Tatars with the Nazis. Some facts point to a small number of collaborators in the Crimea in Kalmykia in the Karachi Land, and in Kabardino-Balkaria, but no evidence exist of general policies of collaboration in these regions …. The autonomous republic of Chechnya-Ingushetia was only partially occupied by Nazi detachments for approximately ten weeks, from early September to mid-November 1942. There was not the slightest evidence of collaboration” (Werth 1999: 220).

3 Halbwachs, whose work focuses on the social frameworks of memory, has outlined the process underlying the making of memory and the way collective memory is produced by groups and written into social contexts (Halbwachs 1997). While memory (either collective or individual) can be seen as impalpable and crumbly, the most stimulating approaches focus on memory policies: “a memory regime resembles a cognitive framework, that is, a matrix of perceptions and representations of official public memory at a given period. … The political and social players are both the producers and the products of memory regimes” (Michel 2010: 193).

4 This text has benefited also from a translation grant from the ULB (Université Libre de Bruxelles) which I would like to thank here.
As Burds writes, “At the first mobilization in August 1941, 8,000 men were called to duty, and 719 failed to show. In October 1941, 4,733 were called, 362 failed to appear. By January 1942, as the Soviets endeavoured to create a Northern Caucasus national division, 50 percent of those called to duty failed to appear” (Burds 2007: 292). Nicolas Werth writes “As war against Nazi Germany broke out, the local authorities in Chechnya-Ingushetia were faced with the problem of mobilization. Until 1938, the Chechens and Ingush were systematically excluded from military conscription, but beginning in 1939, thousands were drafted according to new military rules. In the second half of 1941, over 22,000 men were to be taken into the Red Army, but less than a half actually appeared at the voenkomaty (military commissariat). This proportion went down to only a third in the first quarter of 1942. In April 1942 the Ministry of Defense issued an order stopping the conscription of Chechens and Ingush into the Red Army. However, a few months later, the same ministry allowed 3,000 volunteers to be levied from the Chechen-Ingush Republic” (Werth 2006: 355).

Author’s interview with I. Khatauev (historian and journalist, author of a book on the contribution of the Chechen people to the victory against Nazism during the Great Patriotic War), 9 October 2012, Grozny.

Khanpasha Nuradilov died in Stalingrad in 1943, before the accusation of mass collaboration and the deportation. His national origin was not hidden when he was made a hero of the Soviet Union. Idrisov, Beibulatov, Magomed-Mirzoev, and Dachiev were also awarded military decorations in 1943 and 1944.

This information has also been given during the author’s interview with Vakha Gakaev, 9 October 2012 (Grozny) and an interview with Mairbek Vatchagaev, 27 September 2013.

See also chapters by A. Le Huérou, J. Russell, and T. Lokshina in this volume.

Beybulatov headed a battalion which destroyed seven German tanks and killed more than 1,000 Germans. He distinguished himself in particular in the battle of Melitopol. The sniper Idrisov distinguished himself on the Northwest Front and Magomed-Mirzoev on the right bank of the Dnieper. Matash Mazaev, from the Naur district is a famous tankist. Dachiev distinguished himself on the Dnieper, was decorated during the war, and deprived of his decoration in 1955 (it was restored only in 1985). Visaitov is often represented on his horse: he distinguished himself in western Ukraine and in Germany, where he joined the Anglo-Americans. He released 3,000 Soviet citizens from concentration camps in 1945. He was decorated posthumously in 1990. Uzuev is famous for having defended the Brest fortress and for having shouted to the enemy: “We will die but we will not surrender!” Umarov became famous on the Western Front and was decorated
in 1996 with Abdurahmanov. One can find biographies of Chechen veterans of the Great Patriotic War on a site specially designed for that purpose: www.vov-chr.ru.

11 His code name was André. After the war, he returned to the Soviet Union. When Khrushchev visited France, De Gaulle asked him: “How’s our Commander André?” Khrushchev had never heard of him, but he nodded and said Commander André was fine. Back in Moscow, Khrushchev ordered to find out about him. His French comrades from the Resistance paid him a visit in Chechnya-Ingushetia in the 1960s. The Soviet power restored the road leading to Urus-Martan, where he lived. They gave him a motorcycle similar to the one he used to ride during the resistance. After their visit, “Commander André” mysteriously perished in a motorcycle accident.

12 Author’ interview with I. Khattuev, 8 October 2012.
13 See contribution by M. Basnukaev in this volume.
14 From schoolchildren’s letters to Vakha Gakaev, 9 October 2012.
15 See E. Sokirianskaya’s contribution in this volume.
16 Author’s interview with a professor at Grozny University, 9 October 2012.
17 Among them: author’s interview with Aiza Kurumova, Lublin, February 2003. Author’s interview with Sip S., Nazran, 2000. Electronic interview with Mairbek Vatchagaev, 29 September 2013. The newspaper Dosh publishes every year on February 23 testimonies and stories (www.doshdu.ru). Nearly all Chechens born before 1957 were born in exile. In the diaspora, February 23 continues to be commemorated every year (observations, Antwerpen, Belgium).
18 In the early 1990s, intellectuals from the “punished peoples” of the North Caucasus pushed for a history of the deportation to be written and published: numerous accounts were collected, demands were made that Khrushchev’s first rehabilitation acts be expanded, and requests were presented to the federal power (Campana et al. 2009). At the same time, local authorities started building memorials (Magas in Ingushetia, Nalchik-Dolinskoe in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachayevsk). In bi-titular Republics such as Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria, monuments to the deportation circumscribe one ethnic community as opposed to the rest of the population. In the case of Chechnya and Ingushetia, where there is one titular nation, this was most evident.
19 Author’s interview with Tanya Lokshina, Paris, 23 October 2012. Interviews with Grozny’s inhabitants, October 2012.
20 Author’s interview with I. Shovkhalov and A. Duduev, 2011.
21 Author’s interview with Tanya Lokshina, Paris, 23 October 2012. It should be noted also that whereas in 2008 and 2009, the period before the presidency of Akhmat Khadji Kadyrov was still mentioned (and immediately discredited) by the authorities, the names of former presidents Dudyayev and
Maskhadov have now completely disappeared from the public sphere.

22 Electronic correspondence with Mairbek Vachagaev, 27 September 2013.

23 There are numerous testimonies concerning the deep malaise caused by the dual significance of these two dates. How can an event meant to bring people together also recall collective tragedy? Author’s interviews with Abdulla Duduev and Israpil Shovkhalov, editors-in-chief of the review Dosh, March 2010. Author’s interview with Soip S., Nazran, July 2000. Summoning men to the Party office, supposedly to receive gifts, led them straight to deportation. Any allusion to that memory in the family was always painful, even decades later during the Soviet era. Author’s interview with Leyla G., Nazran, July 2000.


25 Author’s interview, Grozny, 8 October 2012.


27 The symbolic significance of hero-cities is important. In reality, Grozny was not a place where fierce combat took place – the Nazi troops were stopped in the Malgobek district in the Northwestern part of Chechnya-Ingushetia and also on the Karpinski line in Grozny itself for those who managed to reach the town (Werth 2006). A perpetual calendar sold at the Press House in Grozny and published by the Minister of the Policy of Nationalities, the Press, and Information, begins, in January, with the date of the 3rd of January: “The fascist invaders are chased back to liberated Malgobek,” Observation, Grozny, October 2012.

28 We can mention the presentation of the deportation in the hallways of the Department of History in the University of Chechnya: on the poster “Nashi zemliaki v gody VOV” (Our countrymen during the Great Patriotic War), it says “whereas many Chechens distinguished themselves in the struggle against fascism, the authorities decided that certain peoples were traitors, so as to clear their own slate for the heavy losses sustained at the outset of the war due to bad strategy on the part of Soviet authorities and to lay on these peoples a supposed guilt for the first military failures in face of the Nazi Army.” Emphasis is thus laid on a defensive rhetoric.

29 Author’s note: or at least part of society, since some of those serving the power are former combatants, see Le Huérou’s contribution in this volume.

30 Author’s interview, Belgium, March 2013. The amount of budget spending allocated by Moscow encouraged to a large extent the “Enough feeding the Caucasus,” “Enough feeding Chechnya” complaints expressed by some segments of the Russian society. See Basnukaev in this book.

31 Author’s interview with M. Vachagaev, 27 September 2013.

32 Federal forces were several times recognized guilty of attempts on the lives
or physical integrity of plaintiffs from Chechnya by judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (Russian Justice Initiative, www.srji.org/en (accessed 1 October 2013)).

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3 Victims and heroes

Commemorating the Russian military casualties in the Chechen conflicts

Nataliya Danilova

National memorials traditionally have been built with dual purposes: to act as forms of pedagogy about the nation and historical figures within it, and to honor the dead … Yet, this pedagogy is highly limited. Memorials do not teach well about history, since their role is to remember those who died rather than to understand why they died … It is important that the sites that are created to mourn the dead do not foreclose on discussions about why their lives were lost.

(Sturken 2011)

This observation on the memorialization of the victims of the World Trade Center in New York draws attention to a complex problem of remembrance: how can we mourn the dead if we foreclose on public discussion about the reasons for their death? Moreover, how can we commemorate the lives of soldiers killed in ambivalent conflicts if we “forget” the circumstances of these conflicts? Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, in their analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, have suggested that the commemoration of a difficult past is often marked by tension between national causes and their participants. This happens because in the case of an ambivalent conflict, “to the original dilemma of how to honor the participant without reference to the cause, there is a corresponding reciprocal problem of how to ignore the cause without denying the participant” (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991: 404). Commemoration of the Vietnam War in the US has demonstrated that “the identities and heroic sacrifices of fallen soldiers [can be] remembered, but the broader political context of the conflict (on which American society lacks moral consensus) [can be] quietly ignored” (Ducharme and Fine 1995: 1311). This chapter discusses how Russian society remembers Russian soldiers killed in Chechnya (1994–96, 1999–
2009), and how it deals with the context of the war. It also discusses “what is missing and not talked about in representations of the past” (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010: 1103). Omissions and exclusions are typical in the commemoration of difficult pasts, including the legacy of controversial conflicts (Zerubavel 2006). An analysis of the Russian case can contribute to the broader academic debate on the remembrance of the participants in ambivalent conflicts.¹

There is a great deal of unresolved controversy concerning the number of Russian military deaths in Chechnya. The estimated figures for the first campaign (1994–96) range from 3,927 to 5,042 servicemen and from 510 to 1,231 soldiers “missing in action” (Krivoshcheev 2001; Riazantsev 2005). This calculation includes 266 unidentified remains of Russian soldiers, reburied in common graves in the Bogorodskoe cemetery in the region of Moscow on 25 September 2000 (NEWSru 2001; Babchenko 2010). Estimates of human rights organizations and the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers are significantly higher, and number approximately 14,000 deaths (BBC News 2000; Nezavisimaia Gazeta 2000; Prague Watchdog 2000). There is no certainty about the number of Russian military deaths in the second Chechnya campaign (1999–2009). In 1999, “both the Russian Ministry of Defense and Chechen sources accuse[d] each other of understating the number of losses and exaggerating the losses of their opponents” (Herd 2000: 62). In 2009, official estimates amounted to 6,000 servicemen from the different “power” ministries, including the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior Affairs, Security Services, and other government divisions (Kommersant 2009a). However, in 2003, non-governmental sources estimated that approximately 11–12,000 Russian soldiers and over 40,000 civilians had been killed in Chechnya (BBC Russian 2003). Considering only the official estimates, we can safely conclude that over 11,000 servicemen died in Chechnya from 1994 onwards. This number situates the Chechen conflict alongside that of Afghanistan (1979–89), in which 15,015 Soviet soldiers died.

The controversy over the number of deaths in both Chechen conflicts is the result of both mistrust of government reports and the overall lack of information on and regard for the human price of fighting in Chechnya. In 1999, according to a public opinion survey, 76 percent of the population believed that the number of Russian military casualties was significantly higher than officially reported (FOM 2000). It may be
this lack of reliable official information concerning the number of casualties that has encouraged bereaved families and survivors to compile and to publish commemorative lists. Since the mid-1990s, commemoration of the Russian soldiers killed in Chechnya has been a primary concern of bereaved communities, soldiers’ mothers, and veterans (Oushakine 2009; Danilova 2012). This community-led commemoration has developed along with remembrance of casualties in other conflicts. In many regions, memorials built to honor soldiers killed in the Afghan War have subsequently been rededicated to include soldiers of post-Soviet campaigns, among which are Nagorno-Karabakh, Tajikistan, Moldova, Abkhazia, and Chechnya (Danilova 2005; Konradova 2006; Darsavelidze 2007). These locally built and community-initiated memorials commemorate fallen soldiers without distinction of their war experience or military rank.

This chapter compares cultural representations of Russian military casualties in Chechnya as illustrated by memorials, with media coverage of that subject. We begin with a discussion of the Serafimovskoe cemetery in Saint-Petersburg, followed by that of a national memorial to the paratroopers of the Sixth Company from Pskov in Moscow. We then trace changes in media coverage of casualties from the 1990s to the 2000s and conclude with the political and societal implications of war commemoration in modern Russia.

**Chechnya: a disappearing context**

The marginal role of the Chechen conflict in public commemoration in Russia is evidenced by the fact that in some Russian regions there is no memorial to the soldiers who died therein Chechnya. In Saint Petersburg, memorials to the Second World War (known in Russia as the Great Patriotic War) dominate the memorial landscape. Two memorials commemorate soldiers who died in the Soviet–Afghan War, but they do not mention those who lost their lives in other conflicts. As a result, those soldiers are commemorated in local cemeteries throughout the region. The Serafimovskoe memorial cemetery exemplifies this pattern of local commemoration.

The origin of this cemetery dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1905, a plot of land near the Staraia Derevnia square was allocated for the burial of local peasants and paupers (Encyclopedia of St. Petersburg 2010). In the 1930s, the “proletarian”
background of the dead saved it from destruction by Soviet authorities (Merridale 2000). During the Siege of Leningrad (1941–44), the cemetery became the largest site for mass burials of civilians and soldiers with an estimated figure of between 100–200,000 dead. In 1965, the government erected a war monument to honor victims of the Second World War. This impressive monument was adorned with an eternal flame and 2 meter high statues, and marked a state-led campaign to create the “Myth of the Great Patriotic War” (Tumarkin 1994; Weiner 2001). The Soviet era ended with the construction of two cenotaphs commemorating the deaths of Soviet sailors in accidents in 1981 and 1982, retrospectively. From the 1990s onwards, the Serafimovskoe cemetery has functioned as a major regional site for military commemoration.²

In 1996, the first Soviet–Afghan War memorial in the city was erected at the Serafimovskoe cemetery. Its positioning along the Alley of Heroes and at the far end of the cemetery introduces a concept of successive, yet divisive war commemoration. On the one hand, the Alley of Heroes symbolically links memorials to the fatalities of the Second World War with those of modern conflicts. On the other hand, there is a significant difference in visual imagery and textual dedications between earlier and later war memorials. For example, the central dedication of the Soviet–Afghan War memorial mentions only the time and place of the war – Afghanistan, 1979–89. We also see a plaque with the names of soldiers originating and recruited locally. The central composition of the memorial shows the figures of five young boys in Greek-style tunics, symbolizing the youth and brotherhood of the fallen soldiers. Although these symbols are common in war memorialization (Mosse 1990; Prost 1998), this memorial evokes a de-militarized and de-contextualized concept of brotherhood – it makes no reference to the cause of death, or to the controversial context of the Soviet–Afghan War (Danilova 2010). In this regard, it is in fact a memorial that separates “the participant from the cause” and context of this war (Wagner-Pacifci and Schwartz 1991).

Tombstones honoring Russian casualties in Chechnya are also situated along the Alley of Heroes, between the Second World War monument and the Soviet–Afghan War memorial. This positioning shows their integration into a context of national war commemoration. However, tombstones for soldiers who died in Chechnya do not all read alike, the most noticeable difference being that between conscript soldiers and
officers (Figure 3.1). For conscript soldiers, we read the name, date of birth, and date of death, and the short inscription, “perished in Chechnya” (pogib v Chechnye), which positions the soldier’s death in the context of the conflict, but does not elaborate on the circumstances of the death, nor offer any reason for and justification for it, nor associate it with the accomplishment of military duty or sacrifice for the country. This example confirms the point raised by Oushakine who notes that “the deaths of soldiers in hidden and forgotten wars [Afghanistan or Chechnya] were ostensibly devoid of the justifying ideological context that was so prominent, for example, in public representation of losses of the Second World War” (Oushakine 2009: 206–7).

The landscape of the Serafimovskoe cemetery shows that not all tombstones for the Russian casualties of the Chechen conflict are devoid of ideological justification. On the contrary, the tombstones of officers and professionals illustrate the emergence of a decontextualized and service-oriented commemoration. That of Dmitri Kozhemiakin, for example, lieutenant of the Sixth Company of Regiment 104 of the 76th Pskov airborne division (see photo on the right, Figure 3.1) exemplifies such a commemorative discourse. Kozhemiakin and 84 other members of the Sixth Company were killed on the 1st of March 2000 in a battle against Chechen fighters. Kozhemiakin’s tombstone is engraved with the coat of arms of an airborne unit, and bears the inscription “And God said ‘Hey, key-keepers open the gates to the Garden. I order you to let paratroopers into Heaven, from dawn to sunset.’” This inscription is typical of military folklore (Bannikov 2002), and it introduces ideas of military comradeship and the superiority of paratroopers in the Russian armed forces, and by extension, in Russian society. The tombstone also informs us that Kozhemiakin was posthumously awarded the medal of the Hero of Russia (Decree no. 1334, 2000). Except for this reference, the tombstone introduces no other nationalistic narratives, replaced as it would seem, by military values. Moreover, with no indication of where the soldier died, the tombstone reflects a decontextualized concept of commemoration. The absence of reference to Chechnya is also common to the tombstones of the policemen killed on a tour of duty and buried at the Serafimovskoe cemetery.³ In both cases, the context of the Chechen conflict disappears from the commemorative inscriptions, to be replaced by militaristic symbols. This service-oriented commemoration legitimates death but questions neither the context of the conflict nor the
circumstances of death.

*Figure 3.1* A gravestone to a conscript soldier (left) and a gravestone dedicated to a paratrooper of the Sixth Company from Pskov (right)
Source: Photos by author, April 2010.

An illustration of this concept of military commemoration can be found in the memorial to the paratroopers of the Sixth Company in the park of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces in Moscow (Figure 3.2). The inscription reads: “This memorial is dedicated to the soldiers-paratroopers of the Sixth Company, 104th Regiment of the 76th Pskov airborne division. The plaque was put up in 2002 by decree of the president of the Russian Federation.” Thus, the plaque tells us that the dead were in the armed forces, and that the monument was built with government support (Decree no. 214, 2000); however, as with Kozhemiakin’s tombstone, it does not contextualize the death of the paratroopers or offer any textual justification for their deaths. The year of the unveiling ceremony is the only indication that they were killed during the second stage of the Chechen conflict.

In this memorial, the scarcity of textual explanation is compensated for with imagery: the figures of two uniformed paratroopers holding weapons can be interpreted as symbols representing combat brotherhood and militarized masculinity. The idea of brotherhood is typical of war memorials in general and of memorials to the casualties of the Soviet–
Afghan War in particular (Danilova 2005). However, unlike the Soviet–Afghan War memorial at the Serafimovskoe cemetery, this one suggests a ready-for-battle concept of brotherhood. In the 1990s, local and community-driven memorials used “the expressive image of the soldiers who died in agony in a foreign land,” “a calm soldier who is tired of fighting” or “soldiers [who] are depicted sitting down, their weapons dropped, in an obviously non-bellicose posture” (Konradowa 2006: 9; Strelnikova 2011). The memorial to the Pskov paratroopers breaks with this tradition of a grieving and tired soldier, and celebrates the idea of combat readiness: paratroopers are represented as being ready to fight in future conflicts. This projection into the future contrasts with the decontextualization of the past in this memorial, but also reflects its nationalistic underpinning: the coat of arms of the Russian State symbolizes military brotherhood devoted to a nationalistic cause.

![Figure 3.2](image.png)

*Figure 3.2* The memorial to soldiers-paratroopers (*voiam-desantnikam*) in the park of the National Military Museum in Moscow
Source: Photos courtesy of Robert Lenfert, June 2013.

Thus, whereas the tombstones of conscripts in the Serafimovskoe cemetery situate soldiers’ deaths in the context of the Chechen conflict, alternatively the memorialization of professional servicemen shifts the focus of public attention from the context of warfare to abstract military values. The following section examines changes in the media
representations of Russian military casualties from the 1990s to 2009.

From victims to hero-paratroopers

The first Chechen campaign (1994–96) produced extensive coverage, often in appallingly gruesome detail, although one hardly thinks of that conflict in terms of “realistic” warfare, a common description of the Gulf War (Hoskins 2004). Ironically however, one can argue that it did give rise to one of the most realistic depictions of war in modern history: Russian journalists “with honesty, courage, sensationalism or sheer insensibility … show[ed] unvarnished truth” about the conflict (Ellis 1999: 121; Lieven 1998: 205). Contrary to the practice of American or British television during the Gulf War in 1990–91, Russian television and press provided explicit images and descriptions of death, violence, and destruction among civilians and combatants in Chechnya – openly, and with minimal, “common sense” censorship (Rikhter 1995; Wedgwood 1996; Mickiewicz 1999). This media coverage underscored the macabre reality of conflict in Chechnya.

During the first stages of the campaign, media sources sympathetic to the government (Channel One-Ostankino, Rossiiskaia Gazeta, and Krasnaia Zvezda), described the campaign as a large-scale police operation (Russell 2002; Tishkov 2001: 186–87; Mickiewicz 1999: 254–55). This narrative mirrored a government statement according to which Russian military forces in Chechnya:

reinstated a constitutional order and prevented the activity of illegal armored formations which violate[d] the human rights of Russian citizens in the Chechen Republic and some regions of North Caucasus …, and threaten[ed] the security and integrity of the Russian Federation.

(Decree no. 2166, 1994).

Contrary to the official version, the independent media outlets, following the lead of NTV (Independent TV), described the situation in Chechnya as a civil war, an ethnic conflict and a struggle for national self-determination (Lieven 1998: 120–22; Zassoursky 2004: 58–59; Tishkov 2001: 186; Mickiewicz 1999: 249–50). These representations dominated in the Russian media during the first campaign, and formed the basis of the cultural representation of military casualties.
During the entire duration of the campaign, pro- and anti-government media sources published photographs of dead Russian soldiers, images which showed the futility of the conflict, but also a disregard for soldiers’ lives and the feelings of grieving families. During the period from December 1994 to January 1995, the most active phase of the operation, pro-government newspapers, Rossiiskaia Gazeta, and Krasnaia Zvezda, did not publish commemorative lists or obituaries of servicemen, although these newspapers were among the few media that encouraged public support for Russian troops. Analysis of coverage shows that both pro- and anti-government media sources favored an image of Russian conscripts and often the Russian military as a whole, as victims of wrong political decisions and a crisis within the armed forces. This representation was somewhat undermined by reports of acts of cruelty and violence committed by Russian soldiers, but even in such cases, they were presented as involuntary victims of warfare (see, for example, Frolov 1995 in Izvestia; Orlov 2000; Tishkov 2001: 364–75). The pro-government newspapers, Krasnaia Zvezda and Rossiiskaia Gazeta, while recognizing certain errors in the organization of the Chechen campaign, praised the notion of military professionalism and duty; nonetheless, in these articles, there were no references to traditional national formulas of war commemoration in Russia, such as “sacrifice for the Motherland/or Fatherland.” In 1990s Russia, earlier ideological values were discredited, but new national values had not yet crystallized (Urban 1998; Tolz 1998). As a result, pro-government sources struggled to find an ideological justification for the death of servicemen, and fell back on dedication to military duty. The abstract concept of service distracted attention from the context of the first Chechen campaign, and also made it possible to avoid a discussion of “fuzzy” national values. But in the 1990s, the problem with service-orientated commemoration was its unsuitability for the legitimization of the deaths of conscript soldiers for whom military service was a result of compulsory call of duty. In a sense, the deployment of conscript soldiers during the first stage of the conflict predetermined the media representation of Russian soldiers in general as victims of war.

The fate of conscript soldiers in Chechnya stimulated the antiwar protests of soldiers’ mothers, extensively covered in the media (Caiazza 2002; Eichler 2006). In February 1995, the media reported on a trip to Chechnya by mothers of recruits to find their sons, alive or dead
(Vakhnina 2002). The depiction of Russian military casualties via the stories of soldiers’ mothers further victimized soldiers and represented their deaths as family tragedies rather than a phenomenon of national significance.

Thus, the liberalization of the media environment in the 1990s did not lead to a recognition of the lives of Russian soldiers. This was not because of government censorship, but the result of a context of ambivalent and “messy” warfare with a high level of military and civilian casualties, against a background of overall disrespect for the lives of individuals in Russian society. This context favored a depersonalized representation of Russian soldiers as victims of warfare. At the end of the 1990s, in two drama documentaries on the first campaign in Chechnya, _Purgatory (Chistilishche)_ by Aleksandr Nevzorov and _Condemned and Forgotten (Prokliaty i Zabyty)_ by Sergei Govorukhin – both released in 1998 – soldiers were described as hero-martyrs, but also as victims of ambitious politicians, greedy generals, and an ignorant society. These cultural revisions signified a trend from the victimization of Russian casualties during the 1990s to their heroization in the 2000s.

Following a government announcement in September 1999, the media represented the second campaign as a “counterinsurgency operation” (Herd 2000: 57–83; Russell 2005; Baev 2001) and described Chechnya as a region of multiple security threats, reproducing the government statement that international terrorism in Chechnya threatened “the integrity of borders and territories in Russia and abroad” and posed “economic and physical threats to the civilian population” (Bacon _et al._ 2006: 53; Putin 2000). This official justification of the conflict encouraged a positive representation of the Russian forces. According to Belin, in 1999, “during the first months of the campaign, most Russian media, including all major television networks, dwelt on the steady advance of the federal armed forces, the high morale among Russian soldiers, and the welcoming residents of the ‘liberated areas’”(Belin 2002: 18).

From 1999 to the end of 2000, images of the corpses of Russian soldiers disappeared more or less from television screens, but this change did not lead to the remembrance of those who had lost their lives. Since the beginning of the campaign in 1999, a typical media report would only briefly describe the number of service personnel or policemen killed.
or wounded in a particular operation or on a particular day usually without publishing their names (see, for example, *Pravda* 2000a; *Izvestia* 2000). It is difficult to speculate on the reasons for this “absent” representation of casualties. Doubtless, from 1999 onwards the government exercised censorship over descriptions of the Chechen conflict and imposed restrictions on the disclosure of information on Russian casualties (Solovev 2000; Mukhin 2003, 2007, 2008). However, it would be a mistake to ascribe this restricted coverage to government censorship alone, if only because during the first campaign even the independent media rarely commemorated the deaths of Russian soldiers. In fact, self-censorship seems to have been a more powerful instrument, limiting both reports on Russian casualties and the second Chechen campaign altogether.

Basing her conclusions on interviews and focus groups with Russian journalists, Oates states that from 1999 to 2008 journalists did not cover the conflict because it was “a difficult and dangerous story for journalists to cover, both in terms of trying to get information on the ground and the fact that the government was known to be intolerant of any coverage that could be deemed sympathetic to the Chechen cause” (Oates and McCormack 2010: 131). Also, as Oates explains, throughout the 2000s, journalists felt that the public was getting “weary of Chechen coverage” (Oates 2006; see also FOM 1996, 1998; Novikova 2007). Thus we can suppose that the media struggled to find some sort of framework for covering casualties that would satisfy the interests of both government and public. This conceptual problem originated in a reconfiguration of the commemorative discourse in the early 2000s.

In 1999, it was clear that the authorities encouraged a positive representation of the armed forces, but it was unclear what kind of representation they expected in the coverage of casualties. This uncertainty was resolved in March 2000. In one month, from the end of February to the end of March of 2000, Russian forces lost some 135 men, including 85 paratroopers from the Sixth Company of the 104th regiment, 76th Pskov airborne division (Shaburkin 2000), 20 policemen from the Moscow OMON (Novoselskaia 2000), and at least 30 policemen from the Perm OMON (Ilin and Ivanov 2000). Whereas the national media reported all three cases, only the deaths of the paratroopers led to the erection of national memorials and the production of documentaries and fiction films such as *Duty Bound* (*Chest’ imeiu,*
RTR, 2004), Wuthering Gates (Grozovye Vorota, Channel One, 2006), Breakthrough (Proryv by V. Lukin in 2006), and Russian Victim (Russkaia Zhertva by E. Liapicheva and I. Meletina, 2008) (Regamey 2007). In many senses, the deaths of paratroopers of the Sixth Company have become a “foundation myth” of the fight against terrorism in Chechnya.

To unfold this myth and “uncover the values for which a society stands, one need only look at its heroes, and at the mechanisms through which those heroes are commemorated and celebrated” (Ducharme and Fine 1995: 1309–11). In 2000, the official statement on the death of paratroopers introduced the framework of national commemoration. The following quotation from the statement of the Minister of Defense, Igor Sergeev, illustrates this narrative:

Paratroopers gave their lives in battle as heroes, loyal to their military duty, honour and combat brotherhood until the very end …. Our brave paratroopers demonstrated heroism, courage and a high level of professionalism in defending their position. They did not allow terrorists to break a blockade …. We will keep the memory of their heroism forever in our hearts. Their lives and heroic deeds will be an example of honorable service for the Fatherland. It will be appreciated by service personnel and all true patriots of Russia.8

This extract introduces the three main components of this “foundation myth.” First, paratroopers are repeatedly described as “heroes,” and continual references to heroism enable the subsequent cultural exploitation of their deaths via various media (memorials, theater, films, and music). Heroism is justified by references to traditional military values – loyalty, military duty, honor, bravery, and combat brotherhood. Second, paratroopers are presented as professionals, underlining the professionalism of the airborne force, and by extension, that of the armed forces as a whole, whereas media coverage of the first Chechen campaign had been critical of the overall situation in the armed forces. Third, the death of paratroopers is placed in the context of nationalism via references to symbols of the nation-state (Russia and the Fatherland) and the collective memory of the nation. This combination of militaristic and nationalistic narratives was obviously intended to make national war heroes of paratroopers killed in action.
In 2000, the representation of Russian military casualties as heroes emerged as an alternative to victimization. This was not accidental, and we might even suggest—not without a measure of cynicism—that it was difficult to find better candidates than paratroopers to exemplify heroes of modern conflicts. In Russia, the airborne force is one of the most prestigious and popular units of the armed forces (Smirnov 2010). In a sense, just belonging to this unit justifies national commemoration: symbolically speaking, paratroopers “deserve” to be thus celebrated, owing to their cultural image as dedicated professionals and “real” men. The cultural image of Russian paratroopers exemplifies abstract military values and the hegemonic masculinity of Russian society, much like the cultural image of the Marines in American society (Barrett 2001: 77–99). This explains the preference of veterans of ambivalent conflicts and bereaved families for memorials and commemorations (Danilova 2005).

However, it is not so simple to “silence” the ambivalent circumstances of the Chechen conflict or ensure that the representation of fallen soldiers as national heroes will remain uncontested. Analysis of media coverage shows that although the media repeatedly present paratroopers as heroes, they also present them as victims of the Chechen campaign. This ambivalence of context is revealed in titles of commemorative publications: “The Motherland owes a debt to its heroes” (Piskin 2002), “In the footsteps of the Sixth Company” (Polianovskii 2003), “Europe will estimate the price of heroic death at Ulus-Kert” (Kommersant 2009b), and “Forgive us, the Sixth Company! … Not all mysteries of the heroic deaths of paratroopers are unveiled” (Vasilkova 2010; see also, Vasilkova 2000; Pozhnov 2000). Although these publications recognize the paratroopers’ heroism, the normative narrative does not seem able to sustain itself: on the contrary, commemorative publications criticize the authorities as incapable of paying for funerals and tombstones, granting compensations to bereaved families, and holding someone to account for the paratroopers’ deaths. This style of commemorative reporting is common for the coverage of other episodes of mass deaths of Russian servicemen. Publications on the anniversary of the death of submariners of the nuclear submarine Kursk and submarine K-159, sunk in 2000 and 2003 respectively, begin with a recognition of the soldiers’ heroism, but end with cases of court appeals by bereaved families against the government and military authorities (Piabushev 2002; Nekhamkin 2003; Konygina 2005; Fedosenko 2006). This representation of fallen
servicemen as heroes, yet victims reveals the inherent contradiction in the emerging militaristic and nationalistic commemoration in Russia.

Along with Sturken (2011), we can conclude that memorials to the Russian soldiers who died in Chechnya do not teach anything about the history of the conflict or its controversies because in most cases they do not mention that conflict at all. Moreover, scarce coverage in the media ensures its “absence” from the public memory, creating a “collective forgetting” shared by the public, veterans, bereaved communities, and the government. For example, throughout the duration of the conflict, public opinion was divided in respect to the situation in Chechnya (Levinson 2001, 2010; Gudkov 2001; Dubin 2008). This was mainly due to an inability on the part of the public to agree on any kind of political solution to the conflict. Hence both veterans and bereaved communities also had little inclination to discuss the context or purpose of this war (Oushakine 2009). It is therefore not surprising that the government also opted for a decontextualized concept of commemoration. To date, the door to the legacy of the Chechen conflict is tightly shut, but the inability of society to discuss the controversies of prolonged fighting in Chechnya has its political and economic drawbacks. Regional authorities of Chechnya can exploit the “silent” commemoration of the Chechen conflict as a bargaining tool in order to extend their personal political and economic power over the region and negotiate a high subsidy from the federal government (Sakwa 2010; Russell 2011). We might suggest that the “revenge of the Caucasus” on Russian society described by Sakwa and Russell has been enabled by the absence of public discussion of the Chechen conflict.

This context downplays the human price of that conflict, as it fails to encourage recognition of those who lost their lives on service duty from 1994 onwards. There is also a disparity in the recognition of those who died in the first and second Chechen campaigns: the casualties of the first are remembered simply as victims of the war, whereas attempts have been made to remember casualties of the second as national heroes. This heroization, centered for the majority on the paratroopers of the Sixth Company from Pskov reflects the will on the part of the Russian government, and in a way, of society as a whole, to “forget” the context of the Chechen campaigns – its purpose, and above all, those who participated in it at the cost of their lives.

In Russia, the memory of the Chechen conflict can be described as
“the grey elephant in the dark room” (Zerubavel 2006). Society is aware of its existence and occasionally feels its presence, but is not ready to deal with the controversies inherent in it. Bereaved communities resort to the personalization and domestication of fallen soldiers, remembering them as family members and individuals (Oushakine 2009). Government authorities and veterans encourage the remembrance of soldiers for their dedication to military duty. Both strategies can potentially function as instruments of militarization of society and nationalistic uprising. In 2006, Sergey Oushakine, concluding his analysis of the soldiers’ mothers’ movement in Russia, has noticed that “emotional inscriptions of pain in politics could be easily appropriated by more politically and rhetorically skillful groups that are able to transform the politics of pity into a politics of blame” (Oushakine 2006: 309). The politics of pity commemorates fallen soldiers as victims of the Chechen, whereas the politics of blame accuses the “enemy” of causing the death of Russian soldiers, facilitating a discourse of heroization. Although in the 2000s, we can see the attempts to transform the “politics of pity” into the “politics of blame” (reaching its apogee in the commemoration of paratroopers of the Sixth Company), these attempts have had limited results. Analysis of the case of Russia demonstrates that it is difficult for politicians to exploit the memory of ambivalent conflicts for political mobilization, while denying both the context of war and its participants (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991). Contrary to the commemoration of the Vietnam War in the United States, Russian society ignores the context of the Chechen conflict, as it does the identities and sacrifices of the soldiers who lost their lives in it.

Note

1 I am grateful for this publication to Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Siecka-Kozlowski. The chapter is written with the support of the Postdoctoral Bursary from the Centre for Advanced Studies of the University of Nottingham. I am grateful to the editors and reviewers for their comments on the draft of this paper.

2 The Serafimovskoe cemetery also contains tombstones and a memorial dedicated to submariners of the sunken submarine, Kursk.

3 The special purpose police units (otriad militia osobogo naznacheniiia) are based in every region of Russia, and since 1999, have been sent to Chechnya on a regular basis on a tour of duty. The commemoration of policemen killed in Chechnya is an unexplored case in the literature. For details on the
reintegration of policemen with combat experience see a research project by
*Demos* (Lokshina *et al.* 2007).

4 Newspaper coverage of both stages of the Chechen conflict is taken from a
data base (www.public.ru) and online archives of national newspapers,
including *Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Rossiiskaia Gazeta, Izvestia, Novoe Voennoe
Obozrenie, Kommersant, Novaya Gazeta*. The period of analysis covers

5 These cultural revisions have brought to life the story of a conscript-soldier,
Evgennii Rodionov, who was killed in Chechnya on 23 May 1996, and only in
2006, was posthumously awarded the order of the Glory of Russia, and
recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church as a warrior-martyr (*voim-
muchenik*) (Regamey 2007).

6 Exceptional cases included the publication of a commemorative listing in
several issues of a newspaper (see *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* 2000).
*Novaya Gazeta* is another newspaper that published reports concerning the
casualties in 2000.

7 Zassoursky (2004) and Koltsova (2006) discuss the increase in government
control of the Russian media in the 2000s.

8 All national newspapers and main TV channels reproduced the official
statement of the Minister of Defense, Igor Sergeyev (see, for example, *Pravda*
2000b).

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Sharpe.
4 Reconstruction in Chechnya

At the intersection between politics and the economy

Musa Basnukaev

At the beginning of 2000, the industrial landscape of the Chechen Republic was devastated: all commercial enterprises had ceased production, a significant portion of assets had been destroyed or looted and a substantial percentage of the workforce had emigrated from the Republic. More than 154,000 houses and apartments in municipal buildings had been completely or partially destroyed. The total amount of housing completely destroyed extended to over 391,000 square meters and, in Grozny alone, over 376,770 square meters. Up to 70 percent of all apartments and homes – a total area of 500,360 square meters – were damaged. Between the years 1991 and 2000, Chechnya became one of the most economically depressed regions of the Russian Federation – having seen its economic potential and industrial base, its social infrastructure, public and private housing, transport links, and engineering capabilities almost completely destroyed.

(Government of the Chechen Republic 2010)

This extract from the plan for socio-economic development of the Chechen Republic, adopted in 2010, reminds us that traces of war are ever present in Chechnya. Indeed, military operations carried out during the years 1994 and 1996, and 1999 onwards, caused irreparable damage to both the economy and the social fabric of the Chechen Republic. The Chechen people were forcibly excluded from the economic, political, legislative, and informational processes of Russia and fell victim to the widespread hostilities. The experts Ruslan Khasbulatov and Ivan Rybkin consider that the conflict claimed at least 220,000 lives and that, “according to even the most conservative estimates, the economic damage caused during the two wars in Chechnya was worth at least 100
billion USD” (Khasbulatov and Rybkin 2003). A document dedicated to the role of Akhmad Kadyrov in the reconstruction sums it up more briefly: “After two bloody wars the Republic lay in ruins and the nation’s genetic stock had been thoroughly decimated” (Ministry of Education and Science of the Chechen Republic 2011).

How did the Chechen government deal with these consequences of the war? This chapter examines the strategy of reconstruction and development adopted by it after 2007 and its correlation with the overall strategy for the development of the North Caucasus Federal District (SKFO). It analyzes the tensions that arise over budget allocation and the disagreements over special financing that would allow Chechnya to overcome the traces of the war. Beyond technical discussions around the budget, this contribution reminds us that during the post-war period, the relationship between Vladimir Putin and Ramzan Kadyrov has played a key role in determining the development of the Chechen Republic. Relations between the federal center (the Kremlin) and its federal subject (Chechnya) are dictated by the political line taken by Vladimir Putin, and by Ramzan Kadyrov’s economic “curve” – that is, by the economic strategy deployed by the head of the Chechen Republic since 2007.

This development strategy presupposes a reinforcement of “vertical power,” together with an increase in financial support for the Republic. Today’s financial situation in Russia enables Moscow to carry out specific policies towards certain, chosen regions. Notwithstanding the slogan “stop feeding the Caucasus,”2 the cost of supporting the economy of Chechnya is not yet a subject of serious political debate in the country. But for how long can this strategy be maintained?

This chapter will first explain the shift from a special budgetary scheme for Chechnya to the funding of Chechnya on a general basis in 2012. The second part will evaluate to what extent this change was justified by the economic reconstruction of the Republic, while the third describes the strategy of development adopted by the Chechen government for the following years. The chapter will finally focus on the logic that prevails behind the decisions of Russian authorities, between political considerations and an evaluation of the efficiency of budgetary spending in Chechnya.

A special situation: the pros and cons

Since 2000, the Chechen Republic has received direct financial support.
Funds have been allocated on the basis of estimated costs for specific needs, primarily social infrastructure which was destroyed during the two military campaigns (in the years 1994–96 and 1999–2002). Funding was allocated on a project-by-project basis and the Republic of Chechnya received this funding directly. This differs from the situation in other regions. When assessing their budget needs, federal subjects must declare what funds they have available from their own budgets. Their funding adheres to a common formula, namely that income and expenditure are taken into account when calculating financing arrangements:

at the Federal level it has been decided to extend the special conditions for the formation of the budget of the Chechen Republic in accordance with the methods of “direct calculations” up to the year 2017, and to approve the new “Social and economic development of the Republic of Chechnya in the years 2013 to 2017” focused primarily on the development of the means of production.

(Tamaeva 2012)

However, the Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation decided that further funding under the old scheme was not sustainable. Indeed, several Russian experts had already been claiming for a long time that that the “special” principle of financing the Chechen Republic should be abandoned and that the region should be financed in accordance with the general principles which govern the funding of other regions in Russia. The Russian Federation’s Ministry of Finance had also previously proposed that the government re-evaluate the overall question of financing. Targeted financing schemes, which were implemented in order to rebuild the Republic (roads, airports, power plants, gas pipelines, and networks) aroused criticism and doubts among civil servants, who pointed out the lack of control over these funds. A senior official in the North Caucasus Federal District explained:

During the past few years, funding for Chechnya has been picking up speed. This was a political decision – to provide all the funding required to fully restore the Republic from zero. The funding scheme was as follows: huge amounts of Federal monies were
granted simply on the applications submitted by leaders of the Chechen Republic. Neither the Finance Ministry nor the Court of Auditors did anything to prevent this scheme.

(Shirmanova 2012)

Thus, in October 2012, Evgeni Fiodorov, a member of the Russian State Duma Committee on Budget and Taxes said: “The deadline has expired; it is time to abolish the special approach” (RBK Daily 2012). The head of the “Project of National Development,” Andrei Cherepanov, stressed that such a program was relevant to Chechnya only in the post-war years, when it was necessary to rebuild the Republic:

Nowadays Grozny is one of the most beautiful cities in the country, even with some elements of luxury. It’s time to stop the transfusion from the federal budget and to put the Republic on general principles of financing, on the same basis as other regions.

(RBK Daily 2012)

Consequently, the Chechen Republic is to be treated in the same way as other federal subjects in the Northern Caucasus. These regions will be financed in accordance with a program to be implemented by Alexander Khloponin, Russian President’s Plenipotentiary Representative in the North Caucasus Federal District (SKFO). The Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation considers that having a separate program for the Republic of Chechnya is not justified and that, up to 2025, Chechnya will be supported by the government programs that cover the whole of the North Caucasus Federal District (Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation 2013).

As could be expected, the views of federal and regional governments diverge on the question of financing the future development of the Chechen Republic. The Chechen government believes it is necessary to extend the federal program for the development of Chechnya up to 2017 and to develop a strategic program for the years leading up to 2025.

Assuming that the financing of Chechnya within the framework of the state program for the development of the SKFO is only scheduled to start from 2016 onwards, and if a separate program of socio-economic development of the Republic is not established, then “for three years the region will be in a vacuum” (Shirmanova 2012). In addition, within the
framework of the state program for the development of the SKFO, Chechnya is not expected to be allocated more than 11.8 billion rubles during the years leading to 2017 – a sum which is less than 2 billion per year. Moreover, as noted by Eliza Makhmudova, a department director at the Chechen Ministry of Economy and Development, this decision is taken “at a time when the Republic is not only lacking sufficient means of production but has not even completely rebuilt its social sphere” (Shirmanova 2012).

Problems facing a subsidized region: imaginary and real

In 2011, the head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, was right when he claimed that Chechnya still needed larger subsidies from the center:

Some people like to talk about the allocation of allegedly large funds to Chechnya. The authors of such statements need to see what was in Chechnya before the 90s, and what it is left with now. They need to see how these funds are being used. You first need to compare the situation with other regions of the country, and only then ask questions about the donation or grant to the budget of the Chechen Republic.

(Press Centre of the Head and Government of the Chechen Republic 2011)

Indeed, the Federal Agency’s decision to finance the Chechen Republic in accordance with the general principles is premature, owing to the extremely small economic base of the Chechen Republic (compared to what was destroyed during the war years). The Chechen Republic has barely embarked on the long journey of creating a new industrial infrastructure:

To put it bluntly: this is not the time to cut the Republic of Chechnya off from direct Federal funding. So far, the “Federal Targeted Program to restore the socio-economic sphere of the Chechen Republic” has not allowed rebuilding the “real economy” that had been completely destroyed, and it was not intended to address this issue. It did, on the contrary, add an important network of additional social facilities – schools, hospitals, kindergartens,
nursing homes and the like – that have required funding and will further involve significant running costs.

(Зубаирәев 2011)

During the pre-war period, industrial production was the leading sector in the Chechen Republic and accounted for roughly two-thirds of total GDP. In addition to the traditional industries (oil and petroleum refining), several other industries grew and flourished in the region. Electrical, chemical, and petrochemical industries, together with mechanical engineering, represented roughly a quarter of all industrial production. Heavy industries “comprised approximately 80 per cent of the economy. The industrial base of the Chechen Republic produced over one thousand named brands” (Баснукаев 2012). During the pre-war period 194 separate industrial entities, including enormous production facilities, operated on the territory of the Chechen Republic. Prior to 1990, in terms of industrial output and financial turnover, the manufacturing base of the Chechen Republic was a leader in the North Caucasus area.

At the start of 2013, several leading enterprises in the Chechen Republic could be identified, but the list was evidently not long enough to support the conclusion that the economy is developing. In addition, only 13 factories have been built or rebuilt and fitted out. Moreover, according to the Minister of Industry and Energy, Galas Taimashkanov, in order to enhance the Republic’s industrial capacity, plans have been made to apply for loans from “Rosselkhozbank” and the “Moscow Industrial Bank” (Зубаирәев 2011). Accordingly, the repayment of loans will become a burden in the short and medium term for Chechnya. The Government of the Chechen Republic cannot solve the global problem of the revival of the industrial and agricultural sector of the country merely by attracting credits and loans from domestic and foreign firms.

Without a doubt, economic development remains a priority for the Chechen Republic. But if some progress has been made in the Republic, this has often been without support from the federal center. The Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of Russia, Alexander Khloponin, has spoken about plans to construct a tourism ‘cluster’ around the SKFO, which will encompass regions of the five following Republics – Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Dagestan, and Adygeya (Russian Federation Government 2010). The fact
that the Chechen Republic has not been included in this tourism cluster is worth mentioning, especially when viewed in the light of the fact that the leadership of the Chechen Republic has started building a ski resort in the Itum-Kale area.

Moreover, the budget of Chechnya is suffering losses of hundreds of millions of dollars because the company Rosneft is not fulfilling its obligations (Checheninfo 2012). Indeed, in 2012, the consolidated budget of the Chechen Republic showed actual tax and non-tax revenue of 11,649.4 million rubles, while the planned receipts had totaled 12,249.0 million rubles; which means that the consolidated budget received only 96 percent of the planned revenues (tax and non-tax). Of the total revenue of the consolidated budget of the Chechen Republic for the year 2012, 74 percent or 8,621.1 million rubles is due to tax revenues collected by the tax authorities of the Chechen Republic, excluding revenues from the payment of excise duties on petroleum products, which are scheduled and distributed at federal level (Ministry of Finance of the Chechen Republic 2013). In 2012, income tax from the “Rosneft Oil Company” fell, while the budget of the Chechen Republic did not receive any direct income taxes from the Open Joint Stock Company “Grozneftegaz.”

These circumstances can explain the discontent expressed by the spokesperson of the head and the government of the Chechen Republic:

The rate of increase of the post-war economic “base” of the Chechen Republic shows, to put it mildly, a minimal interest on the part of the Federal Centre (Kremlin), that in Grozny and in other regions of the Chechen Republic manufacturing enterprises should appear and give a source of steady income to tens of thousands of young people. Funding from the Federal Budget has really only been successful in financing the reconstruction and building of new schools and hospitals. A mere 6 to 7 percent of the total pre-war Chechen economy has been restored.

(Zubairaeva 2011)

Indeed, the decision to finance the Chechen Republic on an equal basis with other subjects of the Russian Federation from 2013 onwards would have been justified only under certain conditions. The withdrawal of federal funding from the Chechen Republic’s “direct accounts” is only
possible if certain other measures are implemented. Several proposals have been made: the registration of oil companies on Chechen territory (for example, “Rosneft”); a plan to ensure that for the next ten years taxes which are currently earmarked as contributions to the federal budget should instead form part of the budget of the Chechen Republic; the attribution of credits guaranteed by the states to individual entrepreneurs registered in the Republic; the use of funds earmarked for the development of the SFKO. In summary, the spotlight needs to be on initiatives which have previously been completely ignored by the federal center (e.g. the transfer of oil taxation to the Chechen Republic budget) or frozen in recent years.

**Regional economic miracle: myth or reality**

While the Chechen government still claims the necessity to receive special funding, a paradoxical statement was issued in Grozny, in the middle of 2011, which boldly proclaimed that within five to seven years, the Chechen Republic could itself become a donor region. The chairman of the Parliament of the Chechen Republic noted that in a short time, the Republic would contribute to the federal budget “owing to the development of agribusiness, tourism, mineral springs, new factories, business development, and the ability to attract inward investment” (Utsaev 2011b).

This optimistic approach finds some justification in the evolution of the budget. For 2012, tax revenues contributed from the territory of the Chechen Republic to the Russian Federation fiscal system (federal budget, Chechen republican and municipal budgets) increased by 6.1 percent and represented 10.3 billion rubles, or 593.5 million rubles more than in 2011. Taxes and fees amounting to 1.7 billion rubles were paid into the federal budget. During 2012 the consolidated budget of the Chechen Republic (Chechen republican and all municipal budgets on the territory of the Republic) totaled over 8.6 billion rubles. In comparison with the previous year, consolidated revenues grew by 15.7 percent, or more than 1.1 billion (IA Regnum 2013). The increase in tax revenues from the Chechen Republic is due primarily to the increase in revenues from taxes on personal income, above all, from the income of public employees. This increase in tax revenues shows that the Republics’ own sources of revenue for the republican budget are growing.

But most of all, this declaration relies on the assumed success of the
different strategies for development for the region. Under current conditions plans for further socio-economic development in the Chechen Republic are to be achieved by improving its attractiveness for investment, more efficient use of natural resources, the diversification of the economic structure in favor of processing and high-tech industries, improving product competitiveness, implementing major infrastructure projects, creating an optimized structure for agricultural production, ensuring food security, and increasing the contribution of small businesses to the economy.

To improve on the current situation, where the industrial sector of the Chechen Republic accounts for just 1 percent of the output of the entire regional economy, and 1 percent of added value from the manufacturing industry in the region (Government of the Chechen Republic, AV Investment Consulting Company 2012), the opening of new plants is planned:

After its restoration, the Chiri-Yurt cement plant, which has a production capacity of 1200 thousand tons of cement per year, should resume operations. Reinforced concrete production plants will start working in Grozny, Argun and Shali, as well as building industrial plants in Argun and Shali and construction material plants in Grozny. Enterprises involved in providing engineering infrastructure for the construction industry will be restored. A number of new high-tech industries, never seen before in the Republic, in particular the four modular brick plants that produce facing bricks, will come into operation. By the end of 2013, the industrial output in Chechnya will total 30 billion rubles which represents a 1.8-fold increase when compared with the same figures in 2009.

(Utsaev 2011a)

As Abdul Magomadov, minister of Economic Development and Trade of the Chechen Republic, said, some enterprises are ready to be brought into operation, such as the car assembly plant “Argun Pishchemash,” the manufacturer of metal structures “Opytnyi zavod Minproma,” the “Fagusi” Chechen forestry enterprise, and the “Naur” winery state unitary enterprise. The “Chechenavtotrans” Grozny transportation company will also be brought into operation (Press Centre of the
As for Chechen agriculture, which represents 8 percent of the output of the total regional economy and 18 percent of the workforce (Government of the Chechen Republic, AV Investment Consulting Company 2012), the Republic’s “Program of Agricultural Development and Regulation of Markets for Agricultural Products, Raw Materials and Food” for the periods 2008 to 2012, and the implementation of the “Development of Agro Industrial Complex” priority national project, have been called on to solve the problems of the agricultural sector.

The aim is to optimize the management structure of agro-industrial complexes and to develop agro-clusters, holdings, and corporations, with the aim of ensuring food security for the Republic on the basis of economically sustainable enterprises. As a result of a land reclamation program, 11,000 hectares of fertile land in the foothills of Chechnya will be put into agricultural operation, even if the question of landmines has still not been solved.\(^5\)

One of the Federal Target Program’s priorities has been the processing of agricultural products. This involves the rebuilding of processing industry enterprises and equipping them with modern, high-tech equipment that uses a minimum of resources. The majority of agricultural products will still be produced in the private sector, whose share accounts for an average 78.6 per cent of total agricultural production. By 2013, the development of agro-industrial complexes will make it possible to exceed the rate of growth in agricultural production in all categories of farms by 15.2 per cent compared to 2009. Crop production is forecast to increase due to an increase in planting, the inclusion of previously non-agricultural land by leasing to peasant (farmers’) holdings and to individual farms, improving soil fertility, intensification of production, and the introduction of advanced technologies for the production of crops. The planned increase in livestock production will result from increased livestock numbers, improvements in breeding plans, improvements to the technology used in husbandry and feeding, as well as from measures taken by the State to give financial support to the agro-industrial complex for the purchase of agricultural machinery, agricultural equipment, and breeding stock, all based on financial rents (leasing).
Budget allocation, economic effectiveness and political rationales

Even if there is little sense in making predictions about the results of the Chechen government development strategy, a comparison with the results of previous programs may provide an understanding of the different issues at stake, and help in grasping the political logic behind these programs.

Admittedly, “questions were previously raised, on several occasions, about the financial probity with which Chechnya used federal funds. So, for 2010, only a seventh of the budget was derived from income generated by the Republic itself, and the transparency of funds allocation and expenditure statistics were questionable” (Argumenty i Fakty 2012).

But on the whole, the results of the 2008–12 programs were evaluated positively by Moscow. The Federal Targeted Program for Chechnya that ended in 2012 has been implemented successfully enough. Its results included the commissioning of 725 facilities, 1,600 families received help to rebuild destroyed housing, and the macroeconomic indicators grew steadily, improving the socio-economic status and attractiveness of the Republic as a place for investment (Worldofeconomy.ru 2012).

According to prime minister of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, the implementation of federal development programs for the south of Russia, the Chechen Republic and Ingushetia, allowed the opening of more than 120 schools, hundreds of hospitals and clinics, and 50 sports and cultural facilities, and the building of nearly 300 km of roads, and 800,000 square meters of residential premises, and greatly improved the socio-economic status of Chechnya (Worldofeconomy.ru 2012).

Moreover, in terms of comparison with other federal grant recipients, when assessed by the size of grants per capita, the North Caucasian regions are indeed in the top 20. However, in terms of absolute value, Chechnya is not one of the main beneficiaries of federal grants. According to the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, Chechnya received 14.5 billion rubles in subsidies, which puts the Republic in fifth place in terms of federal grants received (the first being Yakut region with 44 billion rubles, followed by the Dagestan totaling
36.8 billion rubles in 2012). It is notable that the top 20, apart from the Caucasus, include not only the regions of the Far East and East Siberia (Altai Republic, Baikal, Primorski Krai, Magadan), but also Western Russia and the Urals (Voronezh, Ivanovo, Tambov, Kirov, and Kurgan region) (lenta.ru 2012).

It is a somewhat paradoxical situation: on the one hand, federal departments have stopped direct funding for Chechnya to please those who say “we’ve had enough of feeding the Chechens,” but on the other hand, they recognize the effectiveness of financial expenditure in the Chechen Republic. Moreover, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation have given the Chechen Republic a bonus of 95.7 million rubles to reward it for the effectiveness with which it has spent the budget. The Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation has assessed the leadership of the Chechen Republic as first rate, using a special methodology which includes 45 points of assessment: Chechnya scored top among the regions assessed. The second place in the Ministry of Finance’s ranking, after Chechnya, was given to the Orenburg region (81.6 million rubles), and in third place came the Bryansk region (81.2 million rubles) (Memax 2012).

The Head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, in turn, referring to the data provided by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of the Russian Federation, told Vladimir Putin that the Chechen economy is the most effective amongst all the regions of Russia (Kovalevskaya 2013).

Finally, Moscow does not plan to change its approach in terms of funding of the region. The prime minister of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, believes that the development program for the SKFO will allow the Chechen Republic to solve its problems, reduce unemployment, provide housing, and develop business activity. Tourism will be promoted in Chechnya, to make the most of the Republic’s favorable geographical position, natural conditions, rich cultural heritage and traditions, and stable social and political environment (Worldofeconomy.ru 2012). “Now the main tools for strengthening the socio-economic sphere are these two main federal programs: the ‘South of Russia’ development program for the Chechen Republic and the development of the Republic of Ingushetia” – said the prime minister, who regards improved coordination between federal, regional, and local authorities as a solution to the problem of financing
the Republic (Ria Novyi Region 2012).

In this regard, one may wonder whether budgetary decisions are inspired more by considerations of efficiency of state budget spending, or by the political objectives that were set by Vladimir Putin in December 2011. According to Vladimir Putin, investments in the North Caucasus are necessary because local residents have to develop their economic potential without leaving their regions. According to V. Putin, the main problem is that more and more migrants from the Caucasus are coming to major Russian cities in the “search for a better life.” The only way to stop this is to develop manufacturing in the Northern Caucasus, and to create new jobs and, as V. Putin added, “financial aid must be given in a precisely calculated, targeted way, not just handed out light-headedly” (RBK 2011). Thus, V. Putin has set the political line: you need to invest the resources of the center in promoting economic and social development in the regions of southern Russia, so that people have no need to leave their homes to work in other regions.

**Conclusion – a thin red line**

So far, the political line in relations between Moscow and Grozny remains unchanged. The former finance minister of the Chechen Republic stated in October 2012 that the new budget “should allow the Chechen Republic to take its place in the list of the best subjects of the Russian Federation,” and the deputy head of the Finance Ministry of the Russian Federation, Alexey Lavrov, stated that the strategy of the local government “is correct” (Eminov 2012). It seems that the financial relationship between Moscow and Grozny is quite stable. So far, nobody seems to have the intention to revise it.

But for how long will Moscow be able to support Chechen economy? It is currently assumed that 2014 – the year in which the Winter Olympics have been held in Sochi – will be the final year in the current phase of building relations between the federal center and its subjects in the south of the country. In this context, Chechnya’s economic development curve with its problems of unemployment, weak development in the real sector of the economy, and the questionable efficiency with which it spends federal funds, may start to be the subject of a new political line for the federal center.

The Chechen Republic, as a subject of the Russian Federation, is now in a difficult situation. On the one hand, to become an attractive region
for investment it needs to demonstrate stability and dynamism in development. On the other hand, large investment projects such as the “Heart of Chechnya” mosque, the “Grozny City” high-rise complex, and the Ahmat arena stadium that Chechnya shows to its guests in an effort to convince potential investors of the Republic’s stability and attractiveness as an investment partner, are viewed with envy by the average Russian and provoke thoughts about unlimited subsidies from the federal budget. Apparently, it is time for the Republic to show not only its successes and achievements, but also how many difficulties and problems it still faces.

Notes

1 The former president of the Russian Supreme Soviet and candidate for Chechen presidency in 2003, Ruslan Khasbulatov, is an economist at the Russian Academy of Economy. The politician Ivan Rybkin was head of the Security Council in 1996–98.

2 The campaign “Stop feeding the Caucasus” was launched by Russian nationalists in autumn 2011 and received the support of different leaders such as Aleksey Navalny, who linked this slogan to his campaign against corruption. “The suggestion is that Chechnya and the other republics of the northern Caucasus receive too much in the way of subsidies, both direct and indirect, and that there is no check on how the money is spent,” but also that that the Kremlin feeds the North Caucasus at the expense of “ordinary” Russians (Loginov 2012).

3 The “Chechenvtormet” state unitary enterprise, “Atia” Ltd., “Elektropult-Grozny” Ltd., the “Orgtekhnika” state unitary enterprise, the “Druzhba” state unitary enterprise cardboard box factory, the Alkhan-Kalinsky “DOK” state unitary enterprise, the “Grozny worker” Publishing Polygraphic Complex federal state unitary enterprise, the “Republican Printing House” state unitary enterprise, the “Grozny prosthetic and orthopedic enterprise” federal state unitary enterprise, the “Chechenavto” open joint stock company, and the “Control ‘Gorlift’” municipal unitary enterprise.

4 The Open Joint Stock Company “Grozneftegaz” was created jointly by the Russian State Oil Company Rosneft (51 percent) and the government of the Chechen Republic (49 percent). Profits of the enterprise were to be distributed thus: 51 percent to Rosneft (the majority shareholder and de-facto “owner” of Grozneftegaz) and 49 percent into the budget of the Chechen Republic. At the first stage, all profits allegedly went to restore the oil complex of the Chechen Republic, and then part of the profits began to flow into the budget of the Republic. But as there was no active reconstruction of
the oil complex in the country, the Chechen government began to require an increase of its share of the profits in the process of redistribution. Instead, Rosneft created a consolidated group of taxpayers which is responsible for all the taxes of all enterprises belonging to this group. Thus, the income from the sale of Grozny oil goes to the fulfillment of tax obligations of other companies belonging to Rosneft.

5 The head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, complained to Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev about the presence of mines (explosive devices) in the Republic’s territories and asked for 50 billion rubles for mine clearance (Rambler News 2013).

6 According to lenta.ru, in 2012 the largest grant per capita in the North Caucasus region was given to Ingushetia (17.5 thousand rubles per person per year), followed by Dagestan (12.3 thousand) and Chechnya (11.4 thousand). By comparison, the average Russian citizen in 2012 was the theoretical recipient of only 2.8 thousand rubles of federal subsidies (lenta.ru 2012).

7 “The Chechen Republic is traditionally among the regions which are characterized by high unemployment and a low standard of living of the population. In 2011, the total unemployment (36.7 percent) is almost 6 times the average Russian rate” (Ministry of Regional Development of the RF 2013).

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Part 2

State and non-state rationales of violence
5 State and violence in Chechnya
(1997–1999)

Ekaterina Sokirianskaya

When the first war was over, the people whom we, the rank-and-file, had made heroes – all received state positions. They received them according to their merit … but started to act in their own interest. The idea the people had suffered for and in which it had invested so much effort, was betrayed.

Ruslan, former Chechen fighter

The first Russo–Chechen war was a success for Chechen separatists and was concluded in the Khasavyurt Peace Agreement signed on the 31st of August 1996 by Aslan Maskhadov on behalf of the president of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria, and by Zelimkhan Yandarbiev and General Alexander Lebed on behalf of president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin. It stipulated the end of the military conflict, the withdrawal of Russian troops, the commitment not to use force against each other and to resolve disputed issues on the basis of international law (Konstantinova 1996). The settlement of the political status of the Chechen Republic was postponed until 2001.

From then on and until August 1999 Chechnya was de facto independent and pursued its statebuilding project. This paper will analyze the attempts of the government of Aslan Maskhadov to build a functioning state and the reasons why his statebuilding project failed.

I will argue that this failure was a result of the Chechen government’s incapacity to establish a monopoly on violence, submerge or consolidate paramilitary groups, and prevent the warlordism that became its main spoiler. The inefficiency of the Chechen security services and troops in combating criminality was partly the result of a lack of an indigenous law-enforcement tradition and of blood feud practices, but it was also Maskhadov’s political choice – his great reluctance to unleash an internal Chechen conflict. At the same time, this paper will argue that despite his
failures as a statebuilder, Maskhadov as a politician won. Through adaptation and compromise without resorting to violence, he managed to maintain the support of the population, avoid internal armed conflict, and politically, to defeat his challengers who strove for power and legitimacy. However, his chief spoiler, Shamil Basayev, exported the conflict outside Chechnya, thus provoking the launch of the second military campaign and putting an end to Chechnya’s quasi-independence and to many people’s hopes for their own recognized statehood.

This chapter of Chechen history began with the presidential and parliamentary elections of the 27th of January 1997, carried out on the basis of the 1992 secular Chechen Constitution. Over 20 candidates ran for the presidency, though no pro-Russian or non-separatist candidates were allowed to run. Still, many Chechens remember the 1997 elections as a very special civic experience:

I cast my vote only once in my lifetime. It was that day. So many people were voting! There were queues at the polling stations. People were dancing. Everyone felt: the war was over, now we would start a new, better life.²

The OSCE recognized the results of the elections. Maskhadov received 59 percent of votes, leaving all other candidates far behind. Second was Shamil Basayev, with 23.5 percent. According to Chechen experts “most people voted for Maskhadov because Basayev frightened them by his aggressive military biography, while Maskhadov was the symbol of reasonable and secular authority” (Aliev and Zhadaev 2005). Moreover, Maskhadov signed the Khasavurt Agreement with Russia and many voters hoped he would resolve the remaining disputes with Moscow. The then acting president Zelimkhan Yandarbiev received only 10 percent. Thus, the 1997 elections granted Maskhadov significant popular support and legitimacy, but at the same time demonstrated that some 30 percent of Chechen voters favored his far more radical rivals.

Maskhadov inherited a post-conflict Chechnya in ruins. His statebuilding was unfolding within a society that had just lived through a most destructive and asymmetric war. A destroyed economy and infrastructure, routine encounters with death, almost 500,000 displaced, psychological trauma, those were just a few of the social consequences of the war. Yet, this was a victorious war, it produced a number of strong
leaders, each of whom felt entitled to a share of power. The unsettled political status and remaining threat from Russia were used by some field commanders as a pretext not to demobilize groups.

Even prior to the war, Maskhadov’s predecessor, Dzhokhar Dudayev largely failed in his statebuilding project (1991–94). The principal problems of Chechen statebuilding had already become evident then – what Dankward Rustow called “the birth defects of the political community” – the profound lack of agreement among the Chechen elite and population on the political future of the nation (Rustow 1970: 363). In Dudayev’s time the schism was between separatists and the opposition, which demanded normalized relations with Russia; in Maskhadov’s years it became a struggle between supporters of a secular vs. an Islamist state. Referenda that could have decided these issues have never happened.

In Soviet times the Chechens had limited access to high government positions. Those who did, became part of the Soviet nomenklatura, and in the period of de facto independence their knowledge of how to run a state was non-wanted: radicals suspected their collaboration with Russia and opposed attempts to include them. This lack of experience in governance, sometimes the lack of a will to build a modern state in earnest, the lack of external support, the presence of strong domestic challengers supported by those of Moscow, combined with the difficulties faced by every post-Soviet state during the post-communist transition made the task of Chechen statebuilding an extraordinary challenge. Dudayev’s failure to keep the economy running, to fill the republican budget by raising tax revenue, to provide for education and healthcare, to combat criminality, to ensure a functioning judicial system and to pay welfare, were quite evident before the war. Yet, Dudayev’s authoritarian style of government and forceful character discouraged the fragmentation of separatists, prevented Islamists from raising their heads, and kept Basayev under control.

The armed conflict of 1994–96 multiplied the challenges and brought about significant social change – profound Islamization and paramilitarization of the male population. Whereas the key prerequisites for any successful postconflict transition are demilitarization, the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, their return to a peaceful life and to their local communities, the unresolved political status of Chechnya and Maskhadov’s reluctance to resort to tough
measures gradually turned the republic into a failed state captured by paramilitary groups.

This paper’s analysis is based on fieldwork, analysis of newspaper publications, statistical data, the monitoring of bulletins, and memoirs. Most of the interviews were conducted during the time I lived and worked in the North Caucasus, from 2003 to 2008, some updating interviews were carried out in 2013.

**The state and post-conflict security**

Statebuilding is the process of creating effective government, which involves a monopoly over authoritative binding rule-making, rule enforcement, and violence within the territory claimed by the state. Here I rely on Michael Mann’s classic sociological definition of the modern state as representing:

(1) a differentiated set of institutions and personnel embodying (2) centrality in the sense that political relations radiate outwards from a center to cover (3) a territorially demarcated area over which it exercises (4) a monopoly of authoritative binding rule-making, backed up by a monopoly of the means of violence.

(Mann 1992: 4)

But not every contemporary state is a *modern* state. Late-coming states often do not meet one or several of the above mentioned criteria, since they operate in fragmented societies, which are weakly homogenized and loosely integrated, with strong informal groups which follow their own binding rules and do not recognize the state’s monopoly over justice and violence. The modern state is the culmination of a process transcending these localized patterns of social integration in societies (Migdal 1994: 12).

In this paper, I speak of *statebuilding*, notwithstanding the fact that Chechen independence was not recognized by any state. In 1991 Chechnya created a fundamentally new polity based on a new Constitution, new identities, institutions, and legitimizing procedures. In 1997–99 it pursued its statebuilding project without the involvement of the federal authorities. Thus, in what follows, the polysemy of the term *state* is reduced to its sociological meaning of one of the social organizations within a given society and I do not consider other
meanings, especially those common to the theory of international relations.

**Economy and criminality**

To perform its functions any state needs resources. It should have the ability to receive them from the society or the territory where it operates. One of the main struggles Maskhadov had fought was that of decriminalizing the Chechen economy and collecting taxes.

According to the annual report of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, after the first Chechen war 80 percent of the republican economy was destroyed, along with the social infrastructure – 121,760 houses and flats, all central republican medical clinics, over 400 educational institutions were bombed out fully or partly (Tishkov 1998: 73). The main challenge faced by the republican economy in 1997–99 was the dramatic disintegration of production and lack of cash. In 1997 the gross domestic product amounted to 2 billion rubles (instead of the expected 5 billion) and in 1998, to 1. 6 billion (instead of the expected 7 billion) (Groznskii rabochii 1999d). Most of the economic activity was concentrated in small private businesses – food stands, small cafes, shops, gasoline stations, selling crude oil products at the roadsides. In rural areas people lived off their household gardens. Industrial enterprises were mostly closed. Several factories survived but changed their specialization, the Russian government financed the reconstruction of the cement factory in Chiri-Yurt and by 1999, 17 out of 44 major industrial enterprises functioned, yet their output amounted to only 5–8 percent of pre-war production (Tishkov 2001: 439).

President Maskhadov had great hope in the privatization of industry, to his mind the only realistic mechanism that would revive the Chechen economy. The state was unable to support the enterprises in trying to restore their pre-war capacities, thus private owners had to step in. Discussions over privatization began in the summer of 1997 and became a major source of contention between Maskhadov’s supporters and the radical opposition, and although the first privatization projects were announced in the summer of 1998, the official privatization process never started in earnest.

Since the oil industry seemed the easiest way to generate revenue,
Maskhadov’s government considered it a high priority and invested systematic efforts to enforce order in the extraction, processing and transportation of oil. This was a real challenge due not only to war damage, but also to a dramatic fall in production, and to theft.⁴

In the post-conflict period, the main damage to the transport of oil was inflicted by illegal in-cuts in the pipeline for the purpose of stealing oil and oil products. Between February and August 1997, over 130 such cuts were registered with over 30,000 tons of oil stolen (Groznenskii Rabochii 1997). Oil products were stolen directly from the pipes or from oil processing factories. The security companies were accomplices in these thefts.

Private gasoline stations and stands for selling illegally extracted petroleum products mushroomed. The authorities repeatedly banned such trade, but in vain. Illegal gasoline suppliers sold fuel more cheaply than registered gasoline stations. In the first six months of 1998, state-owned gasoline station sales dropped tenfold compared to the same period in 1997 (Muzaev 1998a).

In December 1998, oil processing enterprises stopped functioning due to the mass theft of oil.⁵ In April 1999, the managers of the Chechen oil industry asked the government to introduce a military regime in the oil industry (Muzaev 1999c). As of July 1999 Chechen consumers felt the shortage in fuel in the gasoline stations. By then most gas stations had been importing their fuel from outside the republic, since Chechnya was no longer able to satisfy domestic fuel demand (Groznenskii rabochii 1999e). In June 1999 transport of Azeri oil via Chechnya was also stopped. Beginning in 1997, the oil industry was gradually being transformed from a profit-generating sector into a damage-inflicting one (Muzaev 1997). The Chechen government was forced to spend on the maintenance of pipes and equipment, to extinguish fires caused by criminals illegally extracting oil and neglecting safety measures; they invested an enormous effort to secure the pipes, but all the while, profits from the industry were shrinking month by month.

The second profit-generating line of the Chechen budget consisted in taxes from legal entities (Ichkeria 1998b or Muzaev 1998b). In post-conflict conditions the government did not expect much from individual taxpayers and by 1998 stopped collecting taxes from individuals.

Overall economic decay put the few still functioning enterprises on the verge of bankruptcy: industry and businesses were simply unable to pay
taxes. The burden of post-war reconstruction of buildings and equipment, plus the need to ensure security significantly raised production costs. A large number of tax exemptions generously adopted by the Chechen parliament, often applied not only to those eligible, also significantly decreased the state’s capacity to collect budget revenues.

In the post-war economy, when everyone was short of cash, many enterprises undertook barter deals, profits were often paid in kind, and financial transactions were carried out in cash, bypassing bank accounts. The president and Parliament tried to enforce the governmental “Resolution on Cash Collection” of the 24th of July 1997, but with little success (Ichkeria 1998a). In fact, unable to support industry, the government was obliged to tolerate barter.

The tax inspectorate checked only those companies that were registered, whereas most Chechen economic activity was carried out in the shadows. Hundreds of enterprises and private businesses, including some major firms, were not registered with the tax department. Muzayev quotes the results of inspections carried out in October 1997, revealing that 54 major construction firms, responsible for the reconstruction of state objects, were not registered with the tax service of the Chechen Republic. Armed groups that controlled businesses and enterprises also prevented tax collection (Muzayev 1997).

The most stable economic sector in 1997–99 was private farming – the agricultural output of Chechnya between the wars was growing steadily. In 1997 Chechnya had 59 state farms; however, state-owned cattle had been consumed during the war, and many buildings on the state farms were dismantled by local residents and used as construction materials. State agricultural enterprises lacked fertilizers and pesticides, fuel, agricultural machinery, and qualified staff.

The government’s agricultural policy was to annually create republican coordinating centers aimed at assisting private and state agricultural enterprises. The headquarters “Crop-98”, “Crop-99” coordinated efforts aimed at providing farmers with seeds, fuel, and spare parts for tractors, using the existing limited funds, finding barter options, and securing humanitarian assistance. Sheep and cattle-breeding experienced difficult times – almost all veterinary doctors had left the mountain villages, resulting in loss of cattle due to disease (Groznenskii rabochii 1999d).

The state budget of Ichkeria also received some financial inflows from
Russia, since the Khasavyurt Agreement went along with a package of economic agreements, in which Russia took on the responsibility of financing reconstruction, paying pensions and salaries. Moreover, Russia paid Chechnya for the transport of oil along the Chechen part of the Baku-Novorossiisk pipeline in order to cover the costs of maintenance and ensure the physical security of the pipe.

However, soon after the peace treaty, Russia imposed an unofficial economic siege on Chechnya. Moscow paid its share irregularly, partially, and with delays. In late 1998, Russian transfers deducted the Chechen debt for electricity supplies. In 1999, representatives of Russia and Ichkeria negotiated a 2 billion ruble contribution to the Chechen budget. However, the Russian State Duma approved only 240,000, while the Federative Assembly ruled to stop all financial transfers to Chechnya (Ichkeria 1999). According to the fascinating memoir by Ilias Akhmadov, first Basayev’s ally and later Maskhadov’s foreign minister, individual Russian ministries were open to agreements on subsidies for their Chechen counterparts, but parties stumbled over technical issues: how to sign official documents – as between the federal government and one of its regions or as an agreement between two equal entities. As neither side was prepared to compromise, Chechnya was unable to make use of these opportunities to revive industry and receive economic assistance (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 84).

**Law enforcement**

Criminality was the main problem of the Chechen state in 1997–99.6 Hostagetaking, harassment, and the killing of hostages inflicted irreparable damage to the Chechen cause.7 Abuse and killing of Russians and other non-Chechens, often in order to capture their flats, created another exodus of the non-Chechen population from the republic.

All the political forces recognized that the need to curb criminality was crucial to the very existence of the Chechen state. However, the sources of this social evil were perceived differently by the supporters of President Maskhadov and the radical opposition. Maskhadov’s team recognized crime as a domestic problem and considered the illegal armed groups and criminal gangs to be a main disrupting force for Chechen statehood, while the opposition regarded the flourishing of crime as the result of espionage, conspiracies, and collaboration with Russia by part
of the population. They placed high priority on purging the republic of spies and collaborators, pushed for the adoption of a law on lustration and demanded the strengthening of counter-intelligence work. The first director of the National Security Service (Sluzhba natsional'noi bezopasnosti – SNB), an agency responsible for combating high profile organized crime, field commander Abu Movsaev was a close friend and ally of Shamil Basayev, and adhered to the latter view. His agency was manned by ex-combatants, many of whom had dubious and even criminal pasts, covering for illegal activities and sometimes participating in them themselves.

In July 1997, Movsaev resigned and was replaced by Maskhadov’s close supporter, Lecha Khultygov, a war general and a hard-line combatant on crime, among the strongest figures of Maskhadov’s inner circle. Khultygov was the first to declare war on crime and call ex-combatants involved in illegal activities enemies of the Chechen nation and state. Khultygov purged the SNB of criminal elements and introduced public executions of criminals (Muzaev 1998a). Another of Maskhadov’s close associates and tough-liners on domestic crime, Khunkarpasha Israpilov, headed the anti-terrorist center.

Maskhadov personally supervised law-enforcement activities, which developed along three main lines: the combat against oil theft, hostage-taking, and the combat against the trafficking and production of drugs. A special commission was set up aimed at combating the theft of oil. The Chechen government deployed regular armed forces, the special battalion of the Department for the Security of the State and police units to confront illegal oil dealers. Several times in 1998–99 Maskhadov called for former-combatant reservists to support his efforts to tame criminal gangs.

State policy on the combat against crime involved routine measures along with special “campaigns” – raids on criminal formations, which usually mobilized almost all the republican security services. The first round in a series of campaigns called “The Shield of Legal Order” was launched in late May 1997. The second was already carried out in June in response to the kidnapping of Russian journalists – three correspondents of the television channel NTV and two reporters of the TV Company “VID.” Joint units of the security forces checked all vehicles in the main thoroughfares of Grozny and searched all vacant buildings and basements, while special groups carried out checks in villages, including
those high in the mountains. The journalists were not found, but the security services released six other hostages who had been taken for ransom, detained three persons wanted for murder and arrested several suspects of burglary and thefts (Zapodinskaia 1997).

Maskhadov’s administration was well aware that the criminal groups were linked with the main challengers of the regime – radical opposition groups. Small gangs had patrons among major field commanders and their larger armed formations. Thus, each round of “Shield of Order” was accompanied by attempts to dissolve major political–military armed groups. The first of such raids against organized crime coincided with Maskhadov’s June decree on dissolving the “Army of Dzhokhar Dudayev” led by Raduev and another armed group regiment of special assignment troops – “Borz” (Wolf) headed by Colonel Bakaev. The Prosecutor’s Office instigated a number of criminal cases against former combatants in connection with abductions and illegal violence (Pulina 1997).

In December 1998 Chechnya was shattered by the most shocking crime of the time – the murder of four engineers of the British company “Granger Telecom.” It was a dramatic blow for the Chechen cause and the credibility of the incumbent government. A new round of the “Shield of Legal Order” launched in December 1998 detained 596 people, including 78 wanted criminals, and several hostages were released (Groznskii rabochii 1998).

Despite this large-scale effort, organized crime was not easy to suppress. Russia and international organizations paid enormous ransoms for hostages, which meant further hostage-taking and huge resources in the hands of criminal gangs. The Chechen law enforcement agencies were confronted with large and well-armed groups. Thus, in June 1998 the prosecutor general of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria launched an investigation into the illegal capture of oil wells belonging to “Grozneft” by an armed group of around 200 people (Muzayev 1998a). Such criminal groups were prepared to defend their economic interests by arms, while Maskhadov was still cautious of spilling Chechen blood. As a result, his law-enforcement agencies were impotent when confronted with aggressive armed criminals. For example, in August 1998 the special battalion of the State Security Department, supported by police units, suffered a major defeat when it failed to gain control over two oil wells illegally captured by fundamentalist armed groups (Golos Chechenskoi
*Respubliki* 1998a). The security services limited themselves to issuing warnings and trying to regain strategic objects through negotiations with criminals.

The anti-terrorist center and the regional units of the State Sharia Security confronted the organized drug business and carried out raids to find poppy and hemp plantations in the Chechen mountainous and pre-mountainous areas. Hectares of narcotic fields were regularly discovered and destroyed in the forests of Chechnya (Muzaev 1998a).

Objectively speaking, law-enforcement agencies did obtain some results, but they were still too modest to deal with the magnitude and extent of criminality. Security services were paralyzed by the inability to resort to force, as was President Maskhadov, in his political strategy.

**Armed groups: from war mobilization to warlordism**

The first Chechen war was a national liberation war, deeply embedded in the politicized trauma of Stalinist deportation. When asked about motivation to support the separatist cause in Chechnya, almost all my respondents provided historical justifications:

> For me, everything started from school. Since childhood I knew what had been done to our people. I searched through all our school textbooks and there was no mention of Chechens. There were wild tribes, indigenous peoples, but no Chechens. We had a history teacher, Nadezhda Nikolaevna, I asked her in class why there were stories of different peoples … but nothing about us, a whole national republic? I caught her angry glance and got no response. Her husband was a local policeman. A few days later he came up to my father and said, ‘Your son is asking too many questions. He doesn’t need to.’ But I needed to. I knew my grandfather had been deported and had died as a kulak, because they had two flour mills here in the village. His three brothers were shot dead. My father was nine when he was deported to Kazakhstan with his grandmother. She died of hunger a month later. My father was raised in orphanages. I always knew that I would fight when the time came. I was a ready-made revolutionary.⁹

Even before the outbreak of conflict, amateur volunteers started to sense the change in atmosphere and would gather round different commanders
(Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 7). Usually the latter would be someone they knew or someone based in their area.

All the former Chechen combatants I have interviewed described the spontaneous and even chaotic nature of the initial resistance during first the two weeks of the war. There were too many volunteers and a shortage of weapons, there was no central command, groups formed on their own, chaotically and often randomly:

It was difficult even to join this nightmare. For two weeks I could not find a group. The majority of volunteers were forming groups on the basis of previous acquaintances, friendships, and I had no acquaintances, I had just arrived from Kazakhstan.¹⁰

However, a unified command was soon established; the armed forces were divided into front and sectors. Despite the subordination, the autonomy of military units was significant. Made up of volunteers who could come and go, dispersed over a vast territory and fragmented by parts of territory under the control of federal troops, commanders of small units were rather free in their daily planning. Internal cohesion in groups was strong.

My ex-combatant respondents said their groups were formed on the basis of village affiliation or previous acquaintance, and often their social and regional composition was heterogeneous. None mentioned teip (historical clans), vird (Sufi Brotherhoods) or kinship as the principle of organizing the units. As the war progressed the composition of groups could be in flux. The commanders were usually people with some prior military experience or strong leadership skills. Khozh, a former combatant explained:

In our group the commander was 49 years old, he was a school teacher of military education. We had other teachers with us, “intelligentsià” – as they are called. I was 32. The oldest was 56, the youngest 18. Two of us were from the Grozny region, three guys were from Grozny, one guy was an Adyg,¹¹ the rest were from the Nadterechnyi and Naur regions, a total of 21–22 people. All except for one had served in the army.¹²

According to the accounts I have gathered, during the first war, popular
support to combatants was huge, especially in the rural areas. Former combatant Ruslan recalls:

The people’s militia had to be fed, so women baked bread, sewed uniforms, and unloadings. The injured were taken care of. When a unit entered a village, the injured were immediately taken into homes – it was perceived as an honor to take care of them. The rear was working. The entire nation supported us. We were fighting for a pure idea, for independence. And you cannot defeat a nation, when it has an idea. When one side has patriotism and the other side vodka, it’s clear who wins such a war. In the first war truth was on our side and we won with the support of the All-Mighty and the nation. \(^{13}\)

However, Akhmadov explains that already then, a profound gulf had emerged between civilians and combatants: “The small portion of the population that formed the armed resistance was terribly arrogant … and the population did not recognize their authority. Yet, no matter how you look at it, during wartime, we simply had to take charge (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 35).

After the war many of the groups were dissolved, and most fighters returned to peaceful lives. However, some groups remained, and those gradually turned into paramilitaries with a stronger territorial component and personal loyalty to the leader.

The war also accelerated the re-Islamization of society. By 1997 all Chechen politicians resorted to Muslim discourse in their public statements. International Jihadists who arrived in Chechnya in numbers in 1995 were the bearers of fundamentalist ideology and invested a great deal of effort to diffuse it among post-Soviet field commanders and the rank-and-file. In the post-war euphoria, ex-combatants were treated as national heroes, received financial and material support from the state and quite a few of them felt that they were entitled to their share of power. \(^{14}\) Achievement in the war effort became the main criterion for access to power resources and social goods, i.e. income, connections, the ability to obtain employment for relatives, etc., and paramilitaries were now seen as a social lift, which facilitated their institutionalization.

*Regime challengers*
Maskhadov’s choice of ministers after his election clearly shows his priority for accommodating the interests of veterans, avoiding fragmentation among separatists, but also of including professionals – competent and highly qualified cadres in his cabinet. Maskhadov was chair of the government, his first vice-premier was the radical propagandist Movladi Udugov, and Ruslan Chimaev was minister of foreign affairs. He put field commanders or former members of Dudayev’s government in charge of ministries and governmental departments, the Supreme Presidential Council, the Security Council, and the Presidential administration (Muzaev 1997). Defense and security ministries were given to his top commanders and supporters in the electoral campaign: Magomed Khanbiev as the minister of defense, Kazbek Makhbashev – minister of internal affairs (Akhmadov and Lansky 2010: 81).

At the same time Maskhadov realized the importance of experienced cadres, therefore he also invited former pro-Russian managers, for which he was attacked by his more radical comrades who accused him of the “rehabilitation of communists.” As a result, already in April 1997 all prominent field commanders were included in his second government: Shamil Basayev as vice-premier for industry, Ruslan Gelayev as minister of construction, Islam Khalimov for social issues, brigade general Akhmed Zakaev as minister of culture and colonel Isa Astamirov (Gelayev’s chief of staff) as the minister of economy (Muzaev 2005). Yet, he managed to keep a handful of old professionals: the Ministries of Energy, Labor and Social Issues, Road Construction and Residential Property as well as the Departments of State Property, and the National Bank were headed by representatives of the “old” bureaucracy (Muzaev 1997).

Understanding the need for demobilization, from March to June 1997 Maskhadov tried to reorganize the command and structure of the armed forces. On the 13th of March, he founded the National Guard, numbering 2,000 people, meant to be the only regular armed unit (Muzaev 1997). The armed forces of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria included 53 generals, one general per 300 officers (Muzaev 1998c).

In May 1997 Maskhadov abolished the headquarters of the wartime fronts, which had functioned during the war, organized a system of military bases of the Chechen armed forces and adopted the Statute of the Armed Forces (Muzaev 1997). In November 1997 the parliament
adopted the “On Weapons” law, aimed at controlling the dissemination of guns. Subsequently, the government repeatedly introduced measures to buy or confiscate weapons, none of which worked (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 97). A huge arms market functioned in Grozny. The market of violence—services related to security, bodyguarding, the protection of illegal oil refineries and pipes, extortion, along with very profitable hostage-taking business—was visibly growing.

In fact, demilitarization never happened. Field commanders ignored Maskhadov’s reorganization efforts and orders to demobilize groups, which were transformed into numerous security departments, field commanders’ personal guards, local police, and private security firms (Muzaaev 1997). As described by Akhmadov: “Groups were splitting and multiplying. Authority was splintered among them into thousands of small pieces, so that in the end there was no real authority” (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 95).

The first to openly challenge the regime was one of Maskhadov’s rivals in the presidential campaign—Salman Raduev,15 who had well-armed military bases in the town of Gudermes and in the Staropromyslovski district of Grozny. Raduev criticized Maskhadov for his compromises with Moscow, for including former communists in the government and for insufficient Islamization of public life. He carried out numerous demonstrations, parades and rallies where he criticized the incumbent government, and threatened “to take action.”

In June 1997 Raduev was joined by other field commanders, who attacked Maskhadov for the “rehabilitation of collaborationists.” Radical field commanders (Basayev, Gelaev, and Movsaev) left Maskhadov’s government. Just four months after the government’s formation, the elite consolidation was broken.

The real political challenger to Maskhadov was not Raduev, who was popularly perceived as a rascal, but the charismatic radical Shamil Basayev, who had lost the election to Maskhadov and took his defeat very painfully. Basayev, however, was strategic enough not to oppose Maskhadov immediately after the elections and tried to respect the rules of the game. Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, the executive president after Dudayev’s murder, who was also very much looking forward to dropping the word “executive” from his title, took a break after the elections and went on a several months—long trip to the Muslim countries (probably to raise funds).
Other Chechen commanders allied with one actor or another. Basayev and Raduev’s forces were major military formations, well trained and experienced in audacious military operations. Both groups together could militarily compete with the state armed forces. Maskhadov did not have a personal paramilitary group, but relied on state security structures and a small number of faithful personal guards.

Apart from paramilitary groups, the above-mentioned political challengers set up formal political organizations to represent their interests in the public sphere. “Public-political movements” were established which functioned as one-leader political parties and had their own printed organs – newspapers.16

The main ideological divisions between Maskhadov’s supporters and his opponents concerned domestic and foreign policy and the role of Islam in the government. If Maskhadov was investing great hope in privatization as a way to revive the Chechen economy, the opposition was very cautious and argued that there was a high probability it would be carried out in the interests of specific groups, not the entire population. At the same time, opposition leaders did everything they could to pursue an informal privatization or the outright capture of state property by criminal groups. Maskhadov was focused on combating organized crime domestically, while the opposition called for combating spies and “collaborators of the occupation regime.” The opposition was also very sensitive to any criticism of Sharia judges.

In foreign policy, the opposition frequently blamed Maskhadov for what they saw as inadequate reaction to “the cynical and insulting campaign against the Chechen state organized by Russia.” They demanded that all remaining issues with Moscow be settled as soon as possible in favor of full independence for Chechnya. They were unhappy about the lack of government reaction to regional and international developments, called for intervention in Dagestani political processes on the side of the Islamist leaders, and for a more outspoken anti-Western position in international affairs. Maskhadov’s challengers also demanded the introduction of Chechen passports, customs at the borders with Russia, and Chechen registration plates for vehicles.

Domestically, all opposition leaders were pushing for an Islamic state and for the enforcement of Islamic norms. They resorted to Islamist rhetoric, but were allies of the fundamentalists, rather than deeply committed converts. Demanding a more Islamic state was instrumental
for a number of political ends: in conditions of post-war chaos, calling for religious purity and strict adherence to Islam was a convenient moral stance, enabling them to boost their own position while discrediting their rivals.\textsuperscript{17} It was also a way to gain financial support – as Zelimkhan Yandarbiev openly acknowledged.\textsuperscript{18}

In addition to these “indigenous” challengers, there were two groups of “aliens” hosted by the Chechen radicals and playing a prominent role. These were the fundamentalist Islamic leaders – the international Jihadist Khattab,\textsuperscript{19} who supported financially, logistically, and militarily the spread of fundamentalism in Chechnya, and the Dagestani Muslim scholar Bagauddin Muhammad (Magomedov, aka Kebedov),\textsuperscript{20} who provided ideological support and training to the fundamentalists and inspired the transformation of Chechnya into an Islamic state. Both Khattab and Bagauddin Muhammad interfered in Chechen politics from behind the scenes. Knowing the ambitions of Chechen leaders, they never voiced any personal interest in gaining political power. However, they consistently and forcefully pushed for an Islamic state, for more aggressive behavior towards Russia and the West, for all-Caucasian and international Jihad.\textsuperscript{21} Bagauddin Muhammad and Khattab launched an offensive on Sufism and nationalism in Chechnya, which was hardly acceptable to the majority of the population. Maskhadov’s government and his supporters tried to curb the anti-nationalist claims of the Islamists. Thus, Lecha Khultygov, director of the National Security Service, announced in January 1998 that the propaganda of the “ Wahhabis” directly contradicted the national traditions of Chechens. He condemned the enforcement of an “Arab lifestyle” and feared that “the replacement of national tradition by Islamic ones” would eliminate the distinct Chechen nation (Muzaev 1998a). In the midst of his last political crisis, Maskhadov declared “Chechnya is for the Chechens. We do not need … Arab advisors” (Muzaev 1998a).

Pressure on Maskhadov continued till the end of the year, and in late December 1997 he made his first serious concession to the radicals – he appointed Basayev prime minister of Chechnya, and transferred to him most of the executive powers. Basayev promised to tame crime and solve social problems and brought with him a team of people, including his brother Shirvani (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 135) However, already by June 1998 his government had failed, but the result of his activity as prime minister having been the prominent advancement of Islamist
values in Chechnya.

In schools, whereas in January 1998 a number of secular subjects were temporarily excluded from the school curriculum for the sake of economy (musical education, drawing, sketching, physical training), new mandatory subjects were introduced by the Ministry of Education – Arabic, introduction to Islam, Chechen ethics, introduction to Sharia and civil law. Islamic subjects were taught beginning in elementary school, where tuition was to be carried out in the Chechen language. The government developed an Islamic dress code for school children and was working towards the separation of female and male students. While the secular educational system was in deep crisis, the authorities supported the creation of religious educational institutions.\textsuperscript{22}

In 1997–99 the Chechen judicial system was based on Islamic law. The transition to Islamic law occurred by decision of the ruling elite, without the consent of the population. The newly established Sharia system suffered from the low qualifications of judges, which was not surprising since the republic almost immediately had to staff courts at three levels with new cadres, without previous training or time for a transition. Short-term courses for judges were set up, where Bagauddin Muhammad most often trained young people with no background in law, often with no higher education. The Sharia courts co-existed with the secular judicial system, and as a result legal pluralism flourished that further eroded statehood. Until the 1st of June 1999 Sharia courts used the criminal codes of various Muslim countries, including the Sudanese Criminal Code.\textsuperscript{23} On the 1st of June, Parliament passed the Criminal Code of Ichkeria (Muzaev 1999d).

By 1998 the fundamentalists began to aggressively establish Islamic norms and laws in towns and villages. My female Chechen friend described how every day her mother would accompany her from Argun to Grozny to attend university lectures, afraid of aggressive bearded men who checked buses and harassed girls for the length of their sleeves. Another colleague described how, when she traveled by car with her brothers, they could be stopped at any time and armed men would demand they explain their relationship. Sharia courts issued lashes to drunkards. Khavas Akbiev, deputy chief editor of the newspaper "Gums" in the Chechen town of Gudermes remembers:

I had a \textit{café}, where my wife and my relative worked. After the first
war, they ran up to my office and shouted that bearded guys had broken into the cafe with guns. I rushed there. They did not find any alcohol. But they screamed: Who is this woman? What kind of relation do you have to her? I said, this is my wife, and this is my relative. Why are these women working here? Women are not supposed to work in places where men go to. We give you two days; unless you solve the problem we will burn your cafe.24

*Training camps in Serzhen-Yurt: dissolving Jihadism*

The international Jihadist, Khattab brought with him the structure, skills, and most importantly the financial support of international Jihadists. He organized stable financial inflows of weapons, ammunition, training, and supplies. As a professional guerrilla with a masterful command of infantry arms, land mining, mine clearing and mountain warfare, he trained future combatants. In 1995–96 Khattab carried out a number of successful military operations,25 which impressed Chechen field commanders, but according to my respondents among former fighters, Dudayev, a consistent opponent of Islamism, managed to “keep him quiet.” However, when the Russian security services killed Dudayev on the 21st of April 1996, his deputy Zelimkhan Yandarbiev had already been under strong fundamentalist influence. In 1996 Yandarbiev formally introduced Sharia courts in Chechnya and gave the Islamists political prominence.

As a military strategist, Shamil Basayev26 also realized the organizational benefits of the fundamentalist structures and the efficiency of their mechanisms for generating support among the youth. He became close to Khattab, who channeled financial support to his group. In 1996 Khattab married a Dargin woman from an Islamist enclave of Dagestan and settled in Basayev’s native village of Vedeno.

After the war, with the help of Basayev, the foreign Jihadists Khattab and Abu Fatqh founded the training center “Kavkaz” in the former “pioneer” camps near the village of Serzhen-Yurt, in the Shali region of Chechnya. In almost three years the center had already been attended by thousands of young people from the region. According to my respondents, the teachers and instructors in the camp were mostly foreigners; they were accompanied by Dagestani translators from Arabic. Each camp had a specialized program offering ideological training
through study of the Koran, training in explosives and terrorist actions in
the rear of the enemy, training in heavy artillery weapons, methods of
guerrilla war. Training cycles lasted from 45 days to six months. The
camp could reportedly take from 1,000 to 2,000 people at a time. Thus,
thanks to Khattab, thousands of young people gained access to a rather
sophisticated and advanced ideological and military training in
international Jihad. Many of them became bearers of the fundamentalist
ideology and some, indeed, turned into Jihadi militants.

Very different people attended the camp – from rather secular
intellectuals, who went out of curiosity or perhaps to learn something
new about Islam, to radicals who joined with a clear agenda of becoming
fighters. But most of the trainees were idle, bored youngsters, for whom
it was an adventure of a “zarnitsa” type, a free of charge vacation.
Going to training was a sign of manliness and raised a young man’s
status among his peers. One of my Ingush colleagues, a totally secular
intellectual, said that at the time he planned to go as well, but to be
enrolled he had to quit smoking, which is why he reconsidered it.
Another respondent said that he went to learn about Islam, and after the
camp he was very much looking forward to war. The existence of Center
“Kavkaz” played a prominent role in the strengthening of fundamentalist
Islam in the North Caucasus and engaged in military–political struggle
many of those who were otherwise quite disinterested in politics.

Below are two interviews with attendees of the camp, one of whom,
Zelim, fought in both wars:

I was in the training camp of Khattab. There were up to 1,000 guys
at the time … Everything was free of charge. There were Bashkirs,
Uzbeks, Tatars, Tajiks, Ingush, Kabardines, Ossetians, Afghans, and
Englishmen there. There was also one black guy, a professional
runner. He only knew English and Arabic, he came to fight. There
was one guy from Bosnia, without legs, these were some real
fighters there; they were wanted by all security services in the
world. We were divided in Jamaats – there were Ingush, Kabardine
Jamaats, the two latter were very united … After training in the first
camp, the best were selected and transferred to the military camp.
Guys from Russia were taught mining, explosives, and the like …
This was real military training, these people knew that there would
be another war, they were preparing … They showed us videos of
Kashmir, Palestine. I was shocked. Although now I think it was brainwashing … And there was no power in Chechnya, which could approach this camp and bark at them. All the taxi drivers knew the way to the camp. We were passing checkpoints and the military servicemen knew where we were going. It was impossible not to know about this camp. But it was dangerous to touch us.28

The other attendee of the camp, a former communist party member, became a strongly anti-fundamentalist deputy chief editor of the regional newspaper “Gums”:

After the first war we were in Serzhen-Yurt. We thought this was the place where people worshiped God. The first week some Jordanian was lecturing. Gradually I started to feel tension; I saw people’s eyes turning bloodshot. I thought this was some kind of hypnosis, they often repeated words – war, blood, murder. Then I told my friend – “something is wrong with this place” and we left.29

The fundamentalist military group called “Jamaat” led by Khattab was a very well-trained and organized combat-ready group. Some hostages taken for ransom were found on their bases. Dagestani policemen released from captivity in Urus-Martan claimed that the fundamentalists had dug trenches and were preparing for the attack of the presidential troops. My respondents from Serzhen-Yurt claimed that as the political crisis unfolded, they lived in constant fear of armed clashes between Khattab and Maskhadov.

The political crisis and the government’s response

“Weak” is the most common attribute used to characterize Maskhadov as a politician – by experts, combatants, and the population alike. I have hardly ever met Chechens (outside the incumbent government) who had very strong negative or positive feelings towards Maskhadov, but most of them characterized him as “weak.”

Maskhadov had a good reputation and was respected by various combatant groups, but unlike Dudayev, who was a recognized, unquestionable leader, Maskhadov was one of many outstanding field commanders during the war and the others had difficulty accepting his authority. According to Khozh, a former combatant:
Maskhadov was a good person, but very weak. His main mistake was to become president. When the war was over, they should have united and elected one candidate [from among field commanders – E.S.], but Basayev decided to divide the people. He thought he was the national hero. I think Basayev resented the fact that he had not been elected.30

The main goal of Maskhadov’s government, which he and his team expressed repeatedly, was to avoid an internal schism and a civil war. Maskhadov was confronted with armed groups that captured society and used Islam as an instrument of political struggle and for fund-raising purposes. They all received resources from somewhere: some from Islamists abroad, others from affluent Chechen businessmen who sought to buy influence, yet others from the hostage-taking business and illegal oil extraction (Akhmadov and Lansky 2010: 101–20). Maskhadov had no external financial support resources and having the support of the majority of society, did not take advantage of it until the very end, when he felt that society’s patience with the Islamists and towards criminals had reached its limits. Until then he preferred to deal with his armed challengers on his own, without involving large groups of people. Maskhadov also understood that a civil war in Chechnya would be used by Russia as a pretext for invasion. He was thus not willing to take responsibility for starting either the first civil war among Chechens, or the Second Russo–Chechen war.

His strategy was to maintain even sham agreement between field commanders, primarily by means of concessions. He gave informal groups access to power, and by February 1999 had satisfied all their political demands, including declaring Chechnya an Islamic state. At the same time, he launched a few tough offensives on the radical opposition – every armed challenge by the radicals was dealt with militarily, and usually followed by political concessions and the restoration of the consensus. When the opposition felt politically defeated, he would quickly implement the important statebuilding reforms which they opposed – re-organization of the army, purging of criminals from the security services, introduction of educational qualifications for policemen and judges, return of legislative credentials to the parliament, rehabilitation of Sufi tariqas. In the words of Akhmadov, “he was walking a tightrope; every time he tried to do something constructive, all
the splinter groups united against him” (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 100).

1998–99: from tensions to clashes

During Basayev’s leadership, especially in the spring of 1998, the problem of hostage-taking for ransom became extremely acute. Some hostages were found in fundamentalist centers (Muzaev 1999c: 30–32; Yevloyev 1999). Moreover, the fundamentalists reportedly found quotes in the Koran that justified taking infidels hostage for ransom.

In March 1998 Maskhadov’s Anti-terrorist Center tried to attack their base in Urus-Martan, but failed both to destroy the base and to release hostages. At the end of May, as the situation in neighboring Dagestan was deteriorating, Chechen radicals increasingly called for military intervention on behalf of Islamist brothers. Maskhadov took another firm stance against intervention and demanded the departure of two fundamentalist security ministers from his government. Supporters of the ex-ministers got together and launched a raid on Maskhadov’s native village of Alleroy, harassing a few women and shooting a man from Maskhadov’s teip.

Government forces chased the fundamentalists and clashed with them in the town of Gudermes on the 30th and 31st of May 1998. Almost 2,000 people participated in the fight, among them Chechens, Avars, and even Arabs. The oral agreement was not to use guns, to avoid blood feud consequences. “During several hours of the most brutal fighting only one shot could be heard – Maskhadov’s guard was injured, who knocked Wahhabis off like sheaves” (Dorofeev 1998). This was the first violent clash between groups, unarmed until then, but massive in the number of its participants. It was a signal to the president: armed clashes were close.

After the Gudermes fight in protest against Maskhadov’s assertive measures against fundamentalists, Basayev filed his resignation. Just before that he had been severely criticized in the parliament for failing as head of the government (Muzaev 2004). This was a political victory for Maskhadov – his main challenger, who had been given all the power he wanted (except for presidential status), had failed, and thus lost his credibility as a critic of the president’s strategy for dealing with social problems and crime, the latter’s most vulnerable point. After the Gudermes clash, Maskhadov’s forces established control over all state
objects in Grozny (Muzaev 2004). Temporal peace was restored.

Feeling his failure as prime minister, Basayev became increasingly involved in Islamist political projects. Already in April 1998 he organized a permanent “Congress of the Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan” with himself as its chair. The idea behind the Congress was to revive the Islamic Imamate of Imam Shamil in Dagestan and Chechnya (Malashenko and Trenin 2004: 34). Clearly, Basayev’s aim was to hijack the state from his rival, by creating a new political entity – the union of Chechnya and Dagestan with himself as a new Imam Shamil. Bagauddin Kebedov, with his Islamist agenda and Avar nationalist poet Adallo Aliev with his romantic dream of reviving past Caucasus glory supported and boosted Basayev’s ambitions.31

The peak of the crisis came in mid-July. On the 14th and 15th of July 1998 the National Guard tried to disarm fundamentalist groups again in the town of Gudermes. In an ensuing clash, several dozen people were killed and many more injured. It turned out that fighters of two government units – the Sharia Guard and the Islamic Regiment – fought on the side of the Islamists, which indicated that the fundamentalists had seized a significant part of the armed forces (Muzaev 1998b). Two days later Maskhadov made his first tough public statements against the fundamentalists. He mobilized his supporters among the reservists ex-combatants and demanded that the leaders of the radicals leave the republic within 24 hours. He also dissolved the Sharia Guard and the Islamic Regiment. On the 23rd of July there was an unsuccessful attempt on Maskhadov’s life, which was attributed to Islamist radicals. The Prosecutor’s Office summoned the leaders of the opposition for interrogation in connection with this case. The opposition (including Basayev), fearing public disgrace announced its support of Maskhadov.

In the fall Maskhadov made new concessions to the opposition and agreed to adopt “The Law on Lustration” and set up honor courts for its implementation. Another political principle of Maskhadov’s government was sacrificed in the name of sham consolidation. According to Akhmadov, government officials had to go through a meaningless and humiliating procedure, whereby they were asked professionally irrelevant questions “specifically how many times a day he prayed” (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 80).

On the 8th of December 1998 as the world saw the horrifying pictures of the cut off heads of the four British engineers, Maskhadov again
mobilized the reservists and carried out another anti-criminal campaign. His challengers responded by terror and attempts on the lives of several of Maskhadov’s allies. Field commanders Basayev, Raduev, and Israpilov appealed to the Chechen Parliament and the Sharia court demanding Maskhadov’s impeachment (Malashenko and Trenin 2004: 33).

**Maskhadov’s political victory and statebuilding failure**

On the 3rd of February 1999 Maskhadov decided to take on the slogans of the radical opposition and announced the introduction of “full Sharia rule” in Chechnya and set up a special governmental commission to develop the new project of the Sharia Constitution of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria. In the Sharia state the parliament would lose its legislative power and only act as a controlling institution, while the higher legislative organ would be the Islamic Council – the *Shura* – made up of prominent field commanders and Islamic scholars (Muzayev 1999a).

The opposition was taken by surprise and totally disarmed. Maskhadov had satisfied all their demands. Basayev immediately declared his full support of the president. However, the Khattab-sponsored fundamentalist newspaper *Al-Kaf* announced that the creation of the *Shura* and Islamic rule was a hypocritical political maneuver aimed to blunt the vigilance of the Muslims. A few days later Basayev and his supporters declared that they would not join Maskhadov’s *Shura*, and created their own *Shura* with Basayev as its emir (chair) (Muzayev 1999a).

Parliament, previously very supportive of Maskhadov, announced that the introduction of Sharia rule was unconstitutional and that it violated the basis of the Chechen state. It created a commission to impeach the president for violating the Constitution and attempting to dissolve the highest legislative institution (*Grozvenskii rabochii* 1999a). The parliamentarians refused to give up their legislative credentials.

As a result of this final concession to the opposition, Maskhadov both won and lost. On the one hand, he managed to show the population the real face of his challengers – it was not Islam they were fighting for, but naked power. On the other hand he abolished the basis of statehood, also the basis of his legitimacy – the 1992 Chechen Constitution, the
institution of direct popular vote and secular executive power. Moreover, he further alienated his supporters, in particular Parliament, which had been loyal to him throughout 1997–98.

Nonetheless, Maskhadov still enjoyed significant support. Thus, on 15th of March a large pro-Maskhadov rally gathered in the center of Grozny, a crowd which, according to Muzaev, reportedly numbered up to 50,000 people (Muzaev 1999b). During most rallies the government attracted bigger crowds than the opposition, since society was behind Maskhadov and the secular state (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 80).

On the 21st of March and the 10th of April there were unsuccessful attempts on Maskhadov’s life, which mobilized his supporters even further.

By April, Maskhadov had taken two vital steps which strengthened his power. He managed to reach a consensus with Parliament by giving it back its legislative powers and assigning it the task of making cosmetic changes to the Constitution by adding quotes from the Koran and the Hadith, and he carried out a major reorganization of the security services. In addition, he increased his efforts to mobilize public support. His slogans about getting rid of shameful crime and Arab advisors who destroyed the Chechen nation resonated more and more deeply (Muzaev 1999b). In many villages, militias and public councils loyal to the president were set up in the aim of keeping out those who contradicted Chechen traditions, incited distemper, divided Muslims, and challenged the president (Groznenskii Rabochii 1999c).

The activity of the opposition was thus finally neutralized. Even Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, the most radical ideological challenger of Maskhadov called for a compromise with the president (Muzaev 1999c).

**Conclusion**

As a statesman and military person Maskhadov certainly failed, being unable to create a polity that would even barely resemble a modern state where laws would apply, authorities be respected, opposition and combat-ready groups dissolved; where economy, oil extraction at least, would be revived, providing the resources needed to sustain the social infrastructure and the state-funded sector. His security services were paralyzed by their inability to resort to violence:

In the post-war society, taking on the opposition in an aggressive
manner would have meant killing them all. Thus, to accuse Maskhadov of weakness is to blame him for not becoming a ruthless dictator and physically destroying his opponents.

Ilias Akhmadov wrote in his memoir (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 100). Yet, building a state requires establishing the monopoly of violence, something Maskhadov spectacularly failed to do. At the same time, by the summer of 1999 he controlled most of the security services in the republic and had silenced formal opposition via accommodation and achievement. He had gradually improved the quality of the security forces and the judiciary by purging them, which translated into a modest success in taming crime. By mid-1999 the situation had begun to change. Maskhadov’s team had managed to consolidate national and regional forces in the combat against crime. All commanders of security and law-enforcement agencies were mobilized and lived in barracks. In the framework of anti-criminal operations, dozens of hostages were released.

The radical opposition realized they had not much left to gain in Chechnya and accepted Maskhadov’s moral authority. He had beaten them politically with his peculiar manner of accommodation and mediation, and if he had had more time at his disposal he could have started to build on his success. But even when all the opposition’s demands were finally satisfied, though without having achieved their main goal – control of the presidential power in the state, in August–September 1999, Basayev and Khattab enacted raids on the neighboring Republic of Dagestan to support their “Muslim brothers” in the fight against infidels, thus inviting the second Russian invasion of Chechnya.

Like Ruslan, all the combatants I interviewed strongly resented Basayev’s excursion into Dagestan:

This was such a terrible mistake to go to Dagestan! They gave such a trump card to Russia! Later Shamil tried to explain himself, saying that they [Russia-E.S.] anyway planned it and they would have anyway invaded, but he was given 16–17 million dollars to get ready for war. So in order not to lose this money he went. But I always thought, Shamil, you had to understand, that it is one thing if they attacked first and another thing if we did it! How could we expect any support for our cause after that? But he cared less. Honestly, I have never wished death to any Chechen, but when I
learnt that he was killed I felt malicious joy and revenge. This man pushed our nation to the abyss. And I voted for him in 1997 ...\textsuperscript{32}

Notes

1 Author’s interview with Ruslan, former Chechen fighter, Samashki, January 2008.
2 Author’s interview with Tamara, Grozny, June 2009.
3 Between 2003 and 2008, I was permanently based in the North Caucasus where I worked for the “Memorial” Human Rights Center in Ingushetia and Chechnya and carried out field research for my Ph.D. I was also a lecturer of political science at Chechen State University in Grozny (2003–6).
4 War inflicted damage to oil pipes in Chechnya of estimated 340 b rubles. The largest processing factories in the capital Grozny were bombed out. Oil was mainly extracted from fountain wells, because the pumping equipment was out of order – marauders stole the electrical equipment and cables during the war.
5 Five to six new in-cuts into the oil pipeline occurred each day. Thus, a 2,850 meter-long pipeline from the oil base #2 to the Lenin oil processing factory had over 300 in-cuts. The pipeline was divided into sectors, controlled by armed groups; just a small portion of oil actually reached the processing factories.
6 For example, in the first six months of 1998, 130 murders, 66 abductions for ransom, and 137 burglaries were registered in Chechnya (Tishkov 2001: 67).
7 Concerning hostage-taking see M. Roshchin’s contribution in this volume.
8 Three British and a New Zealander who had come to Chechnya to install telecommunication equipment on the invitation of the Chechen government were abducted on 3rd of October 1998. In early December 1998 their cut off heads were found, and the Russian security services received a VHS tape, where the captured foreigners “confessed” to being British spies. This brutal crime had broad international resonance, and was qualified by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan as “nightmarish and inhuman” (\textit{Kommersant} 2001).
9 Author’s interview with Ruslan, former Chechen fighter, Samashki, January 2008.
10 Author’s interview with Kozh, former Chechen fighter, Avtur, December 2007.
11 An indigenous Muslim nation of the North Caucasus, also named Circassian.
12 Author’s interview with Kozh, Chechen fighter, Avtur, December 2007.
13 Author’s interview with Ruslan, former Chechen fighter, Samashki, January 2008.
For more on the Chechen state’s policies towards veterans see Aude Merlin (2012).

A former prefect of the second largest town of Gudermes, then the commander of the presidential guard “Presidential Berets” in 1993–96, Raduev married Dudayev’s niece. On the 9th of January 1996 he repeated a terrorist act committed by Shamil Basayev – attacked a military base and airport in the Dagestani town of Kizilyar and on retreating, took hold of a local hospital, demanding a safe corridor to Chechnya. After Dzhokhar’s death, Raduev considered himself to be a logical successor to his relative and renamed his group the “Army of General Dudayev,” rejected the results of the elections, refused to accept the legitimacy of Maskhadov and went into open confrontation with him.

The newspapers Kavkazskaja konfederatsija (Caucasian Confederation/Yandarbiev), Marshanan Az (Voice of Freedom/Raduev, Basayev), Put’ Dzokhara (Way of Dzhokhar/Raduev), Put’ Islama (Way of Islam) and Islamskaia natsii (Islamic Nation/Udugov), Velikiy Dzikhad (The Great Dzikhad/Gelaev), were in opposition to Maskhadov.

Thus, Salman Raduev in an interview to the analytical magazine Ogonek in 1997 blamed Maskhadov for fighting for power, while he claimed that he fought for Islam. “I am a man of deep religious convictions, I do not drink or smoke” (Belovetskii 1997). According to Ogonek, all funds from the Global Islamic forum passed through him. Maskhadov officially appealed to the Muslim countries not to finance Raduev (Belovetskii 1997).

After the 1997 elections, Yandarbiev took a break and went on a several months-long trip to the Muslim countries (probably to raise funds). In an interview to Vremia Novostei in December 2001, Yandarbiev acknowledged the instrumental value of financial support from the Islamic funds: “Islamic fundamentalism is not dangerous. It is partnership, international relations. You do not consider it a problem if Western investors tour Russia, do you? One cannot divide help into help from Wahhabis and help from others” (Yandarbiev 2001).

Khattab, a Saudi citizen, fought the USSR in Afghanistan, then joined the Islamists in conflict in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In December 1994, he learnt about Chechnya from a CNN reportage and already in January 1995 arrived in Grozny with a group of Arab supporters.

In the 1990s the Dagestani fundamentalist scholar Bahhauddin Muhammad founded a madrasah at the border of Dagestan and Chechnya which was attended by around 700 students, both Dagestani and Chechens (Akaev 2006). In 1997, when the authorities of Dagestan managed to crush many of the fundamentalist centers on its territory, Bahhauddin Muhammad and his supporters with the families performed hijra (migration) to Chechnya where they were allowed to settle in the formerly pro-Russian opposition town of

Both leaders regularly gave interviews to Chechen newspapers, most frequently to the pro-fundamentalist newspapers Islamskii poriadok or Al-Kaf (the latter was sponsored by Khattab). In various interviews, Khattab reiterated that his main life credo was Jihad, which was an obligation of every Muslim. He often repeated that he did not believe in the end of war in the Caucasus and called to prepare for another war (see IGPI monitoring for the years 1998–99 on IGPI website: http://igpi.ru/monitoring/1047645476, accessed 13 September 2013).

The Islamic institute in Kurchaloi educated 400 students. Branches of the institute were open in eight other settlements of Chechnya. The Grozny Islamic center established courses for children aged 10–13, where they could study Arabic, learn to read and translate the Koran. These educational opportunities were free of charge (Golos Chechenskoi Respubliki 28 June 1998).

Author’s interview with Vakhid Akaev, February 2008, Grozny.

Author’s interview with Khavas Akbiev, deputy chief editor of newspaper Gums, December 2007, Gudermes.

The most infamous one being the April 1996 operation near the village of Yarysh-Mardy, where in three hours he destroyed a military convoy of federal servicemen, the 245 motor-rifle regiment, killing 95 federal servicemen, injuring 54, and destroying all the military vehicles.

Basayev became famous in Chechnya already in November 1991, when in response to Yeltsin’s imposition of a state of emergency in Chechnya he hijacked a Russian passenger plane to Turkey. He was rebuked for this deed by the Ichkerian government and put on the wanted list by the Russian law enforcement agencies. In June 1995, when his group seized a hospital in the town of Budennovsk, in the Stavropol krai, Basayev demanded that Moscow start peace talks with Dzhokhar Dudayev. After several unsuccessful attempts to storm the hospital, the Russian government announced a cease-fire in Chechnya. Basayev released the hostages and returned home, seen by radicals as a national hero.

A sport – and military game in the USSR. It was an imitation of military action, similar to military training. These games were part of military education at schools.

Author’s interview with Zelim, former Chechen fighter, March 2009, Samashki.

Author’s interview with Khavas Akbiev, deputy chief editor of newspaper Gums, Gudermes.

Author’s interview with Kozh, former Chechen fighter, December 2007, Avturty.
31 Author’s interview with Adallo Aliev, December 2011, Makhachkala.
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Kidnapping and hostage taking between the two Chechen wars (1997–1999)

Mikhail Roshchin

My personal interest in this topic stems from the kidnapping of the British psychologists and charity workers Camilla Carr and Jonathan (“Jon”) James in Grozny on the 3rd of July 1997. They had been invited by an international NGO – the Center for Peacekeeping and Development – to Chechnya, to work with Chechen children. Literally only a few days prior to this incident, I had met with both of them at the Quaker organization Friends House, Moscow. I well remember trying to persuade them to stay for longer in Moscow, but they were in a great hurry, believing that the Chechens needed urgent help. The day after our meeting, they flew to Grozny with a cargo of humanitarian aid, and two or three days after that, they were kidnapped. At which point, the kidnappers’ ransom demands began.

This incident particularly struck me, I recall, as it concerned the kidnapping, not of rich or, at least, comfortably off people, but of individuals who in their home country of the United Kingdom were effectively jobless, since they had no permanent employment. Camilla Carr and Jon James were only released 14 months later, on the 20th of September 1998. During their captivity they were held in a cellar. Camilla was repeatedly raped by one of the kidnappers while Jon, her common-law husband, was tied to a radiator in the room next door (BBC News 1998b). Now, years later, Camilla and Jon have set down their memories of their traumatic experiences at that time on the website of the Forgiveness Project. This is what Camilla writes about her rapist and his actions:

After several weeks in captivity one of them [the kidnappers – M.R.] – an ignorant and wounded person who we named Paunch –
took the opportunity to rape me. The only way I could get through this horror was by thinking to myself, ‘you can never touch the essence of me – my body is only part of who I am.’

He raped me many times, but mostly I was able to cling on to this detached state of being. He always did it when he was alone and I didn’t dare tell the other captors in case it gave them the idea of gang rape. This went on until I got herpes, which gave me the strength to say no. Paunch asked me to explain why. With a dictionary I shakily pointed out, ‘no sex, no violence’. I couldn’t take any more. He said he just wanted to be my friend! In his own way he was apologizing. He stopped raping me and instead he would talk about his dreams.

(The Forgiveness Project 2010)

Jon, who could hear everything clearly from his position in the room next-door, says:

I had a horrible feeling as Paunch took Camilla next door. I heard a few muffled words, then silence, and an awful wave of realization hit me. I felt sick. I was powerless to take any physical action since I was handcuffed to the heating pipes. The only tool available was prayer. I prayed that the invasion would be swift and painless.

(The Forgiveness Project 2010)

The account of Camilla and Jon’s sufferings given on the Forgiveness Project website has been toned down considerably, but it was clearly a traumatic experience from which, as it seemed during their days of captivity, there would be no escape. In 2008, Jon James and Camilla Carr published a book entitled The Sky is Always There, in which they gave a detailed account of their experience of being taken hostage and of the things that helped them withstand and endure the hardships of this time. In their view, they were greatly helped by the Eastern practices of Tao Chi, yoga, and meditation (Carr and James 2008).

As far as I am aware, John and Camilla were ransomed from the kidnappers by Boris Berezovsky, who at that time held the post of deputy secretary of the Russian Security Council. In any case, they were certainly brought to England in an aircraft specially chartered by Berezovsky (BBC News 1998a; Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 109).
I have recounted the kidnapping and time in captivity of Jon and Camilla in some detail, because it was precisely their story, and the fact that I had met them on the eve of their departure for Grozny, which drew my attention to the issue of kidnapping in Chechnya and neighboring republics of the North Caucasus.

**Understanding kidnappings in Chechnya: sources and analyses**

The phenomenon of kidnapping in the period between the first and second Chechen wars merits the closest scrutiny. It has many aspects, especially when taking account of the differing applications of the terms “hostage” and “kidnapping” which were encountered as the Chechen conflict developed. In this context, the seizure of the hospital in Budennovsk by Shamil Basayev’s unit in June 1995 resulted in a mass hostage-taking, although clearly this capture was only a part – albeit a key part – of the Chechen fighters’ military incursion into Budennovsk (Babitskii 2012). And so, in my view, this incident deserves serious analysis in its own right. Still more does the above apply to the January 1996 raid launched by Salman Raduyev’s unit into Kizliar, which also became one of the most important episodes in the first Chechen war (Caucasian Knot 2013).

In order not to be overwhelmed by the scale of the topic under consideration, I would like to concentrate, in this article, on several high-profile abductions of journalists and of foreigners from that small contingent who had been working in Chechnya in the interwar period, and to look at the consequences this had for Chechnya as a *de facto* independent state, and for its international image. The sources for my work were, first and foremost, material from a variety of mass-media outlets and the testimonies of the hostages themselves, which are becoming more and more numerous as the years pass.¹ The kidnappers have, as a rule, remained silent, not least because many of them are no longer alive. Did law enforcement agencies in Chechnya and Russia conduct any investigations? I very much hope they did, although their conclusions remain unknown, especially considering that independent Ichkeria along with all its archives ceased to exist during the second Chechen war.

Were there any particular individuals who were secretly instigating high-profile kidnappings, seeking in this way to spoil the image of an
independent Chechnya? In this connection especially the late Berezovsky is frequently mentioned, since demonizing his image is a popular pastime; the logic often runs that Berezovsky could have been at once both the instigator of a kidnapping and, so to speak, the subsequent noble liberator. Was Berezovsky involved in the release and ransom of hostages? Most likely, yes, although nothing about this has ever been made public (Akhmadov and Lansky 2010: 109). First and foremost, this would have been during his tenure as deputy secretary of the Russian Security Council, i.e. from the 29th of October 1996 to the 5th of November 1997 (Cherkasov 2013). But overall, and I want to say this right away, I am not a believer in conspiracy theories. I think that, as a rule, the people organizing abductions were individual field commanders, although, for obvious reasons, none of them has rushed forward to publicly admit their responsibility. So it should be understood that where analysis and concrete assessment is concerned, researchers inevitably find themselves on treacherous ground, where any conjecture must be presented with great caution. Finding myself on this not particularly well-defined path, I have tried to be guided by the experience I gained on my numerous visits to Chechnya, including as an independent observer of compliance with the military agreement between Russia and Chechnya, in the summer and autumn of 1995, and as an observer at the presidential elections in Chechnya in January 1997.

**Attacks against aid workers and journalists at the end of the first war**

During the first Chechen war, kidnappings of foreigners were a rarity. Probably the most notorious instance was that of two individuals working for the aid organization International Action Against Hunger: Frederic Malardeau, a French citizen, and Michael Penrose, a British citizen. The two men were released by their captors on the 22nd of August 1996, due to the increasing proximity of combat to the hostages’ place of confinement (*Kommersant* 2002). The kidnapping of Malardeau and Penrose came at the very end of the first war (the Khasavyurt Agreement was signed by Aleksandr Lebed and Aslan Maskhadov on the 31st of August 1996).

Shortly after, on the 28th of September 1996, a worker for the Italian aid organization Intersos named Sandro Pocaterra and two volunteer
doctors – Giuseppe Valenti and Augusto Lombardo – were kidnapped in Chechnya. They were released on the 29th of November 1996 (Kommersant 2002).

On the 17th of December 1996, six International Red Cross workers were killed at a hospital in Novye Atagi, in the Shali district. Between ten and twelve armed individuals broke into the hospital at night and shot dead six people: nurses Fernanda Calado, Ingeborg Foss, Nancy Malloy, Gunnhild Myklebust, and Sheryl Thayer; and also Hans Elkerbout, a construction technician. In 2005, Adam Dzhabrailov was arrested by Russian authorities on suspicion of involvement in the attack on the Red Cross workers (Rossiiskaia Gazeta 2005). However, towards the end of 2010, Aleksei Potemkin, a former FSB officer who had defected to the West, told the British newspaper The Times that the killings were the result of a botched operation by an FSB commando group:

As he tells it, the mission was to destroy fighters, nicknamed borodatyе, or “beardies”. The unit split in two, with 14 men in the advance group under a Captain A. N Sevastyanov (codename Trofim). Lieutenant Potyomkin (codename Blue Eye) was supposed to proceed about 700 meters behind, with two men, to cover their rear. He was 23 at the time, and not long out of FSB academy, and was using night-vision equipment. “I saw about twenty Chechen fighters coming across the fields, just ahead of us. It looked like they were carrying a ‘300’ towards the hospital.” (Ever since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, military slang for a wounded soldier has been “300”; for a corpse it is “200”. That was what used to be scrawled on crates carrying the tin coffins of Soviet soldiers back home.)

A firefight ensued. About a dozen of the Chechens were killed and the rest fled. The captain received the order to check the hospital. Lieutenant Potyomkin mounted the hill of a nearby cemetery – “graves are always good cover” – to give protecting fire as the other Russians stormed in. The commanders wanted the unit to smoke out any Chechen fighters hiding in the compound. If they made contact, the unit was told, they were to “sort it out on the spot, in the usual way”.

Then, according to Major Potyomkin, everything went wrong. Captain Sevastyanov radioed out a desperate message to his
commanders; the gist of which was that the targets they had encountered within were not “ghosts” after all – the slang term for Chechen fighters. “No beardies – only foreigners!” he cried:

When the shooting stopped the unit scattered captured Chechen IDs around the compound to make it look like a Chechen attack. The FSB men withdrew, flying straight back to Moscow – and leaving mayhem behind them.

(Boyes 2010)

This version of events strikes me as more plausible, inasmuch as it meshes well with the chaos that reigned in Chechnya towards the end of 1996. Of course, this brutal killing is not directly linked with the kidnappings of 1997 and later years, but on the other hand it does demonstrate the vulnerability of the socio-political situation in a Chechnya that was, seemingly, heading towards peace.

**Maskhadov presidential elections: a missed opportunity?**

After the presidential elections in Chechnya on the 27th of January 1997, Aslan Maskhadov became president of the republic; however, some days earlier, on the 19th of January 1997, the ORT journalists Roman Perevezentsev and Vladislav Tibelius had been kidnapped. They were released without serious harm on the 18th of February 1997 (*Delovaia pressa* 1999). The situation in Chechnya, Grozny included, at the end of January and beginning of February was peaceful. I was there myself at that time, as part of a large group of observers following the progress of the pre-election discussions and the elections themselves. I remember walking through Grozny one evening with my observer colleagues, and the ordinary residents coming up to us and asking if they could help in any way. However, only a few days later, on the 23rd of February 1997, a photo reporter for the Italian weekly *Panorama* named Mauro Galligani was kidnapped. For his release, a ransom of one million dollars was demanded. On the 12th of April he was successfully freed; furthermore, without, as far as can be ascertained, any ransom being paid at all (*Kommersant* 2004; Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 102–4). This abduction was a portent that the situation as regards safety in Chechnya had begun to change.

On the 4th of March, an ITAR-TASS correspondent, Nikolai Zagoiko, two Russian Radio journalists – Yurii Arkhipov and Nikolai
Mamulashvili – and a satellite link operator working with them, Lev Zel’tser, were kidnapped. They were released three months later, on the 6th of June. As far as is known, these journalists were freed without any ransom being paid, which fact the newspaper *Nezavisimata Gazeta* took great satisfaction in printing forthwith:

The release from captivity of four journalists working for ‘Russian Radio’ and ITAR-TASS is an undoubted triumph for Grozny. The ceaseless snatching of journalists had truly placed the Chechen authorities in an awkward position. A firm impression was forming that Grozny was completely unable to control the situation in the republic. In fact, releasing the journalists from captivity in Chechnya had become a matter of personal honor for President Aslan Maskhadov. It is significant that the journalists were released, as opposed to being ransomed for money (as had happened in all previous instances), as this is also an important factor in raising the Chechen authorities’ standing.

(Maksakov 1997)

For the journalists involved, in the final analysis, this episode ended well. Nikolai Zagoiko now works as a human rights commissioner in Lipetsk Region, while Yuri Arkhipov and Nikolai Mamulashvili have both written memoirs about their experiences as hostages (Mamulashvili 2005; Arkhipov 2011).

On the 16th of March 1997, two journalists from Satka, a town in the Southern Ura, were kidnapped in Grozny: Aleksandr Utrobin, a photo reporter from the newspaper *Satkinskii rabochii*, and Olga Bagautdinova, a correspondent for the newspaper *Satkinskii metallurg*. They had travelled to Chechnya in search of a missing soldier from their region. The kidnappers had demanded a ransom for their release, but on the 6th of May Utrobin managed to escape from the apartment where the journalists were being held and to seek help from the Chechen Interior Ministry. Olga Bagautdinova recounted the incident thus:

We were only freed thanks to Sasha Utrobin’s escape. We spent around ten days working on his escape plan. Our guards had failed to notice that one of the windows in the apartment where we were being held had not been sealed shut. At dawn, when our guards
were asleep, Sasha crawled through it onto the balcony, and climbed down to the ground from the second floor. Three hours later, a Chechen Interior Ministry commando team stormed the apartment. And that’s how we ended up at liberty. The two sleeping guards, Usman Tusaev and Movladi Moskhadzhiev, were arrested. As far as I know, they will soon appear before a sharia court.

(Kommersant 1997)

Notwithstanding the fact that abductions of journalists had begun to occur, overall the relationship between Chechnya and Russia was developing in a relatively positive direction during this period. On the 12th of May 1997, in the Kremlin, Aslan Maskhadov and Boris Yeltsin signed the “Peace Treaty and Principles of Interrelation between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic Ichkeria,” in accordance with which the two sides agreed the following:

1. To reject forever the use of force or threat of force in resolving all matters of dispute.
2. To develop their relations on generally recognized principles and norms of international law. In doing so, the sides shall interact on the basis of specific concrete agreements.

(Dogovor o mire 1997)

Unlike the Khasavyurt Agreement, this treaty sought in principle to usher in relations between Russia and Chechnya within the realm of international law, and it gave additional guarantees as to the de facto independent status of Chechnya.

Seemingly, a gradual normalization of relations between Russia and Chechnya was envisaged, but obstacles on this path were encountered quite quickly. I do not wish to touch here on every problem that arose, but abductions, and especially the abduction of journalists, rapidly began to spoil the image of Chechnya. Now, some years after those events, I can clearly see that the kidnapping of journalists was the first serious harbinger of the forthcoming collapse of Ichkerian statehood.4

The kidnapping of Elena Masyuk, her NTV film crew, and its consequences

A mere two days before the Russian-Chechen peace treaty was signed,
on the 10th of May, a film crew headed by Elena Masyuk, a well-known NTV reporter who had been working in Chechnya since the start of the first Chechen war, was kidnapped. Afterwards, during an appearance on Sergei Korzun’s *Ekho Moskvy* radio programme “*Bez durakov*” (“No idiots”), Masyuk said:

Yes, I’ll explain the situation. This was the spring of 1997. Apart from my film crew, there wasn’t a single journalist in Grozny. Neither foreign nor Russian, and, strictly speaking, this had already been the case for two or three months. Whenever I went anywhere, I tried not to stay there too long. Everywhere we went, we left very quickly. And we never went anywhere where there were crowds of people. And, in general, I really tried to keep track of the situation I was in. Well, on that day … it was the last day of our assignment, and I needed to look into a particular situation arising out of scores that had been settled among some Chechens, some brigade commanders. And I stayed longer at Raduyev’s meeting than I ought to have.

(Korzun 2007)

According to Masyuk, this was her second mistake after the interview, some days earlier, of one of the main players in the business of snatching people (presumably Vakha Arsanov). She was kidnapped on the last day of her field trip, 6 km short of the Ingushetian border. It must be said that this was absolutely not simply a crime against journalists, it was a crime against one of the most honest and objective correspondents of the first Chechen war period. In order to establish something of the quality and value of Elena Masyuk’s work, I have allowed myself to adduce one more excerpt from the conversation on the “*Bez durakov*” programme. She recalls the 1995 hostage taking in Budennovsk, when a bus with hostages and journalists left the town in the direction of Dagestan and Chechnya. After some time, Russian authorities declared that they were unable to locate the Chechen fighters, who were possibly in Pakistan:

E. Masyuk: “… For me, for example, as a journalist who at one point in her life shot quite a lot of footage in Chechnya, it was very important to demonstrate to the authorities that they were lying. And, as a matter of fact, three days after Basayev so miraculously
disappeared on the border of Dagestan and Chechnya, I was able to record an interview with him. And this interview was shown on Segodnia. Korzhakov\textsuperscript{5} sent a petition to the then-public prosecutor Iliushenko for criminal charges to be pressed against me, based on a couple of sundry offences, etc. But for me the principle was important. For a journalist to show that the authorities were lying. And to film Basayev. For me, for example, it was particularly important to film Khattab on the anniversary of the attack on our armored column in Iaryshmandy. So that Khattab could say how it was that he found out our armored column would be travelling through there. How? And how it was that, after a year during which he, Khattab, had been a wanted man, it was possible to conduct an interview with him on Chechen soil. I interviewed him twice. They also accused me. But it was very funny, whenever I saw any of these FSB-inspired programmes, they didn’t even have a photograph of Khattab. What they had were stills from NTV footage.”

(Korzun 2007)

The gist of the message being sent by the kidnappers to the Russian and international journalistic community was obvious – you mustn’t come here. Clearly, it is debatable whether the motive behind the kidnappings was the desire to shut journalists up or the desire to earn money. For me, as a researcher, what is important is the effect resulting from these abductions: an almost complete cessation of journalistic trips to Chechnya, which gradually resulted in the development of a negative image for the de facto independent Chechnya-Ichkeria in the media:

The release of the NTV film crew was only achieved on the 17th of August 1997 and, furthermore, a large ransom was paid. At a press conference which took place not long after the release, on the 20th of August, Igor Malashenko, president of NTV at the time, accused Maskhadov of being the “head prison warder” in Chechnya. He accused Maskhadov’s direct associates (Vice President Vakha Arsanov, vice premier Movladi Udugov) of being directly involved in the trade in people. “In short,” said the NTV president, “we paid a ransom, which was a seven figure sum. And we are now convinced of the state’s inability to protect us.” (Papilova 1997)
Oleg Dobrodeev, who at that time was still working for NTV, added that “not a single one of the Chechen hostages was released without a ransom being paid. And not a single operation to free them was carried out.”

(Papilova 1997)

Elena Masyuk herself spoke concisely but meaningfully about the days she spent as a captive:

The first ten days were spent in an underground space, about one and a half square meters, where all you were able to do was sit. They fed us once a day – one sausage, some bread, some tea. We had the feeling they wanted to humiliate us. And I constantly had the urge to say that in Russia pigs are treated better than this.

Then there came some kind of houses without windows, doors or roofs, then cabins, dug-outs, and caves. The first cave was so narrow that you could only squeeze through into it feet first. They said that once a legendary Chechen rebel had hidden there. The second was at a height of four thousand meters, and resembled a grotto. A bear slept in it in winter. The thing that scared us most was the not knowing – not knowing when we would get out, or how we would be. … We asked [our guards] what would happen if no money was paid for us. They replied that we’d be kept for longer, a year or two. They recounted how the people who took the ORT guys, once they had received the ransom, had bought meat for their entire village.

(Papilova 1997)

Masyuk remembers that on some occasions, she would even have had the opportunity to kill her guards. Though she does not regret that she did not do so, it is clear that, after all that had happened to her, she was far from warmly disposed towards the Ichkerian regime:

Journalists can do nothing more in Chechnya. May the Chechens all just sit there, all by themselves, without journalists. Of course, I’m not condemning the entire Chechen people. But there are certain people who I hate.

(Papilova 1997)
I have deliberately spent some time examining the abduction of Masyuk and her crew in detail, since, in my view, it was precisely this incident that led to a fracture in the attitude of liberal and democratic Russian society towards the events that had happened in Chechnya. If, earlier, a sense of sympathy had prevailed, now it was becoming increasingly obvious that events in the republic were becoming ever more chaotic, and spiralling out of control.

**The tragic scale of abductions in 1997–98**

Of course, incidents involving the kidnapping of foreigners and journalists soon became widely known, but at the same time there was a surge in the abduction of Chechens themselves, Dagestanis, and residents of other neighboring republics. The well-known Chechen journalist Musa Muradov recalls:

A notable feature of Chechen TV when Maskhadov was president was the televised appeals made by relatives of missing people to their kidnappers. Every day, at prime time, people would be on television with tears in their eyes, begging for their kidnapped relatives to be released. Kidnapping in the republic at that time had assumed such massive proportions that sometimes these relatives’ appeals would take up over an hour of the evening’s broadcasts. In the end, this began to irritate the Ichkerian authorities, and such appeals to kidnappers were banned.8

(Muradov 2007)

The instance of kidnapping in Chechnya that achieved most notoriety throughout the world in those years was the abduction on the night of the 3rd of October 1998 of three British citizens – Peter Kennedy, Darren Hickey, and Rudi Petschi – and one New Zealander: Stan Shaw. They had been working on a contract drawn up between the British firm Granger Telecom and Chechen Telecom, installing cell-phone, satellite, and landline networks in Chechnya.

Attempts to free the hostages either by operational means or as the result of a ransom failed, and on the 8th of December, their severed heads were discovered on the Kavkaz federal highway, not far from Assinovskaya village (BBC News 1998c).

It later became apparent that a 65-year-old Dagestani mathematician,
Magomed Chaguchiev, who had also been taken hostage, spent some time with these captives, as he recounted to the British newspaper *The Sunday Times*:

In captivity they were badly treated. Every couple of days they were beaten with gun butts, truncheons, broken bottles and chains. They were shown videos of the dead bodies of other victims and some in the act of being murdered. The kidnappers wanted to extract confessions: from Chaguchiev, that he was really a security forces general; from the British men that they were spies.

At some point the gunmen succeeded: a video was made of the British men, dressed in military uniforms, confessing. Kennedy was the only one who spoke, saying they had installed a satellite aerial so that all the telephone conversations in Chechnya were heard by the British and Israeli secret services and that their ultimate purpose was to thwart the spread of Islam.

(Lenta.ru 2003)

On the 29th of December 1998 the bodies of the dead were ransomed from the kidnappers by the Chechen government, which paid two thousand dollars per body. They were taken that same day to Dagestan by the Chechen vice premier Turpal-Ali Atgeriev, after which they were transported via Azerbaijan to the United Kingdom (BBC News 1998e).

According to the Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov, the field commander Arbi Barayev and his men were behind the killing of the Granger Telecom employees (BBC News 1998d; Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 116–19).

It later emerged that Granger Telecom had held secret negotiations with the criminals, offering to pay ten million dollars in ransom for its abducted employees, but the deal fell through (BBC News 2001a, 2001b). Why? One theory put forward at the time was that people connected to Osama Bin Laden had offered Barayev, who was known to be a supporter of radical Islam, the sum of thirty million dollars for their murder. It was important for them to break any contacts between Chechnya–Ichkeria and the West, and reorient the former towards radical fundamentalist Islam, which is indeed what happened comparatively shortly afterwards. Nevertheless, in this case as in a great majority of others, responsibilities have never been clearly established, nor any
proper inquiries conducted.

**Kidnappings of Russian officials in Chechnya**

In Chechnya during the interwar period there were also abductions of Russian officials: Valentin Vlasov, a Russian Federation government envoy in Chechnya, and Major-General Gennady Shpigun, the Russian Interior Ministry’s special envoy in Chechnya. The crude abduction of the latter at Grozny airport as he was due to depart became one of the *casus belli* leading to the outbreak of the second Chechen war.

Valentin Vlasov was taken hostage on the 1st of May 1998, and freed half a year later on the 13th of November 1998. A ransom of seven million dollars was paid for his release. According to the renowned *Novaia Gazeta* journalist and expert in hostage issues, Viacheslav Izmailov, the money for Vlasov was paid directly by the Russian Federation Interior Ministry (Izmailov 2002).

An even more audacious abduction took place at 15:50 on the 5th of March 1999, at Grozny airport. General Shpigun was already on board a Tu-134 aircraft which had taxied onto the runway, when its path was blocked by two dark green UAZ jeeps:

The aircraft came to a stop, while from behind the doors which had been flung open there appeared two unknown men in masks, who literally threw the general off the plane, and then jumped out themselves. All three men were dragged into the cars, which immediately sped away from the airport in an unknown direction.

(Iaremenko 2006)

Baudi Bakuev’s group was suspected of carrying out the abduction, probably in collaboration with the head of the Chechnya–Ichkeria customs and border service, Magomed Khatuev. Valerii Iaremenko, creator of the news site Polit.ru, reports that:

Magomed Khatuev officially held dozens of hostages, both military personnel and civilians, in Grozny’s military camp no. 15, which fell under his jurisdiction. The hostages were either sold into the families of local residents, like Major Aristov of the medical service, or exchanged for criminals who had committed offences unconnected with military activities in Chechnya. Sometimes, as a
gesture of good will, they would be handed over to Russian politicians, officials, and human-rights activists. Among those who received hostages from camp no. 15 in Grozny were officers from the Russian president’s working group on prisoners-of-war the then-secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Dagestan, Magomed Tolboev; the Novaia Gazeta reporter Viacheslav Izmailov; and others.\footnote{Iaremenko 2006}

It did not subsequently prove possible to arrange Shpigun’s release. On the 31st of March 2000, his body was discovered in an area in the Chechen locality of Itum-Kale. As the Washington Post commentator David Hoffman rightly suggested, Shpigun’s abduction marked a turning point in Russian-Chechen relations, which began creeping towards a new war (Hoffman 2000).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to say that abductions continued for a considerable time, even past the start of the second Chechen war.\footnote{This is not to suggest that abductions ceased after the start of the second Chechen war.} This topic merits very serious attention and in-depth study, still more since the testimonies of witnesses, first and foremost those of former hostages, are now accessible. For my part, I have tried to draw attention to several of the more notorious abduction incidents, and to analyze their impact on the development of the situation in Chechnya in the interwar period.

Kidnapping usually becomes a problem in countries with an unstable political system or in zones of long-standing internal armed conflict. Today, for example, hostage-taking and abductions are live issues in Somalia,\footnote{For example, the conflict in Somalia has been ongoing since the early 1990s, with various factions vying for power.} Yemen, Colombia (Pécaut 2000), and the Philippine island of Mindanao, where the government has been waging war on Muslim insurgents for many years. Hostage-taking is a growing problem in Syria, too, where the civil war has entered into its third year. Taking all this into account, I cannot say that what happened in Chechnya in the period between the first and second Chechen military campaigns (1997–99) was something unique in world history. All this arose as the result of weakened state power, intrigues and clashes among various field commanders, the artful doings of security services, and a severe economic crisis. I do not think that conspiratorial plots from one side or another played a significant role in this process. The problem was
exacerbated by the increasing weakness of state institutions, the decline in the role of law in public life, and contradictory stances among the field commanders.

Notes

1 I cite a number of testimonies in this article. I consider the book by Brice Fleutiaux, a French photojournalist, to be especially valuable, since it presents a good description of the situation in Chechnya right on the eve of the second war. It gives a detailed account of how the Chechen fighters with whom Brice travelled lived in the mountains, plus a short but informative picture of how the negotiations around his release were conducted, and of how his handover to representatives of Russian federal forces went. Fleutiaux was only released on the 12th of June 2000, that is towards the end of the first year of the second Chechen war (Fleutiaux 2000).

2 In this case, it could be conjectured that the security services might have commissioned the kidnappings in order to demonstrate that Chechnya could not lay claim to full-fledged independent status. In addition, ever since the first war, spy mania had been growing in Chechnya, to which it was mainly journalists and foreigners working in the republic who fell victim.

3 An agreement on an array of military issues was signed on the night of the 29–30th of July 1995, which in part called for an immediate cessation of military activities and the creation of a special oversight commission (Orlov and Cherkassov 1998: 25).

4 In this instance I have in mind the absence of any basic legal order in the republic, and the growing inability of the Chechen president Maskhadov to regulate the contradictory interests of his various commanders in the field, each one of whom had his own personal armed unit.

5 Aleksandr Korzhakov was at that time head of President Yeltsin’s security service.

6 Since 2004, Oleg Dobrodeev has been the general director of the broadcasting company VGTRK.

7 In contrast to Dobrodeev, however, many people have suggested that it was precisely the fact that payments were made in secret which led to the kidnapping epidemic.

8 See also in this connection the story of Svetlana Kuz’mina, who had been working in those years with soldiers’ mothers, and who was kidnapped in Chechnya (Reiter 2013).

9 Ibid. This information is supported by materials supplied by Viacheslav Izmailov, which can be read on the site compromat.ru (Izmailov 2000).

10 The French photo journalist Brice Fleutiaux was held in Chechnya from the 1st of October 1999 to the 12th of June 2000 (Fleutiaux 2000). Kenneth
Gluck, a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) employee, was abducted in Chechnya on the 9th of January, and released 26 days later. The Dutch aid worker Arjan Erkel (MSF) was abducted in Dagestan on the 12th of August 2002 and released on the 11th of April 2004. See his recollections in S. Reiter’s article (Reiter 2013).


Bibliography


7 Ramzan Kadyrov’s “illiberal” peace in Chechnya

John Russell

War does not determine who is right – only who is left.

(Bertrand Russell)

This article seeks to provide a further dimension to the already rich range of studies on Chechnya, in general, and the perceived quality of life there under the present regime of Ramzan Kadyrov, in particular, by introducing the concept of “illiberal peace.” As this, together with the related and more widely researched concept of “illiberal democracy,” has been applied already to a number of countries worldwide (Lewis 2010; Kennan Institute seminar 2006; Menegazzi 2012; Smith and Ziegler 2008) that have failed thus far to complete the transition to the level of liberal governance and respect for human rights enjoyed in North America, Europe and elsewhere, appropriate comparisons will be drawn with situations recognized as approximately analogous to that in Chechnya in other parts of the world. Chechnya has been compared to societies as diverse as Northern Ireland, the Arab Emirates and Kurdistan yet, surprisingly, it transpires that Africa provides the most persuasive parallel to Ramzan Kadyrov’s statebuilding (itself a component of peacebuilding) role. In the four post-conflict countries studied (Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Sudan) powerful elites, understanding that their peoples appreciate material progress and stability, while not being so concerned with liberty and pluralism, do seek to co-opt elements of civil society to their statebuilding projects, features that might well be identified in Kadyrov’s Chechnya (Jones et al. 2013).

To be frank, however, precise parallels with Chechnya are not easy to find, as Kadyrov rules over not an independent state, such as Kosovo, East Timor, or even Northern Cyprus or South Ossetia, but a republic within the Russian Federation. Kadyrov has gained, none the less, a
degree of sovereignty, in terms of personal militias, legislation (e.g. the “virtue” laws) (HRW 2011), finances (drawn from both the Russian exchequer and from “dues” paid by Chechen businessmen), and direct foreign relations that many of the above named entities might well envy. It is Kadyrov’s ability to make this sovereignty effective (rather than efficient) that enables one to discuss the successes and failures of both his statebuilding and peacebuilding policies in comparative terms. By the same token, the policies of the Russian Federation (a state that claims to be a “sovereign democracy” and a system that purports to conform to liberal-inspired international norms) vis-à-vis Kadyrov’s Chechnya have to be taken into account, as Chechen sovereignty is tenable only with the financial, political, and personal support of the Russian leadership.

The central hypothesis of this article posits that the younger Kadyrov, who succeeded his father Akhmat as pro-Russian Chechen president in 2007, three years after the latter’s assassination, achieved in Chechnya, however comparatively and imperfectly, a degree of peace in what had previously been an extremely violent conflict-ridden territory. Moreover, it suggests that, whilst accepting that this by no stretch of the imagination may be termed a liberal democratic peace (Mac Ginty 2006), in which the rights and security of individuals are protected by a law-governed state, an illiberal variant might be held to be better than no peace at all. Indeed, it might represent even a form of the peace that some commentators would regard as a more sustainable outcome than that achieved to date by Western interventions in such other former conflict-prone or weak states as Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria.

This is important for, arguably, the central dilemma in assessing the postconflict socio-political situation in Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov is that, although his rule manifestly exhibits more authoritarian than democratic features, for the overwhelming majority of Chechens life in Russia’s previously most violent North Caucasian republic, probably has been more peaceful (i.e. less violent) in the last five years than it had been in any period from 1991 to 2007, when the then 30–year-old took over as de jure head of state. In 2011, for example, according to the Caucasian Knot website, of the 95 confirmed deaths caused by the armed conflict in Chechnya, 62 were insurgents, 21 members of the security forces, and a mere 12 were civilians, the latter category accounting for just nine of the 106 persons wounded in that year (Caucasian Knot 2012). Although arrests, abductions and assassination of Kadyrov’s
opponents, in particular, appear to have become all too commonplace in Chechnya, they have nothing like the negative impact on the civilian population there that the widespread mop-up operations by Russian federal troops had prior to Ramzan’s rise to power (ICG 2012).

One interpretation of this central dilemma might lead to the simplistic conclusion that Kadyrov’s Chechnya, like Putin’s Russia, forms part of what has been termed the “authoritarian resurgence” (Diamond 2008) at the expense of the spread of the “liberal” or “democratic” peace (Doyle 2012) long advocated by the West as the most desirable outcome in all post-conflict societies. However, it might be construed to indicate the implementation of a variant of “hybrid” peace (Richmond and Mitchell 2012; Mac Ginty 2010) in Chechnya. This involved indigenous features of Chechen cultural and societal life being employed to establish some of the most minimalist forms of supposedly populist, if not democratic, institutions and norms, while facilitating the creation of levels of stability and statebuilding unprecedented within its borders during the last two decades. This hybridity has prompted some academics, notably Marina Ottoway (Ottaway 2003), to distinguish “semi-authoritarian” forms of government between the poles of democratic constitutional liberalism and absolute authoritarianism, the category to which, it could be argued, both Russia and Chechnya might usefully be assigned.

Of course, every component in the title of this analysis is contentious: can one speak of Kadyrov’s Chechnya? The answer would appear to be “yes” if we accept the description published in November 2011 in Time magazine in an article by Marie Jego entitled “Welcome to ‘Ramzanistan’: Under an Iron-Fisted Ruler Chechnya Rises Again” (Jego 2011). Next, can we describe contemporary Chechen society as being at peace? An Open Letter from over 100 leading British cultural and political figures published in 2007 stated that: “For the vast majority of the Chechen people, Kadyrov’s presidency is little more than a regime of fear and oppression, with no way out and no avenues to seek justice for the daily crimes against civilians” (The Independent 2007). Despite this, insofar as peace, albeit in what Galtung (1969) would term its “negative” variant, implies merely the absence of war, the transformation of Chechnya under Kadyrov from a weak, conflict-prone state wracked by civil war into a relatively secure and stable society – admittedly still suffering from a violent but, in comparative terms, essentially low-level conflict – deserves analysis. As I have argued in a previous work, much
of the “cultural” and “structural” violence that existed between the Russian colonisers and the indigenous Chechen population has been mitigated by the virtual disappearance of the hitherto ruling ethnic Russian elite in Chechnya, leading inevitably to a reduction in the scale of “direct” violence (Russell 2007).

Finally, what exactly is meant (and not meant) by “liberal” and “illiberal” peace (Lewis 2010) and their “democracy” equivalents, and are there clear demarcations between the two that might be readily understood by those new to the concepts? It could be argued, for example, that Kadyrov’s accomplishment might serve as an alternative template for peacebuilding that some might recognise as comparing favorably with, for example, Sri Lanka’s illiberal use of indiscriminate force to end its own internal conflict (Lewis 2010). Russia might well have opted for such a military solution, but in 2000 chose instead a policy of indigenization (Chechenization). As a direct result of this, civilians in an effectively sovereign Chechnya under Kadyrov today have a degree of collective self-determination that is denied to both Tamils in Sri Lanka and Tibetans in China.

The prime purpose of this analysis, therefore, is not to deny that there could and, perhaps, should have been outcomes for Chechen society that would have been preferable to all supporters of genuine liberal democracy, inside and outside of Chechnya, or even to demonstrate that, based on examples drawn from elsewhere, things could have been far worse. Rather, it is to illustrate how difficult and complex the statebuilding project is in a society such as Chechnya, emerging from twenty years of the most brutalizing conflict. Demonstrating the unattainability of a liberal peace or liberal democracy in the short term, enables us to find useful parallels in the experiences of other transitional societies. Thus, no matter how illiberal or unsustainable in the long term the peace established in Chechnya by Kadyrov, thanks to the political and financial support of successive Russian administrations, it must surely be perceived as a welcome relief from the horrors of war and internal conflict endured by Chechens over those two decades.

Of course ordinary Chechens, like the Chinese and others living under illiberal regimes, were they to feel empowered to state their views as freely as do those few brave dissident voices within their respective societies, might well indicate that they probably would prefer to live in a more democratic, less corrupt society which respected individual human
rights. Whether either, faced with the pragmatic realities of their current situation, would sacrifice the genuine chance of a better standard of living in the here and now for the right to a wholly democratic vote remains, however, a moot point. As we have posited, this is not necessarily the case in post-conflict African societies and Robert Kaplan, as far back as 1997, famously queried whether the Chinese people could have experienced their subsequent unprecedented rise in living standards had the student revolts in Tiananmen Square succeeded in 1989 (Kaplan 1997).

To place the Chechen situation in a theoretical framework, a range of approaches to embrace such issues as illiberal democracy (Zakaria 1997), the post-liberal peace (Richmond 2009), democracy promotion (Heydemann, human security (Report of Secretary-General 1992; Kaldor 2007) peacebuilding (Ramsbotham et al. 2011) and statebuilding (Sedra 2012) will be adopted. To provide a comparative perspective a brief study of the “illiberal” experience of other societies in Africa (Jones, Soares de Oliveira and Verhoeven 2013; Cubitt 2011), Eurasia (Etzioni 2011; Rachman 2008; Smith 2012; Verweij and Palizzo 2009) and Latin America (Smith and Kearney 2010; Smith and Ziegler 2008; Smith 2005) that might be recognized to be or have been in a transitional stage will be undertaken. As will be demonstrated, both Africa and Latin America contain particularly rich sources for comparison, the former for the proven ability of its post-conflict leaders to find alternatives to both the liberal democratic and failed states paradigms, and the latter for its record of passing through levels of illiberal democracy from (and, in cases, back to) authoritarian forms of government.

Eurasia, in particular Russia but also other former Soviet republics that have not yet made the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule, is of obvious relevance to the situation in Chechnya. The term “imitation democracy” is often used to describe Russia’s blend of authoritarianism and accountable governance (Furman 2008), for example, in the run-up to the most recent Russian Duma elections in December 2011, even the last Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev characterized the country’s democratic institutions thus (Birnbaum 2011). In a similar vein, what Ivan Krastev (Krastev 2006) has termed “democracy’s doubles” (based on elitism in Putin’s Russia and populism in Chavez’s Venezuela) seem to have taken root both within and beyond Russia’s borders. Ramzan Kadyrov’s “cult of personality” does bear a resemblance to the populism
of Chavez, while his “super-presidency” in Chechnya clearly mirrors Putin’s role in his vertical of power elites. This should not be surprising, for I suspect that Simon Bolivar’s insistence on a high degree of public order to negotiate the twin perils of tyranny and anarchy is as well understood in Grozny as it is in Moscow or Caracas.

Indeed, there already exists a small but growing body of literature on the hybrid nature of Vladimir Putin’s Russia, much of which portrays the current regime as semi-democratic (or semi-authoritarian, depending on the author’s viewpoint), but by common consent illiberal (Lo and Shevtsova 2012; Triesman 2011; Hale 2010; Sakwa 2008, 2011; Fish 2005; McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2004). By contrast, little attention has thus far been paid to hybridity in Chechnya. Indeed, apart from an earlier work of mine (Russell 2009), the only other reliable sources that I have found which address even the wider topic of Kadyrov’s authoritarianism in Chechnya are Lisa Baglione’s conference paper “Post-Settlement Chechnya: A Case of Authoritarian Peacebuilding” (Baglione 2008) and Kimberly Marten’s chapter “Chechnya: the Sovereignty of Ramzan Kadyrov” in her recent book on warlords (Marten 2012). As the former regards “authoritarian peacebuilding” as an oxymoron, and the latter portrays Kadyrov as little more than a rapacious warlord, this analysis, while not seeking to condone in any way Kadyrov’s record, particularly on human rights, does recognize the validity of examining the nature of Kadyrov’s statebuilding project and the extent to which this may or may not promote peacebuilding.

The methodological approach adopted will be to trace the decline of the appeal of the Western model of transition to liberal democracy, which by 2004 had successfully integrated much of the post-Soviet bloc into Nato and the European Union in order to explain the rise of illiberal democracy elsewhere. This will assist in determining whether an illiberal peace (i.e. basic levels of security and stability in a society that readily represses even legitimate dissent) is likely to be the outcome of transitions from violent civil conflict to illiberal democracies.

Whether this can be applied to Russia, let alone Kadyrov’s Chechnya, remains a contentious point, but it is important to stress that both, while maintaining a broadly Eurasian, anti-Western stance, do profess their adherence to admittedly liberal-inspired international norms and should be judged, therefore, on their performance in this sphere. Russia, for example, sees no contradiction in recognizing the independence of East
Timor and South Ossetia, while firmly resisting any such recognition for Kosovo and making even advocacy for the separation of Chechnya effectively illegal. While this might be ascribed to defending Russia’s national interests, there is a growing awareness that the concept of liberal democracy represents a genuine threat to the sustainability of Putin’s semi-authoritarian regime, as the recent anti-NGO laws testify (The Economist 2013). This consideration applies doubly to Chechnya, as Kadyrov is not only dependent on Putin’s support, but also he is extremely sensitive to Russian, let alone any outside scrutiny of his style of governance. Thus, despite the fact that neither Russia nor Chechnya appear to have opted out of what might be termed the Western-dominated world, the applicability of the concepts “illiberal democracy” and “illiberal peace” remains, in my opinion, valid for both.

Theories of “illiberal” democracy, peace, and statebuilding

The concept of “illiberal democracy” emerged at a juncture in the post-Cold War world when two conflicting trends were developing: one, the largely successful transition from authoritarian to liberal democratic governance of the former Socialist-bloc countries in Central and Eastern Europe (with the notable exception of the shocking spiralling descent into bloody wars in the former Yugoslavia); and the other a growing realization that Francis Fukayama’s “End of History” thesis, predicting the final victory of liberal democracy over all other forms of governance, had been overtaken by events and thus was seriously flawed.

The rise of China, in particular, together with the impressive advance made by such paternalistic capitalist states as Singapore and Russia, called into question the hitherto prevailing opinion that Western-style democracy was essential for economic progress (Kaplan 1997). Moreover, a new authoritarian threat was perceived to be emerging in the shape of Islamic fundamentalism, a perception heightened by the works on *Jihad vs McWorld* by Benjamin Barber (Barber 1992) and *The Clash of Civilizations* by Samuel Huntington (Huntington 1993) the following year. This threat was to have a significant effect post-9/11 not only on the West, in terms of a popular readiness to sacrifice a degree of civil liberty for the sake of a greater perceived sense of security, but also on the situation in both Russia and Chechnya, whose conflict briefly became a component of the Western-led “war on terrorism” (Russell 2012).
The biggest threat to the continued pre-eminence of the Western model of democracy as an idealized goal for all transitional societies, however, came not so much from external threats as from a realization among some elements of domestic civil society that it was not democracy *per se* that differentiated the old democracies from the new, but constitutional liberalism. As Zakaria noted in *Foreign Affairs* in 1997: "The ‘Western model’ is best symbolized not by the mass plebiscite but by the impartial judge" (Zakaria 1997: 37). In other words, a genuine and smoothly operating division of representative institutional powers was much more important than the mere fact of holding elections, which may or may not be compromised in terms of fairness and freedom, or, indeed, might produce "illiberal" results.

Zakaria’s analysis is often condensed into the observation that, in the post-Cold War world, democracy has flourished, but liberty has not. Bearing in mind that he was writing before either 9/11 or the 2008 world economic crisis, one might well conclude that the gap between democracy and liberal constitutionalism has widened significantly – yet attracting until recently the attention only of academics seeking alternative paradigms to the liberal peace, rather than that of either Western elites or publics. The current levels of unrest in countries in the southern arc of the Eurozone personify the divergence between what the populace feels is fair and acceptable and what their governments are obliged by markets and economically stronger Western partners (that also have to face competitive elections) to offer.

This is not to imply that the levels of illiberalism in Western countries should be equated to those in Chechnya or Russia, where such dissident manifestations would be dealt with promptly and violently. Clearly, unlike these societies, Chechnya is emerging from a period of violent civil conflict. While emigration from Chechnya to these countries in search of a more peaceful life has been an option utilized by thousands of Chechens, there is little doubt that the attraction of the West has faded somewhat given both the depth of the current economic crisis and the relative stability in their homeland. At the same time, anyone advocating the preservation, let alone the spread, of Western civil liberties cannot but be concerned at the illiberal essence of the high levels of securitization and consequent surrender of liberties, demanded and generally but by no means unanimously accepted, but which in the wake of 9/11 has been supplemented post-2008 by further repressions as the
forced eviction, in the USA and UK respectively, of protestors from the Occupy Wall Street (Greenberg 2011) and Occupy London (BBC News 2012) camps graphically illustrate.

Small wonder, therefore, that those seeking alternative paradigms to the liberal peace identify the self-interested, hegemonic and elite driven policies of Western powers as the reason not only of its failure, but also for the rise of hybrid regimes that do not have the history, institutions or degree of integrated populace required to introduce liberal democracy without illiberal constraints. Although this analysis acknowledges the persuasiveness of the arguments advanced by the critical school of peace studies (Patomäki 2001), it does not share unconditionally the conclusion of some of its most ardent adherents that it is naked neoliberal self-interest directing contemporary Western peacebuilding virtually alone that is to blame for the crisis experienced since the end of the Cold War and, particularly, post-9/11 in the concept and successful implementation – the so-called “crisis” – of the liberal peace (Easterly 2006; Cooper 2007). It does, however, share this approach’s criticism that Western democracy promotion and nation building is too prescriptive and top down, driven by elites (including multinational corporations and markets) rather than communities; that it privileges liberal, and in cases neoliberal, over social values such as welfare (Newman et al. 2010: 15). Most importantly, the Western paradigm appears to have failed sufficiently to recognise that in the post-Cold War world, democratic politics, without the underpinning of liberal constitutionalism and social justice, can be a vehicle for illiberal and sectarian outcomes, as aspects of both the Arab Spring and the fallout from the Eurozone crisis recently have demonstrated.

In the absence of any genuinely community-based, bottom up socially orientated initiatives as demanded, for example, by advocates of the post-liberal peace (Richmond 2009; Mac Ginty 2010) we see the emergence instead of elites led by corrupt and authoritarian leaders, whose main goal is to retain power while maintaining the fig leaf of democratic accountability through controlled elections, media and dissidence. Whilst these negative characteristics are all evident in Kadyrov’s Chechnya, it has to be conceded that they are easily and often found elsewhere, prompting one to conclude that they represent both an opportunity for local authoritarian leaders to seize power and a compromise for war-weary populations between the promise of an end to violence leading to a
better standard of living and the realization that more liberal forms of peace are not readily or realistically attainable.

Apart from Central and Eastern Europe, the most successful region in the post-Cold War world for making the transition from authoritarianism (usually military dictatorships) to liberal democracy is Latin America. Unlike the European experience, all Latin American states had to go through a stage of illiberlal democracy before evolving either into liberal democracies or reverting to semi- or fully authoritarian models. Even for countries with some heritage of democratic institutions, it was not possible to transition directly to Western-style liberal democracies (Smith and Kearney 2010). As in Chechnya today, periods of illiberlal peace were thus to many infinitely preferable to the preceding years of authoritarian repression and/or civil war, even though, as the example of Venezuela illustrates, there remain significant elements of society who wish to restrain the authoritarian tendencies of their populist leaders.

How much more difficult would this transition be in Africa, which had colonial boundaries, populations with tribal and ethnic, rather than national affiliations and little collective memory of institutional autonomy, economic well being or civil liberties as understood in the West? Although exhibiting a much higher level of authoritarianism than in present-day Latin America, there is evidence of statebuilding aspirations to overcome the “failed state” syndrome and to maintain the hegemonic power of local elites without exposure to the risks to themselves that compliance with Western demands for liberal democracy would entail (Jones et al. 2013). A succession of African leaders in post-conflict societies (e.g. Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Sudan) identified that the promise of material well being and stability were sufficient to enable them to co-opt significant sections of the elite to share in and support their statebuilding endeavors.

Undoubtedly, there is a further paradox in a situation in which it can be demonstrated that the desire for a liberal peace is based upon the firm belief that liberal democratic states are the least likely to engage in war with each other while at the same time those self-same states have time and again utilized the most fearsome weapons of war (including such so-called “pariah” weapons [Turner et al. 2010: 87–90] as cluster bombs, landmines and, arguably, unmanned drones). These have been deployed not only against illiberlal authoritarian regimes (e.g. the atomic bombs dropped on Imperial Japan in 1945), but also in Western-inspired bids to
engineer regime change in weak states in the former Yugoslavia, Western Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and elsewhere. On the other hand they have not been employed in such genocidal conflicts as those in Rwanda, Chechnya (1994–2000)\textsuperscript{1} or Syria, giving rise to charges of at best, inconsistency, and at worst, self-interested double standards.

The oft-stated rationale for intervention is that conflict-ridden, “weak” societies (“failed” states) pose a serious threat to international security and stability. However, in many cases the leaders of supposedly liberal democratic states, if not elements of civil society within them, appear satisfied, in the short term at any rate, with the emergence of societies that pay lip service to Western-imported democratic values and institutions but which are, in the everyday reality of those societies, illiberal (what Furman termed “imitation democracies”). If, as a consequence, stability and security are valued in the international arena more than open and transparent democracy, then stable and secure regimes, no matter how illiberal, would appear preferable to those following the inherently unstable and insecure transitional path from authoritarianism to liberal democracy. I have written previously about the application to Kadyrov’s Chechnya of Ian Bremmer’s “J-curve” (the trade off between stability through authority and openness, by which in the short term stability may be increased by authoritarian rule but decreased by moves towards more democracy) (Russell 2008a).

That such states appear to be the norm in many parts of the world does not facilitate the West’s normative approach to democracy promotion. Outside of North America and Europe, there are relatively few states that have the institutional tradition, social tolerance and economic well-being to allow a liberal constitution to operate freely. Thus, although a narrow majority of states might be labelled democratic, in terms of their elections and expressions of their peoples’ will, only a minority perform as well in the spheres of human security and civil liberties. Even the Freedom House’s controversial annual survey of political rights and civil liberties for 2013 is entitled “Democratic Breakthroughs in the Balance”, concluding that 90 countries (43 per cent) were “free” and 105 (57 per cent) “partly free” or “not free”, whereas 117 (including Georgia and Ukraine, but not Russia) of the 195 countries were declared “electoral democracies” (Freedom House 2013; Steiner 2012).

It is useful here to apply Wolff and Wurm’s classification of categories of external democracy promotion: normative (values-based);
materialist (cost- benefit); cultural (“horses for courses”) and critical (consensual domination of Western hegemony) (Wolff and Wurm 2011). At best, it would appear, we are witnessing a decline in the normative approach to democracy promotion and the rise of a materialist one, with, perhaps, some acknowledgement post-Iraq and Afghanistan, that a more culturally nuanced approach is required. At worst, we are seeing the fears of the critical school being realized. Human security is effectively ignored, so that strong governance (be it authoritarian or law-based), alongside securitization, is held currently to be more important than the social and welfare demands of the communities involved. Such a conclusion has profound and potentially disturbing implications for any international assessment of the Kadyrov regime in Chechnya or indeed of Putin’s in Russia. Insofar as stability and predictability are preferred to sustainable modernization and liberal constitutionalism in the short term, there is little prospect of any outside pressure on either Putin or Kadyrov having any meaningful effect.

However, insofar as “illiberal” democracies have proven to be far more suited to the establishment of imitation democracies rather than capable of providing a genuinely positive peace, this will be an issue which, at some indeterminate time in the future, both Russia and Chechnya surely will be obliged to address.

**Kadyrov: statebuilding and/or peacebuilding?**

A 2010 report by a British parliamentary mission to Chechnya projected an almost Stalinist image of Kadyrov’s rule in Chechnya: “President Kadyrov has created a cult of personality and an image of being all-powerful within Chechnya – even many of the victims we met have great faith in his ability to put a stop to the human rights abuses perpetrated on a daily basis”. However, even this critical report was obliged to note that: “Shiny new schools, cranes busy with construction, a gleaming and impressive new Mosque – at first glance Grozny appears to be getting back on its feet after the appalling civil war of the 1990s” ([British] Parliamentary Human Rights Group Report 2010).

This grudging acceptance of the existence of a “negative”, rather than the desired “positive” (liberal democratic) peace illustrates the clash between pragmatism (interests) and principles (values) (Russell 2008b) that has engaged Western peacemakers since the *Pax Europaea* (Adamides and Constantinou 2012: 256–57) was so successful in
democratizing former Soviet bloc countries post-1989. However, this project evidently ran out of both steam and sustainability following the onset of the world economic crisis of 2008. On the divided island of Cyprus the concept of a “European Peace” has been contrasted to a *Pax Turca*, with the authors categorizing the latter as the “accomplished peace”, whereas *Pax Europaea* is recognized as the “aspired” one (Adamides and Constantinou 2012). It is tempting to posit that, in Chechnya, *Pax Ramzana (Checheniae?)* likewise represents that which has been accomplished thus far rather than what might be aspired to. The problem in Chechnya, in Russia and elsewhere, is that it is people that we can most readily relate to (middle class, educated elites) that tend to be repressed in such semi-authoritarian societies.

This observation is important as the relative ease of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe was occasioned by the fact that the majority of former Soviet-bloc states contained, or had the potential to achieve, the three social components required of a strong liberal democracy: a degree of economic well-being; a strong, active and influential middle class (important in creating institutions that reflect and support middle-class values); and a national culture that tolerates diversity. The particularity of their experience in the transition to liberal democratic societies was encapsulated in Vaclav Havel’s celebrated observation that: “People who live in the post-totalitarian system know only too well that the question of whether one or several political parties are in power, and how these parties define and label themselves, is of far less importance than the question of whether or not it is possible to live like a human being” (Mac Ginty 2006: 81).

Russia, let alone Chechnya, lacks some if not all of these components and this fact goes a long way to explaining how difficult and, given the potential for instability, how undesirable, in terms of short-term stability and predictability, the transition to liberal democracy can be (Sakwa 2011: 1–51). That both Ramzan Kadyrov and Vladimir Putin continually stress the Eurasian, rather than European, direction of their respective development strategies as well as the sovereign nature of Russian-style “democracy” implies that neither foresees anytime soon the requirement, let alone the desire, for a move towards a more Western style of liberal democracy.

If one accepts that statebuilding represents just one component (that of creating institutions to provide the security and governance of a given
territory and its population) of peacebuilding, what success has Kadyrov had in either in Chechnya? Insofar as peacebuilding involves the prevention of violent conflict, addressing the underlying sources of the conflict, the establishment of social institutions, values, human rights and the institutions of governance and the rule of law (Newman et al. 2010: 8), Kadyrov’s record is decidedly patchy, particularly in the spheres of human rights and the rule of law. On the other hand there certainly has been a quantitative and qualitative reduction in the scale of violence and one of the major underlying sources of the conflict has been addressed, namely the disproportionality and indiscriminate nature of the violence (direct, structural and cultural) visited upon the Chechens by the Russians (Russell 2007: 10–28). Social institutions and values reflect, to a certain degree, traditional Sufi Chechen norms, albeit as interpreted and implemented by an all-powerful individual leader, and the institutions of governance are nominally in place, although admittedly beset by problems of corruption, nepotism and klanovnost (clannishness). Most importantly, perhaps, Kadyrov has transformed Chechnya from being the dangerous “failed” state, which was used to characterise Maskhadov’s independent Chechnya-Ichkeria from 1997–99 (Walsh 2005), into something more tolerable to both Russians and Chechens (Abdullaev 2004).

In these respects Kadyrov’s rule does seem to approximate that of Africa’s illiberal state-builders, rather than those from Latin America (although perhaps El Salvador might be a useful case study for comparison). Like them he has established a hegemonic order that gives him a stranglehold over the political economy of Chechnya (it could be argued that, whereas the African leaders studied – in Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Sudan – have natural resources at their disposal, Kadyrov’s greatest resource is in the form of generous subsidies from the Russian federal budget and contributions to his personal budget by Chechen businessmen, both of which could, of course, be cut off at any time).

It is important to note that, like his African counterparts, Ramzan has sought to co-opt civil society into his statebuilding agenda, however illiberal this may be in terms of repressing those organizations, groups and individuals that do not cooperate. He shares their goal of creating a political order in which the supremacy of the ruling elite is unchallenged and unchallengeable, deploying an inclusive, patriotic discourse to attract supporters to his project not because they genuinely admire him, but
because they can see the economic and social benefit of siding with Kadyrov. This is evident in the readiness of Chechen businessmen within and without Chechnya to contribute to Kadyrov’s personal funds, an indeterminate proportion of which is directed towards his statebuilding project (Marten 2012: 102–38). He further shares his African counterparts’ predilection for creating rents through patronage and to initiate profitable (to himself and key supporters) large-scale infrastructure projects.

Like the leaders of the African states studied (Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan) he is not unduly worried about criticism from the West, especially over corruption, human rights and extrajudicial violence and has become skilful in playing off international actors against each other. Thus, in a move reminiscent of Putin’s recent policy, Rwanda’s Paul Kagame’s “lambasting of meddlesome NGOs” has not prevented half of his country’s budget being provided in foreign development aid, largely from the West, which sees his regime as “a beacon of stability and economic success” (Jones et al. 2013: 18). As a result, “rhetorical convergence to Western tropes … and realpolitik alliances with Washington, London and Brussels have helped shield Africa’s illiberal state-builders from stinging external criticism and provided ample resources to fund long-term strategies” (Jones et al. 2013). If one replaces Western tropes with Russian ones, Putin’s toleration of his controversial Chechen protégé appears as sensible realpolitik.

Finally, noting that Kadyrov like many of the African leaders has built up the reputation of being a “warlord,” he shares with these African state-builders an overblown sense of the infallibility of his vision and of his own competence, both of which are highly questionable, especially in the long term (Jones et al. 2013: 21).

It is, however, reform in the area of security sector, a sphere that is causing so many problems in Afghanistan, for example, that Kadyrov arguably has been more effective. His security forces have effectively been Chechenized and, via a series of amnesties, have provided a source of security and employment even to those formerly engaged in fighting the Russian federal forces. It has been accepted that the utilization of co-ethnics in the counterinsurgency in Chechnya had proven to be more effective than the use of Russian federal forces even before Ramzan Kadyrov came to power (Lyall 2010). Despite frequent reports of the arbitrary nature of the modus operandi and the impunity of these forces,
indications of the extremely low levels of human security within Chechnya, they do appear to have driven most of the Islamist insurgents into neighboring republics and dissuaded, through fear and intimidation, other Chechens from joining their ranks, thus providing a semblance of security within its borders. In writing about the insurgency in the North Caucasus, the Chechen analyst Mairbek Vatchagaev (Vatchagaev 2011) has published figures indicating that Dagestan is “far ahead of other territories in terms of casualties.”

If Kadyrov’s overall record on peacebuilding is thus to be found severely wanting, at least one aspect of his statebuilding does require acknowledgment, namely the degree of sovereignty that he has acquired within the Russian Federation. Whereas most liberal peacebuilding schemes involve an element of sham sovereignty in that the donors call the political and economic tune, Kadyrov has succeeded not only in wresting significant sums from the federal budget for his statebuilding project, but also appears to have avoided having the kind of strings attached that characterise the kind of financial support offered by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Bearing in mind that Kadyrov operates, albeit autonomously, within the Russian Federation, which was listed in 2012 as the 133rd (out of 174) country in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International 2012), it is to be anticipated that the level of corruption in Chechnya is extremely high. However, despite significant criminality, financial irregularities and the siphoning off for personal use of these subsidies and those emanating from Chechens wishing to do business within his realm, a proportion of them do appear to be directed towards genuinely national statebuilding, making him more than just a local warlord exploiting the absence of law and order to enrich himself and his entourage at the expense of the civilian population. There is, at least, I have argued in an earlier publication, an element of the nation builder in Ramzan Kadyrov (Russell 2010). The fact that in 2003, the United Nations identified Grozny as “the most destroyed city in the world” (Zelenko 2012), and yet by 2012, a poll of 27,000 Russian voters had determined that Grozny was “the happiest city in Russia” (RFE/RL 2012) appears to lend weight to this argument.

Insofar as Ramzan Kadyrov’s popularity in Chechnya is concerned, his recent election as Chechen “Person of the Year” is both ambiguous and controversial (RFE/RL 2013). On the one hand, who else in a regime
with such a “cult of personality” could possibly win such a title, but, on the other, who is the Chechen with the highest profile worldwide, particularly since the launch of his Instagram photo-sharing website (Elder 2013)? For all of his flamboyancy and faults, Kadyrov has provided alternative, albeit ambiguous perceptions of Chechnya to the outside world, particularly amongst Muslims.

The fly in the ointment of Kadyrov’s statebuilding is, however, the lack of assurance that the generous subsidies from Moscow will continue to flow. During Russia’s 2011 Duma elections, the oppositionist Aleksei Navalny made a tremendous public impact with his phrase “It is time to stop feeding the Caucasus”, reflecting the anger and disquiet of many millions of ordinary Russian citizens. According to the latest opinion poll published on this question by the Levada Center in November 2012, 65 per cent of Russians supported this slogan, although, critically, more than half of those polled could see no change for better or for worse in the region in the foreseeable future, itself a mark of some stability (Levada 2012). Although this remains a factor that Russia’s political leaders are not obliged to take into account in the short term it is an issue that they can hardly ignore for much longer.

Paradoxically, Kadyrov’s style of leadership is far more acceptable to Putin and his entourage, who crave stability and predictability, than it is to the Russian public at large, which regularly in opinion polls names Chechens as their least loved neighbors. In August 2010, a poll of 1600 Russians revealed that only 1 percent would welcome a Chechen as a member of their family or as a close friend, 4 percent as neighbors and that fully 38 percent would not allow Chechens to enter Russia at all (Levada 2010)! However, as long as there are no repeats of major terrorist attacks emanating from the North Caucasus in Russia’s cities, Russians are likely to accept with resignation their current leadership’s policy in that region. One can only surmise that the less unpredictable and high profile Kadyrov is outside of his realm, the longer Putin will continue to support him. Of course, Kadyrov’s jet-set lifestyle combined with his numerous enemies inside and outside of Chechnya, particularly in neighboring Ingushetia and Dagestan, as well as throughout the rest of Russia also adds an element of uncertainty about how long Ramzan will rule Chechnya.

Conclusion
There is no doubt that in the more than two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 that ended the Cold War, a new political lexicon has been developing. Collocations of words, such as “illiberal peace” that would have been deemed oxymoronic twenty years ago, have now become established concepts in international relations. Much of the lexical baggage of the last century, however, has been carried over into the twenty-first and is, perhaps, in need of redefinition. Nowhere is this more apparent than with terms like “liberal democracy” and “liberal peace”, which clearly do not always mean what the public at large assumes. This creates a damaging binarism between “good” and “bad”, “democratic” and “undemocratic” and, ultimately, between “us” and “them”.

The world today is much more complex than this and, as has been demonstrated, the application of Western norms in non-Western environments has inevitably met with resistance. This has led to a hybridization of democracy, peace and society that contains both liberal and illiberal elements. Although there is still some utility in ranking states in order of their political and civil rights, a greater understanding of the complexities of transition is required before one rushes to judgement of this or that regime. As has been demonstrated, states with poor human rights records have achieved significant progress in economic and social terms. This is not to excuse them from criticism, but it seems churlish to totally ignore real progress in post-conflict statebuilding.

In comparative terms, Kadyrov’s regime’s progress stands out both in the context of the North Caucasus and in the Russian Federation as a whole, while being controversial enough to rule it out as a template for imitation or wider application. His rule is authoritarian and illiberal and there is little respect for civil liberties or human rights. Indeed, it is highly dangerous to be a human rights activist in Kadyrov’s Chechnya (as in Putin’s Russia). Within those very real constraints, however, there are positives to be drawn in Kadyrov’s Chechnya, from the huge new mosques to the resurgence in Chechen culture and language. It is improbable that his regime will last as it is today for long; not least because Putin may tire of his protégé or the generous subsidies will end. When change does occur, it is likely that Kadyrov’s (and, indeed, Putin’s) rule will become more, rather than less, authoritarian and that in both territories this will inhibit modernization and create new social
tensions that will need to be constrained.

However, experience elsewhere has demonstrated that it is possible, although difficult and by no means always successful, to move from authoritarian, via semi-authoritarian, semi-democratic and illiberal democracy towards a more liberal form of law-based governance. Unfortunately, there is little evidence to date that either Russia or Chechnya is about to move in this direction any time soon.

In the final analysis, perhaps it is the uncertainty and instability of what would happen in Chechnya were Kadyrov to be removed from the scene that is the best guarantee that he will remain. Should he do so, it is likely that his statebuilding project will continue to the benefit of himself and those Chechens that through fear, self-interest or conviction support his project. This is likely to be achieved, however, without significant improvements in the establishment of anything other than a most illiberal peace in Chechnya.

**Note**

1 That is, until the switch in Russian strategy towards Chechenization.

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Between war experience and ordinary police rationally

State violence against civilians in post-war Chechen Republic

Anne Le Huérou

We have in the territory of the Russian Federation not just an autonomous territory, but an area which with the consent of senior Russian officials, claims to be outside Russian laws. There are portraits of the President and Russian flags, but that is where belonging to the Russian Federation ends.

(Kaliapin 2012)

The beginning of June 2012, following a series of visits to towns including Urus Martan, the head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, expressed shock at the number of young people carrying weapons in the streets of towns and villages and ordered security forces to remove fighters from Grozny (Grozny Inform 2012) so that “honest citizens” ceased to experience “discomfort” while walking in the streets. Several months later, he reiterated his warning against the uncontrolled use of weapons, this time by those who are expected to embody state order: the police (Ramzan.kadyrov.ru 2013).

These armed men might be considered to be spoilers of a certain kind, not former combatants openly refusing to give up their arms and to return to civilian life, like those in Chechnya during the period from 1996 to 1999, but other elements whose allegiance to Kadyrov, whether it came early or late, whether it was voluntary or forced, has not prevented them from engaging in demonstrations of force of their own volition.

Kadyrov’s remark, an (unintended) variation on the Weberian definition of the modern state based on the rule of law as defined by state monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, reveals the concern of the political authorities of the Republic. These “mishaps” call into question the control claimed by the Chechen authorities over all local law enforcement agencies, one of the pillars upon which the political edifice of post-war Chechnya rests, together with its visible allegiance to Moscow and in particular President Putin. Unless they remain an integral part of a logic of the construction of power founded on the permanent threat of the use of force by “authorized” agents.

This chapter sets out to examine the issue of institutional violence (violence committed in the exercise of state power) perpetrated in Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov. It aims to contribute to understanding this high level of violence in an area that is not at war, nor totally at peace (Kavkazskii Uzel 2013). Clandestine armed groups continue to commit acts of guerrilla warfare, including sporadic attacks against representatives of the security forces. This chapter does not deal directly with that issue but rather addresses the question that security forces act within a context which, over the years, has become dominated more by the police than the military. It seeks to examine how and to what degree the logic of violence has led to the establishment of a specific political order marked by the experience of war, and to examine the common features between practices in Chechnya and those existing elsewhere.
how this ambiguity manifests itself in the practice of police violence against individuals and targeted groups, on the basis of witness statements collected by human rights organizations.

Third, I shall examine the way in which the logic of violence is debated and opposed by different players, with the principal aim of obtaining justice.

As a whole, this chapter also aims to consider police practices in Chechnya within the framework of a study of police violence throughout Russia. It draws on research in progress, a subject based on regular interviews with human rights defenders working in Russia on violence in Chechnya, as well as analysis of press articles and available official documents concerning investigations and court decisions.6

**Forced alliances, allegiances, elimination of competitors: the unification of police forces in Kadyrov’s Chechnya**

The second Chechen war is intimately linked to the Russian statebuilding enterprise around the “power vertical,” which Putin announced when he became president in 2000. The whole political and media discourse came together to create the framework for an “anti-terror operation” (Le Huérou and Regamey 2008; Campana and Légaré 2011), in order to justify and conduct a war principally aimed at demonstrating Moscow’s capacity to impose order on a territory.

After the first months of war and once most of the territory was occupied by Russian forces, every effort was made to engage in a process of internal political stabilization around a Chechen authority loyal to Moscow. The nomination of Akhmad Kadyrov in June 2000 at the head of a provisional administration started a process which was completed with the vote to the Constitution in 2003, when Chechnya formally returned to the Russian Federation. The establishment in June 2000 (Dannreuther and March 2008: 103–4) of two Chechen battalions under Russian command, Vostok et Zapad,7 which from 2002 took an active part in military and police operations alongside Russian forces, reveals Moscow’s desire to rely on local forces from an early stage. In December 1999, Moscow officially set up a regional department of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs – UVD.8

The high levels of violence committed by the Federal army, particularly in the context of dispersing operations, make it difficult to speak of Chechenization before 2003–4, even though testimonies make clear that Chechens were increasingly present during such operations.9 The process of delegating repression to Chechen forces loyal to Moscow accelerated after the assassination of A. Kadyrov in May 2004 and the rise to power of his son Ramzan, who began to consolidate a force for maintaining law and order from his militias, the kadyrovtse, which were officially integrated into the Chechen police force (FIDH and Memorial 2006). From 2004, the kadyrovtse were partly integrated in two special detachments of the MVD, Lug a

ower10 (South and North). These detachments were completely loyal to Kadyrov and at the same time officially integrated in the Federal Ministry, including its operational aspects (Belousov 2006). Most on-site observations during the mid-2000s record large numbers of armed men in Grozny and other cities of the Chechen Republic. Although their institutional affiliations were difficult to identify, for the most part they claimed to be followers of Kadyrov (Memorial Human Rights Center [hereafter Memorial] 2005).

This policy was accompanied by a policy of repression against the civilian population, just as was previously the case with operations led by Federal forces: illegal arrests, torture, and extra judicial executions (Memorial 2005, 2006; FIDH and Memorial 2006; HRW 2006). This
internal transformation of the conflict. However, it is not only a question of the reduction in the quantity of repressive operations (Lyall 2010; Taylor 2011: 250–83), but what these operations mean in terms of the logic of the perpetrators of the repression.

The policy of Chechenization has raised many issues of debate. A number of writers present a positive analysis of the restoration of the state’s monopoly on violence and stress the progress made (reconstruction, reduction in the number of acts of arbitrary and mass violence against civilians), while at the same time recognizing the authoritarian or even totalitarian nature of the Kadyrov regime (Russell 2011; Littell 2009). That Putin might have created Frankenstein (Dannreuther and March 2008) whose aims and actions are not foreseeable is of little importance; it is a question of stressing the heuristic nature of stabilization in Chechnya.

Russia’s success in Chechnya […] is not just important in itself, but in the way it has structured and legitimated the political changes that Putin has introduced during his presidency. Putin’s strategy during the war and the subsequent pacification of Chechnya have helped construct the post-Yeltsin Russian state in a way that has seen the increasing centralization of power and the promotion of authoritarian state structures.

(Dannreuther and March 2008: 9)

Others are more critical (Lokshina 2007; Baglione 2008; Merlin 2010; ICG 2011) emphasizing the uncertain nature of stabilization, which in the long term could undermine Moscow’s authority in the region and which has been obtained at the price of maintaining a high level of violence in a society governed by moral standards and in which non-observance can lead to severe repression. While unconditional approval of Kadyrov’s policies is widespread in Chechnya, silence or denial in relation to the pursuit of violence against civilians, as illustrated in a report from Grozny in July 2013 in which two young journalists give their version of the news – is another constant which could be attributed to fear induced by repression:

“… And the violations of human rights?
–I haven’t heard anything about them …
–The abductions and disappearances?
–That was the Federals not the Chechens …
–So the parents of the disappeared lied?
–Without a doubt.”

(Lenta.ru 2014)

Little by little there has been a shift from delegating repression to Chechen forces under the orders of Federal structures which remain very present, to a situation in which law and order is maintained internally, most notably after the official end of the country-wide anti-terrorist operation was announced by Moscow in April 2009. The very permissive legal framework for the fight against terrorism (Le Huérou and Regamey 2008) continues to be used for special operations. The persistence of attacks committed by combatants in certain areas, in particular targeting the police, supports the pursuit of Kadyrov’s proclaimed objectives: the surrender and/or eradication of terrorists or members of “illegal armed groups.”

While it is generally difficult to obtain reliable and precise statistics throughout the Russian Federation, figures for the number of police in Chechnya are even more subject to caution. Those gathered from official sources and evaluations of observers suggest numbers ranging...
In the Russian Federation, in accordance with the provisions of the Russian Constitution and international norms, a more precise description of police organization in Chechnya in 2000 reveals an exceptional situation: the predominant influence of the special units which led combat missions and operations to fight terrorism and organized crime responsible for the destruction of citizens, are billed as priorities to “guarantee the first human right, the right to peace.”

No mention of the community policing function or even of criminal investigation by the police appears.

As of 2013, much of the Chechen police force is made up of men who have not been professionalized in the Russian police force but by the experience of war, either directly through participation in battle or by the simple fact of having grown up in a country grappling with armed conflict and violence. Senior Chechen police officers have had experience of the Soviet police, but there was a strong break with this practice for a period of at least ten years from 1991 onwards. At the beginning of the millennium, when the Federal forces were all over the territory, the Chechen police played a relatively minor role, though Chechen police officers were present in the villages where “cleansing” operations led by Russian soldiers took place and sometimes acted as intermediaries with families when a member had been arrested by Federal forces (Memorial 2002; FIDH 2002). In March 2001, the Russian Minister of Internal Affairs, Rashailo, tried to present the situation as in the process of normalization, evoking the existence of 5,000 Chechen police officers at different places in the Republic, the creation of a training center for recruitment within “the local population” and even a plan to establish procedures for “evaluation” of Chechen police (Averbukh 2001).

Two key elements contribute, relatively successfully, to the policy of monopolization of physical force by Kadyrov, with different effects on relations with Moscow. First, the progressive elimination of his adversaries at the heart of the pro-Russian Chechen forces, and second, the rallying of ex-combatants. The policy conducted in Chechnya has not been one of integration into civilian life, but the generally forced integration of armed men, both combatants and pro-Russian forces, from different backgrounds and often hostile to one another. Two separate logics underpin this process: that of Moscow which hopes to be progressively to pull its army units and non-permanent Federal police out of Chechnya; and that of Kadyrov who is building his own vertical line of power through this policy of progressive accumulation of coercive capacity in Chechnya.

The internal conflicts of forces loyal to Moscow have on many occasions led to the use of violence by Kadyrov’s units. These demonstrations of force without the sanction of the Federal authorities dent the credibility of a Chechnya under control of Moscow and highlight oppositions (Merlin 2010: 134–39), as evidenced by the bitter struggle led by Kadyrov against the Yamadayev brothers. Sulim Yamadayev, head of the Vostok battalion, is known to be responsible for numerous punitive operations against civilians, most notably in March 2005 against the village of Borozdino-Skaia in the North East of Chechnya (RFE/RL 2009; Memorial 2006; RWR 2006). Kadyrov used testimonies from the village inhabitants and local human rights organizations to accuse S. Yamadayev of crimes against civilians and to obtain from the Russian justice system the inclusion of his name on the list of people wanted by the Federal authorities. Meanwhile numerous violent incidents involved the troops of the two men. Judicial procedures were put on hold during the Russian–Georgian war of August 2008, during which Sulim Yamadayev, as head of the Vostok battalion, distinguished himself fighting on the side of the Russian Federal army, before falling into disgrace. The destruction of the two battalions represented a political victory for Kadyrov, undoubtedly against the advice of part of the local population.
Kadyrov also made use of the numerous accusations of crimes targeting civilians against Ovliga Baysarov, a former independence fighter responsible for the protection of A. Kadyrov at the beginning of the second war and reputed officer of the FSB. His detachment Gorets (guardian) was considered to be a group of rebels (ramzan-kadyrov.ru 2006) and was declared unlawful by R. Kadyrov. M. Baysarov was killed in Moscow in November 2006. Some weeks after A. Politkovskaya, by R. Kadyrov’s men who were never brought to justice. This so-called “special operation” led by Moscow (Zheglov and Mashkin 2006) was evident as a significant breach, if not a reversal, in Moscow’s alleged control of the situation.

In the same vein, the violent kidnapping of a businessman in Moscow in 2012, involving Chechen police officers claiming to be “members of R. Kadyrov’s personal guard” who were released without any criminal investigation (Kanev 2012), reveals the level of protection for which R. Kadyrov’s men benefit, to the point of provoking the anger of a small group of French investigators behind their arrest (Kanev 2013; AFR 2013).

The surrender of combatants is another key element of the Chechenization policy. This has been achieved through a mixture of amnesties, sometimes forcibly imposed, and repression threats, in particular against families, as in the spectacular surrender of Magomed Khanbiyev, former separatist commander and Minister of Defense in A. Maskhadov’s government, after Khanbiyev “voluntarily” joined up after several dozen members of his family were abducted in 2004. While some affirm that the Chechenization process has seen an increase in abductions of members of the families of combatants or presumed combatants (Lyall 2010: 14), as a means underlining a form of indigenization of the repression, it should be recalled that, as attested to in testimonies gathered during the first period of the war, Federal forces themselves employed such practices. Indeed, the Russian prosecutor general tried to legalize these practices by submitting a bill to the Duma in 2004, following the hostage-taking in Beslan, which allowed “counter hostage-taking” of members of the family of combatants or hostages-takers (Le Huérou and Regamey 2008: 218).

The long history of the various amnesties and proposed amnesties (Snezhkina 2006; isparov.ru 2006; ramzan.kadyrov.ru 2006; pravda.ru 2012), which is intertwined with the different phases of the war, reveals measures that were not institutionalized and that struggle to convince, employing a largely discursive register. Several thousand combatants are thought to have joined Kadyrov’s forces over the years, although precise figures are not available. In 2006, the Federal authorities tried to take the lead, with a call from the director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), N. Patrushev, to relinquish arms and the adoption of a law by the Duma in July, but ultimately it was Kadyrov who dictated the conditions and timing of the procedure and the Russian authorities had to “accept the rules of the game of the authorities of the Chechen Republic” (Markedonov 2007; Lokshina 2007; FIDH 2006).

A problem which arose at the time of the implementation of the new law on the police, adopted in March 2011, reveals the difficulties of the police normalization process in Chechnya. The new procedures provided for a new examination of professional competence, the new certificate – and prohibited recruitment to the police not only of former combatants but any person with previous convictions. The application of these rules would mean that a large proportion of police from the special units would be obliged to resign. Chechen parliamentarians introduced an amendment calling for an exception to be made for Chechen police (Kavkazskii Uzel 2011a). Some were concerned to see Chechnya “dictating laws for Russia” (Kalinina 2011), but it can also be seen as the result of improvisation by the drafters of the law or the more general absence of a reintegration policy.
In conjunction with the practice of amnesties, the Chechen authorities have also tried to regulate “traditions,” in particular that of the blood feud. The misuse of this practice, linked to the war, is considered responsible not for the regulation of violence but for their perpetuation. Cherkasov suggests that joining the Chechen security forces can be a way of making an averted use of such practices. Although the customary law (adat) forbids the use of the position of power to perform acts of blood revenge, it is practiced openly by the security forces, using their capacity of official position of police officer to settle personal accounts (Cherkasov 2007). Although a Reconciliation Committee was set up by the Chechen authorities (Caucasian Knot 2011), it is presented as concerning private matters and does not openly take into account the issue of reconciliation between parties in conflict.

The factors described above can lead to two issues for consideration: the first is that the path chosen by Kadyrov to establish unilateral power seems to have only weakly relied on support from Moscow, which is all the more ready to give carte blanche to Kadyrov since at the external political level the Russian authorities do not have any particular fears and are not held accountable by public opinion. The second issue concerns the fact that the monopolization of Chechen forces of repression operations is more a reflection of Kadyrov’s personal achievements than of the success of the “counter-insurrection” strategy (Lyall 2010), in gaining control of Chechnya. Kadyrov seems to have succeeded in combining two logics: the advantage: the gradual monopolization of the use of force which enabled him to appear as the only solution and as the one guaranteeing peace to the population; the construction of a Chechen exception within the Russian Federation, managing to achieve acceptance of significant autonomy – it is sometimes said that Kadyrov succeeded where Nodzayaev and Maskhadov failed – but also the consideration of the laws of the Russian Federation as insignificant. This tacit agreement seems to hold as long as the exception is not put to the test or challenged, either by the outbreak of internal conflicts – a hypothesis which can probably be excluded in the short term – or by the emergence of tensions within the Russian political élite on whether such loose ties of Chechnya with the Russian Federation can be accepted.

The situation since the official end of the anti-terrorist operation in April 2009 has been documented, principally due to the departure of many NGOs and an even greater fear of identifying following the assassination of Natalia Estemirova, director of the Memorial office in Grozny on 15 July 2009. However, on the basis of several confirmed cases, some of which have been widely covered in the media, it is possible to analyze the actions of certain police forces engaged in repression operations in Chechnya today. Such analysis starts with the hypothesis that the violence employed follows a logic of war, while forming part of an routine police activity. It is rendered all the more banal by the fact that it shares many
Manufacturing culprits: Mechanisms of institutional violence—“in peace time” in Chechnya

Human rights organizations still working in Chechnya continue to report frequent cases of various violations committed by police officers during operations against the civilian population. Operations are generally conducted following attacks by combatants against security forces, but also regularly in order to obtain information on the activities of the groups and to maintain pressure. These operations are often accompanied by speeches from authorities at the highest levels demanding mass arrests of combatants and their support (Zhutsev 2011).

Certain police units figure predominantly in testimonies. The OMON detachment, Nefteprod, the unit which was originally assigned to the protection of oil facilities and which was then even responsible for criminal investigations— and PPSM-2, a patrol unit which has the special designation “special designation unit Ramzan named after Akhmad Kadyrov” on its vehicle— are formed either of men who had participated in the war on the Russian side since 1999, or ex-combatants who have received amnesties or been reconverted, a fact which is often used to explain the violence they use (Kaliapine and Merlin 2012; Kaliapin and Reiter 2011). The forced nature of this allegiance in many cases should be taken into consideration; former combatants are often pressured with threats of torture against former brothers in arms, a measure of establishing a point of no return in alliance with governmental forces and of offering guarantees that these men are not false allies, playing a double game: police in the day and combatants at night.

The recurring involvement of these units in violence points to segmentation, the division, between different units of the Chechen police, which appears to draw extensively on previous experience of violence. This dimension is not hidden: we have seen that the authorities officially present these units as the most determined and the most qualified to fight terrorists and organized crime. The case of Alikhan Akhmedov, an investigator in the Chechen criminal police, who was arrested and tortured by members of the OMON regiment in order to prevent him investigating an ordinary crime in which one of them was implicated (Reiter 2012), illustrates the hierarchy in the police force and the level of impunity enjoyed by certain units, even outside the context of the fight against combatants.

The way procedures are handled by the security forces, at the border between legality and illegality, is a recurring feature of operations conducted in Chechnya. The main target group, surprisingly composed mainly of young men (18-25 years old) suspected of belonging to, or belonging to, or supporting combatants. They are sometimes identified as a result of visits to websites supporting combatants, or expressions of sympathy towards the rebellion, criticism of the authorities, including on social networks. At the end of 2012, Memorials gathered testimonies on cases of repeated arrests and abductions in the village of Assinovskaya in the Turgunzha district where 16 young people were kidnapped or illegally arrested during Autumn 2012 (Memorial 2013b). The diversity of operating methods can be observed, from official requests by police officers specifying their unit, to the brutal entry into a house of a large group of armed men who refused to give their identities. Not revealing that they are police officers and wearing masks not only guaranteed them impunity, a characteristic of operations conducted since the beginning of the war, but can also facilitate the attribution of responsibility for acts of violence or disappearances to combatants or criminals, thereby justifying the policy of repression. It can also simply enable police officers to gain time between the moment they stop suspects and an official subsequent arrest. Such methods are often employed elsewhere.
An inhabitant of Assinovskaya, was arrested, detained in an unknown location, beaten and tortured, before confessing under torture to his participation in the murder of a police officer in the summer of 2012. Once the confessions had been obtained, he was officially charged (Memorial 2013b). In other cases, abductions are simply followed by disappearances: On the 3rd of May 2011, Doka Suleimanov was abducted by unknown men at his place of work in Grozny and has never been found. His father obtained information that he had been held on an\n\ndetention site belonging to the police of the Kurchaloi district; at the beginning of July 2007,\n\nNabi Zainalov, was abducted by armed men at the hospital in Achkhoi-Martan, after\n\ninvestigators sent to the location at the request of Memorial refused to intervene.29 These stories recall, sometimes word for word, the testimonies gathered at the beginning of the 2000s following the clean-up operations conducted by Federal forces. However, one difference should be noted concerning the material element of violence: while operations of the Russian military are often accompanied by pillaging and various forms of extortion,\n\noperations carried out in Kadyrov’s Chechnya seem to be dominated by a logic of “gratuitous\n\ndestructive.” A report by Human Rights Watch documenting numerous cases of ars\n\nagainst the homes of combatants, notes that furniture and objects are piled up in one room so\n\nthat they burn more effectively (HRW 2009: 21) and only refers to one case of pillage before\n\nan arson attack.

As in other regions of Russia, the forms of torture most frequently used are electric shocks\n\nand beatings with plastic bottles filled with water, as well as simulating suffocation with a\n\nplastic bag. Perhaps due to almost absolute certainty of impunity, traces are often left: punch\n\nbeats, beatings with truncheons, and more rarely suspension by the arms. These marks should\n\nbe noted during medical examinations conducted on entry into custody (IV period of detention\n\nwithin the police station) and on transfer to SIZO (pre-trial detention center) if the suspect is held in custody during the investigation. In a report released in June 2011, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture notes traces of ill-treatment and\n\ntorture confirmed by the delegation’s medical experts: bruises, recent scars, contusions\n\ncouncil of Europe 2011: 15).

The ambiguous boundary between the official or clandestine nature of operations is also\n\ndeveloped in the choice of detention site, depending on the period of detention and its objective.\n\nWhile “secret prisons” have been evoked, in particular in Kadyrov’s village, Tsentori, or Kurchaloi, “a basement, cabin, or building that no-one risks entering and where someone can\n\nbe held for several months” will suffice.31 This can be illustrated by the emblematic case of\n\nRam Umarpashaev: he was arrested on the 11th of December 2009 at his home in Grozny,\n\nthe presence of several members of his family, by police officers claiming to be from the\n\ntribal in Oktiabrskii. The officers said that they were taking him in for a few hours in order to\n\ncarry out “checks.” He was detained and tortured for four months in a cellar located in the\n\nterritory of the OMON regiment, by police officers who threatened to kill him and to make the\n\ntruth look like combatant assassination operation. He was released – due to the efforts of the\n\nfamily and human rights defenders32 who obtained the opening of an investigation into his\n\ndetention and submitted a request to the ECHR for emergency interim measures (Caucasian\n\nProtest 2010) – without ever having been officially arrested.

Pressure, threats, and violence against the families of combatants or suspected combatants\n\nare another method employed by the Chechen security forces, often in full view (Kavkaz\n\nProtest 2010b). Following the assassination of two police officers by combatants in September\n\n2010, Kadyrov officially declared that “fathers and brothers will have to answer for these acts.
The examination and collection of testimonies reveal close links – conditions of arrest, detention sites – with the testimonies recorded during the period when the military and Federal Police forces were the main perpetrators of repression, but also show similarities with cases of torture and ill-treatment by police all over Russia, with the aim of obtaining a confession, by any price, whether in cases of real crimes or fabricated charges. These mechanisms of police violence have been described as explained in part by factors relating to the routine work of the Police officers and the organization of the penal system (Gladarev 2012; Public Verdict Foundation 2011; Novikova 2011). Confessions are obtained during non-official interrogations, sometimes inside police stations, in other cases in more discreet locations before official transfer to a custody cell (IVS). The lawyer, who is often in collusion, arrives later and the criminal investigation can follow its course in a “legal” manner, based on signed confessions. Although officially prohibited, torture is practiced by police officers, in the performance of their duties, but in a place or at a time which usually enables them to escape controls and sanctions (Russian NGO Shadow Report 2012; ACAT 2013).

In the case of Chechnya, the exceptional nature of which cannot be underestimated, these mechanisms are often aggravated by other factors. First, the situation on the ground still carries the heritage of combat – illustrated by the persistence of regular activity by the army in Chechnya. Second, anti-terrorist legislation places these practices within a political and technical system which legalizes exceptional practices or closes its eyes to illegal practices. This situation is the same in many other states, especially since September 11 (Cohen 2006, 2007; Gigo and Tsoukala 2008). In the case of Russia, moving away from Chechen territory parallel can be drawn with cases of torture and ill-treatment committed by police officers in Tatarstan, in the context of arrests and investigations into representatives of Muslim communities considered to be extremist, including in fabricated criminal cases (Civil Assistance Committee and FIDH 2009). In a tense political context – in this case marked by the need for the Tatarstan authorities to demonstrate the effectiveness against potential terrorist threats – routine police violence is legitimated by the objective pursued, the fight against terrorism, and absolved by those in charge who seek above all to obtain results; confessions are not sometimes required, the law itself providing ways and means of obtaining them.

**Kadyrov’s Chief Security Officer:** “He is not worthy of belonging to the village of Khov Yurt (Tsenteroi). Nobody knows him in the village. We saved you from great danger.”

**Adam Belimkhanov’s Grandmother:** “I went to see him many times. I tried to stop him, but to no avail.”

**Adam Belimkhanov’s Uncle:** “We didn’t agree with his activities. Now, we even feel relieved that all this happened. Maybe others will stop after seeing this. He never lived here and nobody knows him in this village.”

**Kadyrov’s Chief Security Officer:** “They would have known him if he was a real man. In that case he would have been known and respected. At this time, we do not consider him a man. The same will happen to all the others.”

(Memorial 2000)
From the implementation of a “numbers policy” to punitive operations against families and property; from official arrests to abductions and staged eliminations of real or presumed combatants, the breadth of methods used by the security forces in Chechnya can lead to the analysis of this violence either as an extension of police activity to a particular context, or as an exceptional situation, even taking into account police abuses in Russia. These operations, following procedures which are usually irregular, conducted by representatives of public forces either openly or undercover, all have in common that they take place with the guarantee of double protection: from Kadyrov and Moscow. The way in which the problem is perceived and dealt with at various levels in Russia and Chechnya, in particular by those who seek justice for the victims of violence, but also in the discourse of the Chechen authorities, can shed light on the logic of post-war violence in Chechnya.

Chechen and Russian police on the same trial bench?

Russia, recent years have seen growing criticism from the public and those in power towards police abuse, in particular torture and ill-treatment committed by police officers. The media and public opinion have widely taken up this issue and the public authorities have commented in this public trial, which has been fueled by the publicity surrounding numerous scandals (Le Huérou and Sieca-Kozlowski 2012b). Reform of the police, a process initiated under Medvedev’s presidency and enacted in a new law which entered into force in March 2011, disappointed expectations. The authorities themselves labeled it a failure (Gazeta, 2012). However, there has been a rise in cases of prosecution and conviction of police officers for violence committed in the course of the performance of their duties (RFE/RL 2013; Nedtsvennyi Komitetet 2013), indicating a possible end to total impunity.

Can this new context have an impact on the situation in Chechnya? As far as the narrative is concerned, it seems that the Chechen authorities have adopted the same severe attitude that prevails in Russia towards police guilty of abuses. Chechnya’s ombudsman admitted that arrests without a warrant, which were not recorded and which could be considered kidnappings, had taken place. The head of the Chechen Republic also regularly makes declarations which, although they do not refer to precise cases of abuse, renew calls for exemplary behavior on the part of the security forces, which must in particular “surrender their uniforms and wear civilian clothing when they are not on duty” (MVD po chechenskoii republike, 2013). In August 2013, Kadyrov demonstrated once again a willingness to show loyalty and respect for the law at a meeting with the Chechen minister of the interior in the run-up to parliamentary elections (Groznii Inform 2013): the head of Chechnya deplored the sometimes criminal behavior of the security forces and called on police officers to display exemplary behavior not only in Chechnya but in the whole of Russia. During meetings with police chiefs, the issue of complaints made by citizens against abuses committed on the road by police officers driving vehicles with the “KRA” registration plate has been raised throughout the Republic, the registration “KRA” is associated with absolute power. Although Kadyrov called for the prohibition of tinted windows and flashing lights so that “they are like everyone else on the roads,” he did not ask for the abolition of the license plates, which the drivers have taken as a reward for their support.

To a certain extent, Kadyrov’s statements reflect the opinion issued by I. Kaliapin, president of the Committee against Torture, a recognized expert on the question of police violence and author of the report “Letters to the president of the Russian Federation”.
authorities to enforce the Constitution of the Russian Federation on the territory of Chechnya.

(Kaliapin, 2013: 32)

assorting to law has drawn more and more attention as an issue of contest and mobilization (Iraël 2009; Siméant 2007). In Russia, the question of access to national or international justice in cases of violence committed by state agents – during the war, in penal colonies or by the police – has become a major stake for civil society activists and organizations who have committed themselves to this civic or militant cause and have attempted, sometimes successfully, to raise media attention. It has also become an important issue for the authorities, who try to minimize the cost of these procedures. On this aspect, Chechnya can also be seen either as an illustration of the general situation in Russia, or as an exception. The case of I. Umarpashaev can be considered a symbol of the immense difficulty of conducting judicial proceedings and seeing them to a conclusion, but it is also exceptional in that it was highly publicized and reached only a partial conclusion although a criminal investigation was opened by the Investigation Committee against identified persons within the OMON regiment for abuse of power and then, as a result of obstacles at the local level, transferred to the federal level, investigators were prevented from entering the site and were physically threatened by those in charge of the regiment. Such a situation is difficult to imagine in another region of Russia (Kaliapin 2013).

The examination of complaints filed at the ECHR for violence committed in Chechnya by the security forces reveals another angle on the way this violence is treated. Analysis of ECHR decisions based on complaints concerning the Chechen conflict shows the systematic incapacity of the Russian and Chechen authorities to conduct investigations (Leach 2008: 150–55). In January 2013, in the first judgment relating to the period of the Kadyrov administration, the ECHR condemned Russia (Memorial 2013a; ECHR 2013a) for insufficient investigations into a case of abduction, although responsibility for the abduction itself was not attributed to the authorities. Two later decisions of the ECHR, in April and June 2013 (ECHR 2013b; Memorial 2013c, 2013d), established responsibility not only for failing to carry out an investigation, but also direct responsibility of the authorities of the Chechen Republic in the commission of the crime. The court rejected the argument of the authorities that it was a case of settling scores or banditry.

Furthermore, the Chechen authorities demonstrate a capacity for selectivity towards the beneficiaries of impunity. They do not hesitate to take up the accusations of human rights violations committed by Federal forces before 2005.

### Conclusion

The impunity and the combat to end it simply the continuation of a situation which has been pronounced since the beginning of military operations concerning the responsibility of the Russian military and police for crimes against the civil population in Chechnya? If Chechnya can be qualified as a zone in which “Russian laws do not apply,” it remains to be determined whether and to what extent this situation is authorized by the Federal powers. Do they close their eyes, or are they unable to ensure the application of the law, which would be a sign of weakness? This also raises the question of the capacity of Russia to maintain control across its entire territory, especially over members of the law enforcement forces. This would strengthen the hypothesis that the public order established by Kadyrov is a form of pseudo- or quasi-
conclusion of the Russian authorities’ conquest of “vertical power.” However the “removal of control” of the territory by means of chosen local elites can only serve as a compromise because, on the one hand, Chechen society does not have the capacity to hold the leaders of Grozny or Moscow accountable and, on the other hand, Chechnya – tarnished by the experience of war and violence – remains largely a forgotten territory in Russia.

R. Kadyrov renounced the title of president as a sign of his unfailing loyalty to the Federal power. It is considered that his superior alone deserved this title.

This paper was written with the support of the Paris City Hall “Emergence(s)” Program (“Understanding Violence in Russia”).


See contribution by J.-F. Ratelle in this volume.

Some of the testimonies were collected by the author in Grozny in Autumn 2011. The author warmly thanks all interviewees: victims of torture, families, as well as activists and lawyers from various human rights organizations.

The partial nature of available information, given the difficulties in accessing Chechen territory, generally and the security forces in particular, must be taken into account. The dimensions of a mini-analysis, based mainly on individual experiences, the socialization spaces at different times of life, and men who, whether they are ex-combatants or not, today belong to the security forces of the Chechen Republic, would be the subject of another investigation.

Details from Russian military intelligence – GRU – attached to the 42nd motorized division. The two detachments have quite different profiles: Zapad is composed of men who have never taken up arms again in Russia, while Vostok is mainly composed of ex-combatants who switched allegiance early on to the Russian forces.

_Upravlenie vnutrennykh del_. See the presentation of the history of the Chechen Ministry of Internal Affairs on its official website: http://95.mvd.ru/history (accessed 5 March 2014).

Witnesses and victims usually specify if participants in an operation spoke Russian with a Chechen accent or in Chechen.

The two detachments integrated the 248th motorized division. The Sever battalion is run by Alimshar Dzhanishvili, brother of the parliamentarian and former head of the neftepolik detachment (regiment), Adam Delimkhanov.

See contribution by Tanya Lokshina in this volume.

Official term.


Adam Delimkhanov, R. Kadyrov’s cousin, who subsequently became a member of Parliament in the Federal Duma, was at one time accused by police of the United Arab Emirates of ordering an assassination.

One of the ideologues of the Chechen Islamist movement and former interim president of the Chechen Republic.

This was refuted by the Investigation Committee (http://lenta.ru/news/2013/03/25/yurt1 [accessed 5 March 2014]). The protests of FSB officers reveal the climate of confusion around the difficulty for Federal authorities to control the actions of the Chechen security forces.


His father was also arrested, detained for 311 days and tortured during detention, before joining his son in exile. He also filed a complaint before the ECHR.

The stories of refugees who have arrived in Chechnya since Kadyrov took control of the security
conducted (Kaliapin and Reiter 2011; Kaliapin 2013). The Neftepolk was led by Adam Delimkhanov until 2006.

A police officer belonging to the OMON regiment was accused of murdering an acquaintance whom he owed money. For example, Zubair Idrisov was first arrested on 5 August 2009 in the middle of the night in his family home in Avturi (Shali district) then released, rearrested one month later and detained for several hours in the temporary police detention centre (IVS) where he was tortured. Interview with Idrisov family, 9 October 2011.

Police officers can thereby gain the trust of young people hostile to the regime through exchanges of instantaneous messages, posing as combatants. They then arrange a meeting to have food brought them and catch the person red-handed. Interview with human rights associations, Grozny, 5 October 2011.

“On the 21st of October 2012, at 6:30 a.m. armed siloviks wearing camouflage outfits came to the house of V., a 22-year-old resident of the village of Assinovskaya. Both he and his mother were at home at that time. The siloviks said they were officers of one of the district police departments. They detained V. and drove off” (Memorial 2013b).

“On the 16th of December 2012, six armed people in camouflage outfits burst into the house of K., 24 years old. The intruders, who spoke Chechen, declined to introduce themselves …” “On the 16th of December 2012, armed officers of an unknown power structure abducted 20-year-old C. The siloviks arrived in the early afternoon in three UAZ four-wheel cars, a Toyota Camry, and two Gaz minivans at C.’s house. A group of siloviks stormed into it. C. was in the house along with some of his relatives. Without giving any explanations the siloviks seized C., pulled a cap over his eyes and pushed him into one of the cars and drove off” (Memorial 2013b).

K. was abducted on the 4th of December and officially arrested on the 6th of December (Memorial 2013b). Those working on these cases discovered periods of illegal detention for two–three days during which time torture took place, before the arrest was legalized once “confessions” had been signed.

Author’s interview with the mother of A. Zaínalov, 9 October 2011 in Grozny. This disappearance was the subject of an investigation by N. Estemirova before her assassination and has since been taken up by the Joint Mobile Group.

See contribution by A. Regamey in this volume.

Author’s interview with Igor Kaliapin, 5 October 2011.


The head of Memorial who did the transcript of the recording, which was then transmitted to a Russian television channel REN-TV, indicates that the family members being questioned were visibly terrified (Memorial 2009).

These multiple factors of brutalization remind us of those to which Russian police officers, who after serving in Chechnya, returned to their regular police activities in the Russia, were subjected (Lokshina 2007; Le Huérrou and Sieca-Kozlowski 2012a).

Author’s interview, 10 October 2011.


Kadyrov Ramzan Akhmatovich.

I. Kaliapin also relates a personal interview with R. Kadyrov during which he says Kadyrov recognized the abuses committed by some of the men under his authority (Kaliapin and Merzlyakova 2012).

The publication in 2011–12 of numerous reports and interviews of activist lawyers and experts on police violence, including in Chechnya, in glamour magazines and aimed at a middle-class urban Russian readership, is telling.
was withdrawn from television at the last minute in Autumn 2011 in Russia (Kavkazskiz Uzel 2011).
The absence of progress in the investigation into the murder of N. Estemirova should also be highlighted (FIDH et al. 2011).


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9 The North Caucasus insurgency

Understanding the Chechen rebels in the context of the Caucasus Emirate\textsuperscript{1}

Jean-François Ratelle

This chapter seeks to reflect about the role of Chechen insurgents in the recent upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus since the official end of the counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya in April 2009.\textsuperscript{2} I argue that the concept of the Chechen spillover solely focuses on Chechnya as the catalyst to the violence in the North Caucasus; this depicts an incomplete and inaccurate picture of a more complex phenomenon. Structural problems and local grievances in the neighboring republics of Chechnya are the main elements that foster recruitment and violent engagement across the region. Therefore, although the level of violence in Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, and Dagestan has risen significantly between 2009 and 2011 (see Figure 9.1), we are not witnessing a spillover of the Chechen insurgents in other republics driven by the violent repression of the Chechenization process, nor is this process the result of the establishment of an Islamic caliphate with an epicenter in the mountainous region of Chechnya and Ingushetia.

In fact, one can observe very different trends amongst insurgents in the various republics. This chapter argues that Chechen insurgents remain mostly driven by nationalistic goals compared to fighters in Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan. The desire for the creation of the Caucasus Emirate might even have emanated from outside of Chechnya (Sagromoso 2012) as a result of the vacuum created by the death of main Chechen field commanders, such as Shamil Basayev (2006), Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev (2006), and Aslan Maskhadov (2005). If the concept of spillover helps in understanding how the rebel networks have taken root outside of Chechnya, it does not explain why young people still join insurgent groups several years after the end of these networks. This chapter argues that mono-causal explanation about the region (spillover
and Salafism) needs to be contextualized and deepened by looking at the sociological reasons behind why ordinary people turn to rebel groups.

By building on my personal experience in the region in 2010 and 2011, and a series of interviews I conducted with republican ministers, members of the security apparatus (FSB and MVD), local Imams, ex-insurgents and fighters, human rights workers, and journalists in Kabardino-Balkaria, Chechnya, and Dagestan, this chapter will demonstrate that motivations of fighters in Chechnya and outside of the republic do not reflect the grand strategy put forward in the discourses of the leaders of the Caucasus Emirate. To the contrary, young people join insurgent groups and support the insurgency for much more practical reasons, such as limited social mobility, as a protest against societal sins, the experience of daily repression or because they are seeking a sense of community. One should thus focus on the intra-republic dynamic and on the differences between them in order to explain the recent upsurge of violence in the North Caucasus.

![Figure 9.1 Casualties in the North Caucasus](source)

In order to do so, I will first discuss how my fieldwork in the North Caucasus was conducted and why it helps to better understand violent engagement in a comparative way. I will then review the literature that focuses on the spillover of the Chechen wars, particularly focusing on the
narrative depicting violence in the North Caucasus as the result of Basayev’s network. By putting this literature in relationship to my personal observations while conducting field research, I will underline the tensions between an outsider view of the conflict and the dynamics on the field. By building on these discrepancies, the last part of the paper will put forward a sociological analysis of the reasons why individuals actually join the insurgency in Chechnya in comparison to Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria.

**Conducting field research in the North Caucasus: limits and opportunities**

This chapter is based on 13 months of field research in Russia, including six months in the North Caucasus divided in two trips of roughly three months each. This journey forced me to rethink how I perceive the region and the nature of the insurgency. The theoretical and empirical reflections depicted in this chapter are thus the result of my personal experience facing repression and sharing the daily life of radical Islamists in the North Caucasus. Before jumping into the analysis of the fieldwork, interviews, and the literature, a few caveats need to be underlined in order to assess the methodological validity of this chapter. My first objective was aimed at conducting interviews with combatants or ex-combatants. I met with a limited number of individuals who are/were involved as participants in the two Chechen wars mainly Chechens and Dagestanis. At the same time, my sample of interviews with combatants was not randomized and could not be aimed at providing a direct assessment of the psychology of combatants. In order to remediate to these access and sampling problems, I engaged in a series of interviews aimed at depicting the perceptions of the various societal actors about the combatants and their rationale to fight. I gathered interview material with a very broad range of actors composed of supporters of the insurgency (ordinary people, radical Islamists, combatants’ relatives) and people who opposed it (politicians, security forces, government officials, Imams). The objective of this research was gathering enough local material and various views about the insurgents in order to better understand how ordinary people choose to join the insurgency.

More broadly, my research project was first designed to try to understand insurgent strategies by assessing sites of violence and
combatants. Contrary to what is often depicted in the literature about the region (Hahn 2007, 2011; Schaefer 2011), I was not witnessing a spillover of violence of the two Chechen wars but more of a diffuse form of violence where ordinary people are submitted to daily repression through symbolic and physical means as well as a growing local discontent against the local political elites. As I was travelling across the North Caucasus on a weekly basis from Nalchik to Makhachkala, security forces profiled me as potential Islamist and often insurgent. At many checkpoints, and often on the streets of Makhachkala, I would be stopped, searched, and interrogated in order to assess my participation in underground groups. The reason for this profiling was limited to my physical appearance, including my dark features, a beard perceived as “Salafi,” and my physique. According to policemen, who I interviewed following the interrogations, these elements were perceived as evidence of possible links with the insurgency. I was even encouraged to shave my beard by several members of security forces at checkpoints and following arbitrary controls in order to avoid further problems. The beard was underlined as being associated with insurgents and not a common characteristic of a Western citizen. During these informal discussions, interviewees even told me that I could expect to encounter problems and threats to my own security if I would continue growing a beard and associating myself with religious extremists.

This religious profiling made me reflect on the root causes and triggering factors pushing young people to rebel against security forces in the North Caucasus. In order to deepen my understanding of the impact of profiling and illiberal practices in daily life in the North Caucasus, I decided to use an ethnographic approach involving participant observation to study its impact on the radicalization processes amongst youth. Alongside a series of interviews I completed in order to understand local perceptions on the insurgency and radicalization process, my personal experience and immersion would offer me a way to foster a better socio-psychological approach of the impact of repression on ordinary citizens.

An early observation about profiling was the important difference observed in Chechnya in comparison to Dagestan. Although the Chechen republic was supposed to be the hub of the “Islamic” insurgency (Hahn 2011; Schaefer 2011), a potential “Salafi insurgent” was not targeted by Chechen security forces. Crossing checkpoints and travelling in Grozny
and in the Chechen mountains did not lift any suspicions, and it was often a challenge for me to identify the security practices linked to religious profiling in the republic. Kadyrovtsy members remained uninterested in my presence, as they were busy with extracting bribes from local drivers and ordinary citizens. This observation did not mean that the level of repression in the republic has faded away. To the contrary, it seems that the Kadyrov administration was able to strategically target its repression against militant relatives by relying on an important local intelligence network instead of a general religious profiling. Indeed, people in Chechnya were scared to discuss the topic of the insurgency, although they were willing to discuss about life in general and the challenges of rebuilding the republic after the two wars.

When I was able to obtain answers about the insurgency, the majority of the interviewees insisted on the economic incentives linked to violent engagement and the absence of social opportunity in the republic. To quote one of them, 4 “even you as a Canadian would join the insurgency if you did not perceive any possibilities to find a job in your village and sustain your family. The absence of economic opportunity is the main factor explaining the will of young people from our region to join the insurgents.” 5 Islam was, most of the time, rejected as playing a role in feeding the insurgency. Local interviewees acknowledged that the role of religion was gaining preponderance in Chechnya under Kadyrov’s policy of Islamization of the society, but still insisted on the local and nationalistic nature of the factors that push young people to “leave for the forest.” This way of framing the conflict as a last-resort opportunity rather than a religious struggle or a defensive jihad put forward by many ordinary Chechens appears to me to clash with the important parts of the literature that focuses on the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate as proof of the Salafization of the Chechen insurgency and other insurgent groups across the region (Hahn 2007, 2011; Schaefer 2011).

In the case of my fieldwork in Dagestan, contrary to what I described about Chechnya, religious profiling was omnipresent as I was controlled several times a week for simply walking aimlessly in the streets, or attending public spaces. It was not uncommon for me to be stopped and searched twice a day around focal spots, such as mosques and governmental buildings. This indiscriminate religious harassment and the abuses committed by security forces during this profiling have been feeding an important resentment amongst young radical Islamists against
the state. This fear of the “Salafi insurgent” was common amongst all social spheres especially amongst the intelligentsia, government elites, and security members I interviewed. For all of these actors, radical Islamists are seen as a danger for the republic and the intensive profiling as one of the only ways to eliminate the insurgency (for a more complete analysis of the interviews in Dagestan, see Ratelle 2013). This approach has alienated an important part of the local population especially the adept of radical Islam.

What I observed through my personal experiences in the different republics is that the repression in Chechnya, although more brutal, seems to be targeted specifically on a particular segment of the population. In this case, the negative impact of repression in the republic seems to be limited to a smaller portion of the population. If Salafist supporters are violently repressed in Chechnya, people advocating radical Islam do not experiment the same treatment. Contrary to Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan, massive religious profiling is not used as much as a practice of repression. The indiscriminate nature of the religious repression in these two republics has fueled resentment against local governments and religious elites and the insurgent recruitment (Shterin and Yarlykapov 2011; Tekushev 2012). It thus explains why ordinary radical Islamists engaged in violence in Kabardino-Balkaria especially with the Nalchik uprising in 2005 and in Dagestan. If in these two republics, the insurgency is seen as a way to protect Islamic faith, it is not automatically the case in Chechnya. In fact, an ordinary Chechen told me “why would someone join the insurgency in order to fight for the Islamization of the society, our administration is already taking care of this.”

Based on my personal experience and my fieldwork data, several questions came to my mind in relationship to the study of insurgent violence in the North Caucasus. What do my observations about religious profiling and my interviews tell me about the nature of the insurgency in the North Caucasus? Are most of the insurgents in Chechnya and in Dagestan sharing the same grievances, and do they join the insurgency for the same reasons? By reviewing the literature about the North Caucasus, I will demonstrate that a sociological analysis of the trajectories and pathways of violent engagement offers to better grasp and explain the realities I encountered on the field compared to the Chechen spillover and the Salafization of the North Caucasus.
Assessment of the situation in the North Caucasus: a Chechen spillover or a regionalization of the grievances?

When one looks at the actual insurgent situation in the North Caucasus, two major conclusions can be drawn. First, the level of violence (insurgent and terrorist attacks) in the Chechen republic has been consistently decreasing (O’Loughlin et al. 2011) since the official end of the counter-terrorist operation in 2009. One also observes a slow or steady spillover of violence away from Chechnya. “Between 2004 and 2007, the percentage of events occurring in Chechnya out of the total events in the North Caucasus fell from 90 percent to approximately 50 percent” (ibid.: 9). Insurgent and criminal violence has been systematically increasing throughout the North Caucasus – Ingushetia being the most violent republic in 2009 and Dagestan since 2010.

At the same time, the situation in the North Caucasus is not comparable to the level of violence we witnessed during the military phase of the Second Chechen war, especially the years 1999–2002. As I discussed in the previous section, one is witnessing an ambiguous situation where the strength of the insurgency represents a real security threat, although the region is far from falling into a major civil war as we have witnessed in Iraq or in Syria. Driven by several structural problems such as unemployment, corruption, and nepotism, a growing number of individuals decide to engage in radical Islamism and insurgent groups outside of Chechnya. How can one explain the growing participation in the insurgencies and increasing violence in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria when Chechnya is witnessing an important decrease in insurgent activities?

A recurrent explanation found in the literature argues that Chechen field commanders and foreign fighters sought to export the war outside of Chechen borders at the end of the 1990s (Hahn 2007; Schaefer 2011). For these authors, the current upsurge of violence finds its roots in the invasion of Dagestan by the Islamic International Brigade, led by Basayev and Khattab in 1999, and represents one of the first structured military operations seeking to spread violence across the North Caucasus. As the Russian Army drove the Chechen resistance out of Grozny and controlled an important part of Chechnya by the summer of 2000, relying on intensive, disproportionate, and indiscriminate bombings of the capital, the insurgents chose to adapt their military
strategies.

In order to reinforce its guerilla warfare capacities, Maskhadov decided to reintegrate several radical Islamists into the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) decisional structure and officialized the spillover strategy, leading the way to important changes in the operational and tactical strategies of the Chechen insurgency (Hahn 2007: 40–42). The ideological and theological elements were mainly controlled by a foreigner, Sheik Abu Omar as-Saif Abu al-Walid, another Saudi national, integrated the military structure of the insurgency. They put forward a new guerilla warfare strategy involving a spread of the insurgency along Basayev and Khattab’s network, and the use of terrorism outside of the Chechen territory (McGregor 2006; Moore and Tumulty 2008; Moore 2012). Non-Chechen fighters such as Avars, Nogays, Kabardins, Ingushs, and Balkars were sent to their respective republics to fight the local government and the Russian forces. In Kabardino-Balkaria, the military structure of the Yarmuk jamaat was headed by Muslim Atayev (killed in 2004) and Anzor Astemirov (killed in 2010), in Ingushetia by Emir Magas (captured in 2010), and in Dagestan by Rasul Makasharipov (killed in 2005) and Rappani Khalilov (killed in 2007). These small insurgent groups were composed of experienced fighters from the Chechen wars who possessed military skills and devotion to the Chechen leadership. The spillover narrative offers a robust explanation on the early development of the insurgency outside of Chechnya. Without the support of Basayev’s network, it is doubtful that the local fighters outside of Chechnya could have organized into a structured organization as rapidly. At the same time, it does not explain the local popular support witnessed in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria.

In order to complement and reinforce the assumption of the spillover, certain authors also portray the Second Chechen war and the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate in October 2007 as proof of the Salafization/Islamization of the conflict (Hahn 2007). Hahn published in 2011 a research report that supports this claim by arguing the existence of the link between the global Salafi-jihadist network and the Caucasus Emirate (Hahn 2011). This report follows Hahn’s argument made in his previous book (Hahn 2007) and articles (Hahn 2005, 2008) about the central role played by foreign fighters (“Afghan” Arabs), and the supposed longstanding relation between al Qaeda and the Chechen insurgency. For him and other authors (Schaefer 2011; Sagromoso 2012),
“Chechens’ radicalization [happened] under the influence of foreign jihadist terrorist ideologies and movements funded, inspired and perhaps still coordinated by al Qaeda” (Hahn 2007:14). Chechen insurgents then exported this ideology across the North Caucasus, spreading this jihadist terrorist ideology. According to Hahn, Chechnya is part of “a loose global alliance of like-minded Salafist ‘takfiris’10 jihadis, who assist each other in various ways – theo-ideologically, politically, financially, technologically, and operationally – and divide among themselves the labor and the geography of the global jihad” (Hahn 2011: 2).

With the exception of the hyperbolic claims regarding al Qaeda in the North Caucasus, this approach appears inadequate as it solely focuses on Chechen networks and foreign fighters in order to explain the development of Salafism in the North Caucasus; this Chechen-centric analysis omits the role played by local actors in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria. A more nuanced picture of the dynamics of the 2000s and the role of the foreign fighters is depicted by authors like Williams (2004), Wilhelmsen (2005), Tumelty (2005), Moore (Moore and Tumelty 2008), Souleimanov and Dytrich (2008) as they demonstrate how the Chechen nationalist resistance evolved towards a growing Salafi-jihadi rhetoric. These authors propose a genealogy of the dynamics between nationalist and religious grievances in the North Caucasus, and particularly in Chechnya. They postulate causal links between the presence of foreign fighters in Southern Chechnya, the generational change and cleavages in the region, the political situation during the interwar period, and the Second Chechen war to explain why Chechen insurgents decided to put forward a strategy of spillover, and the mounting role of radical Islam in the conflict. At the same time, one element, which remains understudied here, is why local actors outside of Chechnya have accepted to cooperate and fight under the Caucasus Emirate’s umbrella and predominantly Chechen-centric administrative structure.

One can remember that in 1999 during the Dagestan invasion, a majority of Dagestanis had chosen to cooperate with Russian forces in order to expel Salafist fighters under the command of Basayev and Khattab. In fact, throughout my fieldwork, the narrative about the predominant role of the Chechen insurgents played in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria was contested by the whole spectrum of my interviewees ranging from government elites to insurgent supporters and
insurgents themselves. When interrogated about the importance of the Chechen insurgent network and the Caucasus Emirate, the majority of the interviewees in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria seemed clueless on what the Caucasus Emirate is or why Chechen insurgents would have any influence in Dagestan. A relative of an insurgent told me “Why would they care about Chechnya or other republics, we have enough of our own problems here.”\textsuperscript{11} In fact, the answer of a young Dagestani about the insurgency speaks volumes about the importance of the Caucasus Emirate for many ordinary people: “Jeff, all these names of insurgent groups and combatants, where do you find them? I never even heard of them.”\textsuperscript{12} The result of these interviews should not always be taken as face-value, but it should at least warn researchers about the view we try to impose on the conflict from the outside. The role of Basayev’s network and the foreign fighters and the impact of the two Chechen wars are instrumental and crucial in the development of insurgent violence in the North Caucasus; however without tangible local grievances and ethnic networks to build on the previous elements would not be catalysed into violence.

Most of the interviewees insisted also on the locally based roots of the insurgency, explaining the will of young people to join the insurgency based on the deplorable state of the political and social system in the region, the unemployment level, the absence of a governmental-inspired ideology, or the actions of the security forces (Ratelle 2013). As Tekushev underlines, the ethnic role and kinship bounds were instrumental to secure the viability of insurgent cells outside of Chechnya (Tekushev 2012) and building on structural problems. During an informal discussion, one Dagestani told me:

who do you think these young people can trust in this system? You think they can access our legal system freely, you think they can report abuses to the police. You think that the government is there for them. Their only option in order to seek protection or even revenge is the insurgents.\textsuperscript{13}

In this context of repression, Salafism has become the most important recruitment and ideological tool fuelled by the importance of corrupted officials in each republic and their anti-radical Islam policies.

My ethnographic fieldwork based on an immersion with several
groups of radical Islamists in Dagestan confirms that Salafism has gained phenomenal momentum in remote villages (e.g. Gubden, Gimry) in Dagestan as much as in major urban centers (e.g. Makhachkala, Khasavyurt, Buinaksk). The post-Soviet generation born during the perestroika or after the end of Soviet Union has radicalized its practices of Islam and its will to seek new avenues for religious development. The majority of young people I interviewed in Dagestan and Chechnya acknowledged the importance of radical Islam in their life, the inadequacies of traditional Islam, and the generational clash with traditional religious elites. At the same time, these young people denied the role played by foreign proselytizers in the development of radical Islam in the North Caucasus and insist on the important historical roots of Islam in their communities. Based on the testimonies of these young people, I start to reflect about the assumptions put forward by the tenants of the spillover and the jihadization of the North Caucasus. If the foreign influence through Arab emissaries, funding, and internet cannot be denied in the development of Salafism, one should be careful not to reduce their analysis to the role of Chechen and foreign fighters in order to explain the actual situation in the North Caucasus and the growing importance of Salafism.

In fact, although the concept of Chechen spillover and jihadization of the North Caucasus sounds catchy as a process explaining the expansion and diffusion of violence across the republic borders, it obviously does not take into account the fact that the death of Basayev and of his comrades in arms including foreign fighters between 2005 and 2007 did not restrict the violence in the neighboring republics. To the contrary, the level of violence in the neighboring republics systematically increased after the supposed dismantling of the spillover network. How can one explain that a second generation of fighters that did not have any important links with the Chechen insurgency, and especially with Basayev himself, decided to join the insurgency under the umbrella of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and the Caucasus Emirate? Are Chechen insurgents still the driving force behind the rebellion against Russian forces in the North Caucasus? Are fighters in other republics simply an extension of the Chechen forces and the Caucasus Emirate? Are fighters across the region really sharing a sense of common grievances and shared goals?

One way to answer these questions is to look at what are the common
denominators between all republics. First, they have all witnessed the development of important patronage networks which control almost all economic activity (Tishkov 2004; Derluguian 2005; Ware and Kisriev 2010). These networks reinforce economic problems that mainly affect these young people (18–35 years old) such as the absence of social mobility and economic opportunities (Le Cava and Michael 2006; ICG 2012). In order to perpetuate these inequalities, political elites have established an extensive corruption network sustained by a brutal repressive system. Religious repression has become systematic in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria in order to make sure that the population could not mobilize itself against these elites. Without being the only strategy put forward to fight extremism and social contestation in the region, religious profiling plays a crucial role in fostering the will of young people to reach out to insurgent groups for protection. A young radical Islamist told me “if this kind of profiling, the physical abuses and humiliations associated with it continue I will probably seek to join the insurgency. I want to be free to practice the purest form of Islam without any prejudices.” A journalist in Dagestan commented on this topic “the insurgency is the only way to protest against societal problems and sins in Dagestan. Young people do not want an Islamic state; they want to be free to practice their own interpretation of Islam safely.”

In other words, if Basayev’s fighters contribute to set the roots of the insurgency outside of Chechnya, they are not directly responsible for the actual insurgent recruitment and activities. The success in exporting and diffusing the conflict is mainly linked to common structural problems across the region. Basayev’s network built upon a feeling of discontent in order to recruit ordinary people to join the rebellion. Thus, the spillover had a common objective around 2002; however each republic followed a very different trajectory (for a complete narrative about each republic, see O’Loughlin et al. 2011; Sagramoso 2012; Ratelle 2013). Although insurgent groups in the different republics share some common grand narratives (fighting for an Islamic state and against the Russian occupation), the social background of their leaders and their short-term objectives often dictate the dynamics of violence on the ground.

By looking at the sociological trajectories of insurgent leaders and combatants in Dagestan and in Chechnya and how republican governments fight against the insurgency, one can understand why violence in these two republics varies substantially. The last section
moves our analytical focus from a Caucasus Emirate centric-approach to a more locally based analysis of violence.

**Comparative sociological analysis of contemporary fighters in the North Caucasus: the importance of historical trajectories and local grievances**

The assumption depicting the violence in the North Caucasus as unified and coordinated between various ethnic insurgent groups does not reflect the dynamics that we witness on the field. One can observe an important upsurge of violence against religious targets and security forces in urban centers outside of Chechnya in the last few years (2009–13). To the contrary, insurgent violence in Chechnya is mainly configured as guerilla warfare aimed at pro-Russian forces, concentrated in the rural part of the republic, and resulting in major military clashes. Terrorism and suicide bombings remain rare in Chechnya compared to Dagestan and Ingushetia. These empirical observations seem to contradict the model of a regionally coordinated insurrection emanating from the Chechen spillover. How can one explain that insurgent groups under the umbrella of the Caucasus Emirate adopt such radically different violent agenda in terms of targets and strategies? One way to look at these important differences is to focus on the general sociological roots of the insurgents as well as the contemporary socio-political contexts and the situation of young people across the region.

When one looks at the composition of the Chechen insurgency in the 1990s, some common characteristics about the combatants can be identified. They were all born and raised under the Soviet Union, socialized into the Communist system; they witnessed the development of the *perestroika* and the nationalist tide at the end of 1990s, and were self-educated about Islam and its role in the Chechen society. Derluguian argues, by using the example of Salman Raduev, that many Chechen fighters were in fact the product of a sociological trajectory emanating from the Soviet Union period and were more opportunistic than ideologically driven. He underlines that when the economy collapsed in 1991, several thousand of the seasonal workers started seeking answers and new opportunities. Many of the early field commanders like Shamil Basayev, Dokku Umarov, Salman Raduev were beginner careerists showing signs of insecurity and ambitions, ready to gamble on high-
stakes with military means in order to achieve their place in the new society (Derluguian 2005: 52). Many of them rapidly became “violent entrepreneurs, chasing the new opportunities created by the weakening of the state and the chaotic transition” (Derluguian 2005: 239). This conclusion is supported by Tishkov who underlines the relative absence of intellectuals and political dissidents amongst foot-soldiers (Tishkov 2004: 93). The Russian author put forward three major explanations for the massive participation of ordinary Chechens in the wars: the importance of the lure of danger, revenge, and competition for material rewards (greed) (Tishkov 2004: 98). I did not interview enough former combatants in Chechnya in order to definitely assess these claims; however when I look at the trajectories of former combatants (Chechens and non-Chechens) I interviewed I draw similar conclusions. In fact, a former Dagestani fighter in Chechnya told me that he had the choice to be drafted by the Russian army and be killed in Chechnya or join the Chechen fighters to maximize his opportunities to survive and gain from the war. 17 His narrative was similar to what Tishkov described in his research.

The insurgency in Chechnya was thus created around a heteroclite group of individuals from various social groups, such as petty criminal, romantic young people, and sub-proletarians (Derluguian 2005: 253). As the two wars unfolded in Chechnya, the fighters’ socialization remained centered around violence as a way of living. After the end of the first war, “the middle-ranking commanders from the first Chechen war, unable to find a place in the new government or to face demands of civilian life, established private armies” (Gilligan 2009: 28; see also Akhmadov and Lansky 2010 and E. Sorkirianskaia’s contribution to this book). The interwar period in Chechnya demonstrates the difficulty for the new Chechen administration to demobilize these violent entrepreneurs. The Maskhadov administration did not have the resources to confront these militias violently, nor did it have the means to create economic and social opportunity for the local population in order to limit the influence of radical preachers. This aspect was underlined by several of my interviewees as they mentioned how the “honors and the benefits” of the war became concentrated in the hands of a minority of people (see also Tishkov 2004). This situation fueled resentment against the secular structure of the state as the post-war chaos replaced the optimism of the military victory against Russia.
At the same time, an ideological vacuum was created which was rapidly filled by foreign fighters and their proselytism activities. The violent entrepreneurs of the first war were seeking an ideology that would permit them to recycle their military capital into political and economic capital. Salafism and its doctrine governing all aspects of life offered a way to bridge their career as violent actors into the political and economic spheres. If the narratives around violence changed toward Salafism, the composition of the insurgency did not. Violent entrepreneurs remained overly represented inside the Chechen insurgency throughout the first years of the Second Chechen war.

Ramzan Kadyrov was however able to demobilize an important number of these violent entrepreneurs following Basayev’s death. By capitalizing on Moscow’s massive reconstruction transfers, the Chechen leader built an important part of his power on ex-militants primarily motivated by greed. By offering them material and economic incentives to leave the insurgency, he gave them the opportunity to recycle themselves into “legal” criminals and continue their racketeering and criminal operations under the support of the state and the Russian Federation (Russell 2007; Vatchagaev 2012: 229–30). In order to perpetuate their violent entrepreneurial career, these fighters became the backbone of Kadyrov’s brutal repressive campaign against ordinary people and insurgent supporters (Lyall 2010). What Tishkov (Tishkov 2004) and Derluguian (Derluguian 2005) are describing as opportunistic insurgent violence in the 1990s was thus recycled into opportunistic state violence. Therefore, these “amnesty” and reconstruction programs did not pacify Chechnya; they simply reconfigured and “legalized” violence (Lokshina 2007).^{18}

With the demobilization process of the violent entrepreneurs and the death of many of the Salafist field commanders, the profile of the Chechen insurgency rapidly changed. The remaining insurgents were mostly composed of the older nationalists who participated in the two wars and the younger disfranchised Chechens left aside from the economic benefits of the reconstruction. Indeed, as Kadyrov built on his ex-insurgent networks and their intelligence to engage in brutal repression against the insurgency, he also put forward an economic strategy to curb the recruitment. His strategy of using federal funds to create economic opportunities directly benefiting the ethnic Chechens seems to have been successful in limiting the insurgent influence over a
majority of ordinary people. At the same time, despite the undeniable economic success under Kadyrov, his brutal methods and patronage network remain a factor sustaining insurgent recruitment.

Indeed, during my fieldwork, I observed an ambivalent feeling toward the Chechen government strategies and the price paid for stability. As my interviews with Chechen people in urban and rural sectors have highlighted, Kadyrov’s regime was usually credited for the success of the reconstruction and the pseudo-stability he established in major cities such as Grozny and Gudermes. One person in a Chechen village told me: “Most of us do not like Kadyrov’s methods (repression of ordinary people); however one has to admit that the situation is not as bad as it was at the end of the 1990s.”19 Another villager interviewed that same day added: “My problem with Kadyrov is not with his methods against the insurgents; I am disappointed that the majority of the reconstruction happened in Grozny and Gudermes. We did not receive anything from the reconstruction funds.”20 This tension between the relative success under Kadyrov (reconstruction and stability), his methods, and the corruption linked to the reconstruction itself might explain why one observes a temporary decrease of insurgent activities in the republic. After more than fifteen years of instability and violence, minimal progress in terms of stability is highly valued by the local population.

At the same time, the testimonies collected in Chechnya underline that a segment of the younger rural disenfranchised youth does not seem to benefit as much from the reconstruction and the relative stability in the republic. For them, the insurgency represents away to protest against corruption and economic inequalities or to escape abuses committed by Kadyrov’s forces. If one closely examines the details of the recruitment process in Chechnya, the factor that explains why the post-Soviet generation of young individuals joined the insurgency remains very similar to what was described in the literature for the first and the Second Chechen war. The level of repression and brutality from pro-Russian and Russian forces continues to play a role in pushing young people toward the insurgency (Speckhard and Akhmedova 2006a, 2006b; Souleimanov 2007; Souleimanov and Dytrich 2008; Murphy 2010). At the same time, if repression was such an important factor in Chechnya we would witness an increasing participation in the insurgency amongst Chechens and not the opposite tendency. Chechnya is the republic in the North Caucasus where the level of repression has been the most brutal and
mostly based on collective responsibility. In other words, it is wrong to solely insist on vengeance and blood-feud in order to explain recruitment of insurgents in Chechnya.

To the contrary, economic opportunity and patronage networks are seen by local Chechens as one of the main factors driving the insurgency. One of my Chechen interviewees told me that we should try to understand how young people in remote areas of the republic perceive their life and their opportunity to sustain their future family. According to him, young people do not “leave for the forest” because of their ancestral mountainous traditions or the overbearing influence of the Salafist preachers. They do so because the opportunities provided by the end of the war and the “grandiose” reconstruction of Chechnya are limited to Kadyrov’s patronage network. This is especially prevalent in remote villages in Chechnya where reconstruction funds did not provide young people with employment or opportunities. This disfranchised youth is often not extremely religious as depicted by observers outside of the region. Therefore, Kadyrov’s strategy in advocating the Islamization of society does not really impact the recruitment and capacity of the Chechen insurgents, as the fact remains that most young people are driven to the forest by criminal behaviors associated with Kadyrov forces and its local network. By insisting on this disenfranchised rural youth, I do not downplay the possibility of seeing young Salafists joining the insurgency; I argue that the majority of the insurgent recruitment in Chechnya seems to be oriented around the former rather than the latter. This phenomenon might be explained by the relative absence of Salafist preachers in the contemporary Chechen insurgency compared to Dagestan or Kabardino-Balkaria. The way the problem is framed by insurgent leaders in each republic directly affects their strategies and targets.

**The importance of Salafism and Islamic radicalization in Dagestan in comparison to Chechnya**

After several years of wars, very few Chechens had the resources or the opportunity to study Islam abroad or in Chechnya. The two long wars and the anemic interwar period reinforced the importance of the sub-proletarian dominance inside the insurgency and the hierarchical position of foreign fighters (Derluguian 2005). Sadulaev was one of the only Chechen leaders who had the charisma and religious knowledge to
openly challenge the foreign influences and establish an organic Salafist organization. This aspect marks a major difference in comparison to other republics, such as Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria. In these two republics, the first generation of insurgents was mainly the product of religious repression making Islam the cornerstone of their grievances (Ware and Kisriev 2010; Shterin and Yarlykapov 2011; Tekushev 2012). They mold their insurgent groups along these lines, and when they were killed they became martyrs of the struggle for Islam. These elements were often underlined in my interviews in Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan. A group of villagers in Dagestan insisted that I consult Kavkazcenter, a Jihadi website\(^{21}\) in order to understand the importance of their martyrs fighting for pure Islam. One of them insisted on linking the actual combatants such as Yasin Rasulov with legendary heroes such as Imam Shamil. Although ethnic identities remain important in the republic, religion seems to foster a stronger sense of community.

With the nationalistic struggle as the common denominator and the limited opportunity to seek Islamic education, the Chechen insurgency remains offset in term of Salafization compared to the other republics. Furthermore, veteran Chechen fighters who died throughout the years, such as Basayev, become martyrs and idols for the younger generation of insurgents, mainly because of their struggle for the Chechen people and not because of their religious faith and education. For the younger generation, emulating Basayev is associated with the quest for Chechen independence, national identity, and the struggle against the Russians. Contrary to what is depicted by the scholars focusing on the jihadization and spillover-theory, the Chechen insurgency remains to this day much more driven by nationalist objectives compared to other North Caucasian fighters because of its socio-historical roots. This does not mean that religion is not playing a role in building a common sense of grievances in the North Caucasus, and fostering the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate. It means that the recruiting and socializing insurgent networks in Chechnya remain constructed around nationalistic roots rather than Salafist ones (Tekushev 2012).

Although Umarov declared the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate in 2007 in order to replace the secular structure of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, the changes were probably not initiated by Chechen insurgents but by Salafist ideologists from outside of the republic (Umarov 2011; Sagramoso 2012). The Chechen insurgency found itself
in a precarious situation as the death of the majority of its most important field commanders (Basayev, Gelayev, Sadulaev, Maskhadov) and foreign fighters (Khattab, al-Walid, Hafs) and the demobilization process created a need to restructure the foundation of the rebellion (Tumelty 2005; Schaefer 2011). The main Salafist ideologists associated with the Chechen insurgency and the Caucasus Emirate were and and are still mainly non-Chechen. They came from Kabardino-Balkaria (Anzor Astemirov and Musa Mukozhev), Dagestan (Magomed Vagabov, Yasin Rasulov, Ali Abu Muhhamad al-Dagestani), and outside of the North Caucasus (Alexander Tikhomirov aka Said Buryatskii). The will to transform the ChRI into a Salafi-jihadist structure was the result of a bargaining and outbidding process between the Chechen nationalists trying to remain in control of the North Caucasus insurgent structure and the growing Salafist influence in Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan. Instead of provoking a schism inside the insurgent structure, Umarov agreed to create the Caucasus Emirate in order to remain in control of the rebellion.

At a more micro-level, when conducting interviews and fieldwork I was surprised how ordinary people in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria show a level of Islamic radicalization far superior to Chechens. In a recent survey, 20 percent of the respondents openly called themselves moderate Salafis (Kapaeva 2011). Religion was also overly represented in my interviews in Dagestan when I asked questions about the causes of violence in the region. In the case of Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria, radical Islam as an ideology was regularly described positively (proof of faith) or negatively (brainwashing) as one of the main factors explaining why young individuals would “leave for the forest.” A Dagestani state official told me:

these young people leave for the forest simply because of the ‘zombification [brainwashing] resulting from Salafist preachers’, they are not able to think by themselves. The end of the Soviet Union changed everything; young people need an ideology to function.23

To the contrary, an acquaintance of insurgents in Dagestan told me: “these young people are not brainwashed at all, they are simply fed up by the arbitrariness of the system and the religious repression.”24 A recent
survey (September–October 2011) has underlined that 49.4 percent of the respondents answered that people join insurgent groups in Dagestan because of siloviki’s arbitrary behaviors and to take revenge against security forces (Dosh 2011). In fact, the majority of the interviewees in Dagestan except for the government members and security forces have put forward a positive attitude toward the insurgents. This type of reaction was unique to Dagestan and demonstrates the extensive support for insurgents in the republic. Another recent survey (December 2011) in Dagestan indicated that 12 percent of high school and university students approve insurgents’ actions (Kapaeva 2011). According to the survey, these young people not only see insurgent actions as justified but also as the key solution for the problems of Dagestan.

In fact, government officials, security personal, ordinary people, and the intelligentsia underlined and insisted on the link between religious repression and the growing insurgent recruitment. Some government officials admitted in informal discussion that they would join the insurgency if they were in the same situation of these same young people. In fact, one of them with radical views about Islam went a step further and told me: “Thank god I am not in their situation. If any member of my family was harassed or killed, I would immediately leave for the forest even if I have a good social position”. One important political actor in Dagestan even admitted to me that he could not understand why more young people are not seeking protection and support from the insurgents knowing the atrocities and abuses committed by security forces in the republic. These young people openly admit that they would consider or even plan to join the insurgent movement. The unlawful and criminal behavior of security forces during the counter-terrorist operations, the policies of collective responsibility targeting militants’ family, the crackdown on independent journalists, and abundant cases of torture are only a few examples of the common repressive practices in the region. Religious harassment and profiling is probably one of the most visible forms of repression in the region. I witnessed myself the pervasive and durable effect when I was controlled and arrested because of my physical features. Religious repression seems to foster a very different sense of grief toward the government elites in Dagestan compared to Chechnya.
Conclusion: different roots, different perception of the problems, different targets

The entire region of the North Caucasus shares common factors that explain violent engagement, such as the deplorable politico-economic situation, high level of corruption, and governmental repression. Furthermore, in Chechnya just like in Dagestan, my interviewees have insisted that governmental security forces do not want the violence to stop. One Dagestani intellectual told me “Do you really think any of the siloviki want the violence to end? Violence means promotion, career, and money. Where do you think insurgents and criminals buy their weapons?” I heard this narrative several times throughout my fieldwork in all republics including Chechnya. In an informal discussion, a Grozny resident told me: “Kadyrovtsy need the insurgency in order to sustain their criminal activities; and vice-versa.”

These socio-political problems are shared amongst the majority of people in the region; however the major difference is the way they are framed by the insurgents and perceived by ordinary people. In Chechnya, the problems were regularly presented to me as the result of corrupted individuals and their patronage network. In Dagestan, most of the people framed the problem as being systemic. According to them, not only corrupted individuals had to be removed from power, but the entire system should be reformed. I came to attribute this difference on the importance of radical Islam, Salafism, and of radical preachers in Dagestan. Not only are they much more active and present in Dagestan compared to Chechnya, according to my observations; they also have much more influence as they advocate the role and importance of Sharia as a solution to the systemic problem. The nature of the grievances against the state and its security forces is thus very different in Chechnya and in Dagestan and by the same token frames the choices of target and strategies.

In Chechnya, the structure of the insurgency remains centered around insurgents that fought since the First Chechen war and/or the Second Chechen war: Doku Umarov, Suppyan Abdullayev (before he was killed in March 2011), Aslan Byutukayev, Aslambek Vadalov, Tarkhan Gaziyev, the Gakayev brothers (before they were killed in January 2013). For them, religious education does not occupy a central part in their lives, and Salafism mainly remains a catch-all ideology rather than a real
commitment. It does not mean that they are using this ideology in a purely instrumental approach; it rather means that the insurgency is still oriented on short-term objectives including its survival. The brutality of Kadyrov’s repression based on insider intelligence, the logistical difficulty of waging guerilla warfare in the mountains, and weaker popular support, contribute to the necessity to focus on survival over ideology. In that situation, although young Chechens joining the insurgency are exposed to ideology and narratives about Salafism, the insurgency remains structured around nationalist strategies, tactics, and local kinship networks. Furthermore, the younger generation of Chechen fighters, although more radical than the previous one, did not create new insurgent movements as in the case of Dagestan or Kabardino-Balkaria, nor did they become important leaders; most joined existing groups and networks in order to act as foot-soldiers.

In the other republics, the first generation of combatants, Basayev’s network, were killed or captured by Russian forces in the middle of the 2000s, leaving a younger and more radical generation in command of the insurgency (about Dagestan, see Ratelle 2013; about Kabardino-Balkaria, see Shterin and Yarlykapov 2011). The majority of the actual fighters in these two republics were born during the perestroika and did not live under the Soviet Union and usually openly supported Salafism before joining the insurgency. When they decided to join insurgent movements, they did so because of the extreme corruption and repression against radical Islam and Salafism. For them, the insurgency often represents a new social order; joining rebels is seen as choosing a new life through Salafism without the structural problems that are depicted in Dagestan’s society (Ratelle 2013). Salafism becomes an ideology that redefines their life and provides them with opportunities to escape from the despair and the perceived societal sins. Insurgent groups are seen as parallel societies where corruption, inequalities based on social mobility, and religious repression are eliminated. At the same time, Salafist preachers such as Yasin Rasulov or Magomedali Vagapov become leaders of several small insurgent cells catalyzing the process of Islamic radicalization amongst young people. The fact that these insurgent cells are mainly active in major urban centers also helps in recruiting directly in Salafi mosques which are tolerated in Dagestan; reinforcing by the same token the religious fervor inside these groups.

The types of the insurgent cell leaders might explain why the violence
in Chechnya remains mainly focused on pro-Russian forces, compared to Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria, where violence is unfolding along a sectarian religious line between traditional Islam and Salafism. These two republics have witnessed an increasing number of attacks against the representatives of the official clergy and businesses guilty of non-Islamic practices (gambling and alcohol retail outlets). It also explains why Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria witness an increasing number of attacks in urban areas compared to Chechnya. O’Loughlin, Holland, and Witmer have demonstrated that important differences exist between the urban warfare adopted by Dagestani cells compared to guerilla warfare in the case of Chechnya (O’Loughlin et al. 2011). In fact, the process of violence in Chechnya develops along an intra-Chechen dynamic driven by the actions of the entrepreneurs of violence and Kadyrov’s ruthless repression. Attacks in the name of Islam against non-Islamic targets remain extremely rare in Chechnya.

What we are witnessing in the North Caucasus is an insurgency that differs in its roots and triggering mechanisms in the different republics. This chapter sought to demonstrate that North Caucasian insurgents do not share a common profile, and one should be careful in postulating a unique solution in order to curb the insurgency and demobilize the rebels. Future research should seek to engage in comparing insurgent groups in order to put forward models to explain how social and contextual factors affect their recruitment and choice of targets. An interesting research avenue regarding Chechnya would also be to understand and study the differences between Chechen insurgent groups in South Western Chechnya (Umarov sector) linked with the Ingush Jamaats and South Eastern Chechnya (previously the Gakayev brothers’ sector). Considering the latter, one would also have to interrogate what links exist between Chechen insurgent groups and Avar insurgent groups in the neighboring mountains of the two republics. Indeed, one can observe an important collaboration between the Umarov sector and the Ingush Jamaat leading to very different insurgent strategies in South Western Chechnya (suicide attacks) compared to Eastern Chechnya (guerilla warfare). At the same time, it is rather unusual to observe collaboration between Dagestan and Chechen insurgent cells in the borderland region of the two republics. This difference is rather surprising knowing that this borderland region could become the main site of junction and collaboration between insurgent cells linked to the
Caucasus Emirate as witnessed in 1999. This observation could further demonstrate that the short-term objectives of insurgents in Dagestan and Chechnya differ radically. Unfortunately, this kind of phenomenon remains understudied in the scholarship of the North Caucasus and would probably permit us to better understand the real dynamics behind the narrative of the Caucasus Emirate. In other words, promising research avenues have to move away from a Caucasus Emirate–oriented research to a more micro-level understanding of the recruitment and strategies of local insurgent groups. As demonstrated by this chapter, the spillover narrative remains inadequate in explaining the various dynamics observed across the North Caucasus. Furthermore, it does not grasp the importance of non-Chechen jamaats in the development of the insurgency, and overly emphasizes the importance of foreign fighters and Basayev’s network.

Note

1 The author would like to thank Anne Le Huérou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey, and Angela Franovic for their help and numerous suggestions on previous versions of this chapter.

2 As the debate about the duration of the second Chechen war remains lively in the scholarship about the North Caucasus, the dates used in this chapter will be the official ones presented by the Russian government. The reader can refer to the introduction for further discussion about the different phases of the war and the end of the military phase.

3 This was due to the Russian visa regime constraint and my unfamiliarity with the possibilities of fieldwork in the North Caucasus. The first six months were spent improving my knowledge of the Russian language in Moscow and trying to find out how I could conduct field research in the North Caucasus. By the end of the second trip, I decided to travel to the region by myself as I was not able to secure any academic or research affiliations to support my research.

4 The quotations from interviews are reconstructed based on the author’s field notes as no interviews were recorded for security issues. Thus, they should not be taken as a verbatim of the interview. When interviews will be used, basic information about the interviewees will be given in this order: Sex, approximated age, social origin (urban/rural, employment, or social class), Republic.

5 Author’s interview with a Chechen in 2010 (male, 30–40 years old, rural areas, below poverty line, Chechnya).

6 In the sense of this research and particularly for the case of the North
Caucasus, the concept of radical Islam is defined as a non-traditional interpretation of the religion. It is thus not associated here with any political stance, but strictly to the personal practice of Islam and its five pillars. Islamic radicalization is understood as the evolution toward a non-traditional interpretation of the religion and not as the evolution toward violent behaviors associated with religion. I use the label of Salafism to identify one of those radical trends of Islam which also advocate a political stance associated to the practice of religion. In this case, Salafism advocates the establishment of an Islamic state under the Sharia law (Koranic law), along with salaf practices. As moderate Salafis advocate this political stance through various non-violent means, global Salafis insist on the need for violence to achieve it. Their Islamic state shall be obtained through violent means building on the concepts of dar al-harb, jahiliyya, and jihad against the near and the far enemy.

7 Author’s interview with a Chechen in 2010 (male, 50–60 years old, rural areas, below poverty line, Chechnya).

8 The reader can also refer to NGO reports building on primary sources which depict similar trends. See Memorial’s Chronicle of Violence at: www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/rubr/2/index.htm and Kavkazskii Uzel’s monthly and yearly reports at: www.kavkaz-uzel.ru (accessed 5 March 2014).

9 The literature about civil war usually defined the concept according to three characteristics: “(1) they involve fighting between agents of a state and organized nonstate groups that seek to capture control of the government or over a region or to influence government policy by means of violence; (2) the fighting kills at least 2,000 people over its course and 100 on average in every year; and (3) at least 100 people die on both sides of the conflict” (Weinstein 2007: 16). According to these criteria, the actual North Caucasus situation could be seen as a civil war which however is still far from reaching the level of violence and brutality of other open-warfare civil wars like Iraq, Syria, or Bosnia.

10 Takfirsist means that these groups are accusing other Muslims of apostasy because of their practice of Islam.

11 Author’s interview with a Dagestani villager in 2010 (Avar, male, 40–50 years old, rural areas, below poverty line, Dagestan).

12 Author’s interview with a young Dagestani in 2011 (Tabasaran, male, 15–20 years old, born in a village living in a major city, student, below poverty line, Dagestan).

13 Author’s interview with a Dagestani in 2010 (unknown ethnicity, male, 40–50, Makhachkala, journalist, Dagestan).

14 It is extremely difficult to give a single profile of all the young people I interviewed across the North Caucasus. The majority of them were between 17 and 25, they came from rural villages, they were working or studying in
major urban centers (Nalchik, Makhachkala, and Grozny), and I would usually label them as radical Islamists. Religion plays an important role in their daily life and they were willing to engage in proselytism toward other people including myself. At the same time, most of them also openly insist on the importance of their ethnic traditions such as hospitality toward foreigners and tradition of resistance.

15 Author’s interview with a Dagestani villager in 2010 (Avar, male, 50–60, rural areas, pensioner, Dagestan).
16 Author’s interview with a Dagestani in 2010 (unknown ethnicity, male, 40–50, Makhachkala, journalist, Dagestan).
17 Author’s interview with a Dagestani villager in 2011 (unknown ethnicity, male, 40–50, rural areas, manual worker, Dagestan).
18 On this issue see the contributions to this book by Anne Le Huerou and John Russell.
19 Author’s interview with a Chechen in 2010 (Chechen, male, 30–40 years old, rural areas, below poverty line, Chechnya).
20 Author’s interview with a Chechen in 2010 (Chechen, male, 30–40 years old, rural areas, below poverty line, Chechnya).
21 Author’s interview with a Dagestani villager in 2010 (Avar, male, 50–60, village, pensioner, Dagestan). Kavkaz Center is known as being the insurgent propaganda website. The fact that the villagers insist on its importance demonstrates the value given to the role of insurgents in the republic and how they identify with them.
22 The survey was conducted by the monitoring group Youth Protection of the Republic of Dagestan among 3,000 students in the major cities of the republic (Makhachkala, Kaspisk, Khasavyurt, Derbent, Izberbash, and Kizilyurt).
23 Author’s interview with Dagestan official in 2011 (unknown ethnicity, male, 40–50 years old, higher social class, minister, Dagestan).
24 Author’s interview with Dagestan villager in 2010 (Avar, male, 50–60 years old, rural areas, pensioner, Dagestan).
25 The survey was conducted in major cities and smaller villages (Makhachkala, Khasavyurt, Kizilyurt, Tuhchare, and Hutrahe). 2,117 people participated in it.
26 Author’s interview with a Dagestani official in 2011 (Ethnicity unknown, male, 40–50 years old, higher social class, minister, Dagestan).
27 Author’s interview with a Dagestani intellectual in 2010 (Kumyk, male, 40–50 years old, Makhachkala, university professor, Dagestan).
28 Author’s interview with a Grozny inhabitant in 2010 (ethnic Russian, female, 40–50 years old, artist, Grozny, Chechnya).

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Part 3

The impact of war on Chechen society
In May 2001, several inhabitants of the Chechen town of Argun drew up a collective letter to protest against the violence of the Russian military. They complained that Russian forces had converted the town into a shooting range and were doing everything to set the townspeople against them. How else to explain the incessant operations during which young men and women disappeared, the murders, the torture in detention, and the permanent shelling “during which innocent people are killed and houses are destroyed” (Argun inhabitants 2001)?

The letter then turned into a complaint against material destruction, listing the houses that had been recently shelled and recalling that “many residents of Argun, without a job and permanent income, have to keep animals to feed their families. But lately, we have been deprived even of this possibility. Our cows and sheep are living targets for Russian soldiers who shoot them purely for sport. Every evening, two or three cows or bulls are missing” (Argun inhabitants 2001). The petitioners demanded at the same time the end of illegal searches and arrests, information on people arrested and “the possibility to graze cattle in peace.”

This address, in which violence against people, cattle, and houses was mentioned simultaneously, suggests that these different forms of violence are closely intertwined in the victims’ perception. My main assumption is that attacks against objects and valuables are not only fundamental in civilians’ experience of war, but that they are also central to the very rationale of violence. I develop that hypothesis in this article, by seeking to understand the various dimensions of material violence against civilians at the beginning of the second Chechen war. Destruction and looting are not a by-product of violence against persons, but have their own rationale, and can even be considered as acts that trigger
violence.

My aim is not to draw a picture of the destructions or to assess the economic interests and resources of the different groups, which were part of the conflict. I seek to understand looting and destruction on a micro-level, the interaction between violence against goods and violence against persons and the meaning of this violence for both victims and perpetrators.

To explore the various dimensions of material violence, I draw mainly on Human Rights reports by Russian or international NGOs, which represent a rich source partly unexploited by researchers. Writing with a feeling of urgency and a practical aim, Human Rights organizations collected hundreds of testimonies, as well as petitions written by the inhabitants themselves. These reports offer therefore unique material not only for qualifying violations, but also for understanding the rationale of violence and the war experience of the people of Chechnya.

I focus mainly on the years 1999–2001, when, after a period of massive bombing, Russian federal forces established their control over the whole Republic. They pursued lower-intensity military operations in the mountainous South, engaged in periodic skirmishes with Chechen insurgents, but mostly established an overall territorial coverage through checkpoints and regular zachistki (mopping-up operations) in towns and villages. All the Human Rights organizations raised the alarm about irregular arrests and disappearances during these controls, extra-judicial killings, and torture in detention facilities (FIDH 2000a, 2000b; HRW 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Memorial 2002).

The question of violence against property and goods was neither forgotten nor overlooked in these reports, which mentioned destructions from bombing and shelling as well as looting and extortion. Nevertheless, a list of violations always implies a hierarchy, and the qualifications of the “gross human rights violations perpetrated by the Russian armed forces” went often from the most to the less serious: “summary executions, torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and detentions, looting and extortion” (FIDH 2000a: 4 – these and later italics are mine).

As Human Rights reports are the main source used here, I reflect first on how this source is constituted and what place it leaves to material destruction, before exploring three dimensions of material violence. I show in the second part how the victims of violence express their
experience of material loss and how the definition of vulnerability runs through the question of goods and property. In the third part, I reflect on the symbolic dimension of looting and destruction, on the violence deployed against objects and its meaning. The fourth part addresses seizure of property as part of a war economy, based on informal but extremely violent economic interactions between soldiers and civilians.

“Grieving over bees” – what place for material damage in Human Rights reports?

In 2008, the European Court of Human Rights decided that the Russian authorities had violated Khambatay Khamidov’s right to private life and to property when police units occupied and damaged his property in the Nadterechny district of Chechnya between 1999 and 2002 (ECHR 2007). On its website, Russian Justice Initiative (RJI)\(^3\) classifies this case as the only case of damage to property, among all the cases concerning North Caucasus judged by the European Court of Human Rights. According to the ECHR’s monitoring and classification, 152 of the 205 cases it decided concerned disappearances, 31 extra-judicial execution, 12 indiscriminate bombing, seven torture and only one property.

Among the cases decided, Khamidov is the only one classified by RJI as “violation of property” because it is the sole lawsuit where this damage was not linked to violence against a person. A search on the RJI website by key words (“property,” “valuables,” “money,” “seized/seizure,” “cattle,” “destroy/destruction”), identifies more than a dozen other cases where houses or cars were destroyed by bombing, fire, explosion, and as many cases where money, valuables or cattle was forcibly taken by Russian forces. The disproportion compared with cases of violence against persons remains obvious. Few cases deal with violation of property, and when there is an infringement of property rights, this violation is not put first by Human Rights organizations.

Indeed, the way information is collected, selected, and presented induces a certain bias, linked to the conditions of work on the field and the international context in which this information is presented. Seizure or destruction of goods is often described in Human Rights reports as a by-product of violence against persons, as a secondary or supplementary occurrence. The usual wording is that “generally plundering accompanied the vast majority of punitive operations” (Dmitrievski et al. 2009b: b274), that “some killings were accompanied by demands for
money or jewelry, which served as a pretext for execution if the amount proffered was insufficient” (HRW 2000c).

The description of material violence as secondary to violence against persons is consonant with the values of a society that considers that “looting and destroying property is a relatively mild form of violence” (Collins 2008: 245). This hierarchy is reflected also in international and national law. The Russian penal code, for example, provides milder sentences for crimes against property, such as extortion or destruction, than for crimes against health or life.4 The International Criminal Court defines destruction and appropriation of property as well as looting as a war crime, but not as a crime against humanity (International Criminal Court 2011).

But as natural as this may seem to us, the tendency to see material violence as a minor form of violence, compared to violence against people, points to a separation5 and a prioritization between goods and individuals that is both historically and culturally situated. After the First World War, looting and destruction are the most common category of war crimes mentioned in the charges against the persons wanted for extradition (Horne and Kramer 2005: 379).6 Spoliation and confiscation of goods have long been recognized as a specific dimension of the Jewish Holocaust (Mission d’étude sur la spoliation des Juifs de France 2000).

So why are destructions, looting and other forms of damage to property and goods put second in Human Rights reports on Chechnya? It may be linked of course to the specificity of the documentation of these types of crimes. In some cases, sources give detailed information about the amount of looted homes, the circumstances of robbery, the stolen items and valuables and the sums of money pocketed by the criminals. In other cases, only the most general information is available.

(Dmitrievski et al. 2009b: 274)

Information may also be scarce because of the reluctance of the victims themselves, their unwillingness to give detailed information about their economic status, their lack of interest in what happened to their property when their loved ones have been killed or abducted.

This feeling that material destruction is the least of all evils happening
in Chechnya can also induce a selection of the information received from witnesses. Indeed, all Human Rights reports are inevitably based on a triage and formatting of witnesses’ testimonies, which is in turn linked to the strategy of these organizations and to the political and legal environment in which they operate.

To force states and international organizations to condemn and take measures, the most serious crimes had to be emphasized: the question of looting or material destruction appeared less urgent than those crimes that could be qualified as war crimes and crimes against humanity. The formatting of the reports is also linked to the people involved in the collection of evidence, their ability to perceive the various dimensions of evidence, an ability that is linked in turn to their personal history, social and national backgrounds, beliefs and opinions, etc.

The way this selection operates can be illustrated by an example from an FIDH/HRC Memorial fact-finding mission in which I participated in Ingushetia in February 2000. We were collecting testimonies from people who had fled the villages around Grozny that had just been shelled and occupied by the Russian army. In one refugee camp, we talked to an old man, who, in spite of our numerous questions, was unable to give us precise information on places, names, troops involved, but kept repeating that the war was terrible because bees were dying.

Nothing could be done with his story to establish responsibilities, and document what had happened. Only later did I understand that bees are essential to the household economy of Chechen families (ACF 2010: 14), that honey is a key product whose medical powers are held in high esteem, that the 16th sura of the Qur’an (An-Nahl) is dedicated to the Bees and that the Sufi spiritual leader Kunta–Khadzhi was said to have raised bees (Allenova 2008: 225). The old man’s words never made it to the FIDH report, though the mention of bees was certainly crucial for him in expressing the consequences of war on his own life, on the life of his country, and even on the natural order of things. Bees were as meaningful to him as they were important for Isaac Babel in the 1920s when he began one of his Red Cavalry short stories with the words: “I grieve over the bees. The fighting armies have treated them most brutally. There are no bees left in Volhynia now” (Babel 1929: 45).

“A car is not a terrorist”: material loss, survival, and identity in victims’ stories
In November 1999, 37-year-old Rikhalat D., from the village of Gekhi (Urus-Martan region) declared that:

On 7 November 1999, at 15.45 our village was bombed by “ground-to-ground” missiles. These bombs are forbidden in the world, pellets, needle and vacuum bombs. Because of this attack by bomb missiles, people were killed and wounded. And livestock was killed. My house was destroyed, that is wiped off the face of the earth, I was left homeless. My neighbor Ahmed Vakhitovich G., born in 1959, was killed. Their house is completely destroyed, and five head of cattle were killed, chickens and ducks. Their family consists of nine members. The family was left without a breadwinner, the eldest goes to first class, and the mother is disabled. That’s whom the Russian invaders are fighting. Yeltsin, Rushailo, Putin, etc., they are the terrorists.7

I quote this letter at length because it introduces several dimensions of the victims’ experience of material loss, and uses several levels of discourse to express this loss, mixing economic survival and identity. The letter also gives the impression that the war strikes at random, killing a neighbor and sparing the writer: but an approach to war violence through the question of property suggests that vulnerability varies among groups, and that exposure to violence depends partly on material and social conditions.

In Rikhalat D.’s letter, the killings, destruction of houses, loss of cattle, and deaths are enumerated without any order or hierarchy. The author uses different registers and appeals to different levels of justification: material (precise enumeration of the losses), military (knowledge of weapons acquired by experience or hearsay), international law (type of bombs forbidden), Russian official discourse (inverted by saying that the true terrorists are those in the Kremlin).

Material destruction is not only seen as a loss, but as a threat to survival. Her neighbor’s death is a catastrophe because a vulnerable family has lost their breadwinner, and in all letters, the main question is: “what shall we do, how shall we provide for ourselves, if they destroy our apartment?”8 But to keep the household going and subsist is not only a necessity for the future. People have to survive during the bombings, and the need to pursue activities, feed cattle, collect wood, bake bread
and cook, puts them at risk.

Witnesses refer to these daily activities when they tell Human Rights organizations for example that during the bombing of Shaami-Yurt two young men were injured when they came out of the cellar to fetch water, or that when Russian planes started to drop cluster bombs on Aldy, “I was getting ready to make some bread for my father” (HRW 2000c). This reference to daily economic activities is, to some extent, a means of honoring the dead, remembering their last moments or giving them a lost individuality, like this woman talking about her sister’s brother-in-law after the Novye Aldy massacres: “He had been shot in the mouth, his body was lying outside the gates. He had working gloves on – he was always working, sweeping the yard, repairing something” (HRW 2000c).

Finally, these references to peaceful daily activities act as a reminder that the interviewee is a civilian. Indeed, the Chechens who testify to Human Rights organizations during this period speak within a discursive field dominated by Russian official discourse, according to which all remaining residents in Chechnya are fighters and potential terrorists (Le Huérou and Regamey 2008). By mentioning their daily peaceful activities they contradict this discourse and recall that they are civilians, but also express their despair and incomprehension at this stigmatization: “We came here by car, but our car was bombed and is destroyed into pieces, and a car, I mean, it’s not a bandit and not a terrorist.”

As in Rikhalat D.’s letter the killing of cattle is frequently mentioned in the letters of village people: “a ground-to-ground missile completely destroyed our quarter, killed cattle, chickens, ducks, etc. On the eve of winter, we were left without shelter and without economic means.” Cattle are not only central for survival, but also for Chechen identity, according to Chechen writer Sultan Yashurkaev: “even if he has an apartment, the Chechen dreams of a house. And even in the city, he has cattle, chickens, turkeys, sheep. He does not see it as a burden, in the same way that children and fidelity to traditions are the basis of a real Chechen family” (Yashurkaev 2006: 216).

On the other hand, cattle expose inhabitants to particular risk: those who graze cattle outside villages are exposed to bombing and mines, and come close to Russian military bases which are often set up in the open field or in former farm buildings. In December 1999, in Alkhan-Yurt, a young man disappeared after he went to look for the family cow and his
headless body was finally found on the other side of the River Sunzha, where the Russian military were based (HRW 2000b). The need to look after the livestock also puts at risk those who succeeded in leaving their villages for Ingushetia. Sharip Ch., from Katyr-Yurt, told FIDH, that he was injured on 5 February 2000, because, after he managed to get his family out, he returned home to feed his cows and his chickens when the shelling resumed (FIDH 2000a: 27).

The exposure of victims to violence is thus increased by the need to protect or check cattle, possessions or houses. Kheida Makhaouri, who was shot and left for dead by Russian soldiers in Grozny, recounts that she left her shelter because she “decided to take advantage of the lull to take a look at [her] home” (FIDH 2000a: 40).

Houses are both a shelter essential for survival and a central element of the victim’s identity: “For 30 years I built this house, I have worked all my life in a hospital. And in a few seconds I am out on the street.”13 “My house, my farm, my cattle are completely destroyed. Imagine that all that was acquired over a lifetime went down in ashes before the winter season. I am left completely naked.”14 When his house was destroyed in 1995, the surgeon Hassan Baiev saw in this personal experience an embodiment of a larger national identity: “It seemed we Chechens spend our energies building our houses and our lives, only to have them devastated and to start rebuilding them again” (Baiev 2003: 116).

However, houses are not only a symbol of a private sphere the war bursts into. They are also extremely concrete edifices, defined by their architecture, the strength of the building materials used, the existence or not of a basement. Sultan Yashurkaev regretted during the first war that “the greatest wealth in this country, which the Almighty has clearly abandoned, can only be a very deep concrete cellar, and we have none. I cannot count on anything else to prolong my life, neither the UN committees nor the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the Helsinki Group, or the charter of Human rights” (Iachourkaev 2006: 14).

Buildings provide different degrees of protection depending on their design and their solidity, which in turns depends on the money invested, on the social status of the residents or owners. Housing conditions, which correspond in part to economic and social inequalities, expose people differently to the dangers of war. The same could be said of the possession of a car, allowing its owners to leave when the situation
worsens. Those who could not leave Grozny, lacking money to pay for transport or a flat in Ingushetia, frequently express the feeling that the poorest inhabitants were the most vulnerable, like this woman from Novye Aldy, talking after the February 2000 massacre: “We are poor, we have nothing. The rich, they are all gone, those who have money, they could leave. And here there is nothing, no food, no drink, no house, nothing’s left” (Baisaev et al. 2000).

“Even little girls here have diamonds”: looting, symbolic appropriation, and violence

As soon as Russian federal troops entered Chechnya, reports emerged of looting. All the testimonies point to the systematic and organized character of this looting, but also to pointless theft and gratuitous violence: even baby’s necessities are taken, the cattle is killed but not eaten (FIDH 2000b: 22). After a mopping-up operation in Starye Atagi in September 2000, a woman protested:

When the soldiers left, we went into the house and saw complete chaos. The expensive plates in the cupboards were all smashed; there weren’t any more clothes in the closet. Even the bed linen was taken away. All that was left was broken, cut up with knives, rendered unusable.

(Memorial 2002)

Indeed, looting and destruction of property “often occurred simultaneously. … The confiscation of the most precious and smallest items by robbers was accompanied by the spoiling of the rest of the property – furniture, carpets, glassware and other household goods” (Dmitrievski et al. 2009b: 274). This link between looting and destruction suggests a specific logic of violence, but discloses also the symbolic significance of objects in war.

According to Randall Collins’ “microsociology of violence,” “looting is the device for building mass participation” (Collins 2008: 247). Violence against property can act as a trigger to violence: since violence against things and property is held to be less serious than violence against people, it can draw in all soldiers, even those who would have been reluctant to exert physical violence on people. Looting is a way to create solidarity among the group, and the feeling of solidarity in looting
is even more important than the material incentives. Moreover, “whatever is damaged is breached as far as social restraint is concerned” (Collins 2008: 246), and destruction plays a crucial role in the creation of “moral holidays.” This “temporary breakdown in normal social controls … where the feeling prevails that everyday restraints are off” is for Collins a precondition for violence (Collins 2008: 243).

Looting and destruction are thus a way of discharging energy, and creating an atmosphere of “moral holidays,” a world where soldiers are conquerors, where everything is a trophy and can be taken for free. Moreover, this violence occurs in a particular world, the world of war, where objects have another “life,” that is they are given another significance and other proprieties are attached to them.

This is because the usual world of things changes with the war, the inhabitants’ perception of the places they live in and the objects they use is turned upside down, and the difference between what was once “one’s” world (space, things) and the “others” “world is blurred by the war.16" Objects not only take on a completely different value in war time (matches, candles, for example, when there is neither electricity nor heating), but also a totally different function. Thus, pans and other containers are used to gather the remains of loved ones: on 31 December 1999, Issa A., from the Staropromyslovski district in Grozny, gathered the burned remains of his mother and sister by “picking up the bones from among the pieces of slate [from the collapsed roof] and putting them in a basin” (HRW 2000a).

Moreover, this upheaval in the world of things has a consequence for the notion of private property: everything happens as if this notion were temporarily suspended during some periods of the war. Even if it is not a matter of extreme necessity, taking things from abandoned apartments is not perceived as a transgression as it would be in peacetime.

In her diary, Polina Zherebtsova, who was then a schoolgirl in Grozny, recalls how some inhabitants survived during the Grozny bombings of 1999–2000 by eating or using what was left by their neighbors. When her mother, who refused on principle to take anything that was not “hers,” leaves her dirty old sweater in place of a clean one she has found, arguing that it can be cleaned after the war, when there is water, and thus “people will see that we had no choice,” the gesture appears completely incongruous to her daughter (Zherebtsova 2011: 140). Zherebtsova also remembers how apartments were simply ransacked. The fact that
civilians were also engaged in looting is never mentioned in the testimonies gathered by Human Rights organizations, but Sultan Yashurkaev also noted in his diary during the first Chechen war that “a host of people equipped with carts, wheelbarrows, bicycles were busy moving the property of others from devastated apartments and houses. I was struck by the proportions and openness of this phenomenon” (Iachourkaev 2006: 339).

We may suppose that this change of attitude towards objects and the impression that everything can be got for free is even stronger among soldiers. Reading Zakhar Prilepin, a writer who himself went through the war in Chechnya, sometimes gives the impression that Chechnya is a kind of land of milk and honey for the Russian army, where everything is left at their disposal and where during a mopping-up operation, soldiers enter the cellar and come out with their “mouths full of nuts and other sweets” (Prilepine 2007: 83). Nevertheless, this appropriation of “free” goods is not exempt of apprehension: when the group finds some peanuts, and everybody stuffs their pockets with some peanuts, suddenly “somebody has a doubt: they may be poisoned” (Prilepine 2007: 83).

This literary shaping of soldiers’ experience, based on an intimate knowledge of this war, gives us an insight into the soldiers’ perceptions, for which sources are scarce. Military journalist Sergei Tiutiunik also writes that during the second Chechen campaign “bandits started to fill with poison everything from vodka to bread,” and that abandoned objects were stuffed with explosive devices, because “everything that sparks interest can be mined, even a pack of cigarettes” (Tiutiunik 2005: 96). Abandoned objects are at the heart of a vicious circle of suspicion: the civilians who left them are suspected of evil intentions towards Russian troops – an accusation consistent with an official discourse that identified all Chechen inhabitants as potential enemies (Le Huérou and Regamey 2008).

Sometimes, to Tiutiunik’s regret, Russian troops “consider Chechnya as our grandfathers looked at Germany in 1945” (Tiutiunik 2005: 100). This is particularly obvious, he says, in the attitude towards pillaging, when looted objects are regarded as legitimate trophies. General Troshev refers also to World War II and Germany in his memoirs (Troshev 2001). This comparison can appear as a way of “normalizing” these practices: trophies were part of the post-war Soviet material culture (Moine 2013), the appropriation of goods was implicitly authorized by Soviet military
authorities in occupied Germany (Budnitskii 2009: 657) and has never been stigmatized since.

Looting also has a symbolic dimension: taking objects belonging to the enemy, and especially jewelry, destroying them, using them for other purposes, is a way to mark a symbolic victory over the enemy. So the carpets, a sign of wealth and symbol of the intimacy of a house, which are sometimes used to bury the dead, are used to decorate tanks, to sit more comfortably on them or are laid down in the mud in military camps.17

Russian soldiers serve in an impoverished army, in a country that went through an economic crash in the 1990s and a financial crisis in 1998. They are shaped by a popular culture dominated by representations of the Chechen mafia and the ability of Caucasians to make money at the expense of Russians (Russell 2002). Looting can thus be felt as a way to re-establish a certain justice, for soldiers who think that the Chechens live better than the rest of the inhabitants of the Russian Federation and may share the opinion of this veteran of the second Chechen war: “Chechen houses are rich: marble, crystal, tiles, nearly everywhere” (Rechkalov 2003).

This wealth can also be mentioned as an explanation of or justification for violence. In December 1999, in Alkhan-Yurt, Fatima A. recalled that when the soldiers entered her cellar:

the mildest curses were, “Look at these bitches, how rich they are”, and “We will fuck you all”. According to several witnesses who talked to Human Right Watch, a contract soldier went up to a five-year-old girl with earrings, and said, “look, even little girls here have diamonds”, and ripped off the earrings, tearing the ear lobes of the girl [the stones were imitation].

(HRW 2000b)

“Putin told us to take our salary here”: looting and the war economy

“Asan wants blood” According to General Bazanov, one of the main characters in Vladimir Makanin’s novel Asan, Chechen insurgents inform each other on upcoming ambushes or military operation by referring to Asan, a bloodthirsty pagan idol from the distant Chechen
past. To convince his interlocutors, Bazanov turns the radio to catch the insurgent frequency, but instead of the expected coded message, they hear … “Asan wants money.” The economic dimension is central in this book, which, like Makanin’s other novels, plays with Russian literary tradition. Major Zhilin, an avatar of Tolstoy’s *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, sells to the Russian troops the fuel he is supposed to supply them with, and is mostly busy getting enough money to build himself a house somewhere in Russia. The book’s recurring alternation “Asan wants blood/Asan wants money” points to the interconnection between violence and business.

Quoting literature helps us here to understand the interaction between money and war in contemporary Russia, but forces us also to realize that fiction is sometimes all we have to grasp the economic rationales for violence. An analysis of the “economy of civil war” (Jean and Rufín 1996; Humphreys 2003; Ballantine and Nitzschke 2005), the different resources of the conflicting parties (pilfering of natural resources, extortion, drug traffic, misappropriation of international aid), remains to be written for the Chechen conflict. Sources are silent on the economic support given by civilian population to the insurgents, as well as on extortions and requisitions people were submitted to. Several sources point to the involvement of the Russian military in the export from the Republic of oil, ferrous and non-ferrous metals, industrial equipment, etc. (Dmitrievski *et al.* 2009b: 277). This economy has never been analyzed in detail, nor has the circulation of weapons between the Russian army and Chechen insurgents been really documented, though “in Chechnya, it is no secret that many Chechen militia directly or indirectly acquire weapons from the soldiers” (Bagrov 2000d).

Acknowledging this difficulty in documenting large-scale looting, my aim here is to focus on what existing Human Rights reports, together with media coverage, allow us to see of the different dimensions of the war economy in Chechnya. I argue that systematic looting and the violent “free market” around military bases ultimately hinder the “normalization” that civilian authorities have tried to promote ever since 2000.

On 10 February 2000, five days after the massacre of Novye Aldy, V. was arrested and got in a truck with fifteen other men:

The soldiers went slowly with us in the truck along the street. If the
gates of a house were locked, they broke it open with a pickaxe or kicked it open. … While we went along the street, they detained men as well as stolen goods. … In Rasaev’s two-story house, they took ten microwave ovens, several carpets, kitchen utensils, dishes. The looting went on for two hours.

(HRW 2000b)

This testimony shows not only how violence against property and people happen simultaneously, but also what objects excite the greed of Russian soldiers. Looting is meant to improve the every-day life of soldiers, but also to feed the networks of economic exchange. Objects that can be of immediate use (honey, nuts, food and drink) are confiscated straightaway. During a raid in Gekhi that led to the arrest and disappearance of three young men, on the eve of a Muslim holiday “the servicemen searched the house and seized the applicants’ possessions, in particular money (12,000 rubles), clothes, a tape recorder, a vacuum cleaner, watches and all the dishes cooked for the holiday celebration” (ECHR 2010).

But looted objects are not only kept for personal use, as a Russian war veteran explained: “in general, electric equipment was valued. In the material support platoon, they readily exchanged them for food” (Rechkalov 2003). According to the journalist Iuri Bagrov, who worked for Radio Svoboda in Chechnya at the start of the second war, “from the beginning of the second Chechen campaign, many officers already managed to enrich themselves. Almost every officer who ranks above lieutenant has a television, a videotape recorder, a stereo, a VCR” (Bagrov 2000b). Indeed, federal forces confiscate what can be easily resold or exchanged: audio-video and household appliances, clothes, utensils, carpets, and also building material. In Urus-Martan, the soldiers went to the cemetery, “where outbuildings were dismantled, and they took away slates, timber, bricks, shovels and other equipment that had been stored there” (Lasaev 2001).

Though the description of objects taken by Russian troops testifies to Russia’s membership of a globalized world of consumption, there are still similarities with the type of objects taken in Germany during the Second World War: clothes, household appliances, cultural goods (VCRs and stereos instead of gramophones), and means of locomotion. Soviet soldiers were eager to get bicycles (Budnitskii 2009), while in Chechnya
cars provoke particular interest: “on the territory of military units …
there are a large number of light vehicles. These cars were seized by the
military. Here you can see all makes – from luxury SUVs to the Russian
made ‘Zhiguli’” (Bagrov 2000b).

In March 2000, the Russian government declared the abolition of the
so-called “campaign money,” the bonus given to all soldiers who fought
in Chechnya (Bagrov 2000a). We cannot assert with certainty that there
is a direct link between this reduction of allowances and the robberies.
But some victims’ declarations suggest that the soldiers themselves saw
looting as a material compensation, as this woman recalls after a
mopping-up operation in Starye Atagi:

I asked them why they bullied people, why they stole and
rampaged. They answered that they had an authorization from their
superiors. They said, Russia cannot pay them, and Putin ordered
them to collect their salary by themselves here.

(Memorial 2002)

But looting and the reintroduction of the looted goods into a circuit of
exchanges inside and outside Chechnya is only a part of the war
economy. A real business develops around military units – a mix of free
market and extreme violence. This war economy relies on continual
contacts between the military and civilians, where the military are at the
same time the main source of danger and the main opportunity for
earning money and/or doing business.

First, it seems that the presence of Russian military units boosts the
economy. In April 2000:

many residents of Chechnya are engaged in carrying food from
Ingushetia to Chechnya. They carry mainly cigarettes, beer and
chocolates. This is precisely the most popular product mix among
the military, and they are the main buyers. Paradoxically, the
Chechens use the money to buy food from the same military.
However, in a slightly different assortment. In illegal soldiers’
markets you can buy everything – food, bedclothes, bandages, and
the prices are much lower than even on wholesale markets in
neighboring Ingushetia.

(Bagrov 2000d)
But the dangers of this economic business around military units can be illustrated by the case of Starye Atagi, to which Memorial devoted a report in 2002. After December 1999, “local ‘businessmen’, mostly teenagers, purchased petrol and car parts from the soldiers coming to the outskirts of the village, or traded them for food, alcohol and cigarettes” (Memorial 2002). Very soon, though, it became evident that this spare parts trade was linked to violence. In September 2000, the police chief of Starye Atagi, Askhad Bagdalo, realized that the soldiers of the 205th motorized rifle brigade serving at a checkpoint were selling spare parts, which most probably belonged to the cars of two young men, whose bodies had just been found not far from the village. Bagdalo threatened the soldiers with taking them to justice; the same evening, he was shot by a sniper (Memorial 2002).

Finally, an inherent part of this war business is the trade in people, the payment of ransoms to free those arrested during mopping-up operations by federal forces:

In such cases, money was never transmitted directly to officials; there were always intermediaries among the locals. Other detainees were released in exchange for weapons … The shape and size of ransom, in each case were different … Money for the release was collected by the entire village.

(Memorial 2002)

A new form of economy seems to be developing around intermediaries who play a special role. Even if the rationale for “filtration camps” is well known (Cherkasov 2003), we know almost nothing of what happened in Chechen society, on what terms this “buying back” took place, the role of intermediaries, what family or village solidarities were involved.

Thus the presence of Russian military bases hinders the restoration of a normal economy, not only because of the systematic extortion at checkpoints (FIDH 2000a), but also because of the impossibility for Chechen economic actors to restore their pre-war activities. The case of Khanbatay Khamidov, who owned a bakery business in the Nadterechny region and won a case against Russia in the European Court of Human Rights, is emblematic of this impossibility.

On 13 October 1999 the Tambov consolidated police units of the
Ministry of the Interior occupied the Khamidov property. The police declared that “they would only vacate the buildings after the termination of the hostilities in the region” (ECHR 2007: §17). More than a year later, in January 2001, a local court ruled in Khamidov’s favor, but on 24 February 2001 “a bailiff’s attempts to enforce the judgment proved to have been in vain, as the police units refused to comply with the writ of execution” (ECHR 2007: §29). The Tambov police unit vacated the buildings in April 2001, “but relocated to the applicant’s plot of land instead”(ECHR 2007: §32). In June 2001, the Tambov police units finally left, but they were immediately replaced by the Tula police (ECHR 2007: §37). In February 2002, the Tula units left, but were replaced by police units from Kaluga. The police units finally left the applicant’s property in June 2002, but Khamidov could not receive any compensation before the Russian courts. The reason given was that “the plaintiff’s arguments that the Ministry of the Interior adversely occupied their property have proved groundless” (ECHR 2007: §50).

“You’ll be held personally responsible for this” – impunity as an additional dimension of violence

On 17 December 1999, Nikolay Koshman, Russian deputy prime minister and acting representative for the Russian president in Chechnya, visited Alkhan-Yurt together with the Moscow-based Chechen businessman Malik Saidulayev. Alkhan-Yurt is Saidulayev’s home town, and he showed in front of the camera his own house, which had been completely destroyed. Saidulayev and Koshman found several caches of goods stolen by Russian soldiers, including a tent full of blankets and carpets and a military truck loaded with video recorders and other appliances. Among the stolen items, Saidulayev shows Koshman some plates that came from his own house (Dmitrievski et al. 2009b: 77). On an amateur video, Nikolay Koshman can be seen angrily upbraiding army officers in the village. “You’ll be held personally responsible for this,” he tells one officer, who appears to hold the rank of lieutenant colonel. “I’ve never seen anything like it anywhere in Chechnya” (Wood 1999).

In spite of these promises and threats, “for seven months of war, no case has been opened against the military by the military prosecutor” (Bagrov 2000c). Three years later, no real progress had been made. In April 2003, according to official figures, only nineteen servicemen had
been sentenced to prison by courts martial for crimes against Chechen civilians, and only two for robbery (Memorial 2003).

While impunity prevails, the opportunity for those who have had their property destroyed and looted to get any compensation is nearly non-existent. Governmental Decree no. 404 of 4 July 2003 entitles all permanent residents of the Chechen Republic who lost their housing and any possessions after 12 December 1994 to receive compensation up to the amount of RUB 300,000 for housing and RUB 50,000 for other possessions (ECHR 2011). But the possibility of obtaining any compensation is hindered by the practice of the Russian investigative system and Russian courts.

This is an incentive for applicants to take the affair to the European Court of Human Rights, which has decided at least three cases linked to the destruction of flats and property during bombings in January 1995 and between October 1999 and January 2000 (ECHR 2011). In all these cases, district courts in Moscow and Stavropol used the same reasoning. They recognized that the applicants’ property had been destroyed during military hostilities, and even during an attack by Federal forces. But they noted that under Article 1069 of the Russian Civil Code, the state is liable for damage caused only by unlawful actions on the part of its agents. Yet, according to the court, the military operation in the Chechen Republic had been launched by virtue of relevant presidential and governmental decrees; therefore, there was no unlawful action on the part of state bodies and no grounds to seek compensation.

In this text, we have explored various dimensions of material violence, how attacks on goods and property are perceived by Human Rights organizations and the victims themselves, the link between violence against things and violence against persons, the changes brought by the war in the notion of “one’s own” property, the symbolic dimension of looting as well as the economic rationales for violence at a micro-level. Lack of compensation or reparation for stolen goods and destroyed property adds a further layer to the violence experienced by the victims, challenges the foundations of Chechnya reconstruction, and reveals the long-lasting vulnerability of Chechnya’s people.

Note

1 This paper was written with the support of the Paris City Hall “Emergence(s)” Program (“Understanding Violence in Russia”).
2 I have used elsewhere official declarations by political and military authorities, as well as memoirs or fiction by former soldiers (Le Huérou and Regamey 2008; Regamey 2007; Regamey 2008). I will draw on these sources here also, but to a lesser extent, focusing mainly on Human Rights reports and showing that these reports allow us to grasp material violence even if they did not focus especially on this issue.

3 Russian Justice Initiative provides legal counsel to victims of Human Rights violations in Russia/North Caucasus, initiates litigation in the European Court of Human Rights and monitors the decisions of that body. This monitoring is available on www.srji.org/en/legal/cases (accessed 10 April 2013).

4 Cf. Criminal Code of the Russian Federation No. 63-FZ of 13 June 1996 (as last amended on 29 June 2009). The hierarchy of gravity of crimes was different in the Soviet Union from what it is in contemporary Russia, and destruction could entail the same punishment as murder, while theft of state property in large amounts could be punished by death (Article 93–1 of the RSFSR Penal code of 1960).

5 Indeed, as Kopyttoff points out, “In contemporary Western thought, we take it more or less for granted that things – physical objects and rights to them – represent the natural universe of commodities. At the opposite pole we place people, who represent the natural universe of individuation and singularization. This conceptual polarity of individualised persons and commoditised things is recent and, culturally speaking, exceptional” (Kopyttoff 1986: 64).

6 I thank Nathalie Moine for this reference.

7 This letter is one of several letters collected by I. Yakhiaev, president of the Chechen branch of the association Memorial and given to Alexander Sokolov, member of the Council of the Memorial HR Center in Tbilisi in November 1999. All these letters are written on different kinds of paper and signed; some of them are certified by the village administration. The writing and style of these documents has been retained when published on the Memorial website (http://memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/ncaucas/zajavl.htm). The style and expressions used have also been respected in the translation as far as possible.

8 Declaration signed by Malkan S. “living in Grozny, arrived in the village of Kurchaloi, Ordzhonikidze street, as a refugee, with my family of 10 persons.” No date (Chechnya inhabitants 1999).

9 Roza Kh., testimony given to the FIDH/Memorial fact finding mission on 7 February 2000 in the Sunzha Hospital (Nazran, Ingushetia); FIDH mission delegate field notes.

10 Letter by Koku Yu., from Ishkoi-Yurt, Gudermes region, refugee in Kurchaloi with her family of ten. No date (Chechnya inhabitants 1999).

11 Letter by Malika G, born 1969, from the village of Gekhi, region of Urus
Martan, 8 November 1999 (Chechnya inhabitants 1999).
12 Yashurkaev, who used to graze cows when he was a young boy, later bought a cow himself: “We survived thanks to this animal. Already an adult, when I was earning my living as a Soviet clerk, I repeatedly grumbled that I was going to get rid of it. Time had changed, I then said, now we live in cities; but I could not get rid of it. I was stopped by the feeling that it would be a betrayal, towards the cattle, and towards the past” (Iachourkaev 2006: 14).
14 Letter by Ali Z, born in 1950, living on Central Street in Gekhi, 8 November 1999, 10 a.m. (Chechnya inhabitants 1999).
15 “They even had bags, in which to put stolen goods, and some soldiers, like porters, were only engaged in carrying full bags and loading them into trucks” (Memorial 2002).
16 L. Polshikovas’s study of change in the perception of space by victims of violence in Chechnya demonstrates how violence and lack of security has led to a transformation of perception: what was before the “others’ world” becomes “one’s own” space and vice-versa. “Such objects as ‘home’ and ‘yard’, which are without doubt placed within ‘one’s own space’, have undergone a transformation in the minds of the people who had suffered violence. They remain ‘one’s own’ while not being the safety zone anymore.” On the other hand, “what used to be parts of ‘one’s own’ countryside world, like a poultry house, a juice factory, a potato facility, a cottage settlement or a mill, is now turned into ‘alien’ things. It is here that the filtration camps are located, as well as the military facilities where people disappear. … What used to be a garden cottage community is now a site of firing squad execution and a burial place of those executed extra-judicially. A village shop has become a place of torture” (Polshikova 2012: 7–8)
17 “When we were under Gudermes, remembers Iura, all the tents were full of carpets. We didn’t even have to step on the ground. From tent to tent there were carpet runners” (Kalinina 1996).

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11 Sufism in Chechnya

Its influence on contemporary society

Mairbek Vatchagaev

This article attempts to explain how Sufism in Chechnya today is being exploited by the various political forces in the republic in pursuit of their own ends. In stark contrast to followers of classical Sufism, the present-day adherents of Sufism in Chechnya are not characterized by their mysticism or, it follows, their detachment from politics. Sufi structures in Chechnya today are very openly and actively involved in the republic’s political life. Over time, the descendants of the sheikhs (spiritual leaders of Sufi brotherhoods) have become the leaders, in a certain sense, of political factions; it is they who decide who will cater for the interests of one or another Sufi brotherhood. This has led to a substantial change in the very nature of Sufism in Chechnya, which has in turn influenced changes in Chechen society as a whole. This article offers an explanation of the way in which this influence is exerted on Chechen society today, and of how it may impact on the socio-political situation in the near future.

Up until now, although many works on the role of Sufism in Chechen society exist, researchers have largely restricted themselves to exploring the historical extent of its introduction or to anthropological studies (Akaev 2011; Zel’kina 1999), or they have sought to elucidate the role played by one or another sheikh in the history of the nation (Akaev 1994; Nasukhanov 2008; Khaiba 2012; Rasanov 2009).

Furthermore, the modern historiography of Chechnya contains not a single work purporting to show the internal organization of a Sufi tariqa (Sufi brotherhood) and, accordingly, its virds (the Chechen term for the smaller brotherhoods within a given tariqa), as a fundamental component of the structure of Chechen society itself. It is precisely the tariqas which, at this point in the history of Chechen society, have weakened its kinship structure (the teip structure). And so the tariqas have over time become one of the factors weakening the position of clan and family
relations within Chechen society.

With this thesis as its starting point, this article will examine the changes which have occurred in the Sufi *tariyas* in the recent past, including under the conditions of military conflict in Chechnya. It will address the way in which they managed relationships during the wars, the factors driving society at a time of bloody conflicts, and the bearings by which Sufism is now trying to orient itself under conditions of neither war nor peace.

**Methodology**

Based on the author’s own fieldwork, which he undertook in Chechnya from 1996 to 1999 as research for a monograph, he has drawn conclusions concerning the material foundations and activities of the Sufi brotherhood structure. Between 2001 and 2005, the author’s work was based on video and audio recordings he obtained via assistants in Chechnya (Vatchagaev 2009).

The author made comparative studies: of the differing *tariyas* in Chechnya; of the various brotherhoods within one *tariqa*; and of various Sufi brotherhoods from the different *tariyas*. All of this has enabled him to garner a large amount of multi-faceted anthropological material on the current state of Sufism in Chechen society. During numerous discussions with the leaders of one or another Sufi brotherhood, it has become possible to see the internal politics of the *murids* (the members of a *vird*) somewhat differently.

The objective of this study is the attempt to show the deeper substance of the Sufi brotherhood structure at the present day. In point of fact, over the two centuries of Sufism’s presence within Chechen society, its practices have changed very considerably. Under the USSR, it was actually confined forcibly within the bounds of Soviet society, losing all contact with Sufi structures elsewhere in the world. Within this sealed environment, ethnic boundaries also established lines of demarcation.

In this work, the author only gives one facet of his conclusions as to the political activities of the Sufi element in society, namely its assumption of certain of the functions of political parties, and paying particular attention to elections.

**The politicization of Sufism**
The numerous Sufi brotherhoods that exist in Chechnya all belong to one of two *tariqas* known throughout the world: the Qadiriyya and the Naqshbandiya. These two *tariqas*, which became established in Chechen society in the nineteenth century, still remain fixtures for Chechens at the beginning of the twenty-first.

Each Sufi *tariqa* in Chechnya is represented by a great number of diverse Sufi brotherhoods (the *virds*). Each Sufi brotherhood represents the interests of a particular group of people within Chechen society. They function as a mechanism for the political regulation of Chechen society as opposed to a vehicle for the mystical teachings of one or another sheikh intent on bringing his brotherhood closer to understanding the mysteries of Islam (Vatchagaev 2011: 228).

Ever since the Sufi brotherhoods appeared in Chechnya, they have undergone significant transformations in their relationships with power. The Naqshbandiya Brotherhoods, which offered armed resistance to Russia’s conquest of Chechnya and which, following the conquest, organized uprisings in the years 1877–78, saw a large number reach an accommodation with the authorities in the Soviet period. While, in contrast, those of the Qadiriyya, who had come to Chechnya as opponents of both the war and of any possible compromise with imperial power, became antagonists during the Soviet era.

During Soviet rule in the country, the classical roots of Sufi traditions were lost. Chechen Sufism paid more attention to retaining religious practices and the ceremonial aspects; it became less spiritual. That thread linking a local sheikh to the wider Sufi world was lost. Sufism became completely bound up with the authority of the local sheikh. The entire history of a Sufi brotherhood was linked to the aggrandizement of the sheikh and to facts supporting the exclusiveness of their sheikh’s position of precedence in the international Sufi *silsila* (the genealogy of the *tariqas*). This led at times to contradictions with the foundations of Islam, as a brotherhood’s sheikh might be elevated to the level of the prophets.

At specific periods in Chechen history, the sheikhs have acted not as the leaders of Islamic groups but of political groups in Chechen society. In fact, the Sufi brotherhoods in Chechnya can be seen as prototypical “political parties,” meaning political movements promoting different interests for the Chechens. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the example of the collapse of the Russian Empire, when Bolsheviks,
monarchists, socialists, and Islamic theologians all tried to bring as many murids from the various Sufi brotherhoods over to their side as they could.

The followers of Sheikh Bamat-Girai-Khadji Mitaev considered the Bolsheviks to be incapable of taking the lead in the race for power, and so their approaches to the Bolsheviks were only made on the basis that they might potentially be temporary allies in the struggle against White general Denikin. These forces were led at the time by Sheikh Ali Mitaev. The followers of Sugaip-Mulla Goisumov, in contrast, found it possible to reach agreement with the Bolsheviks. They did so as a counterweight not only to Denikin’s army but also to the Dagestani Imam Gotsinskii’s pretensions of becoming the single leader of the whole Muslim North Caucasus. The effect was also felt here of Sugaip-Mulla’s personal hostility towards Sheikh Uzin-Khadzhi Saltinskii,⁴ who had declared the creation of a Northern Caucasus Emirate, with its capital in the Chechen village of Vedeno. Some individual sheikhs, such as the followers of Sheikh Solsa-Khadzhi Yandarov, observed a strict neutrality towards all the warring forces which arose between 1917 and 1919.

The division of the Sufi brotherhoods along political lines was directly related to the question of whom to form alliances alongside in the new, post-Tsarist Chechnya. In this situation, the sheikhs acted as political leaders, while their followers (the murids) were their electorate, over whom the political forces fought, each trying to pick up as many supporters as possible in order to establish their authority in Chechnya (Kozlov et al. 2011: 261–82).

In this instance, we are not dealing with parties as usually understood, but with indirect imitations. The Sufi brotherhoods on the ground work towards their own aims and objectives, without acknowledging any of the parties that are formed in Russia, most often at Moscow’s behest. These aims are by and large the same for each: to promote their people in the structures of power; to protect the interests of the members of their brotherhood; to help members of the brotherhood to receive higher education; to help them find employment, and so on. Naturally, the brotherhoods do not have manifestos, unlike political parties for whom such action plans are essential. In our example, all this is done exclusively through the authority of a family member of the sheikh, to whom the fate of the brotherhood has been entrusted. His actions are not to be discussed, let alone criticized; he is not to be bypassed, or even
offered advice. This autocratic structure is endemic to nearly every Sufi brotherhood in Chechnya.

The position of Sufism following the establishment of Soviet power in Chechnya

The alliance between Bolsheviks and Islam in the USSR lasted until 1924. When it became clear to the Bolsheviks that their hold on power was assured, the authorities embarked on a rupture with their erstwhile Muslim allies. There followed mass arrests and shootings of sheikhs, as well as their most devoted murids and turkkhs. According to the authorities’ plan, the terror unleashed by the regime against Islamic figures was to have removed the spiritual buttresses of those forces which may at some stage in the future have formed a resistance to the Bolsheviks (Akhetmekhanov and Dukhaev 2007: 21).

Thanks to the efforts of those who rallied around their sheikhs during the Soviet era, militant atheism was not able to undermine the faith. The very history of the Sufi brotherhoods is the history of a struggle for spiritual survival which required constant resistance to the Soviet regime. Sufism’s flight underground allowed for the basics of Islam to be preserved within society far better than in those regions where there had been no Sufism. In those places where Sufi brotherhoods had been active – in Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan – Islam was better safeguarded than in those regions where Sufism had no footing: in Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaev-Cherkessia, and Adygeia. There was not a single mosque in these latter republics. Muslims in these republics to a great extent relapsed into pagan beliefs, mistaking these for Islamic norms (amulets, pagan festivals passed off as national holidays, traditions mixing national and Islamic factors, etc.) (Babich and Solov’eva 2004: 46).

The Sufi brotherhoods also played a significant role during the wholesale deportation of Chechens in 1944. The Sufi structure along with the teip (clan) framework became an additional support at this time. The authorities tried all kinds of ways to combat the influence of religious figures. According to the plans of senior party figures, visits to Chechnya made by the Sheikhs Abdul-Khamid Yandarov and Baudin Arsanov6 ought once and for all to have discredited the men themselves and demoralized their followers. Those in power assumed that they could use the sheikhs’ authority for their own ends. But in fact everything
worked out to the contrary: the sheikhs did not employ their authority in support of Soviet power, yet managed to use the latter’s strength in order to help their murids. Even those thousands of Chechens who, at the sheikhs’ request, had surrendered themselves to the authorities after the deportation in Chechnya were not shot. They were arrested and exiled, but given the solemn oath of the Chechen sheikhs, the authorities were compelled to guarantee their lives. In this way, the sheikhs saved thousands of their countrymen, rather than handing them over to their destruction as atheistic Soviet propaganda subsequently suggested had happened (Vatchagaev 2009: 202).

Following the Chechen return from deportation, classical Sufism as such was entirely relegated to second place. During this period, the Sufi brotherhoods operating deep underground tried in all kinds of ways to keep young people within their sphere of vision, rather than let them succumb to the influence of militant atheism.

**Contemporary Sufi brotherhoods in Chechnya and the first open clash of the tariqas**

In Chechnya today, the Qadiriyya tariqa is represented by six Sufi brotherhoods, while there are 22 Naqshbandiya Brotherhods (Vatchagaev 2009: 285).

The fact that there are two tariqas (The Naqshbandiya and Qadiriyya) introduces a peculiar sort of competition principle into Chechen society. This is manifested in attempts to place members in positions of power: obtaining appointments as imams to mosques, and as qadis7 in villages with a mixture of tariqas. At the same time, although perhaps slightly less acutely, there is also competition between the Sufi brotherhoods within the same tariqa. In villages where the majority of residents belong to the Naqshbandiya, members of Sufi brotherhoods may plot against one another. Equally, in those places where Qadiriyya adherents form the majority, they may also conduct secret intrigues against one or another rival Sufi brotherhood from the ranks of their own Qadiriyya tariqa.

Following the collapse of the USSR, as the Sufi brotherhoods emerged from deep underground, they first clashed over the post of chief mufti in Chechnya. In the run up to this episode, it was plain to see that forces were aligned on the basis of attitudes towards Russia. The Naqshbandiya came out in favor of an alliance with Russia within a newly reformulated Federation, while the Qadiriyya in contrast stood for a complete
withdrawal from the Russian Federation and a declaration of independence. The selection of a Naqshbandiya member as mufti drove the Qadiriyya into constant conflict over this issue. The outcome of this two-year resistance was that Qadiriyya adherents of the teachings of Kunta-Khadzhi managed in 1993 to claim the post of mufti for themselves, deposing Mukhammad-Bashir-Khadzhi Arsanukaev (Muzaev 1999: 156) of the Naqshbandiya tariga and replacing him with Magomed-Khadzhi Alsabekov. This victory allowed the Qadiriyya to consolidate its position against a background of demonstrators unhappy with the position of the Naqshbandiya mufti regarding separation from Russia. The Naqshbandiya were unwilling to surrender this post to the Qadiriyya as a result of this pressure from the demonstrators, and right until Mukhammad-Bashir-Khadzhi Arsanukaev’s death in 1998 they considered him their lawful mufti; he was in addition officially recognized as such by the Russian government in Moscow (Roshchin 2011: 40).

**War in Chechnya (1994–96): the second open confrontation between the tarigas**

One of the peculiarities of Islam in Chechnya is the fact that the Sufi brotherhoods have preserved the military structure that has characterized them ever since the Caucasian wars of the nineteenth century. Each Sufi brotherhood, depending on the scale of its distribution among the Chechen population, is divided into units of a thousand, a hundred, or ten men. Each subdivision is headed by an elected leader (Vatchagaev 2009: 36). This structure allows for a rapid response to anything that happens in Chechnya, be this war or, for example, elections. In each population center, one or another brotherhood leader will assume responsibility for dealing with all the issues that affect the members of that brotherhood.

Since the beginning of the political stand-off between Chechnya and Russia in 1991, the Chechen Sufi brotherhoods have revealed their political positions regarding what was occurring. A majority of the members of Naqshbandiya Brotherhoods, and all without exception in the Qadiriyya adopted a stance in favor of independence. The followers of the Naqshbandiya Brotherhood of Sheikh Deni Arsanov declared themselves clear opponents of the Chechen authorities at the time, taking the stance that relations with Russia should not be worsened. Furthermore, against the background of escalating problems in
Chechnya, the Russian authorities sought to exploit the situation within Sufism for their own ends. Accordingly, Akhmed Arsanov, the grandson of Sheikh Deni Arsanov, was appointed as Russian president Boris Yeltsin’s representative in Chechnya. This was the first attempt following the collapse of the USSR to reach out to the Chechens using a respected figure, one of the descendants of the Sufi sheikhs (Kogan-Yasni 1998).

However, it is clear that Moscow had overestimated the influence of the Naqshbandiya sheikh Deni Arsanov, notwithstanding the size and popularity of his brotherhood. Even the brotherhood of Sheikh Doku Shaptukaev, although closely related to the “Arsanov” brotherhood, did not express open support for Moscow. Several followers of Naqshbandiya sheikhs from the mountainous area of Chechnya came out in support of Dzokhar Dudayev’s government in its confrontation with Moscow. To these should be added one of the most influential and respected brotherhoods in all of Chechnya: the brotherhood of Sheikh Tashu-Khadzh from Saiasanov, Yusup-Khadzh from Koshke’di, Geza-Khadzh from Zandak. It should be noted that among those who chose not to express an opinion on the confrontation was the brotherhood of Absat-sheikh from Alleroi (although the entire inner circle of Aslan Maskhadov were followers of this sheikh), Suaip-mulla from Shali, and Usman-Khadzh from Lakha-Nevre (even if Aslan Maskhadov considered himself a murid of this sheikh).

The Sufi brotherhoods did however clearly express their positions during the military operations in Chechnya between 1994–96, when the Russian army encroached into Chechnya with the aim of putting an end to the separatist movement in the republic, and bringing it back under federal control from Moscow.

The support of the Sufi brotherhoods in the war against Russia was an obvious phenomenon. Units named for the brotherhoods they were drawn from entered the battlefield. Units named for “Sheikh Kunta-Khadzh,” “Sheikh Tashu-Khadzh,” “Sheikh Ali Mitaev,” “Sheikh Yusup from Koshke’di,” and others took part in military operations in Chechnya. Which is to say that several Chechen military units were formed on the basis of their allegiance to particular Sufi brotherhoods, rather than along territorial lines or other features. Sometimes these units might be from just one village, but still formed from the murids of one or another sheikh. The members of the unit named after Sheikh Ali Mitaev
were mainly residents of the village Dadi-Yurt (Komsomol’skoe), in the Gudermes district. Whereas members of the unit named after Sheikh Tashu-Khadzhi were residents of the Nozhai-Yurt district, and *murids* of Sheikh Tashu-Khadzhi. Members of Yusup from Koshkel’di’s unit were residents of the Gudermes and Nozhai-Yurt districts of Chechnya, and so on.

It would be a mistake to think that every *murid* without exception would hold to the opinion of their sheikh. It is, after all, a personal choice. However, the opinions of the sheikhs should not be entirely discounted. Their influence on the older generation was high. Whether or not this war was to be acknowledged as “holy” depended on how those in the older generation would make their decision between the sheikhs and the politicians. The main basis on which the Muslims of Chechnya would participate in this war with Russia would essentially be a declaration of jihad. The mufti of Chechnya, Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov, took on this mission, calling the population of Chechnya to jihad against Russia.

It is no surprise that the first Salafist unit was formed in 1995 on the pattern of the Sufi units in Chechnya; it was commanded by Sheikh Fatkhi, who, although Chechen by nationality, was born in Jordan.\(^{12}\)

Actually, this *jamaat*\(^{13}\) was formed as a separate element, not as part of the Chechen army. They considered themselves separate, with their own command structure, and they considered their subordination to Chief of Staff Aslan Maskhadov to be nominal, at best. In answer to the objection that this disrupted the basis of the Chechen Army’s unity, they referred to the construction of the Chechen Army on the principle of units formed from the followers of particular sheikhs, and the creation of territorial and *teip* units.\(^{14}\) This same structure of disparate formations allowed them to insist on their own separate sub-unit as an Islamic *jamaat*. This particular element was made up of those who shared the beliefs of Salafism.

**The Brotherhoods and the 1997 elections in Chechnya**

Sufism in Chechnya graphically demonstrated its political nature after the war. The Sufi factor was far from being secondary in the elections in January 1997. The individual candidates did not conceal that they were being backed by particular Sufi brotherhoods. Those candidates who ignored the input of the Sufi brotherhoods failed to win even one percent
of the overall vote at the election. Thus, the candidate Shamil Basayev immediately staked his hopes on all the votes of the followers of Sheikh Bamat-Girei-Khadzhi Mitaev and Ali Mitaev. He recounted stories of how his grandfather had worked together with the two sheikhs. Everything indicated that this could in fact have been the case. Considering that their followers made up a large proportion of the population of the foothills region of Chechnya, he thus became the main rival to Aslan Maskhadov.

Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, the successor to President Dzhokar Dudayev, who had been killed in 1996, also tried to play on the fact that he was a long-time follower of Sheikh Bamat-Girei-Khadzhi, but set against his demands for the introduction of sharia law and the formation of an Islamic state, this did not seem particularly convincing.

Literally just before the elections, Aslan Maskhadov’s election campaign team managed to bring followers of the Mitaev’s Sufi brotherhood over to their side at a secret meeting held in Grozny, at a private residence belonging to one of Sheikh Ali Mitaev’s followers. When Mitaev’s *murids* learnt of this meeting, and of their leader’s positive disposition towards Maskhadov, they took this as an instruction to vote for him. This came as a surprise to presidential candidate Shamil Basayev, since as a result he suffered complete defeat, without exception, in every population center where the majority of residents were followers of Sheikh Mitaev.

**Sufism in Kremlin policy (the second Chechen military campaign)**

Following the failed experiment of 1991, when the grandson of Sheikh Deni Arsanov was appointed as the Russian president’s representative in Chechnya, Moscow went for broke at the end of the 1990s. From the start of the second military campaign in autumn 1999, a course was set by the Russian authorities towards neutralizing the Sufi element among the ranks of the resistance. Moscow was able to find a compromise figure in Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov, who had been mufti of Chechnya since 1995: having made the call to holy war against the Russian army in 1995 had gained him popularity among the Chechen component of the armed resistance. The man who was recommended for the post of chief mufti by the Ichkerian leadership in the guise of Dzhokar Dudayev and Shamil Basayev turned out to be the man who could fulfill this
neutralizing role.

In the second military campaign, the Russian authorities were able to find a common language with Kadyrov, and in this way to create a schism among the ranks of the resistance. In contrast to the first military campaign, Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov considered that the war unleashed by the Salafists was nothing other than an attempt to destroy the fledgeling Chechen state through Russian hands. It can only be assumed that at some point at the very beginning of the campaign he still believed that an end might be put to the Salafists by those same Russian hands, and that he might remain at the head of an independent Ichkerian state. But Moscow’s plans for Chechnya were clear from the very beginning: Moscow had no intention of entering into dialogue with an independent leadership. This is precisely why the Kremlin, in the guise of President Vladimir Putin, categorically refused to enter into dialogue with the President of Ichkeria, Aslan Maskhadov. Moscow had to take revenge for the first military campaign it lost in Chechnya, and to re-establish Chechnya as nothing more than a subject of the Russian Federation. This was to serve as an example to anyone who might have wanted to talk about independence in the future. Moscow had decided to show that the price of independence for a Russian Federation subject would be excessively high.

Akhmad Kadyrov was able to convince a majority of Sufis in the republic that Moscow had no designs on their rights. Furthermore, everything was presented in such a way as to suggest that the war unleashed by the incursion of jamaats into Dagestan must as a consequence lead to a weakening of the Sufi majority’s forces in this war; a weakening which, it was plain, the Salafists would take advantage of, and was in fact their intent. And so, in contrast to the first military campaign, where the Sufi element was largely represented as an anti-Russian instrument in the hands of politicians, in the second campaign, Sufism was completely undermined by the actions of Kadyrov.

**Elections in Chechnya between 2003 and 2005**

Essentially the same thing that happened at the election of Aslan Maskhadov in 1997 also occurred at the 2003 elections in Chechnya. Among the candidates to become president of a pro-Russian Chechnya was a man who openly declared that he intended to rely on one of the biggest Sufi brotherhoods in Chechnya, that of Sheikh Mitaev, whose
murid he himself was. This was a well-thought-out move. Although a representative of the Qadiryya tariqa, the candidate Khusein Dzhabrailov could secure the support of followers of several Naqshbandiya sheikhs, too. For example, two founders of Sufi brotherhoods – Sheikh Bamat-Girei Khadzhi Mitaev, of the Qadiryya, and Sheikh Doku Shaptukaev, of the Naqshbandiya – were close friends during their lifetimes. This is precisely why followers of Qadiryya sheikh Bamat-Girei Khadzhi Mitaev always emphasize their respectful attitude to followers of the Naqshbandiya tariqa of Sheikh Doku Shaptukaev. The friendship between the two sheikhs has been transferred to the relationship between the two brotherhoods some one hundred years later. If Khusein Dzhabrailov were to be supported by the Naqshbandiya adherents of Doku Shaptukaev, there would then be a strong possibility of support from a related brotherhood, that of Deni Arsanov. As a result, the candidature of Khusein Dzhabrailov, which was not rated highly by Moscow, could have had the most realistic prospects of success among those whom Moscow had allowed to participate in the Chechen elections (Pravoyaia Initsiativa 2004). Things had progressed sufficiently far that Moscow, seeing the real danger of their own candidate failing, demanded in an unsubtle way that Khusein Dzhabrailov withdraw from the election, the pressure being brought to bear by means of a threat to blockade business activity within the Russian Federation. Khusein Dzhabrailov was compelled to withdraw his candidature in favor of the Kremlin’s candidate Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov (Newsru.com 2003).

The same scenario was repeated a year later, at the unscheduled Chechen presidential elections in 2004 when, at Moscow’s insistence, a renowned Chechen businessman from Moscow, Malik Saidulayev, withdrew his candidature in favor of the Kremlin nominee Alu Alkhanov (Newsru.com 2004). The fact that Moscow had not fully understood the ploys of candidates from the Sufi brotherhoods suggests that they had underestimated the power of the Sufi factor at elections.

And so it is very important to understand the general picture of how the interests of the Sufi brotherhoods in Chechnya are aligned. Of course, no-one has conducted surveys of the population; no-one has found out how many murids are in the Sufi brotherhoods of one or another sheikh. But it can be assumed, on the basis of the overall picture, that a comprehensive majority of the republic’s population today still identifies
itself with a Sufi structure. Putting it another way, around 90 per cent of Chechens are involved in actual politics through the Sufi brotherhoods which have been acting as – or, more precisely, as substitutes for – political parties over the last two hundred years.

In Chechnya at present there are no real political parties capable of representing the interests of various sections of the population: their place is taken by Sufi structures. And so the purpose of all the parties formed by the federal center is purely to act as levers for the administrative regulation of political processes, bypassing the actual nature of Chechen society at this time. Whilst the parties exist on paper (Hale 2006), they are exclusively a mechanism whereby the interests of the federal center can be expressed, nothing more.

**Kadyrov and Sufism in modern Chechnya**

Ramzan Kadyrov, the son of Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov, has gone still further than his father. He has become in some sense the inheritor in the republic of his father’s ideas, and enjoys complete trust from the Kremlin, and from Vladimir Putin personally. Ramzan Kadyrov has elevated Sufism to the level of a cult celebrating Russia’s state policy in Chechnya.

In his attempts to overcome armed resistance from his electorate, Ramzan Kadyrov began to use Sufi traditions in his propaganda. Moreover, taking advantage of the widespread trust shown him by federal forces, he began a large-scale program building mosques in every population center, or rebuilding mosques which had previously existed. This entails the construction of hundreds of mosques in Chechnya. This total includes such grandiose edifices as “The Heart of Chechnya,” which can accommodate ten thousand people, and is ornamented with gold and with exclusive Swarovsky crystal chandeliers (Robsalt.ru 2008; Chechnyattravel 2012).

As part of this process of returning to the Sufi brotherhoods their due, Ramzan Kadyrov reconstructed cult objects linked to one or another sheikh throughout the republic. In the workplace, state employees in ministries and other institutions have been compelled to adopt national costume. Under his aegis, a television channel has been founded in Chechnya which, uniquely among all Russian Federation subjects, broadcasts 24 hours a day. In addition, Ramzan Kadyrov has established a special Islamic channel, which broadcasts for almost 12 hours a day,
showing Islamic films dubbed into Chechen. There is a special Islamic press in Gudermes, which publishes work on Sufism and releases ideological material aimed against Salafism.

Under this policy set by Moscow, for the first time Chechen Sufis have begun to make contact with Islamic Sufis in the Near East, North Africa, and Malaysia. This is a phenomenon which has not occurred for over one hundred years, precisely because of the Russian policy of blocking all links between Russian Muslims and the wider Islamic world. At the same time, major Islamic theologians who adhere to the Sufi dimension of Islam have begun to receive invitations to visit Chechnya to conduct international Islamic conferences.

None of this would be possible without the active support of Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The post of general director was created within the Ministry, especially, it would seem, for the Chechen project. The position was held from its creation in August 2004 through until September 2009 by the former leader of the Communist Party of the Chechen-Ingush republic, the Chechen Dokka Zavgaev, who had earlier been recalled from his post as Russian Federation ambassador to Tanzania and named deputy foreign minister of the Russian Federation. That is, his role included, alongside managing the foreign ministry’s financial affairs, working on promoting the Kremlin’s project of “Restoring Chechnya” into Islamic traditions, and establishing contacts with the Islamic world. The Islamic world was to see Chechnya as a part of Russia where Islam was the way of life.

Ramzan Kadyrov’s activity on the international stage has been so intensive that it might suggest to an outsider that here was a case of independent politics being conducted on an equal footing with leaders in the Islamic East. There have been frequent meetings with the King of Saudi Arabia, the Emir of Qatar, the head of the United Arab Emirates, and renowned international spiritual leaders. This has all become so frequent and usual that there are few in Chechnya who doubt that such interactions are linked to Ramzan Kadyrov’s personal qualities.

However, even in this policy of cultivating Sufism there are lacunae to which neither Moscow nor Grozny wish to draw attention, which will ultimately lead to results diametrically opposed to those intended. The fact is that, in his policy of dominating Sufism, Ramzan Kadyrov is placing his largest stake on the Sufi Qadiriyya Brotherhood of Sheikh Kunta-Khadzhi Kishiev, within which he happens to be a member. This
can only be a cause of concern for the numerous other Sufi brotherhoods in Chechnya, which always look with alarm upon the rise of another brotherhood to the heights of political power. And so, willingly or unwillingly, Ramzan Kadyrov is himself creating opposition, in the form of those people on whose behalf he is ostensibly acting.

As for the feared prevalence of one brotherhood upon the others, there is in fact nothing to support the conclusions drawn by certain experts as to the numerical superiority of adherents of the Qadiriyya tarīqa over the Naqshbandiyya. No work or research has been done on this question, either in the USSR or later. And so it should not be taken as read when conducting research into this factor in Chechnya. Furthermore, during fieldwork in Chechnya on the cult structures of Sufi sheikhs, conducted between 1996 and 1999, after many hundreds of meetings and interviews in almost every population center in Chechnya, the author formed the personal impression that there was an approximate equality in number between the followers of the two tarīqas. Indeed, it seemed as though the Naqshbandiyya may actually be more numerous than the Qadiriyya. By remaining in the shadows and not performing zikr\(^{17}\) (in public, the Naqshbandiyya create this false hypothesis about the overall domination of the Qadiriyya in Chechnya), this is more an optical illusion than reality.

The other point not considered by either Moscow or Grozny is the discrediting of Sufism by its association with the authorities. The “co-operation” between the authorities and the Sufi brotherhoods discourages support from a certain section of the population, namely the intelligentsia and those young people who are still studying or have just completed their higher education. They reject this alliance between the state and Sufism. They see in it a betrayal of the republic’s interests. It is, among other reasons, precisely this notion of collaboration which drives young people into the ranks of the jihadis, rather than any desire for revenge over insult and humiliation, as human rights activists operating in the North Caucasus repeatedly insist upon. The departure of an active, educated segment from Sufi spheres pushes Sufism into aggression directed at its own constituency. The departure of the educated does not automatically equate to their acceptance of Salafism, it is an act of protest against Sufism. This phenomenon is the subject of lively discussion among Chechen communities on the internet. For example, reading Salafist sites, one can occasionally form the impression that they
have no other enemies apart from Sufis.

**Conclusion**

When speaking of Islam in Chechnya, it should be borne in mind that while it has many tendencies in common with the development of religion elsewhere in Russian society, it also has highly specific aspects which have enabled the Sufi element to be still more dominant at the present time.

The Sufi structure, which has adapted itself to the real life of Chechen society, has become more of a national phenomenon, having to a great extent lost the characteristics of classical Sufism. The very fact that it has taken on specific functions associated with political parties bears witness to its excessive politicization. Correspondingly, this has led to the opinion of the Sufi element being taken into account in the political decisions made in Chechen society. However, the stake placed on just one of the many brotherhoods will bring about the opposite results to those intended, since all the others act in opposition to the brotherhood on which the state has made its bet. This is why it is vital to consider the degrees of closeness between the various Sufi brotherhoods.

The realities of present-day life in Chechnya demand the participation of individuals from many, if not all, the Sufi brotherhoods, which will lift the hidden resistance of some brotherhoods towards others whose members are represented in positions of power.

However, one should not be carried away by the thought of the Sufi brotherhoods’ omnipotence. This may have been possible during the period of their resistance against authority up until the Chechen wars of the 1990s. However, since the appearance on Chechen soil of the Salafists, the brotherhoods’ energies have been divided between two fronts: against the authorities and against the Salafists. While the Sufis are being used as allies of the authorities, disillusionment with Sufism and the swelling of the ranks of radical Salafism will continue to rise as a direct result. And so the role of the Sufi brotherhoods will also be susceptible to change, proportional to the weakening of their position in society.

**Note**

1 A Sufi Sheikh is the spiritual leader who teaches his disciple – the *murid* – how to follow his life path. Classical Sufism implies that a sheikh must be
alive, so as to lead his murid, and that silsila (chain of spiritual transmission) passes from one living sheikh to another. In Chechen Sufism, however, some brotherhoods are based on defunct sheikhs who did not transmit silsila to anybody. In order not to break the continuity, it is admitted that sheikhs transmitted their spiritual leadership to members of their family— which makes Chechen Sufism different from classical forms of Sufism.

2 A murid is a person who is committed to a murshid (teacher) in a tariqa (spiritual path) of Sufism.

3 The fact that Sufi Brotherhods exert some of the functions of political parties (organizing interests and ideas and playing an active role in the competition for power) does not exclude the existence of political parties in Chechnya. During the 1997–99 period, main political figures (A. Maskhadov, Sh. Basayev, S. Raduev, M. Udugov) founded their political parties, organized meetings, played by the formal rules of electoral pluralism and did develop some forms of clientelism through the party (Akhmadov and Lanskoy 2010: 91–5). With the “political settlement” of the second war and the reintegration of the Chechen republic within the Russian Federation, the Chechen political landscape started to reflect the situation on the federal level. Main political parties exist as such on funds from the federal center, elections are mainly a formal procedure that lead to a victory of the party of power (Hale 2006; Gel’man 2008).

4 Born in a Dagestani village, Saltinskii, an associate of Imam Shamil, had served years of hard labor in Siberia; he attempted to establish an Islamic theocratic state—an emirate—in the North Caucasus, along the lines of Shamil’s imamate.

5 The title turkhk signifies a local leader of one or another vird (one of the Sufi Brotherhods within a tariqa). There may be one drawn from a single brotherhood in a village, while if the village is large, then there may be several turkkhs drawn from the same brotherhood. Most often, in a particular population center, there will be several turkkhs, each belonging to a different brotherhood.

6 Following the deportation of the Chechens in 1944, the Soviet authorities sent Chechen sheikhs back to Chechnya, in order that they use their standing to persuade those Chechens who had remained in the mountains to voluntarily surrender and to join their families in exile. At the same time, those same authorities sought to discredit the sheikhs’ participation in these operations as a betrayal by the sheikhs of their murids. By insulting and humiliating them, the authorities were certain that they could deprive the sheikhs of support from their murids. In fact, the murids rejected the authorities’ propaganda and accepted everything that the sheikhs did as a mission laid upon them by the Almighty.

7 Translator’s note: a qadi is a judicial figure with jurisdiction over Muslims.
8 Bislan Gantamirov, one of the leaders of the anti-Dudayev opposition, who was later appointed by Moscow as Grozny mayor counted himself a follower of this particular sheikh.

9 Sheikh Deni Arsanov and Sheikh Doku Shaptukayev were cousins; moreover, they both received siksila for the right to have their own brotherhood from Sheikh Ellakh-Molla. Ruslan Khasbulatov considered himself a follower of this sheikh.

10 The grandson of this sheikh – Shamsudin Yusef – became the first foreign minister of Ichkeria, under Dudayev.

11 We see thus that even if Sufi brotherhoods take political stances and promote political interest, they do not ensure a unique position among their followers: the fact that a leading political actor belongs to this or another brotherhood does not determine the position of the brotherhood itself, whereas the position of the brotherhood does not strictly determine the political position of all the followers.

12 He was the descendant of mujahir Chechens, who forcibly left the Russian Empire to settle in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth century.

13 Translator’s note: jamaat literally means “assembly.”

14 One example of a teip-based unit was the element formed to protect Aslan Maskhadov; its members were all drawn from the Alleroi teip, although they were from different population centers in the republic, including mountainous areas, valleys, and the Terek region.

15 The districts of Shali, Vedeno, Gudermes, Kurchaloi, as well as Grozny agricultural district.

16 These unscheduled elections were called as a result of the assassination of Akhmad Kadyrov at the military parade in Grozny on the 9th of May, 2004.

17 Translator’s note: a Sufi devotional practice involving the recitation of prayer and litany.

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12 Virtue campaign for women in Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov

Between war backlash effect and desire for total control

Tanya Lokshina

Since around 2007, the Chechen authorities have been engaged in a “virtue campaign” for women, the headscarf policy being one of its core elements. They enforce upon women a compulsory dress code in Chechnya’s public institutions, including schools, government offices, hospitals, etc. and attempt to extend it to public places, including for example, streets, parks, shops, and entertainment centers.

Local officials generally justify the enforcement of this policy – as well as other elements of the campaign – on traditional grounds. However, it is contrary to Russian law, discriminatory, and is leading to abuses.¹ The enforcement of a compulsory Islamic dress code on women in Chechnya violates their rights to private life, personal autonomy, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion, thought, and conscience. It is also a form of gender-based discrimination prohibited under international treaties to which Russia is a party, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. This policy is in breach of Russia’s Constitution, which guarantees freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and gender equality.

This article will examine the introduction of the “virtue campaign” for women subsequent to Ramzan Kadyrov’s rise to power in Chechnya. Documents from Chechnya promoting the “virtue campaign” will be examined, as well as statements and remarks by local officials. A particular emphasis will be made on testimonies from interviews with victims and witnesses that display the rise of harassment and violence against women who do not comply with the “traditional” and “religious”
dress and behavioral code. Cases of harassment presented here range from “cautionary measures” such as verbal abuse and attacks using paintball guns, to “honor” killings, often carried out by members of the victim’s extended family, under the auspices of law enforcement agencies.

Most of the interviews were conducted by the author in Grozny, Chechnya’s capital, in September 2010 and follow-up research, including analysis of published materials and phone interviews, was carried out through December 2010. The findings were published in a Human Rights Watch report, *You dress according to their rules* (HRW 2011), on which this article largely draws and excerpts of which it reproduces.

In the course of the field mission to Grozny, 35 individuals were interviewed, mostly female, who had experienced or witnessed attacks and/or harassment aimed at forcing Chechen women to adhere to a compulsory Islamic dress code. We also spoke with six NGO activists and conducted additional interviews in Moscow or by phone from Moscow. Victims and witnesses were identified by approaching individual women, both randomly and through local NGO contacts, who were then able to refer to other victims or witnesses. Additional follow-up research was done by the author from Moscow in August 2012 and July 2013. All of those interviewed were deeply concerned about possible repercussions for themselves and their families for being interviewed and asked for their real names not to be used.

Excerpts from print and video interviews with senior Chechen authorities, including Kadyrov, which are analyzed here, display governmental endorsement on public television of the virtue campaign against the republic’s women, despite the campaign being contrary to Russian law. Transcripts of statements by President Kadyrov in the Chechen language and virtue-campaign related leaflets were translated from Chechen by a native speaker.

**Ramzan Kadyrov’s rise to power and introduction of the campaign for “female virtue” in Chechnya**

The “virtue campaign” for women in Chechnya has been a key project for Chechnya’s leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, since he consolidated power in Chechnya. In 2000 after Russia ended its large-scale military operations to bring Chechnya back under Russian federal rule in 2000. At that time, the federal government gradually began to transfer responsibilities for
governing the republic and carrying out counterinsurgency operations to pro-Kremlin Chechen leaders. This process, which involved handing over the license to violence from federal forces to pro-Kremlin Chechen forces, became known among analysts as “Chechenization” (Demos Research Center et al. 2006: 114–15; Lokshina 2007).

Seeking a figure who could gain the trust of important social strata within Chechnya, the Kremlin chose Akhmat Kadyrov, Chechnya’s former mufti, or leading religious authority, who was appointed in 2000 as acting head of the administration of the Chechen Republic and then became president in the October 2003 elections organized by the Kremlin.\(^2\) As a security policy, “Chechenization” aimed to place most responsibility for law and order and counterinsurgency operations on republican security structures. Akhmad Kadyrov’s personal security service, known as the Presidential Security Service, which was headed by his son, Ramzan, acted as an important factor in this process. The Presidential Security Service, informally referred to as \textit{kadyrovtsy}, soon became the most important indigenous force in Chechnya.\(^3\)

After Akhmad Kadyrov was killed in a bomb attack in May 2004 in Grozny, Russian authorities organized a presidential election to replace their chosen partner. Twenty-seven-year-old Ramzan, who was already commander of the \textit{kadyrovtsy}, inherited his father’s influence but could not yet run for president, as the Chechen constitution establishes 30 as the minimum age for presidential candidates. Alu Alkhanov, a candidate chosen by the Kremlin, was elected president, and Ramzan Kadyrov was appointed first vice-prime minister in charge of security.\(^4\)

Over the course of 2005, Kadyrov was able to push his allies into key positions in the Ministry of Internal Affairs for Chechnya, and thus gain direct influence over the ministry as a whole (Lokshina 2007: 150). In 2005 and into early 2006, Ramzan Kadyrov’s political power grew substantially and in spring 2006, he became prime minister of Chechnya. In February 2007 his ascent to power was completed through Alu Alkhanov’s apparently forced resignation as president. Replacing Alkhanov, Ramzan Kadyrov was sworn in as president of the Chechen Republic in April 2007, following his nomination to the post by Russia’s then-president Vladimir Putin (Lokshina 2007: 54; \textit{New York Times} 2007; Bensmann 2007).

In 2008, Kadyrov firmly established himself as the only real power figure in Chechnya (Memorial 2010a). Since then, there have been
persistent, credible allegations that law enforcement and security agencies under Kadyrov’s full de facto control have been involved in abductions, enforced disappearances, acts of torture, extrajudicial executions, and collective punishment practices, mostly against alleged insurgents, their relatives, and suspected collaborators (HRW 2006, 2009; Memorial 2010a). Numerous experts on the North Caucasus, including those in international organizations, have described Kadyrov’s rule over Chechnya as a “personality cult” regime and stressed that Kadyrov’s orders have become, in essence, the only law in the republic. In 2010, Kadyrov’s title was changed from “president” to “head” of the Chechen Republic (Lenta.ru 2010) but this change was only nominal and has had no impact on the scope of this authority.

The virtue campaign for women: from words to public policy

The year 2006 marked Kadyrov’s first attempt to exercise moral policing of women, while he was still prime minister, shortly before his promotion to the presidency of the republic. Early that year, Kadyrov stated that the use of cell phones had a negative impact on female morality by supposedly providing women with an opportunity to flirt with men and arrange dates, after which several young women had their cell phones forcibly taken away from them by law enforcement officials (Nesterenko 2006; Estemirova 2007). Around the same time, Kadyrov made his first public calls regarding the necessity for Chechen women to cover their hair (Estemirova 2007).

After being appointed president of the Chechen Republic by the Kremlin in 2007, Kadyrov began to more actively convey to the public the role he believed females should play in Chechen society and the social and moral rules, by which local women needed to abide. He openly asserted that women were inferior and should be subjugated to men, equating women with male property. He also openly and uncritically acknowledged polygamy (Ramzan-Kadyrov.ru 2007; Antonenko 2008) and honor killings as a part of Chechen tradition, even though both are unambiguously prohibited by Russian law.6

Kadyrov referred to Chechen customs of maintaining family honor when commenting on the murder of seven women whose bodies were found by the roadside in Chechnya at the end of November 2008. Kadyrov told the BBC:
Here in Chechnya if a woman is running around, if a man is running around with her, then both of them are killed. According to the information available, there was a woman who was “working” with the killed [women] – she wanted to take them away from the [Chechen] Republic, [she] was in the process of obtaining travel passports for them in order to sell them to brothels [abroad]. It’s being said that the women’s relatives [found out and] killed them … I’m simply talking about [our] customs. Ask anyone, even the youngest boy, “What are you gonna do if your sister starts running around?” Anyone will tell you, “I’ll kill her!”

(Antonenko 2008).

Several high-ranking Chechen officials, including the local ombudsman, Nurdi Nukhzhiiev, echoed Kadyrov in their assessment of the situation, without suggesting that such “traditions” should be changed. “Unfortunately, we have some women who have started to forget about the behavioral code of highland women. And their relatives – the men who consider themselves offended [by the behavior of those women] – do sometimes lynch them,” stated Nukhzhiiev (Postimees 2008).

Issues surrounding modest dress and head coverings for women have been at the core of Kadyrov’s efforts to strengthen “female virtue” in Chechnya. In 2007, he launched a special program for the revival of moral values among Chechen youth, which placed special emphasis on modesty laws for women (Memorial 2008).

By the autumn of 2007, Kadyrov had publicly announced, including on television, that all women working for state institutions had to wear headscarves and that he expected to see his wishes carried out immediately (Estemirova 2007). In November 2007 Kadyrov elaborated on the issue of female dress for Grozny and Vainakh republican television channels singling out the Ministry of Culture for its failure to enforce headscarf rules among its own staff:

Today, I’m worried about how our young women dress. Our brides sometimes present themselves to their mother-in-law, to the groom’s relatives – do excuse me – almost naked and with their head uncovered. They show up in the streets in mini-skirts and with their hair loose. The mentality of our people does not allow for these things. I’d really like to see Chechen young women look like
true Muslims, who observe the customs and traditions of their people. The key role here should belong to the republican Ministry of Culture. However, just look how the ministry’s own [female] staff-members dress! We have already issued a directive that all bridal parlors should exhibit [our] ethnic [female] dresses. The Committee on Youth Affairs is planning to recruit prominent designers to create one single uniform for youth educational institutions.

(Grozny Inform 2007)

By the end of 2007, women employed in the public sector, including television anchors, female officials, teachers, and even staff-members of the ombudsman’s office diligently wore headscarves to work (Il’ina 2008; Nikulin 2010).7

In 2007 local education authorities introduced uniforms in Chechen schools and universities, which included headscarves for female students. Those who tried to resist the headscarf requirement were simply denied entry to their respective offices or academic institutions, despite the absence of any legal basis for the new requirement (Memorial 2008). In response to an inquiry by journalists, the deputy head of Chechen State University, Mokhdan Kerimov, vehemently defended the headscarf requirement for female students, but not by reference to any legal basis: “Our girls have been covered up by headscarves since the very day that the Chechen nation came into being. [We] demand that [they] wear headscarves. [We] demand that the Chechen State University has a Chechen face” (Antonenko 2008).

The headscarf requirement for access to the university’s premises apparently extends to non-Chechen and non-Muslim females. The Memorial Human Rights Center reported that in February 2008, security guards denied entry to one of the organization’s non-Chechen researchers into the university’s compound, demanding that she cover her hair. She tried to explain that she was not Muslim, but university officials informed her that it did not matter as the headscarf requirement concerned all females. After approximately one hour of arguing with university officials, the Memorial researcher convinced the deputy head of the university to allow her to enter, in light of her long history of cooperation with the university. However, she was told clearly that no such exceptions would be made for her in the future. The deputy head of
the university also refused to show her any written instructions regarding the entry ban for women without headscarves but made a reference to Chechnya being “an Islamic republic with its own national mentality.”

The author of this article had a similar experience when she tried to enter the Chechen State University without a headscarf in May 2008. The security guards refused to let her discuss the matter with the university’s leadership. She told them that she was neither Chechen nor Muslim, and that the ban had no basis in the law. The security guards insisted that in order to enter the building “all women had to wear headscarves, no matter what.”

Two female staff members of Chechen State University, who asked that their identities be withheld due to possible reprisals, described how young male security guards routinely inspected their clothing for “propriety” and “broke into classrooms,” including in the middle of a lecture, to check if all women had their hair covered. They described the experience as “deeply humiliating” for them as well as for other female members of staff at the university.

In a December 2008 interview with the BBC, the deputy head of the university strongly denied that the headscarf requirement for access to the Chechen State University premises contradicted the Russian constitution, saying that “no constitutional breach could be found, as elements of the uniform are accepted in numerous educational institutions in the country and [more broadly] in the world” (Antonenko 2008).

The chair of the Rule of Law and State Building Committee of the Chechen Parliament, Mompash Machuev, also reassured the press that all laws of the Chechen Republic “are in strict compliance with the federal ones. All normative acts already adopted or to be adopted by the Parliament of the Chechen Republic are checked for compliance with federal legislation” (Zubairaeva 2008). This statement may in fact be accurate, as the headscarf policy, along with many other rules enforced in Chechnya under Kadyrov, are not provided for in law or even tabled before the parliament (Zubairaeva 2008).

Gradually, throughout 2009 and 2010, the “headscarf rule” started to spread to public places in general, including entertainment venues, cinemas, and even outdoor areas (Rosbalt Kavkaz 2010; Kavkazskii Uzel 2010b).

For example, in mid-October 2010, a staff member from a local NGO
working in the House of Print – a large building in the center of Grozny that houses numerous Chechen media outlets and organizations – reported that Ministry of Information officials had summoned all tenants on the 8th of October to a meeting. During the meeting, women were specifically instructed that they would not be allowed into the building unless their hair was covered with headscarves.

Kadyrov appears very sensitive to public criticism of the headscarf policy. A leading researcher for the Memorial Human Rights Center in Chechnya, Natalia Estemirova – who was abducted near her home in Grozny and brazenly murdered in July 2009\textsuperscript{11} – had been vocally protesting the Chechen authorities’ policy to enforce a compulsory Islamic dress code for women since 2007 (Estemirova 2007; Il’ina 2008). In early 2008, Estemirova gave a long television interview in which she criticized the headscarf policy, insisting that forcing Chechen women to wear headscarves was wrong, unlawful, and constituted a blatant violation of the right to privacy. The interview, which was part of a program about the Islamic revival in Chechnya, was shown on REN-TV, a television channel that broadcasts to many regions in Russia, on the 30th of March 2008. The next day, Ramzan Kadyrov personally dismissed Estemirova from the Grozny City Human Rights Council,\textsuperscript{12} raising his voice at her, making derisive remarks to try to shame her for not adhering to modesty laws, and threatening her with repercussions for her unyielding criticism.\textsuperscript{13}

In December 2012, Kadyrov eloquently commented on the headscarf policy in schools. He said that wearing a headscarf in schools doesn’t violate any laws and that it’s not imposed officially. He also mentioned that any interventions regarding the headscarf issue are created to destabilize the image of the peaceful Caucasus (Ansar.ru 2012).

However, it is important to note that although Kadyrov may want strict imposition of the headscarf policy, he does not extend this support to wearing of the proper full hijab, which he apparently views as an element of Arabification and Salafist Islam.\textsuperscript{14} In a speech in June 2012, the Chechen leader condemned women, dressed in a traditional Islamic way, for covering their chins and hands. According to Kadyrov’s words, he reproached the girls for following the Arab culture and abandoning their own. Here are some extracts from his speech:

I told her: “Listen, you are a grown woman, but there is nothing
feminine in you. You don’t enjoy neither your children nor your parents. You only talk about atomic bombs, special service agents and Arabic video clips.” I said: “You won’t find such a beautiful mosque as [our mosque] here. People come from far away in order to see it.” I could find neither our mosque, nor our ziyarats [holy places] on her phone – everything was Arabic – “Why do you think that you need to wear black? Show me the place in Quran where it’s written that you have to dress in black and cover your chin. There are no such words! There is no such ayat [verse] of hadith [traditional saying of the prophet Muhammad]!”15

Such statements stand in ambiguous contrast with the apparent Islamization policies in Chechnya. In fact, Kadyrov opposes conservative Islamic dress code as part of his struggle with insurgents who generally adhere to the Salafist trend in Islam. Moreover, one may argue that Kadyrov’s campaign for female virtue is not so much about Islamic values but rather about his aspiration for total control.

It is also clear that Kadyrov’s aspiration to control women is not limited to what they wear and how they cover their head. In 2012, he denounced a famous Chechen singer for marrying an Armenian (Bolotnikova 2013). The president publically accused her of immoral behavior, reminding her that he spent about 10 million rubles on each of her solo concerts. At the end of his accusation, Kadyrov confessed that he sent a private jet to Armenia, forced the girl to abandon her husband, and return to Chechnya.16

**Abuse and attacks: reprisals against “uncovered” women**

In summer 2010, numerous reliable reports were received of attacks on and harassment of women in public places who did not dress according to the locally applied Islamic code. Coercion to force Chechen women to adhere to a compulsory Islamic dress code has manifested itself in a number of ways, including public shaming, threats, and even physical violence.

In June, unidentified men, including law enforcement agents, attacked women who were not wearing headscarves in the center of Grozny, shooting at them with paintball guns. At least one of the victims was hospitalized as a result (Kavkazskii Uzel 2010d). The author in her capacity of Human Rights Watch researcher conducted interviews in
Chechnya with two victims and three witnesses of paintball attacks. A 29-year-old victim reported that while she was walking down the same street in the afternoon on the 6th of June with two other young women, none of them wearing headscarves, two cars drove up to them. Bearded men in military-style black uniforms, who looked like law enforcement officials, shot at them from the cars’ windows with pink and blue paint, screaming, “Cover your hair, harlots!” Male passersby applauded the attackers and yelled: “Serves you right for having no shame!”

Parallel to the attacks, threatening leaflets appeared in the streets of the Chechen capital, explaining to women that the paintball shootings were simply a preventive measure designed to make them cover their hair – if they failed to cooperate, more “persuasive” means would be used. Several dozen women interviewed unanimously interpreted this as a threat to use real weapons instead of paintball guns.

The leaflet, read as follows:

Dear Sisters!

We want to remind you that, in accordance with the rules and customs of Islam, every Chechen woman is OBLIGED TO WEAR A HEADSCARF.

Are you not disgusted when you hear the indecent “compliments” and proposals that are addressed to you because you have dressed so provocatively and have not covered your head? THINK ABOUT IT!!!

Today we have sprayed you with paint, but this is only a WARNING!!! DON’T COMPEL US TO RESORT TO MORE PERSUASIVE MEASURES!!!

Numerous sources, including women’s NGOs, reported that the punitive paintball campaign ended in mid-June, likely due to the fact that its objective was achieved: for at least several weeks afterwards, women generally refrained from entering the city center without headscarves (Kavkazskii Uzel 2010a).

Commenting on the issue on the television station Grozny on the 3rd of July 2010, Kadyrov expressed unambiguous approval of the lawless paintball attacks, claiming he was ready to “give an award” to the men who carried them out. He also stated that the targeted women deserved this treatment and that they should be so ashamed that they should
“disappear from the face of the earth” (Memorial 2010b). This comment amounts to open encouragement, at the highest level of the government of Chechnya, of the physical assault and public humiliation of women. There is no evidence that federal authorities responded to Kadyrov’s statement in any way.

Several weeks after the attacks subsided, some women cautiously began to appear in Grozny’s center without headscarves. Around the start of Ramadan in mid-August 2010, however, another punitive campaign began, targeting women who were not wearing headscarves and/or were wearing clothes deemed too revealing.

In the first days of Ramadan, groups of men in traditional Islamic dress (consisting of loose pants and a tunic), claiming to represent the republic’s Islamic High Council, started approaching women in the center of Grozny, publicly shaming them for violating Islamic modesty laws and handing out brochures with detailed descriptions of appropriate Islamic dress for females. They instructed women to wear headscarves and to have their skirts well below the knee and sleeves well below the elbow.

The brochure admonished females:

Dear sister in Islam! Today Chechnya wants to uphold decency and morality. Your dress, dear sister, should be a demonstration of your purity and your morality, but mainly of your faith. Your clothes and your morality preserve your honor and that of your relatives and parents.

It also called on men to take charge of women’s appearance:

... a terrible picture is to be seen in the streets. We are not accusing women. The main fault belongs to the men. A woman won’t lose her sense of reason if her husband doesn’t [lose his]. Men, we need your help. Of all that we see, the worst is the way some women dress. But what is even more terrible is that the men folk allow their sisters, wives, and daughters to dress in this way and don’t consider that it is wrong to do so.

The purported envoys from the Islamic High Council were soon joined in their efforts by aggressive young men who pulled on women’s sleeves,
skirts, and hair, touched the bare skin on their arms, accused them of being dressed like harlots, and made other humiliating remarks and gestures. This harassment persisted throughout the entire month of Ramadan, until mid-September. Dozens of victims and witnesses spoke about such incidents and confirmed this distinct pattern when being interviewed.\textsuperscript{25}

Islamic High Councils exist in all Russian regions with significant Muslim population and regulate the religious affairs of local Islamic communities, and the Islamic High Council for Chechnya has made no secret of their endorsement of the virtue campaign. On the Council’s website as recently as September 2012, Mufti Sultan Mirzaev, the Council’s chairman, praises the “beauty and modesty” of Chechen women, and blames the phenomenon of women with uncovered hair as “Western influence” and “against Vainakh [Chechen ethnicity] morality” (Islamtuday.ru 2012), a sentiment echoed by Kadyrov in an interview with the BBC (Antonenko 2008). In the same article on the Council’s website, Kadyrov is cited as saying that: “Nobody should remain indifferent to this phenomenon [of women not wearing headscarves in public], because [their] outer appearance and behavior in public, and women’s lifestyle as a whole characterizes the spiritual condition of our society” (Islamtuday.ru 2012).

In two cases reported, which occurred during Ramadan, law enforcement personnel harassed women for not adhering to the Islamic dress code. In the first case, a group of three police officers walked into a small grocery shop in Grozny and noticed that the woman behind the counter was not wearing a headscarf. They started screaming at her that she was a disgrace, and demanded the telephone number of her boss. They called the boss, demanded that she appear immediately, and instructed her to make sure her entire staff was “properly dressed” lest she face “serious problems.”\textsuperscript{26}

In another case documented by Human Rights Watch in summer 2010, several armed, bearded men in black uniforms – evidently, law enforcement servicemen – dragged a 19-year-old girl, who had long, uncovered hair and wore a long but clingy dress, towards a street trash container, screaming that she was a “slut” and belonged in a garbage dump. They would have shoved her into the container if not for the intervention of an older woman, whose screaming drove them away.\textsuperscript{27}
The virtue campaign: female and federal responses

Numerous women interviewed by the author in Chechnya said that they found the virtue campaign, and specifically the headscarf policy, deeply offensive but could not protest openly, fearing for their own security as well as that of their relatives. One of them summed up the problem in the following way:

It’s so humiliating, but you have no other option – you have to put on the headscarf. If, say, they hit you, and that’s not unlikely, then your brothers won’t be able to leave it at that. They’ll have to take action against the aggressors, who will just kill them. You dress according to their rules not so much out of fear for yourself, but to protect your family.

Meanwhile, neither the Kremlin nor any other federal body has responded publicly to the virtue campaign or its implications for women’s rights in Chechnya. Perpetrators of the paint ball attacks have not been held accountable for their actions. No federal body has publicly indicated to Kadyrov that his comments on the issue – and his “dream that all Chechen women should wear headscarves” (Nemtsova 2010) – are inconsistent with Russian law, and encourage lawless practices. Nor was there a response to Kadyrov’s public condoning of the unlawful and criminal paintball attacks. Nurdi Nukhazhiev, Chechnya’s ombudsman denied that there had been any such attacks on women and stressed that his office had not received any complaints on the matter (Kavkazskii Uzel 2010c). Earlier, Ilias Matsiev, head of Grozny mayor’s press service, also denied any acknowledgment of these attacks (Kavkazskii Uzel 2010a).

At the same time, public statements by NGOs calling for accountability for the attacks on women in the summer and autumn of 2010 prompted broad media attention, both in Russia and internationally, towards the issue. There have been no paintball attacks or other forms of concerted harassment in the past two years, possibly as a result of the flood of criticism and exposure of the issue. In the autumn of 2012, after Ramadan, pressure on women to adhere to a strict Islamic dress code subsided to a certain extent, particularly the harassment campaign. From then on and to the present, there have been no reports of such organized physical attacks against women.
Zareta (not her real name), a 19-year-old student, comments on the current situation concerning headscarves:

Of course, like any other girl I would like to dress fashionably and beautifully, however I’ve got used to [wearing] a headscarf, I wear it like many other girls and I don’t have any problems with that. There was a time when girls without headscarves were attacked with paintballs, which was a peculiar mark of shame. Now they don’t do it anymore. So, there are lots of girls in Grozny, who don’t wear it at all …

However, the headscarf rule continues to be applied to students, public sector employees, and those working in governmental offices (HRW 2012).

Dress code requirements in Chechen schools are apparently becoming even more rigid. According to teachers’ reports, the beginning of the 2012–2013 school year has seen the introduction of new uniforms with skirts-below-the knee and kerchiefs for girls in elementary school and “[clothes] in full compliance with Islamic norms” for girls in high school. The schools appear concerned about numerous protests by parents, including those who oppose the new uniforms simply because they cannot afford to buy them, especially if there are several children in the family. However, they seem to have no choice, as the new “uniform has been ordered from the top [authorities]” (Asueva 2012).

At least one district department for education also demanded that its female employees and teachers strictly adhere to an Islamic dress code, with hair, neck, arms, and legs completely covered up. In spring 2012, a staff member of a district department for education told the BBC about almost getting fired for coming to the office with her neck exposed:

My dress was of ankle-length, the shirt buttoned all the way up, and my hair covered by a large kerchief … But our boss had a screaming fit because my neck showed. He started yelling, ‘Do you think there is a change of power [in the republic]? Don’t you value your job?’ He was so angry that I actually had to call my husband and asked him to bring me another scarf for my neck.

(Asueva 2012)
There is also a continuing public campaign to encourage compliance with the official dress code beyond government institutions, to all public places. Posters with slogans, “The headscarf is the Chechen woman’s pride” are widespread in Chechnya, especially in the capital (Kirilenko 2012). Also, in August 2012, staff members from the Ministry for Youth Affairs distributed headscarves to women in the streets of Grozny, as well as in the Sunzha and Shali regions of Chechnya. According to the director of the Ministry’s social policy department, Luisa Dzhabrailova, approximately 1,200 headscarves were handed out within the framework of that project (Grozny Inform 2012).

A massive propaganda campaign has appeared in all Chechen media. Aside from the banners on the streets that call for modesty and obedience among the women, messages about the importance of the headscarves are constantly broadcasted from television screens. One of the recent examples is a propaganda video on the Chechen National TV and Radio Company channel. In a form of a poem it shows how a girl embraced the headscarf:

Wearing a headscarf I hide myself from the dirt  
Protecting myself from the sinful desires,  
So I don’t become a trophy of the dissolute look …  
I wear a headscarf not in order to be different,  
But because I respect my brothers …  
I wear a headscarf in the name of Allah.31

Propaganda of such sort usually comprises the most significant factors, which can influence a girl in traditional society – reference to God, family honor, and protecting purity.

Many men, including those who are critical of Kadyrov’s regime, appear to approve of the idea that a woman must cover her head. Zareta says: “I haven’t ever met a guy who would be against the headscarf – most of the boys I know want to see their wife wearing it … ”32 This trend indicates that most men have responded positively, or at least passively to the virtue campaign, as it simplifies the task of controlling their women. This acceptance has to be analyzed in the light of the deep transformations in the men/women relationships induced by the war (Prochazkova 2003), but also of the deprivation of power in the public life that men have endured in Chechnya during wars and under
Kadyrov’s rule.

**Rise in “honor” killings in Chechnya as the most dramatic consequence of the virtue campaign**

Women’s rights activists in Chechnya across the board have reported their belief that so-called honor killings have become more frequent in Chechnya with the evolvement of Kadyrov’s virtue campaign. They attribute this to the fact that such crimes not only go largely unpunished by the authorities, but tend to be welcomed and encouraged publically. The first shocking evidence of this came at the end of November 2008 when bodies of seven murdered women were found by the roadside in different districts of the republic. In his comments for the media, Kadyrov essentially condoned the horrible crime, as did Chechnya’s ombudsman, Nurdi Nukhzhiev (see earlier for quotations), and the crimes have gone unpunished to date (Postimees 2008).

Over the past five years, “honor” killings or attempted “honor” killings in Chechnya have been reported increasingly frequently to Human Rights Watch, amongst other prominent rights groups. Most of these reports could not be verified through interviews with family members of the victims and direct witnesses due to their extreme fear of repercussions. However, it is important to note that in some of the cases reported, the perpetrators were identified as the women’s distant male relatives (second or third cousins) working for law enforcement agencies. A prominent rights activist stated in September 2012 that up to ten young women were victims of “honor” killings in Kadyrov’s native village, Tsenteroi, in the course of the past year alone. Several activists from Chechnya reported that in most of the cases that came to their attention, women were killed not for actually committing adultery or being unmarried and sexually available to men, but rather because they had been photographed holding hands with a man, or because they had been discovered receiving susceptible SMS and phone calls, or simply based on rumors.

A case reported by the Caucasian Knot in 2009 involves the death of two unmarried sisters in Chechnya’s Shelkovsky region, 16 and 19 years old, the older of whom was allegedly pregnant. The father claimed that the younger daughter shot the older one dead for “honor,” and then was “accidentally” fatally wounded as he wrestled a Kalashnikov 5.45mm away from her, after entering the room upon hearing shooting
(Kavkazskii Uzel 2011a and 2011b).

Two years later, in June 2011, the newspaper reported another case of two sisters found shot dead, a 15-year-old and a 19-year-old. The father was reported as saying that they died as a result of negligence, whereas the newspaper said that a law enforcement source had previously indicated that the motive for the killing was “honor.” The newspaper further commented that in the majority of “honor” murder cases “the relatives of girls and women killed for amoral behavior often hide the [murder] and announce that they died suddenly from natural causes. Furthermore, as a rule, law enforcement agencies don’t pay much attention to such matters, since they are perceived as the just punishment for having insulted the family’s honor” (Kavkazskii Uzel 2011b).

Two cases reported to Human Rights Watch in the summer of 2012 also suggest that a woman’s mere refusal to adhere to the prescribed dress code and wear a headscarf may trigger violence or even an “honor” killing. In one case, it emerged that a woman’s cousin who lives abroad but saw some photographs of her wearing a tight knee-length dress, and with her hair loose, hired men to kill her. Two unknown men attacked the woman in the center of Grozny late one evening and attempted to drag her into their car. Luckily, two of her acquaintances coincidentally showed up at the location and started screaming at the men and grabbing on to the victim, forcing the men to flee. The woman, who suffered multiple bruises as a result of the attack, was able to flee Chechnya immediately with the help of friends.35

A further case was reported to Human Rights Center Memorial (Memorial 2012). In 2011, Kheda (not her real name) was kidnapped by her fiancé, but was sent back to relatives the next day. It’s not clear whether the two sides couldn’t agree on the marriage, or whether Kheda’s fiancé’s family were afraid of her relatives, as some of them were law enforcement officers. According to Memorial, after returning, Kheda was beaten up several times by male relatives and nobody intervened. On the 2nd of December, 2011, Kheda was allegedly strangled with her headscarf by her cousin’s colleagues, who worked in the police force. The girl’s relatives refuse to comment on her murder. Human Rights Watch could not verify these allegations.

Some observers predict that there will be a further increase in “honor” killings, given the fact that they are mostly perpetrated with impunity. Lipkhan Bazaeva, the head of non-governmental organization, A
Woman’s Dignity, says: “We have a traditional, conservative society, but
the government has gone too far. It declares unacceptable limitations for
women: a woman doesn’t have any rights as an individual, even if her
husband beats her up against Russian laws” (Markosian 2012).

**Conclusions: current state of impunity means no clear end in sight**

It is worth questioning whether it is any wonder that “honor” killings are
becoming more widespread in the republic, when the local leader openly
and uncritically acknowledges these so called “honor” killings as part of
Chechen tradition. In the following speech Kadyrov states that women
should be treated as a man’s property:

> A woman should know her place … She would be [man’s] property.
And the man is the owner. Here, if a woman does not behave
properly, her husband, father, and brother are responsible.
According to our tradition, if a woman fools around, her family
members kill her … That’s how it happens, a brother kills his sister
or a husband kills his wife … As a president, I cannot allow for
them to kill. So, let women not wear shorts.

*(Komsomol’skaia Pravda 2008)*

With Kadyrov making such statements and the Kremlin failing to
intervene, the perpetrators can be certain of their impunity, which only
inspires future crimes and leaves the women in Chechnya particularly
vulnerable to lawless practices ranging from verbal abuse in the street, to
paintball attacks and “honor” killings. Only if the Chechen government,
prompted by the Kremlin, takes decisive measures to punish perpetrators
of crimes against women, rather than endorsing such crimes, will women
in the Chechen Republic be able to live with the rights guaranteed to
them in the Russian constitution, and the numerous international treaties
to which Russia is party. The continuation of the “virtue campaign” and
consequent violations of the rights of women will persist as long as
perpetrators remain unpunished, and even encouraged, by the state.

**Note**

1 While Human Rights Watch, which the author represents, takes no position
on Sharia-inspired norms or cultural dress practices, the organization opposes
all laws or policies that impinge on basic rights, including government-mandated public dress codes. Human Rights Watch has criticized the governments of France, Germany, and Turkey for violating religious freedom by banning religious symbols in schools and denying Muslim women the right to choose to wear headscarves in schools and universities. By the same token, however, the organization supports the right of women and girls to choose not to wear religious or traditional dress.

2 Kadyrov supported independence in the first Chechen war, but switched sides to support Moscow early in the second war (see M. Vatchagaev’s contribution in this book). Russian and international human rights groups reported that the elections were marred by voter intimidation and major fraud (IHF 2004).

3 This article uses the term kadyrovtsy to refer to forces believed to be effectively under the command of Ramzan Kadyrov.

4 President Alkhanov described Kadyrov’s responsibilities as “answering for the coordination of the work of republican security structures and, likewise, organizing cooperation between republican law enforcement structures and federal units on the territory of the republic,” and “directly tak[ing] part in organizing special operations involving members of the MVD of the Chechen Republic” (Pilipchuk 2005).

5 See, for example, the November 2010 testimonies at the trial in Vienna (Austria) on the murder of a Chechen refugee, Umar Israilov, by Dick Marty, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and former rapporteur on human rights in the North Caucasus, and Lord Judd, member of the UK Parliament and former rapporteur on Chechnya for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (FIDH 2012; Shpitzer and Milashina 2010; Rosbalt 2010).

6 Chapter 3, Article 14 of the Family Code of the Russian Federation, “Conditions preventing the execution of marriage.”

7 The author of this article traveled to Chechnya every few months between 2003 and 2009 and witnessed this dynamic.

8 Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a researcher of Memorial Human Rights Center (name withheld), 3 December 2010. See also Memorial Human Rights Center report (Memorial 2008).

9 This incident occurred when the author of this report was on a Human Rights Watch field mission to Ingushetia and Chechnya in May 2008 and wanted to enter the university to find a teacher who was her personal acquaintance.

10 Human Rights Watch interview with two staff members of the Chechen State University in 2010 (names and dates withheld).

11 Natalia Estemirova was abducted outside her home in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, on 15 July 2009, and was found shot dead in the neighboring republic of Ingushetia later that day. The circumstances of Estemirova’s
murder, along with a pattern of threats against her, Memorial staff members, investigative journalists, and human rights defenders in Chechnya, point to possible official involvement in or acquiescence to her murder. It is not clear, however, which steps – if any – have been undertaken by the investigation to examine possible official involvement in this crime. At this writing, the perpetrators in the killing of Natalia Estemirova have not been held to account (HRW 2010).

12 In February 2008, Natalia Estemirova was appointed to chair the then newly formed Grozny Human Rights Council under the mayor of Grozny.

13 Natalia Estemirova shared with Human Rights Watch the details of her meeting with Ramzan Kadyrov in a telephone interview in the evening of the 31st of March 2008 and then repeated the story in even greater detail in Moscow several days later (Memorial 2009; polit.ru 2009; HRO 2009).

14 Unlike full Islamic hijabs, headscarves promoted and enforced in Chechnya as “traditional” do not cover the woman’s chin and forehead. Salafism emerged in the North Caucasus in the late 1980s as a literalist trend in Sunni Islam, based on the interpretation of al-salas al-salih (the pious predecessors). Salafism rejects Islamic theology and philosophy developed after the death of the prophet Muhammad, and seeks to return to the “pure Islam” of the Quran and al-Hadith (the recorded words and practices of the Prophet), as understood by al-salaf al-salih. Salafi adherents believe that after al-salas al-salih polytheism, reprehensible innovation and superstition infiltrated Islam through human religious practice. A culture of withdrawal from “corrupting influences” and dissociation from “infidels” is propagated. This is, in part, characterized by opposition to the perceived degenerative influences of the media and mass culture, including all entertaining distractions -cafes, perfume, etc. Living in separate communities is believed to enable effective avoidance of infidel culture and resemblance thereto. Salafism, unlike Wahhabism is apolitical, but certain Salafist beliefs cause tension in the political field based on the belief that Muslims should submit only to Sharia law and adhere to no ideology other than the Quran (Moussalli 2009).


18 Human Rights Watch interview with Khadizhat N (not her real name), 15 September 2010, Grozny.
19 Human Rights Watch interviews with 31 female residents of Grozny (names withheld), 15–17 September 2010, Grozny.
20 Document examined by Human Rights Watch.
21 Human Rights Watch interviews with 20 women (anonymous), including five representatives of women’s NGOs (names of organizations withheld for security reasons on request of the interviewees), 15–17 September 2010, Grozny.
22 Human Rights Watch interviews with five representatives of women’s NGOs (names of organizations withheld for security reasons; copy of the brochure on file with Human Rights Watch on request of the interviewees), 15–17 September 2010, Grozny.
23 Copy of the brochure on file with Human Rights Watch.
24 Copy of the brochure on file with Human Rights Watch.
25 Human Rights Watch interviews with 31 female and four male residents of Grozny (names withheld), 15–17 September 2010, Grozny.
26 Human Rights Watch interview with two representatives of the Joint Mobile Group of Russian Human Rights Organizations deployed in Chechnya who witnessed the incident during the last week of August (names withheld), 15 September 2010, Grozny.
27 Human Rights Watch interview with Kheda Z. (not her real name), 16 September, 2010, Grozny.
28 Human Rights Watch interviews with 31 female residents of Grozny (names withheld), 15–17 September 2010, Grozny.
29 Human Rights Watch interview with Malika T. (not her real name), 17 September 2010, Grozny.
30 Human Rights Watch interview with Zareta D. (not her real name), 23 June 2013.
32 Human Rights Watch interview with Zareta D. (not her real name), 23 June 2013.
33 Human Rights Watch telephone interview with XX (name withheld), 9 September 2012 (see also Nalbandyan 2012).
34 Human Rights Watch Skype interviews with NN and YY (names withheld), 20 June 2012.
35 Human Rights Watch interview with ZZ (name withheld), Moscow, 3 July 2012.

**Bibliography**


13 Chechen refugees in Europe

How three generations of women settle in exile

Alice Szczepanikova

The Boston Marathon bomb attacks in April 2013 brought Chechnya and the Chechen Diaspora back to the attention of the international media. Yet the immediate and somewhat hasty conclusions drawn on the basis of the ethnic Chechen background of the two main suspects show how little we know about the Chechen Diaspora around the world. This chapter aims to partially fill the gap with a study of Chechen refugees in Europe. It examines the gender and generational dynamics in Chechen communities in Austria, Germany, and Poland, where Chechens have settled in increasing numbers since the early 2000s. The main questions addressed are: how do reception and settlement conditions in receiving countries interact with refugees’ pre-migration experiences, and what specific adaptation strategies do these conditions encourage?

Research on refugees in Europe focuses mainly on their situation in the countries where they have sought asylum. Background on their countries of origin is usually provided as a description of the driving forces that led to their displacement. Such conditions however, do not affect all refugees in the same way. There has been increasing acknowledgment in the literature that people of different generations and genders react differently to exile (Indra 1999; Berg 2011; Forbes Martin and Tirman 2009). The following research focuses on the situation of Chechen refugee women and aims to show what insights can be gained from examining their different pre-migration backgrounds. Analysis shows that after gender, age, and generation play a major role in shaping the way they settle in Europe.

The study is based on 35 biographical interviews with Chechen women and on 15 semi-structured interviews with social workers, lawyers, and academics working with Chechens in Austria, Poland, and
Germany. The interviews were conducted in 2010 and 2011. The selection of interview partners was based on a snowball method and guided by a search for the greatest possible diversity in terms of age, education, family status, region of origin in Chechnya, and length of stay in Europe. All the interviews with Chechen women were conducted in Russian.

The first part of this chapter introduces the overall situation of Chechen refugees in Europe, then describes their living conditions in Poland, Germany, and Austria. The second part describes the different adaptation strategies of three generations of Chechen women in those three countries.

**Chechen refugees in Europe**

In 2003 and 2004, Russian citizens (the majority from Chechnya) constituted the largest group of asylum seekers in Europe. In 2013, over 37,000 Russian citizens applied for asylum in the 28 European Union (EU) countries making Russia the second most significant source country of asylum-seekers after Syria (UNHCR 2014: 27). Austria, Germany, and Poland, where this study was carried out, have been among the main receiving countries of Chechens in Europe together with France and Belgium (see Figure 13.1). Austria has the largest and most concentrated Chechen community in Europe. It hosts over 20,000 refugees and asylum seekers from the Russian Federation; most of them are thought to be Chechens (UNHCR 2011a).\(^1\) Poland also has a sizeable Chechen community among its 14,000 refugees from Russia (UNHCR 2011a). The ethnic origins of Russian citizens living as refugees in Germany are more diverse than those living in Austria and Poland. It is therefore more difficult to assess the number of Chechens among Germany’s almost 40,000 refugees from the Russian Federation (UNHCR 2011a). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) estimate it at approximately 10,000 and rising.

In 2013, Poland and Germany have seen an unprecedented rise in asylum claims by Chechens. In Germany, there were 14,887 new applications by Russian citizens in 2013 in contrast to 3,202 in 2012 (UNHCR 2014, 2013). Security officials reported that almost 90 % of these arrivals come from Chechnya (Ludwig 2013). This wave of arrivals was allegedly started by unfounded rumours about a newly welcoming attitude of Germany towards Chechens. They were deliberately spread in
Chechnya by criminal groups demanding exorbitant fees for getting people to Europe (Bidder and Hebel 2013; RFE/RL 2013). The readiness of a significant group of people to act on these rumours reflects the level of desperation they find themselves in.

![Graph showing asylum applications by Russian citizens from 2002 to 2013](image)

*Figure 13.1 Asylum applications by Russian citizens 2002–13*

*Source: Author, based on the UNHCR statistical database, 2014.*

The conditions for Chechen asylum seekers in Europe have changed dramatically over the past decade. Various developments in the asylum policies both of individual countries and at the EU level have made access to the asylum procedure, let alone to refugee status, more difficult for Chechens (Rozumek 2005; Esser, Gladysch, and Suwelack 2005; ECRE 2007). Instances of detention and deportation have become more widespread all over the EU.

**Europe as an uneven playing field for Chechen refugees: a view from the EU’s periphery**

Most Chechens coming to the EU travel through Poland. It is often a matter of luck and money whether they will be stopped there and obliged to launch their asylum application from Poland. Because of the Dublin II (and since 2013, the Dublin III) Regulation, it has become increasingly difficult for them to be accepted later on as asylum seekers in another EU country, where they may have relatives or other ties.² On the basis of this
regulation, every year thousands of people are moved inside the EU and are not allowed to make their asylum claim in the country of their choice. Most commonly, they are moved back to countries on the periphery of the EU which they had crossed on the way to their destination. This has led to the overburdening of countries like Poland, whose asylum systems do not have the capacity to provide adequate reception and integration conditions to such large inflows of asylum seekers.

Despite the danger of being detained and sent back to Poland, many Chechen refugees try to reach Germany, Austria, or France (ECRE 2011). Unlike Poland, these countries are more likely to grant them refugee status (see Figure 13.2) and tend to offer better access to specialized services for traumatized refugees, better housing, welfare support, and employment opportunities (see also Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker 2011). For example, a Polish social housing program is almost inaccessible to refugees. The very few successful applicants I heard of while carrying out this research waited nearly ten years before being offered municipal housing. At the same time, there is an environment of prejudice and occasional aggressiveness against Chechens among the local Polish population.³ This is especially strong in economically deprived areas where until recently, many accommodation centers for asylum seekers were located. Chechen asylum seekers and refugees have great difficulty finding affordable accommodation in locations where employment opportunities exist. They often pay exorbitant rents, have only short-term rental contracts and live in continual fear of having to find a new place to live (see also UNHCR 2011b: 35–43).
Figure 13.2 Recognition rates for Russian citizens, 2008–11, in selected EU countries, percentage, Geneva Convention Status, first instance decisions. Source: Author, based on Eurostat, 2012.

When I first met Leyla (38 years old) in Warsaw, she lived in a small two-room apartment on the outskirts of the capital. She shared the flat with her husband, two children of school age, and her older sister. Only by pooling their incomes could they afford to pay the rent. The owner of the flat was willing to give them only a half-year rental contract and they were constantly worried that it might not be extended. The children have already changed schools a number of times due to moves. Leyla’s sister worked as a cashier in a supermarket, her husband did day-laborer jobs on construction sites, and she tried to find occasional work as a cleaning lady. She obtained a university degree from Grozny’s College of Chemical Technology and before leaving Chechnya had a few years’ work experience in a laboratory. She had been living in Poland for five years and had obtained the so-called “tolerated status,” which granted them temporary protection. Her view of the situation was exceptionally grim, but it reflects the views of many others in a similar situation:

Back home, we were fighting for survival, we ran away from the war and here, we are again struggling to survive. Conditions in Poland are terrible for the children.

When I tried to contact her again in November 2011, Leyla’s mobile phone number was no longer working and a friend of hers, who had put us in touch before, told me that the family had probably moved to another country.

Having a stable and affordable place to live is a basic precondition for any integration process. It opens the way for employment, children’s education and the possibility of building social networks with the local population. The majority of refugees have had to live in a state of temporariness for several years prior to being granted international protection and are exhausted from the stress of constant moves and adjustments. Long-term insecurity about basic elements of their lives have in some cases resulted in a reluctance to invest in any long-term prospect, even education that might lead to a more stable job or buying furniture to create more of a sense of home.
Information on the different reception and recognition conditions in the various European countries spreads quickly among refugees, thanks to the availability of information and communication technologies and to Chechens’ transnational family networks, often spanning several countries. Awareness of these different conditions prompts a logical initiative to move where conditions are more favorable and the promise of stability and security is greater (see also Olszewska and Maciejko 2008). Of the 12 women I interviewed in Poland in 2010, only four were still living in the country a year and a half later. This was despite the fact that some had already lived in Poland for a few years, during which their children were attending Polish schools. It is a well-known fact that the EU asylum system includes the possibility of punishment by detention and deportation for multiple asylum applications (Schuster 2011). Those who do not succeed in getting to their desired destination and are sent back to Poland lose the money invested in the journey and may end up homeless; Polish charities are often unable to support these returnees. Increasingly, they are also being detained. A representative of the Association for Legal Intervention, an NGO based in Warsaw, reported that whole families with children are being locked up in detention centers for months after their return; though at the same time there seems to be some margin for exceptions (see also Ngalikpima and Hennessy 2013); almost every refugee family I spoke to knew of someone who had left Poland and moved to a western European country without being sent back to Poland under the Dublin II Regulation. This encourages refugees to try their luck. Combined with what is often a desperate economic and social situation, many are willing to take the risk. Thus, the lack of prospects for the future and the chance, however remote, to exit Poland and find better conditions elsewhere nurtures refugees’ impatience with extended temporariness even after they have been granted international protection. This prevents them from settling down and rebuilding their lives.

**Reaching the desired destination: a view from Germany and Austria**

Usually, those who managed to reach Germany or Austria and obtain international protection did not plan to move to another country. Some complained that it was more difficult to obtain Austrian or German citizenship than, for example, Belgian or French. Others expressed
concern over the growing number of instances in which refugee status had been withdrawn from refugees in Austria. However, in general, their future plans were oriented towards the country that had received them. In contrast to Poland, refugees in Austria and Germany have easier access to affordable subsidised housing.

This does not mean that Chechen refugees face no problems in the two countries. One concern raised both by Chechen refugees and NGO advocates in Germany was the difference in treatment in the various federal states. Reception conditions, for example, are much better in Berlin, where a network of organizations supports traumatized refugees and also helps persons coming from Poland not to be sent back on the basis of the Dublin II Regulation. But the situation can be radically different in other parts of the country, especially in the accommodation centers of more remote areas, where asylum seekers have less access to support and suffer from social isolation. This is heightened by the mandatory residence rule (*Residenzpflicht*), which prevents asylum seekers from travelling beyond the district of their local Immigration Office without special permission. A social worker from a Berlin-based NGO, Xenion, explained the scale of the problem:

This regulation is the cause of many tragic stories. For example, if a man arrives first and his wife later, there is only about a fifty per cent chance they will be allowed to live in the same district, and in order to visit each other, they either have to ask for special permission or break the law.\(^9\)

There have been some improvements in the social support provided to asylum seekers. Based on the 2012 decision of the German Constitutional Court, the social benefits to which asylum seekers are entitled, which had not been increased since 1993, were raised almost threefold in order to constitute dignified living conditions in line with the German Constitution (EDB 2012).

As noted earlier, the Chechen community in Austria is larger and more concentrated than in Germany or Poland. In the early to mid-2000s, Austria had the highest recognition rates for Chechens. It reached its maximum of 94 percent in 2004 (Langthaler 2009). Since 2008, rates have gone down rapidly for all asylum seekers in Austria and for Chechens in particular, most of whom settle in Vienna, probably the only
Western/Central European city, where the Chechen language can regularly be heard on the street and in public transport. This makes Chechens more visible and more likely to be stereotyped by the media than in Germany, where they are still less numerous than other major refugee and immigrant groups. Typical images depict Chechens as ready to commit violence (gewaltbereit) (BTGG 2006). Incidents of young Chechen men fighting with other migrants or with the locals gain considerable publicity. Cases of Chechen men mistreating their wives and children have also attracted media attention, contributing to a negative image of Chechen culture as oppressive and patriarchal. A social worker from an NGO Interface in Vienna with many years of experience working with Chechen refugees and women in particular, commented: “The media write about women only when they have been killed or wounded, or in cases of forced marriage. There are very few positive images of Chechens in general and of women in particular.”

The higher concentration of Chechens in Vienna facilitates mutual support by members of the community and from Austrian institutions. For example, a number of Viennese elementary schools employ Chechen teachers to give weekly lessons in Chechen language and culture to Chechen pupils. However, this concentration also creates an environment of heightened social control. After the assassination of Chechen refugee Umar Israilov in broad daylight on a street in Vienna in January 2009, mistrust and fear have intensified among Chechens in Austria. Many try to keep their visibility low by not participating in public events organized by other Chechens or socializing with compatriots they do not know. As an NGO lawyer from Diakonie in Vienna noted:

People distrust each other; they keep a distance from one another. For example, since 2009, they have explicitly requested not to have a Chechen translator for their [asylum] interviews, which was not the case before. They worry that their personal information might be misused in some way.

This sense of insecurity has been further increased by high profile visits to Chechnya of Austrian politicians. These visits were used by Ramzan Kadyrov to convince the Austrian representatives that all is well and that Chechens no longer need protection in Europe. In fact, it is widely believed that the Russian embassy in Austria is actively collaborating
with the Kadyrov administration to promote the return of Chechens to their homeland. This is sometimes implemented through misinformation and blackmail (Höller 2013). The above examples indicate that obtaining recognition as a refugee in a European country does not necessarily lead to a life of safety and a sense of security.

Despite differences of size and concentration, as well as in the conditions of reception of Chechen communities, the adaptation strategies of three different generations of Chechen women are remarkably similar in all three countries. The next section examines how pre-migration experiences interact with conditions in destination countries in the shaping of these strategies.

**Adaptation strategies of three generations of Chechen women**

Gender structures refugees’ responses to displacement and shapes the process of settlement in destination countries. Studies of refugee settlement in different geographical contexts show that women tend to cope better by drawing on the continuity of activities between their main responsibilities back home and in exile and by capitalizing on their social networks (Kibria 1993; Ong 2003; Indra 1999; Kay 1988). Chechen women also show this trend (Szczepanikova 2008; Szczepanikova 2005). Back in Chechnya, they were responsible for the well-being of their children and other relatives; they were also determined to recreate a sense of home even in the most difficult conditions of exile. Continuing to fulfill such tasks has kept them going in times of uncertainty and the imposed passivity of awaiting decision on their asylum claim (Szczepanikova forthcoming).

Many Chechen men have found it difficult to cope with the loss of their social status. This phenomenon has also been addressed in the literature on other groups of migrants (Jansen 2008; Franz 2003). With regard to war refugees, Jansen’s (Jansen 2008) study of Bosnian male refugees resonates with the experiences of Chechen men I was able to speak with during my research, as well as what I was told by their wives. Jansen points out that extra-household recognition is crucial to men’s construction of the self. In particular, middle-aged, professional, educated men who had fled the war “tended to stubbornly cling to their remembered personhood, located there where they recalled having counted as someone, and misplaced in resettlement” (Jansen 2008: 195).
Refugee men in general and Chechen men in particular also found it more difficult than women to engage with a highly feminized system of support for refugees in the three countries. The dominant notion of masculinity is constructed as incompatible with pleading. NGOs are often perceived as arenas where refugee clients “have to engage in various emotional acting roles and performances in order to show neediness and obtain access to resources” (Szczepanikova 2010: 465–66). While women may also feel burdened by these expectations, they are more often willing to overcome this when the well-being of their families is at stake. Their greater engagement with the outside world of institutions and organizations provides them with important lessons on how to cope with the new environment. In contrast, I have met Chechen men who locked themselves in their own world, following the latest news from Chechnya while letting their wives take care of daily necessities.

This study indicates that besides gender, age plays a significant role in shaping adaptation patterns among refugee women, in the sense that the conditions in which they were socialized back home influence how they adapt to new situations, including their ability to exploit new opportunity structures in exile (see also Szczepanikova 2012). Three types of adaptation can be identified, which also reflect the strategies of three different generational cohorts of Chechen women. They should be understood as “ideal types” in a Weberian sense, synthesizing and emphasizing certain characteristics not necessarily present among all the women of a given generational cohort. Moreover, I do not suggest that other categories such as social background, education, urban or rural origin are irrelevant in this context. They certainly determine the resources women can draw on while settling in exile. However, this study also revealed that women who differed in these respects experienced their displacement and settlement in a similar manner. This is partly due to the fact that being a refugee and going through the system of refugee reception has a homogenizing effect, which partially and temporarily reduces the importance of the usual stratifying factors.

The Soviet generation: resourceful mediators

Many of the women born between 1950 and 1965, in their mid-forties to early sixties at the time of this research, were very active during the wars in securing the survival and well-being of their families. In exile they
continue to work and are often the main breadwinners and mediators between their family and the institutions of the host societies. They communicate with NGOs, welfare and healthcare providers, and schools. They can draw on their education and employment experiences from the relatively peaceful period in the former Soviet Chechen-Ingush republic. The pre-war lives of the Soviet generation women were framed by two crucial factors: Soviet modernization policies that legitimized women’s place in the public sphere and patriarchal structures of Chechen society. Two aspects of their socialization appear to have greater significance for their adaptation in exile. First is the importance of education: women of this generation tend to see education as a way to social mobility and professional success. The second is the experience of constant navigation between Soviet and Chechen social orders with their different gender expectations. What emerges from the women’s life stories is that they were making strategic uses of opportunities provided by Soviet society, while cherishing the very different social and cultural specificities of Chechen society (see also Tishkov 2004). It could be said that they were Soviet without ceasing to be Chechen. This experience has proved crucial in emigration. Here again, successful adaptation depends largely on maintaining a balance between the different expectations of the Chechen community and the host society, and on women’s ability to take advantage of the resources offered by both (Szczepeanka 2012).

At the same time, these women express a strong sense of having lost their own future prospects. Many feel depressed and repeat over and over again that they have no projects for themselves and live only for the sake of their children. They also feel torn between their new home in Europe and their houses and relatives back home. This situation becomes particularly critical when elderly parents die and they are unable to attend the funeral and vent their grief.

The settlement process of many of these women is complicated by acute psychosomatic problems from which a pattern seems to be emerging. Their health problems were often suppressed for long periods of time while still in Chechnya or while awaiting the asylum decision. These health issues typically begin to surface once the women’s residential and material conditions appear to be stabilized. However, this is exactly when they are expected to take part in integration courses, to learn the language, and seek regular employment. In all three countries, some elements of social support are tied to claimants’ participation in
such courses. This puts increased pressure on the women. Nonetheless, when compared to other generational cohorts, the Soviet generation women are best positioned to play an active and supportive role in their community. They have the strongest resources in terms of cultural and social capital. Their age and life experience gain them respect among their compatriots. From a political and religious point of view, the overwhelming majority are moderate, which makes reception into the host society easier.

During this research, I encountered a number of women of this generation who were actively engaged in selflessly supporting their compatriots and in struggling to improve the image of the Chechen community in their host countries. For example, Fatima (52 years old)13 works as a teacher of the Chechen language in a few Viennese elementary schools. She also mediates between Chechen parents and their children’s teachers when there are problems at school. Her mobile phone is continually ringing because she has become an informal counsellor in her community. Many Chechens prefer turning to her rather than to an Austrian NGO that aids refugees. Or consider Luisa (52 years old), also a teacher by profession, who retrained as a social worker and is now employed by Caritas in Vienna. She regularly commutes to accommodation centers to solve everyday problems that often arise simply for lack of a common language between the management of these hostels and their inhabitants. She is well aware that in addition to her work, she must also act as a representative of her culture, and with patience, tries to challenge stereotypes of Chechens among her colleagues and the general public. Of the three countries, Austria has offered the most requalification opportunities aimed specifically at refugee and immigrant women with higher education. However, in Poland as well, Satsyta (50 years old), Malika (61 years old), Larisa (51 years old) and Khavra (52 years old) work as cultural mediators for a Warsaw-based NGO, Ocalenie. In their work, they have managed to achieve significant improvements in communication between Polish institutions and Chechen refugees. These women represent both a cooperative and a proudly Chechen face of the Chechen Diaspora in Poland.

The Perestroika generation: turning vulnerability into strength
Some of the women born between 1966 and 1980, in their early thirties to mid-forties at the time of the interview, managed to obtain an education before the war. However, their employment experiences (if any) were often short and sketchy. The formative period of their lives coincided with an era of change and transition: perestroika and the independence of Chechnya. It was a period of great excitement for some, but also a time when many stable jobs disappeared and insecurity increased.

These women are often eager to take advantage of the new opportunities for further education and employment available to them in their host countries. As opposed to the Soviet generation, they feel they can still achieve something in their new homes. They have hopes of building a professional career or at least having stable employment. They want to settle down and buy their own home so as to have something to pass on to their children. Although they also hope to be able to return to Chechnya one day, they realize that because their children are young, they are likely to remain in exile for an extended period of time. The feeling of being torn between the relative comfort of life in emigration and concern for family and friends in Chechnya is also strong, but not as acute as among the Soviet generation.

There are many single mothers and widows in this generation, their husbands having been of fighting age at the time of the two wars. These women are often considered by service organizations in the host countries to be particularly vulnerable and tend to be favored for the provision of social services. This is partly because of their determination to secure the best possible conditions for their children, which leads them to NGOs, often staffed by women of a similar age. On the one hand, as single mothers in a foreign country without the support of male relatives, they are vulnerable to gossip and the intervention of compatriots who may wish to act as substitutes for their husbands, fathers, or brothers. On the other hand, their ability to draw support from local NGOs and sympathetic locals provides them with a level of independence. They may be given more aid in terms of learning the language, accessing housing, education, and employment than women whose husbands are present. However, even such support may not be enough to achieve an acceptable standard of living in Poland. The situation of single mothers is significantly better in Germany and Austria. Forced to work and build contacts beyond the community, single mothers often feel empowered by
what they have achieved. Rosa (43 years old), a widow with three children, reflected on her changing self-perception as follows:

I have always lived behind the backs of men; first my father, then my husband. I could always rely on them. I always thought that this was how it should be, that men were simply stronger. In Austria, I understood that it is often women who are stronger, who can stand up and keep on living.

The wars and displacement have led to the painful realization that women cannot always rely on the protection of their male relatives. But it has also led women to realize their own strengths.

Women in the host society often admire Chechen single mothers for their resilience. Zaira (35 years old), a divorced woman, arrived in Austria alone with her three children after a long journey involving a month-long stay in a detention center in Slovakia and the crossing of a “green border.” She described how she was perceived by her social workers and how it transformed her view of herself:

The journey was very difficult. When I remember it now, I sometimes ask myself: Was it really me who went through all this? Here, people sometimes say to me: ‘You’re very brave’, because I did all that alone. It turns out that I am indeed strong, but I would never have said that about myself before.

Single mothers’ ambitions for themselves and their children’s future are less inhibited by the need to find a balance between progress and compliance with their gender roles in the family, the latter often a problem for married women of this generation. I met many who were deeply concerned about the increasing disparity between themselves and their husbands in terms of language skills, employment opportunities, social networks, and overall self-esteem. Such disparities often create marital tension and require an extra effort on the part of women, as they carefully try to keep their husbands from losing their sense of self-worth. The men often see the success and recognition their wives receive outside the home as a threat. Their masculine identities are under tremendous strain in exile. Many educated men are not able to find acceptable employment and are incapable of physically demanding jobs
usually available to immigrant men due to the consequences on their health of life in a war zone. In addition, the experience of being an asylum seeker and a refugee is overwhelmingly perceived – by men and women alike – as humiliating and degrading. While women seem to be coping with this situation, it can keep some men from striving to succeed in the new environment by using legal means.

The *perestroika* generation probably enjoys the most advantageous conditions in exile, allowing these women to immediately benefit from new opportunities in the host country. Their strongest resource is that of having the will and energy to achieve professional success in the new country. They are also mobilized by a sense of empowerment and the realization that in the host countries women have greater freedom and that more opportunities are open to them. They are reconciled with the fact that they will stay longer in the host country, and this helps them overcome the burden of being torn from their homeland and their loved ones. What these younger women need is continuous support from the host society, combined with the recognition and appreciation of the fact that they are constantly being called upon to negotiate between the opportunities of life in emigration and the norms associated with being a Chechen woman. Many have also experienced a revival of their religious faith, which has helped them during the most difficult times; thus their attachment to their Chechen/Muslim identity should not be perceived by their supporters in the host societies as an obstacle to their empowerment.

**The war generation: new religious identities and gender practices**

In all three countries, a similar trend can be observed among Chechen women born between 1981–92 and later. These women were in their late teens to late twenties at the time of the research. Many of them had married early and immediately started a family. Most of these early marriages were concluded by free will, sometimes even against the will of the girls’ parents. Having a family early in life often makes women drop out of school, and the imperative of having more children increases the time during which they cannot work on improving their language skills and pursue further education.

However, not all Chechen women of this generation are eager to marry and have children at an early age. There are also many who have the
ambition to succeed professionally and are determined to postpone marriage until they have completed their education and acquired work experience. Their parents, who value the educational and employment opportunities available to their children in Europe, in most cases, strongly support their efforts. Their occasional doubts about the decision to leave Chechnya are mitigated by these new opportunities available to their children. So much said, the tendency towards early marriage and the adoption of highly conservative gender practices has been mentioned again and again in all three countries. Although no statistical data are available about the extent of this trend, there is growing concern among the older generation of women as to the future prospects of these girls. They see them as passive, interested only in getting married and having children, and lacking the ambition to further their education and achieve professional success.

Many older women perceive the religious practices of the young generation as alien to their own concept of being a Muslim. The religiosity of young women is most commonly observed and discussed on the basis of how they dress. Headscarves that completely cover the hair and neck have become increasingly popular among young Chechen women in exile, and often go along with long, loose dresses. This is not traditional in Chechen society, where tight skirts and high heels have long been preferred by women of that age. Many of the older women argue that this type of clothing is against Chechen traditions. Larisa’s (49 years old) is a typical comment on the subject:

Our mothers or even our grandmothers didn’t cover themselves in this way. This is not a Chechen way; foreigners imported it to Chechnya after the war.

War, disruption, and displacement were the driving forces in the socialization of this generation of young women, influencing their system of values and continuing to shape their adaptation to the new environment. As opposed to the Soviet or perestroika generations, these women could not refer to other, peaceful times when trying to make sense of the shattered world around them. War experiences give young people a sense of the fragility of social institutions. School attendance in Chechnya was often interrupted when parents feared sending their children out of the home due to bombing or “mop-up operations.” In the
early 2000s, schools and universities lacked both basic equipment and qualified teaching personnel. Survival and basic safety therefore became more pressing than education and the prospect of a professional career (Szczepanikova 2012).

Conditions of prolonged instability produce a tendency to cling to institutions that are the most resistant in times of crisis. Together with religious faith, the extended family was a crucial source of support during the wars (Sokirianskaia 2005; Tishkov 2004). It was and continues to be vitally important for both women and men, young and old, to remain embedded in their extended family networks. The physical reproduction of the ethnic group has been an essential part of Chechen socialization for many generations. It figures prominently in the dominant discourse of the Chechen nation, constantly under threat due to its centuries-long struggle against assimilation and annihilation by the Russian colonizer and aggressor. It is therefore not surprising that establishing a family and becoming a bearer of the nation should carry high moral value in the migratory context as well. The young women opt for strong identification with Islam and family life because they haven’t many other resources to draw on. It is this identification that provides them with a source of stability and recognition (Szczepanikova 2012).

Such a strategy is reinforced, though not entirely determined by the difficulties young refugees face when gaining access to education and employment in the receiving societies. Those who arrive still at the age of compulsory education find it easier to obtain the certificates necessary to continue their studies, and evidence from all three countries shows that Chechen pupils show remarkable success in local schools. However, those who are beyond the age of compulsory education but lack recognized proof of their previous education face considerable obstacles and their access to further studies is complicated. This is particularly the case in Austria and Germany (Vasilyev 2008). Thus, their dreams of pursuing further education are often shattered by lack of money and/or the motivation to attend evening classes in order to obtain the necessary certificates.

The relationship between young Chechen women’s religious identities and their ideas on their roles as women would require more extensive elaboration, beyond the scope of this article. There is a growing body of literature on young immigrant Muslim women’s religious identities and their engagement with the patriarchal family contexts in which they often
live. Rather than assuming that young women’s empowerment must go hand in hand with secularization, researchers suggest that some young women strategically use specific interpretations of Islam as a way of resisting patriarchal traditions and restrictions imposed on them in the name of religious duties (Afshar *et al.* 2006; Echevarría 2012; Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2002). Thus, certain interpretations of Islam can become a means of challenging patriarchal traditions, experienced as too strict. There were a few Chechen women who associated themselves with a reformist stream of Salafi Islam and who expressed criticism of patriarchal norms. They associated these norms with Chechen customary law, adat. Iman (22 years old), who only recently changed her appearance in line with a stricter religious dress code, commented:

There are many things I don’t like so much about Chechen traditions. I have a different opinion from other Chechen women. For example, I think that men should help their wives with children and with household work. This is not against our religion. But many Chechens think it’s shameful for a man.

However, accounts of Muslim women’s emancipation coinciding with the strengthening of their religious beliefs are often drawn from the experiences of educated and economically active women who are second generation immigrants from Maghreb or Turkey. Young Chechen refugee women who embrace revivalist Islam and adopt more conservative gender practices do not come under this category because they often abandon institutional education and are economically dependent on their husbands. Nonetheless, what evidence there is suggests that interpretations of what is a proper religious way of life can vary, and it is likely that they will vary even more in the future. Chechen women of all three generations are free to access diverse sources of religious education, including on the internet and in local mosques attended by Muslim converts and immigrants from other parts of the world.

**Conclusion**

Refugees from Chechnya have established a considerable presence in Europe but so far, few studies have been devoted to them. Their living conditions in different European countries can differ dramatically. They
are a very heterogeneous group with regard to their education, urban or rural background and religious affiliation. This chapter has attempted to contribute to our understanding of the adaptation challenges and gendered processes of settlement of Chechens in Austria, Germany, and Poland.

The case study of three generations of Chechen women has wide implications for theorizing on the nature of patriarchal gender order and its capacity for transformation and reinvention in the migratory context. Despite the dramatic social and political changes of the past decades, Chechen society remains predominantly patriarchal, though not a static and immutable social system, and as this study has shown, it can accommodate diverse gender practices. As a system of norms and values, it is also being constantly negotiated. The experiences of war and emigration have intensified debate on the appropriate role for a Chechen woman in Europe, in Chechen families and communities. The empowerment of older and middle-aged women and their capacity to succeed in fulfilling roles traditionally considered masculine has certainly influenced thinking on this issue. It remains to be seen how the younger generation of women, those who grew up during the wars and are reaching maturity in emigration, will deal with this challenge. For the moment, it can be said that they are choosing to make strategic choices in a context of multiple constraints, rather than blindly accepting the traditional patriarchal structures inherent in Chechen culture. Will their future lead them towards investment in education and in professional careers, towards lives characterized by the pursuit of religious modesty and/or the search for fulfilment in the domestic sphere? Will they try to find ways of combining these goals? Answers to these questions will likely depend on the support and recognition they will receive in their host countries to help them cope with the legacy of their disrupted childhoods.

Note

1 UNHCR statistics do not account for refugees who were granted citizenship in their host country; thus the actual numbers are likely to be higher.
2 The Dublin II Regulation is an EU mechanism adopted in 2003 and revised in 2013 to determine which member state is responsible for an asylum claim. Its aim is to determine responsibility on the basis of a common institutional and legislative framework for the reception and integration of refugees
throughout the EU rather than on that of an existing reality. At present, there remain considerable disparities in the way member states treat asylum seekers and persons with international protection (Schuster 2011; Ngalkipima and Hennessy 2013; FRA 2012).

3 There have been reports of a number of attacks against Chechen refugees in Poland (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker 2011; Łukasiewicz 2011; Miecik and Cieśla 2013). For the most recent, in the city of Białystok in the eastern part of the country, see Klimowicz and Medek (2013).

4 The recognition rate is higher if all positive decisions are considered. These include a variety of time-limited statuses such as tolerated status, subsidiary, and humanitarian protection. These are usually renewable and granted for a period of one to three years, renewal depending on the existence of a continuing need for international protection.

5 The number indicates the interviewee’s age at the time of the first interview. Unless explicitly mentioned, women’s first names are pseudonyms.

6 While children’s well-being greatly depends on their parents’ socio-economic situation, it should be said that Polish schools have gradually developed support systems for their Chechen pupils; for example by employing so-called cultural mediators from among the refugee community to assist children and their parents when communicating with schools.

7 Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej.

8 Warsaw, November 2011.

9 Author’s interview conducted in Berlin, April 2010.

10 Author’s interview conducted in Vienna, March, 2010.

11 It is widely believed that the killing was ordered by Ramzan Kadyrov (International Federation for Human Rights 2012), who Israilov personally accused of torture in a case he brought to the European Court of Human Rights. The assassination was carried out by Chechens, some of whom were recognized refugees in Austria. Most of the perpetrators subsequently received heavy prison sentences in Austria.

12 Author’s interview conducted in Vienna, March 2010.

13 The first names of the women mentioned in this paragraph are their real names. Given the public character of their activities, they were willing to partially reveal their identity with regard to information related to their work.

14 This religious movement has spread among Chechens since the end of the first Russo-Chechen war. Different interpretations of Islam and of the religious way of life have acted as dividing factors not only in Chechnya but also in the Diaspora.

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Vienna: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.


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