Russian Colonialism in the North Caucasus: The Chechen Case

by

Mathieu Drolet-Duguay

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

©Mathieu Drolet-Duguay, 2023
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part,
by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

We acknowledge and respect the lək'ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Russian Colonialism in the North Caucasus: The Chechen Case

by

Mathieu Drolet-Duguay
B.A., University of British Columbia, 2020

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Serhy Yekelchyk, Supervisor
Department of History

Dr. Neilesh Bose, Departmental Member
Department of History

Abstract

This thesis examines the long-standing colonial relationship between Russia and the Northern Caucasus, more specifically in Chechnya. Arching back to Imperial Russia, this thesis seeks to connect the Russo-Chechen conflicts marking the end of the Soviet period and the inauguration of the new Russian Federation with a long standing legacy of colonial violence. In parallel, this thesis discusses the changing role of Islam in the Chechen anti-colonial struggle and in the current arrangement between the Kremlin and Ramzan Kadyrov, who now ruthlessly protects Russia's interests in Chechnya.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee .....……...ii

Abstract .....……..…….iii

Table of Contents ……..iv

List of Figures ……...v

Acknowledgements …..…...……vi

Introduction ..……...…….…1

Chapter One ..……22

Imperial Russian Colonialism in Chechnya: Learning How to Tame the Mountaineers

Chapter Two ....…….51

Restoring the Empire vs. Restoring the Chechen Honor

Chapter Three ....…….84

Kadyrov's Fiefdom, or Ushering a New Era of Russian colonialism in Chechnya

Conclusion ….……..121

References ……..……..128

List of Figures

1. Map of North Caucasus 1

Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude to the professors that have supported me throughout my academic journey. None of this work could have been realized without the unconditional support and mentorship of Dr. Chu Shao-Kang, Dr. Adam Jones, Dr. Todd Campbell and Dr. Manfred Elfstrom. I would also like to thank Noah Michael Rabinovitch and Lynne Jones for their precious help. Finally, I thank Dr. Serhy Yekelchyk for his patient guidance and assistance throughout this arduous process and Dr. Neilesh Bose for his enlightening recommendations.

Figure 1. North Caucasus Regions Map (Peter Fitzgerald, 2008, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:North_Caucasus_regions_map.png.)

Introduction

Even though the post-Soviet Russo-Chechen Wars of the 1990s are relatively recent historical developments, the literature covering them is already reasonably abundant. However, as with most prominent political and historical events studied, the historiography does not necessarily reflect a consensus among the scholars studying the topic. Instead, it consists of a varied collection of different approaches and perspectives. The identification of the source of the conflict has been the cause of a long-standing debate between historicists, who view it as deeply rooted in the colonial relation between Russia and Chechnya, and modernists, who regard the post-Soviet conflicts as products of their respective political and social contexts. However, the issue of Chechen identity is also at the heart of this controversy. Some wonder if radical Islamic movements or ethnonationalism fueled the resistance to Russia or if they did develop as responses to Russian imperialism. Other scholars went as far as to question the very existence of

a distinct Chechen national identity, perpetuating the idea that Chechnya is essentially Russian and that the emergence of radical Islamism is the defining feature of the enduring resistance.

This thesis recognizes that Islam had been a long-defining feature of the North Caucasian people but will argue that at various points during the Russian colonial rule in Chechnya, religion was utilized by Chechen leaders from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century to serve their agendas. While not specifically investigating the origins of Islam in the Caucasus, this thesis instead focuses on its chronicled utilization by leaders of the anti-colonial resistance. Beginning with Sheikh Mansur and Imam Shamil, who respectively incited jihad against imperial Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Chechen Islamic tradition was instrumentalized by agents of the anti-colonial resistance to reach a wider audience. Even Dzhokhar Dudaev, who took advantage of the collapse of the Soviet structures to initiate a more secularly driven wave of Chechen nationalism, came to understand the benefit of appealing to the more devout. During the wars of the 1990s and 2000s, rebel leaders like Shamil Basaev made use of Islam as an ideological vehicle for the resistance against Russia. Despite the hostilities officially ending in the mid-2000s and the Chechen resistance being tamed, the new Russian-appointed leader Ramzan Kadyrov continued to use religion effectively, mainly as an instrument of control, mythmaking, and social engineering. The third chapter of this thesis will discuss how Kadyrov's interpretation of Islam reinforces Russian colonialism and bolsters his ruling power over the Chechens.

This thesis will seek to make an original contribution in connecting the issues of Russian colonialism and Chechen identity, as well as linking the use of violence in Chechnya to the continued evolution of Russian colonial practices. To do so, it will address some critical historiographical controversies and interpretations advanced by Western journalists and scholars.

This thesis will also identify the underlying issue of the attribution of guilt and other discussions in the literature about the implications of using violence.

The following introduction does not pretend to be an encompassing study of the historiography of the Russo-Chechen conflict. Still, it aims to discuss some of the most apparent contentions found in the literature, which will be used as source material in the following chapters. Discussing the arguments of these monographs, articles, and other academic sources on the subject, the introduction attempts to pinpoint the gaps waiting to be filled by scholars and the connections to be made among these various approaches.

Engaging in the reconciliation of historicist and modernist perspectives, this thesis contends that the more recent Russo-Chechen conflicts (1994–1996, 1999–2009) are indeed part of a broader modern conflict reflecting the emergence of post-Soviet Russian neo-imperialism, which is invariably informed by a colonial relationship with established patterns of violence. Historically, the Chechens have responded to this colonial relationship by seeking solidarity through common identity markers, such as a shared Islamic faith and a sense of belonging to the territory.

During the early 1990s confrontation with Russia, the Chechens, as a group, were inflicted severe trauma in the events accompanying the tentative decolonization, which left the republic's infrastructures in ruins. After a chaotic interwar period, the most recent Russo-Chechen armed conflict (1999–2009) did not result in the assertion of Chechen self-determination. Russia's subsequent installment of a proxy regime to effectively freeze the row succeeded in ensuring the continuation of Soviet and Russian imperialism in Chechnya. This new phase was also accompanied by the advent of historical obscurantism that prevails to this day in the republic. Taking a neocolonial approach to examine the outcome of the Russo-

Chechen conflict, this thesis will discuss how the new regime actively engages in denying the Chechen people the right to commemorate the past while engaging in the manipulation of historical narratives, with a clear objective to create one in which Chechnya is, and has always been, an unalienable and essential part of Russia.

It may be tempting for scholars of modern politics to disregard the historical aspect of contemporary conflicts. As the French historian Lucien Febvre once realized, history is the science of men, placed in time and "subject to perpetual change," which cautions against the seeking of solely deeply rooted historical explanations to modern phenomena, sometimes overlooking the more recent and occasionally radical contextual transformations.[1] For example, the Russian ethnographer Valery Tishkov argues that the Russo-Chechen conflict is essentially a "contemporary problem between contemporary actors," justifying his rebuttal of historicist explanations by claiming that "it is the conflict that constructs Chechens, not vice versa."[2] Tishkov questions the very existence of the Chechen nation before the post-Soviet confrontation and accuses the Chechen society of unjustifiably rehashing the abuses of its Russian imperial and Soviet past, firmly affirming a definite historical distinctiveness and wholeness of the post-Soviet Russian Federation.[3]

However, his claims find little resonance among modern analysts of the Russo-Chechen conflict, who have grown increasingly attentive to its complexity and historical depth. A more nuanced approach must acknowledge the importance of understanding contemporary global, regional, political, societal, and economic contexts. This thesis will work at harmonizing perspectives by framing the conflict as part of a Russian colonial scheme, viewing the Chechen

---

[1] Lucien Febvre, "A New Kind of History," in *A New Kind of History and Other Essays*, ed. Peter Burke, trans. K. Folca (Routledge, 1973), 32.
[2] Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 10, 17.
[3] Ibid., 14–5.

response as evolving within the parameters of this scheme. While Tishkov's contribution to the field must be recognized, this thesis will seek to counter some of his more myopic, colonialist, and deeply patriotic views, such as his claim that little was known of the Chechen nation before the visit of the German ethnographer Julius Von Klaproth in 1812.[4] In this regard, Amjad Jaimoukha has remarked that the North Caucasus seems to represent a "blind spot" for most modern Russian nationalists, which limits Chechnya to being, in their view, essentially a Russian territorial property populated by 'uncivilized mountaineers.'[5]

To analyze the historical depth of the Russo-Chechen conflict, the works of authors such as the political scientist John B. Dunlop and historians Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov and Moshe Gammer will be discussed in the first chapter, as they will provide the historical background to the colonial violence in Chechnya. These authors have developed what Clifford Geertz would call a "thick description," mainly borrowing from the disciplines of ethnography and anthropology.[6] For example, Dunlop affirms that the origins of the Chechen people can be traced as far as 6,000 years ago and that it is only in the sixteenth century that the Russians began to covet the area the Chechens currently inhabit, initiating the anti-colonial struggle which continues to this day.[7] Similarly professing the existence of the Chechen people on a "longue durée," the historian Jaimoukha extracts it from the traditional narrative confining it to its relation with the Russian Empire, pointing out that the first confrontations with the invaders were those with the hordes of Tatar-Mongols taking place during medieval times, noting early displays

[4] Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 18–19.
[5] Amjad Jaimoukha, *The Chechens: A Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2004), 8–9.
[6] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 1973), 9–10.
[7] John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–3.

of what he calls the Chechen "age-old spirit of national preservation."[8] This thesis recognizes the Chechens' longevity as the region's titular population. However, it will focus on the colonial relationship with imperial Russia as a starting point. Rather than ascribing Chechen nationality to blood ties or ethnic belonging, this thesis will argue that modern Chechen nationalism resulted from a growing desire for individuals of a cultural community to bring the anti-colonial struggle to a successful end. Furthermore, it will acknowledge the various points during this struggle at which the shared Islamic faith of the Chechens has been exploited by those spearheading the movement. Although this thesis will not engage in an exhaustive ethnographic study of the Chechen people, it still will defend its distinctiveness as a historical cultural community beyond the shared Islamic tradition.

The work of Moshe Gammer will be helpful in understanding the pivotal events of the nineteenth-century Chechen anti-colonial struggle, which profoundly altered the course of the history of Chechnya.[9] His work has been prominently utilized by historians taking an interest in the period marking the emergence of muridism in Chechnya. However, this thesis will not analyze the theological and the socio-organizational complexities and implications of muridism – which Gammer does rather extensively – but assess the political implications and the role of the most prominent murids in the anti-imperial struggle. Gammer's work effectively positions the Chechen struggle as a direct response to the Russian imperial and colonial context. However, this thesis does not reduce the role of Sufi Islamic traditions in Chechnya to that function alone, seeing as Kadyrov has more recently used it instead to reinforce Russian colonialism.

---

[8] Jaimoukha, *The Chechens*, 1–2.

[9] Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 1994)

Not all authors extend their investigation beyond the Chechen Soviet experience, but "modernists" generally identify a preceding colonial relationship as a pre-existing condition shaping the contemporary conflict in various ways. The author Brian G. Williams addresses the unequal relationship between Chechnya and its suzerain, remarking that "any Chechen will tell you, their ancestors never set out to conquer Russia."[10] This thesis will build on Williams' general assertion that the radicalization of the post-Soviet Russo-Chechen conflict is a product of the long-standing decolonization struggle, which is itself a response to a Russian imperial project that transcends political changes, in contrast with the more traditional historical compartmentalization making a more apparent distinction between imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet Russian imperialism.[11]

This thesis will also work to dismantle some misconceptions about Chechen colonial history. While some most apparent factors are currently hindering the research on the subject, including language barriers, a lack of accessibility of primary sources and a generalized concern from outsiders not to infringe upon Russian domestic affairs is partly explaining the continuous stereotyping of representations of Chechen people and lasting misinterpretations of their history.[12] As a result, Chechens have often been subject to orientalism in the literature, informed mainly by the way the Russians presented their colonial venture as part of a benevolent "mission civilisatrice." Best described by Eduard Said, the orientalist discourse that took hold of the colonial world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries consisted in viewing colonized populations as part of an inferior people, waiting to be co-opted by a higher culture.[13] In that

[10] Brian G. Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya: The Russian-Chechen Wars, the Al Qaeda Myth and the Boston Marathon Bombings* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2015), 2.
[11] Ibid., 2–3, 8–9.
[12] Jaimoukha, *The Chechens*, 1–3.
[13] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 41–2.

regard, this thesis accepts that Chechnya was made to be known in Russia and abroad as the land of uncivilized mountaineers. This representation still pervades some of the literature.

However, it could be wondered if the concept put forward by Eduard Said in the late 1970s adequately reflects the context of the Russo-Chechen conflict. The historian Maria Todorova more recently concluded that, while Said's orientalism still excites passions, it has been "superseded as a whole," suggesting that, in the case of the relationship of the Balkans with the West, for example, the concept was favored by intellectuals to explain what was a much more complex and most definitely distinctive phenomenon to comprehend.[14] Whenever used in analyzing the historiography of the Russo-Chechen conflict, the concept of orientalism, as presented by Said, should then be adapted to the local and historical context. Otherwise, as explained by Todorova, "the discourse is becoming circumscribed in the category of orientalism," but lumping the other as generically 'oriental' essentially perpetuates misconceptions.[15]

Saluting Said's attack on orientalism as a critic epistemological advance during a moment of "general crisis of representation" in historiography, Todorova introduces the idea that generalizations in historical interpretations must be explained beyond the far too broad qualification of 'orientalism,' which does not account for a distinctive historical existence outside of the paradigm of the East-West dichotomy.[16] Simply put, she calls for a reorientation of the discourse around the concept of orientalism, making it more adaptable to the historical context of the subject studied. In the case of the Russo-Chechen conflict, there would be an acute risk, for example, of conflating the Chechens with their Islamic faith, perpetuating some of

[14] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 9–11.

the stereotypes initially attributed to them by the Russians. Examining the historiography of a conflict that sprung out of a colonial relationship, this thesis benefits from being fully aware of such a concept as orientalism.

Further geographically contextualizing the concept of orientalism, the historian David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye remarks about Russia that its "exoticism, eastern geography, and frequently repressive rule have continued to encourage the Western view that it is essentially Asian."[17] As a result, not only is the treatment of Chechen history vulnerable to orientalist assumptions, but the Russian subject is also at risk of being misrepresented through a set of prejudicial misconceptions and generalizations. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye notices that, for example, most Russians would probably deny being Oriental, although, on a late twentieth-century account, they would undoubtedly be considered Eurasians.[18] Doubling on Todorova's criticism of Said's orientalism, the author adds that the wording is "deliberately vague," overlooking the reality that many European nations have an oriental tradition.[19] Recognizing some utility to the application of Said's definition of orientalism in the Russian context, the author adds that: "in the Russian mind, there are both one Orient and many Orients, from the ancient Tartar city of Kazan in Europe, only 600 kilometres east of Moscow, to Asian lands such as Persia, India, China, Mongolia, and Japan."[20]

Both Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and Todorova believe that Said's concept of orientalism is oversimplifying complex and multi-layered problems that need to be understood in their distinctive historical contexts. Moreover, the fact that Russia can concurrently be the bearer

[17] David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2010), 2.
[18] Ibid., 3–4.
[19] Ibid., 6.
[20] Ibid., 10.

and subject of orientalism in the literature on the Russo-Chechen conflict makes it a challenging exercise to properly apply Said's binary perspective unless assessed under specific parameters accounting for distinctiveness.

For these reasons, the author James Hughes advises against the use of terms such as 'ethnic hatreds' or 'ethnic enmity' to explain the causes of the Russo-Chechen conflict, suggesting that it contributes to the perpetuation of orientalist assumptions, reminding us that radicals have ever so often weaponized these historical interpretations to justify their actions.[21] While he does not entirely excuse the multi-ethnic antagonisms from having played an essential role in the emergence of the post-Soviet Russo-Chechen conflict, Hughes refutes the assumption of the inevitability of the conflict.[22] Hughes also warns against what he calls the '*Braveheart'* syndrome, which seems to arouse academics and journalists enough that they consistently produce work that romanticizes and exaggerates the Chechen historical struggle and resistance to Russian imperialism, perpetuating generalizations and myths.[23] This thesis will avoid the entrapment into heroic historical narratives, maintaining that the longevity of the Chechen anti-imperialist struggle reflects the continuity of the Russian efforts at subjugating the region's population.

Informed by these cautionary approaches, the first chapter will attempt to address the enormous influence of the Soviet experience on the Chechen people, for whom it simply was the continuation of the previous Russian imperial colonial rule driven by a different political ideology. Even Valery Tishkov, who usually privileges ahistorical explanations for the surge of post-Soviet Chechen secessionism, does discuss the deportation of the Chechens from their

---

[21] James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad,* National and Ethnic Conflict in the 21st Century (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1–2, 12–13.
[22] Ibid., 1–2.
[23] Ibid., 4–5.

homeland in 1944, an episode which he deems to be a culturally traumatic event around which Chechen anti-Russian sentiments may well have later crystallized.[24] Brian G. Williams agrees that the Chechen radical nationalists of the 1990s were the products of the Soviet system, adding that it was during the Soviet rule that the Chechens began to define themselves by their "*national'nost*," or belonging to a nation.[25]

The clear chronological structure of this thesis will show that this sense of belonging evolved: from kinship to religious and cultural affiliation, producing the community solidarity required to survive aggressive Russian colonialism. During the final years of the Soviet Union, the sense of belonging to a distinct cultural community progressively imparted the Chechens with a desire to politically enfranchise themselves, especially as the Soviet empire's disintegration was perceived as the potential end of Russian dominance in the region. This period will serve as the point of departure for the second chapter, which will seek to connect the legacy of Russian colonialism in Chechnya with the events that followed the demise of the Soviet Union. It will argue that, despite fundamental changes in political ideology, the newly created Russian Federation still maintained its imperialistic dominance in Chechnya.

Acknowledging the significance of the Russian colonial legacy in Chechnya and the lingering effects of the deportation and the return of the Chechens to their homeland, the second chapter will discuss the modernist point of view that the late Soviet years had created unbearable economic conditions in the region, contributing to a societal climate favorable to an insurgency. Describing the situation in which Chechnya found itself between 1964 and 1991, Dunlop points out that in those years, poverty and unemployment were endemic in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, suggesting the industrialization of Chechnya had never benefited the largely undereducated

[24] Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 28–30.
[25] Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya*, 82.

indigenous labor force.[26] As prophesied by Karl Marx in his materialist conception of history, it would then seem logical that when social relations came in contradiction with the forces of production, class consciousness began to emerge among the disillusioned and frustrated Chechens, who fully realized their unequal position in the division of labor at a national level.[27] The Chechen collective interest had come to be underserved by the arrangement of social power sanctioned by the Soviet Union. Jim Nichol agrees that economic distress played an essential role in creating instability in the region, adding that even Vladimir Putin now recognizes its significance and precedence to later issues of Islamic extremism and the anti-Russian sentiments in the North Caucasus.[28] In post-Soviet Chechnya, this perceived injustice was astutely weaponized by secessionists to make their actions seem more justifiable to the Chechen masses. However, at this point, the political aspirations of the Chechens remained essentially secularly driven.

For most analysts, it is unsurprising that the collapse of the Soviet structures following the fall of the Soviet Union constituted, for many, an opportunity for expressing some more secular nationalist sentiments in Chechnya. The political scientist Michael O. Slobodchikoff argues that Gorbachev's liberalization efforts during the *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* era had weakened the centralized power, paving the way for a challenge of the regional order.[29] Moreover, the various conflicts that emerged from post-Soviet Russia's regional hegemony following the collapse of the USSR seemed to be out of control of the new global diplomatic order. The second chapter will argue that the international community treated the Chechen

---

[26] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 86.
[27] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford University Press, 1977): 168–9.
[28] Jim Nichol, "Stability in Russia's Chechnya and Other Regions of the North Caucasus: Recent Developments," in *Chechnya Still Boiling*, ed. George S. Toler (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2010), 8–9.
[29] Michael O. Slobodchikoff, *Building Hegemonic Order Russia's Way: Order, Stability, and Predictability in the Post-Soviet Space* (Maryland, US: Lexington Books, 2014), 8.

question as a domestic Russian problem. Maintaining this perspective that Chechnya was an integral part of Russia placed the newly independent Russian Federation in a position that allowed it to operate outside international legal frameworks. To justify intervention, the Russian government invoked the fear of a potential domino effect among the other ethnic groups composing the entity succeeding the Soviet Union.[30]

As it will be argued throughout the second chapter, the aggressive stances taken by Yeltsin and his successor Putin to solve the Chechen issue signalled that Russian imperialistic ambitions had never been abandoned and that Russia had no real intention to move toward a more liberal democratic and diplomatic approach to problem-solving. Russian leaders quite possibly interpreted the quasi-indifference of the international community as a green light to launch forceful interventions to quell Chechen separatism. This context of renewed intensification of colonial violence and the resulting domestic turmoil produced the ideal circumstances for the radicalization of secessionists in Chechnya, who eventually resorted to Jihadism as a potent ideological vehicle for their anti-colonial struggle.

The authors like Emil Aslan Souleimanov, Jasper Schwampe, and Sofie Bedford, who follow a "modernist" interpretation of Chechen nationalism, agree that the period following the dismantlement of the Soviet institutions was characterized by the regional fractionalization of political power, social disorder, civil unrest, and significant economic decline and that it created the perfect conditions for criminality, religiously-inspired extremism and insurgency to foment.[31] However, they still question the legitimacy of the leadership of the Chechen secessionist project, noting that the first president of the Republic of Ichkeria, Dudaev, had to order the armed forces

[30] Ibid., 19–20.
[31] Emil Aslan Souleimanov, Jasper Schwampe and Sofie Bedford, "Chechnya: A Study of Post-Soviet Conflict," in *Crises in the Post-Soviet Space: From the Dissolution of the Soviet Union to the Conflict in Ukraine*, ed. Felix Jaitner, Tina Olteanu and Tobia Spori (London: Routledge, 2018), 213–6.

to crack down on the opposition in June 1993.[32] Likewise, this thesis does not assume the popular support of the secular Chechen independence movement led by Dudaev. However, once the Russians began their military intervention in Chechnya in late 1994, the perceived lack of popular mobilization around Dudaev's political project arguably did not matter as much as the resurgence of the Chechen anti-colonial struggle against Russia.

Concurrently, this thesis acknowledges the validity of the claim made by more dispassionate studies of the Russo-Chechen conflict that the phenomenon is part of a broader post-Soviet transitional period. In their study of conflict in Post-Soviet spaces, Felix Jaitner, Tina Olteanu, and Tobias Spori refer to the closely intertwined political and economic transformative processes at work at the dissolution of the Soviet Union as an "intersecting crisis phenomena."[33] In other words, analysts of the conflict must consider the junction in a time of unprecedented changes for both Chechnya and Russia and the rest of the world. Because the Chechens are not part of an ethnically homogenous group but rather an affiliation of closely related ethnic groups that have been sharing culture, customs, and territory for an extended period, Chechen nationalism is essentially what the political scientist Benedict Anderson calls a "cultural artifact," whose meaning has changed over time depending on the context in which it evolved.[34]

In his assessment of the evolution of post-Soviet Chechen nationalism, James Hughes remarks that post-communist conflicts tend to mirror those that followed rapid decolonization earlier in the twentieth century.[35] According to the author, a weak central government, endemic

---

[32] Ibid., 217–8.
[33] Felix Jaitner, Tina Olteanu and Tobias Spori, "Crises in the Post-Soviet Space," in *Crises in the Post-Soviet Space: From the Dissolution of the Soviet Union to the Conflict in Ukraine*, ed. Felix Jaitner, Tina Olteanu and Tobias Spori (London: Routledge, 2018), 1–2.
[34] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Revised Edition (London: Verso, 2006), 4.
[35] Hughes, *Chechnya*, 162.

poverty, mountainous terrain, and brutal and indiscriminate Russian counterinsurgency operations must be identified as converging and aggravating factors in the Chechen case.[36] This thesis recognizes these circumstances as the most immediate causes of the escalation of the conflict.

The second chapter will also argue that the indiscriminate bombing of the urban center of Chechnya in 1994-1995 effectively marked a historical point of no return in the post-Soviet Russo-Chechen relationship. The journalist Thomas de Waal remarks that historians and political scientists alike have tended to dismiss the critical effect of this disproportionate military response on the Chechen collective cultural memory.[37] In reality, Russian military intervention in Chechnya in the 1990s contributed directly to reviving the anti-imperialist struggle against Russia and establishing a new basis for anti-Russian sentiments, allowing the Chechens to connect the violent Russian legacy of colonialism in the region with actual events. As Jaimoukha remarks, these events only added to the generational cultural trauma resulting from imperial Russian and Soviet genocidal policies, suggesting that the internalization of these traumatic memories has probably contributed to the Chechens' withdrawal on themselves, leading to further misrepresentations of the mainly orally transmitted Chechen culture from the part of outsiders.[38]

Furthermore, Tim Edensor noted that literature on nationalism, which informs our definitions of nation, society, and community, has often been subject to "very little critical analysis in terms of how it is represented and experienced through popular culture and in

[36] Ibid., 163.
[37] Thomas de Waal, "Chechnya: The Breaking Point," in *Chechnya Still Boiling*, ed. George S. Toler (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009), 18.
[38] Jaimoukha, *The* Chechens, 1–3.

everyday life."[39] While studies operating at a more general theoretical level are numerous, and political and military history remains the focus of most of the literature on the Russo-Chechen conflict, the more quotidian and banal ways in which the Chechen culture manifests itself are less evident in the historiography. Edensor argues that most cultural studies focus on traditional culture and time-honored folk practices, a process that primarily excludes the new vernacular traditions acquired through time.[40] This way, traditionalists overlook that culture is ever-changing, transforming, and expressed differently through time. Recognizing this evolutionary process acknowledges that Chechen society is subject to and the agent of perpetual change, which should be further accounted for in the historiography. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey, and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski also maintain that traditional historiography sometimes presents "a breakdown into key political events (which) does not necessarily coincide with the chronology as experienced by local people."[41]

In contrast, Georgi M. Derluguian notes, in his introduction to Anna Politkovskaya's *Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches From Chechnya*, that the Russian author-journalist never hesitated to journey repeatedly into Chechnya to gather testimonies, a feat for which she was denounced in Russia for a "lack of patriotism."[42] Politkovskaya's work is partly constituted of tragic personal stories and portrayals of the lives of the Chechen civilians caught in the crossfire of a war they did not wish to take part in.[43] An essential feature of Politkovskaya's work, as

---

[39] Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Bloomsbury Academic,2002), 1.
[40] Ibid., 14.
[41] Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozloski, "Introduction," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014), 2.
[42] Georgi M. Derluguian, "Whose Truth?" introduction to *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*, by Anna Politkovskaya, trans. Alexander Burry and Tatiana Tulchinsky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1–2.
[43] Anna Politkovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya,* trans. Alexander Burry and Tatiana Tulchinsky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 33–8.

opposed to more dispassionate studies of the conflict, is that it brings human tragedy to the forefront of history and does not pretend to be objective. Politkovskaya openly takes the position of a defender of the civilian victims of the conflict when reporting on their sorrow. Her reports illustrate the extent of the bleakness of life in war-torn Chechnya. Some accuse Politkovskaya of journalistic sensationalism, but it is unclear exactly how she would have benefited from relaying these accounts, given the risk of ultimately paying the price of her own life, which she did in 2006 in a suspected political assassination.[44]

Most importantly, her accounts of the daily life inside the warzone contradicted the narrative put forward by the Russian federal troops to justify their presence in Chechnya, which was that the second military intervention in Chechnya was a counterterrorist operation.[45] As one of the few researchers accessing the republic during that time, Politkovskaya's work is essential to this thesis, supporting generalized suspicion about the nature of the Russian military operation. As such, Politkovskaya is unambiguous when it comes to identifying Russian troops and pro-Russian forces as the main perpetrators of human rights abuses during the Russo-Chechen conflict.

For any meaningful reconciliation process to take place in the post-war period, all sides must recognize their involvement in the events. But in this regard, de Waal argues that "Russian society has yet to own up to the enormity of the tragedy it has inflicted on Chechnya," adding that without such recognition, the spectre of Chechen "de-colonization struggle" will remain ever-present, haunting the future of normalization of the Russo-Chechen relations.[46] Even the Russian scholar Tishkov admits a broader civic responsibility, mainly in the inertia that enabled

---

[44] Tom Parfitt, "The Only Good Journalist…" *The Guardian,* 10 October 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/oct/10/russia.media.
[45] Politkovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell*, 50–1.
[46] de Waal, "Chechnya," 20.

such tragic events to take place, but refuses to go as far as viewing post-Soviet Russia as the inheritor of the mistakes made by Soviet and Imperial Russia.[47] However, Brian G. Williams identifies the "senseless killing of Chechens by invading Russian Federal forces" as the main driving force behind the subsequent escalation of violence by the rebellion, making clear that the aggressor, in this case, is Russian.[48]

To further emphasize that the use of extreme violence by the Chechens was primarily defensive, Williams surmises that the rebel leader Shamil Basaev, widely portrayed in the media as a cold-blooded irrational terrorist, may very well have acted in retaliation for the Russian targeted execution of his wife, children, and sister.[49] Therefore, this thesis will not adhere to the Russian narrative that Chechen separatists were merciless murderers. Nonetheless, it will recognize the role of Jihadism in the conflict and the use of terrorism by the Chechen secessionists. Still, it will refute the idea that Islam was the main radicalizing force and argue that the escalation of violence in the conflict motivated adherence to Jihadism.

However, it would be mistaken to generalize the Chechen civilian experience in this period. As Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey, and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski notice, civilians were "often trapped between fighters and soldiers or police, and involved in complex networks of allegiance."[50] To evaluate the various degree of implication of each actor in the conflict, John Russell developed a model of analysis which lends itself to more nuance. Analyzing the case of the Russo-Chechen conflict, Russell conceives the different actors as 'entrepreneurs of violence,' directly or indirectly contributing to the perpetuation of violence.[51]

---

[47] Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 2.
[48] Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya*, 89, 92–3.
[49] Ibid., 78-82.
[50] Le Huerou, Merlin, Regamey and Sieca-Kozlowski, "Introduction," 5.
[51] John Russell, *Chechnya – Russia's 'War on Terror'* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3.

The author established a comprehensive list of behaviors and events conducive to violence, attitudes, and processes supporting structural violence, as well as contradictions and variants.[52] By doing so, Russell found that he could more rationally explain and contextualize the extreme violence employed by both parties in the conflict.[53] Russell's nuanced approach seeks to bring us to a less binary approach to the conflict that unequivocally identifies perpetrators and victims.

Despite the novelty of the topic of the post-Soviet Russo-Chechen conflict, many are investigating it as the events unfold. Under these conditions, a condensed study of topical historiography cannot pretend to be all-encompassing. Chiefly, this is because the conflict, as the third chapter will argue, has not been resolved and continues to evolve daily. Still, isolating some of the most contentious issues and positioning the work of some authors is both practical and beneficial for analysts willing to contribute to the ongoing conversation. While the first and second chapters work at harmonizing historicist and modernist perspectives, the third chapter will argue that neocolonialism, or the Russian ability to pursue colonialism beyond the significant political changes in the Kremlin and through other means than waging war, is a more appropriate framework to view the current state of the Russo-Chechen conflict. Taking from the ever-evolving academic literature on the subject, as well as recent news outlets, documentary films, and other media sources, the third chapter will argue that while the establishment of a proxy regime with a high degree of autonomy has allowed Russia to maintain its rule over Chechnya, effectively freezing the conflict, it has also enabled an autocratic leader to take advantage of the lack of existing infrastructure to establish his fiefdom and model the Chechen republic after his worldviews and interpretations of Islam, while manipulating historical narratives in an attempt to fabricate a new Chechen ethnonational identity.

---

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 2–3.

As it will be argued throughout the third chapter, the current equilibrium resulting from the successful indigenization of the Russo-Chechen conflict rests on the patrimonial relationship between Russia's president and Chechnya's appointed authoritarian leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, whose ability to maintain tight control over the local population is key to his rule. Taking from a contemporary body of literature, the third chapter will expose the brutal methods deployed to enforce his power. It will detail his efforts at creating a new Chechen cultural identity centred around his beliefs, including his distorted interpretation of Sufi Islam tradition. Cross-referencing various reliable international news outlets, as well as human rights reports bringing to light Kadyrov's mistreatment of homosexuals and severe curtailment of women's rights in the name of traditionalism, the third chapter will also discuss how the despot's actions seem to reflect his own overly masculinist, homophobic and sexist worldviews. Similarly, this chapter will look at the Chechen leader's obsession with martial arts sports, which allows him to gain some notoriety in the West while promoting his interpretation of a "virile" Chechen cultural identity, conveniently diverting the attention from the daily human rights abuses committed by his regime.

Because the third chapter deals with ongoing events, it conceivably pertains to both the history and political science fields. Likewise, the literature that informs its content has been chiefly published after the end of the official Russian military intervention in Chechnya in 2009. Most readily recognize the neo-colonial nature of the relationship maintained by the Russian Federation in Chechnya. Their readings of the situation acknowledge that the objective behind the increasing Russian involvement in neo-imperialist activities is the preservation of actual territorial sovereignty and the eventual recreation of a Russian empire comprising the regions colonized by tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. Therefore, this thesis agrees with John

Russell's claim that the indigenization of the conflict is not to be considered a viable settlement.[54]

Finally, this thesis will fill a gap in the literature by connecting contemporary Chechnya to the Russian legacy of violent colonialism in the region. It will argue that the current Chechen context is best viewed through a neocolonial lens. From the emergence of muridism in the nineteenth century to the outbreak of secular ethnonationalism and the eventual appearance of Jihadism, the actions undertaken by the Chechens have been consistently informed by the will to respond to colonial violence. This thesis will work at demarcating itself from the traditional clear-cut and binary portrait of the Russo-Chechen relations by proposing to examine them under a neocolonial lens that allows for a reconciliation of historicist and modernist explanations. Exploring the viability of the outcome of the Russo-Chechen wars, this work will bring awareness to the unresolved colonial predicament in which the Chechens remain.

[54] Russell, *Chechnya*, 6.

Chapter One

Imperial Russian Colonialism in Chechnya: Learning How to Tame the Mountaineers

Few academics and analysts interpret the Russo-Chechen conflict of the 1990s without considering its historical roots. It is impossible to set aside the centuries-old Russian colonial legacy in the North Caucasus, including in the region of Chechnya, which has been the locus of a ruthless and sustained campaign of repression since early in the nineteenth century. Many historians see this campaign as tantamount to ethnocide directed at the indigenous population of the Caucasus. My work focuses on a little-explored aspect of Chechnya's historical legacy—the influence of colonial and anti-colonial violence on the present, as well as the changing parallel role of Islam in defining a Chechen identity. This chapter will situate the post-Soviet Chechen conflict in the broader context of a colonial struggle against Russian imperialism. This work subscribes to the view that the Chechen struggle is part of a more extended history of colonial violence and its response. This historical process survived the significant political changes in Russia throughout the twentieth century. The purpose of this chapter is not to suggest the legacy of colonialism as the only explanation for the more recent developments in Chechnya but to emphasize its importance in the historical development of this coveted region, which has seen an equally enduring resistance to aggression from its targeted indigenous population. Revisiting existing literature on the topic, this chapter will explain the origins of the local opposition, the concurrent emergence of muridism in Chechnya, and the subsequent development of ethnonationalism that surfaced during the collapse of the Soviet Union. This analysis will establish the historical foundation for the argument developed in the following chapters, namely that the genocidal violence that characterized Russian imperial and Soviet domination of Chechnya set a precedence for the normalized violence that prevailed in the region during the

1990s and early 2000s. As a result of this permanent struggle, many Chechens, including the leaders of the post-Soviet independence movement, came to view the Chechen cultural identity as inseparable from the historical struggle against Russian aggression, which posed a recurring threat to their existence.

It seems complicated to pinpoint the birth of the ethnic group occupying present-day Chechen territory. Still, ethnographic studies such as those produced by John B. Dunlop, Amjad Jaimoukha, and the former Russian minister of nationalities under Yeltsin, Valery Tishkov, are essential to understanding the origins of the Chechen people and the Russian colonial legacy in this region of the Caucasus. In *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, the author John B. Dunlop dates the presence of the Chechens in the area as far as 6,000 years ago, long predating the arrival of any Russians in the Caucasus.[1] In a Russian colonial setting, the situation of the Chechens corresponds to the criteria enunciated by the United Nations and the World Bank for the recognition of indigenous peoples, as they are autochthones presenting "social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live."[2] This work recognizes the Chechens as indigenous to their land, even though the group is not ethnically homogenous.

While the distinctive native tongue belongs to the "Nakh" branch of Caucasian languages, the dialect was eventually regrouped and standardized during the Soviet period with that of the Chechens' close neighbors, the "Ghalghaaj" or Ingush people, under the term "Vainakh."[3] A good indication of a prevailing colonial relationship is that the Chechens do not

---

[1] John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–2.
[2] "Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations," *United Nations*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us.html; "Indigenous Peoples," *World Bank*, 2021, https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples.
[3] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 2.

refer to themselves as such but as "Nokhchii."[4] The Russians began to name them "Chechens" after the first village they encountered in the region and never considered the alternative.[5] While Dunlop notes that the Russians, during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, first established a fort at Tarki in 1559 to keep the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and the Crimean Khanate in check, the Russian scholar Tishkov maintains instead that little was known of the mountaineers before the visit to the region of the German orientalist and ethnographer Julius Von Klaproth in 1812, minimizing the historical significance of previous Russian incursions in the Caucasus for the indigenous population.[6] This thesis acknowledges that such colonialist attitudes have sometimes permeated the historiography, reflecting the historical narratives prevailing at the time.

More recent ethnographic work has helped recover the historical existence of the Chechen people, clearly establishing that the Nokhchuo people the Russians encountered were characterized by two distinctive critical features, adding to the presence of a regional dialect that played significant roles in the resistance to the Russian colonialism that followed: a traditional regional form of political governance and an allegiance to the Islamic faith. According to Dunlop, this progressive conversion of the Caucasian peoples to Sunni Islam, from the seventh to the seventeenth centuries, did put a halt to the advance of Orthodox Christianity in the region, which had started in the sixteenth century and was most certainly part of the objectives of the Russian colonizing mission.[7] However, Joanna Swirszcz argues that historical evidence shows that "lowland Chechen tribes began converting (to Islam) with the help of Kumyk missionaries" earlier in the sixteenth century.[8] According to her, the Sufi Islam that developed in Chechnya

---

[4] Ibid., 1–2.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 3–4; Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 17.
[7] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 3.
[8] Joanna Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," *Nationalities Paper* 39, no. 1 (January 2009): 62.

was "more tolerant of local customs and traditions" but strongly encouraged Muslim solidarity against invaders and unification under the leadership of Sufi brotherhoods.[9]

The Chechen mountaineers lived at the time in isolated "auls," practicing what has been labelled as "mountain democracy," a kinship-based political system in which a council of elders made decisions but in which individuals were largely self-subsistent and considered equals by birthright.[10] Adding to this arrangement, a complex code of customary laws, the "adat," took precedence over all foreign legal traditions.[11] Although the most important Chechen tribes, such as the Ichkeri, the Aukh, and the Kist, possessed a strong sense of cultural belonging, Dunlop insists that it was not expressed through a conventional and modern nationalistic identity.[12] Instead, tribal identities and loyalties prevailed. These were based on the "teip," or clan unit, which the scholars Donna Winslow, Rene Moelker, and Francoise Companjen describe as comprising "several villages of about 10–15 families each, who claim descent from a common ancestor."[13] In this clannic societal organization, Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev outline an ultra-patriarchal code of honor, chiefly linked to the male's ability to defend or avenge offenses committed to members of his family. This custom later pervaded Chechen society.[14]

When the Russians moved in to colonize the Caucasus, they found the most formidably tenacious adversaries in the mountaineers. From the first encounters with the Russian invaders, the region's history became inextricably linked to that of the resistance against Russian and Soviet imperialism.

---

[9] Ibid., 65–66
[10] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 19–20.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 19–21.
[13] Donna Winslow, Rene Moelker and Francoise Companjen, "Glocal Chechnya: From Russian Sovereignty to Pan-Islamic Autonomy," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 131.
[14] Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev, "Blood Revenge and Mobilization: Evidence from the Chechen Wars," *International Security* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 169–70; Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 60–61.

As previously noted, the Russians began to organize occasional raids on their Muslim neighbors of the North Caucasus by the sixteenth century.[15] However, according to Dunlop, it was with Peter the Great's 1722 Caspian military campaign that the Chechens realized they would have to defend their homeland from Russian invaders.[16] The British author John F. Baddeley observed that "as in other parts of the world, the native levies in the Caucasus, however numerous and however brave, have never been able to stand against the disciplined forces of a more civilized neighbor in the open, whatever success they might and did, achieve — witness a hundred instances in Daghestan and Tchetchnia (sic) — in forest depths and mountain fastness.[17]" In other words, while the mountaineers retained some military advantage in the hills from their vast knowledge of the terrain, it proved much more difficult to defend the lowlands against a significantly more modern and experienced Russian army.

Eventually, in the 1760s, Catherine the Great considerably ramped up the Russian military presence in the region, designating it as an important geostrategic location for the imperial defense.[18] Baddeley devoted an essential chapter of his work on the Russian conquest of the Caucasus to that specific period between 1722 and 1771, during which the Russian control of the Caspian coast began to be prioritized to prevent encroachment on future trade routes by the Ottoman Empire.[19] The author C.W. Blandy agrees that, from this period on, Russia became consistently aware of both territorial and ideological threats posed by southern neighbors and

---

[15] Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (Abingdon: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1994), 1–2; Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 4.
[16] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 7–8.
[17] J.F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (London: Routledge, 1999), 26–7.
[18] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 7–8; Zubeyde Gune-Yadcy, "A Chechen National Hero of the Caucasus in the 18th Century: Sheikh Mansur," *Central Asian Survey* 22, no. 1 (March 2003): 103–4; Moshe Gammer, "Empire and Mountains: The Case of Russia and the Caucasus," *Social Evolution & History* 12, no. 2 (September 2013): 120–1; Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov, *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance Towards the Muslim World*, ed. Marie Broxup (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 149.
[19] Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest,* 103–4.

considered the mountainous Transcaucasian region and its rugged landscape a convenient natural border buffer zone, a conviction that remains valid to this day.[20] Interestingly, the historian Jeronim Perovic points out that there were, at the time, some doubts as to the actual benefits of a Russian expansion in the area and points to the pro-Russian allegiances of the North Caucasian peoples who sought protection against other enemies as decisively weighing in for the pursuit of territorial expansion.[21]

As it turns out, the Chechens did not accept the annexation to the Russian Empire. In fact, despite the apparent inevitability of the Russian military and colonial advances in the Caucasus, the local indigenous resistance to the Russian imperial project began to gradually acquire mythical proportions and a religious dimension with the activities of Sheikh Mansur, starting in 1785 with what the author Zubeyde Gune-Yadcy describes as an appeal to the Muslim people of the Caucasus for religious unity against the "Russian infidels."[22] Mansur failed to unite all the Caucasian tribes and was eventually defeated. He had hoped that the anti-Russian resistance in the region would crystallize around a shared Islamic faith, potentially attracting support from the Ottoman neighbors.[23] Gune-Yadcy notes that Mansur's capture in 1791, and his subsequent death while imprisoned, did not prevent his influence from pervading the modern history of the Caucasus and contributing to the rise of Muridism in the region over the next century.[24] This form local leadership was effected through the murids, who were devoted disciples of Sufi Islam that held regional political and decisional powers as spiritual teachers.[25]

---

[20] C. W. Blandy, "Chechnya and Regional Security," in *The Politics of Security in Modern Russia,* ed. Mark Galeotti (London: Routledge, 2010), 89–90.
[21] Jeronim Perovic, *From Conquest to Deportation: The North Caucasus Under Russian Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 25.
[22] Gune-Yadcy, "A Chechen National Hero," 106.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 111.
[25] Vakhit Akaev, "The History and Specifics of Contemporary Islamic Revival in the Chechen Republic," *Russian Social Science Review* 56, no. 6 (November-December 2015): 43–4.

However, the author Vakhit Akaev warns that contemporary Muridism should be associated not so much with Sheikh Mansur's movement but mainly with the later struggles of the nineteenth century.[26] Still, Akaev admits that the development of Murid brotherhoods initiated by Sheikh Mansur did survive social and political changes in the region, explaining their current and enduring presence in the North Caucasus.[27] Joanna Swirszcz argues that from this point on, "Chechens view their sense of self and nation through their Muslim background and confrontation with Russia and have fused the two through symbolism."[28]

By the time Sheikh Mansur's movement was quelled, the Chechens had acquired an unfavorable reputation among the Russians due to their persistent resistance. According to Dunlop, the military condescendingly referred to them as "scoundrels," "ragamuffins," and other deprecatory terms.[29] Maryam Jameelah suggests that Russia, in its colonial expansion, "behaved towards the native population of Central Asia and Siberia no differently than the British, French, or Dutch, their racist sentiments as virulent as white men elsewhere. Russian imperialism was (and still is) as arrogant as any variety of white colonialism and just as oppressive, if not even more so."[30]

Going into the nineteenth century, and more specifically following the annexation of Georgia in 1801, tsarist Russia pursued even more aggressive colonial policies in the Caucasus, culminating with the appointment as commander-in-chief of the Russian troops of Aleksei Yermolov in 1815. General Yermolov was the first to envision the deportation of the entire Chechen population as a solution to the Caucasian "problem." His ethnocidal strategy consisted

---

[26] Ibid., 43.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 59–60.
[29] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 11.
[30] Maryam Jameelah, *Two Mujahidin of the Recent Past and Their Struggle for Freedom Against Foreign Rule: Sayyid Ahmad Shahid; Imam Shamil: A Great Mujahid of Russia* (Lahore, Pakistan: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1976), 25.

of forcing the Chechens out of the towns to settle into the rugged countryside or capturing and sending them into exile in Siberia.[31] Yermolov's policies entailed massive displacements of indigenous Chechens to deprive them of the fertile lowlands they traditionally farmed on.[32] Then, Yermolov ordered the construction of the fortress of Grozny, a name which means "menacing," from which he would pursue continuous economic and military warfare on the mountaineers.[33] To this day, Yermolov's name retains a potent symbolical power in the Chechen collective memory as a purveyor of Russian imperialism in the Caucasus.[34] This lasting impression roots the Chechen struggle in the Russian imperial past and on a greater timeline than only that of the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.

Yermolov's brutal military excursions in the Caucasus to subdue the mountaineers had produced a somewhat adverse effect. John Dunlop contends that during this time, as a mechanism of cultural defense against Russian aggression, orthodox Islamism made its way into Chechnya and neighboring regions under the banner of the Naqshbandi Tariqa (brotherhood), contributing to increasing solidarity among the Caucasian peoples in their fight against the colonizers.[35] Yet, the Russians commonly identified the Chechen people as a single ethnic group. Most of the Chechen indigenous clannic communities evolved outside the realm of centralized governance and considered tribal loyalty and kinship ties as paramount to ethnic belonging.[36] However, the relentless Russian genocidal policies prompted the Chechens and

[31] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 14–6; Gammer, "Empire and Mountains," 122–3.
[32] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 14–6.
[33] Winslow, Moelker and Companjen, "Glocal Chechnya," 132.
[34] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 13–4.
[35] Ibid., 21–2.
[36] Ibid., 20; Norman N. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2002), 92.

other Caucasian tribes to attempt to consolidate under a shared religious identity and express solidarity in response to pernicious imperialism.[37]

In this context, Imam Shamil arose as what Dunlop calls the "most outstanding political and military leader to ever emerge in the North Caucasus."[38] Aiming to establish a pan-Caucasian caliphate, Shamil appealed for the mountain tribes to unite, a call to which many Chechens positively responded, and ultimately launched a holy war against Russia in 1834.[39] Shamil was known as the third imam of a tentative state that came to be known as the Caucasian Imamate, which claimed the allegiance of many different ethnic groups of the northeast Caucasus.[40]

The late professor Moshe Gammer devoted part of his work on the Muslim resistance to tsarist Russia to Shamil's predecessors as the leader of the Caucasian imamate: Ghazi Muhammad and Gamzat Bek.[41] According to Gammer, Ghazi Muhammad had gained such following and respect by 1830 that he was proclaimed the Imam of Daghestan and, although not unanimously supported by other leaders of the Naqshbandi Tariqa, he then incited his devotees to launch a Jihad against Russia.[42] As a result, the Russians resorted to various tactics to muzzle the imam and, after some attempted negotiations, launched a manhunt that embittered Muhammad's fellow mountaineers.[43] Gammer notes that the Russian troops' destruction of 30

---

[37] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 19, 29–30.
[38] Ibid., 24; Austin Lee Jersild, "Who Was Shamil? Russian Colonial Rule and Sufi Islam in the North Caucasus, 1859–1917," *Central Asian Survey* 14, no. 2 (1995): 205.
[39] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 25–7; Brian G. Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya: The Russian-Chechen Wars, the Al Qaeda Myth, and the Boston Marathon Bombings* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2015), 22–4; Jameelah, *Two Mujahidin of the Recent Past,* 20–2; Stefan Creuzberger, "Freedom Fighter and Anti-Tsarist Rebel: Imam Shamil and Imperial Memory in Russia," in *Sites of Imperial Memory: Commemorating Colonial Rule in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,* ed. Andrew Thompson, Dominik Geppert, Frank Muller and John M. Mackenzie (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2015), 170–1.
[40] Jameelah, *Two Mujahidin of the Recent Past,* 20; Jersild, "Who Was Shamil?" 206.
[41] Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 47–66; Avtorkhanov, *The North Caucasus Barrier,* 149–50.
[42] Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar,* 49–50.
[43] Ibid., 52.

to 35 villages during the winter of 1830–31 was particularly infuriating to the Chechens and contributed to their gradual mobilization.[44] Over the months that followed these events, Gazhi Muhammad enjoyed a few significant victories over the Russians and even threatened to take back Grozny. Still, the Russians were able to organize an effective counter-offensive.[45] According to Gammer's findings, Muhammad could not gather support from the neighboring Ingush and Ossetians, severely hindering his ability to form a united front to reclaim the Caucasus from the Russians.[46] After failing to negotiate a truce with the Russians, Ghazi Muhammad was killed in the fall of 1832.[47]

His successor, Imam Gamzat Bek, quickly negotiated an agreement with the Russians that would at least allow the enforcement of the Islamic Sharia law in the region. Still, the Russians did not trust him and began to pressure local rulers into opposing his authority.[48] In the power struggle that ensued, the ruling house of the Avars, which had historically allied with the Russians, was annihilated, ultimately leading to the retaliating assassination of the imam in September 1834, paving the way for the emergence of Imam Shamil as a central figure of the Caucasian Wars.[49]

It was, in fact, Gazhi Muhammad who introduced the young Shamil to the study of the principles of the Naqshbandiya Tariqa, and Shamil even took part in Muhammad's last stand in Gimrah.[50] Gammer argues that Shamil's past exploits made him the designated successor to Gazmat Bek and that the new imam immediately set out to avenge Gamzat Bek's death and

---

[44] Ibid., 53–4.
[45] Ibid., 55–6.
[46] Ibid., 57–8.
[47] Ibid., 59.
[48] Ibid., 61–2.
[49] Ibid., 63.
[50] Ibid., 69–70; Jameelah, *Two Mujahidin of the Recent Past*, 21.

conquer Daghestan, pressuring the Avars into accepting his nomination.[51] Remarking that the Russians were mainly concerned with the Western Caucasus at the time, Gammer explains that Shamil benefited from a change in the imperial approach, which included accommodating the imam so as long as the mountaineers would remain peaceful.[52]

Under this new arrangement, Shamil would be allowed to implement the Sharia law on the territory under his rule, but he had to recognize Russia's suzerainty.[53] Imam Shamil's authority was not unanimously recognized and, from time to time, openly challenged. Between 1835 and 1836, Shamil embraced an ascetic lifestyle and eventually began to acquire a strong influence as a religious mystic, gaining a devoted following.[54] Among his most practical realizations is the organization of a taxation system over Dagestan and parts of Chechnya, which prompts Gammer to claim that under Shamil, the foundations of a state had begun to emerge, contrasting with the clannic traditional tribalism that had prevailed until then.[55] Stefan Creuzberger and Joanna Swirszcz both see the organizational efforts made by the imam to develop multi-ethnic statehood based on Islamic law as "the culmination of the anti-colonial movement" in the Northern Caucasus.[56]

Gammer notes that, by 1840, most Dagestani and Chechen tribes were effectively under Shamil's authority, which prompted the Russians to believe that the mountaineers were somewhat subdued and generally accepted to live under the accommodations agreed to with the imam.[57] However, the Russians made a faux pas when they began confiscating firearms from

---

[51] Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 70–1, 73.
[52] Ibid., 74–5.
[53] Ibid., 75–6.
[54] Ibid., 79–80; Jameelah, *Two Mujahidin of the Recent Past*, 32–3.
[55] Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 80.
[56] Creuzberger, "Freedom Fighter and Anti-Tsarist Rebel," 172; Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 67.
[57] Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 113.

the Chechens to pacify the region.[58] Gammer argues that "weapons for the mountaineers were more than a practical necessity; they were their pride and signified their manhood and freedom."[59] Accordingly, the Chechens viewed this treatment as humiliating and directly threatening their livelihood.[60] At the same time, when the Chechens heard that Circassian tribesmen had successfully repelled the Russians, they began to feel empowered.[61] Shamil's forces were then noticeably enhanced by the Chechens' growing allegiance to his cause.[62]

Moreover, during combat, the mountaineers were undoubtedly advantaged by their expertise, knowledge of the terrain, and ability to retreat in the highlands before reappearing at a proper time to counterattack.[63] Soon enough, these skills made Shamil and his followers some formidable rivals to the Russian imperialists, who understood that there could be no victory against the mountaineers as long as they remained united in their opposition. However, Shamil also made some miscalculations of his own in his call to resistance to the Russians, mistakenly believing that the historical links shared by the North Caucasian peoples with the Ottomans would eventually garner their support for his cause.[64] Gammer argues that the Ottoman Empire had, in fact, already resolved by the 1840s not to encroach on Russian internal affairs in the region, especially given Russia's "extreme sensitivity to any interference in the Caucasus."[65]

Nevertheless, Shamil continued throughout the year to swear by this unlikely Ottoman support to pursue his objectives until the outbreak of the Crimean War of 1853–54.[66] When the confrontation between the Ottomans and the Russians that Shamil had hoped for finally seemed

---

[58] Ibid., 113–4.
[59] Ibid., 114.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 116–7.
[62] Ibid., 118–9.
[63] Ibid.; Jameelah, *Two Mujahidin of the Recent Past*, 22–4.
[64] Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 257–8.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 259–60.

to be materializing, he mobilized his Dagestani and Chechen supporters to raid the tsarists' positions across the Caucasus.[67] By then, Shamil had acquired such a mythic status, even in Europe, that the French and the British decided to cooperate with his imamate.[68] In the field, however, it did not prove easy to collaborate with Imam Shamil. This inability to coordinate efforts undermined any alliance, while Shamil's inflexibility made any agreement with the Russians improbable.[69] However, Moshe Gammer insists that the imam was far from being a fanatic or an extremist.[70] The author suggests that he was a "born leader, commander, diplomat and politician," which explains his longevity as the head of the Caucasian defense during the turbulent period of the Caucasian Wars.[71]

Building on the progress made by his predecessors, Shamil proved to be a unifying force for the diverse Caucasian tribes. Still, the Muslim resistance movement he spearheaded did not prevent the Russian imperial rule from prevailing over the Caucasus, nor did it stop the imam's eventual abdication and capture by the Russians. However, Sufi-inspired opposition to Russian rule continued to occur frequently over the following decade, despite the imam's absence from the region.[72] Shamil died while on a hajj to Medina in 1871.[73] However, he was never forgotten among the Circassians, Chechens, and Dagestanis, for which he continues to be a hero, as the figurehead of the anti-imperialist struggle against Russian invaders and a champion of the Caucasians' quest for self-determination.[74] Gammer partially credits the imam with the preservation of the Sufi Islamic tradition in Chechnya throughout the end of the nineteenth

---

[67] Ibid., 267–70.
[68] Ibid., 272–3; Creuzberger, "Freedom Fighter and Anti-Tsarist Rebel," 172.
[69] Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 273–4.
[70] Ibid., 292.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Jersild, "Who Was Shamil?" 212.
[73] Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 294; Jameelah, *Two Mujahidin of the Recent Past,* 37.
[74] Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 295; Creuzberger, "Freedom Fighter and Anti-Tsarist Rebel," 178, 181.

century, even as it underwent a change in allegiance from the Naqshbandiya Tariqa to the Qadiriya Tariqa, still two brotherhoods of the same faith.[75]

Not adhering to modern nationalism per se, Shamil established the basis for a sense of belonging for Caucasian tribes, who could identify as part of a broader joint religious group rather than the traditional clan unit. Swirszcz notes that "the mass conversion to Islam during the Caucasian Wars, specifically to the Sufi brotherhoods, proved to be the most successful way in uniting all the mountain people against a common enemy."[76] Reviving the project of creating an imamate that would unify the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus against Russian domination, later rebel leaders attempted to replicate Shamil's efforts at consolidating local ethnic and religious identities with the objective of cultural self-preservation through political and military means.

It may appear that local autochthonous rulers in the Caucasus have, at various points, been pacified and even forged alliances with the Russian administrators. Still, Jeronim Perovic warns that our reading of these temporary compromises should not bolster the Russian perspective of "perpetual submission and incorporation of a certain people into the Russian Empire."[77] Such an approach would fail to account for the views of Caucasians, who may have preserved these fragile alliances with the Russian colonial administrators "as long as they served their interests."[78] On the other hand, for the Russians, the resistance was invariably interpreted as threatening the empire's integrity and violating these misperceived pledges of submission.

Furthermore, for the Chechens, "the concept of 'submission' (*poddanstvo)* had fundamentally different connotations than for the Russians."[79] The Chechens never hesitated to

[75] Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 295; Jersild, "Who Was Shamil?" 205.
[76] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 68.
[77] Jeronim Perovic, *From Conquest to Deportation: The North Caucasus Under Russian Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 27.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 29.

confront the Russian troops after 1871 violently.[80] Perovic explains that the traditional clannic organization of the Chechen society was nullifying any overarching agreement made with the Russians at this point, therefore making it inapplicable to the Chechen general population.[81] Dunlop also emphasizes the ongoing nature of the confrontation, noting that as a response to Shamil's rebellion, Russia revived General Yermolov's tactics, expelling an estimated 100,000 Chechens from the Caucasus between 1856 and 1864, most of whom relocated to the Ottoman Empire.[82]

After their rebellion was quelled, Caucasian Muslims continued to be encouraged to leave the region, facing the constant threat of deportation to Siberia.[83] The author John Russell aptly remarks that "the Russian message to the Chechens over the centuries appears to have remained: abandon your old ways or perish."[84] In other words, the Chechens were to accept the Russian overlordship or face the threat of being ethnically cleansed from their homeland. On the other hand, the Soviet dissident historian Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov notes that the Russians eventually felt compelled to grant a degree of autonomy to the Chechens after the end of the Caucasian Wars, finally recognizing their freedom of religion, the prevalence of the "adat" and "sharia" laws, and some taxation autonomy.[85] These accommodations were arguably made in the spirit of peacekeeping in the Russian colonies.

When the Chechen mountaineers revolted again in 1877–78, during Russia's next war with the Ottomans, they were rapidly humbled by a significantly outnumbering Russian army.[86]

---

[80] Ibid.; Jameelah, *Two Mujahidin of the Recent Past,* 37–8.
[81] Perovic, *From Conquest to Deportation*, 29.
[82] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 29–31; Jameelah, *Two Mujahidin of the Recent Past,* 37–8.
[83] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 32; Avtorkhanov, *The North Caucasus Barrier*, 149–50; John Russell, *Chechnya – Russia's 'War on Terror'* (London: Routledge, 2007), 12.
[84] Russell, *Chechnya*, 23.
[85] Avtorkhanov, *The North Caucasus Barrier,* 150.
[86] Ibid., 150–1; Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 32–3.

Avtorkhanov argues that, by then, Europe had become aware of the Caucasian struggle, which appeared in the writings of Tolstoy, Marx, and Engels. Pointing to the enduring Caucasian clannic political tradition, Avtorkhanov explains that the mountaineers knew nothing of "class antagonism and despotic government," living until then in largely egalitarian tight-knit societies ruled by popular assemblies.[87] As a result of their continuous and fierce resistance to the tsarist rule's assimilationist policies, the Chechens did not receive the same treatment as Russian settlers when Grozny became a growing cosmopolitan city at the end of the nineteenth century, boosted by the region's booming new oil industry.[88] John B. Dunlop argues that the Chechens were "reduced to a condition of harsh poverty and land hunger'' as a punishment for their intransigence.[89]

The Chechens welcomed the crumbling of tsarist Russia at the end of World War I as a potential beam of hope in their struggle against imperialism and colonialism. Valery Tishkov affirms that the Chechens enthusiastically supported the overthrow of the tsarist regime, which effectively represented a sudden opportunity to assert their autonomy, if not total independence from Moscow.[90] Moreover, the new communist state was, in theory, to make the domination of ethnic Russians less prevalent with an effort to construct a "trans-ethnic Soviet state.''[91] However, Brian G. Williams argues that it proved particularly difficult for the Soviets to secularize and modernize the Muslim populations according to Soviet-Marxist nationality politics.[92]

---

[87] Avtorkhanov, *The North Caucasus Barrier,* 151–2.
[88] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 70.
[89] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 35.
[90] Tishkov, *Chechnya,* 21.
[91] Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya*, 37.
[92] Ibid.

Chechnya was made an autonomous oblast within the Russian Federation in 1922 and merged with its Ingush neighbor in the Chechen-Ingush autonomous oblast (province) in 1934 before acquiring the status of Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) in 1936.[93] The Bolsheviks followed up with the imposition of their modernizing agenda, most notably secularizing education and allowing women to participate in society as equals, as prescribed by the Soviet Constitution, contrasting with the regional Islamic tradition.[94] Over the decade that followed the establishment of Soviet rule, the Chechen language also underwent significant changes, moving from Arabic to Latin script. Although, some vernacular literary culture persisted, with official matters conducted in the native language until as late as 1936.[95] Created as an ethno-territorial unit, the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous SSR still existed within a larger Russian "union republic," thus allowing the colonial framework to survive. However, the traditionalism of the Chechen autonomous oblast and Chechen-Ingush ASSR represented a practical obstacle to the project of Sovietization and the development of a Soviet supra-national identity.[96]

During the founding years of the Soviet Union, Josef Stalin was named People's Commissar for Nationalities. At first, he had created in the Caucasus the Soviet Mountain Republic, granting it a certain degree of autonomy, after which he had changed his mind, breaking the Caucasian mountaineers into smaller ethnic-based administrative units, leaving them vulnerable to disarmament and Russification.[97] John Dunlop underlines that, in the case of

[93] Winslow, Moelker and Companjen, "Glocal Chechnya," 133; Jacob W. Kipp, "Russia's Wars in Chechnya," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 8, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2001): 51.
[94] Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya,* 37–8.
[95] Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 22–3.
[96] Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya,* 40.
[97] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 42–6; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 85.

the Chechens and Ingush peoples, the redrawing of the borders promoted their union under a common "Vainakh'' identity.[98]

Eventually, the Soviet regime chose the Caucasus as the human laboratory for its plan of agricultural collectivization, which was to be implemented following the violent expulsion of the prosperous peasantry (kulaks).[99] Jacob W. Kipp found that the Chechens fiercely resisted this Soviet collectivization plan, which prompted Stalin to take concrete action against the resistance.[100] With the help of the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), a substantial purge of "anti-Soviet elements" was coordinated in the region between 1937 and 1938, during which an estimated 14,000 Chechens were arrested, killed, or sent to forced-labor camps, a number which amounted to a considerable three percent of the total Chechen population at the time.[101] Around the same period, the Cyrillic alphabet was effectively imposed on all "newly created written languages'' throughout the Soviet Union, directly impacting over seventy ethnic groups, including the Chechens.[102] John B. Dunlop contends that the Chechens understood that the Soviet Union represented a significant threat to their existence and even began to attempt to mobilize the residents of neighboring regions of Karachai and Balkariya to coordinate cultural self-preservation efforts.[103] Under these circumstances, the regional religious tradition that had survived the imamate wars of the 19th century began to serve as common ground for communities of the Caucasus impacted by Soviet policies to establish networks. However, Soviet rule actively and somewhat successfully discouraged initiatives that could result in religious solidarity, especially between ethnic minority groups. During these years,

---

[98] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 46–7.
[99] Ibid., 49; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 85.
[100] Kipp, "Russia's Wars in Chechnya," 51–2.
[101] Ibid; Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 55; Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 23.
[102] Kipp, "Russia's Wars in Chechnya," 51–2.
[103] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 56–7.

Joanna Swirszcz notes that: "cut off from the rest of the Islamic world, Chechens were still practicing Islamic rituals, seemingly forgetting at times that they were Islamic. The Soviet period was the main blender of Chechen tribal customs and religious procedures because of the closed doors on religion…"[104] This helped to confuse religious identity and ethnic identity further.

When World War II broke out, the Germans began an invasion of the USSR by occupying a border town in the Chechen-Ingush SSR. According to Valery Tishkov, an estimated 29,000 Chechens joined the Red Army to fight Nazi Germany.[105] Most historians agree that the Chechens, although first being courted by the Germans to ally against the Soviets, remained loyal and unmoved by the German promises of religious freedom and the abandonment of collectivization.[106] Despite their participation in the war effort against the Germans, Stalin took action on a people he had always disdained at the height of the war in January 1944. He used his suspicions about a Chechen collaboration with the Nazis as a pretext to issue a decree ordering the deportation of all Chechens and Ingush to the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan and Kirghizia.[107]

During the process, Brian G. Williams notes that a "large percentage of the Soviet soldiers were billed directly in Chechen households," adding to the humiliation.[108] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in his critically acclaimed *The Gulag Archipelago,* describes the procedure as expeditious: residents were marched or loaded onto trucks, brought to train stations, then loaded into wagons like cattle to be sent to Central Asia, although the author claims that some were also

[104] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 72.
[105] Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 24.
[106] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 58–9; Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 24; Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya*, 47–8.
[107] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 61–3; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 94-5; Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya*, 48–50.
[108] Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya*, 50.

sent to far-eastern Siberia and the Russian North.[109] The American historian Norman Naimark remarks that the Soviets had already acquired valuable experience in large-scale deportations with the Koreans and the Finns, which made high expectations about the success of the expulsion of roughly half a million Chechens-Ingush not unreasonable.[110] However, in some villages, such as that of Khaibakh, the entire population was murdered on site, with cases of individuals burned alive.[111] Most horrendously, an estimated fifty percent of the Chechen-Ingush taken as prisoners are thought to have perished during the transportation, which took place in the most inhumane conditions.[112] Those arriving at their destination found desolate lands, inadequate to support a population that died in large numbers from starvation and diseases over the following years.[113] While the deportation is thought to have involved around 300,000 victims, the Soviet regime also pursued a cultural cleansing of the Chechen-Ingush SSR, removing any trace of its indigenous peoples, including the names of the settlements.[114] To complete the humiliation, a statue of General Yermolov was erected in Grozny in 1949, with the inscription on the pedestal quoting his infamous words: "there are no people under the sun more vile and deceitful than these."[115]

During this episode, other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in the region and Crimea (but not in Central Asia) were almost entirely cleansed from their homelands, both near and far from Chechnya, including the Balkars, the Crimean Tatars, the Karachais, the Kalmyks and the Meshketians.[116] According to Tishkov, this bloody chapter has "ruined the lives of several

---

[109] Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, trans. by Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 84; Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 64–5.
[110] Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 96–7.
[111] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 64–5; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 96–7; Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya*, 55–6.
[112] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 68.
[113] Ibid., 69–71; Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 27.
[114] Winslow, Moelker and Companjen, "Glocal Chechnya," 133; Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 27.
[115] Winslow, Moelker and Companjen, "Glocal Chechnya," 133.
[116] Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya*, 48–9, 74; Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2016), 134.

generations of Chechens."[117] Some argue that the trauma was such that it left the Chechens aghast for decades until the liberalization of Soviet political and cultural life of the late 1980s.[118] For the genocide scholar Adam Jones, there is no doubt that this event resonated within later Chechen movements toward independence and that the Russian post-Soviet continuation of genocidal policies toward the Chechens perpetuated this multi-generational and enduring cultural trauma.[119] Brian Glyn Williams agrees that the event has shaped Chechen identity since "almost all Chechens have a personal link to someone who died during the deportation and exile of their people."[120]

Although Nikita Khrushchev eventually allowed for the return of the Chechen and Ingush peoples to the North Caucasus in 1957, recognizing his predecessor's crimes, a significant portion of the displaced chose to remain in Kazakhstan.[121] Those who returned were met with some marked systemic interference. Tishkov found that typically, the Soviet industrialization drive in Chechnya between the 1960s and 1980s failed to include the indigenous Chechens, limiting their career opportunities and fostering high levels of domestic petty criminality.[122] The vernacular language was lost to subtractive bilingualism, within which the local Chechen dialect could not compete with the more universal Russian.[123] In terms of worship, an estimated eight hundred mosques and churches were closed as part of Soviet secularization. Still, Winslow, Moelker, and Companjen suggest that the Sufi Islam faith did carry on behind closed doors.[124]

---

[117] Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 26, 32.
[118] Ibid., 25; Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 82–4; Russell, *Chechnya*, 12.
[119] Jones, *Genocide*, 135.
[120] Bryan Glyn Williams, "Commemorating "The Deportation" in Post-Soviet Chechnya: The Role of Memorialization and Collective Memory in the 1994-1996 and 1999-2000 Russo-Chechen Wars," *History and Memory* 12, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2000): 106.
[121] Nikita, Khrushchev, "Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U.," delivered on 24–25 February 1956, *Marxists Internet Archive*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm; Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 34.
[122] Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 41–2.
[123] Ibid., 47–8.
[124] Winslow, Moelker and Companjen, "Glocal Chechnya," 132.

The author Mairbek Vatchagaev indicates that this spiritual withdrawal contributed to the progressive development of a unique brand of Chechen Sufism that conflated local politics and regional alliances with mysticism and theological teachings.[125] Vatchagaev notes that most Chechen deportees found some comfort and support in the Sufi structure even while living in exile.[126]

The *Glasnost* era initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev eventually allowed for the exposure of Stalinist repressions and created opportunities for many union and autonomous republics to seek more independence from the Kremlin or their host union republic. In Chechnya, James Hughes points out an environmental protest against the construction of a biochemical plant at Gudermes in 1987-88 as the first signal of a modern popular Chechen political mobilization.[127] When the Soviet rule over the republics began to recede and, ultimately, collapse, some Chechens viewed it as the impetus to sever ties and seek national self-determination. However, Chechnya was never constituted as a union republic with a constitutional right to separate from the Soviet Union. Therefore, it was expected to remain an integral part of the new post-Soviet Russian Federation.[128] As a result, the new Russian authorities did not interpret the Soviet demise as granting Chechnya and other autonomous regions within the Russian Federation the right to secede. Vatchagaev observes that during the fall of the Soviet empire, a schism also occurred between the dominant Sufi brotherhoods established in Chechnya: the Naqshbandiya chose to remain aligned with Moscow in the transformation of the Russian Federation into an independent

---

[125] Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Sufism in Chechnya: Its Influence on Contemporary Society," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond,* ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014), 221–2.
[126] Ibid., 223–4; Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 73.
[127] James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad, National and Ethnic Conflict in the 21st Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 18–9.
[128] Miriam Matejova, "Russian 'Chechenization' and the Prospect for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya," *International Journal on World Peace* 30, no. 2 (June 2013): 10.

state. At the same time, the Qadiriya fiercely stood up in favor of Chechen total independence.[129] A two-year struggle during which the Quadiriya took advantage of the unpopular Russian allegiance of the Naqshbandiya to eventually claim the post of mufti for themselves. The importance of the Sufi brotherhoods in Chechnya's societal organization continued to be exploited by both sides in post-Soviet conflicts in Chechnya.

Ultimately, in November 1991, the independence of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria was proclaimed by the former Soviet Major General Dzhokar Dudaev, who acted as its first president after having dissolved the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, and having held elections with a meagre turnout (10 to 12%, according to Valery Tishkov).[130] Immediately establishing symbolic references to the Chechen centuries-old colonial struggle, Dudaev issued postage stamps that included representations of himself, Sheikh Mansur, and Imam Shamil.[131] Irrespective of his high position in the Soviet Army, Dudaev, who lived in exile with his family, which had been deported to Kazakhstan in 1944, when he was born, and remained there until 1957, seemed to understand the Chechen struggle against the Russians as rooted in the colonial history of the Caucasus.[132] As such, he once affirmed that: "Russian history is one of barbarism, stealing and killing, especially here," adding that Chechens "wear this history in (their) genes."[133] During his time commanding a division of Soviet strategic bombers in Estonia from 1987 to 1990, Dudayev

---

[129] Vatchagaev, "Sufism in Chechnya," 222–4.
[130] Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 58–9, 62–4; Kipp, "Russia's Wars in Chechnya," 52.
[131] Andrew Higgins, "Profile: Dzhokar Dudayev: Lone Wolf of Grozny," *Independent UK*, 23 October 2011, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/profile-dzhokhar-dudayev-lone-wolf-of-grozny-1569145.html; "Russia, Republic Noxciyn," *Ukrafil* (30 January 30, 2012), http://ukrafil.com/en/news?action=rsrtme&offset=588.
[132] Malcolm Gray, "A Fatal Phone Call for Moscow's Nemesis; The Death of a Rebel Clouds Peace Prospects," *Maclean's* 109, Issue 19 (6 May 1996): 30; Steven Erlanger, "Man in the News; Chechen Warrior Chief: Soviet Army Credentials – Dzhokar M. Dudayev," *The New York Times*, 15 December, 1994, https://www.nytimes.com/1994/12/15/world/man-in-the-news-chechen-warrior-chief-soviet-army-credentials-dzhokhar-m-dudayev.html; Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 74–5.
[133] "Chechens Vow to Fight On," *Tampa Bay Times*, 25 April 1996, https://www.tampabay.com/archive/1996/04/25/chechens-vow-to-fight-on/; Chris Bird, "Dudayev Claimed Lgeacy of Chechnya's Warrior-Prophets," *Associated Press*, 24 April 1996, https://apnews.com/article/cefca7d12255839e5bc6f10bfb38beea.

had sympathized with Estonian nationalists to the point where he refused to enforce orders from the Soviet government to shut them down, leading to his eventual resignation and return to Chechnya to spear the independence movement.[134]

Meanwhile, C. W. Blandy explains that the call for Chechen independence was viewed by Moscow as a direct threat to Russian territorial integrity, considering the geostrategic importance of the Transcaucasian buffer zone and the perceived high risk of a spillover to adjacent regions.[135] The Kremlin also claimed that Dudaev's open rebellion posed a significant threat to ethnic Russians residing in the area.[136]

Vasili Rukhadze and Glen Duerr note that during the same period, the Russians offered a diametrically opposite response to the case of South Ossetian separatism in the Ossetian autonomous region within Georgia, which directly served their agenda of undermining the Georgian sovereignty acquired with the Soviet collapse in 1991.[137] This paradoxical Russian response indicates that the new federal entity was not ready to abandon its predecessors' imperialist ventures in the Caucasus. While the Chechens' demands were based on the same ethnic and historical premise as the South Ossetians', the Russians did not hesitate to frame the Chechens as terrorists, bandits and criminals to justify military intervention to quell separatism.[138]

Tishkov, the then minister of nationalities in Yeltsin's government, argues that the Chechen "national revolution" was marked by generalized societal violence, disorder and ethnic aggression directed at the Russians, provoking their exodus from the North Caucasian region.[139]

---

[134] Erlanger, "Man in the News."
[135] Blandy, "Chechnya," 90.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Vasili Rukhadze and Glen Duerr, "Sovereignty Issues in the Caucasus: Contested Ethnic and National Identities in Chechnya, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia," *Nationalities Affairs New Series*, no. 48 (2016): 36.
[138] Ibid., 42.
[139] Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 65, 68.

James Hughes does agree with Tishkov's claim and points to evidence of ethnic cleansing perpetrated between 1991 and 1993, during which non-indigenous ethnic Russians were vigorously expelled from the republic, blurring the lines between Chechen victimhood and perpetration during these years.[140]

Although John Russell acknowledges that most Russians understood the Chechen struggle for independence, he underlines Dudaev's minimal support outside the borders of Chechnya; elsewhere in Russia and internationally, he was widely seen as a criminal megalomaniac afflicted with "illusions of grandeur."[141] For example, during an event commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Chechen-Ingush deportation, Dudev notoriously threatened to "detonate a nuclear bomb in Moscow" in retaliation for Russian hostility. This threat may have energized his supporters but deterred international diplomatic support for his cause.[142] In this regard, James Hughes is right in his suggestion that no Western nation ever dared, or even wanted, to intervene in favor of Chechen sovereignty in the spirit of keeping diplomatic relations with the new Russian Federation, preferring to consider it a Russian domestic matter.[143]

Despite the occasional radicalism of his pronouncements, Dudaev seemed to be a primarily secular politician, making no reference to Islamic law in the 1992 Ichkerian constitution and later blaming Russian aggression for the subsequent "politicization of Islam" in Chechnya.[144] The third Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov similarly denounced the perpetual "cycle of war, deportation and genocide" imposed by the Russian domination as making the

---

[140] Hughes, *Chechnya,* 15–6.
[141] Russell, *Chechnya,* 56–9.
[142] Hughes, *Chechnya,* 154.
[143] Ibid., 29.
[144] Emma Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War,* Human Rights and Crimes Against Humanity (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 25, 29.

conflict historically unsolvable.[145] In an open letter to the French philosopher Andre Glucksman, Maskhadov once stated that "no Russian leader has ever tried to solve the problem of these continuous wars, nor have they tried to improve the abject and perpetual misery of their own peoples," noting that since the days of General Yermolov, the Chechens have been invariably stigmatized as "bandits," and now as "extremists."[146]

Later a prime minister in Maskhadov's government, the warlord Shamil Basaev (named after the nineteenth-century imam), claimed that he and the separatists were the ones hunting "terrorists," which he argued were the "pigs and the infidels who occupied Chechnya," namely the Russians.[147] Basaev, whose family proclaimed a lineage that could be traced back to one of Imam Shamil's deputies, later turned to Wahhabism and terrorism as part of the extreme radicalization of his anti-imperialist activities.[148] Over the course of his terrorist actions, Basaev did not make a difference between Russian civilians and the Russian military as he saw Russians made no distinction between Chechen combatants and civilians. Publicly, he never refrained from calling Russia "Rusnya," a derogatory term meaning "filthy," and never denied his involvement in hostage-taking operations, making large numbers of casualties (which he blamed on disproportionate Russian response).[149] At the core, it would seem that Basaev was motivated by the optics of Chechen national self-determination and insisted on it as being the bringing of

---

[145] Aslan Maskhadov, "Open Letter to the French Philosopher Andre Glucksman," *Central Asian Survey* 19, Issue 3-4 (2000): 309.
[146] Ibid.
[147] "Obituary – Shamil Basayev; To Come," *The Economist* 380, Issue 8486 (15 July 2006): 84.
[148] Jonathan Steele, "Obituary: Shamil Basayev: Chechen Politician Seeking Independence Through Terrorism," *The Guardian*, 11 July 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/jul/11/guardianobituaries.chechnya; Alessandra Stanley, "As Chechens Take to Hills, Clans Gird for a Long Fight," *The New York Times*, 22 January 1995, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/01/22/world/as-chechens-take-to-hills-clans-gird-for-a-long-fight.html; Richard Boudreaux, "Hostages in Russia's Heartland: Defiance of Russians Flows in the Veins of Lead Hostage-Taker: Guerrilla: Shamil Basayev's Family Has Long Fought Invaders. But the Killings of His Mother and 2 Children Preceded His Raid on a City Outside Chechnya," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 June 1995, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-06-18-mn-14600-story.html.
[149] "Excerpts: Basayev Claims Beslan," *BBC News*, 17 September 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3665136.stm.

ultimate "justice." Shamil Basaev, just like Imam Shamil did in the nineteenth century, eventually came to view himself and his acolytes as mandated with the messianic mission to unify the Islamic people of the Caucasus, from the Black Sea to the Caspian coast. This undertaking culminated with the failed invasion of Dagestan in August 1999.[150]

While Russia was at first hesitant to get involved in a protracted armed conflict during the problematic post-Soviet transition, it resolved to send unmarked tanks into Grozny in November 1994 when it appeared that the secessionist threat would persist. Pugnacious Chechen separatists effectively overwhelmed a largely incompetent Russian military. Emma Gilligan argues that this first confrontation established the patterns of violence that were to define the next decades in the region.[151] Effectively, Russia responded with the bombing of Grozny, which began on New Year's Eve 1994 and was, at the time, the largest since World War II, traumatizing the Chechens by the sheer extent of the destruction, notably of museums, schools, and archives.[152] Most importantly, the extent of the human casualties caused the custom of blood revenge to become a "national mantra" for the Chechens.[153] For some, seeking revenge became the sole motivation for continuing the fight, effectively making all Chechnya-based Russian troops legitimate targets for retaliation.[154]

Escalating their response, the Russian troops employed different strategies, involving torture and resorting to indiscriminate airpower to terrorize the Chechen civilians. Among these tactics, the massacre of over a hundred villagers by the Russian troops in Samashki in April 1995

---

[150] Emil Souleimanov, "Chechnya, Wahhabism and the Invasion of Dagestan," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 4 (December 2005): para. 7–8.
[151] Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 26.
[152] Thomas de Waal, "Chechnya: The Breaking Point," in *Chechnya Still Boiling*, ed. George S. Toler (New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc., 2009), 19–20; Hughes, *Chechnya*, 81; Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya*, 97–9.
[153] Souleimanov and Aliyev, "Blood Revenge and Mobilization," 171.
[154] Ibid., 173–5.

remains unpunished and unaccounted for.[155] This carnage contributed to infusing even more virulent anti-Russian sentiments among the Chechens, regardless of their allegiance to the separatists.[156]

Centuries of ethnocidal policies implemented by Russia at the expense of Chechens have certainly influenced parties involved in the armed conflict of the 1990s and 2000s. For one, the Russians had, in the past, acquired valuable experience in dealing with the mountaineers, developing military, economic, and political methods that were pursued over extended periods regardless of the political transformation of their empire over the past two centuries. On the other hand, the Chechens had also developed a mythical view of their resistance to Russian imperial domination, rooted in historical struggles and ethnoreligious traditionalism, contributing to the forging of a common Chechen cultural identity. The ethnonationalist discourse of the post-Soviet Chechen separatist leaders sought to have the Chechen perpetual struggle against Russian colonialism acknowledged. The separatists soon considered religious extremism an ideological vehicle for the anti-colonial resistance. However, Islam is, in this case, not the source of radicalism but merely a variable of a complex equation. This chapter delineates the Islamic faith's position as a catalyst of the anti-colonial struggle, serving as a standard marker of identity and an agent of solidarity. As the next chapter will also argue, the extreme intensity of the Chechen resistance followed that of the Russian aggression.

On the one hand, Russia justified its neo-imperialist attitudes by claiming that Chechnya had not been anything but Russian for centuries. On the other, the Chechens maintained that secession was a legitimate political means to bring a long-standing genocidal relationship to an end. Their objective was to complete the struggle initiated at the onset of the Caucasian Wars.

---

[155] Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 26.
[156] Williams, "Commemorating "The Deportation" in Post-Soviet Chechnya," 126–7.

The Soviet collapse constituted the impetus for Chechen separatists to end Russian colonialism in the Caucasus and a relationship they viewed as unjust, unequal, and increasingly unsteady. The Chechen rebels visibly underestimated the Russian military capacity, while on the other hand, the Russians undervalued the pugnacity of the local resistance. The following chapters will continue to investigate the role of Islam in the radicalization of the Chechens, as well as the manifestations and impacts of colonial and anti-colonial violence during the most recent conflicts and in their aftermath.

Chapter Two

Restoring the Empire vs. Restoring the Chechen Honor

The previous chapter located the Russo-Chechen conflict of the 1990s in an anti-colonial struggle arching back over two centuries. It also acknowledged that not all of the dimensions of the conflict could be traced back to this legacy of colonialism and accompanying violence. It has then established the circumstances under which the Chechens' Islamic faith did develop in parallel with the anti-imperialist struggle while being influenced by the local clannic tradition. This chapter will contend that the conflict was equally connected to its contemporary context, namely the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet Union and the subsequent pursuit of Russian neo-imperialism in the changing international and regional orders. Clinging to its territorial integrity amidst a reconstruction period, the newly independent Russian Federation reacted strongly to the challenges posed by the potential breakaway of the Chechen autonomous republic. From the Kremlin's point of view, the danger posed by a possible domino effect among the former autonomous republics and autonomous regions within the Russian Federation did warrant a swift reassertion of Russian territorial integrity. In the post-Cold war era, the West believed that Boris Yeltsin's desire to normalize relations between Russia and the international community, and his will to integrate into the modern global economy, would deter him from using force and encourage him instead to privilege political channels to engage with the Chechen separatists. In the case of Chechen separatism, many in the international community chose to treat the issue as a Russian domestic problem, effectively signalling by this stance that Russia was free to act as it deemed fit to reassert its authority on the republic. As a result, for much of the 1990s, the West willingly ignored the widespread human rights abuses committed by the

Russians in Chechnya, enabling the perpetuation of a previously defined pattern of colonial violence.

Chronologically organized, this chapter will examine the events that followed the claim for independence made by Dzhokar Dudaev on the behalf of the Chechens in November 1991. It will identify the critical aspects and variables of the conflict that resulted in a rapid escalation of violence from both parties involved in the conflict. It will describe how Russia may well have interpreted the lack of support of the international community for the Chechen cause as a signal that it was free to act as it deemed necessary to restore its territorial integrity. Increasingly desperate that their pleas were not being heard, Chechens began to consider the radical tactics espoused by jihadists as legitimate not only for retaliation but the pursuit of the anti-colonial struggle against Russia. This chapter will explain that even after the more temperate Aslan Maskhadov was elected President of Chechnya in 1997, radical separatists revived Imam Shamil's nineteenth-century project of creating a Pan-Caucasian Islamic caliphate, banking on a long-existing Islamic tradition in the region to bring new blood to the movement. At the time of their failed invasion of Dagestan in 1999, which ultimately resulted in a significant ramping up of Russian military operations in Chechnya, radical separatists had completely departed from the initial secular political objectives of the claim for independence from Russia made in 1991. The next chapter will then describe how Russia indigenized the conflict to preserve its authority in the Chechen autonomous republic, through the intermediary of an indigenous proxy ruler who finds new ways to make use of the Chechens' Islamic tradition to maintain order and impose on the Chechen people his own pro-Russian interpretation of the history of Chechnya.

Delving into a growing body of literature on the topic, this chapter will establish that, despite critical political changes brought upon by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new

leaders in the Kremlin chose to perpetuate the long legacy of Russian colonialism in the North Caucasus. Having been humbled in their first attempt to recover Grozny from the separatists in 1994, the Russian post-Soviet federal state deployed a severely disproportionate military force and made use of indiscriminate violence, and enabled the violations of fundamental human rights to ensure that the autonomous republic of Chechnya would remain under its control.

In the process, the prompt, combative, and sometimes equally violent insurgency sometimes blurred the lines between perpetrators and victims over the course of the conflict, with both sides involved increasingly devoid of consideration for human life. Arguably, partly in response to the trauma caused by the conflict and the lack of response from the international community, the Chechen secessionists moved from being essentially guided by largely secular nationalist aspirations to break free from Russian colonial dominance to the acceptance of Salafi-jihadism and tactical terrorism as an acceptable mean of retaliation against the Russians.

In a post-9/11 global context, these new developments provided Vladimir Putin, newly inaugurated as President in 2000, with a pretext to justify the ramping up in 2002 of what was to be presented as Russian counter-terrorist operations in Chechnya. In turn. the disproportionate Russian response in Chechnya allowed the conflict to take tragic proportions in terms of human lives. Eventually, even Moscow realized that sustained military intervention in Chechnya was not a viable strategy due to the persistence of the Chechen resistance and, as Chapter 3 will show, instead turned to the co-optation of the Chechen elites and the subsequent establishment of a puppet regime, as an alternative to total war. In doing so, Russia continued to pursue neo-imperialist policies toward peripheral regions of its sphere of influence while preserving its territorial integrity.

In a post-Soviet context, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and abandonment of communist ideology, Russia faced a crucial geopolitical challenge, which the British military historian John Erickson qualifies as a crisis of identity.[1] The loss of influence over the former Eastern Bloc and the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact did immediately create, from a Russian perspective, conditions favorable to the spread of Western political influence. In this new security environment, Moscow's view was that it needed to assert its presence in the peripheral areas of the former Soviet Union, purportedly in the name of self-preservation. Erickson describes the emergence of this new Eurasian security environment as consisting of the former union republics, considered by Russia to be "near abroad," some of them now identified as satellite states of the new federal entity and viewed as critical peripheral components of Russian neo-imperialism.[2] However, in contrast to the Soviet era, the Russian national interest was openly prioritized, meaning that Russian national security was to prevail over that of these peripheral regions of the Russian sphere of influence.[3]

While it needed to maintain its territorial integrity, Russia also needed to preserve as best as it could direct economic and political influence on peripheral regions that could present threats by following the examples of the former Soviet republics. In the former Soviet autonomous republics with significant non-Russian ethnic populations, such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Yakutia, the Kremlin responded to the danger posed by their potential breakaway from the federation by negotiating varying degrees of local autonomy and integrating the titular population in their political affairs.[4] The Russian Federal Treaty of 1992, which Chechnya and

---

[1] John Erickson, "Russia Will Not Be Trifled with: Geopolitical Facts and Fantasies," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 22, no. 2-3 (1999): 242.
[2] Ibid., 243–4.
[3] Ibid., 248.
[4] Sansar Tsakhirmaa, "Comparative Ethnic Territorially Based Autonomy in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Yakutia of Russia: An Analytical Framework," *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 5 (2020): 891–2.

Tatarstan did not sign, established what Deniz Dinç calls asymmetrical federalism in Russia, granting much power to regional leadership.[5] Dinç notes that the Tatar elites, for example, maintained strong ties with Moscow and demonstrated a willingness to negotiate their political status, and "when they passed the red lines of the federal center, they immediately retreated and showed the center that they were ready to compromise."[6] This diplomatic approach led to the adoption of several treaties culminating with the treaty of February 1994, a power-sharing agreement with Tatarstan's elites.[7] In contrast, according to Dinç, "informal networks among the Chechen elites and the Federal elites largely did not exist," which made any pressure to reach a compromise between the two a lot less expectable.[8] Instead, Moscow immediately felt that it needed to prevent the less-tempered Chechen brand of separatism from spreading to neighboring regions of the Caucasus.

In the post-Soviet context, the Trans-Caspian region still represented a prized territorial possession, notably because of the presence of oil and gas wells and the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline, which at the time represented a critical piece of the Russian energetic policy.[9] According to Erickson, the Americans were, at the time, already devising plans to challenge the Russian energetic monopoly in the region by supporting the construction of an alternative pipeline with the aid of more American-friendly states such as Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia, making it a particularly sensitive area of the new Russian "near abroad."[10]

---

[5] Deniz Dinç, *Tatarstan's Autonomy Within Putin's Russia: Minority Elites, Ethnic Mobilization, and Sovereignty* (London: Routledge, 2021), 135–6.
[6] Ibid., 137.
[7] Ibid., 137–8.
[8] Ibid., 137.
[9] Erickson, "Russia Will Not Be Trifled with," 261.
[10] Ibid.

At the same time that it was alarmed by Dudaev's claim of Chechen sovereignty, the Kremlin was aware of signs of irregularities in the procedures justifying his claim, most notable being the exceptionally meagre turnout to the referendum that confirmed his leadership position. These cast doubt on the popular legitimacy of Dudaev's claim on behalf of the Chechen nation, especially considering that, up to that point, most Chechens did envision themselves not as part of a national political entity but rather as a cultural community organized according to local traditional clannic and tribal allegiances. It seems to be the struggle against the Russian colonialist ambitions that prompted some Chechen support to crystallize around Dudaev's proposal of a political project. In the months following his seizure of power in the Fall of 1991, Dudaev quickly imposed conscription on male citizens, created the first Chechen army, and immediately engaged in the demobilization of the Soviet troops within Chechnya, including the confiscation of military equipment.[11] Over the next year, Tracey C. German noted a significant escalation in violence against the Russian military stationed in Chechnya, adding that six months into its independence, Chechnya was now well-equipped to defend itself, which forced the Russians to withdraw in June 1992, marking "the failure of the Russian leadership."[12] According to Ib Faurby and Marta-Lisa Magnusson, during the two years following Dudaev's proclamation of Chechen independence, disagreements in the Russian Duma over actions to be taken "more or less left the Chechens to themselves."[13] During this period, undoubtedly empowered by this temporary victory over Moscow, Dudaev began to "authenticate its statehood" by producing a Chechen constitution as well as forming state structures "based on a system of patronage, as the president rewarded his loyal disciples by granting them key positions in his new government."[14]

---

[11] Tracey C. German, *Russia's Chechen War* (London: Routledge, 2003), 56–7.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ib Faurby and Marta-Lisa Magnusson, "The Battle(s) of Grozny," *Baltic Defense Review* (February 1999): 75.
[14] German, *Russia's Chechen War*, 59.

However, German is critical of Dudaev's economic plan for the Chechen republic, describing it as idealistic and utopic, with little in terms of genuine economic reforms, ultimately bringing high unemployment rates and poverty, even forcing most schools in the republic to close their doors.[15] German maintains that "revolutionary fervor did not readily translate itself into a clear economic policy."[16] Amidst economic uncertainty, Chechen officials began illegally exporting oil, an operation that is thought to have directly benefited Dudaev and his entourage.[17] While the president enriched himself, many poverty-stricken Chechens began to resort to criminal activities to survive.[18] However, German remarks that the "high level of criminality so often associated with independent Chechnya is equally characteristic of post-Soviet Russia" and the widespread financial uncertainty that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.[19]

With Yeltsin establishing control of the Duma in December 1993, Russian politics took a different turn, which Faurby and Magnusson qualify as "more nationalistic as well as authoritarian."[20] Moscow also began to worry about regaining total control of the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline, which runs through Chechnya.[21] To avoid conflict, the Russian military administration mistakenly thought that bribing Dudaev's troops with money and weapons would suffice to appease the tensions.[22] After Dudaev survived an assassination attempt in May 1994, Moscow began to identify and assemble an anti-Dudaev opposition to assist the Russian Army's plan to take over the capital.[23] Then, again, according to Romanas Sedlickas and Stasys Knezys,

---

[15] Ibid., 61.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 63.
[18] Ibid., 64.
[19] Ibid., 64–5.
[20] Ibid., 75.
[21] Ibid., 76.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Gail W. Lapidus, "Contested Sovereignty: The Tragedy of Chechnya," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 18.

the new Federal Counterintelligence Service, replacing the old KGB, and the Russian Army General Staff's Intelligence Command, transmitted misleading information to Moscow about the alleged dissatisfaction of Chechen elders and military personnel with Dudaev's authority.[24] Some military planning began around October 1994, although considering several alternatives to using armed forces, such as infiltrating Dudaev's opposition with Russian soldiers and then providing them with military equipment.[25] Russian crews were recruited under the promise of significant amounts of money and assured that the operation would be brief and involve minimal security risks.[26]

In November 1994, the Russian military launched a campaign to seize the capital of Grozny, only to end up in a humiliating defeat. Due to a lack of coordination and the fact that Dudaev had been made aware in advance of his opponent's strategy, the Russian ground troops were allowed into the city only to find themselves ambushed by Chechen snipers.[27] Sedlickas and Knezys argue that the Russians were insufficiently prepared for such an operation and severely underestimated Dudaev's supporter's numbers and their determination to repulse the attack on their capital.[28] Gail W. Lapidus notes that while Russian officials publicly denied involvement in such an incident, the Chechen government "paraded captured Russian military personnel live on television."[29] The Kremlin had been arguably naïve even to expect that surrounding Grozny and taking control of the airspace above the capital would be enough to overwhelm the Chechen separatists.

---

[24] Romanas Sedlickas and Stasys Knezys, *War in Chechnya* (Texas: A&M University Press, 1999), 43–4.
[25] Ibid., 44–5.
[26] Ibid., 45.
[27] Ibid., 48–9.
[28] Ibid., 49–51.
[29] Lapidus, "Contested Sovereignty," 18–9; Sedlickas and Knezys, *War in Chechnya*, 46.

The miserable failure of the Russian troops resulted in them retaliating by launching the indiscriminate aerial bombing of Grozny, which began on 31 December 1994, during which an estimated 27,000 civilians perished.[30] Faurby and Magnusson consider that these figures could, in reality, be much higher.[31] In the aftermath of the event, Russia made some "implausible claim" that Dudaev's men had organized the New Year's Eve bombing of Grozny as a false-flag operation to garner sympathy for their cause.[32] Svante E. Cornell notes that a stunning average of 4,000 blasts per hour was recorded during the bombardment of Grozny, as compared to the 800 explosions per hour recorded during the contemporaneous bombing of Sarajevo, which has made the "standard of horror" in the post-Cold War era.[33]

Even after this event, there was a noticeable hesitation on the part of the international community to publicly condemn Russia's actions in Chechnya, possibly for fear of putting post-Cold War international diplomatic relations in jeopardy. In February 1995, Human Rights Watch published a report denouncing the Clinton administration's continuous and "unqualified support of Russian President Boris Yeltsin," noting that the American president was merely issuing mild statements about his hope for a pacific resolution of the conflict.[34] The same report complained that "the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights was denied permission by the Russian government to conduct a fact-finding mission to the region."[35] Despite this, Svante E.

---

[30] Lapidus, "Contested Sovereignty, 20; Faurby and Magnusson, "The Battle(s) of Grozny," 81; "On The Observance of The Right of Man and The Citizen in the Russian Federation (1994–1995)," *The Andrei Sakharov Foundation*, https://sakharovfoundation.org/observance-rights-man-citizen-russian-federation-1994-1995/.
[31] "On The Observance."
[32] Andrew Higgins, "Russians Kill 250 Chechen Civilians," *The Independent* (13 April 1995), https://web.archive.org/web/20071127162231/http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_19950413/ai_n13976922.
[33] Svante E. Cornell, "International Reactions to Massive Human Rights Violations: The Case of Chechnya," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 1 (1999): 88.
[34] Ibid., 91; "Russia: Three Months of War in Chechnya," *Human Rights Watch* 7, no. 6 (February 1995), https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Russia1.htm.
[35] Ibid.

Cornell still blames the United Nations Commission on Human Rights for remaining "shamefully silent on Chechnya."[36]

Matthew Evangelista and Svetlana Savranskaya emphasize that in the State Duma, some supporters of President Yeltsin opposed the military intervention in Chechnya. Still, they remained silent out of fear that he could lose the incoming election if too many were to withdraw their support.[37] More obstacles to Western criticism of Russia's actions included the fragility of the relations with post-Soviet Russia and, most importantly, the opening of the Russian economy to foreign investment, partly explaining why the West preferred to consider the Chechen conflict as a Russian domestic matter conveniently.[38] Gail W. Lapidus notes that there were both "puzzlement and disappointment" within liberal circles in Russia as reactions to the absence of a Western response to the onset of the Russo-Chechen conflict.[39] For many, the post-Cold War era was to bring about the end of Soviet unaccountability, which had allowed the authorities to act freely and unrestrained by pledges to human rights that accompanied the integration into a liberal international community. [40]

Svante E. Cornell remarks that the EU and some northern European states seemed more disposed to condemn human rights abuses and the use of disproportionate force on civilians in the Russo-Chechen conflict than the institutions dedicated to maintaining global peace and order.[41] He also notes that, interestingly, most governments of the Muslim world had a moderate

---

[36] Cornell, "International Reactions," 91.
[37] Svetlana Savranskaya and Matthew Evangelista, "Chechnya, Yeltsin, and Clinton: The Massacre at Samashki in April 1995 and the US Response to Russia's War in Chechnya," trans. Sarah Dunn, *National Security Archive* (15 April 2020), https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2020-04-15/massacre-at-samashki-and-us-response-to-russias-war-in-chechnya.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Lapidus, "Contested Sovereignty," 45.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Cornell, "International Reactions," 91

response to the events, and the support for the Chechen cause seemed to have been limited except for Turkey.[42]

In the meantime, the Russian military persisted in their unabated attacks on the Chechens. When reports began to surface about the massacre of 250 civilians in Samashki by the Russian troops in April 1995, the International Committee of the Red Cross publicly denounced the assault against civilians, qualifying it as a blatant violation of humanitarian law.[43] While the perpetrators were identified as members of the Russian military, Cornell believes the Russian authorities may not have officially ordered the Samashki massacre.[44] While it does not absolve them from the inexcusable indiscriminate execution and torture of Chechen civilians, the crimes were sometimes committed by soldiers under the effects of alcohol and various stimulants.[45] Then, allegations were made by the Chechens that chemical weapons had been repeatedly used by the Russians in their attacks, producing severe health problems among innocent bystanders.[46]

Svante E. Cornell considers the weak response of the international community to have been motivated by contradicting self-interests and "realpolitik."[47] Maria-Cristina Coleasa agrees that in the context of the 1990s, the utmost priority appeared to have been to normalize relations with Russia and seek cooperation, explaining the international community's decision to overlook the Russo-Chechen conflict while simultaneously adopting an interventionist stance elsewhere in the world, most notably in Somalia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda.[48]

---

[42] Ibid., 92.
[43] Higgins, "Russians Kill 250."
[44] Cornell, "International Reactions," 90.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Maria-Cristina Coleasa, "The International Response to the Chechen Wars," *Studia Europaea* 62, no. 2 (June 2017): 111–2, 118–20.

Tuomas Forsberg and Graeme P. Herd argue that the EU's response, or lack of it, can also "provide us with a barometer of the EU's ability to shape and influence human rights policy in a state with little or no prospect of membership."[49] The consensus is that the EU and the rest of the international community "have failed to change Russia's policy toward Chechnya."[50] In the eyes of most members of the European community, the Russian concern for preserving the Russian Federation's territorial and political integrity justified the methods used.[51] There was, therefore, little will to sanction Russia for its actions but rather a desire to maintain a newly established partnership and a cooperative perspective throughout the conflict. Russia was even integrated into the Council of Europe when a cease-fire was agreed upon in 1996, demonstrating the extent of the European support for the Yeltsin administration.[52] These arguably could have been interpreted by Moscow as indications that Russia was free to use any means at its disposition to reassess its authority on Chechnya.

Furthermore, the radicalism of the actions undertaken by some of the most prominent groups of Chechen separatists contributed to eroding the Western liberal countries' sympathy for their cause. Svante E. Cornell identifies two significant events that may well have dissuaded potential supporters of the Chechen cause: the 1995 Budennovsk Hospital hostage-taking situation in which 120 died and the subsequent ill-fated raids on the villages of Kizlyar and Pervomaiskoe (Dagestan), perpetrated by Chechen gangs in 1996.[53] Chechen president Dudaev condemned both events. Although in both cases, it was found that most victims were killed by the disproportionate and indiscriminate response of the Russian troops, the international

---

[49] Tuomas Forsberg and Graeme P. Herd, "The EU, Human Rights, and the Russo-Chechen Conflict," *Political Science Quarterly* 120, no. 3 (2005): 455.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 461.

[53] Cornell, "International Reactions," 87.

community did not seem to have caught that part.[54] These events showed Westerners that both parties were actively involved in violating human rights during the Russo-Chechen conflict and most likely effectively diminished the support for Chechen separatists outside the republic's borders. As the attacks on Russians began to wear the signature of jihadist groups, Chechen separatists were increasingly associated with radical Islamism, which aided the Russian narrative justifying an eventual return of the military in Chechnya.

In 1998, Svante E. Cornell argued in an article that religion did not play a central role in the early part of the modern Russo-Chechen conflict.[55] Instead, the author emphasized the ethnopolitical nature of the conflict, with religion only being one of the variables.[56] Recognizing the distinctive religious composition of the population of the Caucasus, Cornell then pointed out that none of the parties involved justified their action by theological difference.[57] The author suggested that the historical Chechen struggle against "Russian overlordship," as well as the relative "demographic strength" of the ethnic Chechens, were the most defining features of the first Russo-Chechen conflict.[58] For the author, it is the refusal of Russia to recognize the Chechen right to self-determination combined with the lack of support for the cause outside the border of the republic that is at the core of the transformation of the conflict.[59] According to Cornell, the lack of solidarity from other nations of the Muslim world at the time can be interpreted as evidence of the secular nature of the conflict, especially considering Chechnya's proximity to Iran.[60] However, Cornell had formulated his hypotheses at the end of the 1990s, a

[54] Ibid.
[55] Svante E. Cornell, "Religion as a Factor in Caucasian Conflicts," *Civil Wars* 3, no. 3 (1998): 46.
[56] Ibid., 47.
[57] Ibid., 48–9.
[58] Ibid., 53–4.
[59] Ibid., 54–5.
[60] Ibid., 59–60.

few years before the emergence of Salafi-Jihadism in the Chechen ranks. Cornell had overlooked the possibility that religion could once again play a significant role as an instrument of radicalization.

Cerwyn Moore, for one, refuses to dismiss religious symbolism and traditionalism and argues that it did play a part in the modern articulation of the "shared sense of collective or national identity" for Chechens.[61] Although, Moore also points to the traditional customary code of the "adat" as the transmission belt for the Chechens' deeply held "belief in the role of blood relations, brotherhood, and the role of honor, or indeed, the notion that cowardice in war can disgrace a family," beliefs shared by the separatists likely prevailing over religious symbolism at the onset of the Russo-Chechen conflict.[62]

Still, Moore points out, it is during the first years of the Russo-Chechen conflict that Movladi Udugov, who was part of Dudaev's campaign leading to Chechnya's independence along with the "Salafi-connected" Islam Khalimov, did infuse the separatist discourse with an Islamic flavor which Dudaev readily perpetuated, as he found it appealing to the populace.[63] The war waged by Russia in Chechnya reinvigorated the existing religious element of the Chechen ethnonational identity with the endorsement of local brokers of power. It was unsurprising to see Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, a devoted Islamist who succeeded Dudaev after his assassination in April 1996, openly vowing to install sharia law in Chechnya and establish a criminal code that was "modeled on that of Sudan."[64] From this point on, the status of Islam became the source of internal rivalry and tension, which characterized Chechnya for the entire duration of the conflict,

---

[61] Cerwyn Moore, *Contemporary Violence: Postmodern War in Kosovo and Chechnya* (Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 2010), 33.
[62] Ibid., 41.
[63] Ibid., 58–60.
[64] Ibid., 59.

reflecting the lack of unanimity among the Chechens as to the place of religion in their political organization.

But for James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, describing ethnonationalism and religion as causing the radicalization of the Chechens during the war is an oversimplification of what was a much more complex process. The authors categorize nationalism and Islamism as "power ideas," remarking that they are fundamental antitheses, with nationalism being an essentially "secular organizing principle," all the while Islamism "aspires to the creation of a theocratic transnational dominion."[65] It is when the Chechens were disillusioned with the idea of national self-determination that they eventually turned to Islamic jihad. The radicalization was "intensified by the personal lived experiences and common mutual brutalizing effects of the war."[66] For the authors, the "relative effectiveness of the jihad element in the resistance" made it attractive for the Chechen militants, who could also find some support from foreign jihadist groups, as opposed to the limited solidarity expressed abroad for the project of Chechen secular nationalism.[67]

At the heart of this transformation and adoption of new ideas is what Alexander Rustler sees as the continuation of Russo-Chechen horizontal inequalities.[68] For Rustler, combining "power ideas" such as nationalism and Islamism with these horizontal inequalities explains "the fluidity of Chechnya's conflicts," which gradually moved from secular nationalist aspirations towards supra-regional jihadism.[69] Furthermore, the author argues that no singular factor can

---

[65] James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, "Power Ideas and Conflict: Ideology, Linkage and Leverage in Crimea and Chechnya," *East European Politics* 32, no. 3 (2016): 315.
[66] Ibid., 328.
[67] Ibid., 329.
[68] Alexander Rustler, "The Fluidity of Chechnya's Conflicts: From Nationalism to Jihad to Supra-Regional Jihad," *Ethnopolitics* 20, no. 5 (2021): 546.
[69] Ibid.

singlehandedly account for the resulting violence.[70] The common denominator of the equation seems to be a "communal memory of shared suffering, economic underdevelopment and social as well as cultural exclusion," which constituted the basis for the forging of a "distinct and salient Chechen identity."[71] Radical Islam eventually "struck a chord with the deprived Chechen people," who viewed it as an ideological vehicle to pursue the confrontation against the Russians.[72]

Therefore, the secularism of the first wave of post-Soviet Chechen nationalism was not caused by the absence of an Islamic tradition in Chechnya. On the contrary, Hank Johnston views the Chechen Islamic tradition as part of the cultural fabric. He argues that "it was only a matter of time until Islam appeared" as a defining feature of Chechen society.[73] Johnston adds that "under war conditions, the role of Islam as a unifying symbol for the preservation of the state was amplified, as is quite typical of other religions and other states during wartime."[74] According to Johnston, Islam is deeply embedded in the cultural text accompanying the historical Chechen struggle for independence.[75]

In the meantime, the fact that Russia was waging war against its citizens was becoming highly unpopular, and Yeltsin also began to fear that his re-election campaign could be jeopardized. After violently disposing of his archrival Dudaev, President Yeltsin invited the new acting President Yandarbiev in May 1996 to negotiate a ceasefire that would end the bloody conflict. However, the journalist Michael Specter, from the *New York Times*, suggests that he

---

[70] Ibid., 548.
[71] Ibid., 553.
[72] Ibid., 561–2.
[73] Hank Johnston, "Ritual, Strategy, and Deep Culture in the Chechen National Movement," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 3 (2008): 337.
[74] Ibid., 334.
[75] Ibid., 324.

never seemed to have done so genuinely intending to resolve the issues that sparked the war in the first place.[76]

During that summer, the future Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov conducted more talks, eventually leading to the signing of the Khasavyurt Agreement, which was to normalize Russo-Chechen relations, at least until 2001.[77] Of the accord signed, James Hughes remarks that it was accompanied by an unfulfilled promise from the Kremlin to help with reconstruction efforts.[78] When later duly elected as the third president of the Republic of Ichkeria, Aslan Maskhadov failed to demilitarize and unify the nationalist forces, which caused a new breakdown of order in Chechnya and the resurgence of warlordism, events ultimately leading to the onset of a second Russo-Chechen protracted armed conflict (1999–2009).

Neither party found the interwar period satisfactory. Moreover, the interwar circumstances facilitated the emergence of influential warlords such as Shamil Basaev, who enjoyed notoriety from his past military exploits in Abkhazia (1992–1993) and took inspiration from his Salafist connections to call on his followers to turn the nationalist revolution into a jihad, independently from the ceasefire pursued by the Chechen military.[79] With the help of the Saudi Wahhabi militant Ibn al-Khattab, Basaev recruited young Caucasians and eventually welcomed foreign jihadists bringing their experience and new financial support to the

---

[76] Michael Specter, "Chechens' Leader Signs Peace Pact with The Kremlin," *New York Times* (28 May 1996), https://web.archive.org/web/20121105124717/http://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/28/world/chechens-leader-signs-peace-pact-with-the-kremlin.html.

[77] "Khasavyourt Joint Declaration and Principles for Mutual Relations," *United Nations Peacemaker* (31 August 1996), https://peacemaker.un.org/russia-khasavyourtdeclaration96; Lapidus, "Contested Sovereignty," 23.

[78] James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, National and Ethnic Conflict in the 21st Century (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 91–3.

[79] Ibid., 98–101; Brian G. Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya: The Russian-Chechen Wars, the Al Qaeda Myth, and the Boston Marathon Bombings* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2015) 32–3; Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Sufism in Chechnya: Its Influence on Contemporary Society," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014), 226; Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya: From Communism and Nationalism to Islamism and Salafism," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 25, no. 1 (2009): 74.

movement.[80] Al-Khattab's ability to produce footage of the ongoing battles proved to be very useful in creating propaganda videos to recruit foreign radicals.[81] However, Ben Rich and Dara Conduit concluded in their assessment of the impact of foreign jihadists on the conflict that mainly, these fighters damaged the nationalist cause, ultimately providing Moscow with justification for another Russian military intervention in Chechnya.[82]

The late Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya explains that president Aslan Maskhadov was essentially a "Westernizer," looking up to Europe and the rest of the Western world, striving to adopt human-rights-based laws and customs. On the other hand, the "Easternizers," such as Basaev and al-Khattab, advocated for establishing further connections with the Arab Middle East and complete Islamization.[83] Critical of the methods used by the Salafists, Politkovskaya does not hesitate to qualify both Basaev and al-Khattab as "international terrorists."[84] She also points out the ambiguous Russian position as occupier of a seat on the UN Security Council, which gave it a veto that could halt any peacekeeping intervention in the region.[85] That position proved particularly advantageous for Russia, especially after it was possible for them to publicly conflate the rebels with terrorists, thanks to Basaev and al-Khattab's actions, ultimately paving the way for the second military intervention in Chechnya.

While the seeds of contemporary Chechen nationalism had indeed been planted by Dudaev and began to be sowed in the interwar period, Valery Tishkov notes that it is principally

---

[80] Hughes, *Chechnya*, 101–2; Ben Rich and Dara Conduit, "The Impact of Jihadist Foreign Fighters on Indigenous Secular-Nationalist Causes: Contrasting Chechnya and Syria," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 2 (2015): 115.
[81] Joanna Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," *Nationalities Paper* 39, no. 1 (January 2009): 76.
[82] Rich and Conduit, "The Impact," 119; Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 77.
[83] Anna Politkovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*, trans. Alexander Burry and Tatiana Tulchinsky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 179–80.
[84] Ibid., 182.
[85] Ibid., 187–8.

following the inauguration of President Maskhadov that calls were publicly made to avenge Moscow's atrocities that were committed during the First Russo-Chechen War.[86] Chechen intellectuals also began to take a great interest in mythmaking. They embraced a new kind of ethnic-nationalistic chauvinism aimed at celebrating the Chechens as the foundational people of the Caucasus, which developed further into what Tishkov calls a xenophobic collective paranoia.[87] However, these delusions Tishkov condemns may very well have been one of the consequences of the violence of the First Russo-Chechen War (1994–96), which had the adverse effect of forcing Chechnya to withdraw into itself. On a more positive note, Tishkov notes that during the interwar period, some efforts were made to revive the Chechen language, which had been practically extinct.[88] The interwar period can be seen as having created the perfect conditions for merging the nascent Chechen nationalism and the revival of a religion-based militancy inspired by past confrontations against Russia, a fertile ground for recruitment and the escalation of violence from the Chechen side going into the second Russo-Chechen conflict.

At the same time, viewing the conflict as essentially separatist, nationalist or Islamist alone is, according to Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, overlooking the fact that the post-Soviet insurgency was "shaped instead by a complex, changing network of affiliations."[89] Warning against oversimplification, the authors argue that these new irregular coalitions forming between the different brokers of power in Chechnya reflected the historical multi-ethnic character of the anti-Russian resistance in the North Caucasus.[90] It would be too speculative to attribute

[86] Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society* (University of California Press, 2004), 196–8, 208–9.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., 200–3.
[89] Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya," 75.
[90] Ibid., 76.

allegiance to the actors of the insurgency, as affiliations were ever-changing in such an unstable environment, often with the ultimate objective being self-preservation.

To explain Chechnya's interwar instability, it must be said that Aslan Maskhadov inherited a failed state with ruined infrastructures.[91] The autonomous republic was left in less-than-ideal conditions in the hands of an underequipped leadership who failed to consolidate its power and initiate the reconstruction process. John Russell describes the reigning state of warlordism, where no structure for civil society was put in place, enabling various entrepreneurs of violence to establish their rule over the weakened and fragmented population.[92] Amidst the anarchy, the disenfranchised Chechen youth provided radical groups such as that of al-Khattab and Basaev a basin for recruitment. Further adding to the reigning lawlessness, the hostage-taking of civilians and foreigners grew in popularity among radical and criminal groups in the area.[93] During these uncertain times, serious discussions occurred between the Chechen insurgent groups and other Caucasian radicals to establish a caliphate that would include the Dagestani republic. A proposal was even made to expand and ally with groups from Abkhazia, Kabardino-Balkariya, Karachai-Cherkessia and Ingushetia.[94]

While Moscow once more became increasingly worried about the potential spread of secessionism in the North Caucasus, the relations between Yeltsin and the West began to embitter over the question of NATO interventionism in the Serbian-Kosovar conflict. Yeltsin

---

[91] C. W. Blandy, "Chechnya and Regional Security," in *The Politics of Security in Modern Russia,* ed. Mark Galeotti (London: Routledge, 2010), 91.
[92] John Russell, *Chechnya – Russia's "War on Terror"* (London: Routledge, 2007), 14; Anne Le Huerou, "Between War Experience and Ordinary Police Rationales: State Violence Against Civilians in Post-War Chechen Republic," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014), 153.
[93] Emma Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War*, Human Rights and Crimes Against Humanity (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 27–8
[94] Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 30.

went as far as to threaten to wage war against NATO if ground troops were to be deployed.[95] U.S. President Bill Clinton finally denounced Russian continued aggression on Chechen civilians, prompting his Russian counterpart to remind him to mind his own business and that the case of Chechnya was, first and foremost, an internal affair.[96] Amidst growing accusations of corruption and a plummeting confidence rate in both the Duma and the general population, Yeltsin announced his resignation on 31 December 1999, not before appointing the former KGB agent Vladimir Putin as a prime minister and designating him as his preferred successor at the head of the federation.[97]

Previously, in August 1999, Shamil Basaev, Ibn al-Khattab and their jihadist supporters had invaded Dagestan to extend the foundations of a prospective Pan-Caucasian caliphate. Putin had then obtained the first opportunity to demonstrate his assertiveness as a leader and confirm his new authority.[98] It represented a breakthrough moment for Putin to avenge previous Russian military defeats against the Chechen rebels, resulting in the launch of aerial bombardment, tactical missile strikes, and the deployment of a hundred thousand Russian troops on the ground.[99] Donna Winslow, Rene Moelker and Francoise Companjen point out that the incursion of the rebels had also threatened the Russian oil imports from the Caspian to the Black Sea via

---

[95] "Yeltsin Warns of Possible World War Over Kosovo," *CNN* (10 April 1999), http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9904/10/kosovo.russia.diplomacy.01/.

[96] Charles Babington, "Clinton Spars with Yeltsin on Chechnya," *The Washington Post* (19 November 1999), https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1999/11/19/clinton-spars-with-yeltsin-on-chechnya/3c6a47e4-b7c3-40b2-8f3b-4228963a5221/.

[97] Yekaterina Sinelschikova, "How Boris Yeltsin, Russia's First President, Resigned," *Russia Beyond*, 31 December 2019, https://www.rbth.com/history/331510-how-boris-yeltsin-resigned; "Yeltsin Redraws Political Map," *BBC News*, 10 August 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/415087.stm; Anastasia Edel, *Russia: Putin's Playground; Empire, Revolution, and the New Tsar* (Berkeley, California: Lightning Guides, 2015), 114–5; "Yeltsin's Man Wins Approval," *BBC News*, 16 August 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/422001.stm.

[98] Blandy, "Chechnya and Regional Security," 93; Rich and Conduit, "The Impact," 117; Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya," 85.

[99] Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 32–3.

the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline, making an energetic military intervention all the more inevitable.[100]

To highlight the intensity of the military operation, The Russian Air Force conducted over four thousand strikes between October 1999 and February 2000, while ground troops battered the cities and towns with rockets and cluster bombs.[101] Emma Gilligan underlines that these actions were most evidently contravening the 1980 Geneva Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions of Weapons Deemed to Be Excessively Damageable to Civilians, to which Russia was an actual signatory.[102] As a result, three months of indiscriminate bombing left a large part of Chechnya's physical and cultural infrastructures in ruins, once again terrorizing the civilians in an apparent success for the Russian military.

Russian officials publicly reiterated on their art that the conflict was neither ethnic nor religious, but simply a counter-operation to deter Chechen terrorism.[103] This allowed the federal forces to seem justified in employing atypical means to this end. According to Emma Gilligan, the Russians introduced new methods of intimidation, making warfare a lot more unconventional. Most notably, the Russian troops became notorious experts in *zachistka*, a practice which consisted of sweeping towns, forcing residents out of their homes, separating men and women while identifying potential Chechen fighters, and terrorizing or executing them.[104] Gilligan stresses that those instances of torture, cruel treatment, and violence committed against civilians provided evidence of war crimes as defined in the Geneva Convention of 1949 and the

[100] Donna Winslow, Rene Moelker and Francoise Companjen, "Glocal Chechnya from Russian Sovereignty to Pan-Islamic Autonomy," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 137.
[101] Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 35.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 32–3.
[104] Ibid., 39–41; Russell, *Chechnya – Russia's 'War on Terror,'* 13.

Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998.[105] The extent of civilian casualties suggests a broader and deliberate intent to subjugate the Chechen population. This intent was made conspicuous by the normalization of *zachistka*, which is a term meaning cleansing, corresponding to a vocabulary generally belonging to past cases of genocide and ethnic cleansing.[106]

Moreover, many reports highlighted the existence of informal detention centers, such as an infamous one operated in the village of Chernokozovo, substantiating claims that Russia blatantly violated human rights in its so-called domestic "anti-terrorist" operations.[107] While Russia was bound by international conventions on inhumane treatment and the use of torture in arbitrary detention, multiple reports were made public of prisoners being marked or branded for summary execution, taking electric shocks to the genitals, and being asphyxiated with plastic bags, among other degrading and dehumanizing treatments.[108] Gilligan notes that the stigma attached to being the victim of rape made it noticeably challenging to collect statistics due to the reluctance of victims to speak out, but it is unfortunately believed that rape was widespread.[109] Gilligan also contends that the significant number of disappearances and extralegal murders between 1999 and 2001 indicate that crimes against humanity were systematically committed in Chechnya during this period.[110]

Chechen victims struggled mightily to make themselves heard by the international community, which, until the Kosovo controversy at the turn of the century, had conveniently

---

[105] Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 47.
[106] Ibid., 49–51.
[107] Ibid., 58–9; Bryan Glyn Williams, "Commemorating 'The Deportation' in Post-Soviet Chechnya: The Role of Memorialization and Collective Memory in the 1994-1996 and 1999-2000 Russo-Chechen Wars," *History and Memory* 12, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2000): 130.
[108] Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya*, 61–3.
[109] Ibid., 68–9.
[110] Ibid., 78–81.

turned a blind eye to Moscow's actions in the spirit of preserving cordial post-Cold War diplomatic relations. A few brave individuals have persisted in their attempt to raise awareness of the ongoing situation in Chechnya. Russian journalist and author Anna Politkovskaya took it upon herself to publish dispatches from war-torn Chechnya at the risk of her own life. Capturing the essence of the human tragedy endured by the Chechens, she related stories like that of Isa from Selmentausen, who recalls having cigarettes put out against his body, his nails put out, and being violently beaten with "Pepsi bottles filled with water" while being detained by guards.[111] Politkovskaya reveals in her work how Chechen men were sometimes raped, inflicting such trauma that seeking vengeance subsequently became "the only purpose of the rest of their lives."[112] Without Politkovskaya's work, many of these atrocities would have remained unheard of.

The implications of the gendered violence committed by the Russian troops during the war were far-reaching in Chechen society. Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev remark that honor and virility are crucial parts of the Chechen masculine identity in a society whose patrimony is primarily based on the ability of the men to protect and defend theirs.[113] In fact, there is no doubt that the Russians were well aware of that cultural trait when engaging in military operations in Chechnya. The political scientist Adam Jones explains that the perpetrator usually practices genocidal male-on-male rape to feminize the victim or render it "homosexual," all the while bolstering his masculinity.[114] In the case of the Chechen male, there was no greater

[111] Politkovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell*, 51.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev, "Blood Revenge and Mobilization: Evidence from the Chechen Wars," *International Security* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 170.
[114] Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2016), 332.

humiliation than being raped by a Russian soldier. Such an assault directly affected their traditional masculine role in Chechen society.

Although, the violence did not only target males, and was not necessarily sexual or gender-exclusive. Politkovskaya's dispatches also contain collected first-hand reports such as that of Rosita, a Chechen grandmother arbitrarily taken from her home, shoved, kicked, and thrown in a pit covered by logs in the middle of winter.[115] Subsequently taken out for questioning, Rosita affirms that she was tortured by electrocution while officers required her relatives to pay a ransom for her release.[116] In fact, during the Russian feds' assault on Grozny in the winter of 1999–2000, not even hospitals were safe from the Russian Feds. The troops raided them and destroyed most medical equipment, forcing ailing patients to flee and forfeit life-saving treatments.[117] The conflict made many orphans like Angela Zaitseva, a child whom the war deprived of "knowledge of her name, and when and where she was born."[118]

It is, therefore, unsurprising that the notion of revenge very quickly became an underlying objective of the Chechen struggle against Russian troops. As a result, the rebels, who had by now fully realized the asymmetric nature of the warfare, began to retaliate by targeting Russian civilians. Among the most spectacular acts of terrorism committed on Russian soil, C. W. Blandy contends that the attack of Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow in October 2002, resulting in over 130 civilian victims, gave the impulse to a Russian firm military response, especially in the new post 9/11 global context.[119] While Americans were initially sympathetic to the Chechen cause, Brian G. Williams suggests that, after 9/11, perceptions of the world had changed and that

---

[115] Politkovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell*, 48–9.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 68–70.
[118] Ibid., 89–91.
[119] Blandy, "Chechnya and Regional Security," 94–5; Hughes, *Chechnya,* 136.

Westerners came to view "a myriad of complex, pre-existing issues through the simplistic black-and-white lenses of the so-called War on Terror."[120] Then, the broadly televised siege of Beslan in 2004, counting many children and women among the 333 victims, further solidified Putin's framing of the war on Chechnya as a counter-terrorist operation, both on national and international stages.[121]

The reprehensible nature of Basaev and his men's acts, which he considered as legitimate tactics of retaliation against Russian indiscriminate aggression on Caucasian Muslims, provoked a shift in the international opinion, which had already aligned with the ongoing global "war on terror."[122] John Russell adds that traditional elements of the Chechen so-called "martial culture," such as the practice of hostage-taking, beheadings, and other atrocities, constituted prime material for Russia's propaganda campaigns to gather popular support for its operations in Chechnya.[123] According to the narrative being promoted by the Kremlin, the second Russo-Chechen war was the prolonging of a "mission civilisatrice" imperial Russia had embarked on two centuries earlier in the Caucasus.[124] During this time, James Hughes argues that pragmatism continued to characterize the European community's attitude to the Chechen War as its heavy dependence on Russian oil and gas weighed heavily in its decision to remain relatively indifferent to claims of human rights abuse committed by the Russian troops in Chechnya.[125] Likewise, the concurrent aggressive American response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 made it difficult for the US not to support Russia in its own "war on terror." In a demonstration of

---

[120] Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya,* 208; Winslow, Moelker and Companjen, "Glocal Chechnya," 135.
[121] Winslow, Moelker and Companjen, "Glocal Chechnya," 138; "Beslan Remembers 334 Victims of Deadly Russian School Siege," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 01 September 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-town-of-beslan-remembers-victims-of-deadly-school-siege/30815305.html.
[122] Hughes, *Chechnya,* 157–9.
[123] Russell, *Chechnya,* 37.
[124] Ibid., 30.
[125] Hughes, *Chechnya,* 128–31.

solidarity with the Russians, the US officially listed three Chechen rebel groups as Foreign Terrorist Organizations.[126]

James Hughes finds these terrorist designations questionable, as they grossly overlooked that marginalized criminal groups committed most acts with no real political affiliation and often had highly personal motivations, such as seeking vengeance for the death of a relative.[127] Conversely, it could be argued that the indiscriminate bombardments and the well-documented massacres of civilians committed by the Russian military constituted themselves acts of state-sponsored terrorism.[128]

Effectively, brutal acts of retaliation were committed by the Chechen rebels with what could be qualified as a reciprocal lack of regard for human life. A distinctive local feature of that reprisal was that it followed the culturally embedded principle of "blood feud," a concept exploited by the most radical separatist groups' leaders to incite violence to restore the Chechen people's honor and pride. Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev argue that "blood revenge," a custom shared by many other Islamic honor-based societies, played a crucial part in the mobilization of Chechens against the Russian aggressors.[129] In other words, the principles of reciprocity and equivalence present in the Chechen traditional value system certainly contributed to increasing the intensity of the response from the insurgency.[130] A failure to exact revenge would have been considered a display of "weakness or cowardice," which is entirely inadmissible in the ultra-patriarchal Chechen social organization.[131] While they affirm that, since the 1990s, popular support for Chechen separatism and the ideology of Salafism was

[126] Ibid., 138–9, 143.
[127] Ibid., 150–2.
[128] Ibid.,161.
[129] Souleimanov and Aliyev, "Blood Revenge" 159–62.
[130] Ibid., 161–62.
[131] Ibid., 169–70.

ambivalent, Souleimanov and Aliyev emphasize that Russian indiscriminate violence during military operations prompted many civilians to join the insurgency to take revenge.[132] As it proved almost impossible to identify individual perpetrators, blood revenge became the logical justification for attacking any Russians. With its call to the use of terrorism, Salafi-Jihadism proved to become a rather convenient ideological vehicle of the Chechen retributive mission. Therefore, it is not Islam that radicalized the Chechens. However, it was instrumentalized by radical separatists the same way it had been in the distant past by the Imam Shamil or, more recently, by Dudaev.

In this context, Aurelie Campana and Jean-Francois Ratelle remark that Basaev and al-Khattab were quite successful at promoting terrorism and guerilla warfare, even resurrecting the project of constituting a pan-Caucasian Islamic caliphate.[133] Coincidentally, when the more moderate President Maskhadov was assassinated in 2005, the more radical Abdul Khalim Sadulaev replaced him and quickly made the diffusion of the insurgency across the Caucasus an official policy of his.[134] However, both Sadulaev and Basaev were eventually killed in 2006, an event which Campana and Ratelle argue had a momentary but significant negative impact on the overall strength and cohesiveness of the Chechen separatist troops.[135] The next leader of the insurgency, Dokku Umarov, signified his intention to abandon the Chechen independence movement to fully promote the establishment of a Caucasus Emirate and bank on a potential alliance between Muslims to accomplish the anti-imperialist struggle.[136] Thanks to these efforts

[132] Ibid., 173–4, 177.
[133] Aurelie Campana and Jean-Francois Ratelle, "A Political Sociology Approach to the Diffusion of Conflict from Chechnya to Dagestan and Ingushetia," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 2 (2014): 121.
[134] Ibid.,
[135] Ibid., 122.
[136] Ibid; Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya," 88.

made by Salafi-jihadists, the discourse shifted from ethnonationalism to a much more radical and religiously motivated "struggle to save the North Caucasus from infidels."[137]

In the end, Salafism appeared for some Chechens to be the last resort under which the restoration of the Chechen honor seemed conceivable. While Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty credit the foreigner al-Khattab for some of this success of Salafism in Chechnya, they warn against any conflation of Chechen jihadists and other global jihadist organizations, noting that terrorist incidents were ascribed local political objectives rather than overarching religious significance.[138] The authors contend that the simplicity of Salafism, compared with the complexities of local Sufism, most evidently facilitated the recruitment of the Caucasian youth during the interwar period and in the future.[139] Ben Rich and Dara Conduit have concluded in their assessment of the impact of foreign fighters on the Chechen cause that their presence played a minor part in propagating Salafi-jihadism, contributing instead to dividing the insurgency and eroding any potential Western sympathy for the Chechen cause.[140] The authors remark that before the arrival of foreign jihadists, militant Salafism was practically absent from the contemporary religious landscape of the Caucasus.[141] Nevertheless, it has been persistently invoked by Moscow as a pretext to justify its ruthless military interventions in Chechnya.

However, Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty do not so easily dismiss the contribution of foreign fighters. They argue that the Arab contingent in the North Caucasus effectively played a significant role during the Second Russo-Chechen war, notably in financing and ideology.[142]

---

[137] Campana and Ratelle, "A Political Sociology Approach to the Diffusion of Conflict from Chechnya to Dagestan and Ingushetia,", 123.
[138] Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya: A Critical Assessment," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 5 (2008): 417–9, 425–7.
[139] Ibid., 417–9, 425–7.
[140] Rich and Conduit, "The Impact," 115, 120.
[141] Ibid., 125.
[142] Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya," 89.

Kuwaiti, North African, and Turkish jihadis have provided volunteer manpower to the front lines and have contributed to enlarging the recruitment basin for the Chechen jihadi fighters.[143] However, this external support had the adverse effect of giving more weight to Moscow's claim that Chechnya had become a safe haven for foreign terrorists.

Gradually, the Kremlin realized it would have complete freedom from international intervention to treat the Chechen conflict as long as it remained an internal matter. It then opted to adopt a new strategy to counter the persistent insurgency. To install a remotely-controlled government in the republic, Moscow named the powerful mufti Akhmat Kadyrov and his paramilitary force in charge of the battle against the separatists in 2003, effectively making the conflict a civil war and, importantly, allowing for a gradual withdrawal of the federal troops.[144] In parallel, a strategy of "chechenization" of the conflict was put in place, consisting of granting pardons to and enrolling former Chechen *boevikis* (insurgent fighters) in local militias.[145] Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty suggest that Moscow had capitalized on the "dynamic between traditional Sufi Islam and its Salafi opposition" by appointing Kadyrov, who enjoyed significant support from the Qadiriyya Sufi brotherhood in his public departure from the Salafi resistance.[146] Miriam Matejova also notes that co-opting the Chechen-leading elites and providing funding, better training, and equipment contributed to lowering intra-Chechen violence and significantly "weakened the Chechen resistance capabilities."[147]

---

[143] Ibid., 90.
[144] Blandy, "Chechnya and Regional Security," 95–96; Souleimanov and Aliyev, "Blood Revenge," 178.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya," 85.
[147] Miriam Matejova, "Russian 'Chechenization' and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya," *International Journal on World Peace* 30, no. 2 (June 2013): 11–2, 14; "Russia 'Ends Chechnya Operation'", *BBC News,* 16 April 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8001495.stm.

However, Akhmat Kadyrov was then unexpectedly assassinated a year later. After a period of interim rule, he was eventually replaced by his son, Ramzan, who has since benefited from Moscow's funding and protection.[148] Jim Nichol argues that, while it could be claimed that Russia "officially" abandoned its counter-terrorist operations in Chechnya in 2009 and somewhat succeeded to stabilize the region, it also could be implied that it had simply chosen to pursue its 'war on terror' by other means, namely by appointing an influent local warlord as the head-of-state, who then would be allowed to designate any opposition as a terrorist threat with the covert support of the Kremlin.[149] Nichol notices that as a reminder to ethnic Chechens that they were still at Russia's mercy, Putin's government pressed for all Chechens in neighboring regions to return home, going as far as "bulldozing camps and turning off electricity" in their temporary refugee camps.[150] To prevent any future resurgence of Chechen separatism, the new Russian constitution signed by Putin imposed a ban on pro-independence parties from the political arena.[151] Although, C. W. Blandy cautiously warns that there will always be a possibility that young Chechens gravitate to the mountains and congregate to continue the struggle against Russian occupation.[152]

To recapitulate, when the Soviet Union collapsed, Chechen separatists saw a legitimate possibility to obtain political sovereignty or enter a new arrangement with the Russian colonizers. For the Kremlin, the departure from communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union did not by any means signify a dissolution of Russia. As a result, the claim of independence made by Dudaev and his acolytes was eventually met with the military power of

---

[148] Matejova, "Russian 'Chechenization,'" 11–3; Blandy, "Chechnya and Regional Security," 97.
[149] Jim Nichol, "Bringing Peace to Chechnya? Assessments and Implications," in *Chechnya Still Boiling*, ed. George S. Toler, (New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc., 2009), 60.
[150] Ibid., 53.
[151] Russell, *Chechnya*, 44.
[152] Blandy, "Chechnya and Regional Security," 103.

the new Russian entity. While the first conflict seemed to have ultimately settled on granting a higher degree of autonomy for the Chechen republic, it left its infrastructures in disarray, enabling entrepreneurs of violence and radical militants to rule. It was during this time that religious extremism began to take root in the region as more Caucasian Muslims came to view it as an effective ideological vehicle to spear the struggle against the enduring Russian legacy of colonialism in the area. However, Islam had been a feature of Chechen society for centuries and only became an agent of radicalization as it was weaponized by the insurgency's leadership, who understood its power as a location of solidarity for the Chechens.

In a post-9/11 global context, the acts of terrorism and threats to Russian public security posed by the radicals gave an impetus for a second military intervention in Chechnya. Violations of human rights were then widespread and committed by both parties involved. Still, the international community conveniently remained silent, desirous of preserving the fragile nascent diplomatic relations established with the new Russian political entity that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The lack of will to intervene from the international community gave Vladimir Putin, the new man in power in Moscow, a free hand in the operations undertaken in Chechnya at a critical time when he sought to assert his newly acquired authority over the federation. Before the second conflict became a quagmire for the Kremlin, and to ensure that Chechnya remained under Moscow's control, the local elites were co-opted, effectively allowing for the transfer of the burden of maintaining public order to a loyal local ruler. This strategy succeeded in bringing immediate stability to the republic. Although, as it will be argued in the next chapter, this new peace came at the cost of Chechens' freedoms and human and democratic rights. But in the end, Russia has successfully found new means to preserve colonial control over the autonomous North Caucasian republic, continuing the work of its imperial and Soviet

predecessors. The next chapter will also discuss how the new leadership found creative ways to instrumentalize the Chechens' shared Islamic faith again to attain political objectives, a recurring trope of the history of Chechnya.

Chapter Three

Kadyrov's Fiefdom, or Ushering a New Era of Russian colonialism in Chechnya

The previous chapters have dealt with the historical origins of the Russo-Chechen conflict and its transformation from a struggle against Russian imperialism spearheaded by religious leaders to a secular project before once again being moved by radical Islamism. This chapter will investigate how, after having dispatched the radicals and re-established a Russian rule by proxy, the pro-Russian Chechen leadership found it again profitable to instrumentalize Chechnya's Islamic tradition to its ends. This time around, it serves to reinforce the Russian colonialist narrative. Examining the aftermath of the armed conflict through monographs, academic articles, reports from non-governmental organizations and human rights-driven entities, Western and Russian news outlets, filmed documentaries, and specialized online publications, this chapter will argue that the replacement of direct military rule by a proxy indigenized authoritarian government in Chechnya is, in fact, the continuation of Russian colonialism. It will share the view that the current pacification of Chechens needs to be evaluated negatively as part of a frozen conflict. The current status of the conflict is directly connected to the ability of the new pro-Russian Chechen authority to deter the potential resurgence of anti-Russian activity. Recognizing that the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's authority has effectively stabilized Chechnya in terms of halting violent confrontations with the Russian forces, it will contend that Moscow's patronage of his regime may be interpreted as the perpetuation of the Russian imperial ventures in the North Caucasus, only by other means than waging direct and total war.

This chapter will suggest that Russia's current arrangement with a local warlord comes at the cost of a severe curtailment of human rights and freedoms for the Chechen civilian

population, notably the women and the LGBT community who have been targeted by policies inspired by Kadyrov's worldviews and interpretation of the Chechen Islamic tradition. His loyal militia, borrowing from the violent and genocidal methods of the Russian and Soviet occupiers, has merely taken over the functions of the Russian troops by keeping the Chechens under strict control. Kadyrov extended for the Chechens the hardship that accompanied imperialism far beyond 2009, when the Russo-Chechen military confrontations officially ended, by perpetuating a legacy of violence initiated by Russian colonialists in Chechnya.

Conceding that Kadyrov's rule may well have represented for the Kremlin the only viable option left for Russia to preserve its territorial integrity in the North Caucasus, this chapter points out that the existing covenant between Putin and Kadyrov relies entirely on the vitality of their relationship, which is adding a significant layer of unpredictability to the already volatile Russo-Chechen post-war relationship. A change in the variables of this hazardous equation likely has the potential to trigger another armed conflict in the future. However, by becoming the most violent of Chechens and a capable servant of Putin, Kadyrov has temporarily suppressed the anti-colonial resistance. Yet, this chapter will call into question the viability of such a regime.

While Chechnya has made considerable material progress in its reconstruction effort in recent years, the following chapter suggests that overwhelmingly concentrated decisional powers in Kadyrov and his personal coterie's hands render civil infrastructures ineffective. Furthermore, the despot has been consistently active in his attempt to control all aspects of social and cultural life in the republic. Cultivating an ever-growing personality cult and enforcing policies and laws justified by a distorted amalgamation of Islamic conservatism and traditionalism, Kadyrov is involved in the reinterpretation of Chechen history and mythmaking, critical components of his social engineering efforts. He insists on Chechnya being an integral part of Russia. To render

this affirmation more palatable to the more devout Chechens, he presents the help he received from Moscow in ousting the jihadi separatists from the republic as proof of Russia being the "most loyal ally and protector of Islam."[1] Rather than being a source of radicalization, Islam, as a distinctive feature of the Chechen religious tradition, is being utilized by Kadyrov as a political tool, just like it had been by Imam Shamil in the 1800s or the separatist jihadi fighters of the Russo-Chechen wars of the 1990s and 2000s.

As collateral of Kadyrov's reinterpretation of history, the memorialization of culturally traumatic events, such as the deportation of 1944 and the contemporary Russo-Chechen conflict, remains a sensitive issue in modern Chechnya, as it does not serve Kadyrov's narrative. Denying the Chechens the right to memorialize past traumatic events, Kadyrov severely hinders any meaningful collective healing process. Such a process would require an unlikely recognition by Russia of the cultural trauma suffered by the Chechens and an even more improbable acknowledgment of the historical significance and implications of long-standing Russian colonial policies in Chechnya.

The Kremlin initially had chosen Akhmad Kadyrov, a formerly separatist Chief Mufti who offered his help to the Russians in the Second Chechen War beginning in 1999, to be the first President of the Chechen Republic. However, he was killed in 2004 after multiple failed assassination attempts in previous years.[2] It is likely that Moscow then elected to support his Akhmad's son Ramzan to take over the leadership of the pro-Russian Chechen government to preserve the existing complex "clan-based power structure" that supported Kadyrov senior.[3] To

[1] "Kadyrov Says Russia Remains Islam's Most Loyal Ally and Protector," *TASS Russian News Agency*, 17 May 2017, https://tass.com/politics/946363.
[2] Frank Brown, "Death in Chechnya; Rebel Bombers Killed Akhmad Kadyrov. Will His Brutal Son Now Replace Him?" *Newsweek*, International Edition, 24 May 2004, 28.

[3] Ibid.

become the president of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov had to wait until coming to the constitutionally legal age of thirty. Therefore, after his father, Akhmad Kadyrov, was assassinated, a three-year interim period followed, during which Alu Alkhanov acted as a figurehead. In the meantime, Ramzan continued consolidating his influence, serving as a deputy Prime Minister. The beginning of his presidency in early 2007 coincided with the gradual Russian military withdrawal from Chechnya.

This development should not be interpreted as evidence of Russian unilateral success. It is possible that Russia realized that unless it was willing to indefinitely pursue the total war against separatists, backing a local warlord and indigenizing the republic's leadership represented the best option available to stabilize the region. According to Kimberly Marten, who scrutinized the role of powerful warlords in emerging states with weak infrastructures, the Chechen case showed that, contrary to the belief that Putin maintained a firm hand on all of what was left of the post-Soviet Russian empire, the leader, in reality, had to deem the republic to be uncontrollable to "outsource Chechnya to a private contractor."[4] Marten suggests that the hundreds of millions of dollars for the reconstruction of the republic that were subsequently funnelled directly through Ramzan Kadyrov most certainly created a future problem for Moscow, who "may never be able to take back control of Chechnya without another bloody war."[5] John Russell agrees that, without entrusting a local power broker such as Kadyrov to uphold the law, there is a high probability that the confrontation with Chechen rebels would have been dragging on much longer.[6]

---

[4] Kimberly Marten, *Warlords: Strong-Arm Brokers in Weak States*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), 103–5.
[5] Ibid., 103.
[6] John Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov: The Indigenous Key to Success in Putin's Chechenization Strategy?" *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 4 (2008): 662, 665.

Nevertheless, because he had to be approved by Moscow as the successor to his father as the head of the republic, Kadyrov did have to confirm his authority by convincing some of the Chechen rebels to abandon the fighting and join his troops, all the while sorting out rivalries with other pro-Russian factions, often using coercion and extreme violence.[78] When Kadyrov came to be trustworthy enough for Putin to delegate the military control of the republic to him, the Russian president signed a decree in 2006 confirming the official withdrawal of the Russian troops from Chechnya.[9] The administration of the international airport of Grozny, as well as supervision over the customs, was then passed to Kadyrov, giving him an appreciable degree of sovereignty as a regional leader. Eventually, the warlord was assigned by Moscow the task of overseeing every aspect of the post-war reconstruction of the republic.

Kimberly Marten remarks that the capital of Grozny was effectively quickly restored and developed as a modern city.[10] However, Musa Basnukaev, who carefully examined the reconstruction process, argues that despite the significant investment projects in the capital which aimed at restoring its image and contributing to the projection of economic stability, Chechnya's overall attractiveness for potential Russian investors suffered from its reputation of becoming a funnel for federal subsidies.[11] Many believe that Grozny represents a tree that hides the forest. In reality, minimal emphasis has been put on rebuilding an economy less reliant on Moscow outside that of the capital. Furthermore, to preserve oversight on the extractive industry in the republic, the Russian state-controlled company Rosneft remained in control of the majority

---

[7] Marten, *Warlords*, 111.
[8] Anne Le Huerou, "Between War Experience and Ordinary Police Rationales: State violence Against Civilians in Post-War Chechen Republic," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014), 156–8.
[9] Marten, *Warlords*, 116–7.
[10] Ibid., 122.
[11] Musa Basnukaev, "Reconstruction in Chechnya: At the Intersection Between Politics and the Economy," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. by Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014), 84–6.

of the oil wells, despite Kadyrov denouncing the situation and demanding more autonomy to tax oil revenues.[12] However, this situation represents an exception to the rule. Mostly, the regional dictator remains publicly very cooperative with the Kremlin. In return, Moscow enjoys not having to deal with hazardous regional issues while preserving Russia's economic suzerainty over Chechnya.

Ostensibly, Kadyrov and Putin seem to be a perfect match, and they never refrain from publicly reaffirming the strength of their relationship, a vital element of the current Russo-Chechen peace. Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Jasutis Grazvydas, who have observed this dynamic at play, suggest that beyond the obvious "neo-patrimonial" bond that has developed between President Putin and Ramzan Kadyrov, the real key to the Chechen leader's survival is the continuous flow of funding coming from Moscow but most importantly, his ability to manage the allocation while actively protecting Moscow's interests.[13] This method of ruling is not innovative and mirrors that of past Russian imperialist projects. For Julie Wilhelmsen, who examined the Putin-Kadyrov rapport, this type of patron-client relationship between Moscow and Chechnya corresponds to an "imperial hierarchy."[14] Wilhelmsen adds that many empires characteristically ruled peripheral regions through intermediaries.[15] It is to render this kind of rule acceptable to the historically ferociously anti-imperialist Chechens that Putin regularly engages publicly in the characterization of his relationship with Kadyrov as a kinship-like bond.

---

[12] Matthew Bodner, "Kadyrov: Elders Say Chechnya Has as Much Oil as Saudi Arabia," *The Moscow Times*, 18 June 2015, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/06/18/kadyrov-elders-say-chechnya-has-as-much-oil-as-saudi-arabia-a47493.

[13] Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Jasutis Grazvydas, "The Dynamics of Kadyrov's Regime: Between Autonomy and Dependence," Caucasus Survey 4, no. 2 (2016): 124–5; Basnukaev, "Reconstruction," 77; Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov," 664.

[14] Julie Wilhelmsen, "Inside Russia's Imperial Relations: The Social Constitution of Putin-Kadyrov Patronage," *Slavic Review* 77, no. 4 (2018): 919–20.

[15] Ibid., 921–2.

Contributing to legitimizing the presence of Kadyrov as a middleman, it conveniently distracts the public attention from Putin's broader neo-imperialist agenda for Russia.[16] In this plan, the North Caucasus remains an integral part of the imperial project as a borderland between Europe and Asia.

The British specialist on International Relations, John Russell, who extensively studied the current Chechen regime, observes that "Kadyrov has been quite explicit in his assertions that he is Vladimir Putin's man rather than the Russian president's man."[17] In a lengthy interview he gave to the Russian journalist Andrey Vandenko, the Chechen leader affirms that he owes his life to the Russian president, who, even though knowing that Kadyrov was uneducated and not a career politician, still chose to appoint him to fight "the enemies of the Chechen people and of all of Russia," about the Chechen separatists.[18] In turn, Putin often describes him as a "son."[19] However, would Putin be removed from the current equation, it is uncertain that Kadyrov would demonstrate the same loyalty to Moscow. For the time being, Kadyrov's ability to preserve Russia's territorial integrity while enjoying a significantly higher degree of independence than most regional leaders in Russia appears to be a "win-win" situation as long as both leaders remain in place.[20]

Kadyrov is prone to go above and beyond to express his loyalty to the Russian leader, as he "constantly affirms his admiration and subordination to Putin in public speeches."[21] Going to

---

[16] Ibid., 928–30.
[17] Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov," 670.
[18] Andrey Vandenko, "Chechnya's Leader in a TASS Special Project Top Officials, Part 1: About Fears, Foes and Friends, Boris Nemtsov and Fighting Wars," *TASS Russian News Agency*, https://tass.com/top-officials/914561#884835.
[19] "Ramzan Kadyrov: Putin's Feared Chechen Strongman," *Al Jazeera*, 21 May 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/21/ramzan-kadyrov-putins-feared-chechen-strongman.
[20] Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov," 660.

[21] Wilhelmsen, "Inside Russia's Imperial Relations," 931–2.

the extreme to honor this contract, the regional tyrant is suspected of having organized political assassinations outside the borders of the Chechen republic on behalf of his Russian handler. Julie Wilhelmsen suggests that the 2015 murder in Moscow of Boris Nemtsov, one of Putin's most vocal critics, for which five Chechens were convicted, could very well have been a "gift to cement the Putin-Ramzan relationship."[22] In June 2020, *The Moscow Times* reported that Georgian authorities had arrested a Russian national they accused of being hired by Kadyrov to assassinate a television host who had insulted Putin on the air.[23]

While Putin entrusts Kadyrov with managing the funding allocated by the Kremlin, he tolerates that about a third of it eventually ends directly in the dictator's pockets.[24] Meanwhile, Kadyrov regularly displays a lavish lifestyle: a personal zoo, a gigantic mansion, and a fleet of imported luxury cars.[25] Stars from the West turn a blind eye to the poor human rights record of his regime to come to attend his glamorous birthday celebrations. Two-time Oscar winner Hilary Swank and the singer Seal have notably faced public and media backlash for doing so in 2011, but many others have successfully eluded the public eye to fraternize with the tyrant.[26] To this

---

[22] Ibid., 935; Souleimanov and Grazvydas, "The Dynamics of Kadyrov's Regime," 116; "Chechen Gang Guilty of Nemtsov's Murder," *BBC News,* 29 June 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40447105; "Boris Nemtsov Murder: Five Chechens Jailed for Attack," *BBC News,* 13 July 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40592248.

[23] "Kadyrov Accused of Masterminding Murder Plot Against Georgian TV Host Who Insulted Putin," *The Moscow Times,* 17 June 2020, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/06/16/kadyrov-accused-of-masterminding-murder-plot-against-putin-a70582.

[24] John Russell, "Kadyrov's Chechnya: Template, Test or Trouble for Russia's Regional Policy?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 3 (2011): 509; Wilhelmsen, "Inside Russia's Imperial Relations," 929–30.

[25] Marten, *Warlords*, 123; Souleimanov and Grazvydas, "The Dynamics of Kadyrov's Regime," 119; Russell, "Kadyrov's Chechnya," 517; Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov," 670–1.

[26] Ben Child, "Hilary Swank Sacks Manager and Staff Following Ramzan Kadyrov PR Disaster," *The Guardian,* 31 October 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/oct/31/hilary-swank-sacks-manager; "Hilary Swank 'Sacks Manager' After Chechen Appearance," *BBC News,* 31 October 2011, https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-15524921; Daniel Frankel, "Hilary Swank 'Had No Idea' How Bad Kadyrov Was, Insider Says," *Reuters,* 31 October 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hilaryswank-idUSTRE79T37J20111031.

effect, Russell eloquently remarks that "Kadyrov has combined the trappings of a medieval warlord with those of a modern jet-setter with a zeal befitting any Saudi playboy prince."[27]

Meanwhile, a radical drop in criminal violence was recorded in Chechnya since Kadyrov's inception as the Moscow-backed leader of the republic. However, Kadyrov himself readily employs extreme violence to achieve this. During a 2021 working meeting, President Putin affirmed that Chechnya "has become one of Russia's safest regions" while praising the role played by Ramzan Kadyrov in this success.[28] However, Marten questions the long-term viability of such a regime, noting that Kadyrov makes "continued use of beatings, torture, kidnapping, arson and death squads against his own population," tactics that deter the opposition but could very well insidiously drive a new insurgency.[29] Moreover, Emil Aslan Souleimanov, Namig Abbasov, and David S. Siroky underline the risk for Moscow in "delegating power to unloyal agents" in that it could feed regionalism and a new wave of separatism.[30] Fortunately for the Kremlin, Kadyrov remains, for the time being, a dependable stooge with a proven talent for quelling dissension.

The Russo-Chechen conflict has been effectively frozen by the equilibrium resulting from the installment of the Kadyrov proxy regime and a strategy of indigenization of the leadership of the republic. While doing so, Putin and the Kremlin have succeeded in reinstating Russian territorial control of Chechnya by favoring "Chechenization" over direct rule.[31]

---

[27] Russell, "Kadyrov's Chechnya," 517.

[28] "Working Meeting with Head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov," *President of Russia*, 23 June 2021, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65911.

[29] Marten, *Warlords*, 131.

[30] Emil Aslan Souleimanov, Namig Abbasov, and David S. Siroky, "Frankenstein in Grozny: Vertical and Horizontal Cracks in the Foundation of Kadyrov's Rule," *Asia Europe Journal* 17, no. 1 (2018; 2019): 88.

[31] Russell, "Kadyrov's Chechnya," 516.

However, as Kalsa Alliksaar and Kristyna Foltynova have found, the appeasement of the Russo-Chechen conflict came at the cost of liberal democratic advances and the severe curtailment of human rights, the direct result of the ruler's ruthlessness.[32] For Miriam Matejova, Moscow's strategy is quite simple: as long as "Putin's little Saddam" controls Chechnya, remains loyal to Moscow and protects its oil assets, the reconstruction of the republic will be funded, and Kadyrov's barbarity will be tolerated, or, even worse, covertly supported.[33] Qualifying the resulting state of things as an "illiberal peace," John Russell remarks that it nonetheless represents 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."[34] For Matejova and Russell, the state of post-war Chechnya under Kadyrov is best described as one of "negative peace," which has not been accompanied by a significant improvement in the human condition.[35]

Furthermore, the Russian strategy of Chechenization is represented as part of the domestic pursuit of the Russian counter-terrorist operations undertaken in the early 2000s.[36] Rather astutely, the Chechen dictator takes advantage of the situation by designating any opposition, activists, and even journalists, as potential "terrorist" threats to justify their persecution by the authorities.[37] In this regard, Anne Le Huerou remarks that Kadyrov

---

[32] Kalsa Alliksaar and Kristyna Foltynova, "The Untouchable: How Kadyrov Maintains His Tight Grip on Chechnya," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 20 September 2021, https://www.rferl.org/a/kadyrov-chechnya/31469045.html.

[33] Miriam Matejova, "Russian Chechenization and the Prospect for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya," *International Journal on World Peace* 30, no. 2 (June 2013): 17–8, 20.
[34] John Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov's Illiberal Peace in Chechnya," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014), 133–134.
[35] Matejova, "Russian Chechenization," 20; Russell, "Kadyrov's Chechnya," 522–3.
[36] Jim Nichol, "Bringing Peace to Chechnya? Assessments and Implications," in *Chechnya Still Boiling*, ed. George S. Toler, (New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc., 2009), 60.
[37] "Rights Defender Kalyapin Hospitalized After Beating," *Caucasian Knot*, 25 August 2022, https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/61121/; "Novaya Gazeta Demanded to Open Criminal Case Against Kadyrov," *Institute of Mass Information*, 1 February 2022, https://imi.org.ua/en/news/novaya-gazeta-demanded-to-open-criminal-case-against-kadyrov-i43588.

essentially borrows from his supervisor Putin's political playbook in terrorizing the opposition. However, he is doing so with the help of his loyal paramilitary: the Kadyrovites.[38]

Over the years, the Kadyrovites are suspected of having conducted targeted attacks on notable vocal critics of Kadyrov, even far outside the borders of Chechnya. A prime example of this brazenness is the July 2020 assassination of the separatist Mamikhan Umarov in broad daylight in a shopping centre's parking lot in Vienna, Austria.[39] A Chechen man was convicted of murdering Umarov, who had been cooperating with Austrian authorities after similar targeted attacks on other members of the Chechen diaspora in Europe.[40] Shaun Walker, a journalist at *The Guardian*, noted that Sulim Yamadayev, Kadyrov's political archrival, was assassinated in Dubai, and six other prominent Chechens were killed in Istanbul, Turkey, between 2009 and 2019.[41] In January 2021, a Swedish court convicted a Russian man for the assault with a hammer on Tumso Abdurakhmanov, who had been critical of Kadyrov on an online blog.[42] *The Moscow Times* reported that the court found out during its investigation that the convicted man's travel expenses had been covered, making it "clear that a power with significant financial means was behind" the attack.[43] Regrettably, many Chechens seeking asylum elsewhere also face daily threats against their lives and their families.[44]

---

[38] Le Huerou, "Between War Experience," 153–6; Marten, *Warlords*, 132; Russell. "Ramzan Kadyrov," 666.
[39] "Russian Shot Dead Near Vienna Was Reportedly a Kadyrov Critic." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty,* 06 July 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-asylum-seeker-austria-murder/30706727.html.
[40] "Chechen Man Given Life Sentence for Killing Dissident in Austria," *The Guardian,* 06 August 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/06/chechen-man-given-life-sentence-for-killing-dissident-in-austria; Angelika Kaimova, "Widow of Chechen Killed Near Vienna Confirms He Was Police Informant," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 24 July 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/widow-of-chechen-killed-near-vienna-confirms-he-was-police-informant/30745752.html.
[41] Shaun Walker, "We Can Find You Anywhere: The Chechen Death Squads Stalking Europe," *The Guardian,* 21 September 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/21/chechnya-death-squads-europe-ramzan-kadyrov.

[42] "Russian Jailed in Sweden Over Hammer Attack on Anti-Kadyrov Blogger," *The Moscow Times,* 11 January 2021, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/01/11/russian-jailed-in-sweden-over-hammer-attack-on-anti-kadyrov-blogger-a72576.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Walker, "We Can Find You Anywhere"; Wilhelmsen, "Inside Russia's Imperial Relations," 933.

Alternatively, other Chechens who have been living in exile since the end of the war found creative ways to continue the fight against Russia by joining the ranks of foreign jihadist groups. Russell notes that terrorist operations, such as the bombing of the Nevsky Express train in November 2009 and the March 2010 Moscow suicide bombing in the metro, caused some to seriously question the durability of the Putin-Kadyrov arrangement and the long-term success of the regime in suppressing the opposition.[45] However, Kadyrov's success at maintaining order inside the republic's borders seems to have always prevailed over his critics in the Kremlin. In turn, Kadyrov's ruthlessness and cruelty toward his detractor seem to know no limit. Among the instances where critics were brutally silenced, *Novaya Gazeta* reported in August 2022 that Salman Tepsurkayev, moderator of 1ADAT, a Telegram channel criticizing Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, had been found dead after he had been tortured. A grenade had been inserted into his mouth and detonated from a distance.[46]

Among Kadyrov's most vocal and persistent critics, the journalist Anna Politkovskaya actively denounced the abuses committed by the Kadyrovites, whom she viewed as merely "taking over *zachistka* functions from the Russian troops."[47] There was no doubt for Politkovskaya that Kadyrov and his guard were mercenaries at the service of the Kremlin. The scholar Michaela Pohl underlines that, while Politkovskaya was quickly identified as an enemy of the regime, she was persistent in her fight against the "Kadyrov cult," publishing multiple damning public reports about Kadyrov's questionable use of the funding dedicated to the

[45] Russell, "Kadyrov's Chechnya," 510.

[46] "Human Rights Activists Report Death of Kadyrov Critic," *Novaya Gazeta*, 24 August 2022, https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/08/24/human-rights-activists-report-death-of-kadyrov-critic-news.

[47] Michaela Pohl, "Anna Politkovskaya and Ramzan Kadyrov: Exposing the Kadyrov Syndrome," *Problems of Post-Communism* 54, no. 5 (2007): 32.

reconstruction of the republic.[48] Politkovskaya argued that the counter-terrorist operations in Chechnya, whether conducted by Russian troops or the Kadyrovites, were a pretext to suppress the opposition and facilitate the "kidnapping" of the republic by Ramzan Kadyrov.[49] On 7 October 2006, Politkovskaya was assassinated, an event curiously coinciding with Kadyrov reaching the age of thirty, the legal, constitutional age to serve as president in Chechnya.[50] Pohl suspects that "her death made it unnecessary for Ramzan to deal with this woman after taking power. Instead, he got a clean start."[51] Her death was probably welcomed behind the scenes in Moscow, as Politkovskaya had been one of Putin's most vociferous critics, continuously attracting the international community's attention to his regime's human rights abuses. Eventually, others took on Politkovskaya's mission to expose the actions of the keyholder of the republic of Chechnya but were also assassinated in the process, like the human rights activist Natalya Estemirova, killed in 2009.[52] As well as the Russian news outlet *RT* reported in February 2022 that Elena Milashina, journalist and founder of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, was forced to temporarily flee Russia to protect herself from the threats coming from Kadyrov.[53]

Nevertheless, concerns over the Chechen regime continue to be voiced by Western scholars, activists, and journalists who can remain outside the reach of the despot. Gisela Erbsloh, for one, is unconvinced by Kadyrov's qualifications as a quasi-head-of-state, suggesting that he has very little to show on his resume: little education, no profession, and a minimal

---

[48] Ibid., 34–5.

[49] Ibid., 37.
[50] Ibid., 38.
[51] Ibid.; Russell. "Ramzan Kadyrov," 659.
[52] "Russian Activist Found Murdered," *BBC News*, 15 July 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8152351.stm.
[53] "Russian Journalist Leaves Country After Personal Threats," *RT*, 4 February 2022, https://rt.com/russia/548315-journalist-leave-country-threats/.

vocabulary, both in Russian or Chechen.[54] Much like a schoolyard bully, his sole talent seems to be his ability to intimidate others and present himself as an uncontested leader. To appease the more regionalist and anti-Russian elements still active in the republic, the leader fabricates more Chechen sovereignty and pretends that all the money invested by Moscow in the republic comes instead directly from Allah.[55] Granted, Kadyrov enjoys some freedoms that other regional leaders would not, but it should be considered that Moscow adopts such a stance for the resulting regional stability.

Noting the similarities between his and Putin's "super-presidency," John Russell draws parallels between Kadyrov's ability to rule over the populace with the populism of the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez.[56] Kimberly Marten is even willing to compare the cult of personality instituted in the republic by Kadyrov to that of former Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, noting that even schoolchildren are now encouraged to train to be able to join the Kadyrovites eventually.[57] Tom Parfitt, from *Times*, pointed out that some Chechens now locally describe the billboards depicting Akhmat and Ramzan Kadyrov, and President Putin, as representing "the father, son and holy ghost," adding that hundreds of roads and public buildings are now named after the Kadyrov family, more evidence of this effort to canonize the Kadyrov and their Russian handler in Chechnya.[58]

However, for Russell, Ramzan Kadyrov is more than simply a warlord who consolidated his power among members of his clan before claiming authority over the Chechen nation. This

---

[54] Gisela Erbsloh, "Seeking Chechen Identity Between Repression and Self-Determination Under the Ramzan Kadyrov Regime," *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 5, no. 2 (2016): 203.
[55] Ibid., 211.
[56] Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov's Illiberal Peace in Chechnya," 137.
[57] Marten, *Warlords*, 113.
[58] Tom Parfitt, "Kadyrov Street? It's Over There, There, and There; Chechnya." *The Times*, 01 January 2021, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/kadyrov-street-in-chechnya-its-over-there-there-and-there-fwzwp7wnb.

development was greatly facilitated by the absence of civil infrastructure in the aftermath of two successive wars.[59] To explain the lack of progress with the adoption of liberal democracy in Chechnya at the time, Russell identifies three significant missing preconditions required for it to emerge: "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."[60] The absence of these preconditions directly contributed to Kadyrov's rise to power and ability to maintain his autocratic rule.

To further explain the apparent absence of an indigenous mobilization against Kadyrov, Russell hypothesizes that most Chechens are mindful of the precarious nature of their homeland's relative current stability.[61] Gisela Erbsloh believes that many Chechens were convinced over the years of the necessity of Kadyrov's regime for the republic's strength. These people were most likely persuaded by the speed at which Grozny was rebuilt after the war and the significant decrease in local crime rates.[62] For some, the successes of other authoritarian regimes, such as that of China and Singapore, seemingly challenge the dominant Western paradigm of the absolute necessity of transitioning to Western-style democracy to develop a robust modern economy.[63] However, in her assessment of the post-war Chechen economic recovery, Tamara U. Elbuzdukayeva questions claims being made about the success of the reconstruction, noting that the rate of unemployment remained significant since the industrial complex must be rebuilt and that foreign investments are practically absent.[64] She notes that the high levels of unemployment could lead to renewed societal instability, remarking that hundreds

[59] Russell, "Kadyrov's Chechnya," 520–2; Russell. "Ramzan Kadyrov," 674.
[60] Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov's Illiberal Peace in Chechnya," 142.
[61] Ibid., 138.
[62] Erbsloh, "Seeking Chechen Identity," 208; Russell. "Ramzan Kadyrov," 671.
[63] Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov's Illiberal Peace in Chechnya," 138.
[64] Tamara U. Elbuzdukayeva, "Economic Recovery in Chechnya," *Chechen Scholars on Chechnya, Norwegian Institute for International Affairs* (2010): 52, 59.

of thousands of Chechens have not received a proper education during the Russo-Chechen wars.[65]

While outsiders can acknowledge the current regime's role in the stability of the republic, John Russell insists that there remains a possibility that Putin eventually becomes irritated by his dauphin or that their relationship sours over time, adding a degree of precariousness to Kadyrov's regime.[66] Russell suggests that Kadyrov's "idiosyncratic behavior, notably his attempts to remove each and every real or imagined political rival within Chechnya," could well have the adverse effect of damaging the current deal with the Kremlin.[67] Pessimistic in his prognosis, the author points to the more skeptical Russian commentators who view the Kremlin's policy on Chechnya as "a modern Russian version of the Roman Empire's ill-fated deal with its periphery."[68] According to this perspective, the current arrangement is bound to fail because of the unreliability of a contract between two erratic despots. Some analysts worried that Kadyrov's susceptibility to international scrutiny might displease Putin and damage the current deal. However, the actions undertaken by Russia since 2014 in neighboring Ukraine tend to demonstrate that Putin is somewhat indifferent to the international community.[69]

Some analysts are prompt to point to the clannic structure of the traditional Chechen society as a rampart to liberal democratic advancement in Chechnya. However, such a perspective overlooks Kadyrov's ability to prevail over all existing social structures. Gisela

---

[65] Ibid.
[66] Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov's Illiberal Peace in Chechnya," 147.
[67] Russell, "Kadyrov's Chechnya," 520.
[68] Ibid.
[69] "Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 27 March 2014, 68/262: Territorial Integrity of Ukraine," *United Nations General Assembly* (68th Session, Agenda Item 33b), 01 April 2014, https://daccess-ods.un.org/tmp/7436732.05375671.html; "General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Resolution Demanding Russian Federation Immediately End Illegal Use of Force in Ukraine, Withdraw All Troops," *United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases* (Eleventh Emergency Special Session, 5th and 6th Meetings) 02 March 2022, https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/ga12407.doc.htm.

Erbsloh maintains that traditional clan loyalty has been entirely "redirected to Kadyrov" in post-war Chechnya.[70] Moreover, as Kimberly Marten remarks, the autocrat's father was a leading member of the most powerful clan in Chechnya, making him the logical candidate for post-war leadership and suggesting that his candidacy was aligned with the traditional clannic structure that operated at the time.[71] From a Russian point of view, the endowment of Kadyrov with the republic's future primarily reflected immediate priorities: stability and economic expediency over long-term consequences.[72] According to Marten, "as long as Chechnya did not threaten to leave Russia, or once again did become a terrorist haven, it retained no particular value to the Russian state."[73] Under these circumstances, outsourcing the task of preserving Russia's territorial integrity, as well as silencing the terrorists, seemed to have been paramount for the Kremlin to the development of any long-term political plan for Chechnya. In this case, the backing of Kadyrov appeared to be an acceptable compromise.

Many years into the Russo-Chechen post-war settlement, Kadyrov remains an appointee, but it would not be unrealistic to think that Moscow may not have the option to ask him to resign anymore.[74] The political scientist Martin Breitmaier concluded in his analysis of Kadyrov's rule that the armed forces of Chechnya are technically under the command of the Kremlin. Still, they take orders "exclusively from the Chechen leadership."[75] Souleimanov, Abbasov, and Siroky affirm that "Putin has created a Frankenstein-like ruler over whom he risks losing control."[76] Marten agrees, adding that the installment of Kadyrov may become one of Moscow's most

---

[70] Erbsloh, "Seeking Chechen Identity," 204; Russell. "Ramzan Kadyrov," 674.
[71] Marten, *Warlords*, 135.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 136.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Martin Breitmaier, "Ramzan Kadyrov: Insecure Strongman?" *European Union Institute for Security Studies* (February 2016): 1-2.

[76] Souleimanov, Abbasov, and Siroky. "Frankenstein," 87; Russell. "Ramzan Kadyrov," 673.

crucial security miscalculations and that "tolerating warlordism means accepting a future of political backwardness and illiberalism."[77] However, when examining Russia's democratic progress since Putin's inception as a ruler, whether the Kremlin has any intention to pursue a path toward liberal democracy is highly questionable.

In her analysis of Chechen post-war leadership, Gisela Erbsloh points out that, in his persistence to portray his policing of the republic as the result of a consensual return to more conservative and stricter Chechen cultural customs and laws, Kadyrov introduced a moral code that contradicts that of the traditional Chechen society, most notably in allowing the public shaming of women and elders.[78] This action caused no widespread resistance. To further his social engineering objectives, the Chechen leader has been proficient in using internet communication technologies. Karena Avedissian, who examined Kadyrov's mastery of social networks, commands his ability to use technology to "manufacture" a new brand of Chechen nationalism, which is pro-Russian in stance and centred around his worldview.[79]

To bolster systemic machismo as part of his effort to engineer a new Chechen socio-cultural identity, Kadyrov imitates his sponsor, Putin, in his attempt to project to be the archetype of the hyper-masculine heroic leader of the Chechen people. While Putin does so while being filmed practicing the sports of ice hockey, judo, or shirtless horse riding, Kadyrov cultivates an obsession with the more violent sport of mixed martial arts, which he elevated to the rank of national sport.[80] Karena Avedissian notes again that Kadyrov regularly uses the social network

---

[77] Marten, *Warlords*, 138.
[78] Erbsloh, "Seeking Chechen Identity," 204.
[79] Karena Avedissian, "Clerics, Weightlifters, and Politicians: Ramzan Kadyrov's Instagram as an Official Project of Chechen Memory and Identity Production," *Caucasus Survey* 4, no. 1 (2016): 20.

[80] *MMA: Russia's Extreme Obsession*, Al Jazeera, 06 August 2020, video, 26:00, https://youtu.be/17QhWAZGSJY; "K-G-Beefcake: Putin Bares His Chest in Siberia," *NBC News*, 05 August 2009, https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna32299822; Karim Zidan, "Why the UFC's Sportswashing of Chechnya's

Instagram to display his virility and masculinity through sport, suggesting that it has now become a tool in his mission to remodel the Chechen cultural identity, all the while serving his cult of personality.[81] On his fortieth birthday, in October 2016, it was reported by several news outlets that Kadyrov hosted a mixed martial arts event in which he assigned fights to three of his sons, aged between 8 and 11.[82] Karim Zidan, a contributor to *Foreign Policy* and *The Guardian* who frequently reports on the head of the Chechen regime's passion for mixed martial arts, suggests Kadyrov most likely intended to legitimate his sons as heirs to his "throne" by having them fighting in a cage, putting the "strength" of the dynasty on public display.[83]

For Zidan, Kadyrov can be directly credited for the immense popularity of mixed martial arts in Chechnya and for "propagating the idea that proficiency in combat sports such as MMA is part of Chechen manhood."[84] As a result of the growing popularity of the sport, several fighters who have trained at the Akhmat MMA fight club, founded by Ramzan, went on to compete in famous American promotions such as the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) or Bellator, adding to the local prestige of the brutal sport. Zidan concluded that the dictator's use of the successes of these athletes outside the borders of Chechnya is a form of "sport washing," a

---

Dictator is a Problem," *The Guardian*, 29 September, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2018/sep/29/ramzan-kadyrov-ufc-chechnya-dictator.

[81] Avedissian, "Clerics, Weightlifters, and Politicians," 33–4, 38.

[82] *Chechen Ruler Criticized After Putting Sons in MMA Fight*, Yahoo News, 12 October 2016, video, 00:43, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyQazZdIlAk; "Kadyrov Children's Televised MMA Bouts Prompt Criticsm in Russia," *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty*, 06 October 2016, https://www.rferl.org/a/kadyrov-children-mma-mixed-martial-arts-criticism-russia/28035237.html; "Kadyrov's Preadolescent Sons Brawl in Cage Fight Tournament," *The Moscow Times*, 06 October 2016, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/10/06/kadyrovs-pre-pubescent-sons-fight-in-mixed-martial-arts-tournament-a55621.

[83] Karim Zidan, "Dynastic Propaganda: How Kadyrov Weaponizes His Sons to Secure His Bloodline," *BloodyElbow*, Vox Media Inc., 25 November 2021, https://www.bloodyelbow.com/platform/amp/2021/11/25/22801992/ramzan-kadyrov-chechnya-dictator-children-fights-boxing-mma-porpoganda-sportswashing-news.

[84] Zidan, "Dynastic Propaganda."

convenient distraction from the local ongoing human rights abuses.[85] In 2021, *The Economist* began to notice that the Akhmat Fight Club gyms, operated by Kadyrov's right-hand man, Abuzayed Vismuradov, have become formidable recruiting pools for the Kadyrovites.[86] Nonetheless, for combat sports fans around the world, Kadyrov is now a familiar figure, often photographed with UFC's star Khamzat Chimaev and boxing world champion Artur Beterbiev (who represents Canada on the international scene to evade the sanctions against athletes training at Akhmat Gym), among many other renowned Chechen athletes who publicly display their ties with the tyrant.[87] Through a shared passion for the sport, the despot has been able to extend his network and notoriety elsewhere in the Caucasus by developing and maintaining close relationships with Dagestani mixed martial arts athletes, such as the former UFC champion Khabib Nurmagomedov, one of the world's most admired Muslim athletes, and his protégé, Islam Makhachev.[88]

It would be tempting for scholars to dismiss the influence these athletes have on the Chechens by practicing such a violent sport, but considering the status that mixed martial arts have attained in Chechnya. Such disregard would be short-sighted. In reality, many of these athletes use their platforms to echo and promote Kadyrov's messages profusely. For example,

---

[85] Zidan, "Dynastic Propaganda."; Karim Zidan, "The UFC Star and the Chechen Warlord," *BloodyElbow*, Vox Media Inc., 07 April, 2022, https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2022/4/7/23013370/ufc-khamzat-chimaev-ramzan-kadyrov-russia-ukraine-mma-politics.

[86] "The Wolf's Return: A Martial-Arts Star's Comeback is a Boost for Chechnya's Dictator," *The Economist,* 07 August 2021, https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/08/05/a-martial-arts-stars-comeback-is-a-boost-for-chechnyas-dictator.

[87] "Chechen UFC Sensation Feted by Kadyrov," *RT,* 13 May 2022, https://www.rt.com/sport/555436-ufc-khamzat-chimaev-kadyrov/; "World Boxing Champion Speaks on Kadyrov's Support," *RT*, 30 June 2022, https://rt.com/sport/558135-artur-beterbiev-kadyrov-support/; "Russian Star Comments on Kadyrov Relations After US Fight Scrapped," *RT*, 3 November 2022, https://www.rt.com/sport/565825-maxim-grishin-us-visa-kadyrov/.

[88] Karim Zidan, "Khabib Nurmagomedov's Dominance was Straightforward. His Legacy is Anything but," *The Guardian*, 27 October 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2020/oct/27/khabib-nurmagomedov-legacy-ufc-champion; "Makhachev Parades UFC Title on Visit to Kadyrov," *RT*, 31 October 2022, https://www.rt.com/sport/565652-islam-makhachev-ufc-title-ramzan-kadyrov/.

when the 18-year-old Chechen Abdulak Anzorov beheaded a teacher in a suburb of Paris in October 2020 for having shown his students *Charlie Hebdo*'s 2012 caricature of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, Kadyrov commented that a "disrespectful attitude to Islam" was always to be considered a provocation.[89] Then the well-known Russian MMA fighters Zelim Imadaev and Albert Duraev responded to this perceived attack on Islam on their Instagram by sharing Kadyrov's words, hailing Anzorov as a hero for his acts, perfectly cognizant of their reach and audience, which likely comprised many Chechen young males.[90]

Incorporating traditionalist and radical Islamism elements into his rule, Kadyrov, like many Chechen leaders before him, instrumentalizes an existing component of the Chechen cultural identity, a shared Islamic faith, in his aim to construct a new one that would reflect his interpretations.[91] Analyzing Kadyrov's use of Instagram during a one-month period, Avedissian found him steadily promoting Islamism and boasting about his alleged own piety, seemingly to legitimize the direction taken by his regime.[92] During this process, the leader "selectively borrows and distorts elements of Chechen Sufism."[93] Integrating Chechen politics with his interpretation of Sufism, Ramzan Kadyrov is furthering his father's ambitions of establishing a theocratic regime in Chechnya. Joanna Swirszcz, who investigated the role of Islam in the Chechen national identity, believes that Kadyrov's relative success in his instrumentalization of Islam can partly be explained by Sufi Islam's flexibility, which allows Kadyrov to marry elements of folk Islam and fundamentalism to manufacture a national ethnoreligious identity.[94]

---

[89] "Two Chechen MMA Fighters Support French Teacher's Killer," *Caucasian Knot*, 19 October 2020, https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/52495/.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Avedissian, "Clerics, Weightlifters, and Politicians," 23–4; Joanna Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," *Nationalities Paper* 39, no. 1 (January 2009): 79.
[92] Avedissian, "Clerics, Weightlifters, and Politicians," 27, 29–30.
[93] Ibid., 28.
[94] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 81.

The dictator has even remodelled the concept of jihadism to fit his political objectives and reflect his allegiance to Russia, in stark contrast with the separatist and anti-Russian jihadi fighters of Chechnya's recent and distant past. When justifying the deployment of Chechens to fulfill Putin's orders to invade Ukrainian territory in February 2022, the Mufti of Chechnya, Salah Mezhiev, publicly affirmed that it was for the sake of Allah and to defend the religion of Islam.[95] Kadyrov claimed that "to die on the path of the Almighty is an honor for every Muslim."[96] In reality, it is very unclear how Ukraine would threaten Islam.

John Russell suggests that "Sultanism" best describes the amalgam of religion, autocracy, and oriental despotism espoused by Kadyrov.[97] Understanding the utility of using religion as a catalyst for Chechnya's state control, the dictator ordered the construction of several mosques across the republic and established a special Islamic televised channel, a special Islamic press in Gudermes, while requiring all state employees to adopt a traditional dress code.[98] Russia could even coopt this new state of Chechen affairs into its nationalist narrative, presenting Chechnya as clear evidence of successful Russian multiculturalism. Indeed, Mairbek Vatchagaev observes that the federation was very supportive of the social engineering process put forward by Kadyrov, after which "the Islamic world was to see Chechnya as a part of Russia where Islam was the way of life."[99] Vatchagaev emphasizes that locally, this alliance between the state and Sufism eventually caused a rift between the Chechen intelligentsia and the Sufi brotherhoods,

---

[95] "Kadyrov Calls on Chechen Law Enforcers to Die on the Path of Jihad," *Caucasian Knot*, 30 March 2022, https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/58659/.
[96] Ibid.; "Kadyrov Calls for Russian Jihad Across All of Ukraine," *The Moscow Times*, 26 October 2022, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/10/26/kadyrov-calls-for-jihadacross-all-of-ukraine-a79192.
[97] Russell, "Kadyrov's Chechnya," 519.
[98] Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Sufism in Chechnya: Its Influence on Contemporary Society," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond,* ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014), 229–30.
[99] Ibid

prompting some to join the ranks of Salafists, at home or abroad, to continue the revolt against Russia.[100]

Benefiting from Moscow's benediction, Kadyrov has a free hand to suppress any perceived dissension with the help of his loyal paramilitary squad, a task which he accomplishes with success. The Kadyrovites do not refrain from recycling some of the methods designed and implemented by the Russians and their Soviet predecessors in the enforcement to enforce their policies toward the Chechens. The political sociologist Anne Le Huerou views it as a consequence of the lingering effects of total war and contends that almost two decades of combat and zealous anti-terrorist legislation, which "closes its eyes to illegal practices," are important factors adding to the persistence of such "exceptional practices."[101] Even if Moscow would deem these practices unacceptable, it has very little control over the actions of Kadyrov and his corps of Kadyrovites.[102]

On the international stage, the sparse information that can be gathered by humanitarian organizations, who are systematically bullied out of the republic or denied entry, did not yet bring about a significant response to the crimes committed by Kadyrov's regime. Despite the opacity of the regime, allegations of torture and forced disappearances continue to emerge regularly. In 2006, a damning report produced after two investigative missions in Chechnya was published by the 37th Session of the United Nations Committee Against Torture, shedding light on multiple cases of torture at the hands of the Kadyrovites during unlawful detention.[103] Mostly, but not exclusively, young males, the victims described the methods used: prolonged

---

[100] Ibid., 232.
[101] Le Huerou, "Between War Experience," 161–3.
[102] Ibid., 166.
[103] "Widespread Torture in the Chechen Republic: Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper for the 37th Session UN Committee Against Torture," *Human Rights Watch* 2 (13 November 2006), https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/chechnya1106/, 1.

beatings with objects, infliction of severe burns and electric shocks, and sexual abuse.[104] According to *Human Rights Watch*, several victims were coerced to confess to crimes they had not committed.[105] Detainees confirmed that the detention centers in which they were taken were informal, effectively removing them from media attention and preventing access to legal counsel or medical aid for the captives.[106] Anne Le Huerou found that these arbitrary detentions were often indeterminate in length.[107] Based on its investigation, *Human Rights Watch* concluded that "enforced disappearances in Chechnya are so widespread and systematic that they constitute crimes against humanity."[108]

There have been worrying developments in the department of human rights in Chechnya. Multiple news reports and public calls from the international LGBT community have since 2017 generated significant concerns over Kadyrov's regime's mistreatment of homosexuals in Chechnya. Both Putin and Kadyrov categorically reject these allegations. It should be pointed out that Chechen generalized homophobia is effectively consistent with that of Putin's Russia.[109] However, Kadyrov is willing to go even further, vehemently denying the existence of such a thing as homosexuality in the Chechen republic. At the same time, accusations of anti-gay pogroms and purges conducted by the Chechen authorities multiplied.[110] In September 2021,

---

[104]Ibid., 2; Le Huerou, "Between War Experience," 161.
[105] "Widespread Torture," 4.
[106] Ibid., 9.
[107] Le Huerou, "Between War Experience," 161–2.
[108] "Widespread Torture," 12; "Russian Paper Alleges Summary Executions in Chechnya," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty,* 09 July 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/chechnya-summary-executions-kadyrov-gazeta/28604204.html.
[109] Jacob Poushter and Nicholas Kent, "The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists," *Pew Research Center*. 25 June 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/; Elizabeth Kuhr, "1 in 5 Russians Want Gays and Lesbians 'Eliminated,' Survey Finds," *NBC News*, 24 April 2020, https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/1-5-russians-want-gays-lesbians-eliminated-survey-finds-n1191851.

[110] Andrew E. Kramer, "Chechen Authorities Arresting and Killing Gay Men, Russian Paper Says," *The New York Times,* 01 April 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/01/world/europe/chechen-authorities-arresting-and-killing-gay-men-russian-paper-says.html; Andrew E. Kramer, "'They Starve You, They Shock You': Inside the Anti-Gay Pogrom in Chechnya," *The New York Times,* 21 April 2017,

upon hearing that U.S. President Biden alluded to the violations of gay rights in Chechnya, *The Moscow Times* reported that Kadyrov declared: "I can only invite him to our republic so that he can see with his own eyes that there are no roosters in the Chechen republic."[111] Kadyrov pretends that those who complain of having been persecuted by his regime for their sexual orientation are lying to earn money. Of the media reports, he claims that "It's they, shaitans (devils), corrupt and subhuman, who invented this."[112] Adam Delimkhanov, considered in 2019 to be Kadyrov's right-hand-man, then publicly appealed to the members of the Chechen diaspora abroad to take it upon themselves to stop those Chechens whom he deemed to be "disgraceful" to their country by straying from the Chechen tradition.[113]

The Chechen authorities' alleged homicidal campaign against homosexuals does not precisely correspond to the classic definition of genocide. Still, the fact that it is aimed at the extermination of the members of a group according to their sexual orientation would certainly

---

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/21/world/europe/chechnya-russia-attacks-gays.html; "Chechnya LGBT: Dozens 'Detained in New Gay Purge'," *BBC News,* 14 January 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46871801; "They Have Long Arms and They Can Find Me: Anti-Gay Purge by Local Authorities in Russia's Chechen Republic," *Human Rights Watch,* 26 May 2017, https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/05/26/they-have-long-arms-and-they-can-find-me/anti-gay-purge-local-authorities-russias; "Chechnya Accused of 'Gay Genocide' in ICC Complaint," *BBC News,* 16 May 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39937107; Oliver Carroll, "Chechnya's 'Gay Purge' Victim Speaks Out Over Torture Ordeal," *Independent,* 19 October 2017, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/chechnya-gay-purge-maxim-lapunov-press-conference-homophobic-anti-gay-torture-beatings-ramzan-kadyrov-russia-a8003051.html; Lydia Smith, "'People are Being Tortured and Killed': Chechnya's Deadly Anti-LGBT Crisis," *International Business Times,* 27 July 2017, https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/deadly-anti-lgbt-crisis-unfolding-chechnya-1616551; Lydia Smith, "Chechnya Detains 100 Gay Men in First Concentration Camps Since the Holocaust," *International Business Times,* 15 April 2017, https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/chechnya-detains-100-gay-men-first-concentration-camps-since-holocaust-1616363; *Full Interview: Ramzan Kadyrov the Leader of Chechnya*, BBC News, 23 june 2018, 13:07, https://youtu.be/9WKvCUGUhto.

[111] "Chechnya's Kadyrov Takes Umbrage at Biden's LGBT Reference," *The Moscow Times,* 22 September 2021, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/09/22/chechnyas-kadyrov-takes-umbrage-at-bidens-lgbt-reference-a75107.

[112] "Chechen Leader Says Human Rights Activists Spread Rumors on Gay Persecution for Money," *TASS Russian News Agency*, 18 July 2017, https://tass.com/politics/956869.

[113] "Kadyrov's Right-Hand Man Calls on Diaspora to Stop Disgraceful Chechens Abroad," *The Moscow Times,* 25 November 2019, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/11/25/kadyrovs-right-hand-man-calls-on-diaspora-to-stop-disgraceful-chechens-abroad-a68302.

ascribe it to a category that the political scientist Adam Jones defines as "gendercide."[114] While the Lemkinian definition of genocide does not include sexual orientation as an identifiable characteristic of a group, the Kadyrovites' actions could potentially be prosecuted by the International Court of Justice while falling under the international legal designation for crimes against humanity, understood as committed by a state against individuals.[115] However, individual victims must feel safe enough to share their personal experiences for this to happen.

In Chechnya, few are eager to share their personal stories out of fear for their own lives. Tanya Lokshina suggests that, in the LGBT community, most individuals realize that retaliation from the Kadyrovites is "practically inevitable" if the authorities can identify them as members of the community.[116] For example, Movsar Eskerkhanov, who became the "first Chechen to openly call himself gay," was eventually forced to backtrack on his "coming out" and issue an official televised apology to the Chechen people for having allegedly disgraced himself under the pressure of Western reporters.[117] The Chechen Republic's Minister for National Policy, External Ties, Press, and Information at the time, Dzhambulat Umarov, took this opportunity to publicly reiterate that the imposition of homosexuality on the people of the Caucasus is unacceptable and that it targets the traditional family values and role of males in Chechen society.[118]

Unfortunately, on the international stage, countries' leaders do not seem particularly passionate about directly addressing Kadyrov's human rights abuses, much cognizant that the

---

[114] Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2016), 336.
[115] Adam Jones, *Crimes Against Humanity: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, England: One World, 2008): 9, 28, 34.
[116] Tanya Lokshina, **"**Anti-LGBT Violence in Chechnya: When Filing Official Complaints Isn't an Option," *Open Democracy,* 4 April 2017, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/anti-lgbt-violence-in-chechnya-when-filing-official-complaints-isn-t-option/.
[117] "Chechen Authorities Accept Apology of Man Accusing Them of Persecuting LGBT People," *TASS Russian News Agency*, 16 November 2017, https://tass.com/society/976032; "They Will Kill You Anyway, Be It Family or Strangers: Gay About Life in Chechnya and Flight from Russia," *Caucasian Knot*, 24 January 2019, https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/45924/.
[118] "Chechen Authorities Accept Apology of Man Accusing Them of Persecuting LGBT People."

complaints would have to be primarily directed at Russia. Concerns over preserving cordial economic and political ties with Moscow generally prevail. Historically, Moscow has been reluctant to fully recognize the rights of minorities identifying with non-traditional sexual orientation. Therefore, in this regard, it could be said that Chechnya is only a microcosm of the widespread and systematic homophobia of its suzerain state, Russia, which contributes by capturing and handing back Chechen individuals suspected of homosexuality to the authorities of their native region.[119]

The result of the lack of intervention from the part of the international community and the ruthlessness of local authorities is that the fate of the persecuted rests in the hand of grassroots and activist organizations, not only willing to denounce the abuses publicly but also to help the individual victims. A 2020 HBO-produced documentary film, *Welcome to Chechnya*, describes how a group of activists has taken on the mission to save as many individuals as possible from the Chechen anti-gay purge. David Isteev, crisis response coordinator of the Russian LGBT Network, and Olga Baranova, from the Moscow Community Center for LGBT+ Initiatives, have joined efforts to open a secret shelter in Moscow, providing individuals leaving the Chechen republic with a safe refuge before they most likely are to leave Russia.[120] Baranova insists that, from its humble beginning, the operation has now taken such worrying proportions that it has become clear to her that the situation in Chechnya is catastrophic, as she pleads for more attention from the international community to be given to the issue.[121]

---

[119] "2 Gay Men Sent Back to Chechnya Were Kidnapped – Rights Group," *The Moscow Times*, 8 February 2021, https://themoscowtimes.com/2021/02/08/2-gay-men-sent-back-to-chechna-were-kidnapped-rights-group-a72869.
[120] *Welcome to Chechnya: Inside the Russian Republic's Deadly War on Gays,* directed by David France (New York: Public Square Films, 2020), https://www.welcometochechnya.com/.
[121] Ibid.

Furthermore, the journalist Masha Gessen, from the *New Yorker*, met in 2017 with gay Chechens who fled the republic and was stunned to find out that families are carrying out honor killings of gay women and men, who are thought to disgrace their clan, adding to the urgency of the situation.[122] David Isteev explains in *Welcome to Chechnya* that "it's a disgrace to be gay in Chechnya. And for a family to find out that someone is gay? It's a shame so strong it can only be washed away by blood," referencing these honor killings, the result of a most radical form of homophobia.[123] Publicly encouraging such practice, the Chechen regime makes certain that gay peoples are never at ease and cannot even turn to their families for help.[124] The reporter James Longman, from *Nightline ABC News*, took an investigative field trip to the republic in 2019 and directly confronted Chechen police chief Apti Alaudinov on the matter, but encountered overt homophobia, denial, and "patriotic masculinity," as the Chechen official assured him that homosexuality does not exist on Chechen soil.[125]

Attempting to explain this virulent homophobia, Arthur Clech, from *Le Monde Diplomatique*, suggests that a socially internalized "martial norm of virility and an inherited Soviet "denial of homosexuality" are to blame.[126] To some extent, the Chechen widespread homophobia is directly linked to the ultra-patriarchal masculinity that takes root in the conservative Chechen religious tradition. The scholar Dominic Scicchitano examined the

---

[122] Masha Gessen, "The Gay Men Who Fled Chechnya's Purge," *The New Yorker*. 26 June 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/07/03/the-gay-men-who-fled-chechnyas-purge.

[123] *Welcome to Chechnya*, 03:40.

[124] "Young Russian Tries to Sue Over Violent Lesbian Exorcism in Chechnya," *The Moscow Times*, 22 January 2020, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/01/22/young-russian-tries-to-sue-over-violent-lesbian-exorcism-in-chechnya-a69009.

[125] James Longman, *Am I Next: Gay and Targeted in Chechnya*, Nightline ABC News, 01 November 2019, online video excerpt, 18:26, https://youtu.be/JSMyzzYMb2w.

[126] Arthur Clech, "Chechnya's Very Long State of Emergency: Homosexuals as Terrorists," *Genocide Watch*, 07 June 2018, https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2018/06/07/chechnya-s-very-long-state-of-emergency-homosexuals-as-terrorists.

evolving conception of the role of men in Chechen society. He explained that for some Chechens, a perceived threat to the traditional heteronormative identity does warrant the state's endorsement of homophobic and misogynic practices.[127]

Additionally, Scicchitano contends that the separatist conflict in Chechnya has significantly radicalized and redefined the role of Islam in Chechen society, which paved the way for a new hyper-masculine interpretation of the role of men.[128] The First Chechen War and its militaristic nationalism gave the rebel fighters an overwhelmingly masculine and heroic role.[129] Then, the Second Chechen War came, and even more violent masculinity was expressed by both sides involved in the conflict.[130] Scicchitano considers that the persecution of gay men in contemporary Chechnya was a predictable outcome and concludes that a "nontraditional" sexual orientation challenges any expectation of appropriate Chechen masculinity.[131] In this context, queer men become the targets of state-sponsored violence because they are seen as "un-Chechen."[132] Beyond the traditionalist explanation pointing to an existing machismo culture, Chechnya is characterized by a misogynistic and "exclusionary anti-queer nationalism," partly the product of two decades of warfare and a long-standing anti-imperialist struggle that militarized the civil society.[133]

Another far-reaching collateral of the regime's encouragement of ultra-patriarchal and ultra-masculine cultural practices has been women's rights, which have been considerably curtailed in post-war Chechnya but significantly more so since Kadyrov's taking over. In 2006,

---

[127] Dominic Scicchitano, "The 'Real' Chechen Man: Conceptions of Religion, Nature, and Gender and the Persecution of Sexual Minorities in Postwar Chechnya," *Journal of Homosexuality* (2019): 1548–9.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., 1550–1.
[130] Ibid., 1553–5.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid., 1557–8.
[133] Ibid., 1558–60.

when still a prime minister, Kadyrov introduced restrictive policies on female morality, notably by forbidding the use of cell phones by women.[134] Around this time, the leader clarified his reasoning, publicly affirming that women were inferior and should be subjugated to men.[135] The journalist Tanya Lokshina carefully examined the Chechen "virtue campaign" instituted by Kadyrov in 2007, which included a new compulsory dress code in public institutions and a strict headscarf policy.[136] She cannot help but notice that Russia is a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and that even its constitution guarantees gender equality. Lokshina remarks that these conventions sadly do not seem to apply to Chechnya.[137] In fact, not only is gender inequality implied by policies in Chechnya but those changes are often implemented without any resistance. Although Lokshina has found the policy to be highly unpopular among the women she interviewed, she emphasizes the near impossibility of protesting in Chechnya under such a heavy-handed repressive regime.[138]

Gisela Erbsloh found that "typical problems experienced by many Chechen women in the aftermath of the wars have been poverty, illness, mental and physical decline, and marital relations."[139] She contends that the most important has been the "widespread violence against women at the hands of their husbands and in-laws."[140] Erbsloh stresses that, before Kadyrov took over, women were well-respected members of their communities, but they are now entirely "subordinated" to men."[141] In June 2020, *Caucasian Knot* reported that the mother of a deceased

---

[134] Tanya Lokshina, "Virtue Campaign for Women in Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov: Between War Backlash Effect and Desire for Total Control," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014) 238.
[135] Ibid., 239.
[136] Ibid., 236.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., 245.
[139] Erbsloh, "Seeking Chechen Identity," 219–20.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., 222.

female victim of domestic violence from Gudermes was even forced to publicly apologize for advocating for an investigation into her daughter's brutal death after Kadyrov denounced the procedure of autopsy as prohibited by Islamic tradition.[142] A month later, Libkhan Bazaeva, head of the NGO "Women for Development," was quoted in the same news outlet admitting that "domestic violence in Chechnya is aggravated by the fact that in the society, both in the Caucasus and Russia as a whole, people don't want to bring their family problems out into the public."[143] Bazaeva pointed out that both in religion and traditions, "there are very strong arguments against family violence," implying that this behavior does not correspond to the moral principles of Islam or the Adats.[144]

Tanya Lokshina found many more examples of gendered violence targeting Chechen women. Over the course of a field mission to Grozny, she noted cases ranging from "verbal abuse, 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."[145] Rather than protecting the Chechen women, the authorities tend to be complicit in their inaction, which they justify with the importance of respecting the Chechen traditional patriarchal ways of life. In 2015, reports emerged of an alleged forced marriage between a seventeen-year-old teenager and the much older Chechen police chief Nazhud Guchigov with the ceremony attended by Ramzan Kadyrov.[146] When the event drew some criticism from Russian and foreign media outlets, the

---

[142] "Instagram Users: Mother of Deceased Woman from Gudermes Forced to Apologize," *Caucasian Knot*, 24 June 2020, https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/51286.
[143] "Practice of Domestic Violence in Chechnya is Contrary to Norms of Islam and Adats," *Caucasian Knot*, 7 July 2020, https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/51410/.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Lokshina, "Virtue Campaign," 242–3.
[146] Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber, "Chechen Teenager 'Forced' to Marry Police Chief Amid Growing Row in Russia," *The Guardian*, 18 May 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/18/chechen-teenager-forced-marriage-russia; "Policeman's Teen Bride Puts Chechen Marital Practices in the Spotlight," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*,16 May 2015, https://www.rferl.org/a/caucausus-report-teen-bride-chechen-marital-practices/27020167.html.

complaints were swiftly dismissed by Kadyrov and Russia's children's rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov, both claiming that arranged marriage is an integral part of Caucasian traditional customs.[147] Such a case effectively brought to light the issues of honor killing and forced marriage in the North Caucasus, but dissenting voices were again rapidly shut down by the regime.[148]

The emergence of Kadyrov ostensibly indigenized the rule of the republic. Yet, it also signified the removal of Chechens from political participation by increasingly concentrating the power in one man's hands. A sudden and massive Chechen civil mobilization is unlikely, given Kadyrov's effectiveness at suppressing the opposition. Nonetheless, this is not to affirm that Chechnya is devoid of mobilization against the regime. Gisela Erbsloh notices that the magazine *Dosh*, founded in 2003, consistently offers independent and alternative coverage of Chechen public affairs, doing so at the perils of the lives of its contributors.[149] For obvious security reasons, *Dosh* is managed remotely. Because of Kadyrov's strong tendency to have opponents assassinated even abroad, the magazine still refrains from being too overtly critical of the Chechen leader.[150] Nonetheless, in a republic where authorities actively work at dismantling any mounting opposition, *Dosh* remains a vital tool to document and make public the deterioration of human rights in Chechnya.

Some argue that the Chechens most likely suffer from the cultural trauma caused by a consistent policy of ethnocide adopted by Imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russia and that the current "negative peace" brings about none of the conditions necessary for a meaningful healing

[147] "Policeman's Teen Bride."
[148] "Story of Chechen Woman Taken Out of Moscow Emphasizes Problem of Forced Marriages," *Caucasian Knot,* 18 July 2019, https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/47850/.
[149] Erbsloh, "Seeking Chechen Identity," 205.
[150] Ibid., 224.

process to occur.[151] Russia has, for one, never officially recognized having pursued a consistent genocidal agenda in Chechnya. With Kadyrov being so energetically loyal to Putin, there is little prospect that atrocious acts committed during the Chechen-Ingush deportation of 1944 or the Chechen Wars of 1994–1996 and 1999–2009 will ever be publicly commemorated inside the republic. Nevertheless, these are arguably crucial steps to be taken before a genuine Russo-Chechen reconciliation can occur.

Kadyrov is very proactive in discouraging public acts of memorialization and remembrance of traumatic events. For example, the president of the "Assembly of Caucasian Peoples," Ruslan Kutaev, a member of a federal opposition party, was sentenced to four years in prison in July 2014 for drug possession in Grozny.[152] Gisela Erbsloh suggests that Kutaev was most likely arrested for organizing a small forum about how to commemorate the deportation.[153] In the capital, authorities have dismantled the monument commemorating the deportation of 1944, erected in 1991.[154] A more modest website dedicated to the deportation, which seems to have only been online for a few years before disappearing, was created in 2011 with the collaboration of the Archives Department of the Chechen government and the Youth Committee, making testimonies of survivors, articles, and historical documents available, with its content carefully examined and approved by the Chechen Parliament.[155]

---

[151] Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztompka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1.
[152] Erbsloh, "Seeking Chechen Identity," 206–7.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid., 217.
[155] Aude Merlin, "Remembering and Forgetting in Chechnya Today: Using the Great Patriotic War to Create a New Historical Narrative," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014), 43.

Kadyrov does not hesitate to manipulate the commemoration of important historical events to serve his interests and personality cult further or to promote his allegiance to Putin. Sidestepping the need for the memorialization of the deportation for the Chechen survivors and their families, Kadyrov has now set a single day of mourning as a national day of commemoration, which coincides with the day of the burial of Akhmad Kadyrov—the current leader's father and former president of Chechnya.[156]

The specialist in Caucasian studies, Aude Merlin, examined the curious decision taken by the regime to publicly honor the Chechen contribution to the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War with a monument. Merlin identifies this strategy as an attempt by the regime to "create a new form of Chechen patriotism, linking together the local dimension and some formal marks of allegiance to Moscow."[157] In the process, Grozny was symbolically awarded the title of "hero city" of the Patriotic War by Moscow, pushing further the interpretation of historical narratives presenting Chechens as defenders of the Soviet empire.[158] However successful in Chechnya under Kadyrov, this technique of manufacturing historical narration is not supported by all in the North Caucasus. The Chechen leader drew the ire of the neighboring Dagestanis in 2019 by accusing Imam Shamil, the Avar hero from the Caucasian Wars, of having caused the "annihilation of the Chechen people" by forcing them to fight against Russia.[159]

Without acknowledgment, memorialization, or even commemorating past traumatic events, the process of Chechen national identity building is significantly hampered. While Kadyrov fabricates the new Chechen history, Russia is allowed not to take any responsibility for

---

[156] Ibid., 45.
[157] Ibid., 39–40.
[158] Ibid., 48–9.
[159] "Kadyrov Statement About 19th-Century Resistance Leader Sparks Controversy," *RadioFreeEurope/Radio Liberty*, 09 August 2019, https://www.rferl.org/a/kadyrov-imam-shamil-controversy-chechnya/30101390.html.

its involvement in past culturally traumatic events. According to Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of cultural trauma, the denial of guilt hinders a meaningful healing process from taking place through proper rituals of memorialization.[160] If the remembrance of these traumatic events may not help make them more rationally understandable, it would at least serve the Chechens in recovering their cultural identity after centuries of Russian colonialism in the region.

Against all odds, some of those forced to flee their homeland can retain some sense of Chechen cultural belonging, especially in the age of globalized communication networks. According to Walter Sperling, this has proven to be the case even for long-term emigrants, for whom the Chechnya of their memories has been entirely reduced to dust.[161] Sperling attributes much value to the process of remembrance for cultural communities, noting that Chechens abroad have resorted to online forums and social networks to recreate virtual communities among survivors and memorialize their experiences by discussing and creating new bonds.[162] In this new arena, the Chechen diasporic sense of a shared national identity thrives through discussions about grief, resistance, survival, loss, and defeat. Sperling insists that many thousands of exiled Chechens can reconnect with their hometown community via these online forums and social networks.[163] The author maintains that by commemorating their past together in an uncensored environment, the Chechens are "rebelling against the dominant discourses of the Russian and Chechen nations."[164]

To recapitulate, this chapter acknowledged the current Russo-Chechen arrangement as successfully having halted the armed conflict between the Chechen separatists and Islamic

---

[160] Alexander, *Cultural Trauma*, 7.
[161] Walter Sperling, "Grozny as It Was Before the War: Remembrance and Reconciliation in Virtual and Real Post-Soviet Communities," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond,* ed. Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (London: Routledge, 2014), 22–4.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid., 22, 27.
[164] Ibid., 32.

radicals and the federal authorities. However, to portray Ramzan Kadyrov's regime as having permanently ended the conflict would be overlooking that, in the case of Kadyrov's death or a coup, there exists a realistic potential for a resurgence of Chechen nationalism, separatism, and further Russian interventionism. Even Kadyrov sometimes hints at a potential retirement, although this could be a tactic to evaluate the loyalty of his troops.[165] Martin Breitmaier notes that the eventual decrease in Russian subsidies in Chechnya could become a source of renewed tension between Moscow and the republic.[166] Souleimanov, Abbasov, and Siroky have also identified "cracks" in the foundation of the current arrangement between Moscow and Grozny. First, the authors suggest that the Russian military and security services despise Kadyrov and the rest of the Chechen leadership and that only personal ties to Putin prevent more pressure from the North to oust him.[167] Secondly, local dissidents are primarily silent for fear of being exterminated by the Kadyrovites. Still, Souleimanov, Abbasov and Siroky suggest that there are indications that the brutal regime is highly unpopular with younger Chechens.[168] They maintain that the current situation in Chechnya remains that of "an indigenous group (who) is fighting against (ethnically and religiously) foreign colonizers."[169] Only Putin's support allows Kadyrov to maintain his current status and prevent a return to active conflict, especially since the Russian ruling elite is not unanimously approving this sponsorship.[170] Knowing the importance and endurance of the tradition of blood feuds in the more traditional communities constituting modern Chechen society, it is not a stretch of the imagination either to think that many locals

[165] "Chechen Leader Says His Time Has Come," *RT,* 3 September 2022, https://www.rt.com/russia/562131-kadyrov-hints-at-resignation/.
[166] Breitmaier, "Ramzan Kadyrov," 2.

[167] Souleimanov, Abbasov, and Siroky, "Frankenstein," 89.

[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., 88, 90.
[170] Ibid., 91, 94.

may be waiting for the right time to exact revenge for acts committed by the pro-Russian forces against their relatives and loved ones.[171] However, as John Russell remarks, the Chechen people are "undoubtedly better off now than when they were occupied by Russian federal."[172] In other words, for many Chechens, the benefits of maintaining the status quo and the stability of Chechnya under Kadyrov may outweigh the unpredictable consequences of his removal. For several groups of people, notably women, homosexuals, and the opposition, this stability comes at the expense of their fundamental human rights, as they do not fit Kadyrov's worldviews. Meanwhile, the dictator continues to implement significant changes to the social and cultural life in Chechnya to suit his interpretations of religion, masculinity, gender roles and, more broadly, the history of the republic. Under these circumstances, Russian colonialism can continue to thrive in this once-rebellious but consistently coveted region of the North Caucasus.

[171] Ibid., 95–7; Souleimanov and Grazvydas, "The Dynamics of Kadyrov's Regime," 123; "Relatives of Law Enforcer Killed in Chechnya Declared Blood Feud to Residents of Ingushetia," *Caucasian Knot*, 1 January 2021, https://www.eng.kavkaz.eu/articles/53254/.
[172] Russell, "Kadyrov's Chechnya," 526; Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov," 677.

Conclusion

The main argument of this thesis is that Russian colonial practices of conquer and rule remained consistent toward Chechnya despite Russia's significant political and ideological changes over the past century. It is unsurprising that amidst the chaos of the Soviet collapse, the Chechens sought to emancipate themselves from the Russian dominance over their homeland. This thesis aimed to situate Russian colonialism in Chechnya on a timeline that transcends the traditional view of Russian twentieth-century political history as naturally compartmentalized in the three distinct periods of tsarism, bolshevism, and post-Soviet authoritarianism. Harmonizing historicist and modernist explanations of the Russo-Chechen relationship, this thesis attempted to open a new path for the analysis by seeing it as part of a colonial framework that still survives.

This thesis also sought to understand the role of Islam in the Chechen response to Russian colonial violence. This thesis argues that religion has not radicalized the Chechens. However, it has been utilized by radical leaders to produce solidarity during the resistance to the colonial violence endured since the first Russian ventures in the Caucasus in the sixteenth century. In this regard, Islam did not supersede but fused with the traditional clan-based Chechen cultural identity to produce a consistently solid anti-colonial response. The intensity of this response has varied over the past two centuries. Still, it is directly linked to the success of some Chechen leaders in mobilizing the ever-changing and evolving Chechen cultural identity in an Islamic framework to galvanize the anti-colonial movement. To explain the surges of radicalization among the Chechens through their faith alone is overlooking the reactionary nature of the insurgency, which was contemporary, and a direct response to upswings in Russian colonial violence.

The first chapter connected the post-Soviet Chechen conflict to the broader Chechen struggle against Russian colonialism by exploring the origins of this relationship. It has found

that the Chechen cultural identity—the product of the affiliation of different closely related ethnic groups sharing a territory, a language, a religious belief system, and a traditional regional form of political governance—has consolidated against the background of recurring threats posed to their existence by the Russian invaders. This cultural identity became inseparable from the anti-colonial struggle. As early as 1559, the Muscovite elites envisioned the North Caucasus as a strategic territory offering convenient natural geographical borders. The first chapter discussed the calls made by the Chechen Islamic Leader Sheikh Mansur (1762–1794) for the indigenous Caucasian peoples to unite against the "Russian infidels," giving a religious foundation to the anti-colonial resistance in the North Caucasus. Later, in the 1830s, Imam Shamil emerged as the most crucial figure of the anti-Russian movement, preaching to launch a holy war against Russia. This thesis showed that his efforts at anti-colonial resistance made him a mythic historical figure in the Caucasus. His attempts at creating a taxation system also marked the establishment of the first significant proto-state political infrastructures in Chechnya and the foundations of a Chechen nationhood that could extend beyond prevailing tribal alliances.

After the Imam's abdication, the Russian defeat in the Crimean War of 1853–54, and the subsequent expulsion of over a hundred thousand Chechens from their lands, Chechnya was incorporated into Tsarist Russia in 1871. The Chechens that remained were severely punished economically by being kept in poverty. The first chapter underlines that after the 1917 Revolution, the Bolsheviks did not abandon the colonial ambitions of their predecessors in the Caucasus. The most culturally devastating event accompanying the continuation of colonial policies towards the Chechens was the 1944 deportation. The event had profound multi-generational lingering impacts, likely to have fueled anti-Russian sentiments in Chechnya that

still survive. However, the Chechens did not revolt again until the end of the Soviet era, after Dzhokar Dudaev declared independence on behalf of the republic in November 1991. While there existed little evidence of Dudaev's popular legitimacy in Chechnya at this time, this thesis posited that in the aftermath of Russia's brutal and disproportionate response, most Chechens chose to pursue the anti-colonial struggle regardless of his legitimacy as a president. A primarily secular politician, Dudaev eventually understood the potential of instrumentalizing some elements of the Islamic faith to rally Chechen people to his cause.

When Russia attempted to seize the capital of Grozny in November 1994 and was turned away by the defiant Chechens, it responded with an indiscriminate aerial bombardment. The second chapter took this event as its point of departure. It demonstrated how post-Soviet Russia went to great lengths to prevent a perceived threat of a domino effect among other regions of the Russian Federation populated by non-Russians. Incapable of dislodging Dudaev and the separatists, Russia obliterated the capital. At the time, the international community chose not to interfere and treat the Russo-Chechen conflict as a Russian domestic matter. The second chapter pointed to the West's fear of weakening newly normalized relations as having informed this decision. Russia may have interpreted this as a signal that it could freely pursue its intervention in Chechnya, contributing to the subsequent escalation of violence. For the Chechens, it was likely interpreted as a sign that they would have to continue resisting Russian aggression on their own.

In response to the disproportionate use of violence and lack of consideration for human life demonstrated by the Russian military, some Chechens turned to extreme violence. The second chapter showed that the Chechen radicals eventually embraced radical Salafi-Jihadism as an ideological vehicle for their anti-colonial struggle and the religious framework most suitable

for their desired revenge. Radical leaders understood the place of Islamic traditions in Chechen society and capitalized on it to infuse the anti-colonial movement with jihadist tropes. These became the driving forces behind the radicalization of a disillusioned Chechen youth looking to avenge the losses of the Russo-Chechen War of 1994–96.

When elected in 1997, President Maskhadov failed to rein in the extremists, and Salafi-Jihadism continued to grow in popularity. Inspired by Imam Shamil's exploits in the nineteenth century, some separatists believed that establishing an Islamic caliphate across the Caucasus would consolidate the insurgency among Muslims. With this objective in mind, the rebel leader Shamil Basaev and his supporters invaded Dagestan in August 1999, prompting Russia to launch its "anti-terrorist" operations in Chechnya. For the second time in less than a decade, Russia responded with an indiscriminate bombardment of Chechnya. Russian troops were subsequently sent in and committed atrocities against civilians. The desire for revenge of some Chechens began to prevail over any rational nationalist political ambition. Some Chechens began to target Russians indiscriminately, committing large-scale terrorist attacks inside Russia and other autonomous republics within the Russian Federation. In the context of the aftermath of 9/11 and the global war on terrorism, Putin found there the perfect justification to initiate a second Russo-Chechen war. In line with his imperialist ambitions for the Russian Federation, his troops essentially continued the "mission civilisatrice" undertaken by tsarist Russia in the Caucasus.

Due to the resilience of the Chechen insurgency, Russia eventually had to adopt a new strategy unless it was willing to continue to allocate significant resources to war. The alternative became the co-optation of some influential Chechen community members and the indigenization of the conflict. The third chapter argued that the Russian military withdrawal from Chechnya in 2009 must not be interpreted as a success of the Chechen cause but as the advent of a new brand

of Russian colonialism in Chechnya, effected through a local intermediary. In its attempts to preserve its sphere of influence over the post-Soviet peripheral regions, the Russian Federation replicated the imperial ambitions of its tsarist and Soviet predecessors.

The third chapter showed that critics of the Russian-appointed Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, do so at the peril of their own lives. No existing strong middle-class and liberal culture in Chechnya can build a sustained opposition to Kadyrov and his loyal Kadyrovites. Political mobilization against the regime must be done almost entirely remotely. While for the Kremlin, barbarity seems tolerable as long as the republic remains loyal, the third chapter underlined the multiple layers of unpredictability associated with the short-term stability provided by the "neo-patrimonial" bond between Russian president Putin and Kadyrov. The third chapter explained that the religious character of Kadyrov's rule is motivated by a return to patriarchal conservatism and a tendency to fabricate customs based on his interpretation of Chechen Sufism. His efforts to reinterpret Chechen history reflect a desire to socially engineer a new cultural identity that reflects his beliefs and allegiances. In this narrative, Chechnya is and has always been integrally Russian. In turn, Kadyrov's successes allow Russia to integrate Chechnya as part of its narrative that celebrates the Russian Federation's allegedly successful integration of the Muslim way of life. As part of his plan to revise Chechnya's history, Kadyrov represses any memorialization of the 1944 deportation, a traumatic event that does not fit his pro-Russian perspective. As a result, Chechens have few opportunities to engage collectively in remembrance.

While this thesis acknowledged the role of religion in Chechnya's cultural life, it did not closely engage with its origins and theological definitions and remained focused on the Russo-Chechen colonial relation. Significant ethnographic work would be required to present a more accurate portrait of the clannic organization of the Chechen society. Such an enterprise would

warrant extensive research on its own and require more involvement in the disciplines of anthropology and ethnography.

In essence, the result of the process of harmonizing historicist and modernist explanations of the Russo-Chechen conflict undertaken in the first chapters of this thesis reiterates the importance of viewing historical contexts as defined by a complex network of intertwined processes. From this research emerged an understanding of the Russo-Chechen relationship on a timeline that supersedes the political changes in Russia over the twentieth century and beyond. None of these changes was impactful enough to derail Russia's plan to dominate Chechnya. The third chapter is crucial to understanding how Russia found ways to quell the separatists and jihadists, indigenize the government, and impose a pro-Russian agenda on the republic while perpetuating colonial violence.

Adding to the existing body of literature on the Russo-Chechen colonial relationship, this thesis makes an original contribution by connecting current events in Chechnya with its colonial legacy. It allows for an understanding of the Russo-Chechen conflicts of the 1990s and 2000s beyond the too-reductive, and sometimes unsuitably applied, prisms of nationalism or jihadism. The findings of this thesis also allow for a more informed reading of the involvement of Chechens on both sides in Russia's war in Ukraine. It makes it possible to explain the Kadyrovites' presence in Ukraine as mercenaries on behalf of Russia as part of a broader program of accomplishing Putin's dirty deed.[1] It clarifies why Kadyrov, although mildly criticizing the Russian military for its lack of organization on the front, fully supports Moscow in such an ill-fated enterprise to honor his pledge of allegiance to Putin.[2] Kadyrov imposing his

[1] Mansur Mirovalev, "The Real Role of Pro-Russian Chechens in Ukraine," *Al Jazeera*, 18 August 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/18/the-real-role-of-pro-russian-chechens-in-ukraine.
[2] Shaun Walker, "Putin Loyalist Kadyrov Criticises Russian Army's Performance Over Ukraine Retreat," *The Guardian*, 11 September 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/11/putin-loyalist-

pro-Russian policies on Chechnya also explains why exiled Chechens would choose to form battalions, such as the Dudaev Battalion and the Sheikh Mansur Battalion, to fight alongside Ukrainians against the Russian aggression in order to avenge the losses of the Russo-Chechen Wars of 1994–1996 and 1999–2009.[3] This thesis also explained how Chechens, after having lived most of their lives in war-torn zones or under Kadyrov's ruthless regime, were so disillusioned and desperate that they ended up taking part in suicide bombings and terrorist attacks.[4] Acknowledging the legacy of continued Russian colonial aggression and the violence accompanying it improves our reading of the historically tumultuous Russo-Chechen relations. Only then can the intensity and the sometimes-irrational nature of the Chechen response to this Russian colonial violence become more comprehensible for an observer.

kadyrov-criticises-russian-armys-performance-over-ukraine-retreat; Thomas Grove and Evan Gershkovich, "The Chechen Warlord Who Does Putin's Dirty Work in Ukraine," *The Wall Street Journal*, 16 December 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/chechen-warlord-kadyrov-putin-dirty-work-ukraine-11671204557.

[3] Emily Feng and Kateryna Malofieieva, "Meet the Chechen Battalion Joining Ukraine to Fight Russia – And Fellow Chechens," *NPR*, 5 September 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/09/05/1119703328/chechens-ukraine-russia; "Rival Chechen Fighters Take War to Battlefields of Ukraine," *Associated Press*, 27 August 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/rival-chechen-fighters-take-war-to-battlefields-of-ukraine-/6719518.html.

[4] Oliver Bullough, "Why Are Chechens So Angry?" *Open Democracy*, 2 April 2010, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/why-are-chechens-so-angry.

References

"2 Gay Men Sent Back to Chechnya Were Kidnapped – Rights Group." *The Moscow Times*. 8 February 2021. https://themoscowtimes.com/2021/02/08/2-gay-men-sent-back-to-chechna-were-kidnapped-rights-group-a72869.

Akaev, Vakhit. "The History and Specifics of Contemporary Islamic Revival in the Chechen Republic." *Russian Social Science Review* 56, no. 6 (November-December 2015): 40–62.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztompka. 1–30. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Alliksaar, Kalsa and Kristyna Foltynova. "The Untouchable: How Kadyrov Maintains His Tight Grip on Chechnya." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.* 20 September 2021. https://www.rferl.org/a/kadyrov-chechnya/31469045.html.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Revised Edition. London: Verso, 2006.

Avedissian, Karena. "Clerics, Weightlifters, and Politicians: Ramzan Kadyrov's Instagram as an Official Project of Chechen Memory and Identity Production." *Caucasus Survey* 4, no. 1 (2016): 20–43.

Avtorkhanov, Abdurakhman. *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance Towards the Muslim World*. Edited by Marie Broxup. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.

Babington, Charles. "Clinton Spars with Yeltsin on Chechnya." *The Washington Post*. 19 November 1999. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1999/11/19/clinton-spars-with-yeltsin-on-chechnya/3c6a47e4-b7c3-40b2-8f3b-4228963a5221/.

Baddeley, J.F. *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Basnukaev, Musa. "Reconstruction in Chechnya: At the Intersection Between Politics and the Economy," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond.* Edited by Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski. 76–89. London: Routledge, 2014.

"Beslan Remembers 334 Victims of Deadly Russian School Siege." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 01 September 2020. https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-town-of-beslan-remembers-victims-of-deadly-school-siege/30815305.html.

Bird, Chris. "Dudayev Claimed Lgeacy of Chechnya's Warrior-Prophets." *Associated Press*. 24 April 1996. https://apnews.com/article/cefca7d12255839e5bc6f10bfb38beea.

Blandy, C.W. "Chechnya and Regional Security," In *The Politics of Security in Modern Russia.* Edited by Mark Galeotti. 89–104. London: Routledge, 2010.

Bodner, Matthew. "Kadyrov: Elders Say Chechnya Has as Much Oil as Saudi Arabia." *The Moscow Times*. 18 June 2015. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/06/18/kadyrov-elders-say-chechnya-has-as-much-oil-as-saudi-arabia-a47493.

"Boris Nemtsov Murder: Five Chechens Jailed for Attack." *BBC News.* 13 July 2017. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40592248.

Boudreaux, Richard. "Hostages in Russia's Heartland: Defiance of Russians Flows in the Veins of Lead Hostage-Taker: Guerrilla: Shamil Basayev's Family Has Long Fought Invaders. But the Killings of His Mother and 2 Children Preceded His Raid on a City Outside Chechnya." *Los Angeles Times.* 18 June, 1995. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-06-18-mn-14600-story.html.

Breitmaier, Martin. "Ramzan Kadyrov: Insecure Strongman?" *European Union Institute for Security Studies*. February 2016. https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/ramzan-kadyrov-insecure-strongman.

Brown, Frank. "Death in Chechnya; Rebel Bombers Killed Akhmad Kadyrov. Will His Brutal Son Now Replace Him?" *Newsweek*. International Edition. 24 May 2004. 28.

Bullough, Oliver. "Why Are Chechens So Angry?" *Open Democracy*. 2 April 2010. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/why-are-chechens-so-angry.

Campana, Aurelie and Jean-Francois Ratelle. "A Political Sociology Approach to the Diffusion of Conflict from Chechnya to Dagestan and Ingushetia." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 2 (2014): 115–134.

Carroll, Oliver. "Chechnya's Gay Purge Victim Speaks Out Over Torture Ordeal." *Independent.* 19 October 2017. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/chechnya-gay-purge-maxim-lapunov-press-conference-homophobic-anti-gay-torture-beatings-ramzan-kadyrov-russia-a8003051.html.

Charney, Jonathan I. "Self-Determination: Chechnya, Kosovo, and East Timor." *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 34, no. 2 (March 2001): 455–67.

"Chechen Authorities Accept Apology of Man Accusing Them of Persecuting LGBT People." *TASS Russian News Agency*. 16 November 2017. https://tass.com/society/976032.

"Chechen Gang Guilty of Nemtsov's Murder." *BBC News.* 29 June 2017. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40447105.

"Chechen Leader Says His Time Has Come." *RT*. 3 September 2022. https://www.rt.com/russia/562131-kadyrov-hints-at-resignation/.

"Chechen Leader Says Human Rights Activists Spread Rumors on Gay Persecution for Money." *TASS Russian News Agency*. 18 July 2017. https://tass.com/politics/956869.

"Chechen Man Given Life Sentence for Killing Dissident in Austria." *The Guardian.* 06 August 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/06/chechen-man-given-life-sentence-for-killing-dissident-in-austria.

Chechen Ruler Criticized After Putting Sons in MMA Fight. Yahoo News. 12 October 2016. Video. Running Time: 00:43. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyQazZdIlAk.

"Chechen UFC Sensation Feted by Kadyrov." *RT*. 13 May 2022. https://www.rt.com/sport/555436-ufc-khamzat-chimaev-kadyrov/.

"Chechens Vow to Fight On." *Tampa Bay Times*. 25 April 1996. https://www.tampabay.com/archive/1996/04/25/chechens-vow-to-fight-on/.

"Chechnya Accused of Gay Genocide in ICC Complaint." *BBC News.* 16 May 2017. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39937107.

"Chechnya LGBT: Dozens 'Detained in New Gay Purge'." *BBC News.* 14 January 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46871801.

"Chechnya's Kadyrov Takes Umbrage at Biden's LGBT Reference." *The Moscow Times.* 22 September 2021. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/09/22/chechnyas-kadyrov-takes-umbrage-at-bidens-lgbt-reference-a75107.

Child, Ben. "Hilary Swank Sacks Manager and Staff Following Ramzan Kadyrov PR Disaster." *The Guardian*. 31 October 2011. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/oct/31/hilary-swank-sacks-manager.

Clech, Arthur. "Chechnya's Very Long State of Emergency: Homosexuals as Terrorists." *Genocide Watch.* 07 June 7, 2018. https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2018/06/07/chechnya-s-very-long-state-of-emergency-homosexuals-as-terrorists.

Coleasa, Maria-Cristina. "The International Response to the Chechen Wars." *Studia Europaea* 62, no. 2 (June 2017): 111–20.

Cornell, Svante E. "International Reactions to Massive Human Rights Violations: The Case of Chechnya." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 1 (1999): 85–100.

Cornell, Svante E. "Religion as a Factor in Caucasian Conflicts." *Civil Wars* 3, no. 3 (1998): 46–64.

Creuzberger, Stefan. "Freedom Fighter and Anti-Tsarist Rebel: Imam Shamil and Imperial Memory in Russia." In *Sites of Imperial Memory: Commemorating Colonial Rule in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* Edited by Andrew Thompson, Dominik Geppert, Frank Muller and John M. Mackenzie. 170–184. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2015.

Derluguian, Georgi M. "Whose Truth?" Introduction to *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya* by Anna Politkovskaya. Translation by Alexander Burry and Tatiana Tulchinsky. 1–25. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Dinç, Deniz. *Tatarstan's Autonomy Within Putin's Russia: Minority Elites, Ethnic Mobilization, and Sovereignty.* London: Routledge, 2021.

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

Edel, Anastasia. *Russia: Putin's Playground; Empire, Revolution, and the New Tsar.* Berkeley, California: Lightning Guides, 2015.

Edensor, Tim. *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2002.

Elbuzdukayeva, Tamara U. "Economic Recovery in Chechnya." *Chechen Scholars on Chechnya. Norwegian Institute for International Affairs* (2010).

Erbsloh, Gisela. "Seeking Chechen Identity Between Repression and Self-Determination Under the Ramzan Kadyrov Regime." *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia,* Volume 5, no. 2 (2016): 201–24.

Erickson, John. "Russia Will Not Be Trifled with: Geopolitical Facts and Fantasies." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 22, no. 2-3 (1999): 242–68.

Erlanger, Steven. "Man in the News; Chechen Warrior Chief: Soviet Army Credentials – Dzhokar M. Dudayev." *The New York Times.* 15 December, 1994. https://www.nytimes.com/1994/12/15/world/man-in-the-news-chechen-warrior-chief-soviet-army-credentials-dzhokhar-m-dudayev.html.

"Excerpts: Basayev claims Beslan." *BBC News*. 17 September 2004. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3665136.stm.

Faurby, Ib and Marta-Lisa Magnusson. "The Battle(s) of Grozny." *Baltic Defense Review* (February 1999): 75–87.

Febvre, Lucien. "A New Kind of History." In *A New Kind of History and Other Essays*. Edited by Peter Burke. Translated by K. Folca. 27–43. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Feng, Emily and Kateryna Malofieieva. "Meet the Chechen Battalion Joining Ukraine to Fight Russia – And Fellow Chechens." *NPR.* 5 September 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/09/05/1119703328/chechens-ukraine-russia.

Fitzgerald, Peter. *North Caucasus Regions Map.* Wikimedia Commons. 7 August 2008. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:North_Caucasus_regions_map.png.

Forsberg, Tuomas and Graeme P. Herd. "The EU, Human Rights, and the Russo-Chechen Conflict." *Political Science Quarterly* 120, no. 3 (2005): 455–78.

Frankel, Daniel. "Hilary Swank 'Had No Idea' How Bad Kadyrov Was, Insider Says." *Reuters*. 31 October 2011. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hilaryswank-idUSTRE79T37J20111031.

Full Interview: Ramzan Kadyrov the Leader of Chechnya, BBC News. 23 June 2018. Duration: 13:07. https://youtu.be/9WKvCUGUhto.

Gammer, Moshe. *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan."* Abingdon: Frank Cass, 1994.

Gammer, Moshe. "Empire and Mountains: The Case of Russia and the Caucasus," *Social Evolution & History* 12, no. 2 (September 2013): 120–42.

Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. 3–30. New York: Hachette Book Group, 1973.

"General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Resolution Demanding Russian Federation Immediately End Illegal Use of Force in Ukraine, Withdraw All Troops." *United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.* Eleventh Emergency Special Session 5th and 6th Meetings. 02 March 2022. https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/ga12407.doc.htm.

German, Tracey C. *Russia's Chechen War*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Gessen, Masha. "The Gay Men Who Fled Chechnya's Purge." *The New Yorker*. 26 June 2017. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/07/03/the-gay-men-who-fled-chechnyas-purge.

Gilligan, Emma. *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War.* Human Rights and Crimes Against Humanity. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Gray, Malcolm. "A Fatal Phone Call for Moscow's Nemesis; The Death of a Rebel Clouds Peace Prospects." *Maclean's* 109, issue 19 (May 6, 1996): 30.

Grove, Thomas and Evan Gershkovich. "The Chechen Warlord Who Does Putin's Dirty Work in Ukraine." *The Wall Street Journal*. 16 December 2022. https://www.wsj.com/articles/chechen-warlord-kadyrov-putin-dirty-work-ukraine-11671204557.

Gune-Yadcy, Zubeyde. "A Chechen National Hero of the Caucasus in the 18th Century: Sheikh Mansur." *Central Asian Survey* 22, no. 1 (March 2003): 103–15.

Higgins, Andrew. "Profile: Dzhokar Dudayev: Lone Wolf of Grozny." *Independent.* 23 October 2011. https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/profile-dzhokhar-dudayev-lone-wolf-of-grozny-1569145.html.

Higgins, Andrew. ''Russians 'Kill 250 Chechen Civilians." *Independent.* 13 April 1995. https://web.archive.org/web/20071127162231/http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_19950413/ai_n13976922.

"Hilary Swank 'Sacks Manager' After Chechen Appearance." *BBC News.* 31 October 2011. https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-15524921.

Hughes, James. *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad.* National and Ethnic Conflict in the 21st Century. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

Hughes, James, and Gwendolyn Sasse. "Power Ideas and Conflict: Ideology, Linkage and Leverage in Crimea and Chechnya." *East European Politics* 32, no. 3 (2016): 314–34.

"Human Rights Activists Report Death of Kadyrov Critic." *Novaya Gazeta*. 24 August 2022. https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/08/24/human-rights-activists-report-death-of-kadyrov-critic-news.

"Indigenous Peoples," The World Bank. *World Bank Group,* 2021. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples.

"Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations." United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us.html.

"Instagram Users: Mother of Deceased Woman from Gudermes Forced to Apologize." *Caucasian Knot*. 24 June 2020. https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/51286.

Jaimoukha, Amjad. *The Chechens: A Handbook.* London: Routledge, 2004.

Jaitner, Felix, Tina Olteanu and Tobia Spori. "Crises in the Post-Soviet Space." in *Crises in the Post-Soviet Space: From the Dissolution of the Soviet Union to the Conflict in Ukraine.* Edited by Felix Jaitner, Tina Olteanu and Tobias Spöri. 1–10. London: Routledge, 2018.

Jameelah, Maryam. *Two Mujahidin of the Recent Past and Their Struggle for Freedom Against Foreign Rule: Sayyid Ahmad Shahid; Imam Shamil: A Great Mujahid of Russia.* Lahore, Pakistan: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1976.

Jersild, Austin Lee. "Who Was Shamil? Russian Colonial Rule and Sufi Islam in the North Caucasus, 1859–1917." *Central Asian Survey* 14, no. 2 (1995): 205–23.

Johnston, Hank. "Ritual, Strategy, and Deep Culture in the Chechen National Movement." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 3 (2008): 321–42.

Jones, Adam. "*Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2016.

Jones, Adam. *Crimes Against Humanity: A Beginner's Guide*. Oxford, England: One World, 2008.

Kaimova, Angelika. "Widow of Chechen Killed Near Vienna Confirms He Was Police Informant." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 24 July 2020. https://www.rferl.org/a/widow-of-chechen-killed-near-vienna-confirms-he-was-police-informant/30745752.html.

"Kadyrov Accused of Masterminding Murder Plot Against Georgian TV Host Who Insulted Putin." *The Moscow Times*. 17 June 2020. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/06/16/kadyrov-accused-of-masterminding-murder-plot-against-putin-a70582.

"Kadyrov Calls for Russian Jihad Across All of Ukraine," *The Moscow Times*, 26 October 2022, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/10/26/kadyrov-calls-for-jihadacross-all-of-ukraine-a79192.

"Kadyrov Calls on Chechen Law Enforcers to Die on the Path of Jihad." *Caucasian Knot*. 30 March 2022. https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/58659/.

"Kadyrov Children's Televised MMA Bouts Prompt Criticsm in Russia." *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty*. 06 October 2016. https://www.rferl.org/a/kadyrov-children-mma-mixed-martial-arts-criticism-russia/28035237.html.

"Kadyrov's Preadolescent Sons Brawl in Cage Fight Tournament." *The Moscow Times*. 06 October 2016. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/10/06/kadyrovs-pre-pubescent-sons-fight-in-mixed-martial-arts-tournament-a55621.

"Kadyrov's Right-Hand Man Calls on Diaspora to Stop Disgraceful Chechens Abroad." *The Moscow Times*. 25 November 2019. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/11/25/kadyrovs-right-hand-man-calls-on-diaspora-to-stop-disgraceful-chechens-abroad-a68302.

"Kadyrov Says Russia Remains Islam's Most Loyal Ally and Protector." *TASS Russian News Agency*. 17 May 2017. https://tass.com/politics/946363.

"Kadyrov Statement About 19th-Century Resistance Leader Sparks Controversy." *RadioFreeEurope/Radio Liberty*. 09 August 2019. https://www.rferl.org/a/kadyrov-imam-shamil-controversy-chechnya/30101390.html.

"K-G-Beefcake: Putin Bares His Chest in Siberia." *NBC News*. 05 August 2009. https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna32299822.

"Khasavyourt Joint Declaration and Principles for Mutual Relations." *United Nations Peacemaker*. 31 August 1996. https://peacemaker.un.org/russia-khasavyourtdeclaration96.

Khrushchev, Nikita. "Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U." Delivered on February 24-25, 1956. *Marxists Internet Archive.* https://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm.

Kipp, Jacob W. "Russia's Wars in Chechnya." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 8, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2001): 47–62.

Kramer, Andrew E. "Chechen Authorities Arresting and Killing Gay Men, Russian Paper Says." *The New York Times.* 01 April, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/01/world/europe/chechen-authorities-arresting-and-killing-gay-men-russian-paper-says.html.

Kramer, Andrew E. "They Starve You, They Shock You: Inside the Anti-Gay Pogrom in Chechnya." *The New York Times.* 21 April 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/21/world/europe/chechnya-russia-attacks-gays.html.

Kuhr, Elizabeth. "1 in 5 Russians Want Gays and Lesbians Eliminated, Survey Finds." *NBC News*. 24 April 2020. https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/1-5-russians-want-gays-lesbians-eliminated-survey-finds-n1191851.

Lapidus, Gail W. "Contested Sovereignty: The Tragedy of Chechnya." *International Security*. Vol. 23, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 5–49.

Le Huerou, Anne, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski. "Introduction." in *Chechnya at War and Beyond.* Edited by Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski. 1–16. London: Routledge, 2014.

Le Huerou, Anne. "Between War Experience and Ordinary Police Rationales: State Violence Against Civilians in Post-War Chechen Republic," In *Chechnya at War and Beyond*. Edited by Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski. 152–75. London: Routledge, 2014.

Lokshina, Tanya. **"**Anti-LGBT Violence in Chechnya: When Filing Official Complaints Isn't an Option." *Open Democracy*. 4 April 2017. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/anti-lgbt-violence-in-chechnya-when-filing-official-complaints-isn-t-option/.

Lokshina, Tanya. "Virtue Campaign for Women in Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov: Between War Backlash Effect and Desire for Total Control." In *Chechnya at War and Beyond*. Edited by Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski. 236–55. London: Routledge, 2014.

Longman, James. *Am I Next: Gay and Targeted in Chechnya.* Nightline ABC News. 01 November 2019. Online video excerpt, 18:26. https://youtu.be/JSMyzzYMb2w.

"Makhachev Parades UFC Title on Visit to Kadyrov." *RT*. 31 October 2022. https://www.rt.com/sport/565652-islam-makhachev-ufc-title-ramzan-kadyrov/.

Marten, Kimberly. *Warlords: Strong-Arm Brokers in Weak States*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. New York: Cornell University Press, 2012.

Marx, Karl. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Edited by David McLellan. Oxford University Press, 1977.

Maskhadov, Aslan. "Open Letter to the French Philosopher Andre Glucksman." *Central Asian Survey* 19, issue 3-4 (2000). 309–14.

Matejova, Miriam. "Russian 'Chechenization' and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya." *International Journal on World Peace* 30, no. 2 (June 2013): 9–34.

Merlin, Aude. "Remembering and Forgetting in Chechnya Today: Using the Great Patriotic War to Create a New Historical Narrative," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond.* 37–57. Edited by Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski. London: Routledge, 2014.

Mirovalev, Mansur. "The Real Role of Pro-Russian Chechens in Ukraine." *Al Jazeera*. 18 August 2022. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/18/the-real-role-of-pro-russian-chechens-in-ukraine.

MMA: Russia's Extreme Obsession. Al Jazeera. 06 August 2020. Video. Running Time: 26:00. https://youtu.be/17QhWAZGSJY.

Moore, Cerwyn. *Contemporary Violence: Postmodern War in Kosovo and Chechnya.* Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 2010.

Moore, Cerwyn and Paul Tumelty. "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya: From Communism and Nationalism to Islamism and Salafism. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 25, no. 1 (2009): 73-94.

Moore, Cerwyn and Paul Tumelty. "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya: A Critical Assessment." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 5 (2008): 412–433.

Naimark, Norman N. *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Nichol, Jim. "Stability in Russia's Chechnya and Other Regions of the North Caucasus: Recent Developments." In *Chechnya Still Boiling.* Edited by George S. Toler. 1–16. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2010.

Nichol, Jim. "Bringing Peace to Chechnya? Assessments and Implications," In *Chechnya Still Boiling*. Edited by George S. Toler. 49–72. New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc., 2010.

"Novaya Gazeta Demanded to Open Criminal Case Against Kadyrov." *Institute of Mass Information*. 1 February 2022. https://imi.org.ua/en/news/novaya-gazeta-demanded-to-open-criminal-case-against-kadyrov-i43588.

"Obituary – Shamil Basayev; To Come." *The Economist* 380, Issue 8486 (15 July 2006): 78.

"On The Observance of The Right of Man and The Citizen in the Russian Federation (1994-1995)." *The Andrei Sakharov Foundation*. https://sakharovfoundation.org/observance-rights-man-citizen-russian-federation-1994-1995/.

Parfitt, Tom. "Kadyrov Street? It's Over There, There, and There; Chechnya." *The Times.* 01 January 2021. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/kadyrov-street-in-chechnya-its-over-there-there-and-there-fwzwp7wnb.

Parfitt, Tom. "The Only Good Journalist…" *The Guardian.* 10 October 2006. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/oct/10/russia.media.

Perovic, Jeronim. *From Conquest to Deportation: The North Caucasus Under Russian Rule.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Pohl, Michaela. "Anna Politkovskaya and Ramzan Kadyrov: Exposing the Kadyrov Syndrome." *Problems of Post-Communism* 54, no. 5 (2007). 30–39.

"Policeman's Teen Bride Puts Chechen Marital Practices in the Spotlight." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 16 May 2015. https://www.rferl.org/a/caucausus-report-teen-bride-chechen-marital-practices/27020167.html.

Politkovskaya, Anna. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*. Translated by Alexander Burry and Tatiana Tulchinsky. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Poushter, Jacob and Nicholas Kent. "The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists." *Pew Research Center*. 25 June 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/.

"Practice of Domestic Violence in Chechnya is Contrary to Norms of Islam and Adats." *Caucasian Knot*. 7 July 2020. https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/51410/.

Prince, David, dir. *Welcome to Chechnya: Inside the Russian Republic's Deadly War on Gays.* New York: Public Square Films, 2020. https://www.welcometochechnya.com/.

"Ramzan Kadyrov: Putin's Feared Chechen Strongman." *Al Jazeera.* 12 May 2020. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/21/ramzan-kadyrov-putins-feared-chechen-strongman.

"Relatives of Law Enforcer Killed in Chechnya Declared Blood Feud to Residents of Ingushetia." *Caucasian Knot*. 1 January 2021. https://www.eng.kavkaz.eu/articles/53254/.

"Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 27 March 2014, 68/262: Territorial Integrity of Ukraine." *United Nations General Assembly.* 68th Session, Agenda Item 33b. 01 April 2014. https://daccess-ods.un.org/tmp/7436732.05375671.html.

Rich, Ben and Dara Conduit. "The Impact of *Jihadist* Foreign Fighters on Indigenous Secular-Nationalist Causes: Contrasting Chechnya and Syria." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 2 (2015): 113–31.

"Rights Defender Kalyapin Hospitalized After Beating." *Caucasian Knot*. 25 August 2022. https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/61121/.

"Rival Chechen Fighters Take War to Battlefields of Ukraine." *Associated Press*. 27 August 2022. https://www.voanews.com/a/rival-chechen-fighters-take-war-to-battlefields-of-ukraine/6719518.html.

Rukhadze, Vasili and Glen Duerr. "Sovereignty Issues in the Caucasus: Contested Ethnic and National Identities in Chechnya, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia." *Nationalities Affairs New Series*, no. 48 (2016): 30–47.

Russell, John. *Chechnya – Russia's "War on Terror."* London: Routledge, 2007.

Russell, John. "Kadyrov's Chechnya: Template, Test or Trouble for Russia's Regional Policy?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 3 (2011): 509–28.

Russell, John. "Ramzan Kadyrov's 'Illiberal' Peace in Chechnya." In *Chechnya at War and Beyond.* Edited by Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski. 133–151. London: Routledge, 2014.

Russell, John. "Ramzan Kadyrov: The Indigenous Key to Success in Putin's Chechenization Strategy?" *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 4 (2008): 659–87.

"Russia Ends Chechnya Operation." *BBC News.* 16 April 2009. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8001495.stm.

"Russia, Republic Noxciyn." *Ukrafil.* 30 January 2012. http://ukrafil.com/en/news?action=rsrtme&offset=588.

"Russia: Three Months of War in Chechnya." *Human Rights Watch* 7, no. 6 (February 1995). https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Russia1.htm.

"Russian Activist Found Murdered," *BBC News*, 15 July 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8152351.stm.

"Russian Jailed in Sweden Over Hammer Attack on Anti-Kadyrov Blogger." *The Moscow Times.* 11 January 2021. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/01/11/russian-jailed-in-sweden-over-hammer-attack-on-anti-kadyrov-blogger-a72576.

"Russian Journalist Leaves Country After Personal Threats." *RT*. 4 February 2022. https://rt.com/russia/548315-journalist-leave-country-threats/.

"Russian Paper Alleges Summary Executions in Chechnya." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.* 09 July 2017. https://www.rferl.org/a/chechnya-summary-executions-kadyrov-gazeta/28604204.html.

"Russian Shot Dead Near Vienna Was Reportedly a Kadyrov Critic." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 06 July 2020. https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-asylum-seeker-austria-murder/30706727.html.

"Russian Star Comments on Kadyrov Relations After US Fight Scrapped." *RT*. 3 November 2022. https://www.rt.com/sport/565825-maxim-grishin-us-visa-kadyrov/.

Rustler, Alexander. "The Fluidity of Chechnya's Conflicts: From Nationalism to Jihad to Supra-Regional Jihad. *Ethnopolitics* 20, no. 5 (2021): 545–69.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979.

Savranskaya, Svetlana and Matthew Evangelista. "Chechnya, Yeltsin, and Clinton: The Massacre at Samashki in April 1995 and the US Response to Russia's War in Chechnya." Translation and Editorial Assistance by Sarah Dunn. *National Security Archive.* 15 April 2020. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2020-04-15/massacre-at-samashki-and-us-response-to-russias-war-in-chechnya.

Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David. *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2010.

Scicchitano, Dominic. "The 'Real' Chechen Man: Conceptions of Religion, Nature, and Gender and the Persecution of Sexual Minorities in Postwar Chechnya." *Journal of Homosexuality* (2019): 1545–62.

Sedlickas Romanas and Stasys Knezys. *War in Chechnya.* Texas: A&M University Press, 1999.

Sinelschikova, Yekaterina. "How Boris Yeltsin, Russia's First President, Resigned." *Russia Beyond*. 31 December 2019. https://www.rbth.com/history/331510-how-boris-yeltsin-resigned.

Slobodchikoff, Michael O. *Building Hegemonic Order Russia's Way: Order, Stability, and Predictability in the Post-Soviet Space.* Maryland, USA: Lexington Books, 2014.

Smith, Lydia. "Chechnya Detains 100 Gay Men in First Concentration Camps Since the Holocaust." *International Business Times.* 15 April 2017. https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/chechnya-detains-100-gay-men-first-concentration-camps-since-holocaust-1616363.

Smith, Lydia. "People are Being Tortured and Killed: Chechnya's Deadly Anti-LGBT Crisis." *International Business Times.* 27 July 2017. https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/deadly-anti-lgbt-crisis-unfolding-chechnya-1616551.

Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr I. *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation.* Translation by Thomas P. Whitney. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Souleimanov, Emil Aslan. "Chechnya, Wahhabism and the Invasion of Dagestan." *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 4 (December 2005). Article 4.

Souleimanov, Emil Aslan and Jasutis Grazvydas. "The Dynamics of Kadyrov's Regime: Between Autonomy and Dependence." *Caucasus Survey* 4, no. 2 (2016): 115–128.

Souleimanov, Emil Aslan and Huseyn Aliyev. "Blood Revenge and Mobilization: Evidence from the Chechen Wars." *International Security* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 158–180.

Souleimanov, Emil Aslan, Jasper Schwampe and Sofie Bedford. "Chechnya: A Study of Post-Soviet Conflict." in *Crises in the Post-Soviet Space: From the Dissolution of the Soviet Union to the Conflict in Ukraine*. Edited by Felix Jaitner, Tina Olteanu and Tobia Spori. 213–221. London: Routledge, 2018.

Souleimanov, Emil Aslan, Namig Abbasov and David S. Siroky. "Frankenstein in Grozny: Vertical and Horizontal Cracks in the Foundation of Kadyrov's Rule." *Asia Europe Journal* 17, no. 1 (2018; 2019): 87–103.

Specter, Michael. "Chechens' Leader Signs Peace Pact with The Kremlin." *New York Times*. 28 May 1996. https://web.archive.org/web/20121105124717/http://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/28/world/chechens-leader-signs-peace-pact-with-the-kremlin.html.

Sperling, Walter. "Grozny as It Was Before the War: Remembrance and Reconciliation in Virtual and Real Post-Soviet Communities," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond.* Edited by Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski. 19–36. London: Routledge, 2014.

Stanley, Alessandra. "As Chechens Take to Hills, Clans Gird for a Long Fight." *The New York Times.* 22 January 1995. https://www.nytimes.com/1995/01/22/world/as-chechens-take-to-hills-clans-gird-for-a-long-fight.html.

Steele, Jonathan. "Obituary: Shamil Basayev: Chechen Politician Seeking Independence Through Terrorism." *The Guardian*. 11 July 2006. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/jul/11/guardianobituaries.chechnya.

"Story of Chechen Woman Taken Out of Moscow Emphasizes Problem of Forced Marriages." *Caucasian Knot*. 18 July 2019. https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/47850/.

Swirsczc, Joanna. "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity." *Nationalities Paper.* Vol. 39, No. 1 (January 2009): 59–88.

Tetrault-Farber, Gabrielle. "Chechen Teenager 'Forced' to Marry Police Chief Amid Growing Row in Russia." *The Guardian.* 18 May 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/18/chechen-teenager-forced-marriage-russia.

"They Have Long Arms and They Can Find Me: Anti-Gay Purge by Local Authorities in Russia's Chechen Republic." *Human Rights Watch.* 26 May 2017. https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/05/26/they-have-long-arms-and-they-can-find-me/anti-gay-purge-local-authorities-russias.

"They Will Kill You Anyway, Be It Family or Strangers: Gay About Life in Chechnya and Flight from Russia." *Caucasian Knot*. 24 January 2019. https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/45924/.

"The Wolf's Return: A Martial-Arts Star's Comeback is a Boost for Chechnya's Dictator." *The Economist.* 07 August 2021. https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/08/05/a-martial-arts-stars-comeback-is-a-boost-for-chechnyas-dictator.

Tishkov, Valery. *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Todorova, Maria. *Imagining the Balkans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Tsakhirmaa, Sansar. "Comparative Ethnic Territorially Based Autonomy in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Yakutia of Russia: An Analytical Framework." *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 5 (2020): 891–914.

"Two Chechen MMA Fighters Support French Teacher's Killer." *Caucasian Knot*. 19 October 2020. https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/52495/.

Vandenko, Andrey. "Chechnya's Leader in a TASS Special Project Top Officials. Part 1: About Fears, Foes and Friends, Boris Nemtsov and Fighting Wars." *TASS Russian News Agency*. https://tass.com/top-officials/914561#884835.

Vatchagaev, Mairbek. "Sufism in Chechnya: Its Influence on Contemporary Society." In *Chechnya at War and Beyond*. Edited by Anne Le Huerou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski. 220–235. London: Routledge, 2014.

de Waal, Thomas. "Chechnya: The Breaking Point." in *Chechnya Still Boiling.* Edited by George S. Toler. 17–34. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009.

Walker, Shaun. "Putin Loyalist Kadyrov Criticises Russian Army's Performance Over Ukraine Retreat." *The Guardian*. 11 September 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/11/putin-loyalist-kadyrov-criticises-russian-armys-performance-over-ukraine-retreat.

Walker, Shaun. "We Can Find You Anywhere: The Chechen Death Squads Stalking Europe." *The Guardian.* 21 September 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/21/chechnya-death-squads-europe-ramzan-kadyrov.

"Widespread Torture in the Chechen Republic: Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper for the 37th Session UN Committee Against Torture." *Human Rights Watch* 2. 13 November 2006. https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/chechnya1106/.

Wilhelmsen, Julie. "Inside Russia's Imperial Relations: The Social Constitution of Putin-Kadyrov Patronage." *Slavic Review* 77, no. 4 (2018): 919–936

Williams, Bryan Glyn. "Commemorating 'The Deportation' in Post-Soviet Chechnya: The Role of Memorialization and Collective Memory in the 1994-1996 and 1999-2000 Russo-Chechen Wars. *History and Memory* 12, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2000): 101–134.

Williams, Brian G. *Inferno in Chechnya: The Russian-Chechen Wars, the Al Qaeda Myth, and the Boston Marathon Bombings.* Lebanon, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2015.

Winslow, Donna, Rene Moelker and Francoise Companjen. "Glocal Chechnya from Russian Sovereignty to Pan-Islamic Autonomy." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 129–151.

"Working Meeting with Head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov." *President of Russia.* 23 June 2021. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65911.

"World Boxing Champion Speaks on Kadyrov's Support." *RT*. 30 June 2022. https://rt.com/sport/558135-artur-beterbiev-kadyrov-support/.

"Yeltsin Redraws Political Map." *BBC News.* 10 August 1999. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/415087.stm.

"Yeltsin's Man Wins Approval." *BBC News*. 16 August 1999. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/422001.stm.

"Yeltsin Warns of Possible World War Over Kosovo." *CNN*. 10 April 1999. http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9904/10/kosovo.russia.diplomacy.01/.

"Young Russian Tries to Sue Over Violent Lesbian Exorcism in Chechnya." *The Moscow Times*. 22 January 2020. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/01/22/young-russian-tries-to-sue-over-violent-lesbian-exorcism-in-chechnya-a69009.

Zidan, Karim. "Dynastic Propaganda: How Kadyrov Weaponizes His Sons to Secure His Bloodline." *BloodyElbow*. Vox Media, Inc. 25 November, 2021. https://www.bloodyelbow.com/platform/amp/2021/11/25/22801992/ramzan-kadyrov-chechnya-dictator-children-fights-boxing-mma-porpoganda-sportswashing-news.

Zidan, Karim. "Khabib Nurmagomedov's Dominance was Straightforward. His Legacy is Anything but." *The Guardian.* Published on October 27, 2020. Accessed on December 01, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2020/oct/27/khabib-nurmagomedov-legacy-ufc-champion.

Zidan, Karim. "The UFC Star and the Chechen Warlord." *BloodyElbow*. Vox Media Inc. 07 April 2022. https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2022/4/7/23013370/ufc-khamzat-chimaev-ramzan-kadyrov-russia-ukraine-mma-politics.

Zidan, Karim. "Why the UFC's Sportswashing of Chechnya's Dictator is a Problem." *The Guardian*. 29 September 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2018/sep/29/ramzan-kadyrov-ufc-chechnya-dictator.