

ИСТОРИЯ, ЭТНОЛОГИЯ И АРХЕОЛОГИЯ КАВКАЗА**THE FORGOTTEN COMPLEXITIES OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS PAST¹****G.M. DERLUGUIAN**

In the Balkans or the Caucasus visitors are often told that they cannot comprehend today's ethnic wars without knowing the region's long, long history. How much truth is there in this? What can we learn using the theoretical tools of historical social science? And not least of all, what do scholarly reconstructions tell us regarding the national epic of contemporary struggle the against would-be sovereigns that takes most of its inspiration from the legendary deeds of ancestors? Let us make such an attempt.

For nearly four centuries, starting with Tamerlane's destruction of the Golden Horde in the 1390s and ending with the arrival of Russian colonialism in the 1770s, the North Caucasus lay beyond the reach of any contemporary imperial power. The sheer difficulty of military logistics imposed by geography prevented the Ottomans or Persians from attempting more than occasional forays beyond the Caucasus ridge. Moreover, the great rival empires of Islam had no strategic or economic reason to fight for control over the sparsely populated and politically fragmented tribal fringes where not a single town of any notable size existed at the time. The imperial interests in the region were just as well served by long-distance trade. In the main, this trade procured slaves captured in raids and tribal feuds who were then exchanged for luxury goods (weapons above all) manufactured in the imperial metropolitan centres. This pattern of trade relegated the North Caucasus to a typical 'tribal' periphery in the world-systems generated around agrarian empires [13].

The peripheral position of the North Caucasus during the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries CE, however, did not mean that this was a stagnant backwater. Tribal peripheries could be the sites of very dynamic innovation in warfare, social organization and, as we shall see later, in the deployment of religious ideology. We may recall that Islam itself arose in a fragmented and quite violent peripheral society that had existed in Arabia on the eve of Mohammed's sermon. In fact, Islam was the sole world religion to emerge outside empire – and this matters a lot for understanding Islam today as well as over time. Arabia of the fifth to seventh centuries was no less connected to the neighbouring empires by trade, border raiding and cultural diffusion than would be the North Caucasus a thousand years later. In a rather astonishing geopolitical continuity, the empires, too, remained largely congruous in both epochs: the Ottomans took over and continued the Byzantine inheritance almost wholesale, while the social patterns of Sassanian Iran eventually re-emerged in the Safavid Persian Empire [22]. This analogy in the relations between empires and tribal periphery in two different epochs seems very illuminating

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regarding the nineteenth-century struggle in the North Caucasus. The doctrine and life story of the Prophet offered both ideology and organisational blueprint to the indigenous state-builders in the North Caucasus who – like Mohammed in his own life effort² – had to fight on two fronts simultaneously: against the advancing Russian empire and to overcome the tribal fragmentation of native societies.

To better understand this famous struggle, let us examine the social processes that generated the tribal fragmentation in the North Caucasus during the post-medieval epoch.

First of all, this matters in explaining the emergence of the mind-boggling number of ethnic groups and languages that are native to the North Caucasus. Why in the South Caucasus do we find relatively large national groups like Azeris and Armenians while in Dagestan alone there could be two dozen or more indigenous ethnic groups (depending on what gets called a 'dialect'), some of them no larger than a single village community? I hope it is not merely the sociologist in me teasing my anthropologist colleagues by using the terms that they regard at best with suspicion: tribes, barbarian, periphery. While I join most colleagues in eschewing the use of these terms to describe contemporary peoples and events today, I deliberately want to draw parallels with the original uses of these terms in Antiquity, where the Greek word 'barbarian' meant the peoples from geographic outliers, mostly from the mountains and forests, who had no towns or, for that matter, not much use for literacy. The tribe was a traditional social unit among the early Romans and their Celtic neighbours that had a predominantly military-political role in organising collective defence and attacks on neighbours. It would be also helpful to recall the legendary story of Etruscan rexes expelled from Rome because, as I will seek to show, it might cast light on the notoriously independent character of the Chechens. The goal is to excavate common socio-historical patterns enabling us to better understand the past and present of the North Caucasus. For no contemporary knowledge-making paradigm about the North Caucasus has been more tenacious than that of struggle.

Tribal fragmentation in a post-medieval North Caucasus

The story begins with Tamerlane who, in the 1390s, delivered the last shattering blow to the nomadic empire of the Golden Horde. Despite Tamerlane's megalomaniacal dream of imposing his rule on the whole world, no new empire resulted from this conquest. For centuries to come the North Caucasus existed in a geopolitical vacuum, too remote and insignificant for any outside power to impose its rule. The khanate of the Crimean Tatars, themselves vassals to the Ottoman Porte, laid a nominal claim to the steppe along the Kuban river in the western part of the region. But this only meant that the territory lay within the range of the Tatar cavalry, hunting for slaves as usual. Neither the khanate's administration nor any permanent garrisons were ever established in the Caucasus. The Crimean khanate acted essentially as a bigger predatorial warlord among many local warlords.

² The original meaning of 'jihad' is precisely that: effort.

Who were these local warlords? And what was the reaction of human populations to the situation of being perennially hunted by the slave raiders? The lasting fragmentation of military power in the North Caucasus led to the emergence of the unstable stateless alliances of heavily armed horseback warriors. They led a mobile semi-nomadic lifestyle imposing themselves as serial 'guests' on the agricultural and pastoralist communities. In exchange, following the classical logic of racketeering, these warlords offered armed protection to the communities which they patronised [29, 31]. On the virtue of receiving tribute from the populations they protected, these warriors came to be considered noblemen. The Turks and the Genoese merchants summarily called them Cherkess or, in the Italian spelling which entered all European languages, Circassians, among whom the Kabardins were the elite tribe.

This period witnessed the emergence of the majority of ethnic appellations that operate in the region to this day. But before they became labels in the roster of indigenous nationalities, these names applied to something else: communities and castelike status groups differentiated by occupations and environment. For instance, the Balkars and Karachais evidently had little military power to claim the more productive lands in the foothills. They were forced to adapt to the harsher environments higher in the mountains near the edges of glaciers, where economic survival depended on the seasonal migrations of sheep and goats up and down the valleys in the cycle of transhumant pastoralism. These people called themselves, straightforwardly, Taulula, meaning mountaineers. Similarly the ancestors of Chechens and Ingush had to engage in slash-and-burn agriculture in the dense forests that in those times covered the mountain slopes, offering some protection from raiders as well as a very modest living. Their ethnic appellations come simply from the names of their outpost villages beyond which lived the mountain and forest agriculturalists of a roughly similar language and culture. Indicatively, Kabardin was indeed a personal name that genealogical legend attributes to the mighty warrior who rescued and married, of course, a princess thus starting his noble lineage [7]. What this legend seems to indicate is rather that the original founder of the Kabardin tribe was a successful warlord whose personal name grew to apply to a small army of followers. History abounds in analogous examples, from the African Chikunda, a caste of slave warriors in the Zambeze valley who eventually seized women and cattle to constitute themselves into a tribe [3], to the Tatars, originally the unit of captives under the command of a legendary Mongol warrior named Kara-Tatar. Similarly, we can observe the transformation of the Roman lineage name Caesar into the later occupational denominations of Tsar or Kaiser.

The Kabardin warriors exacted feudal dues from the peasant communities of Chechen farmers and Taulula (Balkar and Karachai) herdsmen in exchange for protection from the nomadic Tatar rovers. In the process of self-constitution into feudal elite, the Kabardin warriors invented elaborate codes based on mutual loyalty, family honour, combat valour and lordly conspicuous consumption. In stateless societies the fragile guarantee of a chieftain's life rested on his reputation as a fearsome warrior and valued friend [13]. Today this code of behaviour is proudly called Adyghe Habze. It is considered the common repository of values and rituals of

all Adyghe peoples (which is the self-appellation of Circassians). Yet, according to the prominent Kabardin anthropologist Barasbi Bgazhnokov (personal communication), there can be no doubt that in the historical past this code was called somewhat differently – namely, Ork Habze, that is, the Knightly Code.

The Kabardin monopoly of violence derived from the possession of expensive armour and battle horses of the famous Kabardin breed. Just how expensive was the equipment of North Caucasus knights? By all historical accounts, fabulously so. In 1757 a Russian commanding officer calculated that the cost of a Kabardin's armour, sabre and battle horse could be as much as 2,000 rubles – adding with barely concealed sadness that his own salary was just 400 rubles a year [4, p. 37]. This suggests three things that explain much about the post-medieval social pattern in the North Caucasus. First, only a very small elite of warriors could arm themselves with such splendour. Secondly, such an elite possessed an overwhelming battlefield advantage over the commoner foot soldiers in terms of mobility, body protection and striking power. Last but not least, the commoner population and local economy were too thin to allow the warriors to arm themselves at the expense of tributary dues alone. The alternative source of large, concentrated incomes could be found only in slave trade.

But any monopoly is subject to erosion over time. Like everywhere in the hierarchical societies of Afro-Eurasia, the exclusive position of knights in shining armour was undone by the gunpowder revolution. In the North Caucasus, its effects registered fully towards the mid-eighteenth century with the proliferation of cheaper guns among peasants. But the social result was quite different to that of absolutist monarchies.

The Great Equaliser

The first guns arrived in the Caucasus in the early seventeenth century via the traditional trade routes – across the Mediterranean and the Black sea, and north from Persia. After the adaptational time lag of several generations, guns became quite common. In the Caucasus, the effect of gunpowder was virtually the opposite of the Western experience [23]. Instead of empowering bigger states capable of supporting standing armies and large bureaucracies, in the Caucasus guns led to the fragmentation of aristocratic hierarchies and a peasant democratisation.

With time, guns were imported in large quantities from the manufacturing centres of northern Italy, Germany and the Ottoman Empire via the Crimean Tatar khanate and trade fairs on the Black Sea coast. So far the nobles could control the spread of new weapons because they had long controlled the slave trade. Yet fairly soon the local smiths learned to imitate the imported weapons with great success. In Dagestan, where arable land was always scarce and whole villages derived income from skilled metal works and other crafts, there emerged a cottage industry of gun manufacture based on an intricate division of labour between differently specialised villages. It is estimated that in the midnineteenth century, at the peak of this early industrialisation, Dagestan alone produced up to 20,000 rifles a year [4, p. 121-2].

The majority were indeed the grooved-barrel rifles of remarkable quality and shooting precision. Rifles have been known in Europe since the sixteenth century but

they were rarely used except for hunting, mainly because reloading a rifle from the muzzle took seven to ten minutes. The relative speed of reloading favoured smooth-barrelled muskets, and thus what the armies of imperial states lacked in precision they made up for in sheer numbers and firepower on the battlefield.

A major obstacle to state-making in the Caucasus was – and, to some extent, still is today – the mountainous terrain. No matter how accessible the famous 'mountain outposts' were to peasant and nomadic tradesmen and how well known they were to local residents and those familiar with the region, geography provided the major obstacles to would-be foreign sovereigns. Location favoured sniping from behind the trees and rocks – essentially a hunting skill which many peasants living at the edge of forests already possessed – over marching in formation and hauling cannons into the battlefield. Since the eighteenth century the Caucasian warriors relied on the muzzle-loading rifles and pistols in combination with the newly invented lighter and less curved version of sabre, the famous Caucasian shashka (meaning simply 'long knife' in the Circassian languages). The shashka was used in upright position to support the rifle while aiming and, after the shot, for slashing in close combat – the same function as Western bayonets only even deadlier. It was not only a very deadly combination but, as it turns out, it was remarkably cheaper compared to the battle-gear of erstwhile knights. If the full combat attire of a Kabardin aristocrat plus his pure-bred battle horse cost a fortune, a good locally manufactured rifle cost only 5-8 rubles [4, p. 17]. This was still a hefty cost, equivalent to several cows. But it was no longer outside the range of a well-to-do farmer or a lucky peasant lad who ambushed his clan's enemy on a mountain pathway and took his horse and weapons.

The effect of guns on social structure was probably not immediate. Age-old cultural traditions derived from aristocratic warfare continued to exercise a strong influence well into the nineteenth century when the mountain princes were still observed proudly wearing their splendid chain mail. But consider a folkloric anecdote from the 1760s that perhaps best captures this moment of historical change. One day, to protest the exactions of noblemen, thousands of Kabardin commoners gathered at an extraordinary tribal convention held at a sacred site. This event was known as 'the Rebellion of Domalei', following the nickname of its leader, roughly translated as 'double shoulders' and indicative of Domalei's extraordinary physical strength. A Kabardin aristocrat, returning from a successful raid and leading several recently captured horses, met the crowd of peasants walking to join Domalei. When the aristocrat learned their purpose, he laughed disparagingly: 'What can you, the naked rabble, do with your stinking guns against the noble steel of my sabre and chainmail?' To this, a grim-looking peasant took his rifle from his back and uttered: 'That we shall see now.' By contemporary accounts, the grave of this self-assured aristocrat stood by a well-travelled roadside until the 1960s when it was paved over during the extension of a mountain highway³.

The dispersion of affordable and well-crafted rifles allowed the Caucasus communal smallholders to resist the tribute-collecting noblemen on horseback.

³ I thank Dr Barasbi Bgazhnokov for sharing this story.

Bluntly said, there was now a good chance that any daring or desperate commoner might put a bullet through the wonderful and wonderfully expensive chainmail of a Kabardin or whatever native nobleman might arrive in a village to demand his customary annual offerings of sheep, grain and perhaps a fox fur from each household. Such resistance was all the more likely if attempts were made under cover of night to seize a horse or, still better, a Circassian girl traditionally famed for her beauty, who might then be sold into Turkish harems. At least a quarter of all reports by the eighteenth-century Russian officials stationed along the North Caucasus frontier mention exactly this sort of micro-rebellion by the newly empowered peasants. The enraged and humiliated noblemen rushed to the imperial fortresses, claiming that they were Russian allies, and asking for soldiers with cannons to discipline the unruly subjects [17].

Cumulatively, the proliferation of privately owned guns enabled the self-emancipation of North Caucasian peasants. It also created an anarchic and inherently dangerous social environment. Many villages were fortified in this period and also grew in size as people sought mutual protection. Moreover, the clan structures grew more pronounced as the people reasserted group solidarities. Clan in this situation was clearly not an archaic vestige. The network of trust offered by extended kinship proved a necessary condition for enabling this self-emancipation. The new 'democratic' villages and the self-governing leagues of villages acquired semi-permanent militias. In such communities the traditional rituals of young male initiation were reconfigured to centre on the explicitly military function of defence and raiding against the enemies [24]. There emerged the new category of the champion warriors of relatively humble origin whose reputations allowed them to negotiate high fees for their mercenary services with many villages at a time. There also appear the popular Islamic preachers who propagated, to use the term of Michael Mann [20], the doctrine of 'normative pacification'. For many centuries before, Islam had remained only a tenuous presence in the North Caucasus, either from the side of Dagestan that had been in the orbit of Arab caliphate almost from the beginning, or, much later, spreading from the Black Sea outposts of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, this Turkish-influenced Islam always remained an aristocratic and apparently nominal allegiance in parallel with the external diplomatic relations of warrior elites. There are few indications of conversion at popular levels before the eighteenth century [32] – and then Islam spreads like bushfire. This could not be explained outside the contemporary context of struggles between the elites and commoners.

This peasant revolution was long ignored by Soviet scholars who, for the duration of the USSR, held a near-monopoly in Caucasus studies. But why? Marxist-Leninism presumably should have hailed all popular rebels, starting with Spartacus. The problem was that the impact of new gunpowder technology on social organization looked like the gross violation of smoother, unilinear evolutionary schemes upheld by the Soviet Marxist orthodoxy. Instead of 'mountain feudalism' progressing towards absolutist monarchy and then perhaps bourgeois revolution, the social organisation of North Caucasian peoples seems to have undergone a marked 'regression' in the eighteenth century to the archaic forms of clan and tribe. This anomaly led many Soviet historians into clumsy attempts to explain away these

observed historical phenomena. The theories of Soviet-era Caucasian anthropologists, in turn, predicted that the archaic traits should be more pronounced among the 'backward' populations of the upper mountain ranges. Yet the strength and extensiveness of clan organisation was highest among those peoples of the North Caucasus, mainly Chechens, whose not-too-distant ancestors actively colonised the foothills and in the process overthrew aristocratic rule.

The social organisation of armed farmers

The rebellious farmers forged their solidarities by reinventing and reinforcing kinship networks, village neighbour communities, and the leagues of villages. Previously, these served mostly the circles of matrimonial and economic-ecological exchanges. In the new historical situation, the traditional horizontal networks primarily became the repositories of collective legal-ethical and military powers. The goal was the collective appropriation and protection of earthly assets. These communities, many of them newly founded, developed elaborate and strict ethical codes, including, in some instances (mainly in Dagestan), even the formal written law that prescribed as a major civic obligation the possession of weapons and participation in common defence. But let us not idealise peasant self-liberation out of its historical context, as do the romantic advocates of Caucasian democratic traditions today. The new community norms unambiguously sanctioned the exclusion of women from civic life and also the possession of slaves by free commoners, although we have little systematic data to tell us just how widespread the use of slave labour may have been in the otherwise-named democratic communities of the North Caucasus.

We must take note of one feature that infamously resurfaced in recent history: the dependence of a warrior's prestige expressed through communal acts of generosity and the ability to procure more sophisticated weapons from the profits of raiding for human captives. This practice had been pervasive before the closure of Russian colonial frontiers. In fact, the abolition of the slave trade was Russia's major legitimation for the conquest of the Caucasus in the nineteenth century. In the latter 1990s the practice of seizing and trading hostages emerged once again as a major component of ongoing wars, especially in Chechnya. Today this practice is reported as an endemic form of terrorism. Its function remains largely the same – to finance the procurement of weapons and the lifestyles of professional warriors.

The geopolitical and social patterns of belated Islamisation

The social revolution of commoners in the eighteenth century was accompanied by a popular radical Islamisation that replaced the erstwhile multiplicity of pagan cults and the typical religious syncretism of frontier zones. There seems to exist a strong causal association between peasant democratisation, the subsequent resistance to Russian conquest, and the particular brand of Sufi Islamic mysticism that came to be practised in the North Caucasus fairly recently [19].

In the mountains of Ingushetia and Ossetia the relics of Christianity lingered as legacies of medieval Byzantine and Georgian missionary efforts. But there were neither priests nor functioning churches. In a consequential divergence, since the

1770s Ossetians have essentially re-Christianised. Evidently the reason is that they happened to inhabit the strategically important valley around the new colonial town of Vladikavkaz. The re-invention of common religious ties to the newly arriving power secured the preferential treatment of Ossetians by Russian authorities.

The neighbouring Ingush were initially only slightly more peripheral in relation to the town but their loyalty was suspect because of cultural-linguistic proximity to the relatively more rebellious Chechens. Ingush were progressively alienated by Russian administrators and their Ossetian allies and driven toward a radical Islamisation as late as the mid-nineteenth century.

The geopolitical determinant of religious conversion, which in turn operated through the networks of trade, diplomacy and military alliance/confrontation between the centres of agrarian civilisations and frontier peripheries, becomes still a more robust explanation as we add more empirical instances from across the Caucasus [11]. In the realm of the aristocratic Kabardins and other Circassian peoples, we observe the inchoate coexistence of superficial Islam, a tenuous individual Christianity, and longstanding local traditions. There the religious choices shifted back and forth in consonance with the political opportunism of warring princely alliances that intermittently sought patronage from the Ottoman, Persian and, since the mid-sixteenth century, Russian empires (and before that, the Tatar overlords, Genoese traders and Byzantine emperors.)

Presently, Islamic religiosity in the Caucasus, by informal measure, is highest in Chechnya (apparently more so in the mountainous part than in the Russian-influenced and relatively peaceful lowlands) and also in the mountainous zones of Dagestan. It is somewhat lower in Ingushetia, and substantially lower in Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Cherkessia (despite a few small enclaves of renewed Islamic religiosity since 1999, driven underground). The Islamic presence is almost negligible in today's Adygeia. From Kabardino-Balkaria to Adygeia, these are the areas where historically the process of popular Islamisation was checked by the early imposition of Russian control, by the victory of native aristocratic ranks, or by a combination of both factors.

In the eighteenth century the fervent Islamic conversion at the popular level spread from Dagestan to Chechnya and then further westward across the whole region. The original source was located in the Sufi religious schools of Dagestan. Indicatively, these religious centres were found outside the old coastal towns that traditionally remained under the domination of rich Muslim merchants, landowners and the orthodox clerics based in the officially patronised mosques. The most active circles of Sufi instruction emerged in the democratic semi-urban villages in the mountainous zone of Dagestan. In a pattern perhaps not dissimilar from the symbolic competition among the Mediterranean city-states in arts, public architecture and philosophy, the large and well-established villages of Dagestan competed among themselves to attract prestigious teachers of religion. Alternatively, they raised and endowed their own Qur'anic scholars.

The conversion spread through the networks of religious brotherhoods (tariqat, literally the 'way') loosely organised around the overlapping circles of Sufi teachers (murshids) and disciples (murids). The numerous itinerant Sufi mystics preached the

virtues of equality, moral order, self-discipline, charity, mutual help and trans-ethnic solidarity among the faithful. They denounced the moral corruption, feuds, greed, selfishness and arrogance of princes. The most radical among the Sufi preachers also called for resistance against infidel powers, which was a direct challenge to the early encroachments by the Russian imperial authorities.

Contemporary Russian authors blamed the religiously inspired resistance of North Caucasus Muslims on the instigation by Turkish agents [25]. By the late eighteenth century, however, the exhausted and beleaguered Turks could no longer project the necessary military, financial and ideological power to foster such a massive movement among the Caucasian highlanders. Instead, let us note the importance of this in a world-historical context, particularly because today's textbooks almost entirely ignore this aspect by focusing on the contemporary religious wars in the Christian West. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the world of Islam was torn by the inward-oriented geopolitical and ideological confrontation between the two central empires of roughly equal strength: the Ottoman state espousing the majority Sunni orthodoxy and its rival, Persia, under the Safavid dynasty whose ideological militancy was informed by the minority Shi'a orthodoxy. The juxtaposition of imperial geopolitics and theological divergence resulted in a series of truly 'world' wars. The Turko-Persian wars produced a destructive stalemate that exhausted the major Islamic states of the period and, incidentally, greatly decreased geopolitical pressure on Western Europe during its own formative period of capitalism.

From the latter eighteenth century until the 1920s, the centres of Islamic ideological militancy shifted to the peripheral outliers, especially the tribal frontiers of the Islamic world that now came under Western pressure. The radical sermons of North Caucasus Sufis squarely belong in this much wider historical context. As Persia entered another phase of imperial decline and Ottoman Turkey turned into the 'sick man of Europe', the broadly analogous movements of religious renovation engulfed places as distant as the tribal frontiers of Afghanistan, inner Arabia, and the vast realm of the Sahara from Sudan to Senegal and from the Hausa emirates of Nigeria to the oases of what today is Libya, the mountains of Atlas, and French-occupied Algeria. This vast topic remains unexplored by comparative-historical social scientists.

Our knowledge of religious movements in the North Caucasus at this time is patchy because their propagation proceeded predominantly in oral forms; only much later were the most notable sermons recorded in Arabic⁴. In fact, many popular preachers, especially in Chechnya, were illiterate. The contemporary Russian reports are confused and exceedingly biased for the evident reason that their authors were the colonial officers who knew little about Islam and generally regarded the subject matter as a hateful and dangerous manifestation of 'Asiatic fanaticism' [25]. Nevertheless, we can deduce that these movements increasingly addressed the aspirations of peasants who were already free from lordly domination or hoped for the liberation in near future and still in this world. Proselytism also carried a strong

⁴ For an overview of Arabic texts from the Caucasus, see Gammer 1994.

social-normative message expressed in the demand for installing the universalistic norms of shah }a Islamic law [6]. It was a direct criticism of the particularistic tribal codes, or adat that in many instances sanctioned the traditional rank inequality, tribute-taking, trial by princes, and the brutal institutions like blood revenge. Russian sources registered numerous complaints by native noblemen who warned of impending rebellion and called for a swift suppression of 'troublemakers' and 'bandits' [16].

Of course, the actual historical picture was vastly more complicated. Not everywhere did the peasants rebel, and many rebellions were defeated. The Sufi-led struggle for religious revival and conversion was surely not based exclusively among mountain peasants and tribesmen. At various stages many noblemen of different ranks and ethnic groups joined the movement, and subsequently many (though not all) defected from the religious militancy [25, 26]. Between the 1750s and the 1810s the Kabardins experienced a series of acute and inchoate struggles around the Islamic project of reorganising the realm on more centralised, shari'a law and more egalitarian patterns. The aristocratic privileges eventually survived with the support of Russian command, the majority of peasants were forced back into dependency, but a substantial minority of petty noblemen, radical Islamic preachers and rebellious commoners resettled into the western Circassian lands where the less accessible landscape offered them better protection against the Russian colonial armies [27].

The emerging democratic communities (whether tribally organised along traditional lines or just the newly formed communities of escaping peasants) furthermore experienced social dynamics of two kinds: lateral expansion and the emergence of an internal military hierarchy. The lateral expansion - spreading wherever possible through the military-agrarian colonisation and absorption of lesser ethnic groups in a short period of historical time (say, a century) - significantly increased the territories and the populations of lowlands Chechnya as well as the Circassian democratic tribes emerging in the wooded hills along the Black Sea.

The second dynamic was an internal social differentiation among self-liberated peasants that resulted in the emergence of professional warriors and charismatic warlords (who, in the beginning, perhaps resembled just lucky and experienced hunters). Their raiding for booty (mainly livestock), and human captives for ransom or slave export soon developed into an independent, prestigious socioeconomic activity that in some instances rivalled the erstwhile predatory warfare of more established noblemen. Of course, to the native noblemen and the Russian command it was banditry pure and simple, devoid of any traditional aura. Therefore, the lucky peasant warlords also tended to become the staunchest supporters of Islamic conversion, a process that provided them with the ideology of holy war against infidels and elevated their own status to that of religious paladin, or ghazi. The Sufi leadership itself split into competing factions on numerous occasions [26]. Ultimately, the movement settled down to create a new church-like orthodoxy, a hierarchy of power and privilege, and actually a theocratic state.

The social mechanisms of actualizing history

How have these histories made themselves known today? The effects have been not so much direct as evidenced through mediating social mechanisms. Against the backdrop of the current war in Chechnya, public opinion in the Caucasus attributes special meaning to the ancestral resistance against the Russian conquest. But this dichotomous epic of good and evil glosses over the social fracture of what is today more popularly called the old jihad: the class struggle of peasants against lords or the convoluted native politics of making deals with the advancing colonial empire.

Furthermore, the varied nationalist epics of anti-Russian resistance directly link the nineteenth-century struggle and the Stalinist purges of 1944 when entire peoples – Balkars, Ingush, Chechens – were deported from their homelands, ostensibly for aiding Nazi armies. The real intent of the Stalinist state, as far as it can be deduced from newly available archival documents, was to break up the native peasant communities that provided the basis for the 'honourable banditry' and occasional rebellions against collectivisation [5]. While there may be no direct continuity, it is possible to identify a clear pattern of repetition in the actions of a state that only imperfectly controlled – and thus feared – the peculiar North Caucasian peasants for whom their daggers, guns and clan solidarities served as a guarantee of their right to land and property.

Nationalists today see a continuing imperial master-plan aimed at the extermination of freedom-loving native peoples. Yet when I have had opportunity to ask North Caucasus residents how and when they learned about the struggle of centuries past, or more recent events such as the deportations, a clear majority admitted that it became an issue only after 1989 when local newspapers and public rallies helped to weave the big picture of historical injustice. Thus, weak repressive states wrought these tragedies, and newly weakening democratising states have provided the conditions for memories to coalesce into major collective grievances.

The second mechanism through which history crucially matters is the institutional framework of national republics. Terry Martin [21] provides an incisive historical-institutional analysis, arguing that the Soviet Union was not a federation but rather a unitary state where power flowed through the central hierarchy of the Communist Party. The bureaucratic appointments within the republics, however, favoured titular nationalities. This was a proactive Bolshevik policy drawn from the experience of many-sided alliances during the Russian Civil War. For instance, in 1919 the Chechen militias, convinced by the Bolsheviks that Marxism was also a form of struggle, hit the White armies from the rear at a decisive moment in the war and probably saved the Reds [14].

Soviet native cadres whose careers entirely depended on the continuation of Soviet institutions, zealously watched against 'bourgeois' nationalism. This arrangement worked well for nearly seventy years. It broke down only after 1989 when Moscow's sudden collapse became widely known and the communist national bureaucracies scrambled to find alternative sources of power. On the whole they abandoned the label 'communist' to become the national governments of newly independent states. The strategy of ethno-territorial affirmative action that was once a major strength of the Soviet state thus determined the way it collapsed [10].

History matters in shaping the cultures that permeate social relations and that become especially important in the moments of crisis. National cultures, however, are terribly slippery things to analyse, as we have learned in the spate of historical rewrites across the former Soviet Union since 1992 [28]. For example, the notorious propensity among Chechens and Kabardins towards symbolic posturing – including bringing weapons to public rallies – obviously can make a difference. But who brings weapons to rallies? Certainly not women, and hardly bureaucrats, medical doctors, or middle-aged workers. It would be worth trying to disassemble the presumably unitary ethnic 'cultures' into the fields and combinations of habitus specified in terms of social class, gender and other statuses – something along the lines of Bourdieu's Distinction [8]. This might help us to remember what so many nationalist activists like to forget: that cultures are not systems of norms but very contentious arenas. History is neither a programming device nor the abode of national spirits. Least of all should history be reified into unitary super-actors loosely called civilisations. History matters through the identifiable social mechanisms that actualise historical memory in popular mobilisations and state ideologies. It transports (and inevitably transforms) cultural dispositions from one epoch to another. It creates arenas of social action and the very actors themselves.

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ЗАБЫТЫЕ СЛОЖНОСТИ ПРОШЛОГО СЕВЕРНОГО КАВКАЗА**Г.М. ДЕРЛУГЬЯН**

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена специальному анализу геополитического положения Северного Кавказа на протяжении XV-XVIII вв. и социальных процессов, которые развертывались в местных обществах в этот период. Почти четыре столетия с конца XV в. Северный Кавказ оставался вне прямой власти какой либо из империй того времени. Регион был превращен в типичную «племенную» периферию мир-систем, складывающихся вокруг аграрных империй. Эта ситуация не означает однако, что он представлял собой застойную заводь. Племенные окраины могут становиться местом очень динамичных инноваций в военном деле и социальной организации. Длительная фрагментация (державной) военной мощи на Северном Кавказе привела к возникновению неустойчивых безгосударственных объединений тяжело вооруженных конных воинов. Прежде всего, это позволяет объяснить складывание поражающего воображение количества этнических групп и языков, характерных для Северного Кавказа. Только очень небольшой элитный слой воинов могла оснастить себя с рыцарским великолепием. Такая элита обладала подавляющим преимуществом на поле боя перед пешими солдатами-общинниками в отношении мобильности, защищенности тела и ударной мощи. Но исключительное положение рыцаре в блестящих доспехах было ликвидировано огнестрельной революцией середины XVIII в. на Северном Кавказе. В конечном счете, распространение владения огнестрельным оружием среди населения сделало возможным самоосвобождение крестьянства Северного Кавказа. Но одновременно это сформировало анархическую и потенциально опасную социальную среду. Более того, вместе с новым утверждением групповых солидарностей, более выраженными стали родовые (клановые) структуры. Клань в этой ситуации очевидным образом не являлись архаическими пережитками. Социальная революция общинников в восемнадцатом столетии сопровождалась радикальной народной исламизацией. Судя по всему имеется сильная каузальная взаимосвязь между крестьянской демократизацией, последующим сопротивлением российскому завоеванию и особой разновидностью суфийского исламского мистицизма, который стал практиковаться на Северном Кавказе довольно поздно. Эти исторические сюжеты актуализировались в 1990-е гг. через посредство определенных социальных институтов. Во-первых, репрессивные государственные системы прошлого вызвали к жизни трагедии войны и депортации, а новые слабеющие и демократизирующиеся государства создали условия, при которых воспоминания о них слились в большие коллективные обиды. Второй механизм, через который история приобретает решающее значение – это институциональные рамки национальных республик. Таким образом, история имеет значение. Она передает (и неизбежно трансформирует) культурные диспозиции от одной эпохи к другой. Она создает арену для социального действия и самих лиц, действующих на этой арене.

Ключевые слова: Северный Кавказ, история, память, XV-XVIII века, геополитическая ситуация, военные вожди, этносоциальная фрагментация, огнестрельная революция, крестьянская революция, исламизация.

THE FORGOTTEN COMPLEXITIES OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS PAST

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Abstract. The article presents a closer look at the geopolitical situation of the North Caucasus during XV-XVIII centuries and social processes that were developing within the local societies in that period. For those nearly four centuries the North Caucasus lay beyond the reach of any contemporary imperial power. The region was relegated to a typical 'tribal' periphery in the world-systems generated around agrarian empires. This situation, however, did not mean that it was a stagnant backwater. Tribal peripheries could be the sites of very dynamic innovation in warfare and social organization. The lasting fragmentation of military power in the North Caucasus led to the emergence of the unstable stateless alliances of heavily armed horseback warriors. First of all, this matters in explaining the emergence of the mind-boggling number of ethnic groups and languages that are native to the North Caucasus. Only a very small elite of warriors could arm themselves with knightly splendour. Such an elite possessed an overwhelming battlefield advantage over the commoner foot soldiers in terms of mobility, body protection and striking power. But the exclusive position of knights in shining armour was undone by the gunpowder revolution of the mid-eighteenth century with the proliferation of cheaper guns among peasants. Cumulatively, the proliferation of privately owned guns enabled the self-emancipation of North Caucasian peasants. But also it created an anarchic and inherently dangerous social environment. Moreover, the clan structures grew more pronounced as the people reasserted group solidarities. Clan in this situation was clearly not an archaic vestige. The social revolution of commoners in the eighteenth century was accompanied by a popular radical Islamisation. There seems to exist a strong causal association between peasant democratisation, the subsequent resistance to Russian conquest, and the particular brand of Sufi Islamic mysticism that came to be practised in the North Caucasus fairly recently. These histories made themselves known in 1990s through mediating social mechanisms. First, repressive states wrought tragedies of war and deportations, and newly weakening democratising states have provided the conditions for memories to coalesce into major collective grievances. The second mechanism through which history crucially matters is the institutional framework of national republics. So, history matters. It transports (and inevitably transforms) cultural dispositions from one epoch to another. It creates arenas of social action and the very actors themselves.

Key words: North Caucasus, history, memory, XV-XVIII centuries, geopolitical situation, warlords, ethno-social fragmentation, gunpowder revolution, peasant revolution, islamisation.